

Paper U1

Mission Council Advisory Group

**Criteria for the Appointment of a
General Secretary**

United Church 2017
Church 2017
Reformed Church 2017
Church 2017

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Mission Council Advisory Group

Criteria for the Appointment of a General Secretary

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Ellis, Immediate Past Moderator john.ellis@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council: a) agrees in principle that the post of General Secretary should be open to all Ministers, CRCWs and Elders of the United Reformed Church; b) requests that changes to the Rules of Procedure be brought to the March 2018 Mission Council meeting in order to give this effect.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To give Mission Council an opportunity to express a view on whether the current requirement for any new General Secretary to be a URC Minister of Word and Sacraments is still appropriate.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Church changed the Job Description of the General Secretary in 2013. • The subsequent General Secretary Nomination Group felt that the change suggested the traditional restriction of the post to Ministers needed review. • With no evident need to seek a new General Secretary in the near future, this is a good time to consider the principle.
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	Human Resources Task Group

Summary of Impact

Financial	No significant overall impact.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Some ecumenical partners may prefer to work with ministerial General Secretaries.

Criteria for the Appointment of a General Secretary

Background

1. The United Reformed Church has always had a General Secretary and restricted that post to URC Ministers of Word and Sacraments. Despite the many changes in the Church and wider society since 1972, this feature of our polity has remained unchanged and no evidence has been identified of any considered review of the principle by any governance body.
2. Following a variety of concerns expressed within Mission Council and elsewhere in 2012-13, a thorough review of the central staff leadership structure was led by the Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG). This led to Mission Council adopting a new pattern. This still included a General Secretary but he or she was to be supported by three Deputy General Secretaries and the secretariat collectively was to provide, in professional and godly ways, that overall guidance and management of staff and work that many felt had previously been lacking.
3. Within the new structure, Deputy General Secretary posts were open to both Ministers and lay people. Although the role description of the General Secretary was altered as part of these changes, it remained a post open only to Ministers. The role description and person specification are attached as an Appendix.
4. When the General Secretary Nomination Group was set up in 2013 under the convenorship of one of the then Moderators of General Assembly, John Ellis, its members queried the restriction to Ministers, especially given the shifts they perceived in the role described towards a stronger element of what might, as shorthand, be called “management”. This query was raised at a very early stage, well before any actual names of potential nominees were before the Group. However the Group accepted the advice of the Moderator and Clerk that it was beyond the remit of the Nomination Group to address this point. Given an assurance that the point would be raised at an appropriate time in an appropriate place, the Group proceeded to use the material and brief given to it to seek the next General Secretary.
5. The Group was glad to bring a recommendation to the 2014 General Assembly for the person to serve as General Secretary from then for up to seven years to his expected retirement date. That completed the Nomination Group’s work and it was dissolved.
6. The former Convenor of the Nomination Group agreed with the new General Secretary that the question of the Minister restriction should be raised with the Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) but not until 2016. This timetable would give the General Secretary time to work fully into the role but would still be well before it was likely that a new search for the following General Secretary would need to begin. This would separate the principle from any particular personalities.
7. In 2016 MCAG agreed that the topic should be considered and asked John Ellis, having been Convenor of the 2013 Nomination Group, to work on the issues with HRAG. In 2017 MCAG discussed a first paper and asked John Ellis to prepare a further paper to equip Mission Council to express a view on whether the present restriction should be maintained.

8. MCAG did not believe it was within its remit to take a view on the underlying question, only to facilitate a debate. However MCAG felt it would help give Mission Council discussions a focus if there were a draft Resolution for the Council to accept, amend or reject, rather than a totally open paper.

The Inheritance

9. It is hoped that the background paragraphs above make it entirely clear that this discussion does not arise from any dissatisfaction with the current General Secretary. This paper is not inviting a performance appraisal of the Revd John Proctor.
10. The United Reformed Church has always restricted a number of Assembly appointments to Ministers alone. These include the Synod Moderator posts and the executive Secretary for Ministries in the central staff team. There is no suggestion that these criteria should be changed.
11. Of the seven people to have served the URC as General Secretary, all have come into post with long service as Ministers behind them. However, their ministerial careers have been far from typical, with most having only a relatively short time spent in pastoral charges and usually a decade or several working in theological colleges, or overseas, as Synod Moderators or in central staff roles.

Current Thinking

12. HRAG sent a questionnaire around a small group of Assembly officers and others who have extensive recent experience of working with successive General Secretaries. The current General Secretary was included in the circulation. A request for lay General Secretaries working in other partner Churches to complete the questionnaire unfortunately produced no response.
13. The questionnaire asked respondents to consider the advantages and disadvantages of opening up the position to a wider range of people than just Ministers in the light of the current General Secretary role description. This did not lead to any consensus in favour or against relaxing the current restriction.
14. A summary of the feedback, as prepared by HRAG, was as follows:

If an Ordained General Secretary:

Advantages

- Will have the confidence of Ministers and Synod Moderators
- Has experience of and understands local ministry
- Credibility and respect – both internal and external
- Theological knowledge

Disadvantages

- Lack of management expertise (in the broadest sense)
- The pastoral approach might predominate
- Reinforces the perception that only the 'ordained minister' can lead

If a Lay General Secretary:

Advantages

- Management expertise (in the broadest sense)
- Changes the perception of what the lay and ordained can do

Disadvantages

- Confidence and credibility issues amongst ministers
- Theological knowledge (possible lower level/lack of)
- Lack of practical experience of local ministry
- Could present problems regarding working ecumenically
- Could be seen as a 'manage/administrator' rather than a 'church leader'
- Could be expensive in terms of salary

15. There were plenty of reminders in the responses that being General Secretary is a demanding post and few individuals, whether ministerial or lay, are likely to be equally strongly qualified in every aspect of the work. Wise General Secretaries work as part of a team and draw on the skills and gifts of others.
16. Respondents were also asked what they perceived as the most important requirements in the General Secretary person specification. Again, there was no consensus about the highest priority. It was noted that almost all the requirements highlighted would be expected to be displayed by any successful senior leader, whether their background was in a Christian or a secular organisation. An exception was the ability to deal well with the diversity of the URC, but that is a skill lay people experienced in denominational roles need to display, just as much as ministers.
17. A question that might have been more thoroughly tested if respondents had included ecumenical partners is whether a ministerial General Secretary more easily achieves credibility outside the United Reformed Church. MCAG suspected that with some partners this could be the case but equally recognised that there are many ecumenical collaborations which include denominations who have a lay person in the role equivalent to General Secretary.
18. Based on the questionnaire responses, it would seem that to make a convincing argument that the General Secretary must be a Minister one has to rely heavily on the view that Ministers relate more easily to a General Secretary who is a fellow Minister. Curiously nobody put forward an argument claiming that lay people in the Church would relate more easily to a General Secretary who is a fellow lay person.

Discerning God's Person

19. However intriguing these points are, it could be argued that they are too binary and not the principal ones. In reality any discernment process is not attempting to compare a typical lay person with a typical Minister. Nor is it trying to decide which of the requirements in the role description really matter.
20. The actual discernment process takes seriously the whole of the role description and looks at it alongside the unique individuals who have been nominated, each one with their own strengths and weaknesses and their own stories of Christian service.

21. The Church has learnt that it is important not to overlook the taxing management skills in the General Secretary role description just because a Minister candidate is exceptional in some other area. Equally there is no campaign to have a lay General Secretary for the sake of making a point. Even if lay applications were permitted, unless a lay candidate could produce clear evidence to demonstrate they could offer a depth of theological reflection, that candidate would not be a plausible one.
22. The question for Mission Council is whether there are adequate grounds for automatically ruling out in advance the possibility of someone who is not a Minister being considered as possibly the best match for the varied role of General Secretary. How confident are we that the Holy Spirit could never equip an Elder for such a role?

Practical Implications

23. The purpose of this paper is to discover Mission Council's mind on a principle. Should the decision be to relax the current restriction, there would be some practical issues that would then arise.
24. If the role was not only open to URC Ministers it would be necessary to define whether there are other limitations on whom may apply. It might be appropriate to limit lay nominations to those who are URC Elders or Church-Related Community Workers, these being people who have formally committed themselves to exercise their ministries in accordance with the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church.
25. As with many other roles in the United Reformed Church which are open to both Ministers and others, a Minister would be appointed on a different "terms and conditions" arrangement from a lay person. Most obviously a lay appointee would not be offered free housing and would be paid a compensating higher salary, not a stipend. The cost to the Church of a lay General Secretary would therefore be lower in terms of capital tied up and higher in terms of current expenditure.
26. Another current difference is that General Secretaries, like a number of other Assembly appointments, are appointed for fixed, albeit renewable, terms. For General Secretaries these are normally seven year terms. Current legislation would not permit a salaried General Secretary to be on a termed appointment and so any such would have to be given an open-ended contract.
27. It is worth noting that all these practical issues have already been addressed in connection the three Deputy General Secretary posts and resolved satisfactorily.

Draft Resolution

28. Should Mission Council be minded to change the status quo, a possible Resolution to achieve that might be as follows.

Mission Council:

- a) **agrees in principle that the post of General Secretary should be open to all Ministers, CRCWs and Elders of the United Reformed Church;**
- b) **requests that changes to the Rules of Procedure be brought to the March 2018 Mission Council meeting in order to give this effect.**

JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE:	General Secretary
RESPONSIBLE TO:	The General Assembly (via an agreed, specified, Moderator of General Assembly)
RESPONSIBLE FOR:	The management of three Deputy General Secretaries and direct Administrative support and oversight of the Synod Moderators
SALARY:	Minister's stipend will apply
<p>JOB SUMMARY: To provide theological and pastoral leadership and operational oversight to the URC by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implementing the policies and decisions of General Assembly/Mission Council; • the management of Church House through the General Secretariat; • ensuring links with the wider Church and the fostering and maintenance of positive external relations. 	

Principal Responsibilities and Duties

1. Provide theological and pastoral leadership for the denomination and maintain its well-being and unity by:
 - a. ensuring that the life and mission of the URC are undergirded by its theological understanding, as expressed in the Basis of Union; and
 - b. responding to opportunities to engage with local churches, Synods and others.
 - c. fostering the unity and wellbeing of the Church
2. Provide operational oversight and leadership to the URC by:
 - a. ensuring that appointment and review groups for Synod Moderators are established and acting as consultant to them;
 - b. providing oversight to the Synod Moderators;
 - c. responding to Synod issues and opportunities as appropriate;
 - d. being an ex-officio member of all Assembly standing committees and the URC Trust;
 - e. ensuring the effective work and reporting of Faith & Order and Equal Opportunities Committees and Mission Council Advisory Groups.

3. Service both General Assembly and Mission Council by:
 - a. assuring the work of the agenda setting body(ies);
 - b. ensuring that all business is properly prepared for the Assembly and Council;
 - c. ensuring that members are given information they need;
 - d. ensuring that meeting facilities are adequate;
 - e. ensuring that the records are properly kept;
 - f. ensuring that the decisions of the Assembly are reported to the Church;
 - g. ensuring the implementation of the decisions and policies agreed by General Assembly and by Mission Council;
 - h. acting as required in relation to the Disciplinary Process and Incapacity Procedures.
4. Provide leadership to, and management of, the three Deputy General Secretaries who form the General Secretariat by:
 - a. agreeing the objectives and priorities for each of the Deputy General Secretaries in the light of Assembly and Mission Council decisions
 - b. ensuring the Church House work plans are coordinated and delivered
 - c. fostering an organisational climate that releases and focuses the energy that comes from competent, motivated specialists
 - d. monitoring and managing individual performance within the Secretariat agreeing appropriate personal development.
5. Oversee the coordination of the work of Church House by:
 - a. ensuring the effective functioning of the General Secretariat team;
 - b. ensuring effective two-way communications with Church House staff through team and Connective meetings and other mechanisms as required;
 - c. enabling cross-department project and task groups to meet agreed objectives;
 - d. preparing, and being the budget holder for, the General Secretariat budget;
 - e. ensuring personal and staff compliance with all relevant legal requirements (e.g. Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Data Protection).
6. Foster, and maintain, links with the wider Church by:
 - a. developing relationships with senior officers of other Churches and being alert to opportunities for closer ecumenical links or collaborative work;
 - b. representing the United Reformed Church on a number of national and international ecumenical bodies; and

- c. working closely with the Secretary for World Church Relations and the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Faith & Order on matters relating to sister Churches and the UK ecumenical instruments.
7. Ensure positive external relations by:
- a. speaking publicly on behalf of the Church, in consultation with the Moderators of General Assembly and with the Press & Media Manager, and with others as necessary; and
 - b. being prepared to act, as and when necessary, to maintain and protect the reputation and image of the URC, in conjunction with Communications.

Health and Safety at Work:

You are required to take reasonable care of the health and safety of yourself and other persons who may be affected by your acts or omissions at work and to co-operate with the United Reformed Church in adhering to statutory safety regulations.

Equal Opportunities:

The Church will behave as an equal opportunity organisation and not discriminate on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation or age.

This list is an indication of the main tasks to be performed. It is not an exhaustive list of duties and responsibilities and may be subject to amendments to take account of changing circumstances.

FINAL DRAFT: 10 October 2013



PERSON SPECIFICATION

JOB TITLE:	GENERAL SECRETARY
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REQUIREMENTS	REQUIREMENTS		MEASUREMENT
	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	
Education and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordained to the Ministry of the United Reformed Church with a proven work history in ministry. • Educated to degree level or equivalent and possesses a theological qualification. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of keeping abreast with theological literature. 	Application form, references and interview
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management of change. • Conflict resolution. • Crisis Management. • Collaborative and ecumenical working within and beyond the Church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relations with and work with the media. 	Application form and Interview
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide awareness of contemporary political and social issues with an ability to reflect on them theologically. • An appreciation of, and sensitivity to, the complex nature of the URC, recognising the theological diversity within the denomination. • Awareness of how organisations function and develop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the wider Reformed and of other Christian traditions 	Application form and interview
Skills and Abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to inspire confidence and demonstrate effective public speaking skills. • Ability to think strategically and encourage others to do the same. • Skilful manager of people. • Sound leadership skills • Able to build, develop and play an active part in the staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to interact comfortably in a wide variety of contexts. • Ability to make time for personal 	Application form, references and interview

	community at Church House. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to prioritise a demanding workload through effective time management and delegation. • An understanding of and commitment to a multicultural church (i.e. ability to relate across different cultures). • Able to demonstrate effective pastoral and listening skills. • Able to demonstrate strong written and analytical skills. 	study and to relax.	
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a deep Christian faith • Hospitable • Patient • Resilient • Possesses a good sense of humour 		Interview and references

