

# Paper T1

## **MIND (ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group)**

Update

United Church 2018  
Church 2018  
Reformed Church 2018  
Church 2018

# Paper T1

## MIND (ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group)

### Update

#### Basic information

<b>Contact</b>	General Secretary <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information only.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Update.
<b>Main points</b>	Response to concerns raised, with indication of proposed way forward.
<b>Previous documents</b>	N/a
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Some consultation with synod moderators through their representative on the advisory group. The legal adviser.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	N/a
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	The clarity, efficiency and fairness of our disciplinary process is a reputational issue for the Church.

# Update

1. At the meeting of Mission Council in March 2018 a number of concerns were raised about the ministerial disciplinary process (colloquially known as 'section O'), mainly by people involved in the day to day operation of the process. These concerns can be summarised as the complexity of the process, the time it takes to operate, the number of volunteers required, the variable skills of some of the volunteers, the costs of the process, and the amount of documentation involved.
2. MIND has heard these concerns, and resolved to address them by initiating changes to the process along these lines:
  - 2.1 Assembly commissions and appeals commissions to be reduced from five members to three, in order to speed up the arrangement of dates.
  - 2.2 Synod panels, shared synod panels, and the joint panel all to be amalgamated into one joint panel, involving a smaller number of people altogether, who will receive greater training and expect to be used more frequently. Such people would not be expected to undertake much other work for the wider URC, in order that they might be available for this.
  - 2.3 The current caution stage to be integrated into the main process rather than standing almost entirely apart. Cautions will thus be one possible outcome for cases considered within the main process.
  - 2.4 The role of the Synod Moderator, beyond being the initial recipient of complaints, shall be widened by the appointment of a synod standing panel of three people, one of whom shall be the Synod Moderator; in many synods it might be appropriate for another to be the Clerk. This better reflects our conciliar nature where decisions are normally taken by groups rather than individuals; it gives a Moderator a small reference group for considering difficult decisions; it protects synod moderators against personal criticism and attack for decisions they are currently required to take; it also protects ministers against any possibility of a personality clash.
3. MIND lays this thinking before Mission Council. If there is no feedback, MIND will assume that Mission Council will be happy to consider detailed proposals along these lines, perhaps at its next meeting. Therefore, if Mission Council is not content with the direction of travel indicated here, it needs to make its views known to MIND.
4. In order to put these changes into effect, MIND has commissioned one of its number with the relevant skills to draft a possible replacement new disciplinary process. MIND will receive and review this at its meeting in January 2019, and then make a decision of principle whether to proceed with amendments to the existing process or with commissioning a new process. MIND reserves the right to bring amendments to the existing process as an interim measure, so that agreed revisions need not wait for the completion of extensive drafting. Nonetheless, MIND intends that any new drafting be more accessible than the present text, particularly for new readers.
5. Therefore, MIND proposes to bring major business to the May 2019 meeting of Mission Council, either as outlined above, or in response to feedback on what is outlined.