

# Paper U2

**Mission council advisory group**

**Future tenure of General Secretary**

Church 2018  
**United**  
Church **2018**  
**Reformed**  
**Church** Church 2018

# Paper U2

## Mission council advisory group

### Future tenure of General Secretary

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Clerk <a href="mailto:michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk">michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Mission Council amends paragraph 5.1 of the Rules of Procedure to read as follows:</b> <i>The General Secretary, who shall be a Minister of the United Reformed Church, shall be appointed for a period of seven years renewable for successive terms of not more than seven years each.</i>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Future tenure of the General Secretary.
<b>Main points</b>	This is presently a one or two term post. The paper proposes lifting that cap for future post-holders.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	<i>The Manual</i> , section C (Rules of Procedure), paragraph five.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Within MCAG, the present general secretary has made clear that he would not in any eventuality seek to take advantage of the proposed change in the Rules.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	

# Future tenure of General Secretary

1. The recent appointment of the Revd Paul Whittle for a third term as Moderator of Eastern Synod reminded many people that synod moderators are not limited to two terms, despite a widespread belief that this was the case. The relevant part of the Rules of Procedure reads as follows:
 

*'Each [Synod] Moderator shall be appointed for such term not exceeding seven years as the General Assembly shall in each case think fit ... the General Assembly shall have power to determine any such appointment during its term or to renew any such appointment for successive terms of not more than five years each.'*
2. Other Assembly appointed ministers, at Church House and Westminster College, are subject to terms, but in many cases these are renewable without limit, subject to satisfactory review and a desire by all parties for the post holder to continue.
3. This means that the General Secretary is almost the only Assembly appointed minister limited to a maximum number of terms.
4. This paper does not argue against termed appointments *per se*. There are many benefits to these. The reviews mean that the church is protected against an inappropriate post holder continuing, and ministers are protected against being trapped in a post that they feel only requires their ministry for a season.
5. However, there are some difficulties created by limiting the number of terms:
  - a) The pool of people available to be General Secretary is limited, and is diminishing as the number of ministers (and members) continues to decrease
  - b) Given the increased retirement age, and the likelihood that this will further increase, it is more likely than it once was that someone would be appointed General Secretary at an age when they would be able to offer longer service than two seven year terms, if they and the church both wanted to
  - c) Were someone to finish two terms less than five years before their retirement date, perhaps significantly less than five years before, it would put them in an awkward position for seeking a pastorate for only a very short time
  - d) Some synods are now moving away from fixed terms for URC Ministers serving in LEPs, even where this causes difficulties with our ecumenical partners
  - e) It is now regarded as bad employment practice to limit the length of time a post holder can serve when both the post and the funding are continuing, and all parties are happy with the performance of the post holder. The General Secretary is not an employee, but that should not be a reason not to follow best practice.
6. Were this argument to be accepted, than it could be resolved by a simple change to Rules of Procedure. The current wording is as follows:
 

5.1 *The General Secretary, who shall be a minister of the United Reformed Church, shall be appointed for a period of seven years renewable for the same term or such shorter period as the Assembly may determine.*
7. A possible revised wording is offered in the draft resolution.