

# Paper C2

## Environmental statement – working towards a Green Charter for the Education and Learning Committee

### Education and Learning Committee

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	None; for information only.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	None

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The development of a 'Green Charter' to guide the operation of the Education and Learning Committee (E&LC).
<b>Main points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. For the URC to achieve net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by well before 2050 requires urgent action.</li><li>2. Identifies how the E&amp;LC can play its part in meeting this target.</li><li>3. Defines a Charter to guide E&amp;LC operation.</li><li>4. Aims to track progress with a carbon calculator.</li></ol>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Committee Paper I3: Carbon emissions target; Mission Council May, 2019
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Secretary for Church and Society

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	Possibly, if carbon offsetting is used.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None at present.

## Environmental statement

### Working towards a Green Charter for the Education and Learning Committee

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 In July 2016, General Assembly adopted an Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church (URC), which was updated by Mission Council in May 2019. The URC appointed an Environmental Task Group which is working towards the denomination's response to this pledge within the policy:

1.1.1 *We pledge to respond to the report's call for repentance in the face of our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to the earth, to its creatures and to many poor communities. We also commit to intercede for those threatened by climate change, and to adopt practices and lifestyles consistent with levels of carbon emissions the earth can sustain. Specifically, we shall strive to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in line with the target we are calling on the UK government to achieve, of net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by well before 2050.*

1.2 Mission Council further resolved to:

1.2.1 *... request the Resource Centres for Learning to ensure that those being prepared for service and leadership are cognisant of the global and spiritual context of the climate crisis.*

1.3 In May 2019, Mission Council requested that all Assembly Committees work on "developing new ways of meeting and working which have environmental benefits". At its meeting in September 2019, the Education and Learning Committee (E&LC) set up a small task group (Robert Pettigrew, David Salisbury and Rosalind Selby, advised by Alan Yates) to begin working towards a Green Charter for E&LC.

1.4 The E&LC believes that changing our lifestyles and work practices is an urgent matter but does not seek to regiment any individual's behaviour. Rather, we seek to set an ethos by example and by awareness-raising. This charter sets out in further detail how the E&LC will fulfil the aims set out in its statement, acknowledging where work and dialogue still needs to happen.

1.5 Within the URC, it is important to note that many individuals have made sacrificial changes to their own lives in terms of refusing, recycling, reusing and reducing in their daily living. A number of local churches have achieved an eco-church award or are working towards that. In what follows, the E&L Committee seeks to encourage and advance integrity of living across its own

work and within its own remit, acknowledging that people and churches are already making changes.

## 2. The E&LC's meetings

### 2.1 Mode of Meetings

At present, the E&LC meets for one overnight meeting a year (normally alternating between Luther King House, Manchester and Westminster College, Cambridge), and two one-day meetings (usually held in London). It is normal for all committee members to attend in person, though occasionally one member attends by Skype/Lifesize. Also, on occasion an additional/small-group meeting is held through Lifesize.

The E&LC will:

- 2.1.1 consider the balance between the efficient working of the committee and reducing the carbon footprint of the committee. Meeting in a pattern of two overnight meetings would reduce the carbon footprint, but would limit E&LC's speed of response and possibly hinder achieving our longer-term goals;
- 2.1.2 keep this under constant review as we urgently need to limit the travelling we do for committee business;
- 2.1.3 aim to reduce face-to-face meetings by using virtual meeting techniques<sup>1</sup>. Additional contact in between meetings should be made by email using 'reply all' for sharing comments;
- 2.1.4 work towards paper-free meetings, unless a committee member with sight problems needs to use a printed format;
- 2.1.5 discourage late or additional material that needs to be tabled.

## 3. Transport to meetings

- 3.1 At present, all reasonable transport costs are refunded without making any assessment concerning environmental impact.

The E&LC task group suggests:

- 3.1.1 Strongly encouraging the use of low-carbon public transport (i.e. bus, tram and train); ensuring venues used are easily accessible via public transport;
- 3.1.2 Acknowledging that use of public transport typically adds journey time, the timing of meetings and agendas of meetings should take account of this;
- 3.1.3 Taking an individual's personal circumstances into account, and not making any individual feel guilty;
- 3.1.4 Making carbon calculations for each person attending meetings. This will be achieved by using an adapted expense claim form;
- 3.1.5 Developing a policy for when the use of high-carbon forms of transport (planes and cars with fewer than three occupants) are deemed reasonable, including encouraging car sharing.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing the E&LC is considering a paper written by Alan Yates on virtual meetings, through the work of another small task group.

## 4. Carbon-offsetting

- 4.1 The Charity Commission allow the use of a charity's funds for carbon offsetting provided the trustees of the charity believe this is the right use of funds belonging to the charity (General Assembly/Mission Council's resolutions and requests, adoption of Five Marks of Mission and Vision 2020 all represent such decisions).
- 4.2 We will offset, at a minimum, the justifiable use of high-carbon forms of transport. Our longer-term goal is to offset all our transport-generated carbon (this will have budgeting implications).
- 4.3 The cost of offsetting carbon will have consequences for the E&LC budget. To mitigate this, E&LC will:
- 4.3.1 encourage the purchase of railcards where at all possible. If an individual would have personal difficulty in purchasing a card, the E&LC budget might be used to support in such situations (it is often the case that one trip to London will pay for a one-year railcard that brings a 30% discount);
  - 4.3.2 encourage early purchase of tickets to take advantage of low rail costs. Should a meeting be cancelled, the E&LC budget takes responsibility for such tickets;
  - 4.3.3 keep the pattern of meetings under review, seeking to keep carbon-cost, carbon-offsetting and E&LC business in the best balance possible.

## 5. Venues for meetings

- 5.1 At present, venues are booked for convenience, availability, finance and room-size. In addition, the E&LC made a decision to use the RCLs as venues. Whilst these considerations should be retained, the E&LC will encourage RCLs to look to making their conferencing and accommodation as environmentally/ethically appropriate as possible:
- 5.1.1 recycle all materials provided in preparation for meetings (recycle paper, reusing name badges etc);
  - 5.1.2 restrict the use of single-use plastic. All drinking vessels in meeting rooms, dining room and bars should be either glass, or recyclable plastic or paper (and there must be evidence that the cups are collected by the venue for recycling);
  - 5.1.3 provide by default, balanced, vegetarian menus (or at a minimum providing such menus for E&LC). *Creaturekind* offer chef training free;
  - 5.1.4 employ waste reduction and recycling techniques (recycling facilities available to guests AND evidence of waste reduction and recycling carried out by the venue);
  - 5.1.5 source gas and electricity from eco-suppliers, and to minimise the amount of fuel used (eg thermostats in each room, solar panels/cells);

- 5.1.6 refrain from investing in fossil fuels businesses.
- 5.2 In coordination with other Assembly Committees, an environmental sustainability index request will be sent to each venue used so that informed choices may be made for the future. Ahead of meetings, the venue will be sent a requirements list.
- 5.3 The best outcome would be that a venue holds, or is clearly working towards, ISO 20121:2012 (a voluntary international standard for sustainable events management) and/or ISO 21401:2018 (a similar voluntary standard for hotel management) [see iso.org]

## 6. E&LC members and associated staff teams

- 6.1 We will occasionally review the membership of the committee; the more members the bigger our carbon footprint is likely to be. It might be worth considering a smaller committee supported by some sub-groups who meet by Lifesize/agree work via email. This will be addressed as part of the Way Forward project.
- 6.2 The E&LC asks that each committee and staff member endeavours to set an example of as many aspects of sustainable living as it is possible for them in their individual circumstances and will support them in doing so
- 6.3 Supporting the committee, its members and others, would involve:
- 6.3.1 compiling helpful information and signposting;
  - 6.3.2 encouraging each person to advocate lifestyle changes towards as much environmental sustainability as possible;
  - 6.3.3 encouraging each person to take every opportunity to encourage their local church and other organisation with which they have connections to examine ways in which they could reach carbon neutrality.
- 6.4 This may require sacrificial change, but this recommendation would take into account the challenges of different abilities and essential needs, and of living in an isolated rural community (for example).

## 7. The remit of E&LC's work

- 7.1 In line with Mission Council's resolution (see introduction), request the RCLs to ensure that those being prepared for service and leadership are cognisant of the global and spiritual context of the climate crisis.
- 7.2 As part of the ongoing review of Stepwise material, to consider how personal discipleship, churches and communities may be equipped with understanding and with signposting for life changes.

- 7.3 All RCLs should be able to offer support to synods, local churches, and other groups of lay people that encourage understanding of and commitment to environmental justice and concern.
- 7.4 Awareness of climate change and its consequences, concern for God's creation in all its aspects, and understanding of necessary actions will be built into EM1, EM2 and EM3.

### 8. Next steps

- 8.1 Mission Council has set a target of making the URC carbon neutral by 2050. E&LC commits to making significant progress by 2025 and will set a target once our carbon footprint is estimated.  
**Action: EL&C**
- 8.2 Undertake research to estimate E&LC's carbon footprint, by introducing a 'miles by transport type' to the expenses form.  
**Action: Convenor and Secretary**
- 8.3 Ask the E&L Finance sub-committee to investigate the financial impact of carbon offsetting on our budget and to develop a recommended offsetting policy.  
**Action: Convenor and Secretary**
- 8.4 E&LC will support Church and Society's work to raise awareness throughout the URC, of the various areas of serious environmental concern: biodiversity, waste management, pollution, deforestation, desertification, global warming and associated extreme weather phenomena and other harm being caused to all parts of creation.  
**Action: EL&C liaising with Church and Society**
- 8.5 EL&C will encourage the URC to develop a Meetings Charter (for both face-to-face and virtual meetings) which all committees will be asked to respond to.  
**Action: AY/RMS to discuss with other convenors (at Mission Council) and liaise with Simeon Mitchell**
- 8.6 Consider how the work of the Education and Learning Team and Convenor might be impacted;  
**Action: Convenor, Secretary and Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship**
- 8.7 Maintain progress against all actions, particularly 9.4, on the agenda of every E&LC meeting, including update of 'Next Steps' in between meetings;  
**Action: Convenor and Secretary for E&L, and all 'Action Point holders'**

- 8.8 Item on RCL Tutors' agenda for July 2020 that considers how the RCLs are working in this area as venues, and in terms of the EM1 and other resources they offer;  
**Action: RMS to lead discussion in 2020**
- 8.9 Continuing liaison with the URC's Environmental Task Group and support their compilation of information and signposting.  
**Action: AY/RMS liaise with Simeon Mitchell**

# Appendix

## The Green Charter for the Education and Learning Committee

### Introduction

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, in May 2019 updated the URC's Environmental Policy to include a definitive target:

*Specifically, we shall strive to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in line with the target we are calling on the UK government to achieve, of net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by well before 2050.*

The E&LC believes that changing our lifestyles and work practices is an urgent matter and this charter is designed to guide how this is done. It does seek to set an ethos by example and by awareness-raising, through which individuals can be encouraged to reflect on the contribution they can make to meeting the URC's targets. The E&LC Environmental Statement, May 2020, sets out in more detail how we will fulfil the aims expressed here and acknowledges where further work and dialogue is needed.

### Our charter

**Meetings:** We will use a balance of virtual, one-day face-to-face and overnight face-to-face meetings to optimise our carbon footprint. We expect this balance to change as we become better able to use communications and optimisation technologies.

**Transport:** We are committed to using low-carbon forms of public transport. We recognise that there will be occasions when this is not possible or practical.

**Offsetting:** We will offset, at a minimum, the justifiable use of high-carbon forms of transport. Our longer-term goal is to offset all our transport-generated carbon.

**Venues:** We are committed to using the Resource Centres for Learning which serve the URC as meeting venues where possible, and we will encourage them in their journey to be leading environmentally friendly and responsible conference centres.

**Committee and staff:** Committee members and the Education and Learning staff team are encouraged to be examples and advocates of environmental best working practice, individually and collectively

**Education:** Through all our programmes, including Stepwise, the RCLs and our support of Synod education and development, we will raise awareness of environmental issues and provide practical advice so that everyone in our denomination can play their part as we strive to become carbon neutral.



