

Paper D1

Education and learning committee
EM1 student grants system

Church 2014
United
Church **Reformed**
Church Church 2014

Paper D1



Education and learning committee: EM1 student grants system

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Smith, convenor of education and learning committee c/o philippa.linton@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council agrees to adopt the revised the scheme for EM1 student grants from September 2015 as outlined in paper D1, of Mission Council November 2014.
Alternative options to consider, if any	n/a

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To seek Mission Council agreement to the system proposed by the education and learning committee for assessment of grants to new EM1 students starting in the academic year 2015/16.
Main points	Serious inadequacies in the current system will be addressed, resulting in fairer treatment of individuals.
Previous relevant documents	Papers H,H1,H2 for Mission Council May 2013. Resolution 16 withdrawn from General Assembly 2014.
Consultation has taken place with...	Resource centres for learning, United Reformed Church treasurer, relevant task groups established by the education and learning finance sub-committee, current EM1 students.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None – the overall budget for EM1 maintenance will be unchanged from what it would have been with the current system.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

EM1 student grants system

1. Background

1.1 The United Reformed Church trains candidates for the ministry of Word and sacraments and church related community work. Their initial training leading to ordination/commissioning is called education for ministry phase one (EM1) and it takes place at one of three resource centres for learning (RCLs) – Northern College, Manchester; the Scottish College; and Westminster College, Cambridge. Their training typically lasts two to four years. The Church covers academic fees for every candidate who is offered a place for EM1 with a RCL. In addition, every candidate is eligible to apply for financial assistance towards their maintenance and support. For part-time students this is based on re-imbusement of their expenses. Full-time students may apply for a core grant with additional allowances for dependents.

1.2 The education and learning committee has recognised a number of significant shortcomings in the current system of financial assessment, which has been used for 15 years and was an improvement on the previous processes. Some of the shortcomings result from the system itself, and others arise because the financial circumstances of candidates for ministry have become more complicated. The shape of families and households has diversified, attitudes to personal debt have changed, and expectations about standards of living have risen. The result of these factors, many of which are beyond the control of the church are:

1.2.1 The current system does not fully take into account the variations in personal circumstances of individual students. Careful study of the current disbursements strongly suggests that in some cases the committee is being over generous with students whilst others are struggling to make ends meet.

1.2.2 The system is complex, difficult for students to understand, and time-consuming for finance officers at the RCLs and within Church House to implement.

1.2.3 There are some hidden subsidies in the system, particularly related to the cost of student accommodation. The resource centres for learning and the education and learning committee have agreed that it is desirable to eliminate these, so that the people and institutions concerned know the true costs. Where additional support is needed by people it should be evident and agreed.

1.2.4 The financial literacy of candidates for ministry varies widely. The shift from receiving a reasonable monthly salary to living on a termly grant can be very challenging to some people. Experience shows that exercising a degree of rigour in discussing personal finances with students at an early stage avoids unexpected problems during EM1.

2. The new scheme

2.1 The education and learning committee has been working through its finance sub-committee in conjunction with the RCLs for the past two years to arrive at a better system of assessing grants. This will be applied to candidates who are accepted to start their EM1 in September 2015. Existing students will continue to receive maintenance and support through the current scheme throughout their EM1 period.

2.2.1 There will be a rigorous system of financial health assessment for candidates accepted for training. This will take household income and expenditure into account more fully than is possible in the present system, so that overall fairness is maintained. The figures used will be based on a scale devised by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to provide a living income.

2.2.2 Analogous to the way that the physical and psychological health of candidates are assessed by an external organisation, all candidates will take part in a financial consultation from which a report will be produced.

2.2.3 The financial report will be given to the candidate and to a new United Reformed Church student finance panel which will make decisions on the level of grant to be given to individual students, working in conjunction with the resource centres for learning and the education and learning office at Church House.

2.2.4 Candidates will be given access to confidential financial counselling where this is needed. Due notice will be taken of sensitivities around household finances concerning private income and family responsibilities, whilst recognising that the use of money is a theological issue which candidates should expect to have to tackle in the exercise of ministry.

2.2.5 The student finance panel will consist of a representative from each of the ministries and finance committee and the chief finance officer and secretary for education and learning of the United Reformed Church. The secretary to the panel will be the finance officer for education and learning.