

Extract from
The Manual *The United Reformed Church*

Section C: Rules of Procedure for the conduct of the United Reformed Church

as amended by Resolutions 32 and 33 (Virtual Meetings) agreed by Mission Council 10th July 2020

Resolution 32 Virtual Meetings

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council resolves to make the addition to the Rules of Procedure covering Virtual Attendance at Physical Meetings and Virtual Meetings, with immediate effect.

Mission Council *agreed*.

Resolution 33 Standing Orders for Virtual Meetings

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council:

- a) re-designates the Standing Orders as “Standing Orders for Physical Meetings”, with immediate effect;
- b) adopts the “Standing Orders for Virtual Meetings”, with immediate effect;
- c) declares, for the avoidance of doubt, that where a majority of those present at a meeting are physically gathered, it shall be a physical meeting conducted according to the Standing Orders for Physical Meetings, and where a majority of those present at a meeting are not physically gathered, it shall be a Virtual Meeting, conducted according to the Standing Orders for Virtual Meetings;
- d) reminds the whole United Reformed Church of the longstanding provision in the Rules of Procedure: “1.3 ...The Standing Orders which are printed in the Book of Reports to General Assembly shall apply to all meetings of the Assembly and the Mission Council and, in so far as they are applicable, to meetings of Synods, district councils and their committees.” Mission Council agreed.

10. Provision for virtual attendance at physical meetings and for meetings held entirely virtually

10.1 Definitions

In this Rule, the following words shall have the following meanings:

10.1.1 “Designated Body” shall mean any Council of the Church, or its Committees, including the Mission Council, Advisory Groups and Task Groups.

10.1.2 “Relevant Meeting” shall mean a meeting called as meetings of the Designated Body are normally called.

10.1.3 “Virtual Attendance” means that a person is not physically present at a Relevant Meeting, but instead is able to participate in and is present at the Relevant Meeting by means of a video and/or audio platform, in like manner to any person who may be physically present. For the avoidance of doubt, in order to constitute Virtual Attendance the presence of such a person at a Relevant Meeting must entail:

(a) the capacity for effective two-way communication, by visual and/or spoken means, between such a person(s) and those physically present and with other people attending virtually;

(b) the ability of such a person to engage in debate with, and to ask questions of, those who are physically present and others attending virtually, and to answer questions from them; and

(c) the ability of such a person to cast a vote contemporaneously with those physically present and others attending virtually.

10.1.4 “Virtual Meeting” means that a Relevant Meeting is held entirely by means of a video and/or audio platform.

10.2 Permission for Virtual Attendance

10.2.1 A Designated Body may permit any person(s) to be in Virtual Attendance at any Relevant Meeting(s).

10.2.2 If a Designated Body resolves to permit Virtual Attendance, it shall mean that, subject to

10.3, the person(s) in Virtual Attendance is/are deemed to be present at the Relevant Meeting for all purposes in the same way as if such person(s) had been physically present.

10.2.3 A decision to permit Virtual Attendance at all Relevant Meetings of a Designated Body may subsequently be revoked in respect of future Relevant Meetings.

10.2.4 For the avoidance of doubt, this section is permissive only and not directive.

10.3 Convener or Moderator at a Relevant Meeting

10.3.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Convener or Moderator, as the case may be, of any Relevant Meeting where Virtual Attendance is permitted, to establish at the opening of the Relevant Meeting:

(a) the identity of any person(s) who purport to be in Virtual Attendance, and

(b) that such a person(s) is/are in Virtual Attendance as defined in section 10, so that they are permitted to participate in the Relevant Meeting and have the right to vote.

10.3.2 If at any time during a Relevant Meeting the continuing ability of a person in Virtual Attendance to participate in the Relevant Meeting in terms of sections 10.1.3 and 10.3.1(b) is questioned, it shall be the responsibility of the Convener or Moderator to establish whether the person still meets those requirements and if not to deem that person to have left the Relevant Meeting.

10.3.3 In all cases described in these Rules the decision of the Convener or Moderator, as the case may be, shall be final.

10.3.4 If the Convenor, or Moderator, is in Virtual Attendance at a Relevant Meeting and becomes unable to participate in terms of sections 10.1.3 and 10.3.1(b), then the Relevant Meeting shall either appoint an alternative Convenor, or Moderator from amongst those attending, or else the Relevant Meeting shall be deemed to have ended. No substitute shall be so appointed unless qualified to perform the relevant function(s) in accordance with the rules and practices of the United Reformed Church.

10.4 No appeal

10.4.1 Providing that a Relevant Meeting remains quorate, no failure of technology however caused, or decision to deem any person to be or not to be in Virtual Attendance or to have left the Relevant Meeting, shall invalidate the Relevant Meeting or any decision taken at the Relevant Meeting, nor shall any such matter be a ground for appeal against any decision taken at a Relevant Meeting.

10.5 Virtual Meetings

10.5.1 For the avoidance of doubt, the United Reformed Church declares that all Designated Bodies may in principle hold Virtual Meetings of Relevant Meetings, unless explicitly prohibited from so doing by a constitutional provision.

10.5.2 In deciding whether it is appropriate for a Designated Body to hold a Virtual Meeting, the Convener, or Moderator, is required to consult with other Officers of the Designated Body to consider what proportion of the members of the Designated Body are able to participate in a Virtual Meeting, and to have particular regard if a greater proportion of members are unable to participate in a Virtual meeting than are able to participate in a Physical Meeting.¹

10.5.3 The entirety of Rules 10.1 to 10.4 shall apply in full, as far as they are applicable, to all Virtual Meetings.

Person responsible for editing document: Clerk of the General Assembly

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¹ For example, if 30 people normally attend a Physical Meeting, but only 13 can attend a virtual meeting, the Officers would be ill advised to proceed with a Virtual Meeting; whereas if 20 people normally attend a Physical Meeting, and 18 can attend a Virtual Meeting, the Officers might consider this a reasonable basis to proceed. The Officers should also be aware that some people who cannot usually attend a Physical Meeting may be able to attend a Virtual Meeting. Timings should also be considered – if people cannot normally attend a Physical Meeting in the middle of the day, it should not be assumed that they can attend a Virtual Meeting then. This, and any other footnotes, are only examples and do not form part of the Rules.