

Paper H1

URC Competency Process: When there are concerns about a minister's performance of their duties

Ministries Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive adopts the URC Competency Process in place of the URC Capability Process.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This process replaces the 2020 version of the URC Capability Process.
Main points	The process begins from a place of call, discernment and a disciplined life to assist ministers who fall short of the expected standards of ministry and are not at this stage in their ministry competent rather than incapable or incapacitated. The aim is not disciplinary but to improve performance of their duties. The hearing stage shall be heard by members of the Assessment Board because of their expertise in assessing for ministry.
Previous relevant documents	2008 Capability Process and Procedure 2020 URC Capability Process RCL Amber Light Process.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators CDAG

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In 2020 General Assembly agreed the URC Capability process (Paper F2). Responses from those who have had to implement this process indicated that it was akin to a disciplinary process and not helpful in the long term. In response to their request, Ministries Committee believes the new process is more pastoral in approach to assist a

minister, who falls short of the expected standards of ministry, in the better performance of their duties.

1. Introduction

1.1 Calling and discernment

A hallmark of the Reformed tradition is the covenant between ministers and those with whom they minister – a covenant based on discernment in the various Councils of the Church. The local church, through its Elders' and Church Meeting, discerns if candidates for ministry should be commended to the Synod. Synods discern if a sense of Call should be tested by the Assessment Board on behalf of General Assembly. Before ordination or commissioning a minister must receive a Call from the relevant Councils of the Church. In the Reformed tradition an inner sense of Call must always be confirmed by external discernment – in the URC the external discernment is located in our Councils.

Ministers work in a variety of roles for the Church – most in local pastorates or church in-community projects, some in special category posts, some for the wider Synod (often alongside local roles), and some in General Assembly posts. Regardless of role, the Church has reasonable expectations of satisfactory ministerial performance and maintenance of professional standards. In 2019 the URC adopted Marks of Ministry for ministers of Word and Sacraments and in 2007 it adopted Core Competencies for Church Related Community Workers which both outline the expected professional standards. Whilst these are detailed documents, it is accepted that no minister is expected to exhibit exceptional gifting in every area. The United Reformed Church has, however, discerned the framework of gifts and graces described in these documents to be that which forms the basis of discernment in both training and assessment.

Discernment, initial and ongoing, is undertaken in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit. The Church trusts ministers to prayerfully and consistently be open to God's further directing whilst ministers are invited to trust that the Church will continue to participate in the ongoing discernment of the external dimensions of a calling.

1.2 Performance and discernment

The Church will undertake the ministry of discernment around performance and standards in two stages – the first under the oversight of the Synod (or by the General Assembly for ministers in Assembly roles); the second under the oversight of the General Assembly's Assessment Board. The primary aim of this process is to provide a pastoral framework to maintain, and where necessary restore, satisfactory performance and professional standards. This process applies to both ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (thereafter known as ministers).

2. Living a disciplined life

1.3 Promises

At ordination or commissioning, ministers make promises to lead a holy life. In 2010 General Assembly (Appendices 3a and 3b, General Assembly *Book of Reports 2010*, pp215-218 and updated at Mission Council *Book of Reports 2020*, pp45-54) agreed guidelines that help to give substance to those promises. These standards comprise personal integrity and health, relationships with

They shall be considered as a tool to evaluate the overall performance level of the minister concerned.

It will be for the Councils overseeing the particular post, together with the minister, and with the guidance of the Synod Moderator (in local and Synod based roles), to identify and agree the particular expectations and standards it requires of its ministers. A role description should be discussed and agreed prior to induction or commissioning; and be consequent to the objectives, mission, and role description for the post. These should be included in any signed terms of settlement.

6. Performance below an expected minimum standard

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of help, support and particular steps that can be taken towards alleviating the concerns. The targets set will be realistic and timed (normally three-six months). The minister will be asked to agree the content and timing of the Special Monitoring programme. Clear record keeping during this time must be kept.

8.1.5 The agreed plan should:

- i) clarify the required standards
- ii) identify the main areas of concern
- iii) establish the likely causes of poor performance and identify any training needs; and/or
- iv) set targets for improvement on the main areas of concern which should not number more than four and a timescale for review (recommended monitoring every three weeks during period and review after three months).

8.1.6 Where appropriate, a note of any such initial discussions may be placed on the minister's file and may be used for the purposes of any future competency hearings.

8.1.7 If the minister serves a group or joint pastorate, the Synod Moderator (or their representative) shall consult with the other churches involved in the pastorate in order to ascertain whether the concerns apply only to one church or are shared by others in the pastorate. If the concerns relate to one church within the pastorate, agreement needs to be reached that in the initial meeting the views of all the churches will be represented.

8.1.8 In an LEP, where concerns are raised about a minister of another denomination, the Synod Moderator will consult with their counterpart from the other denomination about the particular performance issues and agree the process to be used to resolve said issues. Where appropriate structures of another denomination raise concerns about a minister of the URC serving in an LEP, this process shall apply with necessary modifications, and a representative of the concerned denomination shall be invited to attend meetings as necessary.

8.1.9 Where no agreement can be reached with the minister about Special Monitoring, the Council exercising the ministry of oversight may either insist upon such a programme, or determine that the failure to mutually agree such a programme raises the level of the concern such that it is appropriate to initiate the Competency Hearing.

8.2 Possible outcomes of special monitoring

8.2.1 If the Council exercising the ministry of oversight is satisfied that the minister has, by the agreed review date, made good progress during Special Monitoring, it will cease the Special Monitoring. A record of the Special Monitoring and a short report of their progress will be placed on the minister's file. A copy will be given to the minister who may register any disagreement about its content. Ministry continues on a normal basis.

8.2.2 If the Council exercising the ministry of oversight believes significant progress has been made but not yet to the required standards it may

- e) The Legal Adviser will act in an advisory capacity;
- f) The Secretary for Ministries (or a nominated representative) who will act as the note taker.

- 9.2.2 The minister may present their own response to the case or have a representative or friend do this. In any event the minister may bring a friend, colleague, or representative with them to the hearing. A representative may be a legal professional or union representative.
- 9.2.3 The Convenor of the Assessment Board (or Assessment Board member nominated by the Convenor) having received the referral shall write to the minister explaining the process.
- 9.2.4 The Secretary of Ministries shall, in liaison with the Convenor, assemble the personnel for the Panel and will ascertain the earliest date for the meeting and an appropriate venue and make the necessary practical arrangements.

9.3 The Competency Hearing Panel Process

- 9.3.1 The minister will be invited to join the Panel and the Convenor shall ensure that the Panel understands the issues involved, the seriousness of the concerns, the process to be followed and the possible outcomes.
- 9.3.2 The Convenor shall stress the need for appropriate confidentiality and encourage openness.
- 9.3.3 The Panel shall share in prayer together.
- 9.3.4 The Convenor shall ensure the good order of contributions to the Competency Hearing, and further ensure everyone has the appropriate amount of time to make their contributions.
- 9.3.5 At an appropriate stage, the Convenor will ask the Synod Moderator and the Synod representative/representative of the place of ministry if in an Assembly role, to withdraw from the Panel to give the minister the opportunity to raise any relevant issues with the Panel members who shall make the decision.

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9.3.9 The decision will be given in writing by email and by post within ten working days of the hearing.

9.4 Possible outcomes

Throughout 9.4, “the Panel” refers to the Assessment Board members of the Panel.

9.4.1 Not Proved. The Panel may find concerns not proved and the matter is closed.

9.4.2 Further Review. The Panel may discern a continuing call to ministry and decide the referral was too early, discerning that some improvement has happened and, reserving the matter to itself, gives a further period for review and improvement. No more than two further hearings should convene within the review period unless the Panel resolve to extend the review period as noted in 9.4.2.4.below. An improvement plan should be drawn up setting out:

- a) the areas in which the minister has not met the required performance standards;
- b) targets for improvement and a timescale for such improvement of not more than five months;
- c) any measures, such as additional training, mentoring, or supervision, which will be taken with a view to improving performance;
- d) a period for review which shall be not more than 6 months from the date of the decision;
- e) the consequences of failing to improve within the review period, or of further unsatisfactory performance (outlined in 9.4.3 below)

9.4.2.1 The warning and improvement plan will normally remain active for twelve months from the end of the review period. After the active period the warning will remain permanently on the minister’s file.

9.4.2.2 The Competency Panel will receive regular reviews of the minister’s performance during the review period from the Synod/Ministry Support/Steering Group and will write to update the minister and the Council charged with oversight of the post with any comments.

9.4.2.3 No further action will be taken if the Panel is satisfied with the minister’s improving performance.

9.4.2.4 The review period may be extended once for a period not exceeding three months if the Panel feels that there has been a substantial, but insufficient, improvement.

9.4.3 Curtailment and Move to Inactive Status

The Panel may resolve to curtail the pastoral tie or appointment and place the minister into Active Status 7 (whereby they are authorised to perform the functions of ministry on a limited basis as specified in an agreement between the General Assembly and the minister and with the approval of the Accreditations sub-committee.) In the case of a stipendiary minister the

Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee may be involved to ease the transition out of paid ministerial work.

The United Reformed Church believes in the reality of change and notes that a period of limited ministry may give time for reflection, learning, and growth which may help a minister's performance to improve. The limited ministry noted above might provide evidence of improvement. Following such an