

General Synod

Pattern of Meetings of General Synod

Background

1. At their meeting in October 2018, the Business Committee requested a consultation of Synod members on their preferred pattern for February General Synod meetings. This paper outlines the results of this consultation.
2. In the past few years the General Synod has met over three to four days in February *commencing* on a Monday. In 2018 and 2019 the General Synod met/will meet for three to four days *ending* on a Saturday.
3. The Committee proposed that in an effort to attract working aged lay people, it would be worth considering what the preferences of members were of current members. It was believed that there would be value in structuring the February meeting to reflect the July meeting pattern (Friday-Tuesday).

The Consultation

4. The following information was requested of those completing the consultation:
 - To which House they belong (Bishops) (Clergy) (Laity)
 - What age bracket they fall within (Under 25) (26-35) (36-45) (46-55) (56-65) (65+)
 - What their employment status is (options given are listed below)
 - Full time employment
 - Self employed
 - Part time employment
 - Full time parent/carer
 - Full time education
 - Volunteer
 - Semi-Retired
 - Retired
 - Full time ordained ministry
 - Non-Stipendiary (clergy)
 - Full time ordinand
 - Other (please specify)
 - They were then invited to add their preferences (1 – most preferable; 5 – least preferable; or N/A) to the following options on the basis of an average four-day General Synod meeting:
 - Monday – Thursday
 - Tuesday – Friday
 - Wednesday – Saturday
 - Thursday – Sunday
 - Friday – Monday

The Results

5. The following preferences were given:

	Monday-Thursday	Tuesday-Friday	Wednesday-Saturday	Thursday-Sunday	Friday-Monday	Total participants
Bishops	9	1	1	3	5	19
Clergy	53	18	16	5	11	103
Laity	24	13	15	14	16	84

	Monday-Thursday	Tuesday-Friday	Wednesday-Saturday	Thursday-Sunday	Friday-Monday	Total participants
Under 25	0	0	0	1	1	2
26-35	1	1	1	1	0	4
36-45	8	5	1	1	2	17
46-55	27	8	10	5	10	61
56-65	34	16	14	12	13	89
65+	16	4	6	2	6	34

	Monday-Thursday	Tuesday-Friday	Wednesday-Saturday	Thursday-Sunday	Friday-Monday	Total participants
	14	9	8	13	7	51

House of Laity members who are: in full time education; full time employment; full time parent/carers; in part time employment; self employed; a volunteer; other (2)

Key

Most votes		Least votes	
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6. A vote was conducted under the single transferable vote system and the results can be found below:

Valid votes	206
Invalid votes	2
Quota	103

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	
	First Preferences	Exclusion of Thursday - Sunday	Exclusion of Tuesday - Friday	
Monday - Thursday	86	86	24	110 Elected
Tuesday - Friday	34	34	-34	-
Wednesday - Saturday	32	6	38	7
				45

Thursday - Sunday	22	-22	-		-	
Friday - Monday	32	16	48	3	51	
Non-transferable			0		0	
Totals	206		206		206	

Analysis

7. The survey was of existing General Synod members, not previous Synod members or those who might be considering standing for Synod on a future occasion.
8. From these results, the majority of those who took part in this consultation would prefer to keep with the tradition of meeting from a Monday onward and not over the weekend. If, however, the Committee wishes to prioritise the opinion of lay people of working age the results are slightly more evenly spread, but with the same overall result.
9. Attached as Annex 1 is a list of “further comments” submitted by members.

Recommendations by the Business Committee

10. The Business Committee has concluded that the London Synods for the years 2021 – 2023 will include a mix of Synods which meet over a week-end and Synods which meet entirely during the week.
11. The dates which the Synod is asked to approve are set out on the Agenda.

Revd Canon Sue Booy

For and on Behalf of the General Synod Business Committee

January 2019

List of feedback from the pattern of meeting dates consultation

PLEASE AVOID HALF TERM ITS VERY ANNOYING TO FIND THE NEXT SESSION IS IN THE MIDDLE OF HALF TERM Particularly if your spouse ins a Teacher.

please allocate enough time for issues likely to attract amendments and counter-amendments so that only a few contributions often only lasting only two minutes are possible - or make an early speech limit. Fewer presentations and more attention to legislative Business - it is a core business.

I think avoiding a Sunday at the February meeting is important, especially for clergy (thinking selfishly!) who find that hard and should be encourage to try to take the odd Sunday off to have a proper weekend. However, I recognise that for lay people, many (especially in lower paid jobs and from under-represented groups) find it hard to take time off work for things like Synod - therefore weekday meetings favour retired or well-off people!

No to weekends

This is based on my personal preference. I realise that some working people and clergy may think quite differently!

Doing General Synod, travelling back to the North West then doing a full Sunday is utterly draining. I appreciate that it is hard for people who work but Sunday is something else again.

I would like to explore the possibility of one single annual meeting in York over 5 or 6 days.

For ordained members to miss two Sundays a year for Synod business, one of them possibly close to the beginning of Lent, is problematic, especially where they serve multi parish benefices and thus do not see every congregation every week. It is also difficult for clergy and lay ministers wishing to take a Sunday off for February half term, as they would miss two in close proximity.

As mentioned by several speakers in recent 'Take note' debates on Business Committee reports (e.g. David Banting and Jonathan Alderton-Ford), we ought to be using the November 'contingency' dates to enable extended debates on issues that, currently, are either side-lined or subject to unreasonably short time-limits for proper consideration. While (unrecorded) 'group work' has its value, it should not be at the expense of proper time being allocated to Synod's primary role as a debating and legislative chamber.

being semi-retired I have more flexibility with my time than others so I am happy do anything which will widen participation.

Although meeting over a weekend might make it easier for some lay people in full time employment, please remember that some jobs also require weekend working: not everyone works Mon-Fri, 9-5! Personally, I would prefer to give up days in my working week for Synod, rather than the weekend with family and local church (including commitments I have there) - but my situation may be atypical as I am fortunate to have the flexibility of freelance work. Also, when setting the timetable for Synod (especially if a House of Laity meeting is scheduled for before the start of the group of sessions), please give consideration to those of us travelling on public transport from further-flung (and less well-connected) parts of the country and don't set a start time too early on the first day, please!

Whilst you can never please everyone, I think the balance of a weekend in York and part of the working week in London a good balance. In my view including a Saturday does not make it any easier for people with young families and other caring commitments to commit to being on The General Synod.

If we're not going to have 3 synods a year, please can you make that clear asap in the quinquennium? It'd be better to just have the two I think, and know that folk can plan their work life/holidays accordingly.

although I fully understand the issue for people in full time secular employment, which is why my preferred option is to meet Wed-Sat, I am also aware that finding Sunday cover for parochial clergy is becoming increasingly difficult, with all the implications of that.

It could be varied during the 5 years, thus giving all a chance to have their preferred option

There should be fewer meetings, of shorter duration, limited where possible to legislative business rather than presentations

Current members were elected before London meetings included a Saturday. Real issue is, would more younger, or in secular employment, candidates stand if synod always met at weekends? Need to ask non-members. Also, please avoid school half terms: meeting mid-week over half term seems specifically arranged to exclude parents of school age children.

It is interesting that you speak about full time ordained ministry then SSM. You could be full time ordained and SSM

I think the difficulty is that as I am in parish ministry my churches will not accept me taking two Sundays away for Synod. If we don't finish til Saturday afternoon it's a nightmare to be ready for Sunday. So, while I entirely sympathise with the need to make Synod more accessible to those in full time secular work, for me personally Feb Synod in the week works better

Please avoid Saturday transport is awful

I would MUCH rather have a weekend at home with my bubbas and be at Synod during the week while they're at school!!!!

I recognise the desire to accommodate Lay Synod members in full time employment working Mon- Fri. however, most of the House of Clergy are in full time employment and have to work weekends, especially Sundays. Arranging cover can be particularly difficult; as the July sessions of Synod always fall over a weekend it would be unhelpful for a second weekend the February to suffer the same fate. Thank you.

Am conscious that the clergy would find Sundays difficult, as winter tends to need sickness cover too.

Please work hard towards shorter meetings thereby reducing the number of days synod meets. Focus only on what needs to be done. Its costly and expensive and of a bygone age. We have to be radical.

I am the only priest ministering in my context, so meeting on Sunday really is impossible. Saturday is my day off, but I support meeting on Saturdays because of the lay members who have to take unpaid leave from work to attend Synod.

There are often engineering works taking place on Saturday and Sunday which makes travel very difficult and can double the length of the journey.

arriving back late Saturday to go into a busy Sunday feels like the worst option, I think it is really important to be over the weekend for those in Mon-Fri roles who otherwise might need to use annual leave for this.

If we wish to attract younger working people then we need to avoid the half term holiday.

<p>It will always be difficult to suit everyone but as I know for those who work the weekends are preferable.</p>
<p>I don't understand why the November dates aren't used, even for a short group of sessions, to spread the business out more, allowing for more exploratory discussion sessions and not leaving such a long gap (July to February) before business can be moved on.</p>
<p>I wonder how easy it would be for clergy to take another Sunday off and hope that a meeting of the General Synod would not count as one of their Sundays off. Also I suggest the cost of hotel rooms is looked into, whether it would incur additional expense. Meetings ending at the weekend will of course mean less expensive train travel.</p>
<p>The current trail about Saturday has only had a truncated meeting on Saturday that made the last one feel not worthwhile. If it has to be on a weekend, it needs to make full use of the day!</p>
<p>Only, that it is really important to have younger GS members, and also much better representation by Black, Asian and Ethnic church goers.</p>
<p>i am not sure of the impact if any on expenses - does travel or accommodation tend to cost more at weekends? Train travel at weekend can be worse.</p>
<p>Clergy find it difficult to get cover. Sunday meetings are not helpful, and, for that matter, nor sessions ending on a Saturday.</p>
<p>As the parent of three children I would prefer synod not to meet during school spring half term holidays please</p>
<p>If the Synod ends at 4.00 pm on Saturday I can't get back for my Sunday duties: I am a chaplain in France and there are no flights to my region on Saturday evenings. This means extra cost (extra night in London)</p>
<p>If the weekend option is chosen, there could be a service of Holy Communion in Westminster Abbey on Sunday morning (similar to York Minster in July). Alternatively, could General Synod meet once a year for a longer period? (The Convocations however could meet more regularly.)</p>
<p>My preference selection is very marginal.</p>
<p>If General Synod finishes on a Saturday afternoon, then there is a risk that people will leave early unless the agenda for the final afternoon is really compelling.</p>
<p>It's important that working families are given attention as many members - lay and clergy - fall into this bracket. For this group weekends are often particularly precious time-wise.</p>
<p>I think have one session per year over a weekend and the other session which is part weekdays & part weekend, provides balance. Many of us who work, also have church commitments on Sundays</p>
<p>I support moves to make Synod as accessible as possible to those in paid employment.</p>
<p>It is indeed possible to meet over a weekend but less convenient for those of us who have to find cover for the Sunday. Which is the best option cost-wise?</p>
<p>Saturdays are difficult for members who live a long way from London, especially clergy.</p>
<p>A move to a weekend in February will discourage ordinary parish clergy from standing in favour of diocesan officials like me who are less committed on Sundays.</p>

If both sessions were to include Sunday I would have to consider whether I could continue.
It is important not to make Synod so short that debates are too short for a full variety of speakers to be heard, including those who are not usually called.
I appreciated the need to accommodate those in full time work but travelling on Fridays is difficult.
Aim for shorter meetings
Mon-Fri are the best days as children are in school and my spouse works weekends, too.
It's a challenge to fit Synod in with a full time job, not only for the days off for meetings but also time to prepare, particularly getting through all the reading in advance. I appreciate not all papers can be circulated much earlier, but any additional staggering would help!
Clergy members must understand that for almost all working laity, time to attend synod comes out of limited Annual Leave. I do not know any clergy who use their A/L for synod.
(1) As someone with a busy job, the weekend is family-time, and I very much resent having to give that up. I can accommodate York arrangements, but please to not force me to give up family time in February or November. (2) Of paramount importance, for arranging cheaper accommodation and booking time off work, however, is knowing well in advance what the dates will be and whether or not we are meeting on November. As it is, I have to book off two Monday-Friday weeks just in case. I've already had to plan February and book off the whole week, because the business committee has left it rather late to specify which dates will be used. Please, please, give as much notice as possible- those of us with jobs and families really need to know.
July already requires clergy to be absent from their parish for a Sunday - it would be a further challenge if we were to be absent for two Sundays.
Meeting over weekends in February is almost impossible for clergy.
The main thing is knowing far enough in advance so am very grateful for early notice re the Feb group of sessions, thank you.
Just to remind that for those commuting to and from the London Synod rather than staying overnight, railway travel is often disrupted at weekends.
I welcome having this survey but note it will be biased because the current synod membership will probably under-represent those most likely to benefit from, say, a change to weekend sessions since they will not have stood in the past knowing the current pattern.
Trying to avoid school half term holidays is not easy as dates vary a little across the country but for many it would be desirable.
My choice is above is based on my convenience but I am not opposed to weekend meetings if they widen who might stand for election.
Please DO NOT meet during Half Term. When my children were younger this was a major penalty for me and them.
As a retired person, I do not mind which days of the week we meet, therefore I would respect the choice of those who are employed.

For me, as clergy, being away on 'another' Sunday is not well received. I am supposed to take 6 Sundays a year as holiday - to add 2 more (rather than the current 1 more) puts an extra burden on those having to take extra services

The pattern of Feb 2018 and 2019 seems the worst of all worlds - lay people still need to take time from work and clergy have to be away from the parish for the weekend. February Synod also falls in half term again. Only once in the last five years has this not been the case for me. Could there please be attention to this in future planning? Might the General Synod follow the pattern of other churches and meet annually for a week, rather than for two groups of sessions each year?

As a full-time volunteer, my pattern of commitments is really very irregular, and it therefore makes no difference when we meet: this is reflected in my responses. For a good number of years, however, I combined Synod with full-time employment, which took up approximately 8 out of my 23 days' annual leave every year—something that was only realistically possible because I'm single. Although weekends are obviously difficult for the clergy, my impression is that they can usually make the time if they're organised and plan ahead; whereas no amount of organisation can create time off if you're in the kind of job where you're expected to be at your desk between set times every day, and where your secular employer has no interest in or understanding of the General Synod (so no chance of unpaid time off).

Finishing on Sundays runs the big risk of some being disrupted by rail engineering works and get home proving difficult

Please try to avoid February half term. During the last quinquennium I never once had a problem. In this quinquennium the clash has happened three times for me. Older members may not have school-age children, but do we only want older members? The July sessions use a Sunday; please avoid using another. The house of clergy could easily be weighted away from parish clergy and towards diocesan functionaries if more Sundays are used. Clergy and lay should all be ministering in their own churches on Sundays.

This completely misses the point about the February sitting. It needs to avoid any half term holidays if we are to attract a more representative body of people, be that weekends or mid week. Why not try early Feb or early March, then decide whether you want weekends or not

Can we please try and keep away from half-term, especially if the meeting falls heavily in the weekdays.

See speech I made in July - meeting over a weekend makes it easier for visitors to attend therefore makes synod more accountable etc..

Synod is a big deal. I'll move whatever needs moving to be there. I don't mind where you put it, it comes first. Good to have those dates out nice n early.

Engineering work is normally carried out at weekends. Hence it may not be possible to get home easily. The price of transport and hotels is at premium on a Monday . Friday is also a premium day on the railway

Combining Half Term with a Saturday has meant I will need to leave Synod early to spend time with my family when they are also on holiday

I would strongly urge the Business Committee to avoid London meetings on Saturdays and especially on Sundays. Please be mindful of clergy travelling long distances to take services and/or find cover for Sunday duties.

Only that taking clergy for another Sunday out of parishes is a very big ask.

I would have ranked Weds-Sat 5 but system would only allow me to use numbers 1,2 or 3. One Synod which takes a weekend and one which doesn't seems a fair balance for those who like weekend meetings and those who don't.

For me, as a parish priest, the most difficult option is ending on a Saturday at tea time - it comes with a presupposition that we'll be back at the coalface on Sunday - after getting home very late at night. It better to either give us a clear day before (i.e. end Friday or Thursday) or go the whole hog and have a weekend - but for some clergy, getting cover will not always be easy and may preclude some clergy from wanting to stand.

Avoid travelling to or from synod on Saturday or Sunday

Central London is uncomfortable, expensive and speaks of the establishment. Though probably no other option available at that time of year.

Please can we try to avoid half term holidays as it affects younger members of synod, especially those with families. These school holidays vary from county to county but if we went for the 1st week of February it would usually miss it across the country.

Try to avoid the school spring term half term holiday

It's an impossible job to find a solution that everyone is happy with. Having TWO synods that meet on a Sunday seems to make no sense at all, since you'd hope we all have obligations elsewhere on the Lord's Day. As the father of a young family, I wouldn't appreciate losing a second entire weekend.

Really need to make sure we avoid half term..which appears to have failed again...

Rail travel on Saturdays and Sundays is not good with often disruption to services for engineering work. With a working spouse I value weekends for family activities. For Clergy being away from the parish on a Sunday is not ideal.

Retaining the current general pattern - core weekend in July and core midweek in February - would seem preferable. For those lay people who are in employment, July already requires usually three working days off. A four day February group of sessions, will also require two, possibly three depending on the agenda load.

Starting or finishing on Sunday means I have to stay another night, as there are no trains from or to my nearest station on Sunday. Are three nights long enough? In both London and York I prefer the equivalent of four whole days, which means four nights, otherwise it is hard to fit in synod business and all the fringe meetings that interest me.

Currently I commute daily for London GS. Having commuted for much of the past 40 years I am reluctant to commute at week-ends. For a Friday-Monday pattern I would stay in London.... which put costs up. I favour the previous pattern.

I would far rather avoid meeting over a Sunday

Could we not move to three days and find a different way of doing legislative business?

It needs to be such as to attract the greatest number of working laity in order to be most likely to be representative

It is not just the clergy who have to find Sunday cover. Lay members who hold positions such as organist, bell-ringer etc. are also inconvenienced by Sunday meetings.

Whilst I appreciate the difficulty for some lay members of weekday Synods, I feel the balance would swing too far in favour of the laity were both the July and February meetings to include

Sundays. Many clergy have difficulty in finding cover for services in their absence and even with the existing pattern some clergy leave the July synod early in order to be back for Sunday.

For stipendiary clergy missing Sunday in the parish is a big deal

Those of us who travel a considerable distance and have heavy Sunday commitments are likely to find weekend Synod meetings difficult.

I think we either need to go for the full weekend or all weekdays. It will be very hard to hold people to the end on a Saturday if it is the final day. I do not think we should ask people to do long distance travel on a Sunday when public transport is much more limited. It either asks too much time or encourages driving, which is not very Eco.

As a full time incumbent I found the Saturday very hard to attend as I need to be ready for Sunday services. The idea of meeting on a Sunday as well would mean being out of the Parish 2 Sundays in the year for Synod. I think I would not be able to stand for Synod in that case.