

Guide to Synod Questions

The Synod Office hope you will find the following guide useful.

Question Time is a formal part of the Synod Business Agenda and is an opportunity for members to ask questions of the departments, boards, commissions and committees of the National Church Institutions of the Church of England.

Members may ask up to **two** Questions at any Group of Sessions of Synod.

Questions are normally taken on the first day of each group of sessions. The deadline for the receipt of Questions is always given in the General Notes printed at the beginning of the synod Agenda and is available significantly in advance of other deadlines, to give staff time to answer.

- Please study the information about deadlines carefully.
- Notice of Questions should be sent to the Questions Administrator and emailed to: questions@churchofengland.org or via the Synod App using the tab 'Queries Synod Support'.

Question Time: a guide for members

A Question Time is held at every Group of Sessions, normally on the first evening. The Business Committee tries to allow a significant time for Questions, usually between 75 minutes and 90 minutes.

Questions are governed by Standing Orders 112 to 117.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/members-resources/general-synod-standing-orders>.

Ahead of submitting a Question

Please consider if your question is the most appropriate way to obtain an answer before tabling your question.

Question Time should be used to draw attention to policy, fact and 'on the record' answers which are available for future reference. It is primarily a means to hold the National Church Institutions to account and to gather information. It is not intended to pursue individual Synod members' personal interests.

If you wish to make more general enquiries or have the need of very involved or specialist information, you may find it more useful to contact the various Departmental Directors or Chairs of Committees and Boards (who can be identified by referring to the Church of England Yearbook), or the Clerk to the Synod or the sending an enquiry via the Church of England Website.

Questions

All questions are answered in written form on the Questions Notice Paper, with the opportunity to ask supplementary questions orally in the Synod Chamber.

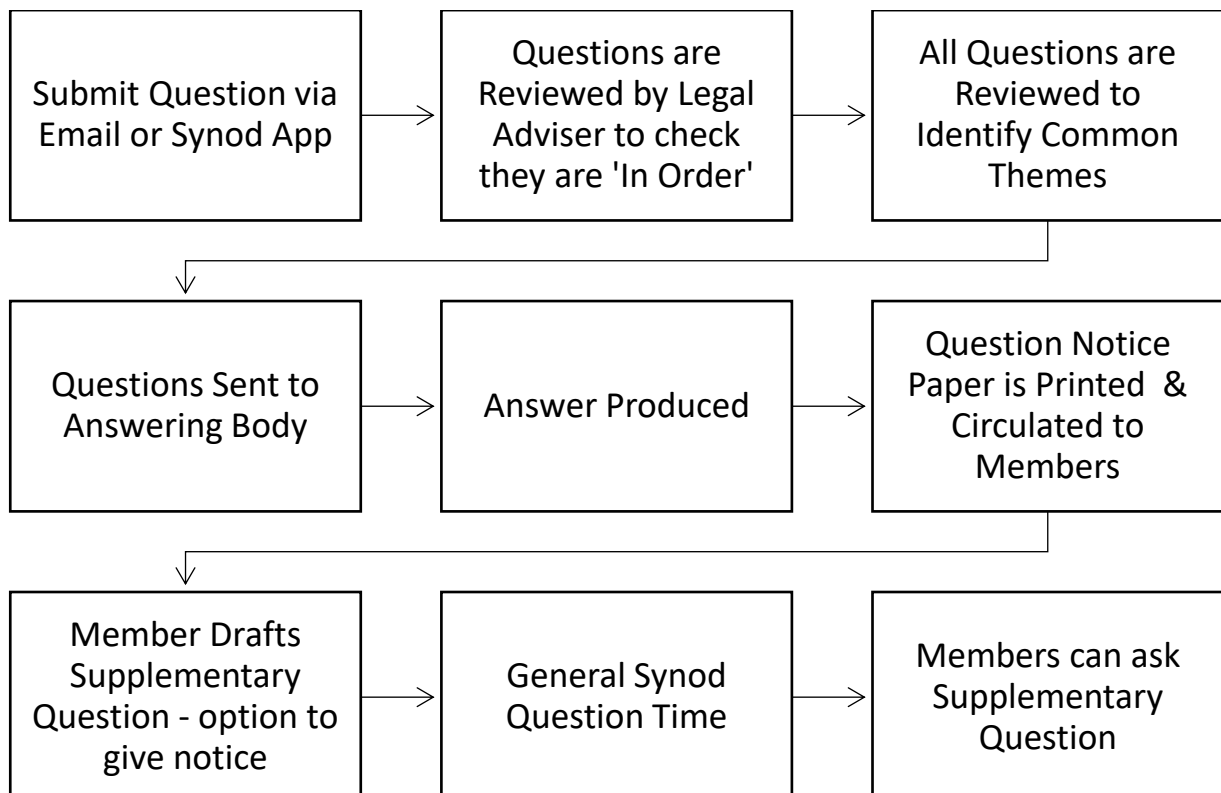
The rule of thumb is to allow two supplementary questions per primary question appearing in the Notice Paper (the Chair has the power to allow additional supplementary questions). The member who asked the original question has the right to ask the first supplementary; other members are also able to ask supplementary questions. All supplementary questions must be strictly relevant to the original question or printed response, otherwise they will be ruled 'out of order.' All supplementary questioners are called at the Chair's discretion.

The slot given for Questions in the business agenda is time-limited so please do keep your questions brief to allow as many questions to be reached as possible.

Members should be aware that if too many supplementary questions are asked it prevents other members' questions being heard. For this reason, please consider if your supplementary question would be better answered by contacting the answering body directly.

All questions requiring an extensive written answer, such as those involving substantial amounts of statistical material, will still appear in the Questions Notice Paper but may have a brief response stating that the information is placed on the Notice Board located near the Synod Information Desk. This information is made available separately to the questioner as well as appearing in the Report of Proceedings.

Process for Questions



How to frame the Question

Questions can be tricky to shape to ensure you get the answer you wish.

There are a few handy tips below to help in drafting which the Secretariat hope will be useful in order for you to receive a useful answer.

Members can ask up to two primary questions for answer at any one Group of Sessions of the General Synod (SO 112(2)(a)).

All primary questions will be printed in the Questions Notice Paper.

A question should:

- be short, concise, precise, factual, not emotive, and not ask for an expression of opinion.
- it must seek information or press for action.
- be about something the Answering Body is responsible for.
- be based on fact, not speculation.
- use neutral language and not contain unnecessary information.
- not ask for information which is readily available elsewhere.
- not refer to a case that is active in the UK courts.
- be asked in the third person and not make personal statements or observations.
Framing a question in the third person usually uses formal language, "Has the Committee considered", not "what are you doing about ..."
If you need to address the person answering the question it is best to use: He, She, It, Its, They, Them, Their and Theirs.
- be framed around only one point (unless asking for a sequence of statistical data).
If additional questions are added to the primary question, it reduces the focus and allows the person answering more opportunity to avoid answering the question, or only answer part of a question.
- if you wish to ask a lengthy question it may be best to contact the department directly to seek the information.
- if an answer incurs a disproportionate cost to answer or requires extensive research that cannot be completed in the time available, the NCIs (National Church Institutions) may decline to answer the question.
- if considerable statistical information is requested or material is not easily fitted into the format of the Questions Notice Paper, the material will be made available to all members on the Synod Notice Board and to the questioning member.

An example initial question

To ask the Chair of the Business Committee:

When will the Business Committee issue updated information on the General Synod section of the Church of England website about how to stand for election to the General Synod?

How to frame a supplementary question

The member whose question it is will be called first to ask a supplementary.

Any Member is allowed to ask a supplementary question to another Member's primary question. This is at the Chair's discretion and is usually restricted to two additional supplementary questions.

Please consider using this sparingly as it increases the likelihood that not all the tabled questions will be reached.

A supplementary question should use most of the points found above but also:

- it must be a question not a statement.
- be linked to the theme of the original question.
- The questioner should listen carefully to the response to any previous questions and consider whether they still need to ask a further question.
- be framed around one point otherwise the person answering will pick the easiest part to answer.

An example supplementary question

"I thank the Chair of the Business Committee for their answer. Will the Committee be publishing the information on the website in accessible formats to ensure all those who may want to stand for election can locate information in an accessible format?"

In Order vs Out of Order

When drafting your question please be as precise as possible.

Questions can only be asked of individuals or bodies listed in Standing Order 112(1) and Standing Order 113 stipulates the permissible content of questions which can be asked.

Questions received may not be 'In Order' in the form in which they have been submitted. Instead of simply ruling such questions 'Out of Order' the Legal Adviser attempts, where possible, to assist members by redirecting and/or redrafting their question to bring them into order.

Where a question does not relate to the duties or business of the person or body concerned, it will be redirected – where possible. However, some questions cannot be redirected to any of the individuals or bodies listed in Standing Order 112(1) and are then deemed 'Out of Order'.

If redrafting is required, the wording proposed by the Legal Adviser will be sent to the member, with a deadline for response and an indication that approval will be assumed if a response is not received by that deadline.

Rationale for declaring a question ‘Out of Order’

To reduce the amount of time and effort involved (for both staff and members), please test your Question against the list of points below before submitting it and reword it if necessary.

A question can be declared ‘out of order’ using the following criteria:

- if the member has already submitted two other Questions for answer at the same Group of Sessions.
- if it is not in fact a question, but a series of questions.
- if its meaning is unclear.
- if it contains any argument (although brief factual material necessary to establish the basis on which the Question is asked is unobjectionable).
- if it contains any imputation (i.e., any express or implied criticism even if that criticism may be true).
- if it asks for an expression of opinion (including on a question of law).
- if it asks for the solution of any hypothetical problem.
- The Secretary General and the Clerk may be questioned about their own duties.

If the question does not relate to the duties of the Secretary General or the Clerk to the Synod or to the business of a body to whose Chair a question may be addressed, it will be declared ‘out of order.’

In all other cases, the Question must relate to the business of the body chaired by the person to whom the Question is addressed.

- Please note that the Archbishops may be questioned only about the business of the bodies which they chair.

The Archbishops are not answerable to the Synod for their personal actions or statements, for their responsibilities as Metropolitans, or for their Anglican Communion responsibilities.

Answering Bodies to whom a question can be directed

- *Appointments Committee*
- *Archbishops’ Council*
- *Business Committee*
- *Central Readers Council*
- *Church Commissioners*
- *Clergy Discipline Commission*
- *Clerk to the Synod*
- *Council for Christian Unity*
- *Crown Nominations Commission*
- *Dioceses Commission*
- *Ethical Investment Advisory Group*
- *Faith and Order Commission*
- *House of Bishops*
- *House of Clergy*
- *House of Laity*
- *Legal Advisory Commission*
- *Liturgical Commission*
- *Ministry Council*
- *Mission & Public Affairs Council*
- *National Society Council*
- *Pensions Board*
- *Remuneration & Conditions of Service Committee*
- *Secretary General*

Deadline to submit a question

The meaning of the deadline is that the Question must have been received before the relevant time. The only fair way to apply the deadline is to apply it strictly.

The deadline for submitting a Question for answer at a Group of Sessions is clearly identified on the Synod timetable.

The timetable is published after the Business Committee meets to set the agenda and is available on the website. The deadline date is also clearly identified in the first circulation of General Synod papers.

Receipt of your question will be acknowledged, and a reference number allocated to it for ease of communication if the question needs to be redirected or reworded to bring it into order.

The deadline is the deadline for submission of any question *that is in order*.

Please do not wait till the last moment to submit your question as it may need to be redrafted to bring it into order. Sometimes a conversation with the member concerned is necessary to establish the meaning which the question is intended to have or to explain why it is necessary for the wording to be changed.

If, when the deadline is reached a question is not in order and cannot readily be brought into order by simple redrafting, it will be ruled out of order. If you submit your question at least one day before the deadline, that will ensure that there will be time for redrafting and consultation if that proves to be necessary.

How should Questions be submitted?

Questions should be submitted direct to the Questions Administrator (Sue Moore, Central Secretariat), by email to questions@churchofengland.org from an email registered with the Synod Office.

Questions may also be submitted via the Synod App using the tab 'Queries Synod Support'.

Please include in your email all appropriate contact details such as email, telephone number at which you may be reached in the time up to the deadline as we may need to contact you to discuss your question.

Withdrawing a Question

A member may withdraw a question for answer at a group of sessions by giving written notice to the Chair, and SO 13 accordingly does not apply. Where notice is given under this paragraph, the question is not to be put.

Any queries about the advice given in this note may be addressed to:

The Questions Administrator Sue Moore questions@churchofengland.org