

General Assembly 2018 – Feedback

The General Assembly of 2018 saw the introduction of circulation breaks, and commissioners are increasingly encouraged to use digital resources. Feedback was sought on these issues as well as the preparation of commissioners.

The main points are:

- Even split of those who did, and did not use the electronic resources
 - Lack of access to technology was the biggest reason not to use them
 - Close to two-thirds of those who did use them had a “Good” or “Very good” experience.
- Circulation breaks were extremely well received
- Preparation, including the “Being a Commissioner” leaflet and First Time Commissioners’ evening, was found to be very helpful.

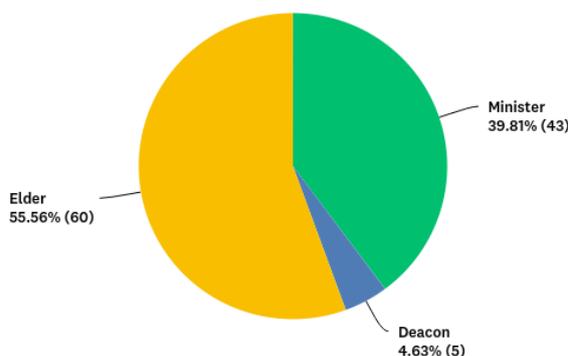
This report summarises the responses; the questionnaire and the full text responses to open questions are appended.

Responses

A brief survey was placed in the pigeon-holes of every third commissioner to ensure the most representative sample. Further comments were invited from other commissioners. Delegates and visitors were invited to return a modified form.

Around 230 questionnaires were distributed to commissioners, and 112 (48%) were returned. One email was received with comments, and two delegates’ forms were returned.

Q10 In what capacity are you attending?



Distributing the surveys using the pigeon-holes has resulted in what appears to be a very representative sample, with 56% of responses coming from elders, 40% from ministers and 5% from

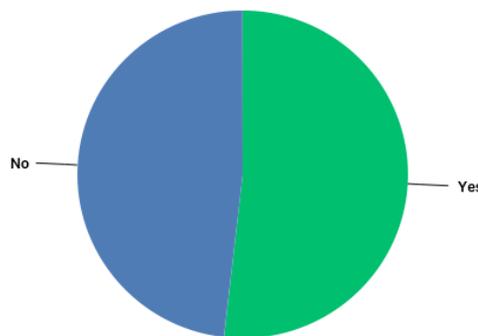
deacons. Responses were received from commissioners from 38 of the 46 presbyteries.¹

In addition, there was an even split between those who use, and don't use, the electronic documents, indicating that we have managed to capture the views of people with differing experiences of the digital GA.

The Digital GA

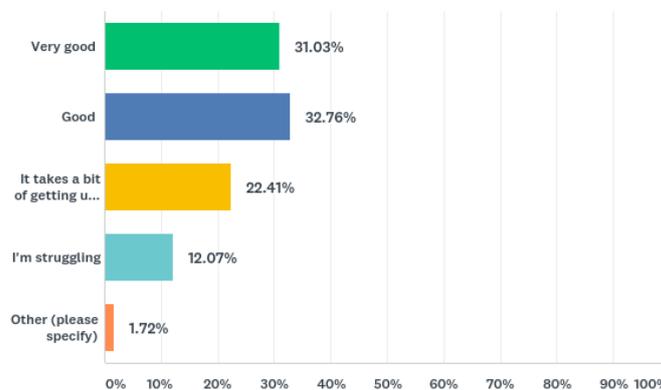
There was an even split between those who had (57; 51.8%) and had not (53; 48.2%) made use of the electronic documents.

Q1 Have you made use of the electronic documents from gapublications.co.uk?



For those who **had** used them, 64% said that their experience was “Good” or “Very good”, while 12% felt that they were “struggling”. Their full experiences were rated as shown below:

Q3 If YES, how would you rate your experience



¹ Presbyteries without a response were West Lothian, Wigtown and Stranraer, Moray, Lothaber, Lewis, Shetland, International Charges and Jerusalem.

For those who had **not** used the electronic documents, 6 (13.6%) said that more information would help them transfer, while 8 (18.2%) said that hands-on training would be of use. 31 other responses were received and are listed in the appendix. Of those who offered comment, 35.5% said that they lacked an appropriate device with which to access the documents, and 19.3% said that they preferred hard copy, for example:

Assumption being made that all commissioners have access to suitable digital equipment with sufficient battery life.

I prefer paper to flick back and forward and write quick notes etc. I am unlikely to want to use electronic. I also feel I'd less likely refer back to electronic afterwards

Two people mentioned the lack of charging facilities and a further two spoke of eyesight issues which prevented them reading from screens for a long period. Other single comments included the lack of broadband in the parish, to stop printing the materials, and the need to find more time.

The fourth question related to additional IT resources. The most popular request was for better indexing of documents with 14 of the 29 comments relating to this, for example:

I tried both options but in the end, the paper option was more flexible and useful for me. It was difficult to flick back and forward to deliverances and specific points being discussed especially in some of the topics that had many pages. I had to give up and revert to using the blue book.

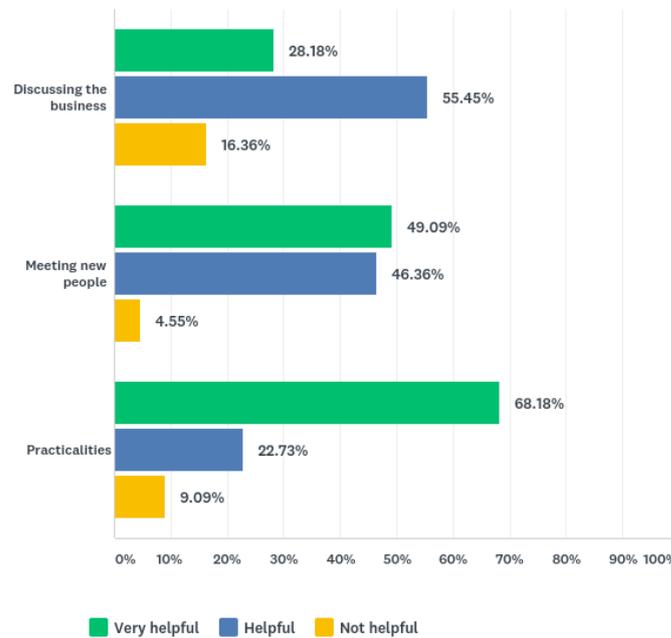
Four people mentioned charging points, and three asked if the daily papers documents could include the relevant reports so that they were easy to find. A further two comments asked about training.

Circulation breaks

The circulation breaks were very well received, with over 90% of respondents finding them helpful or very helpful for meeting new people and for practicalities such as comfort breaks and refreshments. Using the breaks to

discuss business was found to be slightly less helpful, but 84.3% still found it at least helpful. The full responses are given here:

Q5 Did you find the circulation breaks helpful for:



Around half of the responses provided comments about the circulation breaks, with a number of comments about queues or congestion when trying to get refreshments. People appreciated the opportunity to get fresh air, and a number spoke of the benefits of not having people entering and leaving during debates as they knew there would be an official break in which they could move.

A bit crowded at first but got better. I was a bit against them before assembly but was soon looking forward to them, and didn't feel the need to leave the assembly during sessions

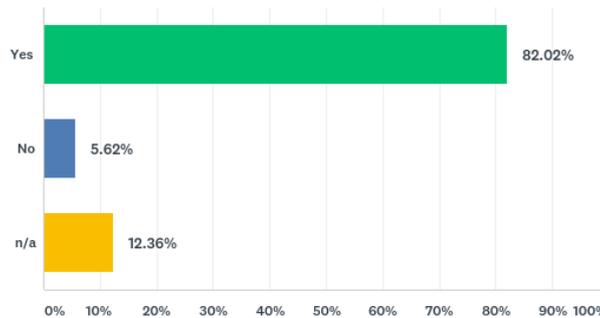
Just that the circulation breaks are too congested. Had it been raining would people have gone outside?

Preparation prior to the Assembly

2018 was the first year in which a “Being a Commissioner” leaflet was distributed to commissioners ahead of the Assembly. 82% of respondents

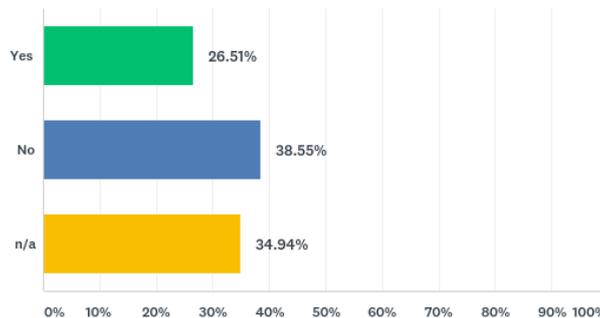
found it helpful, while some declared themselves experienced commissioners and admitted to not looking at it.

Q6 Did you find the "Being a Commissioner" leaflet helpful



Some presbyteries organised local events for commissioners in preparation for General Assembly. 27% of respondents had engaged with these events, while 39% had not. 35% indicated that they had not been aware of local events.

Q7 Did you engage with your Presbytery's Commissioners' preparation



Commissioners attending for the first time are invited to a First Time Commissioners' event on Friday evening. This was very well received with 86% of respondents who had attended the event saying that it was useful.

There were 8 comments from people about other things they wished they had known before coming to Assembly. Four of these related to procedure, three to travel and accommodation arrangements and one about the late arrival of the strategic plan.

Other comments

Sixty-four of the responses included additional comments, listed at the end of this report. Many of these related to the circulation breaks. There were around

fifteen comments about how helpful stewards and other staff had been, and how well organised the week was. The videos on the web site were commended. A couple of comments related to expenses and a further two to preamble before questions.

Fiona J Tweedie, 6 June 2018.

Questionnaire form

ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE – GA 2018

You have been randomly selected to complete this feedback form about some of the new features of the General Assembly. When completed please pop it into the marked boxes in the

The Digital GA

Have you made use of the electronic documents from gapublications.co.uk? YES NO

If NO, can you tell us what would help you to make the transition to electronic documents?

More information Hands on training Other:

If YES, how would you rate your experience of using the electronic documents?

Very Good Good It takes a bit of getting used to I'm struggling!

What additional IT support or resourcing would you find helpful?

Circulation breaks

Did you find the circulation breaks helpful for:-

	Very helpful	Helpful	Not helpful
Discussing business			
Meeting new people			
Practicalities e.g. for refreshments; and comfort breaks			

Preparation prior to the Assembly

1. Did you find the '*Being a Commissioner*' leaflet useful?
2. Did you engage with your Presbytery's '*Commissioners' preparation*'?
3. Did you find the '*First time Commissioners*' event useful?
4. Is there anything you wish you had known about before coming to the Assembly?

General matters

Are you a: Minister Deacon Elder

Which Presbytery are you from?

Any other relevant comments?

Textual responses

What would help you make the transition to electronic documents?

The Blue book will have to be in Kindle form.

Stop printing the materials

purchase of electronic equipment to receive docs

Prefer to read hard copy

Prefer hard copy

Poor eyesight - I can't spend a long time looking at the computer

Perhaps the Presbytery could buy its depute clerk an electronic notebook

Not much. I find books and papers easier to manage

Not comfortable reading from screen

No means of accessing

need plugs so iPad doesn't run our

My background is in IT but for this function, prefer hard copy

more time

I'm much too old to "do" electronic gadgets of the kind you have in mind

I prefer paper to flick back and forward and write quick notes etc. I am unlikely to want to use electronic. I also feel I'd less likely refer back to electronic afterwards

I need a written book/booklet to look through giving me a taster of what is in the reports - I will then go to the internet and look at the full report if it is of interest. Reading reports etc on electronically [sic] is not attractive. My Session Clerk got electronic forms automatically and wished he'd had the blue book to look through. Again introductions to reports as a taster then find the main report electronic if wanting to do further reading. Last year when no blue book the General Assembly passed me and the congregation by.

I don't own a device

I don't have an iPad

Don't have tablet

Buy me the iPad or whatever

Broadband in home parish - cannot download documents in advance - doing it in Edinburgh allows for no preparation

Assumption being made that all commissioners have access to suitable digital equipment with sufficient battery life

Acquire a laptop or notepad

Appropriate device - mobile is too small, laptop is too big

What additional IT support or resourcing would you find helpful?

Would it be possible to have digital assembly papers issued with the reports for that day embedded with links?

Very good for daily papers. Prefer navigating the paper blue book and order of proceedings

Using electronic device does not let you quickly find "section 4.2.1.3 of a report" nor does it let you make amendments/corrections to the text. Therefore asked for a book in addition at the Assembly!

USB charging at seat in hall

The stuff will have to be compatible with my iPad. A good index is essential

The Kindle version on my iPad had deliverance section numbering wildly out of sync. I ended up using the PDF version

The initial docs attached to email were not all oriented. Simply make separate docs

Some training on using the digital system e.g. locating, bookmarking, making notes

My laptop is somewhat old, slow and heavy - like its owner! - need to buy myself something smaller and faster

lots of plugs so can charge machine

Links to ease navigation - having to go back and forwards

Links from Assembly papers to blue book. More exhaustive contents pages

Is it possible to place bookmarks in the Daily papers for easier movement to minutes, amendments etc?

Indexed documents

If possible could the daily papers appear in colour instead of white?

I tried both options but in the end, the paper option was more flexible and useful for me. It was difficult to flick back and forward to deliverances and specific points being discussed especially in some of the topics that had many pages. I had to give up and revert to using the blue book

I still prefer the paper version

I need to buy an iPad

I am fortunate to have access to a good PDF reader/editor some may not be so fortunate so as to be able to make notes and mark up reports

I the transition but still value a book copy which I can make notes on

Have blue book digital but like hard copy of daily papers. Clickable index at start of each report for finding different numbered sections Was useful to be able to look at CofS website and GA publications during sessions

Could a file containing the documents for that day be produced and updated so that commissioners only have to access 1 folder for everything?

Clear - AND succinct - instructions, in the form of a Word document, listings, step-by-step and in words of one syllable, how to get one's computer to do things one wants of it

Charging points would encourage greater usage - devices have a limited life

Charging points - leave home 6am back 9pm and struggle to find charging points other than using Costa and Starbucks. I don't like using these multinationals!!

Better index links

Better document navigation rather than scrolling ie being able to jump from section to section

Being confined to a wheelchair it's another piece of bulky equipment to carry. I find it easier to have hard copies although I could be persuaded to use technology. I like to read the paperwork close up

Ability to see several documents on screen at once or quickly flick between + need to be able to quickly move to a section of report referenced by a speaker. NB I am a former computer programmer who uses Office and the Internet every day

Is there anything you wished you'd known before coming to GA?

Travel options to and from GA

That you pay my accommodation - I knew I was coming but I was NOT told until I received your paperwork. I thought I was to travel from Kilmarnock daily and the choice was mine therefore I went to GYLE for accommodation which was cheaper but adds to my day.

Strategic plan arrived far too late

Rough suspected closing times - I booked trains that are far too late

No, I was very well informed

More practical guidance needed re making motions etc

Arrangements for business committee - as a first time commissioner that you need to look!

About the THREE entirely different ways to attract the Mod's attention if one wants to speak

A little about the procedures, e.g. report, questions, deliverances, comment, counter-motion, voting etc

Do you have any other relevant comments?

Yes. Well done!

Worry about difficulty navigating to different parts of digital resources

While circulation breaks helped with refreshments I felt this assembly slowed the business to the point that the GA struggled to complete the business for each day.

When asking questions to deliverances would it be possible just to ask question without preamble. Discussion would obviously follow. If you have been put on the business committee for the assembly perhaps indicating this to commissioners, especially first time commissioners could be helpful and an indication of what this entails. Also making it clear that the Business Committee meets after close of business and not at a specific time.

Well done. Very well organised

Too much business is covered in too much detail with not enough breaks. Assembly should finish at 5pm. Assembly should consider touring the country for a few years to freshen things up

Too big queues - need more coffee points

Thoroughly enjoyed the experience Meeting the young folks was really good

There wasn't a presbytery event but advice was offered if I needed it

There was a long queue for coffee in the quad. Perhaps this would have been eased by having the serving station in the middle of the space so folks could pass on both sides Also - in line with the several comments on additional needs consideration - namely dyslexia friendly font, alcohol-free wine and gluten free bread - I would add a plea for caffeine free coffee. Yes this is available (at additional expense) in the Rainy Hall but not in the quad

There needs to be better time management of the business Circulation breaks - had social conversations - tend to meet people I already know - long queues/few available seats

The stewards are just great!

The amount of reading is enormous - I had to be selective since I could not have read it all. The Youtube videos were very good and informative Why does everyone want to sit at the end of the table in Rainy Hall. Can we remove one table in order to create some circulation space to access the middle ground of the tables?

Thank you! Keep the circulation break!

Stewards helpful and friendly Enjoyed videos by conveners

Stewards were excellent. I have no complaints The Quad set-up was undermanned and badly laid out. It was just adequate but needed to be faster

Sound system was poor I am grateful for the moments of grace

Some days were overloaded with business - better planning maybe. The \$60 rate is becoming too low. The grace of the moderator toward speakers was admirable - speaking is not an easy business!

Practicalities - too much crush when everyone goes at once Issues about finish of business and start of evening events - I would much rather finish an hour earlier or have an extra hour to consider business with less pressure then continue the circulation breaks.

Practicalities - too busy

Practicalities - refreshments not helpful

Practicalities - Please keep the breaks!! and fresh air!! It would be very helpful to have a summary of the major reports - or a draft version - well in advance so that the Presbytery could organise some form of briefing/discussion session in advance. Elders, especially first-time commissioner elders find the prospect of speaking a little daunting I am always impressed by the preparedness of the youth commissioners which I am not sure we could match - but it would be good to get some way towards this. Do we really need 60 seconds for voting? The organisation generally is very impressive so congratulations to the committee and to all the "121" staff who work so hard over the year to "get the show on the road" - and to the stewards who are a very charming and helpful group.

Practicalities - helpful in that one could get up and walk however long queues made it laborious As a first time commissioner I was struck by, having been to the Friday briefing, how little attention commissioners seemed to pay to rules - mobiles going off, photos being taken, people to-in and fro-ing during convenors speeches, and the lack of respect to the moderator on entry and exit while in session. such actions make me wonder is Assembly commissioners can be so misbehaved how can assembly expect decisions made to be respected by the congregations!!

Practicalities - comfort breaks are a good idea but the system of provision needs to be reviewed - drastically!

Practicalities - A bit crowded at first but got better. I was a bit against them before assembly but was soon looking forward to them, and didn't feel the need to leave the assembly during sessions. found some of the speakers difficult to hear at times with Q and comments

Personally I think the circulation breaks are time wasters

People spoke too long (preambles) in spite of being told not to. Practicalities - too chaotic - too many people trying to go toilets and get refreshments at the same time

Part of the issue of ministers speaking more than elders is that they are here more often!

One of the issues which came up for comment during the Assembly was the innovation of circulation breaks. I wholeheartedly support these. I have had trouble in the past with a slipped disc in my back so that sitting for prolonged periods can be problematic. Not only that but I am now somewhat hard of hearing and find sitting in some areas better than others and these are not always available at the end of rows. The circulation breaks meant that not once this year did I have to ask people to move so I could get out. In some ways more important is that such breaks enable you to talk over issues raised with others and mull over how you might vote when the Assembly reconvenes.

Not helpful to discuss business - it's a break!

Not drinking tea or coffee, the length of time could perhaps be cut but I rejoice at being able to move about for a period and having a comfort break

No local preparation, had to come to Edinburgh

Many youth reps run and curate their parish facebook pages. a bit of a laxer attitude towards electronic use for social media and the ability to take pictures could be helpful - though understandable as to its limitations

Just that the circulation breaks are too congested. Had it been raining would people have gone outside?

Info/videos on CofS website a useful refresher

In Hall used paper

If it is possible, could the blue book be ready for reading at least a week earlier - to enable a thorough study of the reports. They deserve to be given more attention before they are discussed/debated. Thank you for making it possible to access the material in many forms

I would welcome being able to claim fares and accommodation in advance. I have to pay them several months in advance when booking and it's a long time to have several hundred pounds outstanding. Thank you

I have tried using the electronic version before but frankly find it much easier to follow on paper especially as there is a lot of jumping around between different documents sometimes. Would prefer to stick with paper copies but if forced to go electronic, an app that allowed quick and easy switching between reports order of proceedings, daily papers might help. Really appreciated the circulation breaks although 20mins might be enough if there was a second coffee table in quad. Generally impressed with organisation and esp v helpful stewards - thank you!

I have heard some concern expressed from neighbouring commissioners that they are not aware if their handset has registered their attendances and therefore[?] votes. While we do get a total no displayed is there a way in which Commissioners can check easily?

I felt too many people spent too much time speaking about themselves and

their own situation. we can all do that but it didn't always add to the debate.

I feel that, due to comfort breaks, less people have been leaving the hall during debates. For those of us with 4 children and presumably also for those on water pills etc, knowing that there will soon be designated "powder-the-nose time" means we don't need to worry about missing something and being fully involved. The reduction in coming and going during sessions means we are not disturbed by people needing past and doors opening. The comfort breaks give time for leg stretching, fresh air and by giving the brain a rest means we are fresh for the next part - so a reduction in those whom have had the misfortune to fall asleep!! Conversation, if desired, has been valuable

I appreciate that this building is old but we need to know what levels to enter by to get to the hall if you enter from the Mound and the Castle. Circulation breaks - practicalities - there are massive lines of people all merging together. It makes getting in line in a wheelchair very difficult and by the time you've got to the entrance the break time is over.

I have found the week to be really excellent. Organisation in advance has been very good and the experience of being a commissioner is one I would very much like to repeat.

Great week, very informative

Great idea. Serving could be better organised. May not have worked if raining

FTC event VERY useful

FTC event very useful

Enjoyable and an honour to be asked

Discussing the business - in general discussion was around missed opportunities or the less than relevant comments of some commissioners Meeting new people - this was good. It is useful to learn of others' views and perspective on the work of the wider church Mr Kinsey's comment on Wed 23rd re preamble was very pertinent

didn't receive leaflet - not informed of Presbytery events - didn't know about FTC event It might have been easier/faster to get tea/coffee in the time allotted for circulation breaks (which got shorter as the week went on) if there had been two stations in the quad or tea at one side and coffee at the other. At one stage I watched an older gentleman with a stick struggle along a row to get a seat. Perhaps it would be good to have some "Priority seating" as on public transport for the mobility impaired

did not get coffee. just walked about and got fresh air and chat - helped with concentration

Circulation breaks good for fresh air!

Circulation breaks are good if they last for 30 mins and don't overrun

Circulation Breaks are an excellent innovation. I went outside each time and felt

a real benefit. As tea and coffee was available for a donation. The serving of coffee was swift

circulation breaks - good using quadrangle excellent idea

Circulation breaks - advantages - more focussed attention during sessions - less movement - less distractions. Disadvantages - congestion - suggest that one way system through Rainy Hall be reinstated Also name and number of commissioners wishing to speak be announced by the moderator to save time and allow ease of communication.

Catering - too congested, not enough serving points or milk/sugar supply points

Breaks too crowded - prefer going out for 10 minutes if required - and can meet/talk better with others. Thanks for all your hard work!

As a first-time commissioner I have found everyone extremely helpful

Any church meeting (particularly at National level) should include not only business, but fellowship and networking. As such I very much welcome the circulation breaks as being essential to the function of General Assembly. More information on location, particularly for fringe events, would be helpful , particularly for those of us not familiar with Edinburgh. Some of the locations were not included on the map provided in the order of proceedings In this day and age even a postcode would have helped ease some worry over getting lost in a "foreign" city. My appreciation to the top table, in particular the Moderator and Principle[sic] Clerk, for leading the Assembly through the week effectively and respectfully, with grace and humour. I have thoroughly enjoyed it!

Although I like the electronic documents I still prefer paper copies so I can annotate them and add comments

Allowance of £75 as gift to the friend who had put me up for four nights is inadequate. This has saved the GA £600 - my location and travel means I used to travel early and leave late. Can I suggest a figure of £150 to cover costs of provision of hospitality, would far more adequately express the expense family and friends have by taking in a commissioner - and still save the GA plenty of money.

30 min circulation breaks are too long 15/20 minutes would be better. Plus I commend the Grassmarket community project for their organisation in providing tea and coffee (only 1 hiccup)
