

Choosing the Archbishop of Canterbury

At the recent General Synod there were a number of decisions made in relation to how the Church of England's bishops are chosen. These merit further scrutiny and discussion in their own right but they had particular significance because of the imminent process for the selection of a new Archbishop of Canterbury.

Most significant was the failure of the attempt by the House of Bishops to change the decision-making processes of the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) that selects a candidate to nominate to the Crown for a vacant diocesan see. This means that it remains the case that

- Voting in the CNC meeting remains by secret ballot
- Any nomination will require at least two-thirds of the 17 members on the Canterbury CNC (i.e. at least 12 votes so no more than 5 unwilling to support) rather than at least 60% (11 votes)
- There will continue to be one member-one vote with no casting vote for the Chair of the CNC.

There is, as yet, however much known as to who the 17 voting members of the CNC will be. [A page providing information on the names](#) has been created on the CofE website. It has the one name formally announced already listed but five other names seem fairly certain. In addition to the usual non-voting members of the two Appointments Secretaries, the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Bishop Anthony Poggo, is also a non-voting member under [SO 139\(2\)\(b\)](#). The voting members are chosen within 5 categories and the processes of selection, their transparency, and how the processes have worked, vary quite considerably with particular concerns about the 3 to be chosen by Canterbury Diocese and the 5 who will represent the Anglican Communion.

The Chair of the Commission

Usually the CNC is chaired by the Archbishop of the Province in which the see being filled is located but this is not the case in relation to the nomination of an Archbishop. Here, under [SO 138\(6\)](#), the process for Canterbury is that

the person presiding at meetings of the Commission must be an actual communicant lay member of the Church of England appointed by the Prime Minister after consultation with such persons or bodies as the Prime Minister thinks fit.

Exactly how this name emerges remains largely mysterious but it is likely that the Prime Minister's Appointment Secretary (Jonathan Hellewell) consulted widely and drew up a shortlist of eligible names for the Prime Minister to consider. The Chair appointed by this process for the CNC that appointed Justin Welby was [Lord Luce](#) and a similar process is used for York CNC where the Chair last time was [Mrs Joëlle Warren](#).

This name is currently the only officially confirmed one in relation to the process. On 16th December, [it was announced](#) that the Chair would be [Lord \[Jonathan\] Evans of Weardale](#). A Crossbench peer (i.e. not taking any party whip) for ten years, he was Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life from 2018 to 2023. After studying Classics at Bristol University he joined the Security Service in 1980 and rose to become Director General of MI5 in 2007, serving until 2013. He speaks about his life and his personal faith in [this April 2024 interview](#).

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We therefore now have perhaps one of the strangest quirks of being the established church in that not only is the Archbishop strictly appointed by the Head of State but the CNC, the church body which nominates to the Crown, is being Chaired by a former Head of the state's Security Service, appointed to lead the selection of the Archbishop by the Head of Government. Were that to describe the process in any other church context it would at the very least cause an eyebrow to be raised as to the degree of independence the church has from the state and political power.

Two Church of England Episcopal Members

It appears likely that the Archbishop of York will serve on the Commission as no election has been called to find a bishop from the northern province to replace him although he would have to relinquish that role should he wish to be considered. The other episcopal place (usually filled by the Archbishop of Canterbury or a bishop they choose from their province) will be determined by an election in which all current serving members of the House of Bishops (45 at present I believe given vacancies) have a vote (thus 23 votes being required to be elected if all participate).

The candidates do not have to be serving bishops but simply to be

a bishop whose see is in the Province of Canterbury or who has retired and is resident in that Province ([SO 139\(1A\)](#))

Anyone chosen is clearly unable to be considered and it is likely that the contenders will therefore be more senior, experienced bishops whose age prevents them being nominated as Archbishop. The eligibility criteria also mean that, as long as they then become resident in the province, serving bishops due to retire during the CNC process (such as Viv Faull of Bristol and Alan Smith of St Albans), are eligible.

On 27th January [it was announced](#) that the nomination period would open on 31st January and “all nominees are required to complete an online form, which includes the details of their proposer and seconder, and the opportunity to submit a statement of up to 300 words outlining their suitability”. Nominations closed on 23rd February and the process now is that

Ballot papers will then be prepared and sent to the House of Bishops by 3rd March when the voting period will open. The voting period will end on 17th March and a count will be carried out the following day.

When the bishops of the northern province voted to be represented on the York CNC they chose Christine Hardman, then Bishop of Newcastle, and there may be a desire on the part of many for a woman bishop to be involved in Canterbury as well.

It is unclear whether the names of candidates, their supporters and statements, and the voting figures will be released publicly at any stage of this process or whether all that will happen publicly is that “the episcopal member of the CNC for the See of Canterbury will be announced alongside the rest of the membership as soon as possible after that date [of the count, i.e, 18th March]”.

Six Central Members

The General Synod [elected twelve of its members](#), in six “pairs” (three clergy and three laity) at the start of its quinquennium in 2022. This was a new form of representation—previously there

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were simply six individuals—which is now being used for the first time for nominating an Archbishop.

As [reported to the recent General Synod](#), three members (all of the 3 GMH members) have since ceased to serve as members. This means that it is highly likely that the three remaining members of those pairs will be members of the Canterbury CNC (they could, theoretically, nominate another member of Synod to replace them under [SO 140\(6B\)](#) but this is very unlikely):

- Ms Christina Baron (Bath & Wells)
- Mr Clive Scowen (London)
- The Revd Lis Goddard (London)

The news [yesterday](#) that The Revd Canon Andrew Cornes is one of the ten clergy who “the National Safeguarding Team will now seek to bring disciplinary proceedings under the Clergy Discipline Measure against” in relation to the Makin Review and their knowledge about John Smyth means that

- The Revd Paul Benfield (Blackburn) will also serve on the Canterbury CNC.

The other two central members will be one of the members in the other two “pairs” that continue to exist:

- Miss Debbie Buggs (London) and Miss Prudence Dailey (Oxford)
- The Revd Claire Lording (Worcester) and The Revd Joanna Stobart (Bath & Wells)

The six central members will therefore comprise four women (two clergy and two lay) and two men (one clergy and one lay). If the new Regulations relating to the choice of CNC reps from Canterbury are implemented (see below) then there will, unprecedentedly, be no male priest from the province involved in selecting the Archbishop and, if a woman bishop is elected by the House, no ordained male at all from the province.

In addition, 5 of the 6 central members will be from Canterbury province (meaning only two representatives from York as the CNC Chair is also from the southern province). There will also be 2 and possibly 3 (the same number of representatives as from Canterbury diocese itself) members from London diocese and possibly 2 from Bath & Wells, so potentially 5 of the 6 central members coming from just two dioceses. Broadly speaking, 4 of the 6 are seen as theologically “conservative” (for example, they have opposed PLF).

There is much less clarity, and also some degree of confusion and cause for concern, about the processes of selection for the remaining two groups of Canterbury CNC members: the three local members and the five representatives from the wider Communion.

Three Canterbury Members

Usually at any CNC there are 6 members from the diocese but [changes introduced in 2022](#) have altered the situation for the Canterbury CNC so that there are now only 3 members from the diocese. These members are, as with all CNCs, “elected by and from the Vacancy in See Committee” of the Diocese ([SO 137\(1\)\(d\)](#)). It is here that there appears to have been, and still remains, some considerable confusion and serious questions which need answering.

The relevant Regulation and its status

The working of diocesan Vacancy-in-See Committees (ViSC) are regulated by [The Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 2024](#) (with [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). This was amended to become the [Vacancy in See Committees \(Amendment\) Regulation 2025](#) with effect from 14th February this year after changes agreed on the final day of the most recent General Synod ([proposed changes set out here](#) with [an explanatory note](#)). The new regulations were “Proclaimed as an Act of Synod by the General Synod at Church House, Westminster on 14th February 2025”. The original regulations were similarly proclaimed as an Act of Synod in July 1993. This is significant as to the Regulation’s authority and status in relation to the functioning of any diocesan ViSC as an Act of Synod is distinct from the authority and status of both a Measure and a Canon ([SO 41](#)) and the Standing Orders relating to the CNC make no reference to the need for those elected by the ViSC to be elected in accordance with the Regulation.

Stephen Slack in 2011 (when he was serving as Registrar and Chief Legal Adviser to the General Synod) explained in “[Synodical Government and the Legislative Process](#)” that

An Act of Synod is a collective and formal expression by the Synod of its mind on a particular matter: the Synod's Standing Orders provide that, if the Synod desires to give an instrument or resolution formal publication ‘as the embodiment of the will or opinion of the Church of England as expressed by the whole body of the Synod’, it may affirm and proclaim it as such in accordance with the procedure prescribed by the Standing Order.

An Act of Synod therefore represents ‘provision’ corresponding to that previously made by the Convocations for their respective provinces, in the form of an ‘Act of Convocation’. It does not accordingly enjoy any greater authority than that of Acts of Convocation – which, while they were said to have ‘great moral force, as the considered judgment of the highest and ancient synod of the province’, did not create legally enforceable rights or duties.

Although, because of its content, the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993 is well known, an Act of Synod is now – on account of its limited effect – a relatively unusual form of provision.

There are a number of areas where greater clarity is needed concerning the processes in the diocese leading to the Canterbury ViSC which will elect 3 of its members to serve on the CNC. In understanding the complexities of these it is important to recall that Justin Welby’s retirement [was announced](#) on 12th November 2024 and ([as announced on 4th December](#)) took effect on 6th January 2025.

Which ViSC?

Under the Regulation, “In each diocese, a body called the Vacancy in See Committee continues to be established at all times” comprised of 3 types of members: *ex officio*, elected (by the members of Diocesan Synod), and nominated. What is remarkable and surely wholly unprecedented is that between November 2024 and March 2025 there will have been 3 distinct ViSCs constituted within Canterbury Diocese but with all of them potentially not compliant with the Regulation.

There was a ViSC elected to serve from 2021-2024 by the previous Diocesan Synod and its membership is available online [as revised on 12th March 2024](#) and [as revised on 9th December 2024](#) (ie after the date of the Archbishop’s retirement was clear). In relation to the latter, there are listed

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- 10 *ex officio* clergy (the only change from March being a new person as Chair of the House of Clergy, the newly elected Chair at the first meeting of the new Diocesan Synod replacing the previous Chair)
- 6 elected clergy places (but with 2 vacancies as in March)
- 4 *ex officio* laity
- 12 elected laity places (but with 7 vacancies as in March)
- 4 nominated members (all lay women, added since March [by the Archbishop's Council](#), and I understand on 2nd December i.e. some time after the vacancy was announced despite being left unfilled for almost three years)

The number of vacancies (half the 18 elected members) is particularly noteworthy especially as there are clear processes in the Regulation for filling vacancies that arise, including that they “must be filled within six months of the vacancy occurring” ([Para 7\(1\)](#)). This means that between becoming vacant (March 2024 or, more likely, some time before then) and the vacancy occurring in November these should have been filled “by a further election by the house of clergy and the house of laity of the diocesan synod, the members of each of which together constitute a single electorate” ([Para 7\(2\)](#)). It seems that either this requirement was not recognised for some reason or it was ignored. This is despite there being the possibility of a vacancy as the Archbishop was approaching retirement.

At some point before 2nd December attention was given to choosing 4 new members by patronage (even though there were only a few months left before a new ViSC was elected). It is not clear how or why these 4 were selected but they are all lay women from the Archdeaconries with lay vacancies. Although not directly addressed in the Regulations this at best sits uneasily with the requirement in [Para 7\(3\)](#) relating to elected members that “if a vacancy of the bishopric is announced before the vacancy on the Committee has been filled, the vacancy on the Committee...is to remain unfilled until the Committee has completed its consideration of the vacancy of the bishopric”. It effectively amounted to the individual or group choosing the names power to select four people to consider the vacancy when an election to choose new names was prohibited.

The failure to have fulfilled long-standing vacancies among elected members meant that the ViSC in place when there was a vacancy announced would have had only 22 of its 31 members (35 if potential 4 nominated members included) and less than half its number of elected lay members. Therefore the elected members were not 12 laity and 6 clergy as required but only 5 laity and 4 clergy, a significant shift in the balance between the two Houses. The proportion of *ex officio* to elected was 13 to 9 rather than 13 to 18, another important imbalance, particularly with the late addition of 4 nominated members making the ViSC only 1/3 elected rather than the nearly 60% elected it should have been.

It seems clear that this ViSC should have been the body working on the vacancy. This is because the Regulation states that:

- “As soon as practicable after the announcement of a vacancy of a bishopric, the diocesan secretary must provide to each member of the Vacancy in See Committee of the diocese a booklet, which has been prepared by the Archbishops’ Secretary for Appointments and approved by the Legal Adviser to the General Synod” ([para 11](#)).
- Although the term of office of an elected member “begins on 1st January following the most recent election of the members of the diocesan synod” and would usually end “on 31st December following the next election of the members of the diocesan synod” ([para](#)

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[5\(5\)](#)) it is the case that “For the purpose of completing the consideration of a vacancy on which the Committee has begun work, the members elected under paragraph 5 are to continue to serve as such despite the expiry of their term of office” ([para 9\(3\)](#)).

- “The first meeting is to be held as soon as practicable after the vacancy has been announced” ([para 12\(2\)](#)).

Given that “the announcement of a vacancy” occurred on 12th November 2024 it would therefore appear that the ViSC listed for 2021-2024 (and still being updated on the website after 9th December) should have been provided with the booklet and begun work. That this would be normal practice is evident from [the current vacancy in St Edmundsbury and Ipswich](#) where the vacancy was announced in May 2024 as taking place in February 2025 and the first CNC to meet to shortlist is taking place on 4th March 2025 meaning that the ViSC work (with the members of the ViSC elected for 2021-2024) was completed long before the see actually became vacant.

It appears that this indeed is what happened and it met in December with the Dean reportedly in the Chair. This is why it was [announced on 20th January](#), in a letter to General Synod members from Stephen Knott, the Archbishops’ Appointment Secretary, that “the Canterbury Diocese ‘Vacancy in See’ process commenced in December. It was also stated that “It is expected that the full membership of the Commission will be known by mid-March”, and that in February and March there would be wide consultation that would be combined with “the ‘Statement of Needs’ produced by the Diocese of Canterbury” in order for the CNC to have its “first meeting in May”.

At some point in late 2024 a new ViSC was elected for 2025-2027 and its membership is listed online [here](#). It was elected by the newly elected Diocesan Synod (which [first met](#) on 16th November, just four days after the announcement of the vacancy, under [a process](#) which ran from 1st August, elected members listed [here](#)). The new ViSC comprises

- 9 *ex officio* clergy (as before but without Bishop of Maidstone as this was always anomalous as this see is no longer active, effectively replaced by Ebbsfleet)
- 6 elected clergy (only 1 of the previous 6 continuing, no longer any vacancies)
- 4 *ex officio* laity (as before)
- 12 elected laity (only 2 continuing and still with 6 vacancies – all 4 places from Ashford Archdeaconry and 2 from Maidstone Archdeaconry)
- The Chair and Secretary were to be elected on 1st February
- No nominated members are listed and none of the 4 lay women nominated in early December to serve on the 2021-24 ViSC stood for election.

The number of vacancies still remaining is particularly noteworthy given that there was by then known to be a vacancy. I understand that this may be because when the election for this new ViSC was held it was stated that the current vacancy would be being considered by the existing 2021-2024 ViSC (for reasons set out above). Although this meant it was highly unlikely that the 2025-2027 ViSC would need to consider a vacancy for Canterbury, the Bishop of Dover is also now nominated by a CNC and that could become vacant in the next three years so the number of vacancies is still surprising.

It has recently become clear, however, that, for some undeclared reason, neither the newly elected ViSC for 2025-2027, nor that in place when the vacancy was announced that would usually consider any vacancy that arose in 2021-2024, is being used. Instead, a totally new election is underway to establish a third ViSC. It appears that this change in plan only happened in late January given the letter to General Synod members of 20th January claiming that the

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process had already commenced in December. Those elected will it seems simply serve for the imminent CNC and then step back to be replaced by those originally elected for 2025-2027 (who would therefore serve if there was a vacancy in Dover during that period).

The exact reasons for this remain unclear but I understand that objections were raised as to the process by which the 2021-2024 ViSC elected members were originally chosen. Their election process was found to be incompatible with the Regulation in place at the time because people were wrongly informed that only members of Diocesan Synod were eligible to stand for the ViSC. In fact, all elections since 2009 were reportedly similarly flawed, including therefore the ViSC relating to Justin Welby's appointment (and, if the then ViSC was used in the process, that for Bishop Rose's appointment to Dover). This would be a further process failure to add to that of not replacing casual vacancies. However, the Regulation states that "The proceedings of the Vacancy in See Committee of a diocese are not invalidated by a vacancy in the membership of the Committee or a defect in the qualification, election or appointment of any of its members" ([para 17](#)) so this problem would not seem to invalidate proceedings of the 2021-2024 ViSC and therefore a new election does not appear to be required by the Regulation.

It is also unclear on whose authority this newly elected ViSC will be the key body in electing 3 members of the CNC especially as it is effectively electing afresh all elected members when the Regulation (Para 7(3) noted above) expressly forbids election of any new members to fulfil a casual vacancy once it is announced the See is becoming vacant. The Regulation states that "where difficulties arise" the Archbishop (clearly here it would have to be the Archbishop of York) may "give whatever directions the archbishop considers appropriate for removing those difficulties" ([para 16\(1\)\(b\)](#)) and it may be that this is how this complex, almost intractable, problem of attempting to comply fully with the Regulation has now been resolved.

Electing a new ViSC

The diocesan web page on the ViSC gives a description of the new election process now underway and provides a link to the ViSC elected for 2025-2027. The web page reads:

Elections to the Vacancy in See Committee

Please note, this election is for the Committee which is involved in the [selection of the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury](#) only. The Committee for the 2025-2027 triennium has already been elected.

No explanation is given here as to why the Committee already elected for 2025-2027 is not the Committee to consider the current vacancy or why that in place when the vacancy was announced has not continued its work.

The process is now set out as follows:

The nomination process for the Vacancy in See Committee commenced on Monday 10 February and has been extended to conclude at 12 noon on Friday 28 February 2025. The elections will now run from Monday 10 March through to 12 noon on Monday 24 March followed by the vote count on Tuesday 25 March.

[Originally](#) (on a page updated on 14th February, the current page was updated at 4:31PM on 21st February) the closing date was Monday 24th February with the elections running from Monday 3rd March through to Monday 17th March with the vote count on Tuesday 18th March. It is not clear who determined the need for or the extent of these date changes after the process had begun.

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Oxford Diocese has similarly changed its dates for electing its new ViSC (it is unclear why this is only happening now and not before the old ViSC expired at the end of 2024) but it has done so by a longer period (from [nominations originally closing on 24th Feb](#) to [now closing on 10th March](#)).

Meetings of the ViSC and electing ViSC members to serve on CNC

It is clear that the ViSC must “hold at least two meetings about a vacancy” (Para 12) and that “The first meeting is to be held as soon as practicable after the vacancy has been announced”. We are now in the situation where the ViSC to consider the vacancy in Canterbury announced in mid-November 2024 and taking effect in early January 2025 is not going to be able to have its first meeting until April because it will not be constituted until the last week of March but a first meeting of a different ViSC did happen in December 2024. The explanation about the work of a ViSC [on the Oxford Diocese site](#) informs those considering standing that “Its work would require several meetings over a period of six months or so” which signals potential difficulties in the work of the ViSC and CNC given the current timetable.

It is at the second meeting that the ViSC “must discuss the needs of the diocese” after which it “must prepare a statement of those needs...send the statement to the Crown Nominations Commission of the General Synod, and...send the Commission such factual information about the diocese and its organisation as the Commission may request” ([para 12](#)).

The election of members to serve on the CNC “is to be held at such stage in the proceedings on the Committee’s consideration of the vacancy as the Committee decides” (para 13). It would, however, presumably be good practice for a committee (particularly one newly constituted) to experience its members at work and understand as fully as possible what their work and that of being on the CNC entails before trying to discern which of them are best to fulfil this function.

It would therefore appear that the difficulties in Canterbury Diocese leading to the running of a new election for a ViSC raise some serious questions and have created significant process problems regarding timetable. Its work—including its election of those to serve on the CNC—which would normally have begun in November or December will now not be properly even begun until April at the earliest (although it may be that any work undertaken by the previous, subsequently aborted, ViSC will be treated as valid). After its election, the Archbishop’s Council will have to meet to elect a Chair and appoint a Secretary to the new ViSC before it can meet ([Para 8 of the new Regulation](#)). This must raise concerns about [the plan for the first CNC to meet in May](#) given the amount of work that needs to be done before that first meeting.

Which ViSC Regulation?

There has also been an addition to the website in the last week suggesting that the newly elected ViSC will be following the new Regulation. This is despite the Regulation only coming into force after nominations for the new ViSC commenced and months after the vacancy was announced and the ViSC should have begun its work. The page now includes this paragraph:

During the recent General Synod sessions, the [Vacancy in See Committees \(Amendment\) Regulation 2025](#) was approved and ratified. This Regulation makes important changes to the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 2024 which is the legislation governing elections, nominations and the proceedings of Diocesan Vacancy in See committees.

Although there is no clear statement about the implications of this ([unlike for Oxford Diocese ViSC elections](#)) and no explicit statement that the new Regulation will be being followed, the addition of this information and moving of the dates for nomination and election suggest that this

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is likely. A further set of questions arise in relation to the recent changes to the Regulation, the three most significant and controversial of which relate to who is now eligible for election to the ViSC and two changes to how the ViSC will elect its 3 members to serve on the CNC.

Firstly, in relation to nominations to be elected to the ViSC, there is now a new paragraph 6A which has the effect of “restricting the election or nomination of persons who have a “relevant connection” with the same parish, cathedral church, Royal Peculiar or mission initiative as other members, or potential members, of a vacancy in see committee” ([GS 2397X, para 10](#)). This has the effect that anyone with such a “relevant connection” to any of the 13 *ex officio* members is, if the amended Regulation is being applied, since 14th February (four days after nominations opened) no longer eligible to stand. This fact is, however, not clearly stated either on the website or [the nomination form](#) (which also continues to have the original closing date on it rather than the new one).

Oxford Diocese spells out the implications of this in these terms (with an equivalent statement for lay nominations):

Following the passing of the Vacancy in See Committees (Amendment) Regulation 2025 at the February 2025 session of the General Synod it is no longer possible for a clergyperson to be nominated for election if they are authorised to exercise ministry in the same parish as existing *ex officio* clergy or lay member of the Committee. Similarly, where two candidates are nominated and have the same connection by virtue of their electoral roll parish or benefice of ministry and there is no existing connection with an *ex officio* member, only one of those candidates can be elected and a constraint will be placed on the count.

It is not clear whether were a nomination ruled out by this new Regulation to be made and otherwise valid it would now be declared null and void and the nominated candidate not appear on the ballot paper or whether they would appear but their votes would never be counted but (under the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system used) immediately transferred to the next preference on the ballot paper.

Secondly, although the above change prevents the election or nomination of someone with a “relevant connection” to an *ex officio* member or another elected or nominated member, it “would not prevent two or more persons with a relevant connection to the same parish etc. from serving if both/all of them were *ex officio* members of the Committee” ([GS 2397X, para 14](#)). There is therefore a further new regulation (para 9A) which “is concerned with preventing two or more persons from the same worshipping community being elected by a vacancy in see committee to the Crown Nominations Commission” so as to “ensure that where two or more persons have a “relevant connection” with the same parish, cathedral church or mission initiative, only one of them may be elected by a vacancy in see committee to serve as a member of the Crown Nominations Commission”. It remains unclear exactly how this will be put into effect if two members of the ViSC with such a “relevant connection” stand for CNC but presumably once one is elected the other will be removed from the race with their votes being redistributed to their next preference.

Thirdly, there is a very important change relating to the members elected by the ViSC from among its membership which has a particularly unusual effect for Canterbury CNC but not other CNCs. There is now a new paragraph that requires that “of those elected from a vacancy in see committee to the Crown Nominations Commission, at least one lay person and at least one cleric

must be female” ([GS 2397x, para 16](#) relating to [para 13\(8A\) of the new Regulation](#)). The Regulation also continues the long-established principle that “At least half of the number of members elected under this paragraph must be lay persons”(para 13(8)). This has always in the past meant that there must be 3 or may lay members out of the 6 elected to serve on CNC. However, now for the first time, only 3 members are being elected and so this requirement means that Canterbury must elect 2 lay members and 1 clergy member. The effect of the new Regulation is therefore that as there must a clergywoman (assuming at least one is nominated), no male clergy on the ViSC can be chosen by it to serve on CNC. Although the rules have in the past excluded episcopal ViSC members from standing this is a major new, much more wide-ranging, discriminatory limitation on whom the ViSC can elect to represent them on CNC. Presumably if a clergyman on the ViSC is nominated they will either be ruled ineligible to stand and not appear on the ballot or they will have their votes immediately reassigned (even if they are the top candidate).

It remains unclear how this new restriction of assigning two elected places on the basis of certain characteristics will be implemented. It looks like how it is handled by the Canterbury ViSC may be the first occasion it is applied with possibly serious precedents being set. It is quite possible that 2 of the 3 places could be elected unopposed if only one clergywoman and one lay woman are nominated. This is not improbable given the CNC role is time-consuming, onerous and stressful and many are willing to serve on the ViSC but not on the CNC. If there is only one woman nominated in either or both of these groups they could be declared elected before ballot papers are issued and the number of candidates to be elected reduced accordingly (as perhaps has happened in the past when the number of lay candidates has only been sufficient to meet the “at least 50%” criterion). This, however, would mean that those who would have used their first preference to elect her are now given the chance to use their first preference to elect another candidate they favour. This means that it may be best for her to have to stand to enable electors’ preferences to be fully expressed and not give an advantage to some (notably those who vote primarily on theological/party grounds and have achieved one of their favoured candidates being chosen without any preferences about their candidature having to be expressed).

It would also seem to be the case that as soon as one lay man is elected any remaining male candidates among the ViSC laity will have to be immediately eliminated from the count and their votes reassigned to the highest woman on the remaining preferences.

There are a whole range of questions raised as to how this process will be managed given

- the complexities of introducing allotted places based on sex to voting by STV (even without the questions raised should there be a trans or non-binary person standing for election),
- the potential distortion such restrictions place on enabling the proper expression, and implementation, of preferences which is meant to be encouraged by STV,
- whether it is fair to apply these restrictions with these consequences, and
- whether it is really progress if it results in women being chosen to serve on CNC either without being elected or only because one or more men were eliminated from the race perhaps when they had more votes than the woman then elected.

Conclusion

In summary, despite the normally clear processes enabling a diocese quickly to begin work on a statement of needs and to choose its representatives for the CNC, it looks as if the 3 members of Canterbury diocese will be the last CNC members to be chosen. This has happened because of

serious multiple failings in the diocesan processes which have not been clearly explained and possibly further complications now arising from the recent changes in the Regulation concerning the running of the ViSC.

Five Communion Members

Alongside the reduction in the number of CNC members from Canterbury diocese, the other significant novelty (also introduced, driven by Justin Welby, in 2022) is increased representation from the Anglican Communion. The questions raised about this process in the July 2022 General Synod debate about [this proposal](#) (and other changes relating to Canterbury CNC) are worth revisiting as some relate to what follows (see the Proceedings [here](#) and [here](#) and video [here](#) for the main debate where [the Order Paper](#) is necessary to follow what is happening).

In the past, there was only 1 voting member representing the wider Communion and this was “drawn from the Primates Meeting of the Communion (elected by the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council)” (Previous Standing Order). [I was critical](#) about the process and the choice last time (the Primate of Wales). This time there will be 5 members who have apparently already been chosen but *how* they have been chosen remains far from clear. The steep increase in Communion representation now looks even stranger given the prospect of implementing the recent [Nairobi-Cairo proposal](#) that a significant number of the Archbishop’s roles in the Communion be in future filled by an elected Presiding Primate.

The process is particularly complex because (as with the new Regulation in relation to those elected to CNC by the ViSC) there have been introduced a range of requirements to ensure a diversity of representatives.

The relevant Standing Order ([SO 139\(2A\)](#)) reads that “the five representatives of the other Churches of the Anglican Communion”

are to be chosen by the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates Meeting of the Anglican Communion and the Anglican Consultative Council—

(a) with one person to be chosen from each of the five regions of the Anglican Communion (and, for this purpose, the Europe region includes the provinces of the British Isles other than England),

(b) with those chosen to include at least one primate, at least one priest or deacon and at least one actual communicant lay person,

(c) with at least two of those chosen to be male and at least two to be female, and

(d) with a majority of those chosen to be GMH persons.

The [minutes of the Joint Standing Committee in November 2023](#) summarise these requirements and then read:

The Standing Committee discussed how they would choose the panel of five and agreed that current and immediately past members of the Anglican Consultative Council should be the “pool” from which the five were selected and agreed that there should be a youth representative and an indigenous person. The Standing Committee agreed to request the primates from each region to nominate a slate of people. A group from the Standing Committee would then apply the criteria to select the five representatives.

Here there are at least eight areas which remain unclear about the process.

Firstly, the five regions of the Anglican Communion are known to be Asia, the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Oceania. However, the exact composition of each of these five regions does not appear to be in the public domain. While it is fairly easy to guess the allocation of most of the current 42 provinces there are some where it is unclear.

Secondly, the distribution of provinces, and even more that of active Anglicans, is not obviously equitable. For example, Europe presumably comprises the other 3 churches of the British Isles (and, I understand, probably also The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East), the Americas cover perhaps 8 provinces (Brazil, Canada, Central America, Chile, Mexico, South America, USA and West Indies) and Africa perhaps 14.

Thirdly, the five CNC members are, according to the Standing Order, to be “chosen by the Joint Standing Committee” [whose membership is public](#). Of the current 15 members, eight are in episcopal orders, four are laity and three are in non-episcopal ordained orders. The Primates on it (in addition to Canterbury) are from Jerusalem and the Middle East (Vice-Chair), Brazil, Kenya, Pakistan, Melanesia and Armagh. There are again questions as to its representativeness given that 2 of its 15 members are from the Church of England and 2 from the province of Brazil (which has only 9 dioceses and about 120,000 members and has seen a conservative breakaway from it because of its liberal stance which is the province recognised by GSFA and GAFCON). Of the 10 Communion provinces which are covenant members of the GSFA or applying for covenant membership, only 2 of them are represented on the Committee although there is also the Primate of Kenya who is on the GAFCON Primates Council making a total of 3 of its 15 members being aligned with GSFA or GAFCON.

Fourthly, it appears that an unidentified “group from the Standing Committee” has effectively selected the five representatives. The Standing Committee has presumably simply approved their selection given the difficulty of a larger committee subsequently making changes and still successfully meeting all the criteria. There is no information as to who was on the group or how it worked.

Fifthly, the pool of possible candidates can be identified from the [current](#) and [previous](#) ACC membership but the process of nomination by the primates remains shrouded in mystery as to how many primates participated, whether a list by province or by each of the 5 areas was drawn up, and what exactly—given the multiple criteria being applied—they were asked to do in terms of making a selection from recent ACC members (presumably only from among the 4-6 members from their own province).

Sixthly, the multiple diversity criteria for the five seats on the CNC place major constraints on the selection which interact in complex ways. They can be combined in a multiplicity of ways and it is unclear how they were brought into play in making the final selection. There are, effectively, six different tests that needed to be applied. These comprise the 4 set by the General Synod and required by the Standing Orders:

- Geography (1 from each of 5 regions)
- Church Status (at least 1 Primate, 1 cleric, 1 lay person)
- Gender (at least 2 men and 2 women)
- Ethnicity (at least 3 GMH, a term only [defined in the SO](#) as “a reference to a person whose ethnicity is commonly referred to as “Global Majority Heritage”

In addition there are two further criteria introduced by the Communion's Standing Committee:

- Age (the Standing Committee determined there should be a "youth representative", undefined)
- "An indigenous person" (again undefined and required by the Standing Committee).

Phil Groves, drawing on his experience of many years within the Communion and service in the Anglican Communion Office, [has offered some reflections](#) on the way these different constraints might impact the choice of the 5 Communion members. He concludes that "The brief given to the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion thus offers a bias that could result in a delegation more progressive than those from the Diocese of Canterbury or the Church of England" and "I can't find any reason to believe that the Anglican Communion members of CNC will block a woman for Canterbury".

Seventhly, as noted, there are two CofE members on the Standing Committee: the Archbishop of Canterbury as President and the Chair (Maggie Swinson). It is not clear what role they played in either the SC discussions in November 2023 or subsequently, including finally agreeing to the 5 names. Nor do we know whether they were involved in any way in the subgroup that produced the 5 names. A very strong case could be made that they should have totally recused themselves from all stages of the process as it was determining 5 names for the CNC that were meant to be determined by, and representative of, the other churches of the Communion apart from the CofE.

Eighthly, as signalled by the quotation above from Phil Groves, there are questions as to the theological representativeness of the 5 members. Here a combination of the 6 diversity criteria and perhaps the unrepresentative nature of those making the selection could prove highly significant. It is clear that the overwhelming majority of the other churches of the Communion to be represented are broadly theologically conservative (including, but not only, in matters relating to human sexuality). A strong case could be made that 80% of the representatives (i.e. 4) should therefore be theologically conservative and it would be almost impossible to justify an outcome in which the majority (3 or 60%) were not theologically conservative.

Although in one sense now academic if the 5 members have indeed already been chosen and informed of their role on the CNC, there is an urgent need for much greater accountability and transparency about *how* they have been chosen. Further information on these eight matters needs to be published, particularly given the clearly published processes for choosing other members and the significant number of CNC members involved (which is the second largest of all the five groupings constituting the CNC).

Conclusion

We only currently know the names of 6 of the 17 people who will serve on the Canterbury CNC but certain other aspects of the group are becoming clear. These include that there will be

- 8 to 10 women of whom at least 2 (and potentially up to 6) are ordained, with 3 out of the 4 CofE priests involved being female,
- No male priest from the province of Canterbury and potentially no ordained male from the province if the House elect a woman bishop,
- Between 7 and 9 lay people,
- 10 people from the province of Canterbury and 2 (Archbishop and priest) from York,
- 2 Primates (The Archbishop of York and a Communion Primate) and 1 bishop

Andrew Goddard, 25th February 2025.

- Possibly as many members from the Diocese of London as from the Diocese of Canterbury,
- 5 people from other Communion provinces outside the Church of England.

There is, however, still much that remains unknown. In particular, there are major questions and concerns about what has happened in Canterbury diocese and the imminent election of its 3 CNC members. This arises from confusion surrounding the ViSC and the possible impact of the new Regulation passed by General Synod. There is also very little clarity as to how the 5 members of the Communion have been selected.

Given that these two groups amount to almost half the 17 members, greater transparency and fuller explanations about the processes leading to their selection for this important role is really necessary, ideally before their names are made public.