

2021 RESUMPTION OF MEETINGS – ROYAL ARCH

General

1. As Chapters emerge from suspension or lockdown, the Scribe E of any Chapter that was due to meet during the period of the suspension, but was unable to do so, must enter into the Chapter Minute Book a statement substantially in the following form: “As a result of [the suspension of Masonic meetings][and/or][Government restrictions], owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Chapter was unable to meet during the period from to”

2. Royal Arch Regulation 58 provides that there is no power to cancel a regular convocation of a Chapter. Unless a Chapter has placed itself into voluntary suspension under paragraphs 1 to 4 of the Temporary Emergency Measures for Covid-19 (“TEMC”), from 17 May in England (and elsewhere from the equivalent date on which it is possible for meetings to be resumed), a summons **must** be issued in accordance with the Chapter’s by-laws for every regular convocation that falls to be held after that date (for more information, see below). The penalty for a breach of the Rule is potentially admonition or suspension (Rule 179, Book of Constitutions), at the discretion of the Grand Superintendent. **NOTE:** If, when the summons has been issued, it becomes clear to the Scribe E that the number of apologies is such that a quorum (see A2 below) will be unattainable, there will be no point in Companions making an unnecessary journey. He should therefore tell the members so, and then at the moment when the Chapter is due to be opened (but not earlier) he may presume a lack of a quorum and treat the meeting as abandoned. However, the Scribe E must not merely assume that the members of the Chapter do not wish to meet.

3. Paragraphs 5 and 6 of TEMC allow administrative business (subject to certain conditions) to be transacted by an audio/video conferencing facility during the time that a validly opened physical meeting has been called off. The provisions of those paragraphs must be followed strictly.

Missed Installations and Elections

4. Because of successive suspensions or lockdowns, and periods during which at least some Chapters were able to meet, the position may be complicated, and therefore **in cases of doubt specific guidance should be sought**. The following paragraphs, however, should cover most situations. **It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the Officers of a Chapter are appointed or elected to hold office for the period of one year only, from one Installation meeting until the next.**

Election held – no Installation

5. The Royal Arch Regulations allow much more flexibility than the Rules in the Book of Constitutions, so that a Principal’s election does not lapse if he cannot be installed immediately. If the Principals elect could not be installed on the day for which the Chapter was or should have been summoned (e.g. because the convocation had to be abandoned) each of them must be installed at the first convocation he attends **during the year for which he was elected** (Royal Arch Regulation 48, 3rd paragraph, final

sentence), which may be an emergency convocation. If an emergency convocation is called for this (or any other) purpose, no dispensation is required as the Principals alone have the authority to call it (Regulation 59). BUT if the convocation is held at a different venue from that named in the by-laws a dispensation **will** be required for that purpose.

6. Unless, therefore, the period for which the Principals were elected has expired, any Principal elect present must be installed, Officers must be invested, and an Installation Return for that year must then be submitted to the Grand Scribe E in accordance with Regulation 60.

Missed Election – Installation Convocation able to take place

7. If the election convocation could not be held because of the suspension, a contingency not expressly provided for in the Regulations, Regulation 73 refers the matter to the Book of Constitutions. There, Rule 106 provides that failure to elect is to be dealt with in the same way as if the Master Elect had died – which in turn refers back to Regulation 54, which **requires** Principals to be elected at the next **regular** convocation to be held. Notice of the election must be given on the summons. The Principals so elected can be installed forthwith and, if so, will be deemed to fulfil the qualification for election to a higher Chair at the next regular election convocation. A Treasurer and a Janitor must be elected and invested with the other Officers, and an Installation Return must be submitted.

Both Election and Installation Meetings missed

8. At the next regular convocation to be held, elections must take place, Principals elect installed, Officers invested and an Installation Return submitted (all as in paragraph 7 above). **NOTE: Although a Principal elect may be installed at an emergency convocation, a Principal may only be elected at a REGULAR convocation.** This does not mean that one or more emergency convocations cannot be held in the meantime in order to carry out exaltations; but in that event the Companions who previously held office as Principals must continue to act in those offices (just as would be the case in normal times if a Principal elect were not installed on the regular day of Installation).

9. Because the Royal Arch Regulations make adequate provision for Principals to be elected and installed even though the regular days of election and installation have been missed, paragraphs 7 to 10 of TEMC do **not** apply in the Royal Arch.

Q1. The Chapter wishes to re-elect the current First Principal, but he is currently also the First Principal of another Chapter; is a dispensation required to enable him to serve for a second year?

A1. A dispensation is required in order to **install** a Companion to serve simultaneously as First Principal of a second Chapter. Such a dispensation will usually have been granted previously, in which case no further dispensation will be required.

Q2. What is the quorum for a valid Chapter convocation?

A2. Five (**excluding the Janitor**), of whom two must be members of the Chapter, and three must be qualified to occupy the respective Principals' chairs, though it is not a requirement that any of the latter be members of the Chapter concerned. In order, however, for the ceremony of Exaltation to be worked the minimum number is seven (**excluding the Janitor and any candidate**). If on the day of the convocation a quorum cannot be achieved, the meeting **must** be abandoned, and a note entered in the Minute Book. "The regular convocation of the Chapter on [day] [date] [month], [year] was duly called in accordance with the attached summons. Owing to the continued effect of the Coronavirus pandemic the required number of Companions to open the Chapter could not be assembled and the convocation was abandoned" is the wording suggested.

Q3. What is the quorum required to open a conclave of Installed Principals?

A3. Three Installed Principals, **but** no Conclave of Installed First or Second Principals may be opened unless there are at least two such Principals present (excluding the particular Principal Elect). If necessary the Janitor (if qualified) may act as one of the Installed First or Second Principals – but if so, another Companion must act temporarily as Janitor.

Q4. What if a Chapter wishes to meet but the Masonic Hall named in its by-laws cannot provide Covid-secure accommodation?

A4. The Chapter should make all reasonable efforts to find an alternative Masonic Hall (which is Covid-secure) for its convocation. If it proves impracticable, the convocation will have to be abandoned because it will obviously be impossible to achieve a quorum. A summons should, however, be issued – for a convocation at the regular Hall – against the possibility that it may be operational by the time of the convocation. If, once that has been done, it becomes clear to the Scribe E that the number of apologies is such that a quorum will be unattainable, see the Note to introductory paragraph 2 above.

Q5. What happens if a Chapter's Charter is inaccessible because its regular place of meeting is closed?

A5. A temporary Charter of Confirmation, in the form of a letter of authority, should **immediately** be sought from the Grand Scribe E, via the Provincial Grand Scribe E. (Regulation 47.)

Q6. What happens if a Hall could not reopen immediately and so convocations that should have been held had to be abandoned; is there a duty to hold the convocation that could not proceed at some other time?

A6. An abandoned convocation cannot (by definition) be rescheduled, but necessary business can be transacted at an emergency convocation (provided it is not business that may **only** be done at a regular convocation) or at the next regular convocation. If it was the Installation convocation that had to be abandoned, see introductory paragraph 5 above.

Q7. The Chapter reaches its Centenary in three months' time, but many of the members are showing a reluctance to attend in the present circumstances; can the celebration be postponed?

A7. There is no regulation that requires a Centenary to be celebrated on or near to the anniversary itself, and therefore the celebration can be postponed until the situation improves.

Q8. If the Chapter is unable to meet for a significant period, how will that affect its entitlement to celebrate its Centenary in due course?

A8. The suspensions between 17 March and 17 July and during the month of November 2020, together with any *de facto* suspension resulting from Government restrictions, will be automatically be discounted, as constituting *force majeure*. Otherwise, a Chapter is only liable to lose its entitlement to a Centenary Warrant if it fails to meet for a whole year (and therefore becomes liable to be erased under Rule 189, Book of Constitutions). Provided that the Chapter has made all reasonable efforts to hold convocations, a longer period than a year may be disregarded by the Grand Chapter.

Q9. May Chapters revert to the normal ritual for Opening and Closing etc. as soon as the Government approves the removal of the final restrictions associated with the pandemic?

A9. Not only may they; they must, since the modifications were introduced only to cope with social distancing. At this stage, however, it is too soon to say when social distancing will no longer be required.

Q10. During the lockdown, many Chapters held social gatherings and committee meetings using remote conferencing facilities; can committee meetings still be held in this way?

A10. There is no Rule that requires committee meetings to be held face to face, which was why it was permissible during the lockdown to hold such meetings by electronic means. The practice may certainly continue if it is the wish of the Chapter, but Companions may wish to consider how the "dynamics" of a remote meeting may affect the quality of decisions made.