

2021 RESUMPTION OF MEETINGS – CRAFT

General

1. As Lodges emerge from suspension or lockdown, the Secretary of any Lodge that was due to meet during the period of the suspension or lockdown, but was unable to do so, must enter into the Lodge 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 Lodge was unable to meet during the period from to””

2. Rule 137, Book of Constitutions provides that there is no power to cancel a regular meeting of a Lodge. Unless a Lodge 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 Lodge’s by-laws for every meeting 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), at the discretion of the Metropolitan, Provincial or District Grand Master. **NOTE:** If, when the summons has been issued, it becomes clear to the Secretary that the number of apologies is such that a quorum (see A6 below) will be unattainable, there will be no point in Brethren making an unnecessary journey. He should therefore tell the members so, and then at the moment when the Lodge is due to be opened (but not earlier) he may presume a lack of a quorum and treat the meeting as abandoned. However, the Secretary must not merely assume that the members of the Lodge 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 Lodges 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 Lodge 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. A Master Elect must be installed on the day named in the Lodge’s by-laws (though that day may be moved by not more than 28 days in either direction). If the Master Elect could not be installed on the day for which the Lodge was or should have been summoned (e.g. because the meeting had to be abandoned) Rule 108(a) will have allowed a further meeting to be held within five weeks for him to be installed – failing which the outgoing Master continued in office until the next regular date of Installation (Rule 108(b)).

6. At the first meeting held after the resumption of meetings a continuing Master must invest Officers for the then current year in accordance with Rule 108(b), and an Installation Return for that year must then be submitted to the Grand Secretary in accordance with Rule 151. If necessary, a Treasurer and a Tyler (subject to Rule 113) must be elected and invested with the other Officers (Rule 121). If a whole year has passed without any Officers being invested, only Officers for the then current year should be appointed/elected and invested.

Missed Election – Installation Meeting able to take place

7. If an election meeting could not be held, the provisions of Rule 106 must be followed and a Master elected, after notice on the summons, who (unless he is the outgoing Master, and cannot therefore be installed) must be installed at a further meeting held within five weeks. If, however, there is sufficient time, the second paragraph of that Rule allows an emergency meeting to be held not less than three weeks before the date of the Installation meeting for the purpose of electing a Master, who can then be installed on the normal date.

Both Election and Installation Meetings missed

8. If the missed Installation Meeting was due before 1 March 2021 the normal Rules applied and the outgoing Master continued in office (see above).

9. If the missed Installation Meeting was due on or after 1 March 2021, and the effect of the normal operation of the Rules was that the Master would be serving a **third or subsequent year**, a Lodge may have a dispensation under paragraph 8 of TEMC to elect and install a new Master at the same meeting. That meeting should be the first held after the resumption of meetings and may be either the next regular meeting or an emergency meeting held for that purpose.

10. If the missed Installation Meeting was due on or after 1 March 2021, and the outgoing Master had died or otherwise ceased to be a member of the Lodge, so that the normal operation of the Rules would have required the Senior Warden to summon the Lodge for the whole of the succeeding year, the Lodge may have a similar dispensation under paragraph 9 of TEMC to elect and install a new Master at the same meeting (as in 9 above).

11. If a Lodge is content for the Master to serve a third or subsequent year by the automatic operation of the Rules (or for the Senior Warden to continue to summon the Lodge), it cannot be compelled to seek a dispensation under paragraph 8 or 9 of TEMC.

12. The Master installed, and **any Warden invested** at the meeting referred to in 9 or 10 above will be deemed at the date of the next Installation meeting to have served for a full year in that office.

Q1. What does a Lodge do if the current Master, following the operation of Rule 108, does not want to remain in the Chair for another year and a special dispensation under TEMC is not available?

A1. The Master Elect in his obligation undertakes to fulfil his duties as Master “until the next regular period of election within this Lodge AND until a successor shall have been duly elected and installed in my stead”. The only way that a Master can therefore vacate the chair before his Mastership runs out is by resigning from the Lodge. In the present circumstances it is highly undesirable that he should take such a drastic step, and it is to be hoped that the Past Masters will take most of the burden of Mastership off his shoulders. The Master may invite any duly qualified Brother to occupy the Chair and carry out the work of the Lodge (and if he fails to do so, Rule 119 lays down who is to preside in the Lodge).

Q2. What does a Lodge do if, in the above circumstances, the current Master, is adamant and **does** resign from the Lodge?

A2. The Lodge **cannot** elect another Brother as Master and Rule 119 applies. The Lodge will be summoned by the authority of the Senior Warden until the next Installation of Master. (It is a common misconception that if the Master dies etc. the IPM resumes the Chair as Master. He does not.) Once again, Rule 119 lays down who is to preside in the Lodge.

Q3. The current Master is completing his second consecutive year in the chair, does the Lodge require a dispensation for him to serve for a third year?

A3. Yes, **unless** it has **either** been impossible to hold a meeting to install a successor **or** the Lodge has chosen, although entitled, not to seek a dispensation under TEMC (when the opening words of Rule 115 “Except when required to by Rule 107 or Rule 108” make it plain that events over which the Lodge has no control do away with the need for a dispensation).

Q4. The Lodge wishes to re-elect the current Master, but he is currently also the Master of another Lodge; is a dispensation required to enable him to serve for a second year?

A4. A dispensation from the Grand Master is required in order to **install** a Brother to serve simultaneously as Master of a second Lodge. Such a dispensation will usually have been granted previously, in which case no further dispensation will be required.

Q5. It has not been possible to elect the Lodge’s next Master in accordance with the Lodge’s by-laws, but the Installation has still to take place; what procedure must be followed?

A5. (See introductory paragraph 7 above.) Now that the suspension has ended, Rule 106 allows a Master to be elected either (a) on the regular date of Installation, in which case the Master then elected must be installed at a further meeting held within five weeks of that date, or (b) at an emergency meeting held not less than three weeks before the date for the Installation. However, in the event that the Lodge re-elects its outgoing Master, no installation is required or permissible (he is already in the Chair), so he can

immediately be proclaimed and proceed to invest his Officers. To put it a different way: if the Lodge intends to re-elect the current Master, there will be no need to hold an emergency meeting.

Q6. What is the quorum for a valid Lodge meeting?

A6. Five (**excluding the Tyler and any candidate**), of whom one must be an Installed Master, and two must be members of the Lodge concerned; it is not a requirement that the Installed Master be a member of the Lodge. If on the day of the meeting a quorum cannot be achieved, the meeting **must** be abandoned, and a note entered in the Minute Book. “The regular meeting of the Lodge 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 Brethren to open the Lodge could not be assembled and the meeting was abandoned” is the wording suggested.

Q7. What is the quorum required to constitute a Board of Installed Masters?

A7. Three Installed Masters (of whom the Tyler may be one – but if so, a Master Mason must act temporarily as Tyler).

Q8. What if a Lodge wishes to meet but the Masonic Hall named in its by-laws cannot provide Covid-secure accommodation?

A8. The Lodge should make all reasonable efforts to find an alternative Masonic Hall (which is Covid-secure) for its meeting. If it proves impracticable, the meeting will have to be abandoned because it will obviously be impossible to achieve a quorum. A summons should, however, be issued – for a meeting at the regular Hall – against the possibility that it may be operational by the time of the meeting. If, once that has been done, it becomes clear to the Secretary that the number of apologies is such that a quorum will be unattainable, see the Note to introductory paragraph 2 above.

Q9. What happens if a Lodge’s Warrant is inaccessible because its regular place of meeting is closed?

A9. A temporary Warrant of Confirmation, in the form of a letter of authority, should **immediately** be sought from the Grand Secretary, via the Provincial Grand Secretary. (And see also Rules 101 and 103.)

Q10. What happens if a Hall could not reopen immediately and so meetings that should have been held had to be abandoned; is there a duty to hold the meeting that could not proceed at some other time?

A10. An abandoned meeting cannot (by definition) be rescheduled, but necessary business can be transacted at an emergency meeting (provided it is not business that may **only** be done at a regular meeting) or at the next regular meeting. If it was an Installation meeting that had to be abandoned, and the Master could not be installed within five weeks, the outgoing Master will continue in office as above (subject to the availability of a dispensation under TEMC – see introductory paragraphs 8 to 12 above).

Q11. A candidate for initiation was proposed and seconded at the last regular meeting before the suspension of meetings took effect; does the Lodge need to start the process all over again when meetings are resumed?

A11. No. Rule 159 requires a candidate to be balloted for at the next regular meeting. The natural meaning of “next regular meeting” is the next regular meeting to be held, not the next regular meeting due to be summoned.

Q12. The Lodge 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?

A12. There is no rule 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.

Q13. If the Lodge is unable to meet for a significant period, how will that affect its entitlement to celebrate its Centenary in due course?

A13. 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 Lodge 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). Provided that the Lodge has made all reasonable efforts to hold meetings, a longer period than a year may be disregarded by the Grand Master.

Q14. May Lodges revert to the traditional ritual for an Initiation and resume Raisings as soon as the Government approves the removal of the final restrictions associated with the pandemic?

A14. Not only may they; they must, since the modified ceremonies 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.

Q15. During social distancing how should a Lodge be closed in full in the third degree if the Lodge wants to close in full?

A15. A full closing must be avoided so long as social distancing is in force..

Q16. If a Lodge considers that the proposed alterations to the ritual for a First Degree detract from the whole Masonic experience of an Initiation may it make its own amendments?

A16. Any alteration to the usual procedure is bound to detract from the ceremony. What has been circulated has been approved by the Pro Grand Master, the Deputy Grand Master, the Grand Director of Ceremonies and the Grand Secretary.

Q17. During the lockdown, many Lodges held social gatherings and committee meetings using remote conferencing facilities; can committee meetings still be held in this way?

A17. 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 Lodge, but Brethren may wish to consider how the “dynamics” of a remote meeting may affect the quality of decisions made.