



Suspension Planning Group

Questions & Answers

Edition 13; Updated 29th June 2020.

These Questions & Answers (Q&A's) are the result of queries from Craft, Royal Arch, Mark and Royal Ark Mariner Secretaries, Scribes and members. The answers are intended to give the best possible information and advice to Lodges and Chapters and may therefore be amended from time to time as further information becomes available.

Wherever possible the answer will address all Lodges and Chapters, however, as we operate under different Regulations and Constitutions it is inevitable that some guidance may vary. Where this is the case, the answer will be divided into relevant subsections and be denoted as either 'Craft', 'Royal Arch' or 'Mark', (please also note that where an answer applies to 'Mark' it encompasses all Orders administered by Mark Masons Hall). **Yellow** highlights denote amendments/additions to the previous published edition.

These Q&A's will be added to and updated as new queries arise. All such queries should be directed to your Provincial Grand Secretary at their usual e-mail address.

For the purposes of these Q&A's, the term 'Lodge' refers to Craft, Mark and Royal Ark Mariner Lodges.

Rose Croix have produced their own set of Q&As; these were sent directly to all Chapter Recorders within the District.

1	Should the General Suspension be recorded in a Lodge or Chapter Minute Book?
	Yes, since the communication from our respective Grand Lodges/Chapter is in effect a Dispensation that enforces a suspension of all masonic activities, Lodge and Chapter Secretaries and Scribes are advised to place a copy of the suspension instruction from their respective Grand Body into their Lodge or Chapter Minute book.
2	What do Lodges/Chapters do about a meeting for which they have already sent out a Summons, that now falls within the suspension period?
	The Lodge/Chapter should place a copy of the Summons in their Minute immediately preceding the Suspension notice from their appropriate Grand body. A suitable Minute entry might be, "The regular/election/installation meeting of 'date' was not held owing to the general suspension of all Masonic activity issued on 17th March 2020".
3	The Lodge/Chapter has one or more regular meeting(s) scheduled to be held during the suspension period, how will these be affected?
	Craft/Royal Arch - The suspension, so long as it continues in effect, overrides the dates prescribed in the by-laws and no summons need be issued for any meeting falling into that period. When the general suspension comes to an end, as Secretary/Scribe you should enter in the Minute Book words to the effect of "As a result of the suspension, owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, by the MW The Grand Master/First Grand Principal (FGP), of all meetings from 17 March 2020 to [the date when the suspension is lifted] the Lodge/Chapter was unable to meet."

	Mark – As above; plus, if, after the suspension has been lifted, a Lodge feels there is enough of a backlog of work to require additional meeting(s) this can be dealt with in an Emergency Meeting(s) for which no dispensation is required.
4	The Lodge/Chapter has already elected its Worshipful Master, MEZ, Commander, how will an Installation meeting that falls within the suspension period be affected?
	<p>Craft - As the Rules stand, the provisions of Rule 108 mean that the current Master continues in office until the end of the period for which the Master Elect was elected. (While the possibility cannot be ruled out that the Grand Lodge may enact some special measure to address the situation in which many Lodges will find themselves, it is far too early to tell.)</p> <p>Royal Arch - The Royal Arch Regulations are much more flexible in this respect, and Regulation 48 provides that any Principal not installed on the regular date shall be installed at the next Convocation of the Chapter at which he may be present. The next Convocation could be an emergency convocation (for which no dispensation is required provided that it is held at the Chapter’s regular place of meeting – Regulation 59).</p> <p>Mark – Installation meetings for W.M./Commander-Elect will take place at the next Regular meeting following the end of the suspension or at an Emergency Meeting called specifically for that purpose.</p>
4B	It has not been, or will not be, possible to elect my Lodge’s next Master in accordance with the Lodge’s by-laws, but the Installation is due to take place after the suspension ends. What can we do?
	<p>Craft - Provided that the suspension will have ended, Rule 106 allows a Master to be elected either (a) on the regular date of Installation (which could be moved by not more than twenty-eight days to a later date), 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.</p> <p>Royal Arch/Mark - See answers 4 above and 5 below.</p>
5	The next meeting of the Lodge/Chapter was to elect next years’ Worshipful Master, MEZ, Commander, how will this be addressed during the suspension? Can WMs, Principals and Commanders be elected and installed after the suspension is over?
	<p>Craft - No. Subject to the possibility mentioned in answer 4, the provision in Rule 106 for the election of a Master in the case of a missed election cannot be implemented, and accordingly the current Master will continue in office.</p> <p>Royal Arch - Yes. The Royal Arch Regulations make no provision for failure to elect Principals and therefore under Regulation 73 the Book of Constitutions applies. Rule 106 provides that the situation is dealt with in the same way as if the Master Elect had died etc., which in turn refers you back to Regulation 54, which allows Principals to be elected, (of which notice must be given on the summons), and they can be installed forthwith.</p> <p>Mark – Yes. Election meetings will take place at the next Regular meeting following the end of the suspension or at an Emergency Meeting called specifically for that purpose. Lodges will be permitted to elect and install a new Master at the same meeting, subject to Grand Lodge Dispensation, which will be free of charge. This, however, will not be automatic and Lodges are required to apply for such a Dispensation via their Provincial Grand Secretary in the usual way.</p>
6	We proposed a candidate at the last meeting before the suspension, will we have to re-propose him after the suspension?
	No. Regulations, (Craft Rule 159, Chapter Reg. 66 & Mark Rule 134iv), require candidates 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.

7	<p>We balloted for a candidate at an earlier meeting and intended them to join during the suspension period. Will we need to re-ballot if, after the suspension period and on the day of them joining, their ballot was longer ago than the specified period in our constitutions?</p>
	<p>A successful ballot is valid for a period of 12 months in Craft, Royal Arch and Mark Constitutions, so it is unlikely that a ballot will need to be re-taken.</p> <p>However, if the eventual date of their joining ceremony is longer than 12 months after the ballot, it would be prudent to re-take the ballot to ensure matters remain regular. Whilst not usual or typical practice, it is also likely that it would be acceptable, as a result of the current suspension, to re-take such a ballot at the same meeting as the joining ceremony. This advice is to be regarded as interim as we await further specific guidance from Grand Lodge/Chapter.</p>
8	<p>Will the delay of an Installation meeting have a subsequent detrimental impact on those who are required to serve time in a qualifying office before their installation?</p>
	<p>Craft – Possibly, but unlikely. It is probably unlikely that the current Master Elect will wish to stand aside, but if a Brother should be invested as a Warden during the year, a Metropolitan, Provincial or District Grand Master can grant a dispensation under Rule 109 to render them eligible for election. (Note: (a) Such a dispensation can only be issued to qualify a Brother with short service as a Warden, not one with no service as a Warden. (b) The practice in the Grand Secretary’s Office in relation to London Lodges, before the Metropolitan Grand Lodge of London came into existence, was to grant a dispensation only if a Warden had served for at least half a year.)</p> <p>Royal Arch - No, provided that a year will have elapsed since you were elected as Third Principal and have been installed before the next election is held. Even if you cannot satisfy the latter condition, the Grand Superintendent has power under Regulation 50 to grant a dispensation.</p> <p>Mark – No, the qualifying period of ‘one year’ is defined as ‘from one installation to the next’ and is not therefore a 12 month period. Please note that to ensure that the ‘full year’ is served, an officer is required to be present and appointed at the previous installation meeting, otherwise a dispensation may be needed.</p>
9	<p>Will the suspension affect the ‘continuous working’ of the Lodge or Chapter?</p>
	<p>No. There are many precedents for an enforced break in continuity of working being disregarded by Grand Lodge or Grand Chapter when deciding whether to grant a Warrant or Charter.</p>
10	<p>Will members be refunded an element of their annual subscription proportional to the period of the suspension?</p>
	<p>Annual subscriptions are due for each masonic year as defined by a specific period of time, irrespective of the number of times per year that particular Lodge or Chapter may choose to meet. As such, annual subscriptions are not related to, or dependent on, the number of meetings held or attended by members. Furthermore, should a member resign shortly after the beginning of a new masonic year, our constitutions are clear that they remain liable for the whole subscription for that year, which they must remit to enable them to resign in good standing. For these reasons is it not therefore anticipated that members would be entitled to such a refund.</p>
11	<p>Will the Lodge/Chapter still be required to pay rent to their Hall for a meeting or meetings that do not take place as a result of the suspension?</p>
	<p>We are aware that there will be a significant number of different arrangements and contracts between Lodges and Chapters and their meeting place ‘Landlords’. Lodges and Chapters are therefore advised to review their rent agreements and contact their Hall landlords to ascertain how the current suspension might affect them. It is essential that we all do whatever we can to support colleagues in our Masonic halls who may also be able to</p>

	get some help from the government. The PGMs and MEGS have written to those who run our Masonic meeting places.
12	Can a masonic Hall choose to host a 'young masons' club event during the suspension?
	NO! We would not expect any masonic-related meetings to be held during the period of the suspension. The view is that to hold such meetings would not only be contrary to the spirit of the masonic suspension but would also be contrary to current Government advice; specifically, the avoiding all but essential social contact. In addition, by being contrary to Government advice, such meetings will have the potential to bring Masonry into disrepute.
13	Can a Lodge or Chapter hold a 'virtual' meeting using internet facilities?
	Craft/Royal Arch - No. Whilst it is appreciated that the facilities afforded by modern digital communications could enable such a meeting to take place, whether 'virtual' or 'actual' it would still be a 'Masonic' meeting, all of which have been suspended by direction from our respective Grand Lodges. Mark – Mark Masons Hall have set up a process whereby Lodges/Units can hold Virtual Business Meetings. There are qualifying criteria, limited items of permitted business, set procedures and permission must be granted from Province to allow a meeting during the General Masonic Suspension, plus a Provincial Dispensation issued to allow the meeting to take place in the absence of the Lodge/Unit Warrant. Further details are available from your Lodge/Unit Secretary or specific Order Provincial or District Secretaries.
14	The WM/MEZ/Commander will have served two consecutive years during the suspension, what should we do? Is a dispensation needed for him to serve a third year?
	Craft - No. 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 save the need for a dispensation. Mark - No. Rule 107 explains that events covered by Rules 100*, 101* & 102*, permit a WM to continue in office for a further year without Grand Lodge dispensation, (i.e., as a result of matters relating to their successor and related circumstances over which the WM or Lodge has no control). Royal Arch – Yes. Reg. 51 requires a dispensation from the G.Supt. for any Principal to serve for more than 2yrs in succession. An existing Principal serves in the Office until his successor is elected and Installed, which will not happen until the next Regular meeting can be held. That is when the dispensation will be needed if any one of the Principals is intending to serve more that 2yrs in succession. This answer may be superseded by future advice form SGC.
14B	Can I as WM/MEZ/Commander stay in the Chair for another year?
	If this is your first year in the chair then yes, otherwise please see Q14 above for advice relating to specific Orders.
15	A Lodge/Chapter member was due to receive a Jubilee Certificate during the suspension, how might this be addressed?
	The respective Provincial Grand Lodge administrations have agreed a process to follow, details of which will be posted on our websites in due course.
16	What will happen to those who were due to be appointed or promoted to Provincial Office when the Provincial Meetings have been cancelled?
	Mark – Brethren selected for appointment to and promotion in Provincial Grand Rank have been sent Letters of Appointment in the usual way. A further letter will be sent to them stating that, assuming they have formally accepted, they will assume their ranks from the date the Provincial Meeting was due to have taken place, i.e., 18th April 2020. Craft – The above also applies to Craft with effect from 5th May 2020.

	<p>Royal Arch – Selection for Provincial Grand Chapter honours will take place in the usual way during the suspension period. At this point it is anticipated that the Provincial Grand Chapter meeting scheduled for 21st November 2020 will take place as normal. We will update Companions should this situation change.</p>
17	<p>How will we know when the General Suspension comes to an end?</p> <p>Mark – When the suspension ends, a further letter will be circulated informing Brethren that meetings can resume. A copy of this letter should be entered into the Minute Book and the Lodge can resume its meetings in accordance with its By Laws. If at this point a Lodge feels there is enough of a backlog of work to require additional meeting(s) this can be dealt with in an Emergency Meeting(s) for which no dispensation is required.</p> <p>Craft/Royal Arch - Having entered the words in the minute book, (as suggested in answer 3 above), Secretaries/Scribes should start to send out summonses.</p> <p>NB. After the Masonic Suspension is lifted, the nature of our membership may require significant numbers of members to continue with degrees of social-distancing or self-isolation. Lodges/Chapters must therefore be prepared for such meetings to be abandoned if a quorum cannot be achieved.</p>
18	<p>As it has not been possible to hold the Installation meeting, do I need to submit an Installation Return?</p> <p>Regulations require Secretaries and Scribes to make a Return to the Grand Secretary/Scribe <u>immediately after the Installation of the Master/MEZ/Commander</u>. If it has not been possible for an Installation to take place, no Return is necessary.</p>
19	<p>Lodge & Chapter by-laws permit the exclusion, (under Craft Rule 181 & Chapter Reg. 71), of a Brother/Companion who is more than <u>six months in arrears</u> with his subscription, but it will not be possible to hold the necessary ballot because the subscription year ends before meetings can be resumed. Can we ballot when meetings resume and backdate the exclusion to the end of the subscription year, so that the Lodge/Chapter does not become liable for a further year's dues, (and MCF contribution), in respect of him?</p> <p>Craft/Royal Arch – Guidance set out in the 2nd Edition of the UGLE 'First Rising' newsletter, (22 June 2020), has clarified that Lodges/Chapters who, due to the inability to meet during the General Masonic Suspension, cannot exclude a member before the end of the Masonic year, will be able to exclude them on resumption and waive their Lodge/Chapter liability for subsequent Grand dues, provided the following steps are followed and conditions met.</p> <p>The conditions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The member concerned must have been excluded not later than the first regular meeting held after the resumption of meetings, (it will not be necessary to hold an emergency meeting specially for this purpose). 2. The Metropolitan, Provincial or District Grand Secretary/Scribe E, (or in a Group the Grand Inspector), must certify that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the Lodge or the Treasurer has demonstrated to his satisfaction that all reasonable steps were taken to collect the subscription; and (b) the Lodge started to operate Rule 181 (including the service of the notices required by the Rule), but was prevented from completing the required process before the end of the subscription year, ONLY by the suspension of meetings. <p>This means that to satisfy (a) and (b) above, Lodge Secretaries/Scribes should make all the necessary attempts to obtain the Subscription. If this has not happened then:</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A notice should be served in the normal timescale on the person to be excluded, (i.e., at least 14 days before the date of the meeting that the exclusion would have taken place) 2. A notice should be served on the other Brethren. This would normally be by summons, but because no summons will be issued, this should be by any other reasonable method, (e.g., e-mail or letter) 3. The exclusion should be dealt with at the first meeting after the suspension is lifted. 4. The following note should be placed on the Annual Return- "Exclusion Pending- R181 & By-law" 5. THIS WILL FLAG THAT NO DUES WILL BE PAID FOR 2021- as all dues are paid in arrears. <p>The relief should be claimed when submitting the Annual Return in respect of the new subscription year, accompanied by a certificate from the Metropolitan, Provincial or District Grand Secretary/Scribe E (or Grand Inspector) that conditions (a) and (b) have been satisfied.</p> <p>Mark – Provided they qualify, Lodges/Units are able to use the Virtual Business Meeting facility to exclude members for arrears, (in accordance with either their Order Regulations or Unit By-laws).</p> <p>If a Lodge/Unit does not qualify for a Virtual Business Meeting, then Mark Mason Hall have issued guidance that allows a Lodge who are unable to exclude a member for arrears before 31 August 2020, to exclude a member, (by resolution where necessary), at their first Regular meeting following the lifting of the General Masonic Suspension. Such resolutions should be recorded on the date they take place stating the retrospective date that the exclusion became effective from. This also applies to members Elected to Honorary membership and to Resignations that have occurred during the Suspension.</p> <p>This provision is also available for Lodges/Units who do qualify to hold Virtual Business Meetings, but who may therefore opt to address this matter at their first Regular meeting following the lifting of the General Masonic Suspension.</p> <p>Lodges/Unit's following this guidance will not be liable for 2020/21 Grand dues for the three categories of changed memberships listed above. If required, Lodge/Unit Secretaries/Scribes should consult their Provincial/District Secretariat for advice.</p>
20	<p>Can a Lodge/Chapter make a donation to a charity, when it is unable to meet and vote on the matter in open Lodge/Chapter?</p>
	<p>Craft/Royal Arch - Any money paid from the Lodge/Chapter accounts over that shown in the by-laws, has to be proposed and approved of in Lodge/Chapter. The model by laws show this as below, which the majority of Lodges/Chapters follow.</p> <p><i>"Payment of any sum exceeding £..... if for other than ordinary purposes, may be made only by resolution of the Lodge, of which notice has been given on the summons, except in a case of emergency, when such payment may be authorised by the Master and reported to the Lodge at the next regular meeting".</i></p> <p>You can also see that the Master/MEZ can authorise the payment in the case of an emergency and report it to the next Regular meeting, which will be after the suspension is lifted.</p> <p><u>Notes</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is this an Emergency, - The Deputy Grand Secretary has stated, "It would be churlish in the extreme for anyone to argue that this is not an emergency".

	<p>2. Even so it would be wise for the Master/MEZ to ascertain the views of as many Members as possible. This could be done by undertaking a virtual vote* by email or post as in 3 below.</p> <p>3. Members could be sent the proposal with a clear explanation of the reasons for it, a statement from the Treasurer that it will cause no financial hazard to the Lodge/Chapter and a simple “YES/NO/ABSTAIN “ return slip with e date for returns to be submitted. The WM/MEZ would then gauge the level of approval and possible dissent before taking any decision.</p> <p>4. If the General Account is to be used for a donation it would be hoped that the Lodge/Chapter had paid its dues and demands to the Masonic hall, UGLE/SGC and Provincial Grand Lodge/Chapter.</p> <p>*VOTING – It must be stressed that the above relates to ‘payments from the Accounts’ only, no proposals or voting can take place during the suspension period.</p> <p>Mark – Providing they qualify for such a meeting, this is an item of business that Lodges/Units are now able to disburse using the Virtual Business Meeting facility. Please contact your Lodge/Unit Secretary/Scribe for further information.</p>
21	<p>Is it permissible to hold on-line Lodge of Instruction meetings?</p> <p>Craft - Formal Lodges of Instruction are governed by Rules 132, 133 & 134 BoC and, since they are formal meetings, cannot be held during the current general suspension. Such meetings could however be replaced during the suspension period by informal on-line gatherings as described in Question 22 below.</p> <p>Royal Arch/Mark - No formal regulations exist. Brethren and Companions are referred to question No. 22 below.</p>
22	<p>Is it permissible to hold on-line practice meetings?</p> <p>Craft/Royal Arch/Mark - All formal meetings that are either called by a Summons and minuted, or just minuted, are suspended during the general masonic suspension. However, should Brethren/Companions of a Lodge or Chapter wish to meet on-line to practice their ritual and socialise, then provided that proceedings are not minuted or recorded, this would not be regarded as a formal meeting and would be a good way of members keeping in touch.</p> <p>These get-together’s can therefore take place, but Brethren and Companions are reminded to be careful to assure themselves about the security of the media and software being used. They must also ensure their proceedings cannot be overheard, i.e., that individual participants take steps to ‘Tyle’ themselves in their different locations.</p> <p>Likewise, Brethren/Companions should be mindful of those present on-line, e.g., an Initiate can easily be asked to leave a room at a practice meeting, but are you sure they have left a social media gathering? Similarly, Brethren/Companions should be mindful of whether it is absolutely necessary to be explicit when delivering the 'symbolic secrets' elements of our ritual, especially if there is any doubt about the security of the medium or software being used.</p>
23	<p>The Lodge/Chapter Treasurer has not been able to present the accounts as required by the Regulations or Lodge/Chapter By-laws. What needs to be done?</p> <p>Craft/Royal Arch - The regulations state that the accounts must be presented by the 3rd meeting after the date to which the accounts are to be made up, (Rule 153d). As Lodge and Chapter meetings have been suspended and meetings lost during the suspension period do not count towards the 3-meeting deadline, the first regular meeting held after the end of the suspension will be regarded as the next in the 3-meeting period for that Lodge or Chapter.</p> <p>Mark - Accounts are to be presented at the meeting in the month set out in the Lodge By-laws, (Rule 132i). Should that meeting be lost during the suspension, the accounts can be</p>

	<p>presented at the next regular meeting after the suspension is ended. Alternatively, Lodges/Units that qualify to hold a Virtual Business Meeting can use this facility to address this item of administrative business. Please contact your Lodge/Unit Secretary/Scribe for information.</p>
24	<p>The 2nd Edition of the UGLE 'First Rising' mentions that the minimum age for membership may be dropped from 21 to 18? Is this now possible?</p>
	<p>Craft – This has been put forward as a proposal and will not become effective unless and until it is proposed and ratified through the usual United Grand Lodge process, which require a formal meeting of United Grand Lodge. This will not therefore occur until after the General Masonic Suspension has been lifted and until a formal change is made to the Book of Constitutions, (which will, at that time, be formally notified to Provinces and Lodges). The son of a Master Mason may, at the present time, by application for a suitable Dispensation, be initiated from the age of 18.</p> <p>Royal Arch/Mark – There is no stated minimum qualifying age for membership of the Royal Arch or the Mark Degree in their Constitutions and Regulations, the only stipulation being that candidates for membership must be Master Masons, (for a minimum stipulated periods of time).</p>
25	<p>Are Lodges/Chapters able to adjust their rituals and practices to account for Covid-19 safety regulations when the General Masonic Suspension is lifted?</p>
	<p>No. Lodges should not attempt to modify or amend their current working rituals. Work of this nature is already underway and will be led, and ultimately approved, by the United Grand Lodge of England, Supreme Grand Chapter, the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Mason, (and administered Orders) and other Grand Bodies.</p>
26	<p>Prior to the announcement of the General Masonic Suspension, we applied and received a Dispensation allowing the Master/MEZ/Commander-Elect to be Installed. However, that meeting fell within the Suspension period. Following the lifting of the Suspension, will a new Dispensation be issued and will this incur any additional cost?</p>
	<p>Craft/Royal Arch – Whilst this question has not to date been raised by a Craft Lodge or Chapter, WR Province have confirmed there will be no additional charge for any Provincial Dispensations that are required to be re-issued with amended dates as a result of the General Masonic Suspension.</p> <p>Mark – Once an alternative date has been established following the resumption of Masonic activity, a re-application for either a Provincial or Grand Lodge Dispensation can be made in the usual way. There will be no additional costs for re-issued Dispensations from Mark Province or Mark Grand Lodge.</p>
27	<p>As a Lodge/Chapter Secretary/Scribe, what should I do with any formally issued documents, (e.g., Dispensations), that were rendered void as a result of the General Masonic Suspension?</p>
	<p>As meetings were suspended and therefore lost during the General Masonic Suspension, such documents do not form part of the formal Lodge/Chapter records, i.e., those recorded in Lodge/Chapter Minutes. However, since they are products of what is clearly a unique event in our Masonic histories since the creation of our Grand Lodges and Ruling Bodies, Lodges/Chapters/Units may find it useful to retain such documents with their Lodge/Chapter records for the information of future Masonic and Lodge historians.</p>