

# Paper E1

## Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church

### Equalities Committee

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	Discussion and decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>7. General Assembly endorses the report of the Affirmative Action Task Group. It instructs the task group to continue consulting with other URC committees and groups, bringing firm proposals to General Assembly 2023 to ensure the URC takes positive action towards becoming an anti-racist church in terms of its recruitment and representation.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Update on the work of the Affirmative Action Task Group.
<b>Main points</b>	Mapping the formation and make-up of the group; key areas of conversation and concern; the legal position; and recommendations at this stage in the journey. General Assembly is asked to endorse the work thus far and instruct the Task Group to continue this work, bringing firm proposals to General Assembly 2023.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	From 'Not Racist' to Anti-Racist – Mission Council November 2020.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Black URC members and ministers</li><li>2. John Bradbury – URC General Secretary</li><li>3. Jane Baird – URC Deputy General Secretary, Admin and Resources</li><li>4. URC Human Resources</li><li>5. Jenny Mills – URC Secretary for Education and Learning</li><li>6. Nicola Furley-Smith – URC Secretary for Ministries</li><li>7. URC Mission Committee</li></ol>

	8. Ecumenical Partners – including the Methodist Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain.
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## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None at this point.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Our UK ecumenical partners are greatly interested in how racial justice and Positive Action initiatives are implemented in our respective spheres, and are keen to learn from each other as well as supporting each other's journeys.

## Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church

### 1. Background

The Affirmative Action Task Group was created in late 2021 under the remit of the Equalities Committee, as instructed by General Assembly in July 2021.

The group was tasked as per General Assembly resolutions 15, 16 and 18:

- a) To explore how the URC might implement a policy of 'affirmative action' to address the persistent underrepresentation of black and ethnic minority people in Assembly-appointed posts.
- b) To specifically explore the possibilities and practicalities of a recruitment policy which actively engages with, and addresses, the current racial imbalance in Assembly-appointed posts.
- c) To bring recommendations arising from the work of the small group to General Assembly 2022.

### 2. The Task Group

2.1 The make-up of the group was deliberately diverse in respect of ethnicity, age range, lay and ordained members, and experience of/in the URC.

2.2 Members were:

- Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries – Convenor
- The Revd David Salsbury, Secretary to Equalities Committee – Task Group Secretary
- Lindsey Brown, Mission Committee
- Philippa Osei, URC Youth (subsequently Youth Assembly Moderator-elect)
- Muskaan Jonathan, young adult
- The Revd John Macaulay
- Pat Poinen, Cascades of Grace; Racial Justice Advocate
- The Revd George Mwaura
- The Revd Andrew Mudharara.

- 2.3 The group met four times via Zoom, between December 2021 and March 2022. Discussion points included:
- a) Many URC members have no direct experience of being ‘the other’, or of being in a minority group.
  - b) There is, therefore, a lack of understanding within the URC of the need for the anti-racism resolutions.
  - c) That said, we are seeking to journey forward together as the *United* Reformed Church. There is no ‘them and us’; we are one.
  - d) There is a need for a culture change in order for the URC to become a *truly* multicultural Church; a Church in which different cultures are not just present, but their presence makes a difference – to who we are and how we do things.
  - e) There have been many good intentions concerning racial justice expressed by the URC over many years, yet it feels that very little has changed – and, in fact, some things have slipped. There is a need to remind the URC of our previous commitments, and to hold the URC accountable for continuing to honour those commitments.
  - f) Racism absolutely does exist within our Body, as borne out by the experiences of many black and ethnic minority members of our Church. It is most often structural and unintended, although not always so.
  - g) There is a need to help the whole Church to understand by communicating something of these testimonies without compounding the pain of those who have been hurt by asking them to keep retelling their experiences.
  - h) Conversations are needed in every part of the URC – including local church, Synod, and General Assembly – to bring about the desired culture change. Specifically for the task group, there needs to be a shift in mindset regarding who and how the URC recruits to Assembly appointments.

### 3. Consultation

The task group consulted the following individuals, groups and resources:

- Black URC members and ministers
- John Bradbury – URC General Secretary
- Jane Baird – URC Deputy General Secretary, Admin and Resources
- URC Human Resources
- Jenny Mills – URC Secretary for Education and Learning
- Nicola Furley-Smith – URC Secretary for Ministries
- URC Mission Committee
- Ecumenical Partners – including the Methodist Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain
- The Equality Act 2010 – sections 158; 159
- Equality and Human Rights Commission.

### 4. Task Group findings

- 4.1 ‘Affirmative Action’ is not a term recognised in the UK. Instead, the Equality Act 2010 refers to ‘positive action’, wherein an employer can take action to address a

disadvantage specifically relating to any one of a number of protected characteristics, including race. Such action might include encouragement for such individuals to apply for management positions, or providing specific training to equip those individuals. Even so, the decision of who to select must be made on merit alone.

- 4.2 The exception to this is where a candidate who shares a protected characteristic is 'as qualified as' a candidate who does not share the characteristic. In this instance, s159 can be applied – allowing the employer to favour the individual who shares the characteristic over the individual who does not. This might be used, for example, where it is felt that a disadvantaged group is underrepresented in the particular area to which people are being recruited.
- 4.3 It is not possible to have a *policy* of positive action. Positive action can only be applied on a case-by-case basis – and, in the instance of s159, it should be noted that **both** candidates must be qualified and appointable.
- 4.4 The task group noted that the current appointment processes generally follow a business model, with weight given to extensive résumés and 'professional' presentations. While we do not doubt the intentions of these processes, or that they identify 'good candidates', it was highlighted that on some occasions, members of appointment panels have felt less than confident that they were led to appoint 'the right person'. This is, perhaps, unsurprising as the URC is not a business; it is a Church. Where, then, is the room for discerning the Spirit?
- 4.5 A number of black and ethnic minority members of the URC feel they have received insubstantial or unhelpful feedback following unsuccessful applications for Assembly appointments. The task group considered the possibility of such feedback being the panel's way of 'being kind', rather than saying, 'You were unsuitable', or 'un-appointable'. We felt, however, that honesty was an important part of the feedback for any candidate. We further considered whether greater accountability could positively impact appointment panels, and the recruitment processes used. What if those involved knew, in advance, that they would be required to properly explain their decisions; might this encourage panel members to address their conscious and unconscious biases, influence the questions asked of candidates, or impact how seriously black and ethnic minority candidates are considered? What if the default approach was to seek to appoint black and ethnic minority candidates rather than discounting them for what they may be perceived as lacking?
- 4.6 In particular, the task group noted that 'lack of experience' was a recurring theme. Our black and ethnic minority colleagues are not without skills and experience. So, this raises the question of who determines the 'right' skills and experience for appointments – and how? A process designed and predominantly populated by white middle-class men will almost certainly identify 'required skills' as those

possessed by white, middle-class men. We reflected on the text of Isaiah 43:18-19:

Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.

<sup>19</sup> I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

Could it be that God is trying to do a new thing, using people, skills and experiences we have not tapped into before? Could these give opportunity to explore exciting paths, breathing new life into our structures and processes?

## 5. Senior leadership conversations

Draft Resolution 17 concerning a skills development programme for black and ethnic minority colleagues was withdrawn at General Assembly 2021, so did not form part of the group's remit. Even so, conversations on the theme of 'senior leadership' have been taking place between Education and Learning, Ministries, Mission and Equalities. While there is recognition of the specific need to address underrepresentation of black and ethnic minority people in Assembly appointed posts, it has also become apparent that some of the issues go beyond racial justice, intersecting with issues of gender and class. The continuing conversations seek to examine our processes to bring about greater equity.

## 6. Task Group recommendations

### 6.1 Positive action towards an anti-racist Church

The task group recommends that the URC commits to positive action as a best practice model for future Assembly appointments. This would see:

- a) Job Descriptions and Personal Specifications reviewed and revised to ensure they are not unfairly skewed towards specific groups while being exclusive of others.
- b) Attention given to the language and wording used when vacancies are advertised, to deliberately attract and welcome applications from under-represented groups.
- c) Attention given to the places where vacancies are advertised to reach a wider breadth of candidates.
- d) All candidates who possess the baseline qualification requested for a post should be regarded as 'equally qualified', ie if the academic requirement is 'a degree', a candidate holding one degree will be deemed 'as qualified as' another possessing two or more degrees. There would be no inherent impetus to favour the candidate holding additional qualifications beyond those specified.
- e) All appointment panels should reflect ethnic diversity so that no candidate ever faces a completely white (or completely black) panel.
- f) Awareness raising for members of appointment panels regarding positive action principles.

## 6.2 Anti-racism training

a) Anti-racism training (including 'white privilege') should be mandatory for the following people/groups, and should be revisited periodically:

- All members of appointment panels
- All members of Assembly committees
- All Church House staff, including the General Secretariat
- Synod Moderators; we are encouraged that the current Moderators' Meeting has voluntarily implemented such training.

The above list should not be regarded as exhaustive, and should remain under constant review.

- b) Governing Bodies should be strongly urged to ensure anti-racism training for Resource Centres for Learning (RCL) staff if this is not already taking place.
- c) An anti-racism thread should be incorporated into the curriculum throughout the period of training for RCL students, so that anti-racism becomes a default approach rather than something to be explored at specific times.
- d) The task group is conscious that there are various questions to be addressed regarding how the programme of anti-racism training will be implemented in practice. Focused thought will be given to this before General Assembly 2023, with further refinement as the training is implemented.

## 6.3 Mentoring and support

- a) An offer of mentoring should be made available to all individuals who wish to explore Assembly posts.
- b) In addition, there should be an emphasis on peer mentoring available for all individuals who come to serve the URC from overseas, giving practical guidance regarding UK life in general, and negotiating the URC specifically.

## 6.4 Accountability

The URC should be called upon to revisit and consciously seek to implement its past commitments to racial justice – including but not limited to the commitment for Synods to include at least one black/ethnic minority member in its delegation to General Assembly. If black and ethnic minority members are not involved in the structures and processes of the Church, how will they become known in order to be nominated? And how will they become familiar enough with the structures to be able to imagine themselves in Assembly appointed roles?

## 7. Endorsements

The thoughts and recommendations outlined in this paper have been drafted in consultation with the Secretary for Education and Learning and the Secretary for Ministries. They have been endorsed by the Mission committee, Cascades of Grace, and URC Youth representatives to the Equalities committee.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper is offered by way of an update and indication of the direction of travel thus far. Conversations will continue within and between the URC departments, and with our

ecumenical partners. The Affirmative Action Task Group – now to be known as the ‘Positive Action Task Group’ – commits to bringing concrete proposals to General Assembly 2023.