

# Paper E1

## Report on ongoing work

### Equalities Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd David Salisbury, Committee Secretary david.salisbury@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	For information and discussion.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To share with the General Assembly a summary of the committee's work since it last reported in 2021.
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Equalities Committee report to General Assembly 2021 Paper E1, Report of the Affirmative Action Task Group, General Assembly 2022.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	

#### Purpose and remit

- 1.1 The Equalities Committee exists to remind the United Reformed Church that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work, and to facilitate the development of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the denomination. It does this by challenging the practice of the Church, supporting programmes and initiatives, and by listening to the voices of those who are sometimes on the margins of church or society.

#### Committee membership and pattern of meetings

- 2.1 The Equalities Committee currently has five members plus a convenor and secretary. In July 2022, we said thank you and goodbye to the Revd Anne Lewitt whose term as convenor came to an end, and we welcomed the Revd Naison Hove as the committee's new convenor.
- 2.2 In addition to these nominated members, we are fortunate at present to include two members of URC Youth who are the Equality and Diversity reps on the URC Youth Executive. Additionally, the Deputy General Secretary for Admin and

Resources (succeeded by the Chief Operating Officer in 2023) and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries also form part of the committee.

- 2.3 The committee normally meets on three occasions during the year. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the committee was experimenting with virtual meetings, but since 2020 has met entirely online. This has allowed us to meet at times and on days which may not have been possible if meetings had been held in-person at Church House, thus enabling people with different needs and availability to be present and to contribute.
- 2.4 Some members of the committee represent Equalities as observers on other assembly committees with a monitoring and oversight role. This is true, particularly with Nominations, the Business Committee, Education and Learning, Ministries and Faith and Order. We have also collaborated with Church House HR when policies relating to equalities in the employment of staff have been updated.

### **Affirmative action towards an anti-racist church**

- 3.1 The committee brought to General Assembly in 2021 a report and resolutions to encourage the church to act further on its commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist Church by addressing the racial imbalance in Assembly-appointed posts and other positions of influence in the URC. This led to the establishment of the Affirmative Action Task Group (since renamed the Positive Action Task Group) to do more work in this area and to bring further proposals to General Assembly in subsequent years.
- 3.2 An update of the task group's work was presented to General Assembly in 2022 together with a further resolution (Paper E1, Resolution 7, 2022). This paper highlighted some of the issues that the task group had identified, including the need for cross-denominational anti-racism training. Further work has been done on this and a proposal for Anti-racism training in the URC forms part of a paper being presented to Assembly this year by the Mission Committee on behalf of the Legacies of Slavery task group and in collaboration with the Positive Action Task Group.
- 3.3 The Positive Action Task Group has also collaborated with Mission, Ministries and Education and Learning Committees in drawing up plans for a conference in July 2023 called Making Spaces. The aim of this is to bring people currently occupying positions of influence and leadership together with black and ethnic minority members to explore how we might effect change.

### **Supporting people who are transgender, non-binary and intersex**

- 4.1 The committee followed with interest the progress of St Columba's URC, Oxford, in the creation of a paid role to support the trans, non-binary and intersex community in the city and beyond. We were delighted to learn of the appointment of Chrissie Chevasutt to the post of Outreach and Development Worker with Transgender, Intersex and Non-Binary people at the beginning of 2022.
- 4.2 Chrissie was invited to speak at a meeting of the committee in February 2023 where we heard about the scope of her work, and learned first-hand of the many challenges being faced by the people with whom she is working.

- 4.3 Further to this, and troubled by the stories we heard, as well as those reported in the mainstream press, the committee is bringing a resolution to Assembly this year in support of trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people, which asserts their right to live without fear of violence and hatred, and encourages the Church to stand in solidarity with all those deeply affected by this.

### **Equalities and the Church Life Review**

- 5.1 The interim report of the Church Life Review, which was presented at Assembly in 2022, suggested that work of the Equalities Committee might be carried out in a different way following a future restructuring and rationalisation of the church's committee structure.
- 5.2 The committee was encouraged by the voices heard at Assembly in 2022, which expressed the importance of advancing the work of equality, diversity and inclusion within the URC and encouraged the Church Life Review group to think again about some of its proposals. We also accept that more needs to be done to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into the life and fabric of the church, and that as a committee, we cannot go as far as we need to go to be truly effective.
- 5.3 Concerned that the responsibility for upholding the equalities agenda within the life of the Church might be overlooked, the committee has engaged with the Church Life Review group since Assembly 2022 and look forward to receiving its revised proposals at this meeting.