

Paper H2

Special Category Ministry

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive gives thanks for the Special Category Ministry Scheme and affirms the change in its emphasis. Assembly Executive affirms that <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) the SCM programme in its current form is phased outb) 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) be created to intentionally grow new Christian communitiesc) such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Church Life Review called for a review of the SCM scheme. The outcome of the Review resulted in the need for change in direction with focus on pioneering to form new Christian communities.
Main points	Pioneering is a big part of the God's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places. It is an opportunity for the URC to partner with God and others towards a more just and inclusive society. After a review of the Special Category Ministry Scheme (SCM) initiated by the Church Life Review, Ministries has concluded that the scheme needs a new direction. It recommends that the SCM programme in its current form ends; no new projects shall be accredited and current ones will come to end when their term expires; there will be a relaunch of the programme with 13 new posts (one per Synod); these posts will be Pioneering Posts which may encompass the status of mission project; the posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.
Previous relevant documents	SCM Application paperwork.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators Secretary for Education and Learning.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Background

- 1.1 Special Category Ministry (SCM) was first introduced in the 1970s to be posts outside any deployment quotas; they are in addition to ordained ministry being exercised by the vast majority of ministers in local pastorates. The 'special category' posts originally represented an attempt by the church to recognise its missionary task on the 'frontiers' of industry or education and in the face of social injustice. They are 'special' only for the purposes of deployment. It is important that this post is seen as part of the Synod's mission strategy, and any application for a post needed to indicate how this is so.
- 1.2 Special Category Ministry posts are broadly of three kinds:
- a) new or priority areas of outreach where pioneering work is required and where it would not be appropriate to expect the Synod to provide a minister from the existing deployment quota
 - b) chaplaincies: ministers in 'workplace' ministry or in educational institutions, often universities
 - c) innovative ministry in unique situations specific to a locality or Synod.
- 1.3 In 2016 General Assembly agreed that 8% of available full-time stipendiary ministers should be set aside for Special Category Ministries. This number was never realised and, given the low number of stipendiary posts in 2023, this percentage is no longer viable.
- 1.4 In November 2022 the Church Life Review (CLR) brought a proposal brought to Assembly that the Special Category Ministry Scheme should be reviewed. The CLR gave two reasons:
- a) that there is a sense that perhaps the scheme, (rather than the post-holders within the scheme), has not fully achieved what was imagined in terms of innovation and
 - b) that there is perhaps an unrealistic expectation placed on an individual ministry in an SCM post if the aim is to emerge a new Christian community. (GA 2023 Paper N2 para 42).
- 1.5 Ministries Committee, with wider terms of reference than the points raised by the Church Life Review, instigated a review of Special Category Ministry which took place from GA 2022 until February 2023.
- 1.6 We would like to thank the Revds Lythan Nevard, Tim Clarke and Helen Warmington for their work with the review.

2. The review

- 2.1 Whilst there is much to commend a ministry which stands outside the bounds of traditional pastorate ministry, the review highlighted various concerns of the scheme in particular:
- a) the model of SCM ministry as ministry of presence

- b) the difficulty in evaluation of posts
 - c) the length of two five year terms of service may not be long enough to establish the ministry
 - d) the failure of succession planning by Synods resulted in a lack of sustainability of posts/projects.
- 2.2 Over the course of the scheme, the majority of the projects accredited have been about the ministry of presence which, of course, in itself is a useful tool for mission. However, the model of lone worker as a ministry of presence in almost all cases resulted in a failure of succession planning because it was too difficult to envisage how the ministry might continue. The ministry became too person dependent.
- 2.3 Whilst some SCM posts came to a natural end, in most cases, the failure of Synod to engage in succession planning meant the posts were not viable even after ten years.
- 2.4 Further, in most cases, it has been difficult to do any evaluation from which to draw learning points. Reporting has been lacking despite formal proformas and clear timetabling for those reports to be received.
- 2.5 Therefore, Ministries Committee has concluded that, our limited resources might best be targeted elsewhere. At this point in our denomination's life, newly accredited posts should be about creating new Christian communities rather than the ministry of presence.
- 2.6 Ministries therefore recommends to Assembly Executive that
- a) The SCM programme in its current form ends
 - b) No new projects shall be accredited and current ones will come to end when their term expires using the normal review process
 - c) There will be a relaunch of the programme with 13 new posts (one per Synod)
 - d) These posts will be Pioneering Posts which may encompass the status of mission project
 - e) The posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension with a possible extension of five years.
- 3. Why pioneer posts?**
- 3.1 A pioneer place is a renewing form of being church that connects with our changing culture and is foremost aimed at people who do not know the gospel and are not/no longer involved with an existing church. As a denomination we recognise that it is not the church of God that has a mission in the world but the God of mission which has a church in the world. Pioneering is a big part of the God's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places. It is an opportunity for the URC to partner with God and others towards a more just and inclusive society.
- 3.2 Pioneers are people called by God. This is a vocation. Pioneers have a gift for seeing, for imagination, dreaming, inspired not just by what could be but also by a sense of holy discontent, at the way the church is fulfilling its mission and purpose. In particular, this call and gift is exercised among those not currently engaged in the church.

- 3.3 Pioneers are leaders capable of gathering people round a vision for a new missional adventure and facilitating the ministry of that team to bring something new to birth. This is where most SCM projects have not succeeded.
- 3.4 Pioneers recognise that their primary call is to see new communities of disciples emerge in new contexts. They are not mission enablers with a general remit for mission in a place, their call is more focused. Their gift is to start with context and allow that to shape church.
- 3.5 Pioneers are creative and prophetic innovators with a gift for faithfully reimagining church within the neighbourhood and communities to which they are sent.
- 3.6 We understand the primary role of the Pioneer is to be released from the expectations of traditional pastorate ministry to connect with people outside of Church and thus create new ways of doing Church together in the neighbourhood and communities in which they are based. The ultimate aim of those communities would be to become new Fresh Expressions of Church. The intention should always be to become church - not a stepping stone to traditional church but encourage church to emerge in whatever form.

4. Mission Projects as a model of pioneering

- 4.1 In 2020 the Law and Polity Advisory Group deemed that, in essence a Mission Project is some form of Christian work or witness which stands alone, rather than as part of the work of a particular local church. A Mission Project might be:
 - a) a wholly new piece of work ie a missional community
 - b) a new way of operating from the premises of a now closed local church, perhaps where the ecclesial body had ceased, but community work was still going on;
 - c) a transitional arrangement for an emerging piece of work that might become a local church in due course.
- 4.2 We believe URC Mission Projects fall into the category of pioneering. Current mission projects eg Peter's House as a missional community in the Yorkshire Synod and 'No. 84' in Redcar in the Northern Synod are good examples of how a mission project might be considered a pioneer post.
- 4.3 Each centre of mission will undoubtedly look different because they are shaped entirely by the opportunities and needs of their area; activities, initiatives, and partnerships will vary massively depending on the context. However, like other pioneering projects, mission projects build relationships in order to grow creative, accessible church communities, initiatives, and partnerships. We believe that to make a real difference we need to be part of communities, not just working in them.

5. Lay or ordained

- 5.1 Ministries Committee considered whether the posts should be for lay and ordained.
- 5.2 Although current SCM posts can be opened up to lay people after a period of six months if no one suitable is found, we concluded that, at present, new pioneering posts should be for ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related

Community Workers and Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers of the United Reformed Church.

5.3 However, it should be recognised that there may be difficulties concerning the appointing of lay pioneers as lay pioneering is non-stipended. Therefore, housing and other benefits afforded to ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers would not apply.

5.4 As with current SCMs, a request can be made for a post to be opened up to ministers from other churches (ie a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, the Council for World Mission or the World Communion of Reformed Churches) on a Certificate for Limited Service if a post has not been filled by a URC minister after six months. We suggest the timescale moves to 12 months to enable more opportunities for ministers (and lay pioneers) from the URC to consider the particular calling. However, the granting of a Certificate cannot be guaranteed when considering ministry numbers.

5.5 **Training Stipendiary Ministers as Pioneers**

5.6 In suggesting these proposals, we realise that Education and Learning Committee will need to consider suitable provision of training for pioneering. We understand that this request may become part of the review of training provision currently being conducted by the Education and Learning Committee.

5.7 An initial conversation with the Secretary for Education and Learning confirms that it may be better to use the outside provider we currently use for lay pioneer training for consistency of provision. However, we are content to await the outcome of the training review.

5.8 We are not suggesting a new order of ministry but that students in training for the ministry of Word and Sacraments who may feel a call to pioneering should study pioneering modules as part of their degree or diploma.

5.9 For those already in ministry who are successful in their application for such pioneer posts, we suggest they undertake the CMS Certificate in Pioneering Mission or other recognised course deemed appropriate by Education and Learning Committee alongside their pioneering ministry for which provision will be made in the Terms of Settlement.

6. **Thanks to SCM postholders past and present**

6.1 In recommending change, Ministries Committee is not making any judgement of posts past and present but simply acknowledges that the time is ripe to begin something new.

6.2 Ministries Committee acknowledges the General Assembly 2016 resolution that agreed that up to 8% of the available stipendiary posts for ministers of Word and Sacraments should be allocated as SCM posts, believes that moving from the 8% allocation to one Pioneer Minister per Synod will ease the pressure on Synod deployment target figures, increasing them slightly.

6.3 Ministries Committee appreciates that, should Assembly Executive agree to change the emphasis to pioneering, we shall be in a transitional period and the

above is not as tidy as we would like. Ministries Committee recognises that further work will need to be done on criteria for such posts and mission projects as well as the timing of the phasing out of the old scheme and introduction of the new scheme.

- 6.4 However, mindful that resolution 51 charges the denomination to consider the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship, Ministries Committee feels that this is urgent business as any decision will give clarity to those who are in post at present.
- 6.5 Ministries Committee would like to thank all those who have served faithfully in SCM ministry posts over the years.