

Paper E1

Report on ongoing work

Equalities Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd David Salsbury, Committee Secretary david.salsbury.urcwailes@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To share with the General Assembly a summary of the committee's work.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Equalities Committee report to General Assembly 2023 Paper E2 and Resolution 21, General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. 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 monitoring and, where appropriate, challenging the practice of the Church, supporting programmes and initiatives, and by listening to the voices of those who are on the margins of church or society.

2. Committee membership and pattern of meetings

2.1. The Equalities Committee currently has six nominated members, plus a Convenor and Secretary. It is seeking additional members through the new nominations process. In addition to these members, the committee also includes the Equality and Diversity rep from URC Youth Executive, the Chief Operating Officer, and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.

2.2. In 2023/24, the committee met on three occasions, and always online. We have attempted to be inclusive by holding meetings on various days of the week, and at different times. This has helped most members to be able to attend most meetings.

3. In addition to receiving feedback from other assembly committees where Equalities Committee has a monitoring and observing role, the Committee considered these other main items of business:
4. **Support for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people – responding to Resolution 21, General Assembly 2023**
 - 4.1. Following General Assembly 2023 the committee formed a small task group to take forward the resolution exploring support for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people. This group is convened by Kirsty-Ann Mabbott, and includes Judy Rogers, Rosie Martin, Jayne Taylor, Megan Westgarth, Chrissie Chevasutt, Alex Clare-Young and Daniel Raddings.
 - 4.2. The group's aspiration is to create a discussion booklet with accessible information and questions on several theological areas such as: health; legal identity; sex and gender; de-transition and re-transition; Bible; pastoral care; youth / children and transitioning. Alongside the booklet will be a video and modular course that covers areas such as: history; biology; theology; transition; pastoral care; trauma, crisis and needs; the golden rule; and the intersectionality of all these.
 - 4.3. There is an aim to have 'golden threads' running through these resources along the lines of compassion, theology and bodies (embodiedness), so that theology and academia are combined with experiential learning. The objective is to create accessible learning for all, with references and links to the Resource Centres for Learning where they offer academic theological modules that would be of interest to those who wish to go deeper.
 - 4.4. The task group notes that no funding is set aside by General Assembly to create these resources and the Equalities Committee doesn't have any budget. The group is working on producing a costed proposal which will form the basis of an application to the URC Legacy fund, which will be submitted by Equalities Committee in due course.
 - 4.5. Meanwhile, the task group's representatives from URC Youth have offered to work with URC Youth to create a URC Learning Hub 'Conversation Starter' along the same lines as "Vocation and Call" and 'Where are the Young People?' This offer was received with excitement and is also currently being worked on.
 - 4.6. The aim is to have some resources ready to launch at General Assembly 2025.
5. **Positive action and anti-racism training**
 - 5.1. General Assembly in 2023 resolved that anti-racism training should become mandatory for specific groups and individuals who occupy positions of leadership and influence within the URC (Resolution 32, 2023).
 - 5.2. Members of the Equalities Committee worked alongside others from the Mission department and Professor Anthony Reddie to develop this training. The first session took place in January 2024 and its roll-out is ongoing. Most members of the Equalities Committee participated in the training session in April 2024.

6. Exploring a Living Library for the United Reformed Church

- 6.1. Building on an idea that had been developed in the local NHS Trust of one committee member, the Equalities Committee explored whether it might be feasible to establish a 'Living Library' for the United Reformed Church.
- 6.2. The concept of a Living Library is that people who have stories to tell of lived experience from an equality and diversity perspective are available to a wider audience to be 'borrowed'. This is so that they can share their stories and help others better understand the challenges and joys of their everyday lives. The benefit of doing this is to break down barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding which can result in discrimination and the sharing of ignorance about those who are in some ways different.
- 6.3. The committee warmed to the Living Library concept, but thought that the practicalities of trying to set something like this up across the URC would be too complex and demanding of the church's ever shrinking resources.
- 6.4. Despite this, the committee continues to encourage those with stories to tell to find ways of sharing these in safe spaces and appropriate ways, and for the wider church to hear these stories and to learn from them.