

# Paper X3

## The URC will have no mandatory retirement age for both full or part time stipendiary ministry

Thames North Synod

### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 54</b> General Assembly expresses its desire that the United Reformed Church remove the retirement age for ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers. It instructs the Ministries and Finance Committees to consider the feasibility of this, bringing proposals to General Assembly in 2025.

### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	That Assembly express its desire to remove the retirement age for ministers, and instructs the Ministries and Finance Committees to consider the feasibility of doing this, bringing proposals to GA 2025
<b>Main points</b>	<p>1. Justice and Equality are often affirmed as part of the DNA of the United Reformed Church and mostly they are. As the report of the Equalities Committee to the 2023 General Assembly admirably stated at 1.1.</p> <p>‘The Equalities Committee existed 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.’</p> <p>2. In other areas the URC upholds and abides by Government Policy. In the case of retirement, however, the URC self-evidently fails to practice justice, inclusion and equality and</p>

currently rejects not only Government legislation but also the policies of other denominations.

3. The UK government website states, there is no UK retirement age or default age of retirement (forced age of retirement). This is because the default retirement age of 65 no longer applies. You can work as long as you can and decide when to retire. There are limited exceptions where a compulsory retirement age is permitted. These being -

- the job requires certain physical abilities (eg in the construction industry)
- the job has an age limit set by law (eg the fire service)

The physical risks and demands of such work are not the case for ministers.

**<https://www.gov.uk/working-retirement-pension-age>**

4. Age UK states – Employers used to be able to force workers to retire at 65 (known as the Default Retirement Age), but this law was scrapped in April 2011, following a campaign by Age UK. This means that you can keep working beyond 65 if you want or need to.

5. The General Assembly of 2002 resolved that ‘full-time stipendiary service for Ministers and CRCWs will cease at the end of the month in which a person reaches her / his 65th birthday’. An extension of up to three years would be considered ‘in exceptional circumstances’.

The General Assembly of 2006 agreed a ‘duty to consider’ which extended and clarified possible limited extensions to ministry beyond retirement age.

At the 2012 General Assembly Resolution 25 agreed that retirement from full time stipendiary service for Ministers and Church Related Community Workers would be 68. The previously agreed procedures for extensions continued to apply.

6. We welcome and support the URCs commitment to equip and train people for lay leadership and would not rule out a time when stipendiary service is phased out. However, such an aspiration is years away from being achieved and ministry is needed now.

7. Up to now the URC has defended a compulsory retirement age on the grounds that Terms of Settlement do not compare with a Contract of Employment. We maintain that this is disingenuous. Both contain almost identical clauses. Age discrimination is unacceptable and needs to end.

	<p>8. Retirement Policies of other denominations indicate that in passing this Resolution the URC would be aligning with partner denominations, not contradicting their practises. Given the many Local Ecumenical Partnerships we have it makes sense to be aligned. See Appendix 1</p> <p>6. Finally, and crucially, we bring this Resolution because the URC needs those who wish to continue working full time beyond the age of 68. This includes candidating for a new ministry. In reality this is, and will continue to be, a small number of people. Alongside this it is sadly the case that a significant number of ministers and Church Related Community Workers are requesting early retirement. Even allowing for the reduction in deployment numbers for Synods, a cursory look at the list of vacancies alongside available ministers, makes it obvious that all these vacancies cannot be filled. The former argument that continuing to work denies opportunities for young ministers no longer applies, if it ever did. We maintain that older ministers blessed with good health and fitness plus, crucially, who still feel called to stipendiary ministry, should be welcomed and encouraged.</p>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	<p>Ministries Committee Paper November 2022 Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the Normal Retirement Age <a href="https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/extension-to-stipendiary-ministerial-service-beyond-the-normal-retirement-age/">https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/extension-to-stipendiary-ministerial-service-beyond-the-normal-retirement-age/</a></p>
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	<p>Thames North Synod Meeting on 16 March 2024 Ecumenical partners – see Appendix one.</p>

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	<p>Minimal – this will enable current stipendiary deployment levels to be maintained.</p>
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	<p>Passing this Resolution will establish parity with most ecumenical partners and be appreciated by them.</p>