

# Paper E1

## Equalities report on ongoing work

### Equalities Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Jo Clare-Young, Acting Convenor <b>training@urceastern.org.uk</b> The Revd David Salisbury, Committee Secretary <b>david.salisbury.urcwailes@urc.org.uk</b>
<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.
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

#### Summary of impact

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

#### 1. Purpose and remit

- 1.1. The Equalities Committee exists to help the United Reformed Church realise its commitment that equality be enshrined in all areas of its life, work and theology, and to facilitate the development of equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging within the denomination. It does this by monitoring and, where appropriate, challenging the practice of the Church, developing resources, supporting initiatives and by hearing and responding 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. In addition to these members, the committee also includes the Equality and Diversity Representative from URC Youth, the Chief Operating Officer and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.
- 2.2. Since General Assembly in July 2024 the committee has met on three occasions, including a hybrid meeting for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic.

We intentionally hold meetings on various days of the week and at different times of the day which helps most members to be able to attend most meetings.

- 2.3. From General Assembly 2025, the committee will have a new name: Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, and will fall under the wider remit of the Mission and Discipleship Department. We are working on revising our Terms of Reference to complement and reflect the proposed changes in the committee structure of the United Reformed Church and are looking forward to continuing to hold up a mirror to the denomination so that policies and practices of equality and inclusion are maintained in the life of the church.
3. In addition to receiving feedback from other assembly committees where Equalities Committee has a monitoring and observing role, the committee considered these other items of business:
4. Support for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people – responding to Resolution 21, General Assembly 2023.
  - 4.1. A task group, made up of members of the committee together with others, has been working on producing an information and discussion resource for the whole Church. This resource explores trans identities, looking in some detail at theology and scripture, history, biology and pastoral care. It has been written by people who have drawn on their own lived experience and professional expertise in these relevant fields. We are grateful to them for their input into this resource, and their willingness not only to share their expertise but also their vulnerability in putting it together.
  - 4.2. The resource will come in two parts. There is a summary booklet available both in printed form and online which gives a brief introduction to each topic. This summary will link to more substantive online resources allowing for deeper engagement and providing suggestions for further reading, discussion and questions to ponder either individually or in a group setting.
5. **Accessibility issues at General Assembly and Assembly Executive**
  - 5.1. Acting on concerns raised by some members of General Assembly and Assembly Executive about accessibility issues at the venue for these meetings – The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick – the committee made representation to the Business Committee asking that these matters be raised with the management of The Hayes as a matter of urgency.
  - 5.2. Some other matters that are within the direct control of the Business Committee, were also highlighted in the hope that the experience of all members and attendees at General Assembly and Assembly Executive can be improved.
  - 5.3. We are pleased to report that the resulting feedback and correspondence from The Hayes and from the Business Committee has been positive and reassures us that these matters are being taken seriously.
6. **Accessibility of churches and other venues**
  - 6.1. We are often painfully aware that disabled access in many of our churches and other buildings presents huge challenges to people with disabilities, mobility problems and other needs. It is often hard to know how accessible a building is,

or what facilities churches have before visiting. This lack of information can prevent people with disabilities to feel comfortable and welcome in unfamiliar spaces.

- 6.2. We had wondered whether information supplied by churches, for example through the Annual Church Return, could be collated, categorised and made available through the URC website to share the accessibility of churches and other URC venues so that disabled people could check whether a building would be accessible for them. Closer examination of this idea led us to conclude that we wouldn't have the capacity or resources to gather the information, publish it and then, importantly, keep it up to date.
- 6.3. We do however wish to encourage churches and, where appropriate, Synods, to register their buildings with websites such as Euan's Guide ([www.euansguide.com](http://www.euansguide.com)) and AccessAble ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). These disabled access review websites allow the public to search for accessible buildings and venues, including churches, so that disabled people can make informed decisions about the places they visit. We would also encourage churches with their own websites or other online presence to include accessibility information and keep it updated, thus giving confidence and choice to disabled people who might be wondering whether a place is accessible for them.
7. On 16 April 2025, the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ruled that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex. A few days later the United Reformed Church issued a statement in response to this ruling, restating our belief that the United Reformed Church upholds the worth and dignity of all human beings as created in the image of God regardless of their sex or gender. The Acting Convenor of the Equalities Committee was consulted in the formulation of this statement which can be read in full here: [www.urc.org.uk/urc-response-following-the-ruling-on-the-legal-definition-of-a-woman/](http://www.urc.org.uk/urc-response-following-the-ruling-on-the-legal-definition-of-a-woman/)
8. The committee is privileged to have the URC Youth Equality and Diversity Representative as a member. They have brought wisdom and insights from the perspective of a different generation to our discussions which is always valued. Two resources from URC Youth that we wish to highlight are All Are Welcome, the 2025 Children and Youth Work theme ([www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/children-youth-work/all-are-welcome-2025-cyw-theme](http://www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/children-youth-work/all-are-welcome-2025-cyw-theme)), and a new conversation starter on the URC Learning Hub called Disability Awareness for All ([www.tinyurl.com/u47y4zdw](http://www.tinyurl.com/u47y4zdw)).