

# Paper H2

## Criteria for the 13 new pioneering posts to intentionally grow new Christian communities

### Ministries Committee

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 27</b> <b>General Assembly adopts the criteria for the 13 new pioneering posts to intentionally grow new Christian communities.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	<p>General Assembly 2023 agreed Resolution 51a which, through the Church Life Review (CLR), charged the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.</p> <p>In anticipation of the work, Ministries Committee reviewed the SCM programme and, in doing so, brought resolutions to Assembly Executive February 2024 which affirmed the SCM programme in its current form would be phased out and 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) would be created intentionally to grow new Christian communities.</p> <p>This paper sets out the definition of pioneering and the criteria by which the posts would be awarded.</p>
<b>Main points</b>	<p>The paper defines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) pioneering in the URC;</li><li>b) models of pioneering;</li><li>c) criteria for awarding the 13 posts;</li><li>d) the process for application.</li></ul>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Paper H2 Special Category Ministry AE 2024.

<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Synod Moderators Mission Committee CLR New Christian Communities stream working group.
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## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	Reallocation of SCM budget to fund.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Use of CMS to train for pioneering.

### 1. Background

General Assembly 2023 agreed Resolution 51a which, through the Church Life Review (CLR) charged the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced. That stream of the CLR has begun its work.

However, in anticipation of the work, Ministries Committee reviewed the SCM programme and, in doing so, brought resolutions to Assembly Executive February 2024 which affirmed the SCM programme in its current form would be phased out and 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) would be created intentionally to grow new Christian communities. As with the SCM programme, in the first instance, these posts would be for those already in a stipendiary role.

These posts would be seven years in the first instance, followed by a further five years, by which time a new URC community should be established. Partnering with those in the local community is key to developing lay leadership.

Assembly Executive added a third resolution which affirmed liminal ministries both lay and ordained, including but not limited to Chaplaincy and requested Ministries and Mission Committees to consider how such ministries might be supported and developed, returning to Assembly Executive in February 2025 with a report and proposals. Assembly Executive agreed. That timescale has slipped because of the importance of this work and Ministries and Mission Committees will be bringing something for the wider councils of the church in 2026.

This paper is not about the range of ministries in liminal spaces but centres on the 13 new pioneering posts as defined by the denomination through the Marks of Ministry at General Assembly 2022.

### 2. Mission lens of the URC

The mission priorities of General Assembly, as expressed in its resolutions over the last four years have formed into a mission lens for the URC. This is described more fully in Mission Committee's report to the July 2025 General Assembly. Ministries is conscious that what is in this paper should fit in with these priorities. As such, the new pioneering posts to intentionally grow Christian communities will be committed to engaging with issues of Legacies of Slavery and anti-racism, the environment and net zero, poverty, the URC's reinvigoration of its ecumenical vision and areas of deprivation, where appropriate.

The Conversations at the Crossroads Conference in January challenged the denomination to take more risks in developing new worship and discipleship communities outside of our comfort zones and intentionally increase sharing the

Good News in our contexts. There is room in the denomination for both/and – the traditional and the new, the structured and the amorphous – as we know them and as we embrace the cycles and rhythms of Kingdom life. Conversations at the Crossroads also reinforced the importance of supporting pioneering posts with teams of lay workers, some of whom should be paid.

### 3. What is a Pioneer?

As a denomination, the United Reformed Church needs to constantly remind itself 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.

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.

- Pioneers see differently – a possibility, an idea, a way that things could be better or new or different.
- Pioneers make something happen out of what they see.
- It's a gift, a call, a way of being in the world. They can't help it – it's who they are.
- Not everyone is a pioneer. But we need pioneers because without them we'll just get stuck with the way things are.
- Pioneers make a way where there is no way.
- The world is broken in so many ways. But another world is possible.

### 4. Models of Pioneering

Pioneers, and pioneering, look different in different contexts. CMS have developed the pioneer spectrum which locates four different kinds of pioneers on a scale of 'cultural distance' from the culture of the Pioneer's 'home' church. Pioneer model 1 and 2 below tend to start with church in one form or another. Pioneer Models 3 and 4 take cross-cultural steps abandoning the model of institutional church and start with listening and from listening begin to make connections between the host culture and the gospel.

- **Pioneer Model 1 Church Replicators:** those Pioneers who are really good at starting churches on the basis of a model that has worked elsewhere, normally their sending church. Some creative adaptation may be needed. But essentially these are churches replicated from other churches.
- **Pioneer Model 2 Pioneer Adaptors:** those who excel at adapting the way church is often done so that it can engage more effectively with a new context or culture. Often, they start with church but maybe connect with café culture to become café church or all ages to become Messy Church.
- **Pioneer Model 3 Pioneer Innovators:** Model 3a are those whose ministry ventures into a host context, for example a new housing estate or an urban centre and allow the gospel response to shape the new ecclesial community; and Model 3b those whose ministry ventures into the edges of post-modern culture, exploring spirituality alongside fellow spiritual seekers or nomads.
- **Pioneer Model 4 Pioneer Activists:** those who operate outside the institutional church seeking to align community, network or industry with the values of the

Kingdom. These are 'fresh start' pioneers who enjoy starting with a blank canvas. They have been released from the expectations of traditional pastoral ministry or chaplaincy to minister in places where the church is not present.

Ministries recognises the value of Models 1 and 2, but the new pioneer posts should be aligned more to Models 3 and 4. Applications should be written with this in mind.

### 5. Criteria for Pioneering

- 5.1 Ministries recognises that the criteria for accepting an application needs to be flexible.
- 5.2 Applications should come from the Synod and have been endorsed by the Synod Ministries Committee or equivalent to the Accreditations sub-committee (ASC) of the Ministries Committee. They should include:
  - 5.2.1 **Context.** A description of the geographical area and context in which this ministry is to be exercised; the reasons that leads to this application and what are the theological assumptions lying behind them. Not all pioneers are the same. Nor should they be. There are common threads to their ministry; creativity, initiating things, building teams and so on. But it's the context that is key.
  - 5.2.2 **Central conviction.** A description of the overall mission and ministry of the post, as well as the theological assumptions lying behind this, in no more than 50 words.
  - 5.2.3 **Relationship to the URC.** Show how this ministry relates to the overall ministry policy and mission policy of the Synod; give evidence of listening to the story of the place and community. When a Synod is seeking to create a new Christian community, the application needs to evidence that there has been a listening exercise – to the local communities, to God, to the wider church, to the story of a place and community. It is then that what they hear should begin to give birth to a vision for how the gospel can be faithfully expressed in this new place.
  - 5.2.4 **Please supply a role description.**
  - 5.2.5 **Please supply a person specification.**
  - 5.2.6 **Budget.** Please supply a budget. Ministries recognises that the application may not yet be a fully formed vision, with a seven-year strategy and an itemised budget. The URC Ministries budget will support the stipend, but other funding will need to come from Synod or other resources meeting the requirements of the Plan for Partnership. Pioneering is comfortable with emergence, with seeking to follow the Spirit, and allowing dialogue between the gospel and a community to shape the ministry. The Synod and the ASC needs to feel comfortable that their budget may change as the ministry progresses.
  - 5.2.7 **Synod Pioneer Advocate.** Synod shall need to think prior to the application who in the Synod will be the Synod Pioneering Advocate. Advocacy is part of the pioneer vocabulary. Pioneers need supervisors or in the case of the URC a Pioneer Advocate, to advocate for them

and their work at the next level of responsibility. An advocate needs to be someone with an understanding of the principles of pioneering which most will not have although they will understand the local context. If Pioneers have to expend energy on advocating for themselves, it will reduce the energy and attention they will be able to give in mission. Therefore, the URC is aware of its need to redefine the role of advocacy as less steering and more seeking to support and resource Pioneers through the influencing of Synod and denominational structures. Support for the Pioneer is crucial.

The Pioneer Advocate should be named in the application and in place when the pioneer begins their ministry.

**5.2.8 Outside of deployment quotas.** The 13 pioneering posts will be outside any deployment quotas; they are in addition to ordained ministry being exercised by the vast majority of ministers in local pastorates. They represent an attempt by the church to recognise its missionary task to create new Christian communities on the 'frontiers'. They are set aside only for the purposes of deployment. It is important that this post is seen as part of the Synod's mission strategy, and the application should indicate how this is so.

**5.2.9 Length of post.** The post is for a seven-year term in the first instance. This may be extended for a second five-year term only, by which time it is hoped that a new community will have emerged which can continue the ministry.

## 6. Marks of Ministry for Pioneering

### A Pioneer will need to be:

- **A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship; open to journeying as a disciple with others.
- **A person of accountability:** committed to serving as a pioneer within the conciliar oversight of the church; willing to engage in systems of support and mentoring for Special Category Pioneers; willing to engage in mandatory training including safeguarding; ready to collaborate with others for the mission of God.
- **A pioneer:** understand and be involved in the praxis of planting fresh expressions of church, unafraid to take risks in developing enterprising forms of mission; capable of learning from success and failure; able to disciple and nurture the faith of others in fresh expressions/pioneering contexts.
- **A communicator:** passionate and effective in breaking open God's Word in preaching; to be relevant in the world whilst retaining their prophetic edge to equip God's people in their mission and discipleship to share the Gospel and to live God's Kingdom of justice and peace to the full.
- **A lifelong learner:** self-aware and committed to lifelong learning reflecting and re-examining the message they communicate; aware of their own

strengths, gifts and limitations and thus willing to seek support when and where necessary; making use of the URC provision for on-going training for lay pioneers.

- **A contextual theologian:** delighting in Scripture rooted in the Reformed tradition; able to communicate their own faith and its implications; able to encourage others to discover how these rich resources inspire and sustain faithfulness.
- **A public figure:** reliable and effective in representing the Church in preaching and/or service leading.
- **A reformer:** able to help congregations to discern and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as new chapters open in the life of the Church and others close.

### 7. Discerning whether a person is a pioneer

The Pioneer Criteria are to be used for the discernment of whether a person has the capacity for pioneer ministry in the United Reformed Church. Some of the criteria are about assessing a person's potential and recognise that that potential may only be fully realised after training and during the ministry. The recognition of that potential is sufficient to allow a person to be recommended as a pioneer.

However, some of the criteria call for 'demonstrable' ability and, as such, there has to be clear evidence at the point of interview that a candidate fulfils these criteria if they are to be recommended as a pioneer. These demonstrable abilities are so essential that they need to be clearly and evidently in place at the point of interview.

- **How they have responded to God's calling to be pioneer.** Evidence of this will be drawn from:
  - a track record of 'firsts' and initiatives in having started something new;
  - starting a new project or group by identifying and responding effectively to key opportunities for mission;
  - working creatively in non-traditional ways to develop an innovative approach to practices of missional imagination;
  - building partnerships strategically and prayerfully to support the vision, extending their impact and ensuring sustainability with both community leaders and collaboration with agencies outside of the church;
  - reflecting on situations, learning from them and make appropriate changes for the future.
- **A willingness to take risks and show courageous faith.** Evidence of this will be drawn from:
  - being a self-starter with a willingness to build from nothing;
  - taking appropriate risks and be prepared to exercise step by step experimentation;
  - negotiating disappointment well and learn from mistakes to improve further action.



- **An ability to communicate the faith effectively to those outside the church.**

Evidence for this will be drawn from:

- demonstrating how they have communicated the Christian faith to those outside the Church naturally, sensitively and effectively;
- demonstrating an understanding of the interaction between gospel and culture;
- demonstrating how they have helped in form individuals as missional disciples of Jesus.

- **An ability to work collaboratively in creating and working with a team.**

Evidence of this may be drawn from:

- developing vision with others for a new project;
- releasing and equipping others for pioneering ministry;
- helping people to share responsibility for the growth and success of the fresh expression.

- **Well-developed abilities to handle complexity and initiate and manage change.**

Evidence of this may be drawn from:

- an ability to live with uncertainty;
- the use of adaptive practices appropriately in a particular context;
- motivating others to engage with change;
- deal well with conflict;
- enabling others (not just the pioneer) to take on responsibility for project developments and implications;
- shift priorities and emphasis during various stages of development of a project they have been involved with;
- ensure that project team members are equipped for succession planning for when the pioneer post-holder terms ends.

- **A clear vision of the place of their envisaged ministry within the wider URC's response to God's mission to the world.** Evidence of this may be drawn from:

- an ability to understand and be committed to the URC as a 'mixed economy' church;
- a commitment to the reshaping of the Church for mission.

- **Personal qualities required**

- **A demonstrable maturity and robustness to face the demands of pioneering mission and minister:**
  - Demonstrate an established robust, discipline of personal prayer, worship and study which can sustain them in pioneering situations;
  - Adapt their spiritual practices creatively to reflect and engage with their pioneering context;
  - Have the patience to wait for and identify God's timing;
  - Be able to help new disciples grow in their faith;
  - Attend to the movement of the Holy Spirit in particular mission situations.
- **The ability to learn and reflect theologically as a pioneer:**
  - To interpret the Bible in the midst of contextual mission;

- To understand how missional ministry is shaped by culture and context;
- Understand contemporary cultures and the practice of planting fresh expressions of church within them;
- To enable others to reflect theologically on the pioneer context and ministry.

### **8. The process for application**

- 8.1 All applications from the Synod (which is ultimately responsible for securing the funding of the post, should come to the ASC.
- 8.2 The Synod will be invited to do a presentation to the ASC at its next available meeting, normally on Zoom.
- 8.3 If successful, the post may be advertised on the Synod Moderator's List in the usual way.
- 8.4 It should be noted that any successful application for a post should first be offered to stipendiary ministers on the URC roll. A request for it to be opened up to ministers/pioneers from sister 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) or lay people will normally not be considered unless it has been advertised for a URC minister for six months and no one suitable has been found.
- 8.5 In order to evaluate the mission of the post the ASC will conduct regular reviews with the postholder and Synod through a member of the ASC as contact person.
- a) an initial review after six months in post conducted by the ASC
  - b) a mini review after 24 months, conducted by the ASC.
  - c) after 5.5 years of the post, the Synod will be asked to create a small first term Review Group whose task will be to undertake a major review of the post in all aspects of its life. The Review Group should be independent of the post and will be supplied with a list of relevant questions to ask. They will meet a wide range of people connected with the post and project and after deliberation, will recommend either a second term of accreditation, or not. While this may seem a little premature, if the post is not to continue, personnel, funding and other matters will need to be taken care of from the beginning of the seventh year.
  - d) annual reports from the Pioneer Advocate agreed by the post holder will be sent to the Ministries PA in December of each year.
  - e) If a second term is accredited, further reviews and an End-of-Term report will be expected.
- 8.6 Posts are for seven years in the first instance, with the possibility for a five year extension.

### **9. The role of the Pioneer Advocate**

Local pioneer advocates are key people for the future of the church. They are the person who is committed to equality between the traditional and new expressions of church where previously the weight of status and resources is still heavily tipped in favour of inherited structures.



What does local pioneer advocacy look like in practice? A Pioneer Advocate is:

- committed to be in good relationship with the pioneer minister and traditional church and its denominational structures;
- seeks to support and resource the pioneer minister through the influencing of Synod structures;
- supports the work of the pioneer acting in a supervisory capacity on behalf of the Synod whilst being the bridge between the pioneer and the Synod;
- understands the principles of pioneering;
- has some knowledge of the local context.

### **10. Possible financial support for pioneering**

Pioneers learn to pay attention to what God is doing in the world and join in. This means reading the local context and valuing the local culture, then sharing the gospel in appropriate ways by partnering with local people to create a new contextual Christian community for people who wouldn't normally join one.

It is not intended that Pioneers do this on their own. Within the first two-three years their priority should be to grow a team and get as many local people engaged as possible. It is possible that funding may be available to pay other workers using a funding stream from the Church Life Review as pioneering practitioners seek to establish new communities.