



Thames North Synod Retirement Resolution

**Paper D
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Draft Resolution for General Assembly 2024 Retirement Policy

Basic Information

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Draft Resolution.

The United Reformed Church agrees to not have a retirement age and encourages those who wish to continue full or part time beyond the age of 68 to be able to do so if agreed by the local Church Meeting (when applicable) and a Synod Pastoral Committee.

Main points

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-

‘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.’

To embody and enact this intention, the current practice of age discrimination is unacceptable and needs to end.

In other areas the URC upholds and abides by Government Policy. Examples include -

i) Safeguarding

This is rightly in line with national policy and guidelines and the regular updates to ‘Good Practice’ are to be welcomed.

ii) Same-sex marriage

The Resolution to allow the URCs who wish to register to do so while also respecting that some disagree, again puts us in line with Government policy and the majority will of the country.

Also

The Resolution at the 2023 General Assembly affirming the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people and asserting their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred, puts us ahead of Government in terms of inclusion and equality.

In the case of retirement, however, the URC self-evidently fails to practice justice, inclusion and equality and currently rejects not only Government legislation but also that of other denominations. The key points to support this Resolution are:

1. Government Policy

According to the UK government, 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.

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

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.

There are exceptions in some situations where an employer can force you to retire by law, but they must give a good reason why. You may be asked to retire early if your job: requires you to have a certain level of mental or physical abilities, or has an age limit set by another law.

While it may be reasonable to require a medical, other legal limits do not (or should not!) apply to ministers. They are -

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

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/work-learning/retirement/retirement-age/#:~:text=>

2. Policies of other denominations

These are listed in appendix 1.

3. Terms of Settlement *cf* Contracts of Employment

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. On the basis of the old adage, 'If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck . . .' it seems the URC is not practicing justice, inclusion and equality.

4. The needs of the URC

Finally, and crucially, we bring this Resolution because the URC needs those who wish to continue working full-time beyond the age of 68. 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 are requesting early retirement. Even allowing for the reduction in deployment numbers for Synods, even a cursory look at the list of vacancies alongside available ministers, makes it obvious that 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.