

# Paper H1

Ministries Committee

Age of application for  
non-stipendiary ministry

United Church 2015  
Church 2015  
Reformed Church 2015  
Church 2015



# Paper H1

## Ministries

### Age of application for non-stipendiary ministry

#### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Gethin Rhys, convenor, Ministries gethin.rhys@ntlworld.com or c/o ministries@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	None required, unless Mission Council wishes to instruct Ministries on further steps.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To report back on the referral of this matter to Ministries by Mission Council November 2014.
<b>Main points</b>	Ministries failed to reach consensus on a way forward. Ministries has established a working party on non-stipendiary ministry to look at a range of questions, and has added this matter to the terms of reference of that group.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council Nov 2014, Paper X1, minute 14/32.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Assessment Board Synod Moderators' Meeting Secretary for education and learning Finance department.

#### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None if no action is taken. If this matter is proceeded with: - Additional costs for Assessment Conferences if additional applicants come forward. - Average £10,000 per additional candidate for EM1 training.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Some additional income for RCLs if additional candidates admitted for training.

# Age of application for non-stipendiary ministry

1. At Mission Council in November 2014, consensus was not attained with regard to a resolution from West Midlands (WM) Synod that the maximum age for application for candidacy for non-stipendiary ministry should be removed, and the matter was remitted to Ministries, with a request that we consult with Education and Learning and with the synod moderators.
2. The synod moderators sent us notes of a discussion held at their November 2014 meeting. Many of the points raised related to non-stipendiary ministry in general, especially with regard to the process for review and how synods deploy their NSMs. Ministries is grateful for these comments, which will be fed into the committee's working party on non-stipendiary ministry (see para 9 below).
3. On the specific question, the notes report that: "The synod moderators would be inclined to accept the WM resolution, but wonder if, after say 70, there needs to be a more frequent review between synod, person, and area of ministry in order to 'licence' the continuing ministry."
4. The secretary for ministries consulted with Education and Learning and subsequently with Finance, to try to ascertain the cost of training each additional NSM candidate. Although it is difficult to derive a definitive figure from the data available, the best estimate is an average £10,000 per candidate as identified by the West Midlands Synod in para 2.1 of their supporting paper, X1.
5. A conversation on the subject was initiated via the URC Ministers' Forum Facebook group. Only a few ministers participated, and they are unlikely to be a representative sample. Their overwhelming opinion was that the age limit should be removed for applications for both stipendiary and non-stipendiary candidacy, although there were a couple of more cautionary voices.
6. This information was provided to Ministries at its meeting in February 2015. This was the third meeting in succession at which the matter had been discussed. It had also been discussed at the Assessment Board meeting in September 2014. On all three occasions, it was clear that neither the Board nor the committee were keen to proceed with this proposal.
7. The main reasons adduced against the proposal during these discussions are:
  - a) Both Ministries and Education and Learning believe that the additional cost of assessment and training, within a heavily constrained budget, can be justified only if at least ten years' active ministry can be expected after ordination. Figures presented to the committee suggest that 27 NSMs currently on the Roll served for 10 years or less before retirement. (A glance at *Celebrated Lives* will show that this applies to many ministers who have died also), and this number would increase with an increased starting age. Only 12 NSMs currently serving in recognized ministries are over 70 years of age.
  - b) Paper X1 para 2.5 argued for assessing the potential for future service on a case-by-case basis. The Assessment Board felt strongly that it is not equipped, nor could it be, to estimate how long a candidate would be able to

- remain in active ministry after ordination. The medical assessment, which happens after recognition as a candidate, can only report on the candidate's current medical condition and any reasonable adjustments necessary to accommodate that; it cannot predict the future. This is true for all candidates, but the older the candidate, the more serious the issue.
- c) The suggestion in Paper X1 (paras 2.2. and 3) that training could be substantially reduced on the basis of prior learning fails to take into account the experience of Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) and synods that candidates who do not need to engage fully with courses at RCLs and are not therefore an integral part of a cohort of students often find the transition to active ministry difficult and can encounter serious problems later. Ministries Committee strongly supports Assembly policy that the training of non-stipendiary and stipendiary candidates should be equal in terms of rigour and depth, and any move away from this would require an Assembly decision.
  - d) Synod candidating secretaries need to be reminded of the flexibility in the current arrangements, which allow for a candidate to make an application where the maximum candidating age has been reached providing that, following conversation with Education & Learning there is a reasonable expectation that, taking into account prior learning, a shorter than normal training programme may be arranged allowing for ordination by age 60. However, note the cautionary comments in (c) above.
  - e) Anyone accepted for training will need during the period of training to step aside from their existing lay ministries, which may be many (see paper X1, para 3). This means that the Church is deprived of those ministries for four or five years. There is therefore a loss of ministry to be considered as well as possible increased numbers of ordained ministers.
  - f) As ministers serve at older ages, the possibility of capacity issues arising increases. Not every minister recognises their own limitations, and local churches may be reluctant to lose a minister who they know cannot be replaced. To institute proceedings under Section P against an elderly and infirm non-stipendiary minister would seem unduly draconian. Whether or not such action is taken, there is a danger of reputational damage to the Church, and synods can find themselves in a cleft stick.
  - g) A minister might also feel under pressure to fulfil the ten years' 'expectation' of service when no longer fit to do so, thus damaging his/her health further.
  - h) There was a fear that synods might be tempted to recommend applicants for recognition as candidates on the basis of offering a reward for past service rather than discernment of a call to future service.
  - i) There was concern that older candidates were from the wrong demographic group for the needs of the United Reformed Church at the moment.
8. Following a further hour's discussion, the committee was virtually unanimous in rejecting the idea of removing the age-related qualification entirely. A majority of members of the committee were willing (some with great reluctance) to consider increasing the maximum age for application from 55 to 60. However, consensus could not be reached on this alternative proposal.

9. The committee agreed to refer this matter to its working party on non-stipendiary ministry, which will have the following terms of reference:
  - a) To canvas the synods in order to understand current practice with regard to the appointment and review of ministers in non-stipendiary service.
  - b) To canvas the synods with regard to any retirement practice and planning that is currently in place, and to seek contributions from retired ministers who served in a non-stipendiary capacity indicating what was, or what might have been, helpful.
  - c) To reflect on the established three models of non-stipendiary service and advise on their usefulness or otherwise, and to consider whether alternative models might better serve the church and the ministry.
  - d) To identify best practice with regard to the appointment, review and retirement of ministers in non-stipendiary service, in order that the Ministries Committee can encourage the support and use of this ministry.
  - e) To consider whether there should be an age limit for candidating or ordination and if so what that age or ages should be.
  - f) To consider any other matters that affect the support and utilisation of ministers in non-stipendiary service and make recommendations to the Ministries Committee for any improvements.
10. Unless instructed otherwise by Mission Council, Ministries is not planning to address this matter further until the working party has reported.

