
Introduction to the Deployment papers

1 The deployment strategy paper is written against the backdrop of the national *Church Life Review*, whose initial findings were reported at [https://urc.org.uk/images/Assembly-Executive/November-2021/Paper_N2 -](https://urc.org.uk/images/Assembly-Executive/November-2021/Paper_N2_-_Church_Life_Review.pdf)

[Church Life Review.pdf](https://urc.org.uk/images/Assembly-Executive/November-2021/Paper_N2_-_Church_Life_Review.pdf). *“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” Ephesians 3:20*

2 The Synod Strategy is designed to be creative and flexible, and allow Synod and United Areas to look for new patterns of working where appropriate and to provide greater support to the current patterns. It values all forms of ministry and gives thanks for the present diversity, whilst being open to new forms that may emerge. Central to the discussions has been the question “what is unique about the Ministry of Word and Sacrament” and how can we best deploy this resource without spreading ministers too thinly. This remains a crucial question.

3 The paper has also been shaped by the many helpful questions submitted in response to the Moderator’s letter last July. Whilst some of these were very specific to a particular situation all gave background to the breadth of concerns of local churches. Whilst not all directly addressed in the paper, they continue to shape the thinking around its implementation. At all times the Ecumenical implications have been key in our thinking, along with the needs of local fellowships, big and small. The paper is designed to allow “bottom-up” thinking.

4 As was explained at the Autumn Synod Together, the Synod Strategy had a two-prong approach, that evolved into three:

- The Deployment Strategy paper – which was written and then revised, several times, in response to wider consultation through the Synod Ministries Committee, a special meeting with Synod and United Area leaders, and Synod Council. Concerns have been heard.
- Seeking a meeting with representatives of Moderators’ Meeting – this proved most positive and helped gain an understanding of the Moderators’ protocol in sharing the resource of Stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacrament across the denomination. It also led to our third prong.
- Getting a more robust and reliable understanding of where Stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacrament is currently deployed, and a strategic

understanding of what resource might be available over the next four years. This is a significant strand of the strategy.

Future Movement of Stipendiary Ministers: The Principles

5 To provide as fair a share of the available ministers as possible to each Synod, General Assembly agrees a formula for dividing the total number between Synods. Last revised in 2017, this formula is currently based on aggregate church membership and the number of churches in each Synod. The URC Ministries Committee uses this formula and its own knowledge of current trends to estimate the likely target number of ministers for each Synod for several years ahead. These targets are helpful guidelines to assist planning not rigid requirements.

6 Recently, perhaps encouraged by the comments from Southern Synod, there has been a thorough overhaul and streamlining of the processes used to generate and apply these Synod targets across the United Reformed Church. One objective was to free up the relative gridlock in the movement of ministers that has caused widespread concern to both ministers and churches.

7 The position now is that fresh targets have been calculated for each Synod for 2022 and the next four years. In future, in considering whether to publicise vacancies the Moderators' Meeting will take these targets into account. The Meeting will hope that a Synod proposing a new vacancy will be able to show how filling it would be consistent with its target number of ministers four years ahead.

Future Movement of Stipendiary Ministers: Our Numbers

8 Work has been done since the last Synod Together meeting to clarify exactly the scopings of deployed ministers in the Synod and to remove various discrepancies between the information in different databases. The result is that in February 2022 there were 41.25 full time equivalent (fte) deployed ministers serving in the Synod. There was 1.0 fte declared vacancy.

9 This total of 42.25 for our Synod compares with the target for the start of 2022 for deployed ministers and declared vacancies of 43.

10 The equivalent Synod target for the end of 2026 is currently estimated to be 34 fte. On the basis of current information, it is probable that of 41.25 deployed ministers, 13 will have retired by the end of 2026. Thus 28.25 of the current

ministers might still be in post against the target of 34, leaving scope now for publicising vacancies designed to attract an additional 5.75.

11 In practice it is normal that a number of ministers currently serving in the Synod will leave their current posts over such a period for reasons other than retirement. If, say, 4 did so before the end of 2026, then the scope for declaring new vacancies within a 2026 target of 34 would rise to 9.75.

12 Given these fresh figures, our Moderator hopes to bring some of the vacancies that have been scoped and are ready to be advertised to the next Moderators' Meeting.

13 Looking ahead, it is proposed that the Synod Ministries Committee will review all the relevant figurework at least once a year to update it for new information.

14 If the estimated Synod target for 2026 of 34 were shared out between the Areas using the same formula as is used for sharing out the URC's total amongst the Synods, the shares would be as shown below. Again, there would be no intention to make these targets rigid requirements.

Area	Current fte	Target 2026
Central Sussex	3.00	3.5
East Kent	4.00	3.5
South London	18.15	14.0
Surrey & Sussex	10.10	8.0
West Kent & East Sussex	6.00	5.0
Total	41.25	34.0

Where do we go from here if the proposed paper is approved?

15 It is suggested that pastorates that have already met all the requirements for having a vacancy declared, and where the scoping has been agreed by the relevant Synod or United Area, should be presented to the Moderators' Meeting as soon as is practical.

16 For other potential vacancies the processes in the policy paper should be followed by the Synod or United Area. A meeting in early May is proposed, where

two representatives of each Area will be invited to attend and discuss the implications of the paper more fully and to share ideas. These conversations will be ongoing.

17 In future where more vacancies are ready to be declared than can be accommodated by the Synod four-year target then it is proposed these will be discussed at Synod Ministries Committee, on which every Synod and United Area is represented, to advise the Moderator on priorities.

18 If there are any questions on the paper please email the Convenor of Southern Synod Ministries Committee, revhelenurc@aol.co.uk, preferably by close of play 9th March so we can hopefully address these at Synod Together.