

Paper B1

URC Children and the future of Pilots

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Resolutions.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 07</p> <p>1. General Assembly celebrates the work of Pilots over the past 85 years, its association with URC, and affirms our current local Pilots Companies.</p> <p>Resolution 08</p> <p>2. General Assembly approves and encourages Children's and Youth Work Committee in the creation of 'URC Children' as an umbrella to support the rich diversity of Pilots and all other expressions of children's work in local churches.</p> <p>Resolution 09</p> <p>3. General Assembly instructs Children's and Youth Work Committee to cease using staff time and funding on work exclusively for Pilots, and instructs the committee to support Pilots sub-committee to explore options for the future, including the care of local Companies and Friends On Faith Adventures Groups, in the light of this.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	A proposal to develop URC Children as a network, resource and support structure for all work in the URC with those aged 0-11, including Pilots.
Main points	CYWC are implementing their five-year strategy, which this year focusses on 5-11s. CYWC commissioned a Task Group to review Pilots, and this paper and its resolutions are their response to its recommendations.

<p>Previous relevant documents</p>	<p>General Assembly 2018 CYWC Report November 2018 Mission Council: B1 – Children’s and Youth Work Committee – Executive summary of CYWC review report B2 – Children’s and Youth Work Committee – Children’s and youth work review report 2018 B3 – Children’s and Youth Work Committee – CYWC outline strategy May 2019 Mission Council: B1 –CYWC Update November 2019 Mission Council: B1 CYWC Update including new constitution for Pilots</p>
<p>Consultation has taken place with...</p>	<p>Pilots Subcommittee, Synod Pilots Officers, local Pilots Companies, URC Youth Executive, C&YW staff, CYDO+ team, wider URC Children’s and Youth Work network, and the wider URC.</p>

Summary of impact

<p>Financial</p>	<p>The existing CYWC budget and staffing levels would be redeployed to support the wide diversity of children’s work. Pilots Subcommittee to determine the redistribution of restricted funds.</p>
<p>External (e.g. ecumenical)</p>	

Background

⁵ ‘A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶ Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. ⁷ Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. ⁸ Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.’ As he said this, he called out, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’ Luke 8: 5-8, NRVSA

In November 2018, Mission Council received a review of URC Children’s and Youth Work, and the accompanying five-year strategy in response to the findings and recommendations.

This stated:

- Children’s and Youth Work Committee should review its work through the lens of this mission and strategy annually and seek to deploy resources accordingly. The staffing level and budget should remain at their present level for on-going work, and the current short-term posts be reviewed to support the longer-term focus.
- ‘There needs to be a clear and realistic vision for the Children’s and Youth Work of the church, which needs to be seen in the light of wider societal needs. New ways of helping children and young people on the road of discipleship are needed, and an emphasis on mission alongside ministry.’ (General Secretariat)

The five-year strategy 2019–2024 (see Appendix One for a summary) approved by Mission Council included:

1. Re-unite all the parts of children's and youth work
 - Clear vision and focus – every part to see where it fits in this
 - Connect URCGSF, BB, GB, Pilots, Crossfire, Messy Church etc – cross fertilisation
 - Integrated diary of events across whole URC (CYDOs as QA process for this)
 - Integrated flow between age ranges – cross over, shared identity
 - Connect with other areas of URC to impact positively the lives of children and young people (JPIT, CRCW, FCG).

AND

2. Develop accessible go-to resource bank with links to URC people
 - Develop website – accessible, easily searchable etc
 - Develop resources and links to existing wider resources
 - Provide links to URC people and churches that have recent relevant experience in each area
 - Create network of 'this works for us' advocates.

Following the strategic plan, 2021 is the year for CYWC to focus on its work with regards to 5-11 year olds.

Pilots is the organisation and programme for 5-18 year olds supported by the URC. It was founded 85 years ago by London Missionary Society, and was ecumenical and international at its height. Over recent years, the number of local Pilots Companies has declined, and only the URC now supports this organisation which retains its own funds (approximately £40K) and structures, identity and traditions as well as a rich history.

With regards to Pilots the 2018 Review stated:

- Pilots remains the URC programme for children and young people aged 5 to 18. It is run by dedicated volunteers in local churches and PMC / PPB with limited support from Church House and synod staff. It forms a strong community of people within the URC passionate about sharing faith with children through a regular fun club. It has a proven track record of engaging children and young people with no church background, and discipling them through sustained relationships over a number of years, as well as supporting children from church families in their faith and connection with church.
- Existing Pilots Companies believe it is most effective with 5 to 10s and least effective with 15 to 18s.
- There has been a serious decline in number of companies and number of children and young people. Companies appear to close due to lack of leaders, rather than lack of Pilots. Churches setting up new children's work rarely consider Pilots due to lack of knowledge and understanding about it, its old-fashioned image, and unappealing name.
- Pilots is currently rather costly in terms of staff and committee time, and resources produced, in relation to the number of children and young people benefiting. The relationship to URC Youth is unclear.
- It remains a significant means by which some churches engage with families in the local community. 'Pilots is the best thing our church has ever done.'
- Pilots has a place within the 'mixed economy' of children's and youth work in the URC.

The current situation

“⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶ We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us”.
Romans 12:4-6a NRSVA

URC local churches are engaged in a wide variety and joyful diversity of work with children. Among the many different expressions of children's work captured on the Annual Church Return for 2019 are Junior Church (433), Messy Church (242), Parade Service (208), Girls' Brigade (66), Boys' Brigade (74), Guides (all age ranges 216), Scouts (all age ranges 143), Toddler Group (421), Afterschool Club (26), Mid-week Club (49), Holiday Club (161), Youth Club (134) and over 200 churches with activities classified as 'other'.

There are currently 32 affiliated Pilots Companies, and ten registered Friends On Faith Adventures (FOFA) groups, the new programme offered by Pilots from 2019. The URC recorded 13,108 children worshipping (in services, Messy Church or Pilots), and a further 29,533 children associated with the life of the church. Children here means under 18. There are a total of 346 Pilots (75 deckhands aged 5-6, 170 adventurers aged 7-10, 83 voyagers aged 11-14 and 18 navigators aged 15-17), 2.6% of the total in worship, or 0.8% of the total number of children in worship or associated with the URC. Pilots has experienced further decline since the 2018 review, has two fewer synods with volunteer Pilots Officers, and despite restructuring, has struggled to recruit committee members or a Pilots Advocate.

Pilots is uniquely resourced by the URC through dedicated staffing as well as support from the wider Children's and Youth Work staff team, being over 25% of total staff time. Pilots management, publications and expenses are allocated approximately £10k-£12k from CYWC budget (10% of non-staff budget). Pilots is uniquely positioned within the URC as a Subcommittee of CYWC, with direct representation on CYWC and the C&YW Resources Group, and direct representation on URC Youth Executive. Pilots alone commissions promotional and programme materials, events, training and other resources from URC C&YW.

The direction of travel of Pilots since the review has been towards much closer integration with CYWC and wider URC children's and youth work, for example: the Pilots Worship Resource is now a section within the annual theme books; the Overseas Voyage resource this year will be replaced by a joint resource with Commitment for Life; Pilots Publications Board has become part of a new CYWC Resources Group and the Pilots Management Committee has become the Pilots Subcommittee of CYWC.

Task Group

Pilots subcommittee was presented with a paper in October 2020, encouraging them to consider the future. Engaging with the London Missionary Society history in the light of the Legacies of Slavery report and issues of empire and creating Overseas Voyage materials reflecting complex historical and contemporary contexts for children without specialist input was becoming increasingly difficult, alongside the declining numbers of Companies. A joint session with CYWC led to an agreement to set up a Task Group to review Pilots in relation to the URC.

This task group set up by the CYWC consisting of representatives from Pilots and the wider URC was given a remit to identify:

- Key gifts and graces from Pilots that we wish to continue to receive
- A way forward that can allow existing good work in local churches to flourish
- A way forward that moves towards one C&YW structure, allowing the church to receive the best of the gifts of the staff team
- To keep in mind the desire of the United Reformed Church to prioritise missional discipleship
- To consult widely with existing Pilots Companies, URC Youth, the CYDO+ team, Synod Pilots Officers, CYWC staff and others.

The task group designed an appreciative inquiry-framed questionnaire, distributed to Pilots companies and those involved with historic Pilots companies; the wider URC and people across the denomination were encouraged to participate and to share their views. The group also met individually with some of the key stakeholders, including Pilots Subcommittee, CYDO+ team and Staff team members. They also listened to the silence, to what remained unsaid. They submitted an interim report in January, and a final report with recommendations in April to CYWC for consideration in May. The final report is available on request from children.youth@urc.org.uk.

This paper and its resolutions is CYWC's response to the work of the Task Group and their recommendations. The report concluded:

“Whereas URC Youth has developed a strong and inclusive identity for young people and young adults aged 11-25 in the URC, including Pilots, there is no equivalent for URC Children aged 0-10. There is a strong desire within the URC for an ‘in house brand’ and sense of identity. Other areas of work with children currently have no representation within the structures or ways of participating in Assembly level thinking and planning, development of resources, training, events and strategy.

There is a desire to share many of the resources and strengths of Pilots more widely, but a recognition that most local churches not already a part of Pilots are extremely unlikely to affiliate in the future. There is a desire to find new ways of supporting more local churches to enable children and young people to play their part in the mission of God through sustained discipleship.

There is a concern that Pilots structures are not fit for purpose for twenty first century expectations around accountability and liability for a national organisation with affiliated groups as it operates with inherited systems and sometimes unclear relationships with local churches in relation to policies such as safeguarding.

Recommendations to CYWC from the Task Group:

1. **The creation of the URC Children umbrella to encapsulate all work with children in the United Reformed Church.** This to be developed to offer a strong sense of belonging to the denomination and sense of identity that naturally moves into URC Youth. Therefore children and young people are seen as fully involved in the life of the URC, rather than in separate sub groups.
2. **Existing Pilots Companies do fantastic work locally and that work is to be celebrated, encouraged and supported, within the new URC Children.**
3. **The URC as a denomination ceases to invest exclusively in Pilots in terms of staff time and funding.** This could result in either:

- a) *Pilots continues as an independent organisation, to which local URC churches may affiliate (in the same way as some relate to Girls' Brigade or Boys' Brigade) and takes its funds, resources and materials from the URC.*
 - b) *Or: The structure, affiliation and resourcing of the singular national organisation of Pilots would cease and Pilots Subcommittee should determine how to dispose of its existing funding and resources and windup. Local churches may continue to run groups and activities under the title of Pilots/FOFA within the wider framework of URC Children (in the same way that some have continued to run local FURY groups within the wider framework of URC Youth).*
 - c) *Or: further options yet to be considered.*
4. **The URC investigates the liability and responsibilities involved in offering any affiliated programme or other resource to local churches.** *Does the denomination / organisation carry safeguarding, health and safety and other responsibility and risk in combination with or in addition to the local church? The Pilots review has uncovered the issue of Pilots companies that are not formally connected to local URC churches and therefore outside normal accountability within our structures. Closer liaison between Safeguarding and Children's and Youth Work should be explored.*
5. **The future development of children's work within the URC is seen in part as a living legacy of Pilots.** *Ways that Pilots have supported leaders have given us some examples of good practice that could be expanded to support leaders of all types of work with children aged 0-10 (including toddler groups, Messy Church, Sunday School / Junior Church etc) such as the awarding of long service recognition and the creation of a newsletter. New developments (which are not cost effective exclusively for Pilots) such as the development of an online, searchable bank for resources for local churches to adapt to their setting; the development of a forum for sharing resources; the development of a denomination-wide training offer can be enabled through the released staff time and funding. A new consultative group can be created of leaders involved in a wide variety and diversity of work with children that reflects on local church experience and informs the development of future resources and events to support URC Children (including but no longer exclusively Pilots)."*

CYWC received this report and its recommendations in May 2021. This report confirmed CYWC's commitment to serve the whole of the URC, and the metaphor of an umbrella used at General Assembly 2018 (see Appendix Two). The recommendations also align with the five-year strategy. In response CYWC believe that God is leading and stirring us to respond to the Task Group's recommendations by bringing these three resolutions to General Assembly to help further discern God's will and seek approval to continue to pursue these ideas.

URC children

'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?

³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.' Mark 4: 30-32 NRSVA

The 2018 review highlighted the importance of a sense of belonging and identity for both the children and those working with them. The primary place of belonging is in the local group or activity and the local church; however, a sense of being part of something bigger is also important. If the local is the cloche or greenhouse for young seedlings and tender plants, then the denomination is the garden, a supportive environment in which they can become established and naturalised. Larger events and gatherings, and opportunities to develop relationships with peers in other places are all important factors in faith development, supporting the ongoing discipleship.



Following the review in 2018, CYWC commissioned a logo for URC Children. It has been used on publications to indicate that they are for use by those working with 0-11s.

More recent resources such as the annual theme books (One Body, Common Ground and Heroes and Villains), the weekly Families on Faith Adventures @ Home, the Advent Hope & Joy boxes and the Walking Together Towards Easter packs have increased a sense of URC identity within children's ministry amongst local churches. The Lundie Award has increased the profile of children as missional disciples. The development of online training in response to Covid-19 restrictions has enabled children's workers and volunteers to gather regardless of geographic location, for example for our Faith with Under Fives conference in 2020.

CYWC sees the opportunity created by redeploying staffing and budget currently used exclusively to support Pilots as the means to creating a new umbrella identity for 0-11s which includes all children associated with the life of the URC (in the same way that URC Youth includes all aged 11-25). The overlap of age ranges is deliberate to facilitate transition and support local churches in their local arrangements of groups, often by school year rather than date of birth. URC Children would include local Pilots Companies and FOFA Groups but give opportunities to develop support for and work with a wide diversity of children's work such as toddler groups, Messy Church, junior church and so on. This is both the development of the direction of travel set by the review, and the creation of something new. It is an opportunity to increase our vision for children's work, to broaden our definitions and to be more inclusive. CYWC believes the creation of URC Children is an opportunity to serve children better as a denomination.

According to the Annual Church Returns 2019, we have 273 paid workers and 8,419 volunteers in local churches working with those under 26. Part of establishing URC Children would be the creation of forums to enable their voices, needs and views to be heard by CYWC, and the URC as a whole. It would also include the creation of an accessible resource bank to serve all those engaging with children and young people.

Annual Church Returns 2019 also state we have 9,230 children aged under 11 worshipping regularly in our churches and a further 21,994 associated with the life of the church. As with the general trend of URC church statistics and wider UK church statistics, these figures are declining. This is a key time to increase support for children. Part of this development would be the creation of forums to enable the voices of children, their needs and views to be heard by CYWC, and the URC as a whole.

The redistribution of staff time, CYDO+ team allocations and budget would enable the development of other opportunities to create a strong URC Children identity through such activities as events, trips and camps or residential: opportunities to gather together and be part of something larger. It would create opportunities to respond to the ideas and dreams of children, and support them in their discipleship and leadership.

The establishment of URC Children would support URC Youth by providing a natural sense of progression in identity. The Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme and the Lundie Memorial Award are examples of other work under CYWC that span the full age-range of 0-25, and will help to connect URC Children and URC Youth. We realise that URC Youth faces many challenges in engaging with the breadth of those aged 11-25 associated with the church, and do not underestimate the size of the task or the time such a development will take to become established. The releasing of resources and staff time to enable this is vital. The hope is that URC Children will offer a supportive environment for local churches in their engagement with children in, through and beyond the church through provision of resources, training, events and opportunities, as well as advocacy for children within the URC.

Future of Pilots

Pilots has been an important part of the children's and youth work of the URC since its inception. Many people expressed their personal appreciation for their own time as a Pilot and its role in their faith development. Those currently involved in running Pilots Companies remain passionate. The URC owes Pilots a huge debt of thanks and recognises the contribution of Big Days Out, amongst other things to the life of the denomination. CYWC strongly desires to see local Pilots companies continue, and their work celebrated, encouraged and supported within URC Children and URC Youth.

The realities of the decline of Pilots mean that it no longer seems appropriate for the URC to sustain the structures and resourcing currently dedicated to Pilots. If General Assembly agrees to this next step, then CYWC will support and work closely with Pilots Subcommittee as they explore different options for the future. All options should include the continuation of local Pilots Companies. Synod Pilots Officers have already expressed a desire to actively explore a range of options including those mentioned by the Task Group, as well as exploring the potential to partner with other parachurch organisations.

God of the histories we inherit and the histories we inhabit,
we give you thanks for the vision that launched Pilots and the unstinting
dedication that has navigated its 85 year journey so far.

Thank you for its creation of communities spanning the generations and
across the globe,

for its enlivening of our congregations and cherishing of so many,

for its sharing and its teaching of faithfulness,

for all the children and young adults blessed by Pilots and blessing others
through Pilots.

In deep appreciation we honour those who have worked, and who work still, in
our local Pilots' companies.

We rejoice in the astounding series of days out, when Pilots and friends have
gathered from near and far.

We give thanks for the gifts of committee members, writers and creators shaping
programmes and resources that reveal your world and the Church.

God of the histories we inherit and the histories we inhabit,

hear our prayers at these times of great change and great possibility.

Hear us as we confess that there are legacies to reckon with even as we
celebrate this part of our missionary heritage.

Hear us as we dwell upon success and upon sadness, upon vision and upon decline.

Grant us your Spirit's wisdom as we debate and make decisions.

Give us grace to listen with care to one another.

Give us hearts ablaze with passion for your gospel.

Give us commitment unstinting to share with, listen to and encourage all your children.

We pray in Christ's name, who also navigated the calm and the storm, and brought his friends safely through.

Amen.

(Neil Thorogood)

Affiliations and accountability

CYWC appreciates the work of the Task Group in highlighting the issues around Pilots affiliation of local Companies to the denomination. CYWC will work to address those issues raised in the fourth recommendation from the Task Group as a matter of urgency and will report to Mission Council in November 2021 on this.

Next steps

In 2021, it is the 85th anniversary of the founding of Pilots by the London Missionary Society. Pilots wishes to mark this across the month of November, and CYWC will support them in this.

Launching URC Children, if approved by General Assembly, will involve a number of steps:

- a) Staff roles will need to be reviewed and job descriptions changed. It is hoped this could be achieved by early 2022, redeploying staff time to develop URC Children.
- b) General Assembly 2022 will be marking the 50th anniversary of the URC. It would be an appropriate time to formally launch URC Children – by then, plans for how to implement the key ideas expressed above should be developed and actionable.
- c) CYWC to create the desired resource bank facility to include appropriate resources for all those working with children, ideally in time for the formal launch of URC Children. URC Communications will be delivering an accessible resource area as part of the building of the new URC website and it is hoped that this will be able to incorporate children's and youth work.
- d) Recent developments, such as FOFA and Families on Faith Adventures @ Home, would be reviewed as part of the overall future offer for URC Children, along with other resources.

Proposed resolutions:

1. General Assembly celebrates the work of Pilots over the past 85 years, its association with URC, and affirms our current local Pilots Companies.
2. General Assembly approves and encourages Children's and Youth Work Committee in the creation of 'URC Children' as an umbrella to support the rich diversity of Pilots and all other expressions of children's work in local churches.

3. General Assembly instructs Children's and Youth Work Committee to cease using staff time and funding on work exclusively for Pilots, and instructs the committee to support Pilots Subcommittee to explore options for the future, including the care of local Companies and Friends On Faith Adventures Groups, in the light of this.

Appendix One

Fan into Flames: CYWC Strategy 2019-2024

- Already have the glowing embers – need to encourage, rekindle
- Tradition is not worshipping the ashes but tending the flame.

URC aim: thriving local congregations with inclusive, intercultural and intergenerational ethos which are growing those inside and reaching those outside.

Purpose for CYWC: **children and young people playing their part in the mission of God**

Strategy: support and strengthen local congregations in five key areas:

- FAITH – sharing spiritual resources
- COMMUNITY – sharing relational resources
- IDENTITY – sharing stories, events, connections
- ENGAGEMENT – sharing in the life of the local context
- GROWTH – sharing new, creative, risky change (to develop potential).

Five-year strategy: key tasks

1. Re-unite all the parts of C&YW.
2. Initiate deliberate culture change – non-competitive intergenerational whole life missional discipleship throughout whole church.
3. Focus on churches with ‘no’ children and young people.
4. Focus on under 5s, then 5-11s, then 11-18s, then 18+.
5. Reshape CYDO programme – all synods and Church House as learning community and team.
6. Reshape Pilots – including project with Messy Church.
7. Develop accessible go-to resource bank with links to URC people.
8. Develop communication – reinvest in face2face.
9. Celebrate!!

Appendix Two

Introduction to CYWC report to General Assembly 2018

The remit of the Children's and Youth Work Committee is to support, encourage and promote work with children, young people and young adults (0-25 years old) at all levels of the church.

Imagine a brightly coloured golfing umbrella – that's how we see ourselves:

- A colourful canopy for the breadth and diversity of activity undertaken with children, young people and young adults, providing an environment to foster flourishing
- A spoked network of connectivity and communication between local churches, synods and the committee, providing a structure and programme
- A handle to enable the whole to be carried and represented by staff and committee to the URC and beyond
- A sharp end to drive developments forward (and fend off threats)
- A moving mechanism to enable responsive change
- The whole providing a sense of denominational identity for children, young people and young adults
- The sheer joy of dancing and singing in the rain with the prospect of puddles to jump in!

Appendix Three

URC ANNUAL CHURCH RETURNS	2020 (31.12.2019)	2019 (31.12.2018)	2018 (31.12.2017)	2012 (31.12.2011)	2010 (31.12.2009)	2008 (31.12.2007)
Number of churches	1,331	1,355	1,383	1,512	1,545	1,587
Members	43,208	44,788	46,881	61,627	66,746	70,508
Regular attenders	13,734	14,456	16,092	20,596	21,334	21,336
Average Congregation Children <18	4,495					
Average Congregation Main Service – Adult	44,099					
Average congregation	48,594	50,035	53,379	61,725	65,802	70,711

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A – Children worshipping at main service	13,108	13,791	14,188	15,504	14,735	17,142
B – Children associated with the life of the church	29,533	32,844	30,784	44,771	53,279	67,691
Pilots Company (32 current)	39	44	42	73	81	90
Junior Church	433	413				
Messy Church	242	240				
Parade Service	208	204				
Girls' Brigade	66	67	64	58		
Boys' Brigade	74	73	71	85		
Guides / Brownies / Rainbows	216	232	250	263/365/251		
Scouts / Cubs / Beavers	143	143	158	158/168/163		
Toddler Group	421	442	427	531		
Afterschool Club	26	41	33	61		
Mid-week Club	49	78	62	82		
Holiday Club	161	172	151	184		
Youth Club	134	136	127	144		
Other	218	253	289	388		
Worshippers 4 and under	3,297	3,304				
Worshippers 5-10	5,933	6,381				
Worshippers 11-18	2,938	3,194				
Worshippers 19-25	841	912				

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Associated 4 and under	8,522	9,263				
Associated 5-10	13,472	14,872				
Associated 11-18	7,207	7,904				
Associated 19-25	765	805				
Baptisms Infants	1,211	1,247				
Dedications Infants	185	208				
Volunteers working with under 25	8,419	8,952				
Paid Workers working with under 25	273	253				