

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Samantha Sheehan (acting Convenor) rev.s.sheehan@gmail.com Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>From Youth Assembly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. a) General Assembly resolves that nominations for Moderator of the General Assembly may be received from Youth Assembly in addition to Synods.b) General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to work with representatives of URC Youth to establish a proper process for these nominations. <p>2. URC Youth Assembly reaffirms its commitment to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill health. Youth Assembly strongly encourages individuals to take part in Mental Health First Aid training and for local churches, Synods and General Assembly to look into ways to help individuals access this training. Youth Assembly asks General Assembly to join it in recommending that local churches strive to ensure that at least one member of the leadership team has undertaken this training.</p> <p>From CYWC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Children's and Youth Work Committee asks General Assembly to dissolve the Pilots Subcommittee as a formal structure in recognition of the changes within Pilots following General Assembly 2021. Children's and Youth Work Committee will continue to engage with and support Pilots through their network of companies and informal gathering, alongside other such networks for Children's and Youth Work.4. To mark the launch of URC Children at General Assembly this year, the United Reformed Church resolves afresh to ensure that all structures and

	<p>councils of the church (local church meeting, Synod and General Assembly) are consistently mindful of the voice of children and of the impact of their decisions on children and future generations. To enable this, all councils of the church are encouraged to review how they are able to hear and respond to children.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report of the work of Children’s and Youth Work Committee.
Main points	Review of past two years, update on strategy, URC Youth report, launch of URC Children.
Previous relevant documents	GA2021 B1 URC Children and the future of Pilots GA2020 Children’s and youth work review and five-year strategy Mission Council 2018 B2 CYWC review report 2018 Mission Council 2018 B3 CYWC outline strategy.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth Pilots Subcommittee.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Church House staff

URC Youth created a very part-time intern post to assist them with communications, and Charlotte Elliott was appointed in June 2021 (funded by the Carmichael Montgomery Trust fund). Steve Tait, Pilots Coordinator (0.4FTE) resigned in May 2021, and Triin Kubar, Administrative Assistant and Pilots Desk (0.6FTE) resigned in January 2022. Following the General Assembly resolutions on the future of Pilots and development of URC Children, the roles have been reviewed, and Tricia Harding was appointed as Administrative Assistant (0.4FTE) from January 2022 and Sharon Lloyd as Programme Assistant (0.6FTE) from April 2022.

Ecumenical work

We contributed to the Churches Together in England resources for Education Sunday in 2020 (pre-recorded service) and 2021. We contributed to Creating Space with Children online programme, led by the Methodist Church during 2020-2021. Lorraine Webb, Programme Officer, is part of the planning group for European Conference on Christian Education (for Children’s Ministry Network), and organised a mini-conference online in 2021. We are part of the ecumenical group developing new training for children’s, family and intergenerational ministry (to replace Core Skills) called Essentials for Ministry. Sam Richards, Head of Children’s and Youth Work, is part of an international group creating resources to help churches explore intergenerational ministry.

Pilots

Pilots were supported with online gatherings for Synod Pilots Officers and FOFA@home resources sent directly to Pilots Captains during lockdown. A recorded Pilots Sunday service was created in 2020. An online training session was offered to Pilots Officers in 2021. A special badge for all Pilots, bunting, and a video of the prayer was created to mark the 85th anniversary of Pilots in 2021. During 2020-2021, Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC) conducted a review of Pilots, resulting in the paper to General Assembly in 2021 and resolutions 8 and 9, reducing staff and financial support for Pilots, and creating capacity to launch URC Children (see below). Pilots continues to be supported through provision of resources (although these are no longer exclusive to Pilots), and staff support for managing merchandise, record-keeping and accessing funds. The Pilots Subcommittee has not been able to recruit new members. The Pilots community held a summit residential and hybrid meeting in October 2021 supported by staff, and its first online gathering in 2022, as it finds new ways to operate going forward without the formal structures it is unable to sustain.

Children's and Youth Work Committee asks General Assembly to dissolve the Pilots Subcommittee as a formal structure in recognition of the changes within Pilots following General Assembly 2021. Children's and Youth Work Committee will continue to engage with and support Pilots through their network of Companies and informal Gathering, alongside other such networks for children's and youth work.

CYWC strategy update

Mission Council November 2018 approved the CYWC strategy (originally 2019-2023, now extended to 2024 because of the pandemic).

Vision: **children and young people playing their part in the mission of God** – experiencing, exploring and expressing the way of Jesus in, through and beyond the church.

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).

The focus for 2020 was 0-5s, with a series of resources produced to signpost local churches to ways to engage with and support families with 0-5 year olds. Families on Faith Adventures@home (FOFA@home) began as a weekly resource for churches to send to families during the first lockdown, and we have now passed the milestone of more than two years of this weekly resource, which is widely used by churches in a variety of ways to support groups and families. We ran 'TRialogue', a regular broadcast online discussion for 16-25s. We created pre-recorded services for Pentecost, and we ran an online 'fringe event' after the summer Mission Council. We ran an online conference 'Faith with under-fives' with ROOTS over three evenings. We created the URC Infant Feeding Policy, which was approved at November 2020 Mission Council. The Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme was launched to replace the Child Friendly Church award. We created an Advent resource, 'Hope and Joy' boxes, for churches buy to give to families during lockdown, and 2,000 were distributed. We created accessible versions of the safeguarding posters for local churches.

The focus for 2021 was 5-11s. The annual themed resource was Heroes and Villains. We ran an online conference 'Living Faith with 5-11s' over three evenings with ROOTS. We created an intergenerational Lent resource, 'Walking towards Easter Together', for churches to buy to give away during lockdown, and 3,500 were distributed. We created a Holiday Club resource 'Supersleuths' for local churches, and offered small grants to support children's work over the holidays. We created a new resource with Commitment for Life, 'Go with Greta' (for 5-11s) / #connect2 (for 11-14s) on Nicaragua. We ran an online 'fringe event' after General Assembly. We created a recorded service for Environment Sunday. We created an Advent resource, 'Come and See' boxes, for churches buy to give to families during lockdown, and 5,000 were distributed. We launched URC Training with Education and Learning, offering online workshops to help churches build skills in social media, video editing, sharing good news stories, and hybrid church. We launched 'Let's talk about' online sessions for children's and youth workers. We hosted an online gathering around neurodiversity. We introduced the Children and Youth Friendly Synod scheme.

Throughout the pandemic, we produced guidance for local churches in relation to children's and youth work, and more recently for church activities in private dwellings.

So far in 2022, we have supported URC Youth Assembly, and ran a URC Youth Leaders' Gathering event alongside it for the first time in January. We contributed to the URC Lent resource 'Faith Hope and Love on the way to Easter'. We prepared to launch URC Children as a new umbrella identity for all children connected to the URC and those who work with them.

It is now a consolidation year in 2022, as we try to take stock of the impact of the pandemic, and help churches to refocus on their engagement with children and young people. We are aware of the very mixed picture in local churches, some of whom struggled to stay connected with children, young people and families, while others find increased demand from families through food banks, free school lunches, and free resources children's and family resources (such as craft bags, Advent boxes etc). Some churches were helped by young people to embrace technology, while others lost contact with teens and young adults. Many volunteers have had to step down for a variety of reasons, and many groups and activities have not reopened or are being reassessed. The launch of URC Children and supporting URC Youth's review underline the URC's commitment to its calling as a church for all ages.

CYWC is extremely grateful to the CYDO+ team (and the Synods for releasing their time) for all their invaluable contributions over the past two years, which have enabled all the work referred to above, and much more, to be offered denomination-wide. This way of working together to identify needs and respond in a coordinated manner became incredibly important during the pandemic, and enabled the URC to lead the way in supporting churches as they endeavoured to maintain contact with children, young people and families, and resource volunteers, during a very challenging period.

CYWC has recognised significant progress so far in achieving the goals of the six-year strategy, and reconfirmed their commitment to the following priorities:

- Faith – support and resource local churches, and through them grandparents, parents and carers in sharing spiritual resources with children and young people, with a focus on prayer, dwelling in the Word and encountering God in worship,

creation and the whole of life, providing resources (FOFA@home, Holiday Club, annual theme etc), and offer training to build confidence.

- Community – support local churches in building intergenerational relationships and offering care to children and young people – Mental Health First Aid training, emotional resilience, pastoral care, doing things together (worship, service) – and re-focus on relationships rather than programmes and rotas.
- Identity – build a sense of identity among children and young people in local churches through the launch of URC Children and supporting the URC Youth review, engaging with 11-17s, connecting over 18s with wider URC life and supporting their discernment of vocation. Building networks for those working with different groups for mutual support (eg Messy Church, Pilots, uniformed groups, toddler groups, junior church, youth groups). Offering resources, gatherings, events and opportunities alongside sharing stories (eg Lundie Award, Greenbelt).
- Engagement – support local churches in partnering with others to engage with children and young people in the local community – highlight potential partners and examples from across the URC, and support URC Children and URC Youth in engaging with social and global justice as mission.
- Growth – offer supported ways into new, creative, risky change – Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme, young leaders training, Stepwise, Pioneering Hub, New Reality Same Mission, Eco-church and Eco-Congregation programmes.

2022 year of jubilee

The booklet *Celebrate Together*, telling the story of holding a party linked to the Biblical concept of jubilee and sharing something of the history and current life of the URC, was created as an intergenerational resource to enable local churches to include all ages in celebrating the URC's 50th anniversary. In all, 50,000 free copies were made available for churches to give away (thanks to generous funding from the Liggart Trust and the James Donald Tract Fund), along with accompanying resources to link this to worship. We contributed to the jubilee pack sent to all local churches and active ministers. Our annual themed resource for all ages on jubilee went to all churches and lay preachers. We have been helping to develop the Newbigin Pioneering Hub as a 50th anniversary project investing in the future mission of the Church, and offering opportunities to young adults and others.

URC Youth

'Our mission is to discover God, to help each other grow in the Christian Faith, and through our lives reflect God's love to all'. (URC Youth mission statement).

The pandemic has had a huge impact on URC Youth. The Youth Exec were not able to gather and many were personally affected by the pandemic. Despite this, they remained actively engaged in church life in a variety of ways, through serving on committees and contributing to online worship such International Youth Day August 2020.

URC Youth was not able to hold Youth Assembly in person in 2021. With no mechanism to appoint to posts without a physical gathering, Youth Moderator Reuben Watt and Moderator Elect Jo Harris agreed to continue in-post for an extra year. An online Youth dis-ASSEMBLED event was held in January 2021, with Saturday night entertainment and Sunday morning worship. Across 2021, under the banner of Youth RE-assembled,

they followed a series of themes (picking up on things that would normally have been discussed at Youth Assembly) such as vocation, Israel and Palestine, hostile environments, Pride, world church, anti-racism and mental health. This was supported by the TRialogue online discussion programme. They issued statements on Black Lives Matter, free school meals, and conversion therapy.

Online preparation events were held for URC Youth representatives going to Mission Council in 2021, and What Do You Think was held as a hybrid in-person and online event ahead of the online General Assembly 2021.

Youth Assembly 2022 was held in person, in line with the Covid-19 guidance at the time, and many valued the opportunity to gather together and consider the theme of jubilee through commemorating the past, celebrating the present and creating the future. Following the struggles of the past couple of years, URC Youth Executive will be conducting a review of URC Youth and Youth Executive, including racial diversity, reporting progress to the next Youth Assembly. URC Youth reaffirmed its condemnation of conversion therapy. Philippa Osei became the first BAME Youth Moderator Elect. URC Youth brings three resolutions to General Assembly from Youth Assembly. The two are a response to their reflection on the lack of diversity among key office holders in general, and the Moderator of General Assembly in particular, as highlighted in the discussions at General Assembly 2021, and seek to address this by enabling Youth Assembly to nominate directly:

General Assembly resolves that nominations for Moderator of the General Assembly may be received from Youth Assembly in addition to Synods.

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to work with representatives of URC Youth to establish a proper process for these nominations.

The third reflects URC Youth's continued mission to encourage the URC to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill health, as highlighted in resolution passed at General Assembly 2014:

URC Youth Assembly reaffirms its commitment to tackle the stigma surrounding mental ill health. Youth Assembly strongly encourages individuals to take part in Mental Health First Aid training and for local churches, Synods and General Assembly to look into ways to help individuals access this training. Youth Assembly asks General Assembly to join it in recommending that local churches strive to ensure that at least one member of the leadership team has undertaken this training.

URC Children

CYWC has worked on developing a framework for URC Children, which parallels URC Youth, but needs to be different in form and appropriate to the age range:

URC Children will:

- Be an inclusive community, including and valuing every child aged 0-12 in the United Reformed Church
- Be a safe space to explore, experience and express a lifelong adventure with Christ
- Be a body that enables the voice of children to shape church life

- Be an umbrella organisation that, in partnership with URC Children's and Youth Work team, ensures different local groups, households and schools have support and resources
- Be a family who care and love for each other as they discover God together locally, regionally and denominationally
- Be a prophetic voice for the world to hear
- Be people on a mission to serve Christ and build the Kingdom as part of an Intergenerational Church
- Enable children to step into God's call through support and opportunities, valuing gifts, skills and passions
- Be child-led
- Provide a sense of identity within the whole URC
- Provide opportunities for participating, serving, training and development
- Be enabled by children's workers (voluntary/paid), local/Synod/CYWC, and URC structures.

CYWC has identified four key areas for development:

1. **Structures** – how we enable URC children to be child-led and to enable the Church to hear and respond to the voices of children locally, in Synods and as a denomination.

We will seek to work with children to develop structures – potentially looking to create a Children's Assembly of some sort – recognising that this will take time as we consult with children and work with local churches and Synods. In the meantime, we need to be modelling how to engage with children and listen to them, and create resources and training to enable others to move in this direction, with a particular focus on supporting local churches to do this well.

2. **Children** – how we enable children to have a sense of belonging to something bigger through URC Children, and for this to strengthen their identity as disciples.

We have a new logo with the strapline 'URC Children together', and will develop some materials and merchandise. We have a competition to design birthday cards for churches and Synods to use. The CYDO+ team will promote this in their engagement with local churches and through Synod events. The URC website needs a section to parallel URC Youth. We need to start hearing from children about what they want, and we will begin by identifying some local groups we can engage with.

3. **Those who work with and support children** – how we network, resource, and support those engaging with children and their families through local churches across the breadth of work (toddler groups, Messy Church, Junior Church, Pilots, uniformed groups, holiday clubs etc).

We propose to start with those supporting the very youngest, and work up through the age groups from 0-12 to create networks and explore resources and gatherings that would support this group. Pilots and URC Guide and Scout Fellowship are already leading the way, and we will continue to work with them. We will champion Children and Youth Friendly Churches as they are awarded, and share good news stories.

4. **Theology of children** – revisiting and promoting the URC’s theology of children to underpin all our work in this area.

We will review all previous theological material pertaining to children, including the Charter for Children in the Church and the series of theological reflection booklets, and seek to work with URC theologians to develop an accessible resource to inform practice across the URC.

CYWC are excited to be launching URC Children at General Assembly in the URC’s jubilee year:

To mark the launch of URC Children at General Assembly this year, the United Reformed Church resolves afresh to ensure that all structures and councils of the church (local church meeting, Synod and General Assembly) are consistently mindful of the voice of children and of the impact of their decisions on children and future generations. To enable this, all councils of the church are encouraged to review how they are able to hear and respond to children.