

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee Report 2022-2024

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Robinson (Convenor) paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Read and digest.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

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, including URC Youth, URC Children training developments, resource developments, wider URC and ecumenical work.
Previous relevant documents	AE 2022 BDH1 Call and vocation GA 2022 B1 CYWC report Mission Council 2018 B3 CYWC outline strategy.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth CYDO+ team.

Summary of impact

Financial	Within existing budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	Wide-ranging contribution to ecumenical networks.

Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC)

*Children, young people and young adults
are central to God's mission and Christ's church
(Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-14).*

The remit of the Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC) is to support, encourage and promote work among children, young people and young adults (0-25 years old) at all levels of the church, and to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in all the councils of the church, ensuring that their voices are heard and all decisions taken consider the impact on future generations.

Our vision is 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.

To think and shape this work strategically, the Children's and Youth Work Committee meets four times a year. The committee has reorganised its meetings, reducing to two in-person 24-hour meetings and two online evening meetings to increase accessibility and reduce environmental impact. The committee values the active contribution of URC Youth members, and strives to include the voice of children creatively in all discussions. The committee has updated its Terms of Reference and drawn up role descriptors. CYWC wishes to record enormous thanks to the Revd Paul Robinson, Convenor, who stepped into the role a year early and has guided the committee prayerfully, graciously and faithfully over the past five years. We welcome the Revd Samantha Sheehan as the new Convenor from the end of General Assembly (GA) 2024.

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)

Youth Assembly was held in 2023 and 2024 (for a review of these events see **Round-up-2023-web.pdf (urc.org.uk)** and **bit.ly/YA-roundup-24**)

Jo Harris completed her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2023.
Philippa Osei completed her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2024.
Heather Moore commenced her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2024.

Following a resolution, URC Youth secured General Assembly agreement to enable Youth Assembly to nominate a candidate for General Assembly Moderator from YA2024. A new role of Champion for Younger URC Youth was created, and the first post-holder was co-opted following YA2024.

A Disability Awareness task group worked on resources to support raising awareness of issues surrounding disability and church, and promoting the perspectives of disabled people of all ages in the URC. In 2023, this took the form of two social media campaigns, for Disability Pride Month (July) and Disability Awareness Sunday (September), where disabled people across the URC shared their answers to the question, 'What is one thing you want others to know about disability?' They responded to a YA2023 resolution to encourage churches to introduce quiet spaces producing guidance for churches **Quiet-Spaces-Guidance.pdf (urc.org.uk)** and are producing Conversations Starter resources.

A resolution on raising awareness and support in relation to substance abuse resulted in the Feel Safe poster for churches (**see urc.org.uk/feel-safe**). The issues of gender and sexual identity discriminations were discussed, and URC Youth was involved in the development of the Affirmation of Gender Identity resolution brought by Equalities Committee to GA2023, and have worked to build constructive links with organisations offering support and develop a webpage.

Youth Assembly encouraged churches to engage further with the Warm Spaces initiative. Youth Assembly resolved to encourage more ecumenical resource sharing and supported the Mission Committee resolution brought to GA2023.

Youth Assembly discussed the deteriorating situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and embarked on a wider programme of education and

awareness-raising, including participation in visits to IOPT, and a resolution in 2024 to work with Mission Committee to develop further connections and collaborations with just peace-focused organisations and Churches in Occupied Palestine and Israel.

Youth Assembly 2024 encourages local churches to engage with Student Christian Movement's Honest Church campaign (honestchurch.org.uk) to be transparent about the welcome they offer different groups.

Youth Assembly 2024 received the URC Youth Review from the task group, and the actions already taken to respond to the recommendations in relation to Youth Assembly and the Youth Executive. A new resolution instructs Youth Executive to work with Children's and Youth Work Committee to look at the roles and responsibilities of the URC Youth Assembly Moderator, and the potential for making this a paid role; alongside a review of the roles and responsibilities of the Youth Executive. A new task group to explore this is being set up.

Two members of URC Youth are attending the CWM Assembly in Durban, South Africa this year: Zeerak Shahbaz is representing the URC at the Youth Assembly, and Heather Moore (Moderator) is acting as a steward at the main event.

Youth Assembly is moving to a new venue from 2025, and URC Youth's environmental checklist was employed to help reduce the carbon footprint of the event going forwards. The date is also changing to accommodate Assembly Executive moving to early February. Youth Assembly 2025 will be at Kings Park, Northampton, 7-9 March. Youth Exec has struggled with fewer Synods appointing Synod Reps, and the average age has reduced, with a significant number now under 18. This reflects broader changes at Youth Assembly, with half those attending this year being first-timers and the average age having lowered by a couple of years, accompanied by a visible increase in diversity.

We support Youth Executive through hosting residential weekend meetings, employing a Youth Intern to support their Comms, and hosting preparation events for under-26 representatives at General Assembly and Assembly Executive. How to meaningfully hold membership of a local church, given the fragmented and mobile lives of many young people and young adults, remains a key issue. The wider impact of the pandemic, cost of living crisis, rise in mental health issues and financial pressures have reduced the capacity of many young people to contribute time and energy to the life of the church at local, Synod and denominational levels. We need to be mindful of the demands we place on them, and grateful for all that they do bring to the life of the URC, while continuing to invest in discipling them and learning from them.

In 2023, there was a strategic focus on 11-18s. Local churches were invited to Pray like Paul for and with young people. A joint project with Quakers in Britain produced 'Where are the Young People?' conversation starter resources, hosted on the Education & Learning hub. URC Youth were invited to join French and German 15- to 18-year-olds for a week's tri-nation camp in England, and there are plans to hold a similar event in France in 2025. A training programme for young leaders was trialed, and will be rolled out more widely in 2024. In 2024, our strategic focus is on 18-25s, with plans to develop resources to keep creative connection with local churches when moving on to college or employment, and an ecumenical gathering for young adults in early 2025.

URC Children

Following the launch of URC Children at GA 2022, a range of merchandise to support churches and Synods in building a sense of shared identity for children has been made available, including badges, drawstring bags and birthday cards (designed by children

following a competition). Families on Faith Adventures @ Home, the weekly online resource which started in April 2020 during Covid-19 to enable churches to support families, came to an end at Christmas 2022. Following consultation with churches, a new weekly free online resource, Faith Adventures for Children Together (FACT), was launched in April 2023 to provide churches with a non-lectionary, Bible-based resource of pick-and-mix material to support engagement with 0-11 year olds, including a take-home postcard. From January 2024, this has been supplemented with Faith Adventures Youth Resource (FAYR) for 11-14s based on the same Bible passage each week. There is a thriving Facebook group for those using these resources.

In 2023, a series of videos to encourage churches and Synods to consider children's participation was created. In 2024, Prayer Prompts for children, one set for 4-8s and one for 8-12s, with Widget symbols for increased accessibility, were created to support children's spirituality, following a suggestion from URC Guide and Scout Fellowship. These have now also been translated into Welsh. In November this year, the first URC residential conference for children's workers will be held. We continue to support the Pilots community, and they have been actively involved in the development of URC Children.

CYDO+ team

The team of Synod-employed leads for children's and youth work, collectively known as the CYDO+ team, continues to work collaboratively across the denomination, creating a whole range of resources, opportunities, training and events that we offer as the Assembly-level programme for Children's and Youth Work. The generous gifting of up to 20% of their time by the Synods to this joint work makes us the envy of other denominations, and ensures that the programme offered is relevant and appropriate to the needs of local churches. They also enable children and young people to have a voice throughout the structures of the URC through championing and advocacy. We support the CYDO+ team through hosting fortnightly online catchups, regular meetings, a biannual retreat, and training opportunities. CYWC wishes once again to acknowledge the huge debt owed to the CYDO+ team, and the value of the collegiate working processes that enable them to shape strategic priorities, multiply the impact, amplify the sharing of stories, and enable the URC to keep children and young people at the heart of the life of the church.

1. Northern – Hannah Middleton (part-time) and John Stephenson (part-time)
2. North Western – Leo Roberts
3. Mersey – Steven Mitchell
4. Yorkshire – Megan Tillbrook
5. East Midlands – Richard Knott (since April 2023)
6. West Midlands – vacant since April 2023 – Richard Knott prior to this
7. Eastern – Nicola Grieves
8. South Western – vacant
9. Wessex – Philip Ray and Ruth White
10. Thames North – Lorraine Downer
11. Southern – Tom Hackett
12. Wales – Judy Harris
13. Scotland – Jessica Poole (part-time) and Matt Baines (part-time).

Church House staff

The team of four full-time equivalent staff has remained the same since April 2022: Tricia Harding (part-time Admin Assistant), Sharon Lloyd (part-time Programme

Assistant), Lorraine Webb (Programme Officer), Dr Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) and Heather Wilkinson (Administrator), who celebrated 25 years with the team in 2023. The URC Youth Intern (Comms) very part-time one year post has been held by Bertheli Dawson 2022-23 and Rhys Lloyd 2023-24, and we are in the process of recruiting the fourth post holder (funded by the Carmichael Montgomery Trust).

Resources for local churches

Following 2022's theme of Jubilee for the URC's 50th anniversary, in 2023 the theme was Love Is, and in 2024 it is Story, Story, Story. Each year, a themed resource with material for 0-25s and intergenerational suggestions has been produced and sent to each church and to Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. An accompanying free Holiday Club resource has been produced, and small grants to support the running of holiday clubs have been accessed by 26 churches. Plans for 2024 include resources to support churches in preparing children for baptism and communion, with parallel resources for young people to follow in 2025.

We have continued to produce an Advent resource for churches to give away to families with invitations to their Christmas events. In 2022, following feedback that families wanted something much simpler, we produced 5,000 packs at £2 each, of which 3,000 were given away free to churches (at a cost to us of £5,000). Recognising budget restrictions both for local churches and denominationally, in 2023 we asked for pre-orders to ensure no surplus, and sold 3,500 packs at £2.60-£3 each, with grants available for churches who needed free copies. We are already taking pre-orders for Advent 2024 packs. We recognise that these are a significant missional tool for local churches, but as our budget reduces so does our ability to subsidise this resource to the extent of previous years (by £3,700 in 2023).

Grants

We have continued to offer small grants to individuals, supporting young people's access to educational and discipleship opportunities. Following an agreement with the Discipleship Development Fund, we are able to offer quick response group grants, and since April 2024 small grants to support churches building relationships with uniformed groups.

Wider URC work

Wider URC work has included contributing to the Calling and Vocation conversation-starter resource, and supporting Holiday Forum with their children's and youth work provision (offered by the CYDO+ team in 2022 and 2023, and reducing from 2024). The CYDO+ team has also run the youth venues (The Engine and The Den) at Greenbelt Festival in 2022 and 2023, with a commitment to do this for two more years. This involves recruiting and training a team of volunteers, which has cascaded youth work skills and fostered connections. We continue to champion Walking the Way and whole life discipleship throughout our resources. We contribute to You're Welcome conferences for those newly appointed to the URC and to the Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers' training programme.

We have strengthened links with Mission Committee through collaborative working. We have produced the series of Go with Greta (5-11s) / #connect2 (11-16s) resources for Commitment for Life (Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2022, Zimbabwe in 2023 and working on Bangladesh in 2024-25). We have responded to the Legacies of Slavery and anti-racism work by highlighting these matters in our wider resources. JPIT

have contributed to the Advent packs, and we included JPIT material in our all churches mailing.

URC Youth was a case study in the THEOS research for the Church Life Review. They have worked closely with Mission Committee and Equalities Committee in particular to ensure the voice of young people is represented in matters that particularly concern them, such as the environment, ecumenism and equality. Following Resolution 51a at GA 2023, we have been working on a joint residential for URC mission and discipleship animators which will include the CYDO+ team to explore how new worshipping communities are encouraged and supported. We have also continued to support the development of the Newbigin Pioneering Hub training and pioneer community.

The work to develop proposals for a formal ministry of Children's and Youth Work has involved collaboration at a number of points with Ministries, Education and Learning, Finance and Worship, Faith and Order. We see this as an integral part of CYWC's response to the Church Life Review and General Assembly 2023 Resolution 51A which asks the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.

Training and development for those working with children and young people
A wide variety of training opportunities have been offered through the CYDO+ team, facilitated by agreements with Godly Play UK and Youthscape, in addition to the Youth Mental Health First Aid training offered in response to URC Youth resolutions. The Youth Leaders Gathering has continued to be held each year alongside Youth Assembly as a regular gathering and training opportunity. Glorious Grandparenting workshops were offered in partnership with the Bible Society.

Less-formal training has been offered in partnership with Education and Learning through URC Training as online sessions in Widget, Makaton, the Conversation Starter resources and Resilience for churches. Plans are now in place to offer Makaton 'learn and grow' courses designed for churches in the autumn. A series of 'Find out more' sessions have been offered to help local churches discover URC resources and explore how they might work in their context. A monthly 'Talking About' session offers space to hear from experts and discuss a wide variety of topics in children's and youth work. A new online calendar of events and training has been developed (see bit.ly/URCCYWcalendar).

Ecumenical connections

We actively participate in ecumenical networks, hosting a Roundtable for Denominational Youth Leads (out of which the young adults gathering emerged), founding a UK intergenerational ministry network, and as part of the Children's Ministry Network (CMN) executive. Through the latter, we have been strengthening links to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), and hope to formally link the youth and intergenerational networks to CTBI in the near future. Through CMN, we are developing training programmes for children's ministry and family and intergenerational ministry for the whole Christian sector (superseding Core Skills and before that Kaleidoscope), and a resource to support churches hosting school visits. We represent CMN on the steering group of the European Conference on Christian Education (ECCE), which hosted a conference in Budapest in 2023 and is planning another in Geneva in 2026, with online events in other years. We are co-hosts of Join the Conversation, an international online gathering of intergenerational ministry leads, which grew out of an in-person gathering in

London in 2019. Another project stemming from this came to fruition in 2023 with the publication of *Regenerational*, a resource to help church leaders introduce intergenerational ministry through gathered worship (see bit.ly/Regenerational). We have also been involved in think-tanks and consultations for Messy Church, Bible Society, Hope Together, Youthscape and various research projects.

A significant piece of work, in partnership with Churches Together in England (CTE) and some parachurch organisations, has been a sustained engagement with the National Youth Agency (NYA) over youth work in private dwellings. This resulted in a paper presented at the 4th Commonwealth Youthwork Conference and guidance launched at the National Youth Ministry Weekend 2023 to counter the NYA's headline of 'fundamentally unsafe', and to support the development of best practice around the various types of youth ministry that takes places in homes (see bit.ly/YWinPD). We have been in ongoing dialogue with the NYA and the Department for Culture Media and Sport about the negative impact the NYA guidance is having on provision for young people in faith communities. We also produced guidance for the URC.

We continue to encourage churches to develop and celebrate the welcome they offer children and young people through the accompanied Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme – to date, 17 churches have completed this. The Lundie Award continues to celebrate young disciples playing their part in the mission of God. In the past two years the awardees have ranged in age from 4 to 24, two families of siblings and one Pilot, for everything from creative fundraising, volunteering, and leading churches in technology to environmental issues and inclusion (see bit.ly/URCLundie).

Financial

The CYW Committee has actively been engaged in conversations about the budget and the need for that to be reduced in the years ahead. It is thinking creatively, with others, about the part that Childrens and Youth Work will need to play in that process.