

Paper BDFH1

Towards a new formal ministry for children's and youth work: direction of travel

Children's and Youth Work Committee,
Education and Learning Committee,
Ministries Committee, Worship, Faith and
Order Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 14 Assembly Executive confirms that the task group has met the brief of GA2023 resolution and instructs the task group to bring proposals for a new formal ministry of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers to GA2025.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To enable Assembly Executive to understand, refine and affirm the draft proposals for a new formal ministry, giving the task group feedback to enable them to complete their work for General Assembly 2025.
Main points	Outline of progress so far with draft Marks of Ministry, changes to the Basis of Union and underpinning rationale shared as appendices.
Previous relevant documents	B1 General Assembly 2023 Recognition of children's, youth and family ministry

	B1 Assembly Executive 2023 Towards a formal ministry for children’s, youth and/or family work B2 General Assembly 2024 CYWC Update
Consultation has taken place with...	CYDO+ team Resource Centres for Learning.

Summary of impact

Financial	To be discussed.
External (eg ecumenical)	Other denominations are also considering how to increase their ministry in this area.

1. At General Assembly 2023, resolution 13 stated that: **General Assembly is minded that there should be a formal ministry of URC Children’s, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children’s and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.** An update to General Assembly 2024 noted that much progress had been made and task group established to include Worship, Faith and Order and representatives of the Resource Centres for Learning in addition to the three committees indicated with the intention of being able to bring a final detailed proposal to General Assembly 2025.
2. The journey of consultation and discussion so far has affirmed the distinctiveness of this proposed new ministry, clarified that it is neither a sub-branch of the Ministry of Word and Sacraments (MW&S) nor Church Related Community Work (CRCW) but should occupy a unique position in relation to the church congregation and the wider community with a particular focus on children and young people and their wider context. The vision is to complement the existing authorised ministries of the United Reformed Church (URC) by acknowledging a ministry specifically among and with children and young people which focuses on their flourishing as human beings and their nurture as Christian disciples. This is perceived to be timely (for a denomination undergoing a Church Life Review and looking to the future) and a response to the signs of the times and the move of the Spirit within the URC. Appendix ONE ‘Towards a ministry of Children’s and Youth Workers a theology paper’ unpacks this. At a time when other denominations are pushing the recruitment and training of lay children’s and youth workers to be employed by local churches¹, the URC would be unique in recognising a call to a formal ministry resourced denominationally for the whole church.
3. A name for this proposed new ministry has emerged within these discussions: Church Commissioned Children’s and Youth Workers. It is hoped that this name expresses the clear relation to the Church at local and denominational levels, clarifies that this is a new ministry in its own right, and clearly identifies the focus. It is anticipated that Church Commissioned Children’s and Youth Workers would be commissioned and appointed to a range of posts with a range of post titles that express the local or wider role (such as Church Children’s and Family Worker;

¹See [The 30k Project | The Church of England](#) and [The Baptist Union of Great Britain : Children's and youth ministry training](#)

Youth and Student Worker; Family Centre Chaplain; Children and Youth Evangelist) much as MW&S and CRCWs hold a wide variety of posts.

4. As a formal ministry within the URC, Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers would undergo parallel processes for the discernment of vocation, application, assessment conference, formation process at a URC Resource Centre for Learning through Common Awards² (alongside MsW&S and CRCWs following a similar pattern, incorporating placements, and to an equivalent level). Posts with appropriate support structures in place would be approved through Synods and declared as vacancies. Deployment and appointments would be approved in the same way as for MsW&S and CRCWs.
5. In order for these processes to happen a number of documents and policies will need to be approved. In the first instance we offer Appendix two the draft Marks of Ministry for Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers, and Appendix three the changes to the Basis of Union that would be needed. If Assembly Executive is content with the direction of travel then further work would be done to ensure other necessary policies which will flow from these are drafted for General Assembly 2025.
6. The question of how this new ministry, if approved, will be financed through formation and deployment remains to be addressed. It would be helpful if Assembly Executive could give a clear steer as to whether in principle this should be funded in the same way as MW&S and CRCW, or whether it should be by an alternative means, and if so, what this might look like.
7. Finally, Assembly Executive is asked to consider what opportunities this new formal ministry of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers might offer to their local church or Synod context. The following four scenarios are offered to encourage this exercise of spiritual imagination:

A Imagine a child who is brought by their grandparent to a breakfast club hosted by a Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker and their volunteer team. The child feels welcomed and valued by the church community and asks to go again. The child gains confidence and decides to join a drama project preparing for a special church festival, encouraging the parents to come along to watch. Invited to join in an inclusive all-age holiday club provision, the child and their family begin to explore Bible stories and prayer activities. The child finds faith and a supportive intergenerational community, encouraging their family to become more involved with the local church where they are valued and able to participate. Meanwhile the CCCYW identifies a particular issue the child is facing and supports the family in engagement with school and other agencies. With the encouragement of the CCCYW and having become more open to listening to the voice of children, the congregation commits to praying and advocating for increased provision of support locally.

B Imagine a local church that struggles to engage with one or two children or young people. The church can see the potential for the development of its work

² Both Northern College and Westminster College are already able to offer some of the specialist modules within Common Awards for children's and youth work through their wider networks as Luther King House and the Cambridge Theological Federation offer these for other denominations training pathways.

with children and young people, but lacks the expertise, resource, time and energy to develop a ministry program and its relationships with other groups and schools. In liaising with the Synod's CYDO or equivalent it becomes apparent that two or three other churches locally are grappling with the same kind of situation. The churches prayerfully explore together the possibility of calling an individual to develop and grow their ministry amongst their children and young people. A profile is drawn up for the role and the support structures put in place. The vacancy is declared and an individual fully qualified in children and youth work and practical theology (as a CCCYW) responds to the call. They live in a manse made available by the synod, their expenses are met locally by the churches involved, their stipend is provided by the URC. This individual works with the churches, developing pieces of work, developing volunteer support, and, over the space of a couple of years, the children's and youth work blossoms – some families start attending the three churches, who begin to see some growth. They enable the congregation to reflect on how children and young people develop their faith and discipleship as they grow as an intergenerational community. The atmosphere changes as both the present and future prospects of the church now look completely different. Three of the original children are now exploring whether they are called to ministry in the United Reformed Church – either as ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, or Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Workers.

C Imagine an individual who has been exploring what God is calling them to be and do in response to baptism promises. They have a sense that it may well be to full-time work amongst children and young people. They explore how they might respond to that call. They find one option that involves them self-funding a full-time degree-level qualification for three years, gaining some short-term experience at a residential Christian youth centre for the summer each year, in the hope to be able to secure a post for three or so years in a local church. They give up, sensing that it is just not possible to respond to God's call in that way and look for full-time employment in another place whilst offering to volunteer to help out at a youth group in a local church once a week. But then they're invited to an enquirer's conference by their Church Secretary and they hear that the United Reformed Church (URC) has recognised that some people are called to children and youth work in the same way that ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs are called to their work and that there is the option to explore a call to children and youth work. If that call is determined, then the church will offer a formation route as an investment for the future, equip them and release them to fulfil what God is asking of them. They train at a URC Resource Centre for Learning which will provide a formation route tailored to their experience and their calling, they gain experience in placements along the way and four years later are commissioned into a role in a local church setting. Through the decades that follow, the United Reformed Church is blessed by their ministry in various posts in several synods and future church members, elders and ministers can point to the input this individual had in helping them be introduced and explore their faith as a child or young person.

D Imagine a group of churches, a region or an area of a particular synod wondering how to develop their life together. The ten churches look back to a time when each had its own thriving fellowship, ministry, mission and work, each led by their own minister of Word and Sacraments. Recently though they've been asked to consider how they might continue their mission and ministry – they'll only be able to have oversight from a single minister of Word and Sacraments. The group start

to see how with the elders and lay people, they will be able to maintain a sense of fellowship and pastoral care with a minister providing ministry of the Word and Sacraments amongst them. When they realised four of the churches were particularly keen to explore developing work within and among the local neighbourhoods and communities, they called a CRCW. Whilst this provided some opportunity there was still much more that the churches wished to explore, and they were aware that it was often the work with children and young people that got neglected amongst the pressure of making everything else work. So they then explored calling a Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker to help develop their work with children and young people. Slowly, a dynamic and energising team emerged of three individuals of equal status, specialised gifts and professionalism working together as a team ministry to inspire, lead and encourage the congregations in this area. Ideas, programs, ministry, work, outreach, evangelism, kingdom building, pastoral care emerged that used the best of the resources available alongside the vocation and call of the members of the churches.

8. Assembly Executive is invited to discuss the following ahead of considering the resolution (please share discussion notes with **sam.richards@urc.org.uk**):
 - a) Having read the paper and appendices, is this the correct direction of travel for developing this new ministry of Church Commissioned Children's and Youth Worker for the URC?
 - b) What opportunities could this new ministry offer in your context?
 - c) How should this new ministry be financed and what would be the implications for the denomination?