

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This review has been completed for Youth Exec in response to the 2024 Youth Assembly resolutions and the URC Children and Youthwork Committee's request (*see Appendix*).
- 1.2. The review has focussed on how the Youth Exec and the Moderators currently fulfil their roles and responsibilities and considered how this might be done differently. The review firstly considers how the Youth Exec might operate differently and then looks at the role of the Moderator (and Moderator Elect) in light of the proposed changes to the Exec as a whole.
- 1.3. This review does not suggest changes to Youth Exec's current responsibilities as these would be better reviewed in the context of a wider discussion of Youth Assembly and its aims.
- 1.4. The review process has included discussions with the current Youth Exec; current and past Youth Assembly Moderators; the CYDO+ team; the Head of URC Children's and Youth Work; and a representative of the Methodist Children Youth and Family Team. My grateful thanks go to all those who have been willing to share their experience and reflections on the Youth Exec and Moderator roles.

2. URC Youth Exec

- 2.1. The Youth Assembly resolutions (*see Appendix*) reflect a number of challenges facing the Exec largely due to the difficulty in recruiting a full team of Synod Reps (the current Exec includes seven Synod reps and six vacancies). This lack of personnel makes it harder for the Exec to carry out all of its tasks as more work falls on fewer people. This in turn increases the burden that falls on the Youth Moderator who tends to be the one who fills in any gaps. Further questions around increasing diversity within the Exec have been considered in an earlier review in 2023, but this question has still been present in the current process.
- 2.2. The difficulty in recruiting new Exec members has been a challenge for several years. The most commonly mentioned reason for this is the time commitment involved in being a member of Exec. The last decade has seen increased demands on many young people's time especially from GCSE and A Level courses and the need for many students to find p/t work to support themselves. The question of the time commitment that Exec asks is complicated by a lack of clarity around what is involved in being a Synod Rep. This can be confusing and mean potential reps may not fully appreciate what they are taking on and, once they do, may not be able to fulfil the role as they would hope.

3. Current Exec Structure and Working Pattern:

- 3.1. Youth Exec consists of:
 - 3.1.1. The Moderator (following a year as Moderator elect); Moderator Elect (elected at YA each year); Equalities and Diversity Rep (elected at YA every two

years); Assembly Executive and General Assembly Rep (elected at YA every two years); Younger Youth Rep (elected at YA every two years); up to thirteen Synod Youth Reps (usually 1 per Synod, selected by each Synod following their own process)

3.1.2. There is allowance to co-opt up to four extra members onto the Exec if needed. This currently includes the Youth Assembly Clerk and the URC Youth Intern.

3.1.3. The Exec is also supported by the URC's Head of Children's and Youth Work, a member of the CYDO+ team, and a Chaplain.

3.2. Youth Exec currently meets for four weekend meetings through the year, plus the Youth Assembly weekend. There are some key tasks that Youth Exec currently fulfils:

3.2.1. Youth Exec reviews and plans Youth Assembly

3.2.2. Youth Exec acts as a gathering for Synod Reps – reps are intended to represent the young people of their synod in the planning of Youth Assembly. Synods may also have other expectations of what the Synod Reps might do in their Synod. There can be confusion over which tasks or meetings should be a priority for reps with limited time available.

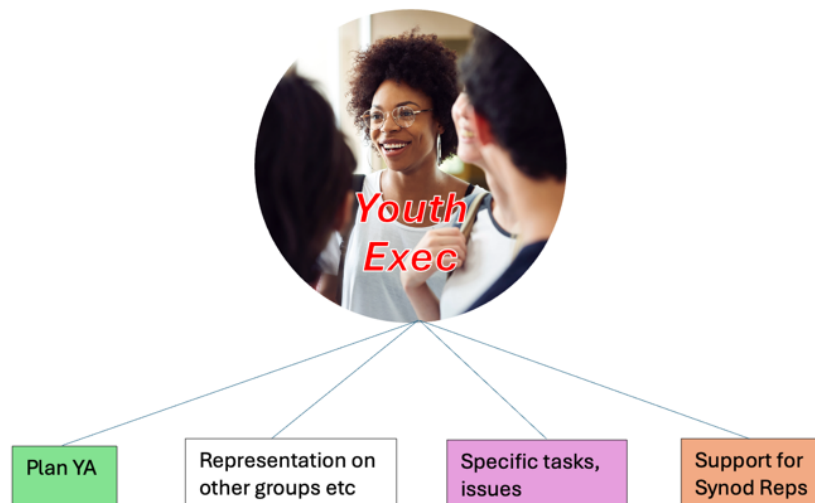
3.2.3. Youth Exec carries out other tasks or work that YA requests.

3.2.4. Youth Exec members represent YA on various other bodies and committees, both within the URC and ecumenically. For some (such as the Equalities and Diversity Rep or Assembly Executive Rep) this is part of their role. For others this is a voluntary additional activity.

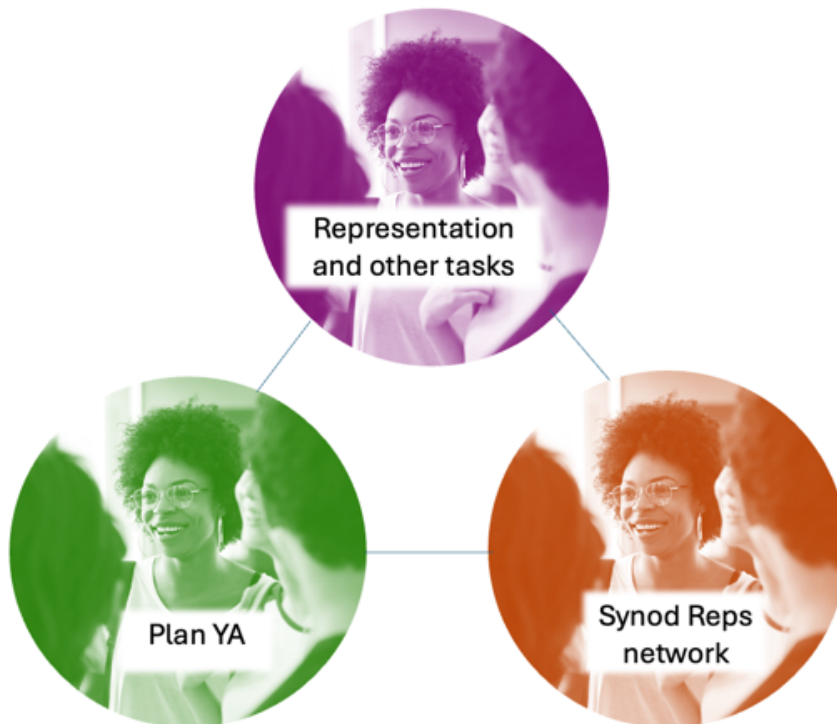
3.2.5. Youth Exec can also act as a 'go to' group to represent the voice of young people in the URC, although technically the Exec only represents Youth Assembly and not the wider body of URC Youth.

4. A New Way for Exec to Work:

4.1. This review sets out an alternative way of organising the work that is done by Youth Exec each year. Currently the Youth Exec operates, and is seen as, one group of young people who all meet together four times a year and work together on all their tasks:



This review proposes that instead of working on these tasks as a single group, Youth Exec should meet and work as three separate Task Groups each covering a particular aspect of the current work:



- 4.1.1. One group would take on the task of planning Youth Assembly; one group would act as a network and support for Synod Reps; one group would gather those with specific roles representing young people on other bodies.
- 4.1.2. All three groups together would make up the Youth Exec. They would all meet together twice a year for residential weekend meetings. These meetings would help strengthen communication, teamwork and co-ordination between the groups.
- 4.1.3. Each task group would agree their own working agenda and timetable outside the residential weekends (this might include meeting online or regionally).
- 4.1.4. Each group would have its own chair/co-ordinator
- 4.1.5. Each group would be put together in different ways (*see 4.2 – 4.4*). Individual young people could be part of more than one group, depending on their interests and availability.
- 4.1.6. The Moderator would be a member of all three groups but would not chair them all. The Mods would provide ongoing communication and connection between the groups.
- 4.1.7. Each group would have support from the CYDO+ team and/or national Children and Youth team in different ways (*see 4.2 – 4.4*).
- 4.1.8. Any additional tasks that YA requests Youth Exec to carry out could be assigned to the most relevant task group; alternatively, an additional temporary group might be formed to pursue and complete a specific piece of work. It would be the responsibility of the Mods to ensure the work was carried out but not necessarily to do the work themselves.

4.2. Task Group 1 – Youth Assembly Planning Group:

- 4.2.1. This group would be put together at YA each year where those attending are able to put themselves forward to join this group. The group would be limited to 6-8 people from YA, and a selection process should be agreed before YA in case more people want to be involved. The selection process could be by election, or lottery, or a selection process based on certain criteria (eg: to ensure diversity in the group). The group would also include one CYDO and one member of the national CY team. Mods would also be part of this group but would not have to chair or lead it.
- 4.2.2. Chairing the group could be done by the CYDO or national team member, but there is a careful balance to be worked out. The CYDO+ team bring experience, knowledge and capacity to help the planning process for YA, but this must be exercised with care so as not to take the event out of young people's hands.

4.3. Task Group 2 – Synod Reps Network:

- 4.3.1. This group would consist of all Synod Reps and the Mods, and would be supported by a CYDO.
- 4.3.2. The role of Synod Reps would be to work in their Synod. The type of work would be up to each Synod to decide and might include joining in youthwork or Synod committees according to the reps' strengths and interests.
- 4.3.3. This Task Group would act as a network for Synod Reps to share their experiences and to support each other. The group could also be tasked once or twice a year with a specific question or issue on which the Reps would seek the views of young people in their Synod. This would be fed back to the wider Exec group, a URC committee or other body.
- 4.3.4. This proposal clarifies the role and priority of being a Synod Rep. As members of Youth Exec they would connect the Youth Exec with the wider group of URC Youth (including those who are not involved in Youth Assembly).

4.4. Task Group 3 – Representing Youth Assembly:

- 4.4.1. This group would include all those current Exec roles that are elected at YA, plus the Synod Clerk, current URC Youth Intern, and a member of the national Children and Youth Team. The Mod would act as convenor of the group.
- 4.4.2. This Task Group would provide peer support and the opportunity for Reps to co-ordinate the work they do. This group might take on extra tasks or requests from YA that don't obviously fit one of the other task groups.

4.5 These three groups together would form the Youth Exec. By calling these groups '*Task Groups*' this plan could fit into the current description of Youth Exec in the *URC Youth Handbook* and *Youth Assembly Standing Orders*. Some small amendments might be necessary to those documents.

4.6 These three groups are not a perfect solution but should be seen as a step forward. At the first Exec meeting after YA each year, the Exec should review how the groups

have worked during the previous year, consider any recruitment issues that may be apparent and consider adapting or changing the groups as necessary. For example, a group may want to invite an ecumenical representative to join them or may need to recruit additional members.

4.7 This proposal offers the opportunity for members of YA to join in some of the work that is done by the Exec but without having to commit to as many weekends during the year or to aspects of the Exec's work that they might not be interested in. It is hoped that this will encourage more young people to have a go and get involved.

4.8 This proposal also offers some clarification of the Synod Rep roles. These would be focussed explicitly on connecting with young people in their Synod, and the Exec task group would offer support and peer connections.

5. Youth Moderator and Moderator Elect:

5.1. Questions have been asked about the Moderator's role in recent years, particularly because of the amount of time the role can demand and whether it would be appropriate for the Mod to be paid in order to acknowledge this commitment.

Current situation:

5.2. URC Youth Handbook sets out the Moderator's responsibilities: to chair YA discussions; to chair Exec meetings; to agree the agenda for YA with the Exec. Many Mods have seen the role in terms of serving Youth Assembly, but it also carries an aspect of leadership within YA and the Exec, although it does not necessarily carry greater authority than other roles.

5.3. The role of Moderator does carry an added level of practical responsibility in chairing meetings etc. as well as the potential opportunities to represent URC young people in other forums. This can ask a lot of the Mod outside the normal residential meetings. Mods have estimated that the role requires an average of up to 8hrs every week (although this tends to be in concentrated periods of time and depends on how much time individuals have available).

Possible Solutions:

5.4. The suggestion of paying Mods for their time could potentially make the Mod role more accessible for some young people who might not otherwise be able to commit the time to being Mod. For example young people who are students and who have to take on paid p/t work to support themselves might feel able to stand for Mod instead of taking on other work. This could be done by making the Mod a p/t paid role (for example 8-12hrs/week). However, a paid role also brings expectations of a commitment to work a certain number of hours that might be more than some yp are able to give. This could reduce the flexibility of the role and potentially exclude other yp with full-time work or other commitments.

- 5.5. A further way of reworking the Mod role might be to combine it with the URC Youth intern role, perhaps as a full-time gap year opportunity. This would create the opportunity for a young person each year to work across URC Youth and Youth Assembly in a similar way to the Methodist Church's Youth President. Expanding the role in this way creates a great opportunity but it also asks for a greater commitment. This might make the role less appropriate or attractive to many young people. Such a development would be a significant change to the Mod role, expanding it to relate to URC Youth more widely. Any such change would therefore only be possible in the context of a wider strategy for URC Youth. This might be a valuable change but is beyond the scope of this review.
- 5.6. Paying the Mod is not a simple process. The requirements of Safer Recruitment assume an equal opportunity of access to any paid role (ie: a candidate should be offered the role because they are the most appropriate according to the skills needed). This could conflict with the current approach of electing the Mod at Youth Assembly. This tension is not impossible to resolve but would not be simple.
- 5.7. Paying the Mod does not really address the challenge of the Mod's workload, although it might make it feel less demanding if it was rewarded in this way. In order to address the issue of the extra work Mods take on, it might be helpful to clarify the role as it currently stands.

The Mod tends to be seen in many ways as the 'leader' of the Youth Exec and Youth Assembly even though chairing and moderating meetings does not necessarily imply this. If one person in a group is seen as the 'leader' there is a common risk that they, and the rest of the group, might make certain assumptions for example that the 'leader' is the person who sets the agenda, makes the decisions, or even does most of the work. This can lead to the rest of the group stepping back from those tasks.

It might be helpful therefore to clarify the role of the Mod as the convenor and facilitator of Youth Exec rather than its leader. This might be helped by distinguishing between 'leadership' and 'leader'. The Mod shows leadership, but this leadership is shared with the other members of the Exec – all members are stepping forward to give their time to make things happen on behalf of Youth Assembly. The Mod does not do all the work or tell others what to do but supports and enables the rest of the Exec to perform the tasks that the Exec has. It can be very tempting for Mods to step in and do the work if others do not step forward, but Mods should be supported in not feeling they are responsible for everything. If the Exec is not sharing the work, it is not up to the Mod to do it.

To be clear, this is in no way a criticism of this or any previous Exec group. This is a pattern that many groups including charity Trustees or Elders' meetings can fall into. It is also an experience that some Mods described.

- 5.8. Therefore, rather than making the Mod a paid role, this review suggests an alternative approach to the issue of the Mod's workload. The proposed change to

how the Exec operates will share out the responsibility for organising and chairing task groups. The Mod's role could then be seen as supporting and co-ordinating rather than necessarily taking the lead. The Mod would show their leadership by:

- 5.8.1. Being responsible for chairing meetings of the Youth Assembly and of the Exec, but this may also be shared with others such as the Mod Elect.
- 5.8.2. Engaging with and encouraging all three task groups, although the level of the Mod's engagement will vary. The Mod should attend meetings of task groups in order to maintain communication and contact between the groups, but this might not be every meeting, and the Mod Elect might share this task.
- 5.8.3. The Mod will convene the Representation Task Group.

This suggested new format for Youth Exec does require a certain time commitment from the Mod as the co-ordinating link between each of the groups. However, the Mod's participation in the groups does not require them to attend all meetings or to lead all the task groups. Chairing and organising responsibilities for two of the groups would be taken on by others.

The Moderator Elect:

- 5.7 The current Mod and Mod Elect structure seems to work well and no-one expressed any reason for this to change. The relationship between the Mod and Mod elect can be shaped by the individuals in those roles.
- 5.8 The Mod Elect will continue to work alongside the Mod. This is an opportunity for the Mod Elect to prepare for being the Mod by shadowing, observing and also trying out certain responsibilities or roles on behalf of the Mod. For example, the Mod Elect can share in chairing meetings, or they might have a particular interest in one of the Task Groups such as planning YA and therefore might attend all the YA planning meetings on behalf of the Mod.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 This review sets out a proposal for restructuring Youth Exec that delegates its current responsibilities to three separate 'task groups'. Dividing the Exec's work up in this way reduces the time commitment and the scale of the task. The intention is that joining an Exec task group might feel less daunting for young people so that more, and more diverse, young people would want to get involved.
- 6.2 There is also the potential in the new structure to relieve some of the pressure on the Youth Assembly Moderator to be responsible for all the tasks of the Exec. This might be an opportunity to reaffirm the collective responsibility and leadership of all members of the Exec.
- 6.3 This review has not suggested any changes to the basic roles and responsibilities of the Exec and Mods. The work of the Exec and the Mods should reflect the aims and

procedures of Youth Assembly. Therefore a fuller review of the Exec and Mods' roles and responsibilities should really only follow a review of the aims and work of Youth Assembly.

- 6.4 This proposal is not a final solution to some of the questions that have been raised about Youth Exec and the Moderators, but it is a 'next step'. Changing how Youth Exec operates will raise further questions that will need to be considered. The new format should be reviewed by the new Exec each year and can be further adapted as necessary.

Youth Assembly is a strong part of URC Youth and the URC more widely, which the denomination is rightly proud of. And, like the wider URC, Youth Assembly needs to keep changing and adapting to the changing needs of young people in our churches and society.

Review completed by Jon Steel (March 2025)

Appendix 1:

Terms of Reference for this Review

1. YA 2024 resolutions:
 - 1.1. URC Youth Assembly instructs Youth Executive to work with Children 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.
 - 1.2. URC Youth Assembly also instructs Youth Executive to work with Children and Youth Work Committee to look at the roles and responsibilities of the Youth Executive.
 - 1.3. URC Youth Assembly requests feedback from Youth Executive at Youth Assembly 2025 with their findings.
2. At the request of the Youth Exec, the URC's Children's and Youth Work Committee tasked a review to:
 - 2.1. Investigate the current roles and responsibilities of the current Youth Exec and Moderators. Reflecting on the denomination, Youth Exec, Synods, the world. Enable the roles to be accessible, manageable, relevant and focussed.
 - 2.2. Address the questions: is the current structure the right one? Is it fit for purpose going forward? Propose an alternative structure? look at the roles Mod/Youth Rep. To have more young people stand for roles in the future. Is the role too big?

Appendix 2:

Summary Diagram:

