

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee Final Report 2024-2025

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

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Action required	For information and discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report of the work of Children's and Youth Work Committee.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	GA 2024 B1 CYWC report GA 2024 B2 Proposal for a new formal Children's and Youth Work ministry – update 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 amongst 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. Our underlying ethos is inclusive, intercultural and intergenerational.

To think and shape this work strategically, the Children's and Youth Work Committee has met four times a year: 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. CYWC wishes to record thanks to the Revd Samantha Sheehan, Convenor for the past year during a period of uncertainty and preparation for transition.

This is our final report, as CYWC will be dissolved into the new wider Faith in Action Committee to cover the work of mission and discipleship. This is a leap of faith for Children's and Youth Work to become more deeply integrated into the whole life of the URC, and an opportunity to embed this passion across a wider range of initiatives going forwards. We have successfully reached the end of our strategy 2019-2024, approved by Mission Council in November 2018 (and extended in response to the Covid-19 hiatus), achieving the nine action areas and supporting local churches in five key areas identified in the review of 2018. Alongside this, we have responded to the deepening environmental crisis¹, and the emerging foci of URC Youth and the wider church.

CYWC have deliberately not developed a new strategy so that the new committee can agree an overarching strategy with clear aims that Children's and Youth Work can be an active participant within. We anticipate this being responsive to, and complimentary with, the Church Life Review. We look forward to children and young people having a place in wider conversations and contributing to the whole church vision and strategy.

This may be the moment for bold reorientation and creative reimagining of the church:

- a) with children, young people and their families firmly at the centre
- b) releasing the denomination from supporting every church in this area, and seeking to grow new communities of worship and discipleship that work for children and young people, and by extension others.

CYWC would like to take this opportunity to remind the new committee and the emerging new structures of two key resolutions passed by General Assembly that should shape and steer the future:

1. *Be consistently mindful of the voice of children and young people 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 and young people².*

2. *Recognise work with children, young people and families as ministry.³*

¹ GA 2020 Resolution 15: General Assembly recognises the climate emergency and challenges all councils, committees and local churches to do everything possible to make URC events and activities eco-friendly, as urged by URC Youth Assembly.

² GA2022 Resolution 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 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.

³ GA 2023 Resolution 11: General Assembly recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry, and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.

The future Faith in Action Committee will have a Children's and Youth Work Programme Enabling Group or sub-committee, which will seek to continue the excellent working relationship with the Synod appointed Children's and Youth Development Officers (or equivalent lead workers) team and the gifting of up to 20% of their time to Assembly level work. This creates a very short and effective feedback loop with local churches, so we hear and respond to their needs, enables specialism and training to be offered across the whole denomination, and very high-quality URC resources to be created and made available to local churches. It is an excellent expression of the URC as denomination, with Synod colleagues working collegially and collaboratively.

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)

General Assembly 2021 URC Youth brought two resolutions designed to increase accessibility of meeting times to enable a wider variety of people to serve:

Resolution 10: General Assembly requests all General Assembly committees and task groups to have at least one meeting each year entirely online and not during normal working hours (9-5 Monday to Friday).

Resolution 11: General Assembly also encourages all General Assembly committees and task groups to have the ability for people to join online for all meetings, with 50% of meetings each year to be held outside of normal working hours (9-5 Monday to Friday).

Eleven committees (and no task groups) responded to a survey about their meeting practices over the past two years:

Q1. Have you had at least one meeting per year online and outside normal working hours?

A: Five no, six yes.

Q2. Have people been able to join all your meetings online?

A: One no, ten yes.

Q3. Have at least half your meetings been held outside normal working hours?

A: Eight no, three yes, with one committee writing to explain that meetings were arranged at times to suit the members, which included one living overseas.

URC Youth are pleased to see the general availability of joining meetings online for those not able to attend in person. However, the timings of meetings still represents a significant barrier for many, particularly those involved in education or employment, which in turn impacts the diversity of people able to consider taking up committee roles. URC Youth would urge all General Assembly committees to ensure that meeting times are not established before new members are recruited, so that meetings can be flexibly arranged to suit the actual needs of the members after a truly open recruitment process, in line with these resolutions from 2021. They would also remind committees to review this regularly, as the lives of those in education and employment can change considerably year to year. This is particularly important at this time of reshaping the URC's committee structure and other changes likely to result from the Church Life Review.

Two members of URC Youth attended the **CWM Assembly** in Durban, South Africa in 2024: Zeerak Shahbaz representing the URC at the Youth Assembly, and Heather Moore (Moderator) acting as a steward at the main event.

Youth Assembly 2024 had encouraged 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, and a leaflet was created and sent to every church in September.

A **Disability Awareness** task group completed work on a set of resources raising awareness of issues surrounding disability and Church and promoting the perspectives of disabled people of all ages in the URC, which are now available as Conversations Starters here: www.bit.ly/URClearning.

URC Youth Executive visited a different URC local church each time it met, broadening their experience of the denomination. They were consulted twice about aspect of the Church Life Review, with a particular focus on issues of membership for young people and new worshipping communities.

Youth Assembly 2025 moved venue and time of year, to March at Kings Park Northampton, in response to the move of Assembly Executive from November to February (see the video and read RoundUp here: www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/children-young-people/urc-youth/urc-youth-assembly/). The theme was All Are Welcome.

Heather Moore completed her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2025. Maya Withall commenced her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2025.

Youth Assembly 2025 received the URC Youth Executive Review of the roles and responsibilities of the Youth Executive, commissioned at Youth Assembly 2024. As a result, 2025 is going to be a year of piloting a transition towards having three distinct sub-groups with specific foci: Synod Representatives Network; Youth Assembly Planning Group; Youth Executive Officers Group. The aims are to reduce the role demands and to enable a wider group of URC Youth to participate. The Youth Executive for 2025-2026 is the most diverse yet.

Alongside Youth Assembly, we ran the fourth **URC Youth Leaders' Gathering**, for the first time leaders were at a separate conference centre and enjoyed the retreat aspect of the event. We plan to repeat this in 2026.

We support Youth Executive through hosting residential weekend meetings, employing a Youth Intern to support their Comms, and hosting **What Do You Think?** preparation events for under 26 representatives at General Assembly and Assembly Executive.

2024-2025 saw a strategic focus on 18-25s. We co-organised **Junction 25**, an ecumenical weekend gathering of young adults with the Methodists, Baptist, Church of Scotland and Quakers, in January 2025. This piece of work arose out of the **Youth Ministry Denomination Leads Roundtable** which we host twice a year. We are currently exploring the feasibility of offering this again with a wider group of ecumenical partners in 2026. We produced **Creative Connections**, a resource to support local churches and 18-25s to build and keep connections during this period of transition. It is available free on the website (www.urc.org.uk/your-church/family-friendly-church/)

or to order from children.youth@urc.org.uk. We are offering a **Pilgrimage to Taizé** for 18-25s in August 2025.

Other opportunities for URC Youth in 2025 include **1T4**, a weekend for 11-14s in May, and an invitation to join the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France in their summer camp **Le Grand Kiff** in the Dordogne in July for 11-18s.

URC Children

The free weekly online resource **Faith Adventures for Children Together** (FACT), launched in April 2023, continues to provide churches with non-lectionary, Bible-based resource of pick and mix material to support engagement with 0-11 year olds, including a take-home postcard. Since 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 November 2024 the first residential **URC Children's Workers Together: THE CONFERENCE** was held at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxon. Following its success, it is hoped to hold this annually and Highgate House, Northampton has been booked for November 2025.

We continue to support the **Pilots** community through their online termly gatherings and provision of resources.

CYDO+ team

The team of Synod employed leads for Children's and Youth Work, collectively known as the CYDO+ team, continue to work collaboratively across the denomination creating 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 (where it is not possible for children or young people to be present themselves) through championing and advocacy. We support the CYDO+ team through hosting regular online meetings (monthly since January 2025), termly in person or hybrid day meetings and training opportunities. In November 2024 the residential 48-hour meeting included a joint day with the Synod Safeguarding Officers, further anti-racism training and a strategic review of work undertaken.

In November 2025 we are offering the team a 48-hour residential retreat led by the Revd Stewart Cutler. CYWC wishes for the final time 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, offer specialist skills across the denomination and enable the URC to keep children and young people at the heart of the life of the church. The nature of this relationship will require some clarification going forwards.

01. Northern – Hannah Middleton (part-time) and John Stephenson (part-time)
02. North Western – Leo Roberts
03. Mersey – Steven Mitchell
04. Yorkshire – Megan Tillbrook
05. East Midlands – Richard Knott
06. West Midlands – Helen Laird (since December 2024)
07. Eastern – Nicola Grieves

- 08. South Western – vacant
- 09. 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 until 31 January 2025).

We would like to encourage Synods where there are vacancies to explore and consider filling these posts.

Church House staff

Lorraine Webb (Programme Officer) took early retirement at the end of March 2025. With the full review of staffing at Church House in progress we have not been able to explore recruiting a replacement for this post. The rest of the team of three full-time equivalent staff has remained the same: Tricia Harding (part-time Admin Assistant), Sharon Lloyd (part-time Programme Assistant), Dr Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) and Heather Wilkinson (Administrator) who celebrated 30 years at Church House in November 2024. The URC Youth Intern (Comms) very part-time one year post has been held by Rhys Lloyd 2023-2024 and Lizzie Crossley 2024-2025 (funded by the Carmichael Montgomery Trust).

Resources for local churches

The theme for 2024 was **Story, Story, Story**, and for 2025 is **All Are Welcome**. 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. The small grants to support the running of holiday clubs have been accessed by 13 churches in 2024. Future plans include resources to support churches in preparing children and young people for baptism, communion and membership.

We have continued to produce an **Advent resource** for churches to give away to families with invitations to their Christmas events. In 2024, we produced and despatched 5,000 packs at £2.60-£3 each and gave churches posters with a QR code to the video. 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. For 2025 we are creating a more durable gift with estimated price of £4-£4.50 per pack (because not book-based these incur VAT), available to pre-order over the summer. Alongside, we will offer local churches bumper editions of Faith Adventures for use with groups and in services.

Nine more churches have been approved as a **Children and Youth Friendly Church** and awarded plaques (now also available in Welsh) over the past year.

Lundie Memorial Award

We have continued to receive a wide range of nominations from across the URC for children and young people aged 0-25 playing their part in the mission of God. In 2024, we marked the first **50 awards** with a poster sent to all churches celebrating these amazing young disciples. In the past year the awardees have ranged in age from eight to 19, for everything from creative fundraising, ministries of jokes and noticeboard design, evangelism, pastoral care and being young leaders (see bit.ly/URCLundie).

Grants

We have continued to offer **small grants to individuals**, supporting young people's access to educational and discipleship opportunities. In 2024-2025 we support two young people visiting Norway and Sri Lanka. Following an agreement with the Discipleship Development Fund, we are able to offer quick response **group grants** (five so far) for Children's and Youth Work, and since April 2024, small grants to support churches building relationships with **uniformed groups** (19 to date).

We have applied to the Discipleship Development Fund for support with three pieces of work. Firstly, for Youth Assembly, to subsidise every place; secondly, for the Taizé trip, to cover travel for young adults, and thirdly, for the coaster project (see below). We are very grateful to the Large Grants Group for their support of this work.

Wider URC work

Wider URC work has included supporting **Holiday Forum** with their children's and youth work provision in 2024 and will again in 2025. The CYDO+ team have also run the youth venues (The Engine and The Den) at **Greenbelt Festival** in 2024, and 2025 will be the final year, with plans to pass over the baton to Ripon College. 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 **Enquirers Conferences**.

We have worked closely with the Safeguarding team, producing a leaflet sent to all churches pulling together information on safer recruitment, training and resources for all working with children and young people (**Safeguarding-leaflet-Oct-24.pdf**).

We have strengthened links with Mission Committee through collaborative working. We have continued to produce the series of **Go with Greta** (5-11s) /#connect2 (11-16s) resources for Commitment for Life for Transcarpathia over 2024-5 and working on a further resource in 2025-2026.

We have responded to JPIT's work around refugees and migration with material for children and youth people in our themed resources. We have focused this year on the renewed called to evangelism in materials for young people. JPIT have contributed to the Advent resource also.

We have embedded the work of Equalities Committee and the desire to be an intercultural church in our resources for 2025 (All Are Welcome and Bags of Welcome) and the Disability Awareness for All conversation starters.

Following Resolution 51a at General Assembly 2023, we helped plan and run **Conversations at the Crossroads**, a joint residential for URC mission and discipleship animators which included 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 following Resolution 13 at General Assembly 2023 (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) has involved collaboration at

a number of points with Ministries, Education and Learning, Finance and Worship, Faith and Order and the Resource Centres for Learning over the past two years. Please see the separate joint paper regarding this.

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 URC Youth Leaders Gathering has continued to be held each year alongside Youth Assembly as a regular gathering and training opportunity, and the URC Children's Workers Together conference has been added to the annual offer.

Less formal training has been offered in partnership with Education and Learning through URC Training as online sessions in Widget, Holiday Clubs and introducing new resources. Three Makaton 'learn and grow' courses designed for churches have been offered. 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).

We contributed to the Education and Learning Consultation about the future needs of the URC.

Ecumenical connections

We actively participate in ecumenical networks. The URC hosts a Roundtable for Denominational Youth Ministry Leads (out of which the young adults gathering emerged) which has now been recognised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) as their network for youth ministry. We co-founded Intergenerate UK intergenerational ministry network (www.intergenerateuk.org) which has hosted three webinars and two in person networking sessions at conferences. Sam Richards serves on the Children's Ministry Network (CMN) executive. Through CMN we have developed Children's Ministry Essentials training programme for children's ministry and we are finalising the Family and Intergen Ministry Essentials programme for the whole Christian sector (superseding Core Skills and before that Kaleidoscope) see the video here. With CMN we created a resource to support churches hosting school visits. 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. We have also been involved in consultations for ChurchWorks Family Hubs, Messy Church, Boys Brigade, Roots, Youthscape and various research projects including co-authoring a paper on Taking the Pulse. Sam Richards is presenting a paper at Intergenerate USA conference in June and will be keynote speaker at the Messy Church International Conference.

Partnership with Ugly Duckling Charity/Table Talk

CYWC and Mission Committee are working with the Ugly Duckling Charity to produce branded coasters for use as conversation starters at church and Synod events. The coasters have thought-provoking questions on them to encourage deepening relationships (and a link to new daily question) and could be used as a pre-evangelisation tool. Every local URC will be sent a small sample with the Children's and Youth Work all churches mailing in September, and will be able to order more for the cost of P&P. We are excited by this small initiative, funded by the Discipleship Development Fund, and encourage churches to use the coasters creatively.