

# Paper BDFH1

## Update on a Ministry of Children's and Youth Work

Children and Youth Work, Education and Learning, Ministries, and Worship, Faith and Order Committees

### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Samantha Sheehan (Convenor), Children's and Youth Work Committee <b>rev.s.sheehan@gmail.com</b> Pippa Hodgson (Convenor), Education and Learning Committee <b>pippahodgson147@gmail.com</b> Mary Thomas (Convenor), Ministries Committee <b>dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk</b> Robert Pope (Convenor), Worship, Faith and Order Committee <b>rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk</b>
<b>Action required</b>	Resolutions below.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 20</b> <b>Following the outcome of the discussion at Assembly Executive 2025, General Assembly:</b> a) <b>commends the training programmes offered through Northern College and Westminster College to train Children's, Youth and Family Workers at local level;</b> b) <b>instructs the new Ministries and Faith in Action Committees to explore how this training can be offered to those working with children and young people, including funding opportunities;</b> c) <b>encourages the conversations to continue as the URC focuses on ministry, training and the Church Life Review;</b> d) <b>thanks the Task Group for its work.</b>

### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Updating on Paper BDFH1 presented at Assembly Executive February 2025 and following the discussion that led to Resolution 14 being withdrawn.
<b>Main points</b>	The proposed direction of travel to establish an accredited ministry to children, youth and/or family was discussed at Assembly Executive in February 2025 and there was no strong appetite for it, nor financial support. The discussions were

	taken back to be discussed by the Task Group. The Task Group proposes that the formal consideration of this type of ministry does not go ahead at this point in time.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	B1: Recognition of Children's, Youth and Family Ministry, Children and Youth Work Committee, General Assembly 2023; B1: Towards a Formal Ministry for Children's, Youth and/or Family Work, Assembly Executive February 2024; B2: General Assembly 2024 CYWC Update; BDFH1: Towards a New Formal Ministry for Children's and Youth Work: Direction of travel, Assembly Executive February 2025.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	CYDO+ Team Children's and Youth, Education and Learning, Ministries Committees Resource Centres for Learning – Northern College and Westminster College.

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None at this time.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Other denominations currently offer such training and those from the URC may choose to access their training.

## Background

- 1.1 At General Assembly 2023, Resolution 13 stated: '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 a 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. Paper BDFH1: Towards a New Formal Ministry for Children's and Youth Work, was offered at Assembly Executive, February 2025.
- 1.2 The resolution in Paper BDFH1, Assembly Executive February 2025, was withdrawn, following discussion. There did not appear to be general warmth to the proposal of this new form of stipendiary ministry amongst Assembly Executive at that time.
- 1.3 The Task Group met to discuss the next steps and proposed an alternative, which was Assembly Accredited Children's, Youth and Family (AACYF) Worker. This was a pragmatic approach following the feedback from Assembly Executive, February 2025.
- 1.4 This proposal was discussed at Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Ministries Committees, and was not felt to be a suitable way forward. There were questions around who would take up this local offer of ministry and concern that this could be created with no take-up. Much encouragement is offered

to the work of the Children's and Youth Work Committee and it was felt as if this encouragement was in word only.

- 1.5 The Task Group met on 2 May and it was decided that an Assembly Accredited Children's, Youth and Family Worker was not the way forward.
- 1.6 Each committee created its response to the proposal.

## **Children's and Youth Work Committee**

- 2.1 Following Assembly Executive and the revised proposal to pursue Assembly Accredited Children's, Youth and Family Worker as a new ministry, we had feedback from the CYDO+ team as well as the URC Youth Leaders Gathering. There is a great deal of frustration and disappointment in the feedback from Assembly Executive and the new potential direction of travel.
- 2.2 The CYDO+ team do not see how the proposed AACYF Worker will have a direct impact on those involved in children, youth and family ministry. It does not go far enough in valuing children's and youth work as ministry or in supporting those that are already involved in this ministry. This conclusion was also shared by those on the committee. From those in local churches, hurt was shared, and a feeling of being undervalued and not recognised by the denomination. They had viewed the proposed children's, youth and family ministry paper as the denomination acknowledging the ministry they offered, and subsequent withdrawal of the proposal as a rejection of this.
- 2.3 There were questions about how this new proposal linked with the CLR local church workers stream, because it is felt that requiring all local workers to be Assembly Accredited as a minimum standard was too much of a barrier for it to be effective (given that these are time-limited posts, frequently filled by non-URC members). It was also noted that there are already a significant number of 'spare time training' programmes which local workers can already access, included ones hosted and offered by the CYDO+ team (Children's Ministry Essentials and Youthscape Essentials).
- 2.4 The proposed AACYF Worker does not address a number of key issues:
  - how as a denomination we form theologically reflective and professionally skilled URC children's, youth and family ministers;
  - how the denomination could deploy this ministry where most effective. (AACYF workers would be volunteers or employed by local churches and therefore are limited to where churches can afford them);
  - how as a denomination we could support those with a lifelong vocation for this ministry.
- 2.5 As a committee, we do not feel able to continue supporting the direction of travel and work towards an AACYF Worker as we do not see how this will have an effective impact on those currently involved in children, youth and family work or those discerning a call to children, youth and family ministry.
- 2.6 We are grateful for the willingness and journey the task group has been on, the conversations it has generated and work that has been undertaken.

- 2.7 We see children's, youth and family ministry as an integral part of the Children's and Youth Work Committee's response to the Church Life Review, and to 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.
- 2.8 In the light of the discussions at Assembly Executive, Children's and Youth Work Committee strongly urge that all ministers be equipped to work with children and young people through embedded training offered through RCLs and Synods for new and serving ministers of Word and Sacraments and Lay Preachers/Local Worship Leaders.

## **Education and Learning Committee**

- 3.1 The committee recognised the effect of the discussions that occurred at Assembly Executive and the subsequent proposal from the Task Group for an AACYFW. They heard the frustration of the Children's and Youth Work Committee and also the fact that, as a voluntary role, this would be limited to those who could afford it. The Education and Learning Committee acknowledged the work done on this by the RCLs and commended the learning pathways offered, acknowledging that they are ecumenical courses that have been carefully planned to accommodate those wanting to work with young people. It was felt that the work that had gone into developing the learning opportunities had not been appreciated and Education and Learning Committee is reassured that the offerings are included in this paper. They also thanked the Task Group for all their hard work over the past two years and that they wanted this work to continue in some form and not be forgotten in continuing conversations around ministry and in the Church Life Review.

## **Ministries Committee**

- 4.1 The committee fully understood the decision of the Children's and Youth Work Committee not to proceed with an Assembly Accredited ministry despite the value of accreditation but acknowledged there were already people doing this sort of work in local pastorates who would not wish for accreditation. The committee were still supportive of this ministry and wish to affirm that the work done thus far will not be lost should conversations in the future warrant another look at the ministry.

## **Worship, Faith and Order Committee**

- 5.1 The Worship, Faith and Order Committee was consulted about Faith and Order issues relating to the recognition of a new, formal and accredited ministry in the United Reformed Church. Guiding principles included:
- 5.1.1 The Basis of Union confirms that it is the whole people of God who continue Christ's ministry in the world (paragraph 19 and 20).
- 5.1.2 Paragraph 13 confirms that Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Elders, and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers focus attention (in varying degrees) on worship, mutual care and encouraging mission because these are recognised ways in which God's saving love is made known. Furthermore, in paragraph 12, we are told that the life of faith to which the United Reformed Church is called is a gift of the Spirit, received through Word and Sacrament.

- 5.1.3 Paragraph 11 confirms that Church-Related Community Workers focus attention on the gospel imperative that God's love is for all, and that this has implications for community development.
- 5.2 These ministries have something to declare, but they are also listening ministries, exercised in the knowledge that God can speak to us through others.
- 5.3 In the light of this, a specific ministry for Children, Youth and Families seemed theologically justifiable along the following lines:
  - 5.3.1 Children, Young People and Families are part of the whole people of God, called to continue Christ's ministry in the world. Dedicated ministry should help to strengthen them in that calling (as in paragraph 19).
  - 5.3.2 Dedicated ministry would have something to say of God's saving love to children, young people and families. But it would also be a listening ministry, helping the United Reformed Church to fulfil its commitment to listening to the voices of children and young people as a natural, rich, God-given blessing to the Church (affirmed by General Assembly in 1984 and reinforced by the Charter for Children in 1990) as well as its commitment to working with Children and Young people (affirmed by General Assembly in 2008 and in the more recent resolutions calling for this new ministry to be established).
  - 5.3.3 Early discussion ruled out a specific Ministry of the Word and Sacraments because this would introduce a second order of that Ministry (the principal in the URC being that there is one order of Ministry of the Word and Sacraments). It also seemed difficult to justify a Ministry which included presidency at the Sacraments which would not be offered to the whole Church.
  - 5.3.4 It was considered important that this new ministry should not be confused with Church-related Community Work. The name agreed by the Working Group, and approved by WFO, was 'Church Commissioned Children/Youth/Family Worker'. This seemed to confirm that it was a recognized ministry of the Church, that it was not a ministry that would preside at the Sacraments, and that it would be flexible to apply to the diverse needs of the denomination and its local churches.
  - 5.3.5 The decision at Assembly Executive, and subsequently at the Children and Youth Work Committee, paused this conversation. However, the Worship, Faith and Order Committee feel it is important to acknowledge the clarity achieved on questions of polity. This will be useful should conversations about new ministries resume in the future.

## Northern College

- 6.1 We have appreciated being part of the journey with the United Reformed Church in exploring ministry to children, young people and families. Luther King Centre is excited to introduce a new pathway designed for those exploring a call to ministry with children, youth, and families – or seeking to grow in their current roles. This two-year, part-time programme has been developed in response to conversations with the URC and a wider recognition of the need for specialised training in this vital area of ministry.
- 6.2 Successful completion of the programme leads to the Durham University Common Awards Certificate in Theology, Ministry and Mission. It offers a dynamic blend of academic study and practical training, grounded in contemporary theological thinking and real-world application. Participants will be supported to grow spiritually, personally and professionally as they prepare for, or deepen, their ministry with children, young people, and families.

## Westminster College

- 7.1 Training for the new Church Commissioned Ministry in Children's Youth and Family Work could be offered by Westminster College, in association with the Cambridge Theological Federation, through an existing course validated by the University of Durham and leading to a Certificate in Higher Education. Formal study would be accompanied by formational input and those in training would learn alongside students entering other formal ministries. Although the conversation has now paused, these learning opportunities still exist and those working in these areas in the United Reformed Church can be encouraged and enabled to take them either as distinct modules or as a full programme leading to a qualification.
- 8.1 It was felt that the proposed training pathways that were offered through Northern College and Westminster College could be offered, despite the decision not to pursue an accredited pathway. It was felt important that people were able to access funding if they chose to do this training. The Education and Learning Committee does have oversight of the Discipleship Development Fund and believes that this could be a source of funding for any lay training for children's, youth and/or families' workers, especially the small grants offered through the Synods. The URC also has a number of funding opportunities that are available, more information can be found on the URC website: [urc.org.uk/grants-funding-opportunities](http://urc.org.uk/grants-funding-opportunities).
- 8.2 The Task Group feel it is important to continue conversations with the Church Life Review through the Programme Director, Myles Dunnett. This would be around the stream focusing on employing lay workers.

## Conclusion

- 9.1 The joint Task Group seeks the support of General Assembly for the resolutions and hopes that, in future, there could be a possible, accredited ministry to children, youth and/or families.



## Appendices

### 1. Northern College

Children, Youth and Families Pathway at Luther King Centre.

#### Introduction

This learning pathway is ideal for individuals who currently serve as, or aspire to become, Children, Youth and Family Workers in church-based or community roles. It combines academic study with hands-on practical experience, tailored to support those on a faith-based vocational journey.

Shaped through consultation with experienced practitioners, this ecumenical programme reflects the real-world challenges and opportunities of contemporary ministry. Developed in conversation with the United Reformed Church, Baptist Ministries, and Children's, Youth and Family Work specialists, the pathway is grounded in the lived experience of those actively engaged in faith and community work.

Teaching is contextual, encouraging students to reflect on and learn from their own ministry settings. Learning takes place within a diverse, supportive community, where students are invited to share insights, challenge assumptions, and grow together in theological understanding and practical ministry skills.

Successful completion of the programme leads to a Durham University Common Awards Certificate in Theology, Ministry and Mission.

#### Programme structure and delivery

Duration of study:

- Two years, part-time.

Delivery mode:

- Weekday in Manchester or online weekend sessions
- Occasional in-person residential teaching blocks.

Placement:

- Substantial church and/or community-based placement over two years
- Ongoing group tutorial support with a qualified Children, Youth and Family Work tutor.

Specialisation:

- Opportunities to focus on either children and families or youth work within selected modules.

Assessment:

- This pathway uses a diverse range of assessments to support different learning styles and ministry contexts, including practice-based portfolios, book reviews, theological reflections etc.

Core modules:

- This pathway is designed to form thoughtful, theologically rooted, and practically equipped reflective practitioners who can make a transformative impact in the lives of

children, young people, and families. To do this, students will engage with the following core modules:

**Foundations for Theology and Reflective Practice (20 credits):**

Develops theological reflection skills and introduces contextual theologies. Encourages both individual and collaborative engagement with experience, scripture, and global theological voices.

**Values, policy and practice in Children, Youth and Family Work (ten credits, residential block):**

Examines legal frameworks (eg safeguarding, risk assessment), professional values, and theological reflection on practice within the UK and global contexts.

**Introduction to Theology and Human Development (20 credits, residential block):**

Explores developmental psychology, theological anthropology, ethical boundaries, and pastoral care skills in work with children and young people.

**Basic Playwork or Youth Work Skills in Practice (20 credits, placement-based):**

Practical experience supported by tutorial groups. Covers relationship-building, communication, educational approaches, play design, team leadership, administration, and reflective practice.

**Introduction to Growing Faith (ten credits):**

Focuses on discipleship and spiritual growth across age groups and life stages. Engages with initiatives such as Messy Church and Prayer Spaces, and considers the cultural shifts needed to support intergenerational faith development.

**Introduction to the Bible (20 credits):**

Introduces Old and New Testament texts, genres, and interpretative approaches. Helps students explore how scripture can be understood and applied in their own ministry contexts.

**Elements of Mission and Evangelism (ten credits):**

Covers the Missio Dei, five marks of mission, church and kingdom, mission history, cultural engagement, and religious diversity.

**Conflict Transformation (ten credits):**

Equips students to respond constructively to conflict in faith-based communities. Includes conflict theory, practical tools, and theological reflection, with case studies and experiential learning.



## Programme costs (per year)

Item	Cost
Academic teaching	£3,093
Residential weekends (incl. meals, accommodation etc.)	£345 (varies by location)
Placement costs – setup, comprehensive tutorial support and associated costs	£515
Additional costs	Individual travel, plus meals/accommodation for weekday onsite study at Luther King House

## 2. Westminster College

Children, Youth and Families Ministry Course

Forming Confident Leaders for Ministry with Children, Young People and Families.

### Course overview

This two-year programme equips students with essential skills, theological understanding, and formational support for effective ministry with children, young people and families. Combining accredited academic modules, practical experience, skills development, reflective formation, and in-person community gatherings, the course develops confident, thoughtful leaders ready to serve the next generation. Much of the course material is common across children, youth and family ministry but also includes dedicated streams and assessment relevant to the particular ministry a student is pursuing. The course will also ensure a specifically Reformed approach. Students can pursue the course for a fully accredited University award (CertHE, University of Durham) or they can pursue the course without seeking credit. They would produce a portfolio which would be part of the evidence used to commend them for Assembly Accreditation in the United Reformed Church.

### Key features

- Eight accredited modules (total: 120 credits) delivered over two years
- Supported by **online facilitated formation groups** for peer learning and reflective practice
- **Two residential conferences per year** for worship, teaching, and community building
- Flexible **flipped classroom model** to increase accessibility for diverse learners
- Option to study for credit or non-credit (portfolio route)
- Option for fully **online delivery** or a **blended model** with in-person teaching weeks.

### Accredited modules

1. **TMM1207: Preparing to Learn: Doctrine, Scripture and Prayer (ten credits)**  
Foundations in reflective learning, grounded in Christian practices of doctrine, Scripture, and prayer.
2. **TMM1517: Introduction to Spirituality and Discipleship (ten credits)**  
Introduction to Christian spiritual practices and models of discipleship, with application to children and young people. Reformed perspectives will be emphasised.

3. **TMM1031: Introduction to the Bible (20 credits)**  
Overview of the Bible's structure, content, and themes, providing tools for interpretation and approaches which will help children and young people in particular to be most engaged in biblical study.
4. **TMM1421: Brief Introduction to Pastoral Care (20 credits)**  
Principles and practices of pastoral care, with focus on children, young people, and families.
5. **a) TMM1491: Basic Playwork Skills and Children's Work Practice (20 credits)**  
Practical skills and theological reflection for working with children through play and activities;  
or  
**b) TMM1501: Basic Youth Work Skills and Practice (20 credits)**  
Core skills for engaging young people, exploring youth work practices and theological grounding. The choice depends on the particular vocation to which the student feels a call. Both modules familiarise students with National Occupational Standards, safe practice and boundaries training.
6. **TMM1121: Creeds and Councils (20 credits)**  
Study of major creeds and councils, equipping students to teach and communicate core beliefs.
7. **TMM1561: Introduction to Theology and Human Development in Childhood (20 credits)**  
Exploration of human development and theology, focusing on childhood, adolescence, and faith formation.

## Learning delivery

1. Flipped Classroom Online Learning
  - All modules are available fully **online**, with core content (lectures, readings, videos) provided for flexible engagement.
  - Live sessions focus on **discussion, reflection, and application**, rather than passive delivery.
2. Optional Face-to-Face Teaching Weeks (Blended Model)
  - For students preferring in-person learning, **three modules** will be offered in **Cambridge over three intensive teaching weeks**.
  - Students participating in the in-person option will require **accommodation and food**, which will be arranged and costed separately.
3. Facilitated Formation Groups
  - Small, online **formation groups** meet regularly throughout the year, led by experienced facilitators, with particular emphasis on **Reformed theology and practice**.
  - Focus on reflective practice, prayer, peer learning, and ministry integration.
4. Proposed Residential Conferences (optional)
  - Two conferences per year, focused on:
    - Reformed worship and spiritual growth.

- Keynote teaching and practical workshops.
- Networking, rest, and encouragement.

## Accreditation and portfolio route

For academic credit:

- Completion awards 120 credits at Level 4 over two years
- Pathway available towards a **Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)** or further study
- **Cost: £3,050 per student per year** plus conference costs (additional costs apply for in-person teaching weeks: accommodation and food). This fee is standard for those pursuing a University qualification through the CTF (validated by the University of Durham).

Non-credit portfolio option:

- Alternative route for those not seeking academic credit.
- Completion of a **Reflective Portfolio**, including:
  - Reflections on learning.
  - Ministry application.
  - Engagement with key readings.
- Supported by formation group facilitators.
- Students receive a **Certificate of Participation** and feedback on their portfolio.
- **Cost: £1,250 per student per year** plus conference costs (additional costs apply for in-person teaching weeks: accommodation and food). This fee is based on the cost of auditing official modules with the costs associated with teaching, tutoring, resourcing and assessing.

## Support

- **Theological mentoring** and practical ministry guidance throughout.
- Experienced tutors support both academic and vocational development.

## Target audience

- Volunteer or paid Children's, Youth, and Family Workers.
- Those seeking **Assembly Accreditation** for Ministry with Children, Young People and Families in the United Reformed Church
- Ordinands and ministry trainees focused on children's/youth ministry.
- Church leaders seeking to strengthen skills and theological grounding.
- Those discerning a call to ministry with young people and families.

## Progression

- Students may continue studies towards higher qualifications or leadership roles within children and youth ministry.