

Paper A7

Eido report on models of lay worker employment across the URC

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett, Programme Manager, Church Life Review myles.dunnett@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 30 General Assembly receives the findings of the Eido report, and notes and endorses the model and toolkit outlined in the appendices.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To examine models of lay worker employment in the URC.
Main points	Eido's executive summary is provided after the report title page.
Previous relevant documents	Paper N1, General Assembly 2023 (Resolution 51)
Consultation has taken place with...	Eido Research Eight case study locations across the URC (interviewees: employer representative(s), line managers, and lay workers) CLR Steering Group and Sub-Committee Business Committee Resources Committee

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

Assessing models of lay worker employment in the URC

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V3.3

Executive summary

This report examines two models by which lay workers are currently employed within the URC: church-employed and Synod-employed. It explores the benefits and limitations of these models and makes recommendations for how each might be strengthened, as well as the circumstances in which a particular model might work best.

These findings are based on in-depth interviews with 24 lay workers, line managers, and Synod or church representatives from eight URC case studies where a lay worker is employed under one of these models.

In cases where churches employ lay workers directly, the church requires members (generally elders) with the necessary skills, knowledge, and capacity to employ and manage staff effectively. They also need access to financial resources, either internally or through grants. When these conditions are met, churches are generally able to provide good employment.

The benefits of this model are often due to the close connection between the lay worker, the church, and their line manager(s). The main weaknesses of this model are the amount of work and potential risk for a local church, and the challenge of keeping up to date with UK employment law and best practice.

Churches that employ lay workers would like more support from their Synod or Church House in the form of template documents, easy-to-access HR advice, and assurance that they will receive support if something goes wrong.

Churches would be more open to employing lay workers through a Synod if they knew the worker would be committed to their local church and community, and that the Synod would not seek to control the activities of the lay worker.

In cases where lay workers are employed by the Synod, lay workers particularly appreciated high levels of freedom and trust from the Synod, the wider perspective a Synod can offer, and relatively robust employment. This model reduces the workload and risk for local churches while still allowing churches to maintain a high degree of agency regarding the activities of the lay worker.

Despite fears articulated by some churches who employ workers directly, synods were not found to want to control the activities of the lay worker. They do want to ensure lay workers are employed well and that the activities of the lay worker connect with the wider vision and mission of the local church.

The biggest challenge articulated by participants regarding the Synod-employed model stems from the distance between the Synod-based line manager and the context within which the lay worker is working.

Across both models, frequent themes that emerged were:

- The need to strengthen the line management of lay workers
- The importance of gaining clarity and alignment between synods, churches, and lay workers before the lay worker starts
- The desire and the struggle to keep up to date with UK employment law and best practice
- Churches' desire to have sufficient control over who is employed, and the activities the lay worker will focus on
- Concerns about what support will be available if something goes wrong in an employment situation
- Good relationships and good people can hide weaknesses in a system
- The desire for parity of employment in pension and salary, regardless of the employment model.

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Section 1 – Introduction

Purpose of the research

The General Assembly asked the Church Life Review (CLR) to examine the infrastructure and models of lay work in support of local churches (GA 2023, Resolution 51). The CLR Steering Group commissioned Eido to explore eight different sites where lay workers are employed, either directly by churches or by synods.

The aim of the research was to explore:

- How these two models of employment work in different contexts
- The extent to which each model is an effective way of employing lay workers (highlighting the strengths and limitations of each)
- What additional infrastructure is needed to help each model work
- Where one model might be more effective to another, and in which circumstances.

The aim of this project was not to evaluate the performance of individuals or church communities, nor the effectiveness of certain types of roles, but rather the effectiveness of the models used to employ lay workers.

The findings of this report are intended to help guide the CLR Steering Group in offering proposals to General Assembly in November 2025 regarding the best way—or ways—of employing lay workers within URC churches.

Research methodology

In consultation with Myles Dunnnett (CLR Programme Manager), Eido developed a research plan to meet the project aims outlined above. The main phases of the research process are outlined below:

- **Sample recruitment.** Myles Dunnnett identified eight suitable sites for enquiry, then gained agreement to take part with each site. At each site, we requested to speak to the lay worker themselves, the lay worker's line manager, and then a representative of the church or Synod who was involved in the employment of the lay worker. The hope was to speak to four church-employed and four Synod-employed sites. Due to availability, and also to include an LEP site (Local Ecumenical Partnership), we ended up with five church-employed, and three Synod-employed sites. More detail about the roles and participating churches is provided within the relevant sections of this report.
- **Participant interviews.** Eido conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant (24 participants in total). These video-conference interviews, which lasted a maximum of one hour, gave Eido the opportunity to ask specific questions related to the research aims, while also allowing participants freedom to share insights they thought could be relevant for the Steering Group to hear. The Eido researchers took thorough notes during the interviews and recorded them to allow them to go back and fact-check and get more detail where necessary. To increase the likelihood of participation, as well as help generate fuller and more honest data, participants were guaranteed anonymity.

- **Qualitative analysis.** The Eido researchers kept a rolling research log of what they thought were key insights and possible themes as the interviews went along. When all the interviews were complete, they then used ‘thematic analysis’, looking at what themes emerged for each individual model, as well as general themes which came through across all interviews.
- **Report writing.** The themes and insights that emerged from the analysis, and Eido’s reflections on those, form the basis of this report. We have sought to be faithful in reflecting the thoughts and experiences of all participants. Along the way we highlight contextual nuances and put participants’ views in context, where those views differ from the experiences and views of others.

The positive impact of lay workers

Whilst the aim of this research is not to evaluate the effectiveness of individual workers, roles, churches, or synods, we want to begin our report highlighting the positive contribution the lay workers we heard about make to the work and ministry of local churches.

Throughout the interviews, it quickly became apparent that the employment of lay workers is helping to both kick-start and enhance mission and ministry activity across the URC. A few highlights include:

- Increased amount of work with young people and families
- Improving the quality of work churches do with young people and families
- Increased capacity and ability for churches to connect with and serve their local communities
- Churches connecting with and serving a more diverse cross-section of their local communities (in terms of age, ethnicity, and socio-economic background)
- Churches growing in number – whether increased participation in groups/activities throughout the week, or attendance at services and growth in membership
- People growing in their faith and discipleship journeys
- An increased sense of life within local churches, characterised by a renewed passion for mission and ministry among elders and members, and an increased sense of hope as they see God at work through them.

Section 2 – The Church-Employed Model

This section of the report covers results we gained from the case studies of a church-employed lay worker.

2.1 Summary of the five case study sites

We interviewed three people from each of five sites where a lay worker (or lay workers) is employed directly by the church. Three of these churches follow a 'typical' URC church structure, one is a CIO, and the other is an LEP.

Three of these churches employ a lay worker in a community outreach, connection, or pioneering-type role (all part-time). One church employs a full-time children's, youth, and families' worker, and another employs a full-time local church leader. All these churches had previously employed at least one lay worker, and some are currently employing multiple lay workers across a range of roles. Two of the lay workers have been in post for three or more years, while three have only been in post for around six months.

Geographically, three of these churches are based in the North of England, one in the Midlands, and one in Greater London. All of these lay workers were already based locally or had an existing connection with the local area or church.

2.2 How this model works

Though all of these workers are employed directly by the local church, the funding model varies, and at some sites it has changed over time. At the time of interviewing, these five sites are funding the lay worker in the following ways:

- Two churches cover 100% of the lay worker's employment costs
- Two are 100% covered by the Synod
- One is 50% Synod-funded, with the other 50% being covered by a mix of church funds and external grants.

In cases where roles are part or fully funded by Synod, it's highly unlikely these roles would otherwise exist.

Four of these five churches have at least one person involved in setting up and maintaining the employment arrangement who has a high level of experience related to employing and/or managing people. In one case, this was the Minister, but generally speaking, this expertise is found within the eldership. These are people who have experience in areas such as HR, finance, and line-managing people in the private, public, or charitable sector. Some are still working in these sectors, but the majority are retired.

Most of these churches have some kind of steering group or management group that helps to set up and oversee the employment of the lay worker. Sometimes this management group consists purely of people from inside the church, and in others it also involves someone from the Synod.

The primary line manager for each of these lay workers varies:

- Three have the Minister
- One has a lay elder
- One has someone from the Synod.

All lay workers have some additional line-management type support and/or oversight from others – generally the management/steering group.

As will be described below, some churches have wanted and been able to receive help and support from the Synod in setting up the employment, whereas others have received less help in this regard.

2.3 Benefits of the church employed model for the worker, the church, and the Synod

This section outlines what we found about the benefits of the church employed model for three stakeholders involved: the worker, the church, and the Synod.

For the worker

There was broad consensus across the interviews with line managers, the church representatives, and the lay workers themselves. The main benefits of the lay worker being employed directly by the church can be brought together under two headings.

Clearer and closer line management

Being employed directly by the church means there is one less layer of management than if the lay worker were employed by the Synod, where they would have both an off-site manager and an on-site day-to-day manager/supervisor. Participants described this closer form of management as simpler because decisions can be made quickly and locally. It also means the line manager (and management team) see the worker and their work regularly, giving them a better understanding of what the worker is doing. This more regular contact makes it easier for issues to be discussed and resolved quickly. Some participants mentioned very practical matters, such as being able to reimburse the lay worker for expenses promptly.

Participants supposed that if their primary line manager were based further away, the manager would have less understanding of what the worker is doing, the context they are working in, and communication would be harder and less frequent.

Though in some ways being line-managed directly by people within the church creates a simpler structure, the line management situation wasn't entirely straightforward (as described in the section below).

Increased sense of connection with the church and local community

Most participants also said that being employed by the church guarantees the worker is able to focus on the ministry and mission of the local church within their local area.

Because the lay worker would have been chosen by the local church¹, the local church is more involved in their employment, the lay worker is more likely to feel a greater sense of connection to the local church, and the local church to them.

In most of these instances, the lay worker is/has become a member of the local church, which increases the sense of belonging.

¹ Though this may also sometimes be the case of a lay worker employed by the Synod, it is always true in the case of a church-employed worker.

Lots of participants expressed a fear that if the lay worker was employed by the Synod, they think they would perhaps have less sense of connection to the local church and would probably be asked to work across a greater number of churches and a wider geographical area².

This fear may not reflect what actually happens or would happen: if a church and a Synod had an agreement in place regarding the location and focus of a lay worker, this could be honoured. However, the fear is real and therefore needs to be addressed.

For the church

Greater control

The main benefit participants reported for the church was that it gives the church a greater sense of control over what the job roles will be, who they employ, and what that worker focuses their time and energy on day-to-day. Some also perceived that employing the worker directly makes it easier for them to care for the worker, because they can take more responsibility for the worker, and make decisions that impact the worker quickly.

Whilst this is an important perception to note, it's also true that Synod model interviewees shared a duty of care to those they employ.

It's also interesting to note that churches who receive funding from the Synod for the lay worker did not feel the Synod was in any way dictating the terms of the person's employment or were particularly onerous when it came to accountability. And churches who were employing workers with Synod funding did not feel any less sense of control.

Increased sense of ownership from the church

Because the church has thought hard about who they want to employ and have invested time (and sometimes money) into employing this person, they have an increased sense of ownership. This sense of ownership is as much to the ministry of the lay worker as to the lay worker themselves. With one exception, these church-employed workers described a strong link between themselves, the work they are doing, and the wider church.

Additionally, most of these churches described how having a lay worker has helped to energise and re-focus people in the church on the particular area the lay worker is focused on (e.g. community outreach or working with young people).

There was also a sense that the worker was more likely to remain committed to the local church over the long-term, whereas they felt a Synod-employed worker could be moved to another site after a certain amount of time. However, it is possible for a lay worker to be employed by a Synod and assigned to a specific church (or churches), which would be contractually binding.

Greater focus on mission and ministry within the local church and area

Just as this was seen as a benefit for the lay worker, a greater focus on mission and ministry was also described as being positive for the church and the local community.

² There is an example in section 3 of the report, which shows a Synod-employed worker can be committed and connected to just one church.

Participants liked that the lay worker doesn't have lots of Synod-related/directed work that they would also have to do in addition to locally focused ministry.

Faster decision-making process for the church

Some participants mentioned they thought the process of managing the lay worker is simpler to do in-house, rather than having to involve the Synod in decisions they wanted to make. Having one less 'layer' of decision-making is seen as a benefit by churches.

For the Synod

Participants generally had little to say when asked what benefit they thought this model provides for the Synod. The two main things that came up were that it obviously means less work and responsibility for the Synod, and that Synods could still benefit from the wisdom and learning lay workers develop through their ministry.

2.4 The limitations of the church employed model for the worker, the church, and the Synod

This section outlines what we found about the limitations of the model for three stakeholders involved: the worker, the church, and the Synod.

For the worker

The overall tone of the interviews was positive: lay workers and the churches employing them are broadly positive about how things are going (apart from in one case). However, the workers and the churches employing them did talk about some challenges and limitations.

Potentially lower pay and benefits

This came up explicitly in interviews with two of the sites and could potentially be true in others as well. The other sites did mention financial concerns in relation to the longevity of the employment, which may also be affecting pay rates, pension contributions, and other benefits (or lack thereof).

In one instance, the worker was initially offered a very low rate of pay, especially considering the level of experience this person possessed. In another church, the church representative and the Minister/line-manager said they think they have been paying their lay worker less than if this person had been employed through the Synod. This became apparent when they saw a similar job role advertised, but with a higher rate of pay (they are now looking to increase their lay worker's pay).

That same church also talked about the pension contribution being lower than if the person were employed by the Synod. Interestingly, when a Synod-employed worker asked why they preferred that model to being employed by the church, they immediately said, 'Pension contributions!'

Less stable employment

Across the interviews, participants alluded to a sense of fragility or 'tenderness' in the long-term employment of lay workers when employed by a church. Finance is a big issue for churches. As one Minister pointed out, churches tend to be 'very conservative when it comes to finances' – they don't want to commit to employing somebody over a long period of time, in case they can no longer afford to do so.

Therefore, most of these workers are on limited-time contracts (typically three years).

While this is a reality, for context, it's important to bear in mind that Synod-employed workers are also often on limited-time contracts.

Ambiguity regarding paid hours and hours worked

Whilst none of the lay workers complained about this, some did mention that they generally work more hours than they are paid for (these were staff employed on a part-time basis). This issue was also picked up by some church representatives as well.

This matter is slightly muddled by the fact that many lay workers are also members of a church, and they are often happy to do some things in that capacity as a volunteer member. There can also be ambiguity around 'what counts as work', e.g. attending conferences, social events, etc.

What seems to help this situation is when there is clarity around what is paid work, and what is voluntary. And it's also very important that there is clear communication between the worker, the line-manager, and the wider church.

Whilst important to pay attention to, this issue is not limited to church-employed lay workers, or even to the URC – this is an issue for many people who work for churches, where the lines between paid and voluntary are often ambiguous and blurred.

Some weaknesses in line management

The issue of line management came up in the interviews with both church-employed and Synod-employed sites. Within the church-employed situations, the picture was mixed.

As described above, participants had positive things to say about line management. However, the general message coming through from both the lay workers and the line managers is that line management isn't as strong or clear as it could be. From both perspectives, the people doing the line management don't always have sufficient line-management expertise to perform the function optimally.

Some line managers don't know exactly what to ask, how best to support the lay worker, and there can sometimes be situations where the lay worker is needing to 'manage upwards': helping the line manager ask the right questions, etc. As well as sometimes lacking line-management skills, the line-manager might also lack knowledge about the specialist area the lay worker is operating in, which can compound the problem.

This issue manifests in different ways. Some described being over-managed, where they don't feel they are being afforded the trust and freedom they need to work as effectively as they would like. Others described a more laissez-faire approach, and would actively welcome greater support, accountability, and challenge.

For the church

Increased workload for Ministers and Elders

This issue was raised by virtually every church representative and line manager. Employing somebody effectively demands a combination of energy, time, and

knowledge. This is especially true when it comes to setting up the employment, but it also requires an ongoing commitment.

Whether these demands fall primarily on the Minister, the elders, management team, or a combination of those, it's generally work that falls on the shoulders of people who are already busy and often overstretched.

Most of these churches are managing to keep up with the requirements of employing a lay worker (or lay workers), but some did raise questions about how sustainable this will be long-term. Some said that all it would take would be for one or two individuals to leave the church for them to be in a position where they would really struggle to keep up with the demands of employing someone. When asked about shouldering the line management responsibilities, along with everything else they have to do, one Minister confessed, 'It's heavy'.

It's important to note that, though most of these employment situations are generally functioning quite well, this finding is heavily influenced by the churches that took part in the research. In various interviews, participants shared examples from other church-employed contexts where things have gone badly wrong.

Financial challenges

Employing someone requires a huge financial investment. Where a role is funded by the Synod, this is less of an issue – though there is still the question of what would happen if the funding isn't renewed.

For churches who are part or whole funding, this can be very stressful. Two of the churches are doing their best to gain funds from external donors and have or are about to enlist the services of professional grant-writers. Churches are working hard to generate the funds to pay for workers, but they aren't finding it easy.

Keeping up-to-date and maintaining processes

The legal requirements of employing someone are not static; the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees change over time. Keeping up with these changes can be challenging. Participants think they are generally keeping up, but the majority don't have a clear strategy to ensure they find out about changes before/when they take effect. Lots of them said they would like help with this. Despite many of those responsible for overseeing the employment having experience in HR (or related areas), many of them are retired, and therefore might not have the most up-to-date knowledge.

Increasingly, employers are expected to have a range of policies and processes in place. Ensuring these are all set up correctly at the beginning takes a lot of work. On top of this, there is the ongoing challenge of keeping these policies and processes up-to-date and ensuring that people actually follow them! This can be particularly tricky in a local church.

One church representative said they think generally people are doing things correctly in their church, but it's hard to know if everybody is following the processes, and there is not someone who has a clear authority or legitimacy to check that people are doing everything as they should. In another church, participants were pretty sure they aren't

following procedures as they should. They especially recognised that they need some help from the outside.

Challenges accessing Synod support

On the whole, participants spoke warmly about their Synod. All of them have received at least some help in setting up and/or maintaining the employment of their lay workers.

Three of the churches described a strong and healthy relationship with the Synod and could share several examples of how they had received support. But one of the churches said that while the Synod had been really helpful with something else they had needed to do, when it came to employing someone the support has been patchy.

This church said they ended up needing to do pretty much everything themselves, and did not have help when it came to things like setting up the contract, creating a staff handbook, and ensuring they had all the correct policies in place. The LEP church have primarily leaned on the denominational structures of the other partner church.

Lack of security if/when ‘things go wrong’

Whilst things are going pretty well in most of these employment case studies in one, there seems to have been something of a breakdown in communication between the lay worker, and the line manager and church leadership. Because records have not been kept by the previous line manager, and because processes haven't been followed, the church is now unsure how to deal with the situation.

In the other churches, where things are going well, most participants said the reason things are going well is partly due to the processes that are in place, and partly because they have employed the right person, and there are good relationships between the lay worker and the leadership of the church. A number of them said everything is fine at the moment, but they are not sure what they would do if something went wrong, which required HR/legal expertise.

In one of the interviews, a participant shared an example from a church that wasn't part of this sample, where a lay worker had identified malpractice within the church. The person they observed doing something they believed was wrong was also their line manager. In that situation, the lay worker felt they had nowhere to go with their concern.

For the Synod

No meaningful data arose in the interviews relating to the limitations of this model for Synods.

2.5 Success factors that impact the effectiveness of church employed model, and additional support churches are drawing upon

This section outlines what we found that makes this model effective. We call these success factors.

Success factors

Level of knowledge within the church

Acknowledging this is with a relatively small sample size, the effectiveness of the employment seems to correlate pretty closely with the level of employment expertise within the church. The churches performing the best are those with more than one person with relevant expertise. The church which is struggling the most has very limited employment knowledge within the church.

Commitment and energy within the church

Because employing somebody properly takes a lot of time and effort, and because lay workers want the wider church to be actively engaged in the ministry area they are leading, the energy and commitment from the wider to the relevant ministry area makes a big difference. Where this is lacking, this can impact the effectiveness and the morale of the lay worker. The impression we got is that it works best when there is a genuine sense of partnership between the lay worker and the wider church. Things go less well when the lay worker feels that the church is merely outsourcing responsibility for a ministry area to them.

Personalities, relationships, and experience

Many participants said that the model is generally working, and often they attribute this to the people involved, the quality of relationship between the worker and others in the church (including the line manager), and the level of experience/competence of the worker. When a church has a gifted and motivated worker, and where the church is maintaining a 'good enough' system, things seem to work out pretty well.

It's interesting to note that the church where things are not working out so well (from the perspective of the lay worker and the leadership), that they had previously employed two lay workers and had not identified any problems. There hasn't been a significant change in the system, only in the employees. This suggests that a weak or insufficient system can be hidden by good relationships.

Additional support churches are drawing on

The following are the main places of support the churches were drawing on:

- The main external source of support churches are drawing from is their Synod. They have sought (and often received) help with areas such as template documents and policies (such as contracts and staff handbooks); drawing up a job description; mentoring and line management for the lay worker; ongoing support for those overseeing the employment; and access to training.
- The majority of these churches also have external help with payroll.
- A couple talked about using external employment-related websites, e.g. ACAS, DWP, .gov, etc.

Additional support these churches would appreciate from Synod/URC

The following are the main areas churches would appreciate more support in:

- Template documents e.g. contracts, staff handbook, policies, etc.
- HR/legal updates
- Access to an HR specialist as and when questions and issues arise
- Knowledge/assurance that they could get help from the Synod/denomination if things ever went wrong in the employment of a lay worker
- Guidelines for pay and pension contributions for lay workers
- Opportunity for lay workers to join the URC pension scheme
- Opportunities for specialist workers (e.g. pioneers, youth & children's workers) to learn from each other and find out about relevant training opportunities

- Some said it is helpful (or might be helpful) to get input from the Synod in the early stages of the process
- With funding being such a big issue, obviously every church would love to have money (or more money) from the Synod/denomination to be able to employ lay workers (though people recognise there is not infinite pot of money to draw from). Support with applying for grants would also be appreciated.

2.6 Summary/analysis of how this model appears to be working

Overall, this model seems to be working relatively well in the case studies we engaged with – especially for well-resourced churches, and where there is a good working relationship between the lay worker and the person/people responsible for line managing them. In order to employ well, churches benefit from support from the Synod, and all churches said they would like even more help (especially with HR updates and advice, and with relevant employment documents).

Local churches particularly like this model as they believe it gives them a greater degree of control and the ability to manage the worker, ensuring the worker remains focused on local mission and ministry needs.

The main limitations of this model are the amount of work that's involved for a local church, and there is a danger that even with an experienced team involved in the employment process, they may not be fully keeping up-to-date or following all the processes correctly.

2.7 Suggestions and recommendations for where this model might work best, and what could be done to strengthen and improve its use

Having listened carefully to what these five churches have told us; we suggest the following based on different church contexts:

For relatively well-resourced churches, where they have the energy, and employment/management expertise within the congregation or eldership, employing directly can be a good option. However, for this to be a sustainable option, to reduce the burden on local churches, and to ensure high standards of employment are maintained, we recommend increasing the support that is made available to local churches through Synods or the central denomination (as per the bullet-points in 2.5 'Additional support these churches would appreciate from Synod/URC').

The alternative model for these churches could be to employ lay workers through the Synod, but for the lay worker still to be viewed as the church's worker. If the church had assurance that they would maintain a high degree of control over the job role and day-to-day management of the lay worker, and if they were assured the worker would primarily be focused on ministry in their church and local area, they would likely be open to this model.

For less-well-resourced churches, participants universally agreed employment through the Synod would be the best option – though a couple of participants suggested they could explore employing a lay worker in partnership with other local churches.

For more senior level lay worker positions (e.g. church leader, consultative-type roles), direct employment through the church can work – but line management is best

done by somebody in the Synod. And care should be taken to avoid conflicts-of-interest.

Section 3 – The Synod-Employed Model

3.1 Summary of the three case study sites

We interviewed three people from each of the three Synod-employed sites: the lay worker, the line manager, and then a representative of the church or the Synod, who is in some way involved, but may or may not have line management or supervisory responsibility.

One of the lay workers is supporting a church through a transition period; one is involved in community outreach, and the other is a specialist youth and children's worker. Two of these workers are connected with a single church, and one is working across multiple churches.

Two of these workers are full-time, the other is part-time. All are on limited-term assignments (one-year, four-year, and five-year). Geographically, these sites are based in the North, the East, and the South-East. In each case, the lay worker is the first in this particular role.

None of these workers had an existing connection with the church/churches they are now working with.

3.2 How this model works (including similarities and differences across the sites)

All three of the lay workers are employed and line managed directly by the Synod, and in each case the Synod was proactive in offering or placing the worker in their location (in consultation with the local church(es)).

In addition to line management within the Synod, one of these lay workers also has a layer of line management within the local church they serve. One of the elders takes a lead on this, though decisions made by all of the elders affect the work the lay worker does or does not do.

The roles and the sites are all quite different from each other. One is a long-standing URC church; one is relatively new and ecumenical; and the other site is a collection of URC and LEP churches.

As opposed to the church-employed lay workers, who all had an existing local connection, the three lay workers employed by Synod all came from outside of the area (two of whom had no previous experience of URC churches).

3.3 The benefits of the Synod employed model for the worker, the church, and the Synod

This section outlines what we found about the benefits of the Synod employed model for three stakeholders involved: the worker, the church, and the Synod.

For the Worker

Freedom and trust

All of the lay workers employed this way shared how they felt trusted by their respective Synod to do their job well, and to make decisions. There was no sense of those within the Synod trying to control or restrict the work they are doing. This sentiment also came through when speaking to those in Synods who are responsible for employing and line managing workers: they are very happy to let the worker

experiment and make decisions, so long as it's activity broadly in line with the aim of their role.

Support and perspective beyond the local church

Being connected in with the Synod opens up a number of potential benefits for the lay worker.

As well as being supported by the line manager, they have other opportunities to connect with other practitioners or people with specific knowledge and experience. There are also regular gatherings where they can learn from and be supported by others, e.g. staff meetings and training events.

Others in the Synod – especially the line manager – offer perspective from a different vantage point than a worker might get within one local church. For instance, a worker in the Synod is able to see the lay worker in context, e.g. if a particular church the lay worker is involved with isn't functioning well, the Synod-based line manager is able to support the lay worker with that in mind.

Being employed by the Synod can also help the lay worker if they have some kind of disagreement with a local church or are wanting to say or do things that might challenge the current mindset or practice of the local church. Workers appreciate having somebody outside of their immediate work situation to speak to, and to be supported by.

It's also worth noting that two of the three lay workers said the fact they are not employed directly by the church made it easier for them to do things the church might not necessarily agree with, and they also felt more able to say things to a church that might be difficult.

More robust employment

Generally speaking, Synods are better placed when it comes to effective recruitment and employment, and there is more knowledge within the system. They are more likely to have up-to-date knowledge of employers' responsibilities, and to have the relevant policies and processes in place.

From the interviews with the church-employed participants, and from what some of the Synod-employed participants said, it seems that Synod-employed lay workers generally have better terms of employment than the church-employed ones. There were indications that Synod-employed workers have a slightly higher pay rate, and higher employer's pension contributions. As cited above, when asked what they thought the benefits of being employed by the Synod were, one lay worker instantly replied, 'pension contributions!'

As with the church-employed lay workers, all of these Synod-employed lay workers are on limited-term contracts. However, within the time the worker is employed, there is more security, because if something doesn't work out at a particular church/location, the Synod would be able to deploy them elsewhere.

For the Church

The contribution of a worker but with less responsibility

As was made clear in section 2 of this report, employing a lay worker is a huge responsibility for a church – requiring time, energy, expertise, and a degree of risk. By having the Synod employ the worker, the demands of employment are greatly diminished, and the financial and legal risks for the local church are much lower. In all three of these case studies, none of these positions would exist were they not being set up and funded by the Synod. Therefore, churches are getting help and/or increasing their ministry capacity that otherwise would not be an option.

Fresh perspective

Because lay workers often bring a wealth of knowledge and experience with them, the church gets to benefit of this. And as explained above, because the relationship between the worker and the church is slightly different when the church is not employing the worker, this can make it easier for the worker to do and say things that might otherwise be more difficult.

It's important to note church-employed workers can also bring a fresh perspective to a church community, but this is perhaps truer for Synod-employed workers, as they are more likely to have no previous connection with the church, and the safety of being employed by the Synod can make it easier for them to bring new ideas. This dynamic is of course impacted by the level of openness of the church to experiment and change.

Knowledge and support from the Synod throughout the whole process

In the instance where a lay worker is being recruited to work specifically with one church, but is employed through the Synod, the church benefits from the expertise and support of the Synod at every stage of the employment process (e.g. helping the church think through how the work will fit with their overall vision and strategy; drawing up the job description and person specification; being part of the interview and selection process; helping set up contracts; providing line management; etc.).

Church still maintains agency

One of the main things churches appreciate about employing workers directly is more control, and ensures the worker is focused on local mission and ministry. One of their biggest fears is that employment through the Synod would mean less control, as well as a more diffused role for the worker.

The views of those involved at the two sites where the lay worker is focused on one specific church may help to assure churches that have these concerns. In both instances, the churches still described having a high degree of agency in how the lay worker used their time and what they focused on. The churches and the lay workers themselves reported how the lay worker has been very focused on the needs and ministry of the particular church/area where they have been assigned.

As noted above, and in Section 2, Synods are not looking to dictate what churches do – they want to work in partnership with them, and to allow the local church to have vision for and be invested in the work that is taking place.

For the Synod

A more strategic role for Synods

As made clear above, Synods do not want to dictate what churches do. However, in a spirit of partnership, where Synods employ lay workers directly, they have more involvement in thinking about what kind of support might be needed in which areas, and they can play a role in working out the right kind of people to recruit (in collaboration with local churches). Synods are also well placed to be able to identify churches/areas not only where a lay worker might be effective, but also where that worker could be best supported.

A more positive role for Synods

Some participants also shared how this model provides Synods with a more positive role. Rather than primarily acting as the compliance people who might say 'no', they pivot to a more positive role where they are more able to say 'yes'.

Also, the more that a Synod is involved in the employment of lay workers, the more they are connected to ministry and mission taking place in local churches/areas. Synod workers get encouraged by hearing good news stories and also grow in wisdom as they hear what workers are learning on the ground.

All of this is likely to create a healthier and more positive relationship between churches and synods.

Problems detected earlier and dealt with more quickly

A helpful point made by one Synod worker was that when something goes wrong in the employment of a lay worker, the Synod is often invited to get involved anyway (generally when things have got to a point where the problems are serious). By the Synod employing the worker, it's easier for them to get upstream, detecting issues (or potential issues) early, and taking steps to deal with them – rather than waiting for the situation to deteriorate. They can also ensure local churches follow best practice in these times, helping them avoid potential relational and even legal fallout.

3.4 The limitations of the Synod employed model for the worker, the church, and the Synod

This section outlines what we found about the limitations of the Synod employed model for three stakeholders involved: the worker, the church, and the Synod.

For the Worker

Weaknesses in line management

Just as participants from the church-employed sites described issues with line management, so too did those employed by Synods. While one of the participants described the line management they are currently receiving as the best they have ever had, the workers and the line managers at the other sites highlighted some weaknesses. It seems that most of these weaknesses arise as a result of the physical distance between the Synod-based line manager, and the context the lay worker is working in.

Because the Synod-based line manager is not based on-site, especially when working for just one church, some lay workers have a level of line management that takes place within the local church (as was the case for one of these participants). This

means the lay worker's experience of the employment, and their ability to operate optimally is still impacted by the quality of line management provided by the local church. Therefore, issues surrounding a lack of support and/or freedom can still occur, as with the church-employed model.

As noted above, Synod line managers (at least in this sample) are doing a brilliant job of trusting lay workers and giving them space to get on with the work in hand. The flipside of this, however, is that this can also mean a lack of support for lay workers. Some lay workers and their line managers admitted that sometimes key information hasn't been shared, and the lay worker would have perhaps appreciated more overt support and more regular contact.

Again, linked to the distance from the worker, line managers based within the Synod have less of an idea what lay workers are actually doing day-to-day, and are therefore not always able to offer specific feedback or advice that the lay worker might want or need.

As was sometimes the case within the church-employed model, there isn't always total clarity on which line manager/supervisor is responsible for what. Two of these lay workers have two line managers. In both cases, the lay workers and the line managers weren't able to clearly articulate exactly who was responsible for what. Thankfully, in these situations, relationships between all parties are generally positive, and the lay workers themselves are proactive in making sure they communicate with both line managers. However, with different relational dynamics or individuals, this lack of clarity could lead to problems.

Time-limited employment

In all three cases, these lay workers are on limited contracts. So, while they feel secure in their employment within the agreed contracted time, they have no assurance what will happen beyond that. This lack of long-term assurance can leave lay workers feeling insecure about their future, wondering what will happen to them at the end of a funding cycle.

It also raises questions about the long-term sustainability of the work they are doing: if their contract is not renewed, what will happen to the projects they are working on, and the people they are working with?

Time-limited contracts are not uncommon for employees in other denominations. It might not be possible to change this reality within URC, but it is important to take into account how lay workers feel about them and their potential limitations.

For the Church

In all of these cases, were it not for the Synod employing and funding the role, none of these positions would exist. It's important to read the limitations for churches in light of that.

Potential misalignment between church and Synod

Generally speaking, these employment situations are working out well, and churches are generally positive about the employment. However, in all three instances, there were hints of at least some misalignment between the expectations of the church and of the Synod.

Despite the Synod's and the lay worker's best efforts to communicate clearly with churches, some churches had failed to grasp the nature of the work the lay worker would be involved in, and the way the relationship between the church and the lay worker would work (this was especially true in the case where the lay worker was working across multiple churches).

At another site, the church is totally happy with and grateful for the work the lay worker has been doing – but they did say before the lay worker arrived, they weren't entirely sure what the lay worker would be doing, and how the relationship would work.

At the other site, the church and the Synod had different views on exactly what the lay worker's role should be, and what their job title should be. The Synod allowed the church to make the final decision, but, in hindsight, both the Synod and the church representative think this probably wasn't the right decision.

Slightly less control for the church

As described in section 2, churches value being able to maintain control over who they employ, and what for. In these three cases, levels of control vary. Generally speaking, lay workers and Synods are very flexible, and they want to work in partnership with local churches. However, having the lay worker employed by the Synod can reduce the level of control a church has over the type of lay worker they get, and what the lay worker will focus on.

Possibility of less 'buy-in' from local churches

This point is essentially the inverse of what was described in section 2. Where churches haven't set up the employment, aren't contributing financially, and perhaps where the idea for employing the lay worker didn't come from them, there can be less buy-in from the wider church (even where the elders might be fully committed to the employment).

This highlights the importance of doing lots of groundwork with local churches (not just with the elders) before a lay worker is deployed.

For the Synod

Workload and responsibility

Obviously, the reduction in workload, responsibility, expense, and risk for the church means an increase in all of those for the Synod. Workers within the Synod are also often busy people, with numerous responsibilities. Communicating effectively with churches, providing effective line management, and keeping up with all of the administration of employing somebody takes a considerable amount of time and energy. Synod workers who are taking on these responsibilities do not find it easy.

Value not guaranteed

Synods that invest in lay workers want to see effective, fruitful, and long-term ministry result from the employment of lay workers. There are lots of variables that effect outcomes, with one of those variables being the role local churches play, not just in supporting the lay worker, but also joining in the work. Synods and lay workers can encourage this but not force it. The 'success' of these initiatives is still dependent on local church communities.

3.5 Success factors that impact the effectiveness of the Synod employed model, and additional support Synods are drawing upon

This section outlines what we found that makes this model effective. We call these success factors.

Success factors

The relationship between the Synod and the churches

At the two sites where the Synod-employed lay worker is working with a single church, the relationship between church and the Synod is positive. Those we interviewed highlighted this is being significant for how decisions get made, and how they can ensure good employment for the lay worker, and positive outcomes for the ministry of the church.

At the site where the lay worker was working alongside a number of churches, there is a lot of relationship building and communicating to be done between the Synod and the lay worker, and the various churches. The Synod and the lay worker recognise how important this is, and they are working hard to build these links. Again, where deeper trust, alignment, and connection is built, more effective ministry can take place within and through these churches. And where these relationships are weaker, it makes it harder for the lay worker and the church to collaborate.

The degree to which the lay worker is integrated into the Synod

At two of the sites, the lay worker seems to be well-integrated within the Synod: they have a strong relationship with line managers, and they are part of Synod meetings and events. At the other site, although the lay worker and the line manager have a good relationship, the lay worker hasn't been integrated into the life of the Synod.

They hadn't met many people within the Synod, didn't know what training or support was available to them, isn't clear on how certain processes work, and was not invited to Synod gatherings. This was a weakness acknowledged by both the lay worker and the line manager.

Wider awareness and support within the Synod

Synods cover large geographical areas, and there are all kinds of things going on within them. It's understandable, therefore, that beyond the line manager, the wider Synod might not know much about a lay worker, and the work they are involved in. In one of these cases, the line manager was on long-term leave and the lay worker, and the church representative said they had little or no support from the Synod during that time.

Therefore, it seems important that at least one or two other people with the Synod, who are not the lay worker's line manager, should have at least some awareness of the situation, and be able to step in if the line manager is away for any extended period of time.

Additional support Synods are drawing on

As with the church-employed model, to employ lay workers well, Synods are also drawing on additional support.

- Levels of HR knowledge and capacity appear to vary from Synod to Synod. The three synods involved in these case studies have relied on a combination of

expertise and support from Church House and/or professional HR support services, in order to set up and maintain compliance with employment law and best practice. One Synod specifically mentioned using an HR app. There appears to be a certain amount of duplication taking place, which probably isn't necessary, given that employment law and best practice is consistent across the UK.

- At least one of these Synods uses an external payroll service.
- Depending on the job role, Synods may still be relying on local churches to provide some kind of supervision/line management for lay workers. This might be a feature, not a bug – but it is worth acknowledging that it is still a role for the local church to play.

3.6 Summary/analysis of how this model appears to be working

These case studies show that employing lay workers through the Synod can work well – creating roles that otherwise would not (and often could not) exist. Lay workers get the benefit of the support and wider perspective of the Synod, and quite possibly be better compensated for their work. In these cases, they all described situations where their Synod gives them freedom to use their initiative and experiment.

Churches benefit from an increased level of support from the Synod. Most significantly, churches take on less responsibility and risk than if they were to employ directly, while still benefiting from the insight and capacity a lay worker brings. This model has positive implications for Synods, giving them enhanced links to local ministry. It also makes it more possible for Synods to ensure workers are being employed well, and that all legal employment requirements are met.

This model is not without its limitations though. The distance between where the lay worker is based, and where the line manager is can make effective line management more challenging. Within this, lay workers might feel they are not adequately supported, and/or they need to have some level of supervision or line management at a local church level, the quality of which depends on the character and skill of that local person.

It can also be hard to find alignment between local churches and the Synod regarding what the worker should focus on, and how they should spend their time. And where churches don't invest time and money in a lay worker, they may not value or support them as much as if they had employed them directly.

This model also requires a lot of time, energy, and resource within the Synod.

3.7 Suggestions and recommendations for where the Synod employed model might work best, and how to strengthen it

For churches that lack the skills and capacity to employ directly, this model is almost certainly the best option. It enables such churches to benefit from the skills and capacity of a lay worker, without the responsibility of employing them.

For churches that do have the capacity to employ directly but still find employing lay workers is a drain on their energy and resources, employing through Synod could be a helpful option. However, there would need to be clear agreements between the church and the Synod regarding the focus of the role, how decisions about the lay worker get made, who takes responsibility for what, and how the line management of

the lay worker will operate. If local churches had assurances around the lay worker's level of connection and commitment to local ministry, and felt they had adequate decision-making powers, more would be open to this model of employment.

Recommendations to strengthen this model

The following are recommendations based on the research to strengthen the model. We recognise that CLR shared services workstream is already engaging with many of these recommendations.

1. Ensure a strong induction process for lay workers, which includes introductions to the people and systems of the Synod.
2. In cases where there is more than one line manager, clarify which manager is responsible for what. Also ensure there is a back-up plan if the Synod-based line manager needs to take extended time off.
3. Ensure Synod workers, who are responsible for setting up and overseeing employment and line management have enough time to focus on this aspect of their work. It takes a lot of time and energy.
4. Take time early in the process to build trust and alignment between the Synod and the local church/churches. This will help build stronger working relationships between the two and increase the likelihood that the employment will be successful.
5. Think long-term. Whether it is some kind of pioneering, community, or children & youth work, these things take time to develop – and Synods and churches want to see these being fruitful over the long-term. It's important to look ahead beyond the 3-5 years that a lay worker might be initially employed for. What is the plan beyond that?
6. Consider increasing HR capacity within the URC as a whole and make this available to Synods. This could include template documents and processes, such as contracts and handbooks. Synods would also benefit from having an HR expert they could speak to, ask questions of, and get advice. Presently, Synods are duplicating work and paying for support from different HR services.

Section 4 – Main Themes Across All Interviews

The previous two sections outlined the themes that emerged in relation to each specific model. Throughout the interviews, themes arose that related to both models, and to the employment of lay workers more generally. We summarise these here.

4.1 Line management

Clarity

Within both models, there were examples where there is more than one line manager, but there was a lack of clarity regarding the role each line manager does and does not play. Often, lay workers have more than one person officially line managing them, and they sometimes have other people they feel have some influence over their work, or to whom they are accountable (e.g. elders, management groups, etc.). In the interviews, lay workers and line managers weren't always able to clearly articulate who is responsible for what. Lay workers would benefit from greater clarity here.

Distance

In both models, participants want to have somebody local to line manage/supervise them and their work. At the same time, they expressed how it's helpful to have somebody outside the situation they can talk to regarding how they are doing, and challenges they are facing.

However, the two lay workers who are working at a more senior level within a local church both agreed their line management is best done at the Synod level. They did not think it was helpful or appropriate to have somebody in the congregation playing that role.

Training

In a number of cases, lay workers and their line managers articulated deficiencies in the strength of the line management that's currently happening. Sometimes line managers aren't offering strong enough accountability, support, and challenge. Others are perhaps not giving the worker enough freedom to make decisions and get on with the work.

Two Ministers, who provide line management, recognise that they had perhaps not been adequately trained for this aspect of their work, and that it wasn't primarily what they had gone into ordained ministry to do. We suggest more robust training, as well as ongoing support for line managers might be worth considering. Perhaps it's also worth asking in each situation if the Minister is the best placed person to line manage the lay worker, or if they actually are willing to take on this responsibility – especially in multi-church or complex pastorates.

Time and energy

All of the line managers agreed that managing well takes a lot of time and energy. With many other competing demands on their time, they don't always feel they are able to execute this function as well as they might.

4.2 Importance of clarity and 'buy-in' before the employment begins

When we asked participants what their advice would be regarding the employment of lay workers, almost all of them talked about the importance of clarity: what is the vision and mission of the church/churches, and how does this role help to fulfil that?

The fact so many of them talked about the importance of having this clarity highlights its significance. It also shows that most people know this. The challenge therefore is not in helping people to recognise this as something important, but to help them ensure they actually take the appropriate steps from the outset. Participants also talked about the importance of clarifying and agreeing processes early on.

Participants on both sides also talked about the potential danger of churches 'outsourcing' an area of ministry to a lay worker, rather than seeing the lay worker as somebody who would help to lead and facilitate the wider church to participate in that aspect of mission or ministry. While this is a danger for either model, based on the case studies within this report, this issue appears more likely in instances where the employment of the lay worker hasn't been instigated by the local church, and/or where the church has no active investment in the lay worker.

4.3 HR law and best practice

Employment law and best practice requires up-to-date knowledge that is both broad and deep. Whether the employer is the church or the Synod, ensuring correct processes and policies are in place and followed is not easy – especially as laws and best practice are continually evolving. Across the interviews, we observed a lot of duplication in work taking place, e.g. churches and Synods developing whole new documents from scratch, such as contracts and handbooks.

Participants within both models agreed that it would be helpful to have more support with HR. The main support they would value includes:

- Access to high quality template documents and policies
- Periodic updates on employment law and best practice
- An HR specialist they can talk to, as situations and questions arise.

4.4 Freedom, control, and support

A helpful aspect of the research process has been having conversations with people involved with both models, and with people at a local church and at a Synod level. Having listened carefully to all parties, there appears to be a gap between assumptions churches might make about Synods, and the reality of how Synods actually operate.

Something that really matters to local churches and their leaders is having the ability to discern what they think God is wanting them to do and then having the freedom to decide to fulfil that vision. If part of that plan involves employing a lay worker, they believe employing the worker directly gives them much more control over who that worker will be, and what that worker will do. The churches who employ directly suspect that if they were to employ a worker through the Synod, the Synod might set goals for the worker, which do not align with the goals of the church. They also think the worker will be less committed to the church and local area, and that the Synod would probably want the worker to be spread over a number of churches.

However, at the two Synod-employed sites where the worker is connected with just one church, the churches have not felt that the Synod have been over-directive about what the worker does, and the Synod have been happy for the worker to be connected with just one church.

Equally, in the examples where the church employs the worker directly, but the Synod is either part or whole-funding the role, the Synod have not been overly prescriptive regarding how the lay worker should use their time – they allow the church to make these decisions.

When we interviewed Synod workers, they expressed no desire to control the day-to-day activities of lay workers; they just want to make sure that the church has a clear vision, that the work of the lay worker fits within that vision, and that the lay worker is supported and employed to a high standard.

On the evidence of this research, Synods respect the decision-making power of local churches, and where it's appropriate, they are happy for a lay worker to work within just one church.

Where this reality can be highlighted and guaranteed, local churches would be more open to employing lay workers through the Synod.

4.5 Concerns about having sufficient support if things go wrong

Frequently in the interviews, when participants were talking about the model they were using and how it was going, they would often wonder out loud what would happen 'if it all goes wrong'.

Many of them say that things are currently going well, but some referred to historical examples where employment hadn't worked out, or they knew of other local churches where the employment had gone very badly.

What churches and lay workers want to be assured of, is that if there is a problem, there is somewhere they can turn to get help.

4.6 Good relationships can hide weaknesses in the system

From our perspective, it was heartening to see the warmth and depth of relationships between many of these lay workers and the churches and Synods they work in. It was also encouraging to see the level of commitment and competence within lay workers, so far as we could observe, and it was described by those who see their work. However, these positive relationships and competent workers can sometimes hide weaknesses in the employment arrangement.

For example, one lay worker described how they effectively have two line managers, but they are not sure which one is responsible for which aspects of their work. But because they get on well with both line managers, and because they are proactive, they say things always work out well and there haven't been any problems. This lay worker made it clear that the situation would probably not be working out so well if they were less proactive, and/or if they did not have such a good relationship with their two line managers.

At another site, the three participants described a less positive situation, where the employment is not working out so well. In this instance, the system had remained relatively stable over time – but the people involved (the line managers and the workers) had changed. Though the situation had been satisfactory in the past, that is not the case in the present. This suggests that the system was probably not robust

before, but this was not identified because of positive relationships between the lay workers and the line manager/church leadership.

4.7 Parity of remuneration, benefits, and stability of employment

As described in section 2, some involved in the church-employed model think that lay workers might not be paid as well as those employed by the Synod, and that they are likely to receive lower employers' pension contributions.

From the Synod-employed participants, one wondered if there would have been housing provision if they were employed by a local church, rather than by the Synod. Across both models, none of these workers had permanent, open-ended employment – they are all on time-limited contracts. While recognising this reduces long-term risk to churches and synods, it does create less stable employment for lay workers.

As above, time-limited contracts are not uncommon for employees in other denominations. It might not be possible to change this reality within URC, but it is important to know how lay workers feel about them and the limitations of this type of contract.

4.8 Recommendations based on overall themes

Based on these overall themes, Eido would offer the following recommendations:

1. In every employment situation, ensure that the lay worker and all involved in employing them, have clarity on who the line manager/managers is/are, and what the line manager(s) is and is not responsible for.
2. Where line managers are not based at the site where the lay worker conducts their main activities, ensure regular contact. Where appropriate, set up local line management/supervision, with clarity about who is responsible for what.
3. Strengthen training for anyone within the URC who has line management responsibilities (whether elders, Ministers, or Synod workers).
4. Ensure those with line management responsibilities are given sufficient time and space to exercise this function well.
5. Boost HR support for churches and Synods³
 - a. Access to high-quality template documents and policies
 - b. Periodic updates on employment law best practice
 - c. Increase access to HR specialists within the URC.
6. Communicate clearly to churches the benefits of employing lay workers through the Synod, making it clear the level of freedom and control they will maintain.
7. To the extent that it's possible, encourage churches to make best use of the knowledge and support within their Synod, as it relates to recruiting and employing lay workers.
8. To the extent that it's possible, encourage churches to invite the Synod to support them where problems with employment are beginning to arise, rather than waiting until they reach crisis point.
9. Be mindful that just because a situation seems to be going well, it doesn't mean that the system is robust. It's possible for good relationships to hide weaknesses in the system.
10. Produce remuneration and benefits guidelines for all parties within the URC, who may employ lay workers.

³ We are aware that this issue is currently being explored by the CLR shared services workstream.

Section 5 – Summary and conclusion

Based on the case studies included in this research, it appears that both the church-employed model and the Synod-employed model can work well – though context is important. Both models have their strengths and limitations, and both could be strengthened by implementing the recommendations in sections 2.7, 3.7, and 4.8.

Generally speaking, most participants did not have a strong ideological attachment to one model or the other, though participants from some churches did express a preference for employing lay workers directly. This was largely because they felt employing directly gave them a greater level of control and would mean the lay worker would be more committed to them and their local community. However, most said that if there was a clear agreement between the church and the Synod regarding the commitment of the lay worker, and how the lay worker would be managed, these participants were much more open to the possibility of employing through the Synod.

The church-employed model was working relatively well in most of these cases, though in one instance, participants acknowledged it wasn't working particularly well. This model can only really work where churches are well resourced. They need members or elders with the time, management skills, and knowledge to employ people well. They also need the financial resources, whether these come from within the church, Synod, external grants, or a combination of these.

All of the churches employing directly talked about how much work it was. They also have some risk concerns regarding what would happen if one or two key members or elders were no longer part of the church, and what would happen if something went wrong with the employment.

The main thing these churches would like are access to relevant employment documents and policies, easy access to an HR specialist, and to know that there will be support from the Synod/URC if things go wrong.

The Synod-employed model also seemed to be working well, though it is not without its challenges. The biggest being the challenge of the employer and line manager being based away from where the lay worker is day-to-day. However, a huge benefit of this model is the reduction in workload and risk for a local church, while still enjoying the benefit of having a lay worker.

A list of recommendations for strengthening this model can be found in section 3.7. The key issues to address are around how the lay worker can be most effectively line managed, and the communication and relationship between the Synod and local churches.

Regardless of the model, the seven themes outlined in sections 4.1-4.7 are critical to pay attention to for lay workers and/or those who employ and manage them. The CLR is already aware of and working on solutions for some of these, while others are new to this research.

We hope that making these findings available to churches and Synods will help them develop wisdom and awareness as they seek to offer good employment to lay workers in the process of strengthening and building local URC churches.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary table of factors to consider based on different church situations

The following table summarises sections 2.7 and 3.7 to enable Synods and local churches to quickly see what they should know or consider depending on some relevant factors identified in the research.

Situation	Church-employed model	Synod-employed model
Well-resourced church	• Capable of offering good employment • Challenge of high workload for the church • Challenge of keeping up to date with employment law and best practice • Need to consider plan if one or two key elders were no longer part of the church • Benefits from support from Synod	• Capable of offering good employment • Lowers workload for local church • Can lower risk for local church • Challenge of having line manager removed from lay worker's context • Need to assure church of their agency and the commitment of the worker to that local church
Lower-resourced church	• Not recommended: unlikely church will be able to set up and manage effective employment	• Synod able to set up and help manage effective employment • Church will still need to offer support to the lay worker and some level of supervision • Important to establish alignment between the Synod and the church
Employing senior roles (e.g. church leader, change consultant)	• Can work well as a model • Best to have line management outside of the church • Important to recognise possible power dynamics and avoid potential conflicts of interest	• Can help to mitigate potentially difficult dynamics and conflicts of interest • Provides sense of support for the lay worker if they need to make difficult/unpopular decisions • Important to agree and communicate expectations with the church

Appendix 2: Draft toolkit of resources Synods and churches may find helpful in employing lay workers well

Eido are not HR specialists and therefore the following list is not intended or able to be a legal or best practice tool kit for employment of lay workers. However, it may be a helpful list of the tools and specific support that churches and synods may value based on the evidence of this research.

1. Make available template forms, policies, documents etc. required for employing a lay worker e.g.
 - a. Employment contract
 - b. Employee handbook
 - c. Policies and processes (such as sickness, booking leave, grievances, etc.)
 - d. Holiday forms.
2. Enhanced training for line managers (whether church- or Synod-based).
3. Regular updates for Synods and churches outlining changes to employment law, and updates on best practice.
4. Access to an HR specialist for churches and Synods, to provide advice for all stages and possible occurrences of employment (e.g. recruitment, setting up the employment, managing the employment, disciplinary processes, ending/terminating employment, etc.).
5. Process of support for churches that they could get help from the Synod/denomination if things ever went wrong in the employment of a lay worker.
6. Role-specific guidelines for pay and pension contributions for lay workers.
7. Process for church-employed lay workers to join the URC pension scheme.
8. Processes for specialist workers (e.g. pioneers, youth & children's workers) to learn from each other and find out about relevant training opportunities.
9. Guidelines for churches and synods, to help them communicate well in the early stages of thinking about employing a lay worker.
10. Induction checklist for Synods and local churches for hiring church-based lay workers.
11. Templates for strategic or long-term thinking before employing a lay worker. If a lay worker is being employed on a three or even a five-year contract, what is the hope/plan beyond that time?
12. FAQs to communicate benefits to local churches of employing through Synod to provide reassurance regarding fears they might have.
13. Processes for a more 'joined up' option for providing payroll services. Currently different churches and synods are using a range of payroll services.