More than 700 young adults have taken part in the Ministry Experience Scheme since it was founded by the Church of England a decade ago.
A year-long placement programme set up a decade ago to give young adults experience of ministry has played a key role in the Church’s drive to be younger and more diverse, the Archbishop of York has said.

Archbishop Stephen Cottrell said more than 700 people have taken part so far in the Church of England’s Ministry Experience Scheme since it was set up in 2013.

They have been ‘richly blessed’ by this experience, he told a General Synod fringe meeting, and this has helped them to understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

“I am really proud that for the first time ever the Church of England has very clearly stated that what it wants to be is younger and more diverse, and I am really proud of the clarity of that ambition and hope, rooted as it is in our understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what God wants his Church to be,” he said.

“One of the ways that this has been expressed over the last 10 years is through the Ministry Experience Scheme.”

The scheme which accepts people aged between 18 and 30 years old has grown from 14 in its first intake to 91 starting this year, with nearly half its participants women, and 27% from UK minority Ethnic backgrounds in the current intake.

Those taking part gain a range of experience from preaching to chaplaincy work to running social action projects and hospice and hospital visiting.

Around one in three participants go on to seek training for ordained ministry while nearly all – 97% - report having found the scheme helpful to discern their vocation in life.

The scheme is starting a new Future Youth placement specialising in children, youth and family ministry, with six pilot dioceses due to start work on this in September.

The Bishop of Jarrow, Sarah Clark, Chair of the Ministry Experience Steering Group, said the scheme had contributed to an increase in vocations to ordination together with the lowering of the age of those being ordained in the Diocese of Durham.

But she added: “I am conscious that some of the young people coming through MES become clearer in their understanding that their calling is not to be ordained, It is to teaching or working in the care sector, or nursing or however God is drawing them, but God is calling everyone to a way of working and a way of life that is shaped by being followers of Jesus.”

Rev Jenny Ingram, now vicar of All Saints Church, Earls Barton in the Diocese of Peterborough, is a past participant of MES.

She said: “I did MES in 2014, at that stage I had a calling to ministry but didn’t have any practical experience of what it would be like to be part of a church leadership team. MES was super because it gave me the chance to do that.”

Rev Selwyn Cush-Etter, who completed the scheme at St Paul’s Church, Shadwell, in London’s East End, said: “MES was definitely the right step for
me following my years as a primary school teacher.

"I was initially looking for a job full-time in a church, but I realised that if I had taken a role in church, I would not have had the variety of opportunities, space and time to reflect and discern more of who I am and what God has called me to do."

More information on the Ministry Experience Scheme can be found on the Church of England website.

Photo credit: Sam Atkins/Church of England