

# Fresh Expressions of Church: State of Play

A detailed account of fresh expressions of Church data received through Statistics for Mission returns

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Published 2021 by Research and Statistics

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# Fresh expressions of Church within Statistics for Mission returns

## Introduction

The Church of England's Research and Statistics team has been collecting data on fresh expressions of Church (fxCs) since 2010, as part of the annual Statistics for Mission survey. This report presents the most detailed analysis of these fxC data to date. Here, we present an analysis of data from 2014 onwards, over which period the questions asked about fxCs have been almost unchanged, and we present a detailed focus on 2019, the most recent year for which we have data.

## Data Collection

The annual Statistics for Mission survey measures key aspects of participation throughout the Church of England. We ask all of the almost 16,000 churches within the Church of England to report a variety of information including church attendances, baptisms, marriages and funerals over the year. In 2019 we received data from 89% of churches. More details of the methodology and dataset are in the 2019 Statistics for Mission report, which can be found on the Research and Statistics team's website.

As part of the Statistics for Mission survey, we ask churches to report on fxCs that are supported by their church. We ask churches the names and descriptions of any fxCs they support, how frequently they meet, where they are held, the age group(s) that they are aimed at, and the regularity with which attenders at the fxC attend other services at the church. Some fxCs choose to provide an individual Statistics for Mission return rather than be included as part of another church's return.

Churches report attendance at fxCs each year as part of the "October count", which asks for the number of people attending church services, fxCs, and services for schools, on Sundays and midweek, during the first four weeks of October. From these figures we calculate an "average weekly attendance", defined as the total attendance at church services and fxCs over all four Sundays and four midweek periods in the October count, divided by four, and an "average Sunday attendance", defined analogously. We ask those people filling in the form, as far as possible, not to count the same person multiple times in the same week. So, filled out correctly, someone who attends church on a Sunday and attends a midweek fxC in the same week will only be included in the Sunday church attendance. Therefore fxC attendance values in this report should be thought of as "additional attendance", i.e. those people who attended an fxC but not a "traditional" church service in the same week. People who attended both "traditional" church services and fxCs in the same week will generally not be included in the fxC attendance figures reported here – we recognise, however, that avoiding double counting is not always possible.

If a church supports multiple fxCs, fxC attendance is not reported separately for each fxC; this is to try to reduce the reporting burden on those filling in the Statistics for Mission return, and is similar to the way that attendances at Morning Prayer and Evensong, for example, are not reported separately.

It should be noted that over time the guidance offered within Statistics for Mission around the definition and recording of fxCs has been improved, so it may be that some of the changes presented here are due to better reporting of fxC data in Statistics for Mission.

## Estimation for non-responding churches

To compare the total number of and attendance at fxCs over multiple years with differing response rates, we have scaled up the relevant figures to account for churches that did not provide a return. We have done this based on the usual Statistics for Mission methodology, by which we estimate attendance and participation at churches that do not submit a return in order to provide national and diocesan figures. Further details are available on request.

## Summary

### Number of fresh expressions of Church

- Data from Statistics for Mission indicate that there were around 9,100 fresh expressions of Church (fxCs) in 2019. The number of fxCs has increased over recent years - the figure for 2019 is 25% larger than the one recorded in 2014 (7,300 fxCs).
- A large proportion of dioceses (64%) have statistically significantly growing numbers of fxCs, and just under 80% of dioceses had at least 10% more fxCs in 2019 than in 2014.
- Three dioceses had 10% fewer fxCs in 2019 than in 2014, but in none of them was the fall statistically significant.
- A high turnover of fxCs is to be expected; alongside the new fxCs that start each year, around 1,200 fxCs stopped running between 2018 and 2019.

### Attendance at fresh expressions of Church

- Data from Statistics for Mission indicate that the additional average weekly attendance at fxCs (not including attendees who also attend “traditional” church) was 49,000 people in 2019. This represents 6% of the total average weekly attendance at church services and fresh expressions of Church. The additional average weekly attendance at fxCs has increased over recent years – the figure for 2019 is 11% larger than the one recorded in 2014 (44,000 people).
- Children made up 40% (20,000 people) of the additional average weekly attendance at fxCs in 2019.
- Around a quarter of dioceses (26%) have statistically significantly growing additional average weekly attendance at fxCs, with just under half of dioceses (48%) having at least 10% larger additional average weekly attendance at fxCs in 2019 than in 2014.
- Around a quarter of dioceses (26%) had additional average weekly attendance at fxCs that was 10% smaller in 2019 than in 2014. In two of these dioceses the fall was statistically significant.

### Fresh expressions of Church details, 2019

- Around 70% of fxCs meet monthly or more frequently than that, with 40% of fxCs meeting weekly.
- Over half (53%) of fxCs are at least sometimes held in church, with many others meeting in church halls and schools.
- 42% of fxCs are not aimed at any specific age group but are open to all ages. 16% of fxCs are aimed solely at young people (under 18).
- Three quarters (75%) of fxCs reported that at least some of the people attending never attend any other form of church.

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# Number of fresh expressions of Church

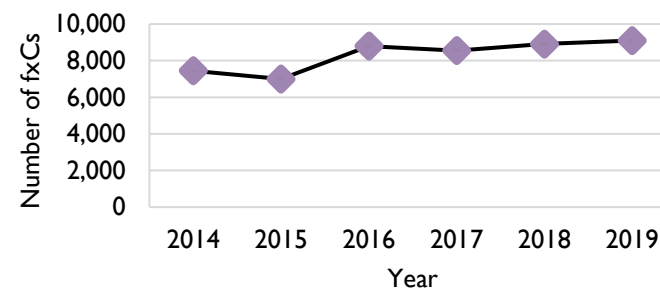
## Trends in numbers of fresh expressions of Church

As can be seen in both Table 1 and Figure 1, Statistics for Mission data indicate that there were 9,100 fxCs in 2019. This represents a 25% increase since 2014. The number of fxCs shows a statistically significant positive linear trend over time ( $p < .01$ ), which indicates that the number of fxCs is increasing.

Table 1. Number of fxCs, 2014-2019.

Year	Number of fxCs
2019	9,100
2018	8,900
2017	8,500
2016	8,800
2015	7,000
2014	7,300

Figure 1. Number of fxCs, 2014-2019.



## Diocesan breakdown, 2019

Across the Church of England there are an average of 0.58 fxCs per church. A diocesan breakdown of the number of fxCs per church can be seen in Table 2.

33 dioceses (79%) had at least 10% more fxCs in 2019 than in 2014. 27 dioceses (64%) show a statistically significant positive linear trend ( $p < .01$ ) over the last five years. Three dioceses (7%) had a decrease of at least 10% in their number of fxCs between 2014 and 2019. None of these had a statistically significant negative linear trend.

## Fresh expressions of Church that stopped running between 2018 and 2019

Arguably, one of the strengths of fxCs is that they are more flexible than “traditional” church. New fxCs can be developed to meet changing local needs. Alongside the launch of new fxCs, of course, are some fxCs that do not continue from year to year. A detailed analysis of the Statistics for Mission dataset suggests that from 2018 to 2019 approximately 1,200 fxCs stopped running.

More detail about the fxCs that stopped running can be found in the Fresh Expressions Lifecycle Survey report<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Fresh Expressions Lifecycle Survey*, written by Dr Samuel Nunney, Church of England Research and Statistics Unit, available from <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/fresh-expressions/what-greenhouse/helpful-resources-alongside-greenhouse>

Table 2. Diocesan breakdown of the number of fxCs, 2019

Diocese	Number of fxCs	fxCs per church
Bath & Wells	250	0.45
Birmingham	160	0.88
Blackburn	200	0.72
Bristol	190	0.92
Canterbury	220	0.60
Carlisle	170	0.51
Chelmsford	370	0.63
Chester	240	0.71
Chichester	270	0.56
Coventry	160	0.68
Derby	180	0.56
Durham	220	0.82
Ely	270	0.81
Exeter	250	0.42
Gloucester	220	0.58
Guildford	210	1.00
Hereford	170	0.43
Leicester	160	0.50
Lichfield	380	0.69
Lincoln	190	0.30
Liverpool	380	1.59
London	270	0.56

Diocese	Number of fxCs	fxCs per church
Manchester	140	0.43
Newcastle	140	0.60
Norwich	240	0.37
Oxford	440	0.54
Peterborough	190	0.50
Portsmouth	80	0.50
Rochester	180	0.71
St. Albans	190	0.45
St. Edms & Ipswich	210	0.45
Salisbury	330	0.58
Sheffield	160	0.78
Sodor and Man	20	0.46
Southwark	250	0.71
Southwell & Nottingham	210	0.69
Truro	170	0.56
Winchester	230	0.65
Worcester	190	0.68
York	250	0.43
Europe	50	0.30
Leeds	350	0.58
<b>Church of England</b>	<b>9,100</b>	<b>0.58</b>

## Attendance at fresh expressions of Church

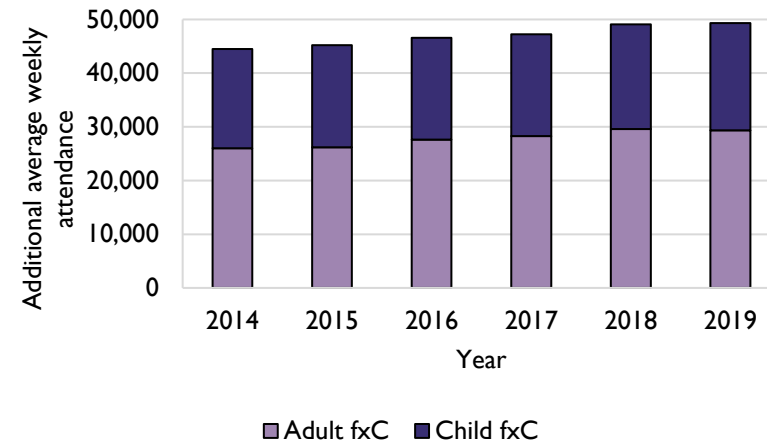
### Trends in attendance at fresh expressions of Church

When attendance figures are collected, those people filling in the form are asked not to double-count attendees. This means that if someone attends a Sunday church service and a midweek fxC in the same week, that person should not be counted in the fxC attendance section. Therefore, all attendances reported here should be thought of as additional average weekly attendance, excluding people who have already attended another church service that week.

Table 3. Additional average weekly attendance at fxCs, 2014-2019, and the fxC percentage of the total average weekly attendance (church and fxC attendance).

Year	Additional average weekly attendance at fxCs	% of total average weekly attendance
2019	49,000	6%
2018	49,000	6%
2017	47,000	5%
2016	47,000	5%
2015	45,000	5%
2014	44,000	5%

Figure 2. Additional average weekly attendance at fxCs, 2014-2019, split into adults and children.



As can be seen in Table 3 and Figure 2, the additional average weekly attendance at fxCs in 2019 was 49,000 people per week. 29,000 of this attendance comes from adult attendance while 20,000 comes from child attendance.

Between 2014 and 2019 fxC attendance rose by 11%. This is a statistically significant positive linear trend over time ( $p < .01$ ), which indicates that additional average weekly attendance at fxCs is increasing. Compared to the 11% growth in additional fxC attendance, the total average weekly attendance (including church services and fxCs) fell by 12% over the same time period.

Additional average weekly attendance at fxCs contributed 6% of the total average weekly attendance at church services and fxCs in 2019.

A further contrast between additional fxC attendance and attendance figures more generally comes from the percentage of children. In 2019, the percentage of children in the additional fxC attendance was 40%. In same year, the percentage of children in the total average weekly attendance (including church services and fxCs) was 14%.



## Diocesan breakdown, 2019

The diocesan breakdown for additional average weekly attendance at fxCs in 2019, and the percentage contribution of additional attendance at fxCs to the diocesan total average weekly attendance (including church services and fxCs) can be seen in Table 4.

20 dioceses (48%) had an increase of at least 10% in the additional average weekly attendance at fxCs between 2014 and 2019. 11 dioceses (26%) had a statistically significant positive linear trend ( $p < .01$ ). 11 dioceses (26%) had a decrease of at least 10% in the additional average weekly attendance at fxCs between 2014 and 2019. Two of these (5% of all dioceses) had a statistically significant decrease.

Additional average weekly attendance at fxCs contributed 4% of the total average adult weekly attendance in 2019, and 19% of the total child average weekly attendance. A few dioceses have unusually large fxC contributions to their attendance:

- The Diocese of Carlisle had 42% of its child attendance within fxCs. This is in large part due to Network Youth Church, which had almost 400 children attending each week (in addition to large numbers of young adults). This fxC accounted for 50% of all additional child attendance within fxCs and 22% of all child attendance in the diocese.
- The Diocese of Hereford had 47% of its child attendance within fxCs. This is in large part due to Open the Book groups. In this diocese 16 churches reported Open the Book as one of their fxCs, and these 16 churches between them reported almost 350 children attending fxCs each week. This group of churches accounted for 55% of all additional child attendance within fxCs and 25% of all child attendance in the diocese.
- The Diocese of Worcester had 40% of its child attendance within fxCs. This is in large part due to Open the Book groups. In this diocese 16 churches reported Open the Book as one of their fxCs, and these 16 churches between them reported over 300 children attending fxCs each week. This group of churches accounted for 55% of all additional child attendance within fxCs and 22% of all child attendance in the diocese.

Table 4. Diocesan breakdown of the additional average weekly attendance at fxCs in 2019, split into adult and child attendance (with the percentage of the total diocesan weekly attendance, including church services and fxCs, in parentheses).

Diocese	Total fxC att.	Adult fxC att.	Child fxC att.
Bath & Wells	950 (5%)	600 (4%)	350 (13%)
Birmingham	1,000 (7%)	600 (5%)	400 (19%)
Blackburn	1,100 (5%)	650 (4%)	450 (14%)
Bristol	750 (6%)	400 (4%)	350 (17%)
Canterbury	1,750 (9%)	1,150 (6%)	600 (23%)
Carlisle	1,600 (13%)	850 (8%)	750 (42%)
Chelmsford	1,600 (5%)	900 (3%)	700 (14%)
Chester	1,450 (5%)	850 (4%)	600 (17%)
Chichester	1,250 (4%)	800 (3%)	450 (11%)
Coventry	800 (6%)	450 (4%)	350 (18%)
Derby	950 (7%)	600 (5%)	350 (22%)
Durham	950 (6%)	550 (4%)	400 (22%)
Ely	1,500 (9%)	900 (6%)	600 (23%)
Exeter	1,100 (5%)	600 (3%)	500 (25%)
Gloucester	750 (5%)	450 (3%)	300 (16%)
Guildford	1,900 (9%)	1,050 (6%)	850 (23%)
Hereford	900 (10%)	300 (4%)	600 (47%)
Leicester	850 (7%)	500 (5%)	350 (25%)
Lichfield	1,800 (7%)	1,100 (5%)	700 (22%)
Lincoln	800 (5%)	550 (4%)	250 (15%)
Liverpool	1,550 (7%)	950 (5%)	600 (16%)
London	2,550 (4%)	1,700 (3%)	850 (8%)

Diocese	Total fxC att	Adult fxC att	Child fxC att
Manchester	850 (4%)	450 (2%)	400 (8%)
Newcastle	800 (7%)	450 (4%)	350 (24%)
Norwich	1,050 (6%)	700 (5%)	350 (24%)
Oxford	2,150 (5%)	1,400 (4%)	750 (13%)
Peterborough	1,000 (7%)	650 (5%)	350 (18%)
Portsmouth	700 (7%)	450 (5%)	250 (21%)
Rochester	900 (4%)	550 (3%)	350 (9%)
St. Albans	1,700 (6%)	850 (4%)	850 (16%)
St Edms & Ips	650 (5%)	450 (4%)	200 (14%)
Salisbury	1,800 (8%)	1,100 (6%)	700 (28%)
Sheffield	1,000 (7%)	600 (5%)	400 (16%)
Sodor & Man	50 (4%)	30 (2%)	20 (17%)
Southwark	1,750 (5%)	950 (3%)	800 (11%)
South & Notts	800 (6%)	450 (4%)	350 (19%)
Truro	500 (5%)	300 (3%)	200 (24%)
Winchester	1,300 (6%)	650 (3%)	650 (22%)
Worcester	1,050 (10%)	500 (5%)	550 (40%)
York	1,150 (5%)	800 (4%)	350 (13%)
Europe	150 (2%)	120 (1%)	30 (3%)
Leeds	2,000 (6%)	1,250 (4%)	750 (17%)
<b>Church of England</b>	<b>49,000 (6%)</b>	<b>29,000 (4%)</b>	<b>20,000 (17%)</b>

## Characteristics of fresh expressions of Church, 2019

Everything included within this section uses raw data from Statistics for Mission 2019, with no scaling up or estimation applied to account for non-reporting churches.

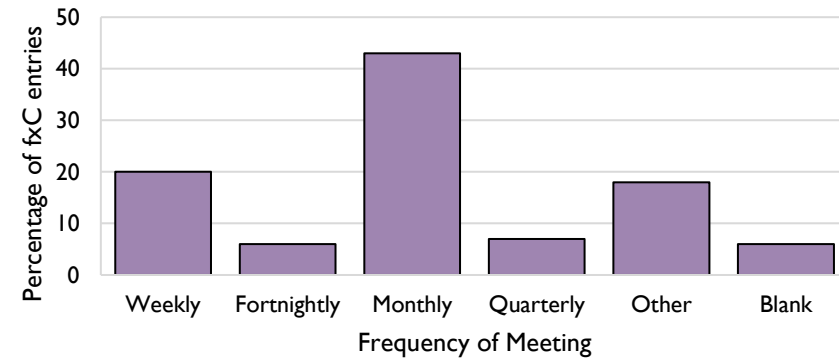
### How often do fresh expressions of Church meet?

As can be seen in Table 5 and Figure 3, the most common frequency for an fxC to meet is 'Monthly'. 69% of the entries within Statistics for Mission 2019 stated that their fxC met monthly or more regularly than that.

Table 5. Frequency of meeting of fxCs, 2019.

Frequency of Meeting	Number in Statistics for Mission	Percentage of fxCs
Weekly	1,700	20%
Fortnightly	500	6%
Monthly	3,600	43%
Quarterly	600	7%
Other	1,500	18%
Left Blank	500	6%

Figure 3. Frequency of meeting of fxCs, 2019.



18% of fxCs selected "Other" as their frequency of meeting. Within the data collection process if "Other" is selected, additional information is requested. The data included within this open text data indicate that "Other" is almost an equal split between groups that meet annually, bi-monthly, weekly during term-times, half-termly, and termly.

## Attendance at fresh expressions of Church by frequency of meeting

The data collection process for fxCs within Statistics for Mission has previously been criticised for allowing churches to report “Quarterly” and “Other” as answers for frequency of meeting. This is because one of the classifications of an fxC is that it is ‘regular’, which our guidance defines as at least monthly.

We could attempt to exclude people attending fxCs classed as “Quarterly” from the national fxC additional attendance totals. In an attempt to gauge what impact such an exclusion would have, attendance at individual fxCs has been estimated by splitting fxC attendance equally between all of the fxCs in a church’s return. For example, if a church reported 150 attendees at fxCs and it listed three fxCs, each fxC would be assigned an attendance of 50. This approach almost certainly over-estimates the attendance at fxCs that meet least often, so acts as a helpful upper bound.

Figure 4. Estimated additional average weekly attendance at fxCs by frequency of meeting.

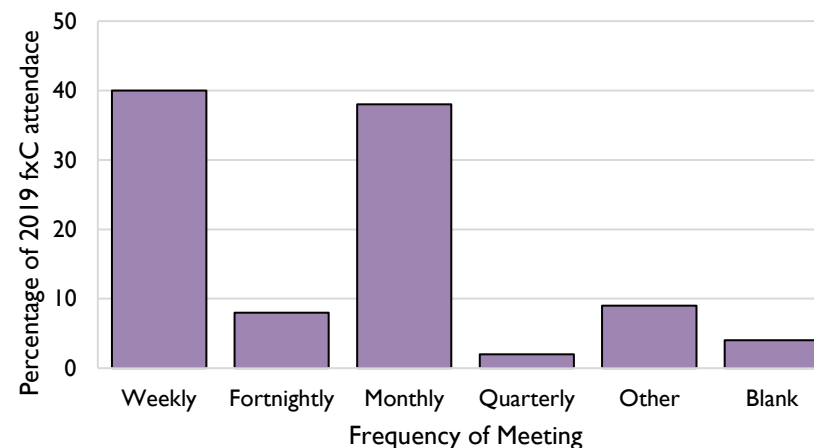


Figure 4 shows that the bulk of fxC attendance is estimated to be at fxCs that meet weekly or monthly; this is entirely to be expected since these account for the majority of fxCs. The estimated attendance at ‘quarterly’ fxCs is very small – just 2% of the reported additional average weekly attendance at fxCs in 2019.

We conclude that removing attendees at quarterly fxCs from national fxC attendance totals is not possible to do accurately, and would have minimal impact even if it were possible. Without establishing the numbers attending each individual fxC, it would not be advisable to remove any of the attendance figures. The only instance where this could be done is in churches that only list fxCs that meet quarterly, though such churches are very rare. In 2019 there were only 200 churches reporting solely quarterly fxCs; in total, between them, these fxCs contributed an additional average weekly attendance of 400 people, less than 1% of the national fxC additional attendance total.

## Where do fresh expressions of Church take place?

Note that respondents were able to select multiple options on this question.

Table 6. Location of meeting of fxCs, 2019.

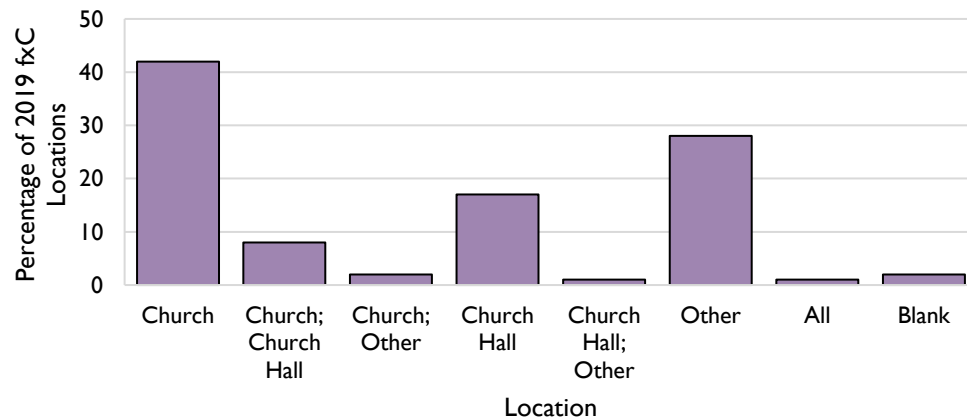
Location	Number in Statistics for Mission	Percentage of fxCs
Church	4,450	53%
Church Hall	2,150	26%
Other	2,600	31%
Left Blank	150	2%

As can be seen in Table 6, 53% of fxCs are at least sometimes held in church. 3,500 (42%) entries selected church as the sole location of the fxC.

1,400 (17%) of fxCs have the church hall as their sole location, while 2,300 (28%) of fxCs selected “Other” as their sole location.

Of those that selected “Other”, 2,100 (80%) gave a description of where they meet. Of these, 500 are listed as meeting in schools – 23% of those that gave a description.

Figure 5. Location of meeting of fxCs, 2019.



## What age groups are fresh expressions of Church aimed at?

Note that respondents were able to select multiple options on this question.

Table 7 shows the different age groups that fxCs are aimed at. 42% of fxCs are not aimed at any specific age group, but are open to all.

*Table 7. Age groups that fxCs are aimed at, 2019.*

Age group	Number in Statistics for Mission	Percentage of fxCs
0-4 years	1,450	17%
5-10 years	1,600	19%
11-17 years	750	9%
18-39 years	1,150	14%
40-69 years	1,450	17%
70+ years	1,450	17%
Family	1,650	20%
All ages	3,450	42%
Left Blank	150	2%

3,800 fxCs selected just one single age group as the population that it was aimed at (45% of all fxCs).

1,400 fxCs were aimed solely at people under the age of 18 (16% of all fxCs). Of these 1,400 fxCs, around 600 (43%) were held in a church, around 350 (25%) were held in a church hall, and just over 450 (33%) met in “Other” locations. Around half of the “Other” responses were stated to be schools.

1,650 fxCs were aimed at families (20% of all fxCs). Of these 1,650 fxCs, around 900 (53%) were held in a church, around 450 (27%) held in a church hall, and around 350 (5%) met in “Other” locations. Just under half of the “Other” responses were stated to be schools.

## Do fresh expressions of Church engage with people who do not otherwise go to church?

Note that respondents were able to select multiple options on this question.

Table 8 shows that 66% of fxCs have at least some attendees who regularly attend church services as well as attending the fxC. 76% of fxCs have at least some attendees who occasionally attend church as well as the fxC. 75% of fxCs have at least some attendees who never attend any other form of church. This demonstrates that fxCs are engaging, at least in part, with people who otherwise do not attend church.

Table 8. Church attendance of people attending fxCs, 2019.

Attendance at church of people attending fxC	Number of fxCs within Statistics for Mission	Percentage of fxCs
Regularly attend	5,550	66%
Occasionally attend	6,350	76%
Never attend	6,250	75%
Left Blank	650	8%

300 fxCs (4%) reported that all of their attendees regularly attend church as well attending as the fxC. Of these fxCs, just under 200 (58%) were held in a church, around 50 (19%) were held in a church hall and 70 (23%) met in “Other” locations. Of these 300 fxCs, 9% of them were aimed at families and 11% were aimed solely at people under the age of 18. 90 (30%) of these fxCs met weekly, 40 (13%) of them met fortnightly, and 160 (53%) met monthly.

700 fxCs (8%) reported that not one of their attendees attend church beyond the fxC. Of these fxCs, 250 (36%) were held in a church, 150 (21%) were held in a church hall and 300 (43%) met in “Other” locations. Of these 700 fxCs, 18% of them were aimed at families and 30% were aimed solely at people under the age of 18. 220 (31%) of them met weekly, 60 (9%) of them met fortnightly and just over 300 (44%) of them met monthly.

Over half of the reported fxCs (4,400; 53%) reported that they had all three types of attendees: some people who regularly attend church beyond the fxC, some that occasionally do, and some that never do.

## Conclusions and future work

Fresh expressions of Church seem to offer a positive story, with increasing trends in recent years of both the number of fxCs and the number of people attending them. It is therefore important to continue monitoring fxCs to see if and how this continues, and to identify, learn, and share good practice.

There are several pieces of work that could be done in the future to enhance our understanding of fxCs:

- Establishing the attendance at each individual fxC. This could be done by amending the Statistics for Mission form to ask people to report the “attendance at a typical meeting” for each of their fxCs. This would also allow us to estimate the total number of people attending fxCs rather than, as is currently the case, the additional contribution of fxCs to total attendance. This change was planned for the 2020 Statistics for Mission form, but was put on hold to focus instead on the ways that churches responded to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Investigating the life span of fxCs.
- Using the planned online service register to track attendance at individual fxCs with more granularity over time.

There are further important questions that could be answered using data that are already available:

- How does number of and attendance at fxCs relate to the size of the church (measured, for instance, in terms of the number of people in the worshipping community, church attendance, or financial strength)?
- How does number of and attendance at fxCs relate to clergy provision?
- Do declining churches start more or fewer fxCs than growing churches?
- Are fxCs concentrated in particular settings, such as urban/rural or deprived/non-deprived areas?
- Does child fxC attendance correlate with the number of children in a church’s worshipping community or a church’s level of engagement with schools?

No doubt there are other questions of interest both to those who work closely with fxCs and to the Church of England more widely. Even without further data collection, there is a great deal of research that could be carried out to better understand fxCs. Any such work would, of course, require appropriate resources. This work is ever more important at present, as the Church of England embraces what has been described as a “mixed ecology” of church.