

GENERAL SYNOD**Church of England Youth Synod PMM
A background paper from the Secretary General****Summary**

Archbishops' Council has fully committed to prioritising ministry with children and young people and developing a church which is younger and more diverse. This has resulted in every Archbishops' Council's agenda having a substantial item on this subject, engaging children and young people's voice in the process and also requiring every paper presented to Archbishops' Council to indicate the impact on this top priority.

Evidence from the recent history of the Church of England Youth Council (CEYC) is that establishing a Church of England Youth Synod would not be the most effective way of hearing and acting on the voice of young people/adults. Instead, we propose a network of diocesan youth councils and diocesan engagement with children and young people prior to each synod and use this work to ensure dioceses elect younger representatives for Synod in future so they are directly involved in decision making and strategy.

Prioritising ministry with children and young people

1. The Church of England vision and strategy has ministry with children and young people at its core and has prioritised the growth of a church which is younger and more diverse. This priority has developed as a clear result of research such as Rooted in the Church, the development of Growing Faith and the shaping of our Vision and Strategy. The vision itself was shaped in partnership with groups of children and young people who were involved in its development through our national younger leadership groups.
2. Archbishops' Council has committed to prioritising ministry with children and young people and hearing and responding to the voice of children and young people is a key part of that, and it is ensuring creative and innovative ways are developed to enable those voices to be fully heard in through research CEYC was always intended as a group for young people, led by young people (through its Core Group). CEYC has been hugely influential in the lives of the young people who have attended meetings or residential, and particularly in the lives of those who have served on Core Group or as General Synod Representatives. It started in an age when students had more time to give to the running of such an organisation, but over the years their capacity to do so decreased as the pressure on their studies and working to finance those studies increased.

A Short Recent History of the Church of England Youth Council (CEYC)

3. When CEYC considered its future in 2015, the feeling of its leadership at the time was that it was not viable. But rather than letting it disband, the National Society (NS) commissioned a review of CEYC and then encouraged them to consider the capacity which an intern might bring (recognising that it was no longer possible to provide the organisational capacity that CEYC needed from within its own voluntary membership) and funded an intern from amongst their membership to plan events, build a web presence and work at recruiting more members. The salary, costs and expenses of the intern were funded by the NS from 2016 until 2019 because it believed there was something important about enabling such an organisation to flourish.

4. However, despite the efforts of the Core Group and full-time intern, their annual residentials only attracted 20-30 participants, and they had to cancel three successive annual April gatherings because insufficient numbers signing up made them unviable.
5. When the last intern decided to move on in July 2019, he and the then Chair met with the Education Office team to talk about the future as they felt that the time had come to concede that CEYC could not continue as there was insufficient interest from young people in dioceses to be members of this kind of national forum to warrant the amount of time and energy they were putting in to it. The Core group agreed and regrettably it was decided by them (as this was an organisation run by young people for young people) to disband. There was no pressure on them to do so from the national team, but neither was there any resistance to this as it was clear that their meeting numbers were such that this was a logical conclusion and the Education Office began to explore other ways to engage the voice of young people more proactively.
6. The question about the viability of and attendance at CEYC events was not about the national budget for CEYC but rather about the numbers of young people wanting to engage through this format. The NS funded the intern to try and redeem the situation and increase the membership, but it became increasingly difficult to dedicate the resource of finance and members of staff to be in attendance for their meetings and providing administrative support when there were so few young people attending.

CEYC representation on General Synod

7. One role CEYC played was to choose 3 representatives who could attend and speak at Synod. In addition to those 3 representatives, other members of CEYC were invited to come to Synod as observers and to have the opportunity to meet with Synod members on an informal basis as well as sit in and listen to debates. The practicalities surrounding this meant that they were always over 18 (for safeguarding reasons) and tended to be more able to attend in York than London, as the weekend format was more conducive to them being there.
8. There was a small budget from Synod to support the representatives attending, but when their costs for a London Synod included hotel accommodation instead of the student accommodation at York it was more challenging. Synod members' expenses are met by their diocese. Synod met the costs of the 3 reps centrally but was unable to pay all the costs for several 'observers'.
9. It is regrettable that, for this quinquennium, more of the 18-25 year old age group were not elected to Synod in their own right. The Business Committee should consider what the barriers are for 18-25 year olds to engage with Synod or be elected within their dioceses, and to explore how dioceses might encourage involvement from young people now so that at the next Synod elections more young people stand and are elected.
10. The Youth Synod PMM calls for the co-option of 5 people elected by the Youth Synod into voting membership of the General Synod. This is not within the power of the Archbishops' Council. Co-options have to be done by the House of Laity and the Convocations, and all the slots for co-option into those Houses are now filled (for UKME members) and so Synod would either have to wait until the next quinquennium, with young people taking the place of UKME people; and/or it would require primary legislation to change the rules on co-option.

11. The same legislative barrier would prevent the Archbishops' Council from co-opting a member of the Youth Synod to the Archbishops' Council. Membership of the Archbishops' Council is set by the National Institutions Measure, so this too would need primary legislation.
12. Given these barriers, we should explore other ways to ensure members of Synod are able to hear the voice of young people in relation to Synod business.

Hearing and acting on the voice of children and young people

13. The recently established Growing Faith Foundation has set up a young adults network, providing facilitation and all the necessary admin support to sustain it, but it feels important that such a network should be led by and for young adults. Currently there is little take-up for the network but if every diocese were to prioritise its development and find 2 or 3 young adults who were committed to playing an active role in the network, it could provide a very useful way to engage with young adults' opinions and views on a range of subjects.
14. Many dioceses have an active Youth Council. If Synod asked every diocese to ensure that there was an active youth council that were able to engage with its Synod representatives ahead of every group of sessions, then it would ensure that young people's voices were heard in their own location and context and be fed back through their Synod representatives. This would be a more effective and efficient way of engaging young people at a time convenient to them.
15. The Growing Faith Foundation has also set up a network for individuals and organisations, including dioceses, seeking to listen and respond to the voice of children and young people and as a result dioceses such as Leicester have set up listening groups to engage with under 18s.
16. The Education Office has also established National Younger Leadership groups involving 250 primary and secondary aged children and young people and, with the right amount of forward planning, could easily discuss upcoming Synod business with such a group and provide a report for Synod to consider.
17. The National Society recently acquired the Archbishops' Young Leaders Award and through the activities of that team would be able to coordinate the active engagement of children and young people's voice in a way that fed into Synod's business.
18. All of these activities require resourcing. The National Church Institutions in each case have to ensure sufficient budget is allocated to make these activities possible in a way that produces meaningful and reliable results. The judgement of the National Society and the Education Office is that resourcing the means discussed in this paper will prove more effective than establishing a separate Youth Synod.

William Nye, Secretary General

June 2023