



# Wessex Synod Youth Executive Handbook

“Our mission is to discover God,  
to help each other grow in the Christian Faith,  
and through our lives reflect God’s love to all.”

The URC Youth Mission Statement



**This Handbook was updated in April 2019**

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# Introduction

## Background

This Handbook brings together all the practices, key documents and expectations of the Wessex Synod Youth Executive (WSYE) which have been adopted since its creation in 2007. It is a resource which the WSYE can refer to in order to explore what has been done in the past in order to make informed decisions for the future, in conjunction with the guidance of the Children and Youth Development Officers (CYDOs).

## Context

The concept of each Synod having its own Youth Executive originally came from FURY\* Assembly (Fellowship of United Reformed Youth). Wessex Synod Youth Executive was started in Wessex Synod at March Synod Youth Day 2007 and the first members of the Wessex Synod Youth Executive were elected to serve for a two year period. Since then, the WSYE has gone from strength to strength in its work representing the young people of the Synod.

This work has included planning and running Synod children's and youth events, sending representatives to Wessex Synod Children's and Youth Work Committee (C&YWC) and sending representatives to other events, such as URC General Assembly and URC Youth Assembly.

Many past members of the WSYE have gone on to fulfil roles on the Assembly level Youth Executive, and the individual development of WSYE members has been a key part of the Synod's commitment to those young people who are elected to serve.

\*In 2015 the name changed from FURY to URC Youth. 'United Reformed Church Youth' now supersedes 'FURY' in referring to all URC activities at an Assembly and Synod level which relate to young people aged 11 to 25. 'URC Youth' is also used to describe all those young people who have some affiliation or connection with a local URC. It is hoped that local churches will continue to use 'FURY' as the name of their youth group, Sunday youth provision, etc, where applicable.

# Constitution

**Background.** In 2007 URC Youth advised all Synods to establish a Youth Executive to take all levels of children's and youth work forward. Wessex Synod is committed to fulfilling this requirement.

The WSYE Constitution sets out the fundamental aims, purposes and practices of the WSYE. It was written by members of the WSYE and has been reviewed and developed over time.

## Membership (2 years)

- Full members (elected) – up to ten young people (aged 14 - 25) representing the whole Synod (ideally from around the Synod)
- Associate members (as decided by the WSYE)

## In Support

- The Wessex Synod Children's and Youth Development Officers
- Chaplain to the WSYE – a 2 year post, chosen by the WSYE (optional)

## Roles and Responsibilities

- The WSYE will meet residentially 3 times a year, moving around the Synod.
- Full reasonable expenses are provided to all members.
- The agenda for these meetings will be circulated in advance of the meeting (see practices on page 10). After these meetings, the minutes will be distributed within a fortnight to all members of the WSYE.
- There may be times when smaller task groups meet.
- WSYE meetings will be held to plan and evaluate the children's and youth work of the Synod as well as a time to provide team building and training and development.
- The WSYE are accountable to the Wessex Synod Children's and Youth Work Committee and will provide regular attendance and reports to their meetings.
- Members of the WSYE are elected by in-person vote at our November meeting, with each term of office beginning in January, lasting for two years. They are welcome to stand again at the end of this time.
- The CYDOs retain discretionary powers regarding the membership of the WSYE in consultation with the WSYE.
- Members are required to fulfil the Role Descriptions and an individual failing to do so may be asked to step down from their position.
- The members of the WSYE have the opportunity to undertake many roles including: Convener, Secretary, Treasurer, Communications Officer and Assembly Representative. Members can only hold one specific role at one time; job sharing is an option.
- Each member will receive a full role description that shall be individually adapted for them through discussions with the CYDO.

# Role Descriptions

## Wessex SYE Full Member (elected)

- All members will bring their own gifts and knowledge to the role and are encouraged to be creative in the way they fulfil the role.
- The post will be for 2 years.

### Essential Tasks

- Attend all the residential WSYE meetings in full, 3 a year, unless agreed otherwise with CYDO. Attend March and October Synod Meetings and URC Youth Assembly in January.
- To help steer the vision for children's and youth work in the Synod and plan events such as RE: (Wessex Summer Camp), Synod Youth/Children's days and other special events.
- To advocate the importance of children's, youth and family work in the church and wider community.
- Promote and support (where possible through attendance) youth, children's and family events in the Synod, the November youth event, and the annual 'RE:' event.
- Relate to other members through informal structures and 'get-togethers' planned by Synod.
- To be accountable to the Wessex Synod Children's and Youth Work Committee.
- Support the local children's and youth work through prayer.
- Sharing good news stories locally and across the Synod.

### Other opportunities depending on skills and experience

- To promote the WSYE Mission Grant and encourage young people to apply for it.

### Wessex SYE members will receive:

- All reasonable expenses will be covered by the Wessex Synod Children's and Youth Work Committee.
  - Regular support from the CYDO in your area (catch-up and appraisal).
  - Relevant training and support to develop own strengths and skills.
- Once members have come to the end of their term of service they can be invited to the next couple of SYE meetings to help with the transition and/or guide new members of SYE.
  - Full Members of the Wessex Synod Youth Executive may also undertake a named role for the period of one year (with the possibility of re-standing). Additional tasks associated with named roles are listed below:

## Committee Roles within SYE

Full Members may choose to put themselves forward to fulfil named roles, such as Convener, but are perfectly entitled not to do so.

### Convener

- To help plan the agenda for each residential meeting and to ensure the meetings are convened, ensuring that the agenda is completed and that all tasks are allocated.
- To ensure attendance at the three Children's and Youth Work Committee meetings each year and offer reports from the WSYE.

### Secretary

- To help plan the agenda for each residential meeting and to record and distribute the minutes following each meeting, ensuring that the agenda is completed and tasks are allocated.
- To make good use of the administrative support available at the Synod Offices.

### Communications Officer

- To ensure the web site content is kept up-to-date and relevant.

## Synod Appointments

### Assembly Representative

- To represent URC Youth Executive to the WSYE and vice versa.
- To attend the National Rep meetings.
- To prepare a report three times a year for URC Youth Executive.

## Role Description – SYE Associate Member (invited)

- Associate Members are full members of the WSYE and have a full voice at each meeting but no voting rights.
- Associate Members are invited to join the SYE **for specific reasons**: the following will receive an invitation to all meetings or part of:
  - Members of other Synod Youth Executives are invited to attend the Wessex Synod Youth Executive meetings when they are living in Wessex Synod
  - Ecumenical youth representatives (understanding age range differences)
  - Individuals with specific skills or experience beneficial to WSYE
- The following will receive an invitation to specific meetings or part of **based on the agenda**:
  - Other Wessex Synod committee representatives
  - URC Youth Executive members who are living in Wessex

## Calendar

### Background

There are many events and meetings which happen on a regular basis, but with so much happening at a Synod and Assembly level, it's useful to have a summary of key WSYE dates. *Please see the Jargon Buster on the final page for an explanation of the events and meetings listed in the calendar below.*

URC Youth Assembly	Meets within the last two weeks of January
WSYE	Meets x3 per year over a weekend, usually in February (elected members only), May and November (open youth meetings).
C&YWC	Meets x3 per year, usually in February, May and September
Synod Meeting	Held x2 per year, in March and October
RE: Wessex Summer Camp	In July, the weekend before school summer term finishes
What Do You Think?	Held biennially* in July, immediately before General Assembly
URC General Assembly	A four day meeting held biennially* in July

\* Biennial means 'occurring every two years' (the biennial Ryder Cup tournament), while biannual means 'twice a year' (the solstice is a biannual event).



# Code of Conduct

## Background

Following a resolution passed at URC Youth Assembly in 2011 concerning the creation of a Code of Conduct for URC Youth members, the idea of a Code of Conduct for the WSYE was discussed at the WSYE meeting in May 2011.

The Code of Conduct below was adopted to ensure that a high standard of behaviour is maintained at all times when carrying out work relating to the WSYE.

## Things to remember when representing the WSYE:

- DO** treat everyone equally and with respect
- DO** model the behaviour you wish others to follow
- DO** respect others' right to personal privacy
- DO** provide and maintain an atmosphere/environment conducive for the sharing of concerns
- DO** encourage young people and adults to feel comfortable and caring enough to point out attitudes they do not like
- DO** remember that all leaders are in a position of trust and should avoid situations that compromise their relationships
- DO** remember that someone else might misinterpret your words or actions

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- DO NOT** have any inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others
  - DO NOT** jump to conclusions about others without checking facts
  - DO NOT** make suggestive gestures or remarks, even in fun
  - DO NOT** let suspicion, disclosure or allegation of abuse go unrecorded or unreported
  - DO NOT** rely on just your good name to protect you
  - DO NOT** believe "it could never happen to me"

# Practices

## Wessex SYE Elections

As of 2019, WSYE elections happen by in-person vote at the open November meeting, facilitated by the CYDOs.

## Agenda and Minutes

- The agenda for each WSYE meeting is prepared by the Convener with support from the Secretary and CYDOs. The WSYE should be consulted to identify any other topics for discussion three to four weeks before the meeting, and the final draft of the agenda should be circulated by the Secretary a fortnight prior to the meeting.
- The Minutes of each WSYE meeting should contain an accurate and accessible record of what has been discussed and decided. They should be circulated amongst the group within a fortnight of the meeting, and should be reviewed and then approved at the next meeting.

## Meeting Etiquette

WSYE meetings are not overly formal, but a professional, respectful approach is expected of those present. The meetings tend to be held residentially so that whilst the business can be completed, there is also a chance for the group to socialise.

## Decision Making in Meetings

In discussing the agenda items, the Convener may choose to make use of the Consensus Decision Making process (see explanation below) and the CYDOs provide blue and orange voting cards at each meeting to make this possible.

## Appointment of Full Members to named roles

- The appointment of Full Members happens in the first WSYE meeting following the election of new members (whose term of office begins in January).
- All roles are vacant at the beginning of the February meeting, with roles explained on the Saturday morning, together with an explanation of the nomination and election process.
- Nominations take place Saturday afternoon, after all members have had a chance to think about who they would like to nominate for the various roles. Individuals can nominate themselves for roles if they have an interest in taking on that role.
- CYDOs will approach individuals with two or more nominations to advise they have been nominated. This is also an opportunity for those individuals to talk through any queries with the CYDO if this helps with their considering to stand.
- Sunday morning those willing to stand will be announced, with an opportunity to say a few words if appropriate. Secret voting takes place, no public discussion.

- CYDOs count the voting papers and inform all individuals elected and those not elected, providing support if required. Sunday afternoon the new post holders are announced.

### **Meeting Venues**

At first, WSYE meetings moved around the Synod, visiting different URCs, and have met in a variety of different facilities from B&Bs to conference centres. The CYDOs now have a resource pack of accommodation options from which the WSYE selects venues a year in advance. One of the three residential meetings per year will incorporate a more social element, and so the location chosen for that meeting may reflect this.

### **Communication between members of the WSYE**

Communication regarding WSYE business is only made through email, post or telephone. The group also has a closed Facebook® group.

### **Representation to C&YWC**

The Convener ensures representation at C&YWC meetings, either by attending themselves or asking another member to do so.

### **Representation & Funding for URC Assembly Events**

Wessex Synod is committed to fully funding all places at URCYA at the early bird booking price, together with transport costs.

Wessex Synod usually allocates two youth representatives to attend 'What Do You Think?' and URC General Assembly, and these places are fully funded. WSYE tries to appoint one WSYE member and one other young person to take these places.

### **Role of the CYDOs**

- The CYDOs attend each WSYE meeting in order to support and guide WSYE members in their discussion, but do not have voting rights and at times may disagree with the view of the WSYE.
- At all times, they hold discretionary powers over the membership of the WSYE.
- In between meetings, they will try to meet each WSYE member individually in order to provide support.

# Consensus Decision Making Explained

## Background

As noted in the Practices section of this Handbook, the Convener of the WSYE may choose to make use of consensus decision making. It is the practice of the WYSE that when consensus decision making is used, anyone present in the room is entitled to express their feelings on the topic being discussed but is not required to do so. Consensus decision making is used in URCYA business sessions, Wessex Synod Meetings and at URC General Assembly, so it is good for the members of the WSYE to have a good understanding of how it works.

## Stage 1: Information

The proposer and seconder (those who are bringing forward the suggestions) introduce their resolution – giving some background information and explaining what it all means. They then formally propose the resolution.

If anybody is unsure about anything in the resolution, or wants to ask a question of the proposer and seconder, then the chair will give opportunity for people to ask questions for information and clarification.

TIP: Anybody coming up to the microphone to speak must give their full name and Synod before speaking.

## Stage 2: Discussion

Once any questions and clarifications have been dealt with, there is an opportunity to have a conversation around the wider topic. This is a chance to share stories, individual perspectives and general thoughts and musings about whatever the motion is themed around. The proposer and seconder might have specific questions for you to consider.

## Stage 3: The discussion moves on to people's opinions about the resolution

Okay, so this is the point at which voting members are invited to speak about the resolution itself. Do you support the motion? Do you have any reservations? Anyone who has an opinion on the proposal is invited to speak, as long as what they're saying is a new point. If everybody agrees and wants to speak it can take a very long time! The chair will often ask for those with specific feelings to speak – if lots of people are in favour then they might ask for somebody to speak against the resolution for balance. The chair may also ask you to show your coloured cards from time to time to show how you're feeling towards the resolution – orange for warm, favourable feelings or blue if you're cold towards the motion and not in favour of passing it. Please don't show your coloured cards except when asked.

**TIP:** The CYDOs are there to help. If you want to make a point, but aren't sure how to put it, they can help you. Feel free to write it down if that's going to help you remember what you want to say. If you're really not comfortable about speaking in front of others, then you can also ask them to voice your opinions for you – your opinion is still just as valid if you do!

### **Stage 3: Decision**

When the chair feels that everybody has had a chance to give any new points of view on the resolution, they'll check that the group are ready to make a decision. If they are, then that is what they'll do! This involves the coloured cards – you'll be asked to hold up orange if you are in favour of the resolution, blue if you are against it. If everyone agrees, that's a consensus.

If there are a few blue cards, those people will be asked if they feel that they've had chance to give their views. If they feel that they haven't, they'll be given that opportunity. If they have, then they will be asked if they're prepared to allow the decision to be agreed, even if it isn't their first preference. If they agree to this with their orange cards, then the group has reached consensus recognising dissent. If not, but the majority is in favour, the Assembly has reached agreement over the issue and the motion is passed.

**TIP:** Those standing against a motion at this stage have the opportunity to record their dissent if they so wish.

### **Please note:**

The version of consensus decision making used by the Convener in WSYE meetings is naturally more informal than in the setting of larger meetings, but the stages followed remain the same, and the points made in this explanation are still valid.

# SYE Mission Grants

## Background

In the C&YWC budget, a certain sum is allocated each year for the WSYE Mission Grants. Any young person within the Synod can apply, following the criteria below. Applications will be discussed by the WSYE at their next meeting, although applications from current WSYE members are not discussed by the WSYE. Instead, applications from current WSYE members are sent to the CYDOs who take the applications to C&YWC for approval.

## Wessex SYE Mission Grant Criteria:

- Projects should be mission based, meeting one or more of the points in the URC 'Vision 2020' statement.
- The individual/s applying must be associated with a URC within Wessex Synod
- The individual/s applying should be aged 14-25.
- The project you are participating in has not been given a WSYE grant within the last three years.

When applying applicants should include the following information:

- Who you are, (name, age and a bit about yourself)
- What the project involves
- Who will benefit
- How much money you have to raise
- How else you are fundraising, including any other grants you have applied for.

You should be willing to feed back to the WSYE once the project has taken place either by attending one of our meetings or by sending a write-up of your experiences.

Each application will be assessed individually by the WSYE. If grants are awarded, they will be up to a maximum value of £250 but will be no more than half of the amount you need to raise.

For Group applications, up to 10% of the cost of the trip will be awarded per person but the amount must not exceed the maximum that would be given to an individual application. A grant will not be awarded for a further three years.

When a project has been granted money previously, they should not apply for another grant for 3 years.

Applications should be submitted in writing to the Synod Office, 120 Alma Road, Southampton, SO14 6UW, or emailed to [development@urcwessex.org.uk](mailto:development@urcwessex.org.uk)

# Vision 2020

## Ten Statements of our Mission and Purpose



### **Statement 1: Spirituality and prayer**

We will grow in our practice of prayer and spirituality, nurturing strength for our witness to Jesus Christ, and developing our discernment of where God is and what God is calling us to do by reading and studying the Bible and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Statement 2: Identity**

The United Reformed Church will be a Church where every local congregation will be able to say who they are, what they do and why they do it.

### **Statement 3: Christian Ecumenical Partnerships**

We will be more confident in our identity, valuing the treasures of our tradition, discerning when to seek ecumenical partnerships, and when and how to seek the further unity of the Church.

### **Statement 4: Community partnerships**

We will be a Church that is more active in the life of local neighbourhoods.

### **Statement 5: Hospitality and diversity**

We will be a Church committed to becoming even more welcoming and hospitable, and embracing all people equally.

### **Statement 6: Evangelism**

We will be more confident to engage in evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God with friends, families and strangers, through story and action.

### **Statement 7: Church growth**

We will be a growing Church with an increasing membership.

### **Statement 8: Global partnerships**

We will be a Church that is an active partner in God's global mission with other Churches around the world.

### **Statement 9: Justice and peace**

We will be a Church committed to peacemaking and reconciliation that keeps faith with the poor and challenges injustice.

### **Statement 10: The integrity of creation**

We will be a Church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

## Jargon Buster

### Background

The WSYE has frequently recognised that within the URC there are many acronyms and names used which, until you get to know them, can be bewildering.

Word/ Acronym	Explanation
<b>URC</b>	The <b>United Reformed Church</b> is a Christian denomination (a religious group within Christianity) with roots in the Reformation of the 17 <sup>th</sup> Century.
<b>URC Youth</b>	The <b>URC Youth</b> is the body of young people aged 11 -25 years associated with the United Reformed Church. It used to be called <b>FURY</b> .
<b>FURY</b>	The <b>Fellowship of the United Reformed Youth</b> . In 2015 the name was changed to URC Youth.
<b>URC Youth Executive</b>	The <b>URC Youth Executive</b> is the executive body of the URC Youth Assembly which exists to provide representation for and of the URC youth, and to carry out the work of the URC Youth Assembly.
<b>Youth Assembly/FA</b>	The <b>URC Youth Assembly</b> is the annual Assembly level URC Youth business meeting and event, held in January. It used to be called <b>FURY Assembly</b> .
<b>WDYT</b>	<b>What Do You Think?</b> is a build up event held for members of the URC Youth prior to each <b>General Assembly</b> .
<b>GA</b>	<b>General Assembly</b> is a four day long meeting held biennially* and is the main decision making body of the URC.
<b>Mission Council</b>	Mission Council meets between General Assemblies to ensure the effective running of the URC.
<b>Synod</b>	The URC is divided into thirteen <b>Synods</b> by geographical location.
<b>Area</b>	Wessex Synod is divided into four <b>pastoral areas</b> .
<b>C&amp;YWC</b>	<b>Children's and Youth Work Committee</b> is the Wessex committee to which the WSYE is accountable.
<b>M&amp;O</b>	Wessex Synod <b>Mission and Outreach Committee</b>
<b>Synod Executive</b>	<b>Synod Executive</b> is the committee which oversees, directs and supports all the work of Wessex Synod.
<b>Wessex Trust</b>	<b>Wessex Trust</b> is a registered charity and is the body which oversees and administers the property, financial and staff resources of Wessex Synod.
<b>CYDO</b>	<b>Children's Youth and Development Officer</b>
<b>Pilots</b>	Pilots is a non-uniformed Christian organisation for all children and young people (5 – 18 Years) and is part of the United Reformed Church, although Pilots Companies exist in many denominations. It is divided into four age groups. Pilots companies often (but not always) meet on mid-week evenings and use discussions, games and projects to explore, complement and celebrate Christian teaching and development.