



Longitudinal research into student numbers on higher education programmes in Christian youth work/ministry and/or Children's work/ministry programmes – 2011-12 to 2020-21

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1 BACKGROUND

For the past ten years I have been researching the numbers of students who have entered higher education programmes in Christian youth work/ministry and/or children's work/ministry. This has been linked to the collection of information on academic programmes which forms the basis of the information available on the Christian Youth Work Training website¹.

The following tables and charts are drawn from the numbers which have been supplied by the individual institutions and providers, on the basis that the overall numbers will be available publically, but individual numbers per institution will remain confidential.

1.1 METHODOLOGY

For the 2020-21 figures, student numbers were obtained from **13** colleges/training agencies offering **26** Christian youth/children's work/ministry programmes commencing September 2020. The request was for numbers of students on programmes which are specifically linking Christian theology with youth and/or children's work/ministry; or which have a pathway in that specialism, or which require/enable a placement in the specialism.

Numbers were requested for 1st December 2020, the same date on which the Higher Education Statistics Authority² numbers are collected across the UK. All 13 institutions provided the requested numbers. The overall student numbers are in the table in Appendix 1, recruitment for September 20 in Appendix 2 and the list of institutions and programmes providing the statistics is in Appendix 3.

¹ <http://www.cywt.org.uk/> was originally set up with funds from Centre for Youth Ministry, Frontier Youth Trust and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. It is now supported by Churches Together in England and seeks to provide details of all of the learning programmes for Christian youth and/or children's work/ministry programmes across the UK.

² HESA collects, processes and publishes data about Higher Education in the UK <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

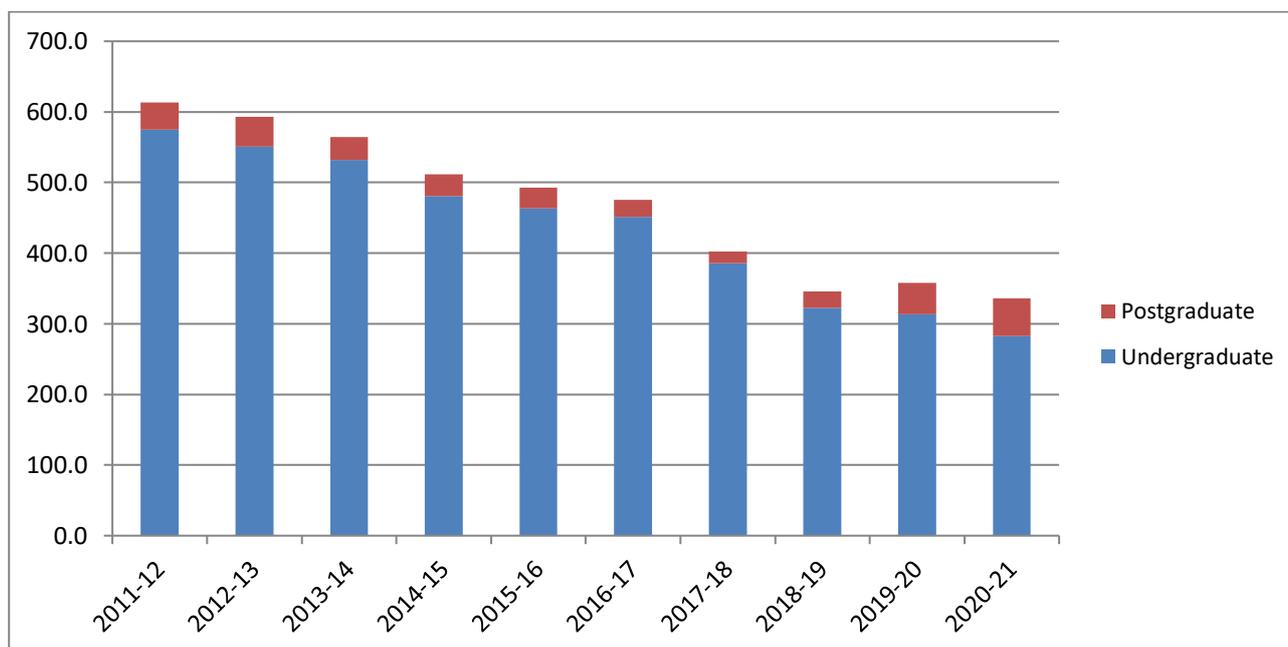
Some of the programmes in Youth Work are also recognised by the Education & Training Standards Committees (ETS) of the four nations, as conferring professional youth work status (JNC).³

The list of institutions and programmes is not exhaustive as new providers enter this field each year. At the same time many denominations, Christian agencies and individual churches are providing training, some of which is linked to existing academically-validated programmes and some which is in-house and carries no transferable qualification. Every effort has been made to capture all of the current provision, but this list is not exhaustive. The results give a snapshot of what is happening with the institutions listed (in Appendix 3).

2 RESULTS

2.1 Total Numbers⁴

Figure 1 – total numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students on Christian youth and/or children’s work/ministry programmes across the UK



The numbers of students on externally validated⁵ programmes delivered by Christian faith-based providers at undergraduate and postgraduate level has declined by almost half across the last ten years from a total of **613** in 2011-12 to **336** in 2020-21 (**45.2%** decline). Undergraduate and postgraduate numbers declined at roughly the same rate until 2018-19, after which there was an

³ ETS (England) is a sub-committee of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth & Community Work (JNC) which covers England and Wales. Similar bodies operate in Scotland and Ireland (North & South combined).

⁴ All numbers are “full-time equivalent” (FTE); for example a part-time student is normally 0.5FTE

⁵ ‘Validated’ means that either the institution has degree-awarding powers, or works in collaboration with a university to validate the programme, or the qualification is validated by some other external body. Where it is a UK university, it implies that it meets the national standards for undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications.

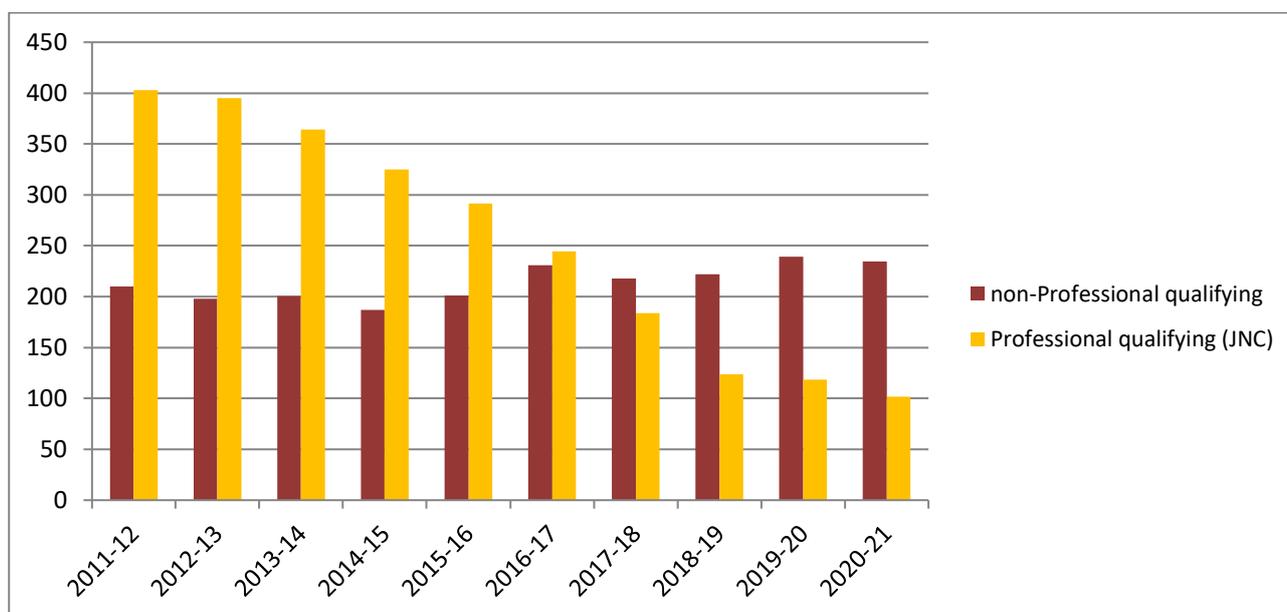
increase in postgraduate students, from **23.0** in 2018-19 to **53.5** in 2020-21. This is the highest number on postgraduate programmes across the ten years.

Overall there was a general decline across the first five years of the research, then a significant drop in 2016-17 followed by a second decline across the next two years before the slight increase in 2019-20 which was caused by the increase in postgraduate numbers.

2.2 Professional qualifying Christian faith-based programmes

There has been a continuing decline in the numbers of students on programmes with a Christian value-base which are validated for the professional recognition in youth work (JNC). This year the number of agencies/providers has not changed but there have been problems in recruitment caused by the global pandemic and internal structural problems for some providers.⁶

Figure 2 – total number of Christian youth and/or children’s work/ministry students on professional qualifying and non-professional qualifying programmes



In 2011-12 the number of students on professionally qualifying programmes was **403**, with **210** on non-professional qualifying courses. In 2020-2021 there are **101.5** on professional qualifying routes and **234.4** on other programmes. The year-on-year change from September 2019 to September 2020 saw a decrease of **2.1%** on non-qualifying programmes, and a decline of **14.3%** on professional qualifying programmes.

This decline may be as a result of talk of the English local authorities pulling out of the JNC during 2015-16, which caused a significant drop in confidence in the professional qualification generally. At the same time funding for youth work was continuing to decline as local authorities across

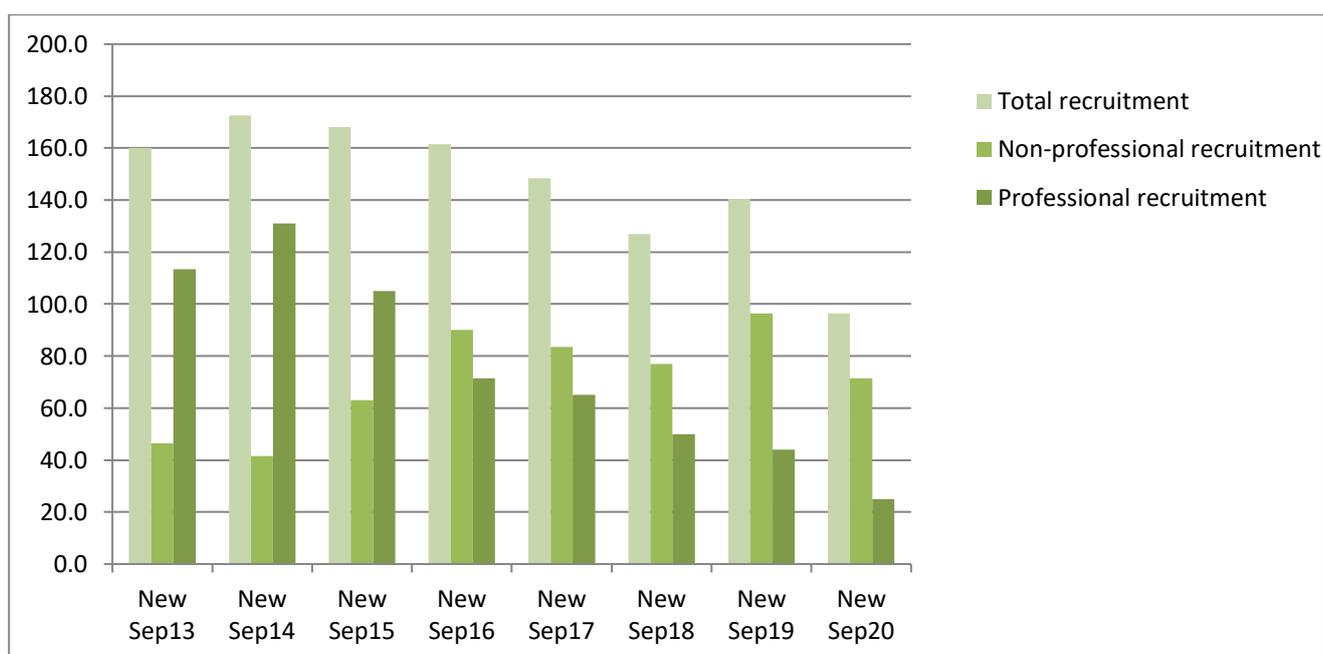
⁶ CYM took the decision not to recruit for the September 2020 intake due to internal reorganisation.

England reduced budgets during the austerity years which followed the financial crash of 2008. This decreased the confidence of youth work as a profession and professional training generally.

In September 2018 the total numbers on Christian JNC qualifying programmes had dropped from the previous year by **33%** from **184** to **123.5**. This was partly due to decreased recruitment and partly to the closure of the Oasis Higher Education College. No new students were recruited and the college was ‘teaching out’⁷ its professional degree. The college had closed due to being unable to recruit sufficient numbers to keep the London-based institution viable.

2.3 Recruitment

Figure 3 – Total numbers of student recruited onto higher education programmes for both professionally qualifying (JNC)⁸ and non-professionally qualifying programmes



Numbers of new students recruited to commence at the beginning of each academic year have been counted from the September 2013 intake. **96.4** students were recruited in September 2020 compared to **160** in September 2013, a decline of **39.8%**.

113.5 were recruited for professional qualifying programmes in September 2013 and **46.5** for non-professional programmes. From September 2016 onwards, more students have commenced non-professional programmes than professionally validated courses. In 2020 the intake was **25** for professional qualifying programmes, a drop of **78%** across the eight years.

⁷ ‘Teaching out’ is the term used in Higher Education to see all students through to completion of a programme before it finally closes.

⁸ The professional qualifying recognition in youth work is sometimes referred to by the acronym JNC (Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Work) which agrees standards and programmes from Level 2 to Level 7 in England, with similar bodies in the other nations.

A similar decline in recruitment to general youth work professional qualifying programmes delivered by higher education institutions in England has been noted, from **951** in 2011-12 to **295** in 2018-19 – a fall of **69%**.⁹ across six years. Whilst a direct comparison is not possible, due to some of the Christian programmes being delivered in other nations,¹⁰ it is, nevertheless, interesting to see similar challenges for youth work training generally as for Christian faith-based professional programmes.

There was an increase in student intake in September 2019, driven mainly by the non-professional programmes and by an increase in postgraduate entrants. This was wiped out in September 2020. The reasons cited by the colleges included the impact of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) global pandemic. In addition one significant provider was undergoing structural and academic changes and was not able to recruit a new cohort for September 2020.¹¹

2.4 Institutions and Training Agencies

In September 2011 there were **16** colleges/training agencies offering a total of **33** Christian youth work/ministry programmes at Higher Education levels¹² and from whom the above numbers were obtained. **Six** of the colleges/training agencies offered a total of **10** professionally recognised courses (JNC).

A further five Colleges/training agencies offered eight courses which included an element of Christian youth work/ministry, such as a placement with a Christian faith-based organisation.

In September 2020 there were **13** Colleges/training agencies offering **26** Christian youth work/ministry programmes. **Three** of the colleges/training agencies offered a total of **four** JNC professionally validated programmes.

A further three Colleges/training agencies offered six courses which included an element of Christian youth work/ministry or Children's work/ministry, often within the placement. One College/training agency, offering a Christian youth chaplaincy programme, did not provide numbers and appears to have closed.

There has been an interesting increase in multi-site delivery across the years. In September 2011 there was just **1** institution which had **5** campus locations across the UK. In September 2020 **3** institutions were delivering in a total of **7** locations.

Some of the changes across the years have been due to internal re-arrangements, for example Bristol Baptist College and Ridley Hall Cambridge were part of CYM in 2011-12 and now deliver higher education programmes independently, both validated through Durham University as part of the university's Common Award.

⁹ Details of Annual Monitoring of these courses can be obtained through the National Youth Agency who provide, through the Education and Standards Committee of the JNC, the secretariat services https://nya.org.uk/resource_category/annual-monitoring/ The Report for 2018-19 for the English programmes, from which this number comes, is due to be made public in August 2020

¹⁰ CYM and Moorlands both have delivery centres in Northern Ireland, and St Padarn's is based in Cardiff.

¹¹ CYM did not recruit to its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in September 2020, but is preparing for new cohorts from September 2021

¹² Level 4 and upwards within the English system

Other changes have been the result of closures of programmes or agencies. Oasis College of Higher Education took the decision to cease recruiting students to its higher education programmes in September 2017. The Scottish School of Christian Ministry (formerly International Christian College) became the Glasgow campus of Nazarene Theological College¹³ for a while and has subsequently fully closed.

ForMission has always delivered at multiple sites, but only one of their programmes is specifically youth ministry and it is delivered in one location by Reign Ministries. St Mellitus College now has five delivery locations around the country, however the Theology and Youth Ministry degree is only delivered in London. Ridley Hall, Cambridge, now also enables potential students to undertake a taster module from the first year of their undergraduate programme in London and from September 2021 is offering a Foundation Award and a Certificate of Higher Education in Theology, Ministry and Mission purely online.

A significant new provider is St. Padarn's Institute (Cardiff) offering their *MA Theology, Ministry and Mission*, the only college based in Wales offering a faith-based route for those who work with children, young people and families. The Light Project (Chester) had initially offered youth ministry at undergraduate level but now offers a more general mission and evangelism qualification and so has dropped out of the numbers figures with effect from September 2018.

From September 2020 the CYM Northern Ireland centre ceased to accept new students onto its professional programme and is teaching out those still there on Levels 5 and 6.¹⁴ Moorlands College, working with Youth Link NI, have opened a new delivery centre in Belfast which had its first intake of students in September 2020, for the Moorlands professionally validated undergraduate programme. This is validated in both England and Ireland.¹⁵

Full details of the institutions and the programmes from whom the numbers have been gained are in Appendix 3 below.

3 ANALYSIS & REFLECTIONS

A paper for the English Education & Training Standards Committee in July 2018 noted the following as reasons for the reduced take up of professionally validated programmes:

- *Rumour – worrying about the future of JNC (the professional qualification)*
- *Lack of awareness of degree level qualifications in youth work*
- *No clear understanding of what youth work is*
- *Academic thresholds can put off people best placed to practice in youth and community work*
- *University is more expensive now*
- *Youth work is an under-funded profession*
- *Personal circumstances*¹⁶

¹³ With effect from 30Jun18

¹⁴ See footnote 7

¹⁵ Through ETS England and the North South Education & Training Standards Committee which validates professional youth work programmes across the whole of Ireland.

¹⁶ Proposal for additional qualification pathways in youth & community work. July 2018

In addition to the above, my own article for *Premier Youth & Children's Work* (February 2018)¹⁷ argued that the reasons could be summarised as:

- ❖ a decline in finances available and the hesitancy of mature students to take out loans
- ❖ a decline in the perceived 'value' of a youth work/ministry qualification
- ❖ a decline in the number of children and young people in our churches
- ❖ a decline in workers in the churches and agencies, who role model this work to young people and thus attract them to this calling/ministry

Colleges and training agencies have responded in a variety of ways to the decline, one of which has been to put training nearer to the placements where the students are based, thus enabling a full-time programme to be managed whilst working for, and learning the trade through a church, a group of churches or a Christian agency. This has resulted in the increase of dispersed campuses. However, a recently published paper indicates that there is a quantifiable increase in attendance of children and young people in Anglican Churches in England who employ a Children, Families and/or Youth Worker¹⁸ It used original data collected by Youthscape in 2015-16¹⁹ to show that there is an average increase of 7 children/young people over churches who do not employ such workers.

Sam Donoghue, the Head of Children's and Youth Ministry for the Diocese of London, has suggested in *Premier Youth & Children's Work* (March 2021 Vol 1) that the decline in numbers...

'...seems to tell the story of how the role of the youth and children's worker in churches has become more precarious and less valued. That has in turn led to less people being willing to invest in training in it in a way that commits them to staying in the field for their career. Why would you invest so much in getting a degree that sets you up for a job that you may only do for a couple of years and doesn't pay enough to enable you to be able to afford to have kids? This has driven down how long people tend to spend in role and limits what they can build that lasts before they move on, often to a vicar training establishment.'²⁰

Donoghue goes on to argue for *professional development for those already in role*, more youth work apprenticeships, as is the case in London, more online training and programmes which recognise the transferability of learning to other careers, such as volunteer management.

¹⁷ Youth Work Training p24 *PREMIER YOUTH & CHILDREN'S WORK* February 2018 (Issue 14)

¹⁸ *Assessing the Impact of a Paid Children, Youth, or Family Worker on Anglican Congregations in England*
Leslie J. Francis, David Howell, Phoebe Hill & Ursula McKenna
Journal of Research on Christian Education; Volume 28, 2019 – Issue 1

¹⁹ *Losing Heart* Youthscape Centre for Research December 2016

²⁰ In *Premier Youth & Children's Work* (March 2021 Vol 1) https://www.magloft.com/app/premier-ycw?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11930306_YCW%20notification%20email&utm_content=header&dm_i=16DQ,73PHE,68UIOM,SPLRJ,1#/shelf/38079/default
Accessed 14Apr21

4 The Future?

The academic year 2019-20 saw the biggest challenge to traditional learning of almost any year in history, and this has continued into the current academic year. The global pandemic arrived and brought with it significant changes to the way learning was delivered and the way that all life, not just university life, had to be lived!

Before the arrival of Coronavirus Covid-19 the major political parties and the government, had all been talking about increasing spending on youth work across England. This talk has now evaporated as a result of the financial issues raised by the necessary response of the government to the continuing crisis.

The costs of taking learning online and of making physical locations Covid-secure have been significant, and especially challenging for small Christian faith-based institutions. With government guidelines at times have been felt to be in flux, and with differences across the four nations and the rise and fall of the “R” factor, it is difficult to know what will happen next. Training programmes will continue to need to enable their students to gain youth work skills in practice together with the additional skills needed to work in digitally and socially-distanced settings.

On the positive side, the National Youth Agency has provided excellent sets of guidance notes for youth workers and youth work across England at each stage of the pandemic (currently on version 6!). Through keeping strong links with government, they were able to achieve “key-worker status”²¹ for professional youth workers (JNC) and qualified Youth Support Workers (Level 3).

The practice of youth and/or children’s work/ministry is facing huge challenges as a result of the impact of Covid-19 and the long-term restrictions in place. Some churches have simply closed down their children’s work and/or youth work. Others have sought creative ways in which to maintain relationships and activities. One of the implications coming out of the experience of the last eighteen months is that Christian youth work generally needs to give thought to the ways in which faith development can take place which are not dependent upon high energy contact activities.

Research, practice reports and theological reflection are needed to help us to understand the most effective ways of enabling faith development, evangelism and discipleship in the new world of online communication and face-to-face work at a (social-) distance. We need to ask and be able to answer the question: how is God at work in these things²², and how is He calling us to be effective youth and/or children’s workers/ministers during the changing seasons of Covid-19 life and whatever the new normal will be in the future.

²¹ This enabled youth work to take place outside with more than the standard numbers allowed under social distance regulations and meant that some youth work was able to continue

²² Romans 8:28 *We know that, for the people God loves and who He has called according to his purposes, God is at work in everything that happens in order to bring through His eternal goodness (DH’s translation of the Greek text)*

Appendix 1 ~ Table of student numbers (Dec20)

Colour code

Undergraduate programmes

Postgraduate programmes

Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with (JNC) professional qualification

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
TOTAL Undergraduate	575.0	551.0	532.0	481.0	463.5	451.5	385.5	322.5	313.5	282.4
TOTAL Postgraduates	38.0	42.0	32.5	31.0	29.0	24.0	16.5	23.0	44.5	53.5
Total HE	613.0	593.0	564.5	512.0	492.5	475.5	402.0	345.5	358.0	335.9
%age change in overall student numbers	0.0	3.26%	7.91%	9.30%	3.81%	3.45%	15.46%	14.05%	-3.62%	6.17%
TOTAL JNC qualifying courses	403	395	364.0	325.0	291.5	244.5	184.0	123.5	118.5	101.5
TOTAL Ordinary courses	210	198	200.5	187.0	201.0	231.0	218.0	222.0	239.5	234.4
	613	593	564.5	512.0	492.5	475.5	402.0	345.5	358.0	335.9
%age on non-JNC courses	34.26%	33.39%	35.52%	36.52%	40.81%	48.58%	54.23%	64.25%	66.90%	69.78%
%age change in recruitment				-7.81%	2.61%	3.87%	8.05%	14.48%	-10.63%	31.39%

Appendix 2 ~ Student Recruitment (Sep20)

Colour code

Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with (JNC) professional qualification

Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes without a professional youth work qualification

JNC recruitment across all Youth & Community Work programmes in England

	<i>New Sep13</i>	<i>New Sep14</i>	<i>New Sep15</i>	<i>New Sep16</i>	<i>New Sep17</i>	<i>New Sep18</i>	<i>New Sep19</i>	<i>New Sep20</i>
Christian JNC recruitment	113.5	131.0	105.0	71.5	65.0	50.0	44.0	25.0
annual %age change		15.4%	-19.8%	-31.9%	-9.1%	-23.1%	-12.0%	-43.2%
Non-professional Christian recruitment	46.5	41.5	63.0	90.0	83.5	77.0	96.5	71.4
annual %age change		-10.8%	51.8%	42.9%	-7.2%	-7.8%	25.3%	-26.0%
Total recruitment	160.0	172.5	168.0	161.5	148.5	127.0	140.5	96.4

Appendix 3 Table of providers, validating universities and programmes (Sep20) providing numbers

Agency	Programmes available in September 2020	University / JNC	Notes
Aurora Training (Diocese of Sheffield)	Training programmes at Level 4 (Cliff College)		Children & Youth
Bristol Baptist College	CertHE Theology, Ministry and Mission MA Theology, Ministry and Mission	Durham Durham	formerly within CYM Children & Families specialism Children & Families specialism
Institute for Children, Youth & Mission	BA (Hons) Practical Theology (Community Youth Work)	Newman (JNC)	Delivered at the Midlands Centre (teach out in Northern Ireland)
	BA (Hons) Practical Theology	Newman	Non-professional pathways
	MA Mission and Ministry (Youth & Community Work) MA Mission and Ministry	Newman (JNC) Newman	non-professional pathways plus Chaplaincy
Cliff College	Certificate in Mission and Ministry (Children)	Manchester	
	Certificate in Mission and Ministry (Youth)	Manchester	
	BA (Hons) Mission and Ministry	Manchester	
	MA in Mission (Children & Youth)	Manchester	
	MPhil / PhD Missiology	Manchester	
CMS Pioneer Mission Leadership Training	BA (Hons) Theology, Ministry and Mission	Durham	pioneer youth ministry or pioneer children and family work
	MA Theology, Ministry and Mission	Durham	
Crosslands Seminary	MA Christian Ministry	SE Baptist Seminary	online
ForMission College	BA (Hons) in Theology, Mission and Ministry with specialism in Youth Work	Newman	Youth pathway delivered by Reign Ministries
Moorlands College	BA (Hons) Applied Theology (Youth & Community Work)	Gloucestershire (JNC)	delivered in Christchurch, Midlands and Northern Ireland
	BA (Hons) Applied Theology (pathways in Children/Schools; Family/Community; Youth Ministry)	Gloucestershire	delivered in Christchurch, Midlands and South West
	MA Applied Theology	Gloucestershire	Placements in Family, Children's & Youth Ministry
Nazarene Theological College	BA (Hons) Theology: Youth and Community	Manchester (JNC)	
Regents Theological College	BA (Hons) Applied Theology	Chester	Youth Ministry track
Ridley Hall Cambridge	CertHE, DipHE, BA (Hons) Theology, Ministry and Mission	Durham	Youth & Children's pathways; Online CertHE
	MA Theology, Ministry and Mission	Durham	Youth & Children's pathway
St Mellitus College	BA (Hons) Theology and Youth Ministry	Middlesex	
St Padarn's	MTh Children, Young People and Families	Cardiff	

