



Longitudinal research into student numbers on higher education programmes in Christian youth work/ministry and Children's work/ministry programmes – 2011-12 to 2023-24

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall trend in numbers of students undertaking higher education qualifications in Christian youth work/ministry and Children's work/ministry continues downwards to **250.5** in 2023-24 from **621** in 2011-12, a **63.1%** fall in total numbers of students across thirteen academic years.

New entrants to programmes providing Christian theology studies or faith-based placements on programmes which also enable the professional recognition as a youth worker, have declined from **113.5** in Sep13 to **11** in Sep23, a **90%** drop. Across the same period more students have opted for the non-professionally endorsed general programmes, which have seen a lesser decline of **75.5%**.

There are signs of encouragement this year which could mean that the tide is turning:

- ❖ An increase in the overall number of new applicants in Sep23 to **89**, against **70** in Sep22.
- ❖ The Church of England working to recruit **30,000** youth workers by 2030, made up of 3,000 new employed workers and 27,000 new volunteers!

1 BACKGROUND

This research, which has been running annually for thirteen years, records the numbers of students who, in this academic year just ending, entered or are continuing on higher education programmes¹ in Christian youth work/ministry and/or children's work/ministry. Details of all of these programmes are available on the Christian Youth Work Training website².

¹ 'Higher Education' covers everything above Level 3 (A-Levels, BTec Advanced etc.) Generally it includes undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications, (English levels 4 to 8)

² <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 validated learning programmes for Christian youth and/or children's work/ministry programmes across the UK.

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

1.1 METHODOLOGY

For the 2023-24 figures, student numbers were obtained from **14** colleges/training agencies (up **1** from last year) offering **35** Christian youth/children's work/ministry programmes (up **6** from last year!) which commenced in September 2022.

In 2011-12 there were **14** Colleges/training agencies offering **30** Christian youth work/ministry courses and providing numbers.

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 that specialism.

Numbers were requested as at 1st December 2023, the same date on which the Higher Education Statistics Authority³ numbers are collected across the UK. All **14** institutions provided the requested numbers. The overall student numbers are in the table in Appendix 1, recruitment for September 23 in Appendix 2 and the list of institutions and programmes providing the statistics is in Appendix 3.

Some of the programmes in youth work are also recognised by the Education & Training Standards Committees (ETS) of the four nations of the UK, as conferring a level of professional⁴ youth work training, often referred to as "JNC".⁵ The word 'professional' is used in this context to refer to those entering youth work generally, who have undergone training and achieved a level recognised across the general youth work field in the UK. The term 'professional' can also apply to those who have achieved an undergraduate or postgraduate qualification in Christian youth work/ministry. For clarity in this paper the term JNC will be used to indicate those programmes which also have the nationally recognised validation.

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 of which is in-house and carries no transferable nationally recognised 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).

³ HESA collects, processes and publishes data about Higher Education in the UK <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

⁵ ETS (England) is a sub-committee of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth & Community Work (JNC) which covers the UK. Similar bodies operate in Wales (ETS Wales), Scotland (CLD) and Ireland (North South ETS).

2 RESULTS

2.1 Total Numbers⁶

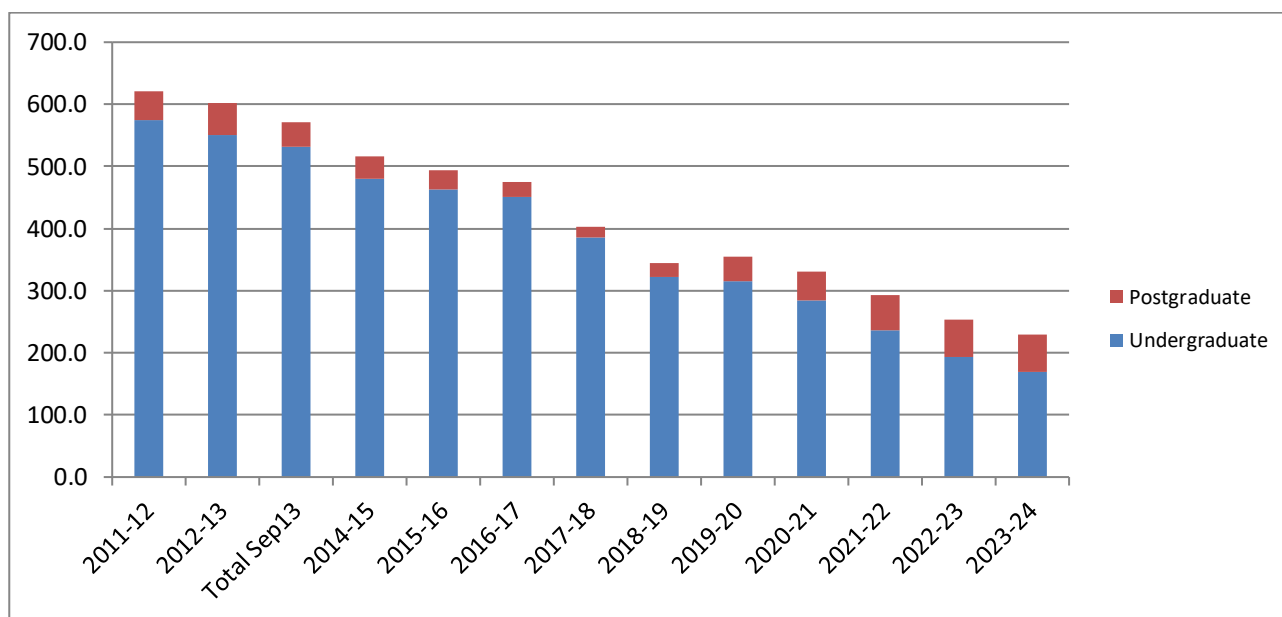


Figure 1 – total numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students on Christian youth and/or children’s work/ministry programmes across the UK

The numbers of students on academically validated⁷ programmes delivered by Christian faith-based providers, or on programmes which include practice or reflection in Christian settings, at undergraduate and postgraduate level has declined by over half across the last thirteen years from a total of **621** in 2011-12 to **250.5** in 2022-23, a **63.1%** fall in total numbers of students.

At the same time as the decline in undergraduate numbers, there has been a slight turn around and increase in postgraduate FTE numbers. Both levels declined at roughly the same rate until 2017-18, after which there was an increase in postgraduate students, from a low of **16.5** in Sep17 to **59.5** in Sep23. This is slightly down on the **61.0 FTE** postgraduate students in Sep22.

Whilst there was a general decline across the Covid years⁸, with an annual decline of 11.22% Sep21 and 13.49% in Sep22, the decline is still too high at **9.48%** in Sep23 as against the previous year.

At the moment there is no research evidence on why this has been the case for the Christian faith-based programmes, but institutions have generally commented on the enduring impact of the pandemic on learning modes (the move to on-line learning) and a general increase in anxiety levels across society as a whole.

⁶ All numbers are “full-time equivalent” (FTE); for example a part-time student is normally 0.5FTE

⁷ ‘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.

⁸ The first Covid lockdown was 23Mar20 and the pandemic had a significant effect until variants were less dangerous and more of the population were immunised, from the Spring/Summer of 2022

2.2 JNC qualifying Christian faith-based programmes

There has been a continuing and significant decline in the numbers of students on programmes with a Christian value-base which also provide the national recognition in youth work (JNC). Last year (2022-23) there had been problems in recruitment caused by the global pandemic and low number generally had meant some internal structural problems for some providers.⁹

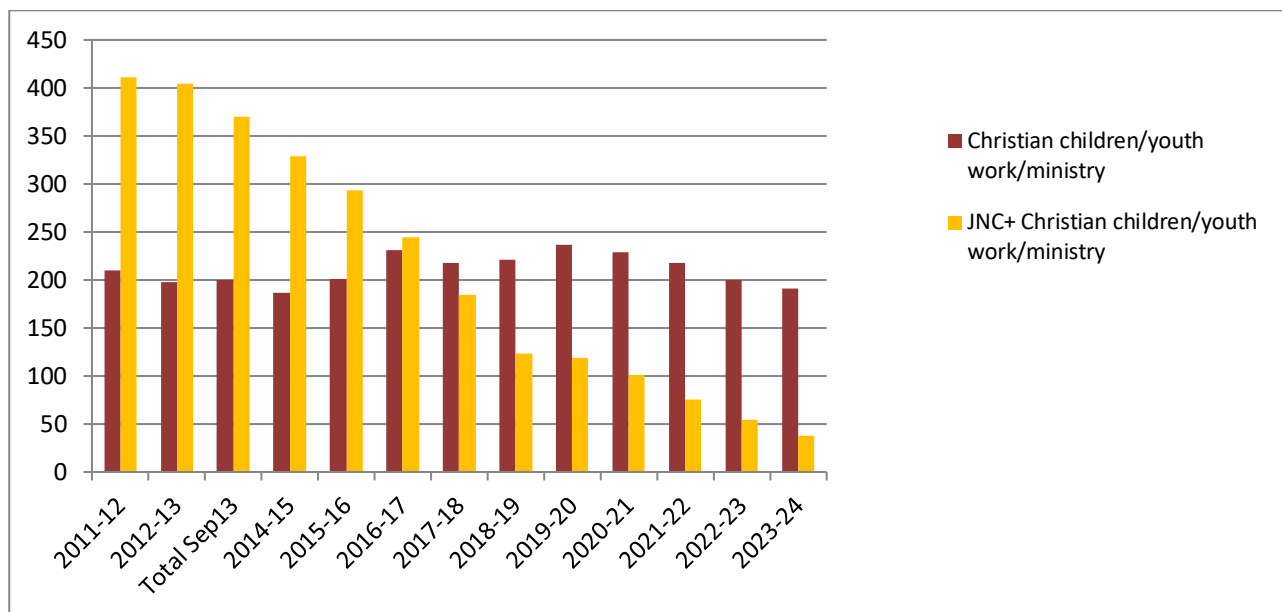


Figure 2 – total number of Christian youth and/or children's work/ministry students on JNC qualifying and on ordinary/non-JNC qualifying programmes

The numbers on the general courses fluctuated on general programmes from **210** in 2011-12 through to **201** in 2015-16. There was a slight increase to 2019-20 (**236.8**). In subsequent years there has been a slow decline to **191.5** this year.

In 2011-12 there were **six** undergraduate and **three** postgraduate nationally validated (JNC) programmes being delivered by **six** training agencies.

In 2023-24 there are **four** undergraduate programmes delivered by **three** training agencies. **Two** of the four are being taught out (Nazarene College and Moorlands Northern Ireland). There is still **one** postgraduate programme which provides a route to professional recognition (CYM).

Most of the programmes which have closed have done so due to the significant decline in student numbers of those wanting to access the professional qualification in addition to the theology and practice of Christian youth work. The Nazarene College in Manchester is teaching out its professionally qualifying undergraduate degree and replacing it with a non-JNC award.

⁹ CYM took the decision not to recruit for the September 2020 intake due to internal reorganisation.

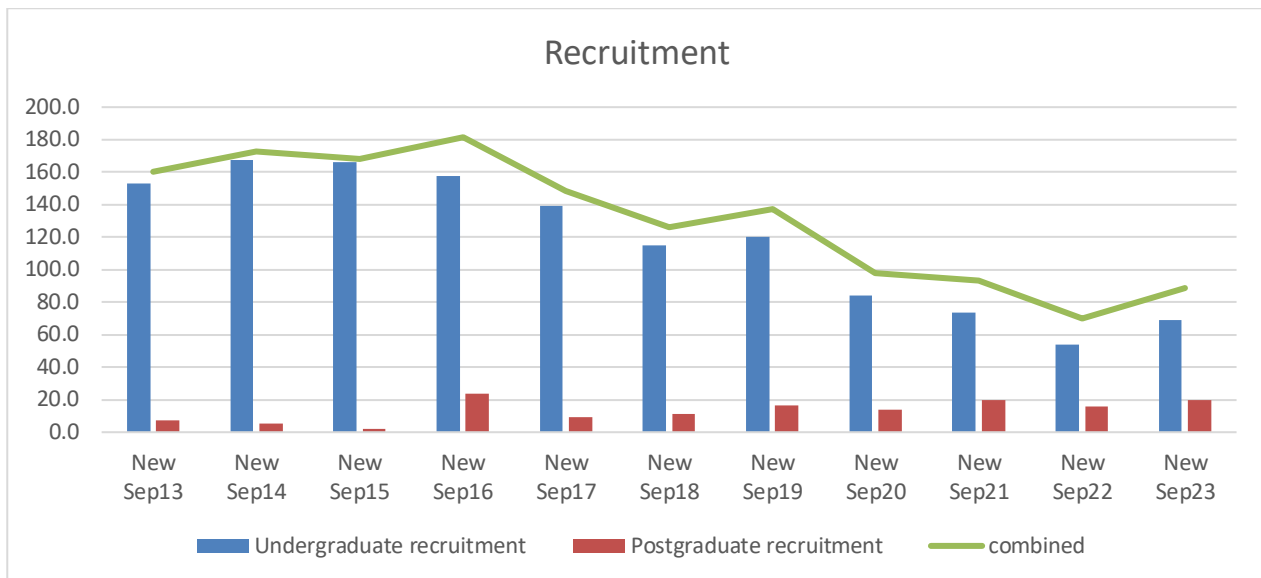


Figure 3 – Total numbers of students recruited onto higher education programmes for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes

Numbers of new students recruited to commence at the beginning of each academic year have been counted from the September 2013 intake when a total of **160** students commenced higher education programmes. A total of **89** new students were recruited and commenced in Sep23 which is the highest number since Sep19 (**95**). It is a **27%** rise on the numbers recruited in Sep22.

There was a slight uptake in Sep16 caused by more students choosing postgraduate programmes and in Sep19 with an increase in recruitment for both under- and post-graduate. Then came the Covid19 pandemic and numbers dropped. The rise in Sep23, **19** extra students, **15** of them for undergraduate programmes could be a sign of the tide beginning to turn, or simply a fluctuation reflecting the ending of the impact of Covid19!

The decrease in numbers entering higher education programmes meant that **8** programmes did not recruit in Sep22 and **7** programmes began teaching-out¹⁰. In Sep23 **7** programmes did not recruit and **2** began teaching out.

¹⁰

'Teaching out' is the term used by institutions when they close a programme to new entrants but continue to run the programme for the current students

2.4 Comparison with youth and community training and employment generally

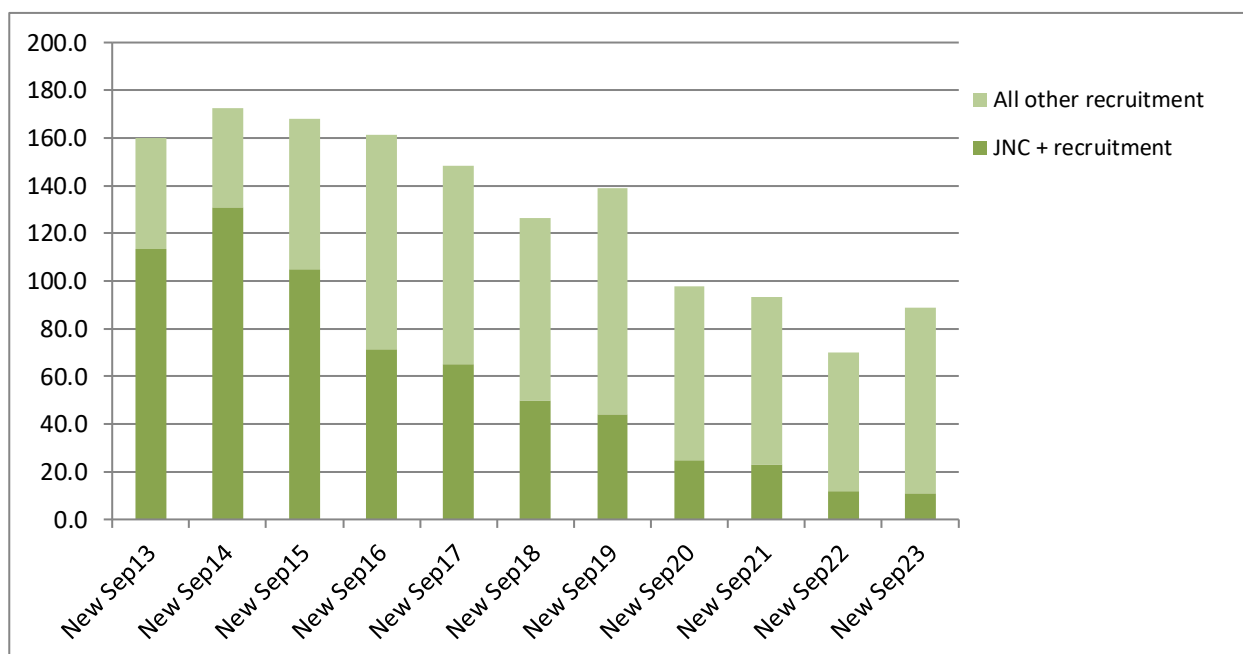


Figure 4 – Total numbers of students recruited onto higher education programmes for both the professionally validated (JNC)¹¹ and all other programmes

There has been a decline in recruitment to general nationally validated (JNC) youth work programmes delivered by higher education institutions in England. There were **951** new recruits in 2011-12, and only **233** in Sep23 – a fall of **75.5%**¹² across the whole period.

Christian faith-based programmes which also provided the professional qualification (JNC) recruited **113.5** in Sep13. This academic year there have been **11** new recruits, a decline of **90.3%**.

In Sep13 **46.5** students were recruited for the non-professionally validated programmes. In September 2023 the intake was **78**, an increase of **68%** across the ten years. The most recent highest intake was in Sep19, (pre-Covid), with **95** applying for non-professionally validated programmes.

Whilst a direct comparison is not possible, due to some of the Christian programmes being delivered in other nations,¹³ it is, nevertheless, interesting to see similar challenges for nationally validated (JNC) youth work training as for Christian faith-based programmes. Figures are not yet available for recruitment to the general (JNC) programmes in Sep23.

Youth work delivered by local authorities in England was drastically reducing across the austerity years which followed the financial crash of 2008. This has caused a long-term, significant decrease in the numbers of youth workers and thus in the profession generally and in training. During

¹¹ The nationally validated (JNC) 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 across the UK.

¹² 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 figures are only available up to 2022-23

¹³ CYM and Moorlands both had delivery centres in Northern Ireland, and St Padarn's is based in Cardiff.

2015-16 there was talk of the English local authorities pulling out of the JNC because of the decline of youth work generally and this caused a significant drop in confidence in the qualifications.

All the political parties had raised their verbal and manifesto commitments to the value of youth work in the lead up to the general election in 2019, however most of the finance promised has not fully materialised! During the pandemic, the value of youth work rose, in part due to the efforts of the National Youth Agency in establishing the importance of youth work to the wellbeing of young people. Qualified youth workers in England were granted key/critical worker status by the government in January 2021.

A recent report on the amount spent by councils in England and Wales on youth work, numbers of youth centres and FTE numbers for youth workers¹⁴ has indicated that there is a slight upturn in the amount spent, although expenditure in England has fallen by **73%** since 2010-11, and by **22%** in Wales. The latest figure for England shows an overall drop to 2022-23 of **35%**.¹⁵



Fig 5 Full-time-equivalent (FTE) workers employed by Local Authorities in England (YMCA Research)

The YMCA research shows that FTE numbers dropped by **53%** from the year 2012-13 to the year 2018-19. Since then the number has been slowly growing. The research indicated that many local authorities counted the youth workers in contracted out services and others employed more youth support workers (Levels 2 and 3) rather than professionally qualified workers (Levels 6 & 7) thus reducing employment costs.

2.5 Institutions and Training Agencies

In September 2011 there were **14** colleges/training providers offering a total of **30** Christian youth work/ministry programmes at higher education levels¹⁶ and from whom the above numbers were

¹⁴ YMCA *Youth Services are On the Ropes* February 2024 <https://www.ymca.org.uk/on-the-ropes> accessed 21Mar24

¹⁵ YMCA (2024) p19

¹⁶ Level 4 and upwards within the English system

obtained. **7** of the colleges/training providers offered a total of **9** nationally validated (JNC) courses. A further five colleges/training providers offered **8** courses which included an element of Christian youth work/ministry, such as a placement with a Christian faith-based organisation.

In December 2023 **14** institutions returned student numbers for **35** programmes, of which **7** programmes did not recruit in Sep23, and a further **3** which are 'teaching out'. Nazarene Theological College are continuing to run their undergraduate degree but without professional validation, Cliff College are closing two of their programmes and Moorlands South West will commence delivery of the JNC validated undergraduate degree in Sep24, replacing the non-professionally endorsed youth work programme.

FROM MULTI-SITE TO MULTI-MODE

There had been an interesting increase in multi-site delivery across the early years of the twenty-first century. In September 2011 there was just **1** institution (CYM) which had **5** campus locations across the UK. In September 2021 **4** institutions were delivering in a total of **9** locations. However from September 2023 there are only **2** institutions now delivering in **5** locations (2 and 3 respectively). This decline was caused by significantly fewer student applying meaning that some locations were no longer viable. At the same time there has been a rise in mixed-mode delivery, with some providers moving to online delivery. This is not proving economically viable as the student finance loans are not available for online programmes.

NON-CHRISTIAN, NATIONALLY VALIDATED (JNC) PROGRAMMES

In 2013-14 the NYA Annual Monitoring Report indicated that there were 41 institutions who returned data on programmes. In 2022/23, the latest year for which figures are available, there were 22 HEIs offering 30 programmes.¹⁷, a 50% drop in universities and colleges offering the national validation (JNC) through general courses.

2.6 Changes

The main changes this year have been as a result of training providers rationalising what they can offer in the light of reduced numbers. Clif College and Moorlands College have both made appropriate changes and other providers have been closing programmes through teaching out.

A new arrival this year has been the Scottish Baptist College. It is one of the few confessional Christian colleges located on the campus of its validating University. The college boasts the best of both worlds – *'a faith-based learning environment alongside the benefits of a University campus experience.'*¹⁸

Decisions by the Church of England concerning their desire to grow the church younger and more diverse, will mean that new training programmes will be coming online during this academic year. The 30k Project¹⁹ aims to raise up 30,000 new children and youth leaders by 2030. The Project Board are prioritising three workstreams:

- ❖ To develop and enhance support for existing workers
- ❖ The recruitment and formation of 3000 new employed workers

¹⁷ NYA Annual Monitoring Report 2022-23 (Draft Report, not yet published)

¹⁸ <https://scottishbaptistcollege.org/about-us/history/> accessed 28Mar24

¹⁹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/30kproject> accessed 29Feb24

- ❖ Develop pathways that support the discernment, recruitment and formation of 27,000 new volunteers.

To achieve this aim there will need to be 500 employed workers and 5000 volunteers commencing work in each of the following six years!

In terms of future recruitment it is likely that we will see more people opting for the Integrated Degree Apprenticeships which are now being offered by a number of institutions which have traditionally delivered Youth & Community Work general (JNC) programmes. However, due to the complexities of the Apprenticeship Scheme and the government levy, it has not been possible for Christian colleges/training providers and employers of Christian youth workers to access these funds – yet!

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

Appendix 1 ~ Table of student numbers (Sep23)

Colour code

Undergraduate programmes

Postgraduate programmes

Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with JNC national professional validation

	2011- 12	2012- 13	Total Sep13	2014- 15	2015- 16	2016- 17	2017- 18	2018- 19	2019- 20	2020- 21	2021- 22	2022- 23	2023- 24
TOTAL Undergraduate	575.0	551.0	532.0	481.0	463.5	451.5	385.5	322.5	314.8	283.9	236.0	192.5	170.0
TOTAL Postgraduates	46.0	51.0	38.5	35.0	31.0	24.0	16.5	22.3	40.5	46.1	57.0	61.0	59.5
Total HE	621.0	602.0	570.5	516.0	494.5	475.5	402.0	344.8	355.3	330.0	293.0	253.5	229.5
%age change in overall student numbers		3.06	8.13	9.55	4.17	3.84	15.46	14.23	-3.05	7.11	11.22	13.49	0.00
TOTAL JNC qualifying courses	411	404	370.0	329.0	293.5	244.5	184.0	123.5	118.5	101.5	75.0	54.0	38.0
TOTAL Ordinary courses	210	198	200.5	187.0	201.0	231.0	218.0	221.3	236.8	228.5	218.0	199.5	191.5
	621	602	570.5	516.0	494.5	475.5	402.0	344.8	355.3	330.0	293.0	253.5	229.5
%age on non-JNC courses	33.82	32.89	35.14	36.24	40.65	48.58	54.23	64.18	66.65	69.25	74.40	78.69	83.44
%age change in numbers				-7.81	2.61	3.87	8.05	14.93	-10.11	29.62	4.49	13.49	9.45

Appendix 2 ~ Student Recruitment (Sep23)

JNC recruitment (England) – all programmes across England, not just the Christian faith-based

Christian JNC recruitment to programmes with the national validation

Christian Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes without a nationally validated (JNC) youth work qualification

Generally	2011-12	2012-13	New Sep13	New Sep14	New Sep15	New Sep16	New Sep17	New Sep18	New Sep19	New Sep20	New Sep21	New Sep22	New Sep23
JNC recruitment (England)	951.0	825.0	701.0	793.0	673.0	456.0	432.0	295.0	259.0	250.0	270.0	233.0	
Overall %age change on JNC recruitment		-15.3%	-17.7%	11.6%	-17.8%	-47.6%	-5.6%	-46.4%	-13.9%	-3.6%	7.4%	-15.9%	
Christian JNC recruitment			113.5	131.0	105.0	71.5	65.0	50.0	44.0	25.0	23.0	12.0	11.0
annual %age change				15.4%	-19.8%	-31.9%	-9.1%	-23.1%	-12.0%	-43.2%	-8.0%	-47.8%	-8.3%
Christian UG and PG recruitment			46.5	41.5	63.0	90.0	83.5	76.3	95.1	72.9	70.5	58.0	78.0
annual %age change				-10.8%	51.8%	42.9%	-7.2%	-8.6%	24.6%	-23.3%	-3.3%	-17.8%	34.6%
Total recruitment			160.0	172.5	168.0	161.5	148.5	126.3	139.1	97.9	93.5	70.0	89.0

Appendix 3 ~ Institutions, programmes and validating universities included in the data (Sep23)

Undergraduate programmes

Postgraduate programmes

Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with the nationally validated (JNC) recognition

<i>Institution/Agency</i>	<i>Programme</i>	<i>Validated by (university/college)</i>
Aurora Children & Youth (Future Youth (MES))	Aurora Children & Youth (Future Youth (MES))	Sheffield Diocese
Children's course in Yorkshire & Southwark	Aurora Youth & Children's Ministry Training	Sheffield Diocese
Cert HE Theology, Ministry and Mission	Bristol Baptist College	Durham
MA Theology, Ministry and Mission	Bristol Baptist College	Durham
BA (Hons) Mission and Ministry	Cliff College	Manchester
BA (Hons) Theology and Mission	Cliff College	Manchester
BA (Hons) Theology and Mission (Children, Youth and Family Ministry)	Cliff College	Manchester

MA in Mission (Children & Youth pathway)	Cliff College	Manchester
BA Theology, Ministry and Mission	CMS Pioneer	Durham
MA Christian Ministry	Crosslands Seminary	SE Baptist Theol Seminary (USA)
BA (Hons) Practical Theology (Community Youth Work - JNC option)	CYM - Nottingham	Newman
MA Ministry and Mission (Youth and Community Work - JNC option)	CYM - Nottingham	Newman
MA Ministry and Mission (Chaplaincy with Children and Young People)	ICYM - Nottingham	Newman
MA Ministry and Mission (Children and Family Work)	ICYM - Nottingham	Newman
MA Ministry and Mission (Christian Leadership in Context)	ICYM - Nottingham	Newman
BA Practical Theology	ICYM Nottingham	Newman
BA Practical Theology (Chaplaincy with Children and Young People)	ICYM Nottingham	Newman
BA Practical Theology (Children and Family Ministry)	ICYM Nottingham	Newman
BA Practical Theology (Community Ministry)	ICYM Nottingham	Newman
BA Applied Theology (Youth & Community Work)	Moorlands College - Christchurch	Gloucestershire
BA Applied Theology (Youth & Community Work)	Moorlands College - NI	Gloucestershire
BA Applied Theology (Youth & Community Work)	Moorlands College - South West	Gloucestershire
BA (Hons) Applied Theology	Moorlands South West	Gloucestershire
BA (Hons) Theology (Practical Theology)	Nazarene Theological College	Manchester
BA (Hons) Theology (Youth & Community)	Nazarene Theological College	Manchester
BA Theology: (Youth and Community Work) JNC	Nazarene Theological College	Manchester
BA Applied Theology (Youth Ministry track)	Regents Theological College	Chester
BA Theology, Mission and Ministry (with a specialism in youth work)	Reign Ministries	Birmingham Newman (via ForMission)
BA Theology, Ministry and Mission	Ridley Hall Cambridge	Durham
Ridley London Online ~ Foundation Award & Cert HE in Theology, Ministry and Mission	Ridley Hall Cambridge	Durham
MA Theology, Ministry and Mission	Ridley Hall College	Durham
BD (Hons) Theology with Pastoral Studies (Youth and Community)	Scottish Baptist College	UWS
Time for Reflection (Chaplaincy and Schools) Module	Scottish Baptist College	UWS
BA (Hons) Theology, Ministry & Mission (youth ministry focus)	St Mellitus College	Durham
MA Children, Young People and Families	St Padarn's	Durham