



EAST MIDLANDS SYNOD COUNCIL

Synod Focus Groups



Your guide to the role and responsibilities of Synod Focus Groups

New ways of supporting our Synod Mission in a rapidly changing world

What are Synod Focus Groups and what areas will they cover?

Synod Focus Groups will be authorised by Synod Council to act on behalf of Synod on matters of importance to the URC, the Synod and local churches. The groups will act in both a pathfinding role and as a resource to local churches in helping to develop their own ideas in areas of work led by focus groups.

Focus groups may be set up either by Synod Council or by those with a specific interest in a particular area. Groups set up through either route will be required to present their proposals to Synod Council. The presentation will include the purpose of the group, the terms of reference, the anticipated membership, the initial period of activity and projected costs. Groups operating outside of Synod Council approval will not be eligible for support.

It is anticipated that some groups may be set up for a specific piece of work over an agreed time period and then be disbanded.

It is envisaged that in the period following the implementation of Synod Council three focus groups will be authorised. These will cover:

***Mission *Ecumenical Work *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation**
Although operating as leader of their own focus group, the Synod Council member for focus groups will act in a co-ordination role to ensure that Synod Council is kept informed of the activities of each focus group. The council member will also be involved in supporting/requesting changes to the agreed terms of reference, resource requirements or timetable for a particular focus group.

What are the primary responsibilities of a Focus Group?

- Defining the objectives of the group.
- Developing strategies, and establishing priorities, timetable and resource requirements (people and financial) to deliver the agreed objectives.
- Championing the particular topic across the Synod and regularly communicating with local churches.
- Offering advice, guidance and support to local churches that have expressed an interest in the work of the focus group and wish to adapt it for their local needs.
- Taking action to ensure that best practice for the topic is always on the group agenda.

- Where appropriate work with other denominations on issues of shared interest.
- Ensuring specialists and organisations outside of the church, who can offer advice and support for the work being undertaken, are identified.

Who are the members of the Focus Group?

In general a Focus Group will have the following membership, however this may vary depending on the particular area of focus. Such variations will have been agreed with Synod Council when the authority to set up the team was given.

- A group leader agreed between the group and Synod Council
- Team members with relevant skills and expertise or an interest in the particular area of work being undertaken by the group
- Expert support invited to attend from time to time for a particular topic

Who will attend meetings of the Focus Groups?

In general terms the team members outlined above would attend a team meeting together with appropriate support resources. The Synod Council member for focus groups would also attend if there was an identified need. The frequency of meetings will be determined by the team but will be specifically arranged to ensure reporting and communication deadlines are met.

Recognising the geographical diversity of the Synod every effort will be made to minimise travel and other costs by meeting face to face only when essential.

How will it work with, and support, local churches?

The specific focus group will be the Synod wide centre of expertise for the particular subject matter. It will:

- Be drawn from members of local churches, and on occasions Synod staff, it will provide the wide ranging level of expertise and interest essential for the successful development and delivery of its objectives.
- Interface with best practice and on the ground experience for the particular subject within the denomination, from other denominations and the secular world.

- Champion/promote the work of the group throughout the Synod.
- Offer advice and guidance to local churches.
- Ensure that other Synod groups support the workings of the focus group.

What are the key links with other areas of the Synod?

(1) Synod Council

- Obtaining approval for the initial setting up of the focus group.
- Seeking approval for changes to the original group mandate.
- Updating Synod Council on the work of the group through an agreed method and frequency.

(2) Synod Council Convenor for Focus Groups

- Providing reports of group activity at an agreed frequency.
- Seeking advice and guidance on issues affecting the work of the group.
- Agreeing the approach to be made to Synod Council to extend the original mandate for the group or to close the group if the objectives have been met or the original plan cannot be delivered.

(3) Training and Development Group

- For delivering identified training/development needs for the focus groups or individual members which will underpin their work.
- For delivering the agreed support to local churches which is essential to support the delivery of focus group initiated work.

(4) Finance

- For management of allocated budget.

(5) The wider United Reformed Church

- Ensuring that relevant materials available from the wider church are accessed, developed and used where appropriate.
- Engaging with those at Church House, and in other Synods, who are working in areas covered by the focus group to ensure sharing of best practice and operational experience.

How can I get involved?

If you have an interest in a particular subject for which a Synod Focus Group already exists then speak to the leader of the group who will be able to brief you on the work being undertaken. If this is a new group or you are uncertain who to speak to then contact the Synod Council member for focus groups.

This leaflet is produced by the Synod Structures and Priorities Review Group, who will be providing a series of leaflets about the new Synod Council and its supporting functions to assist you in understanding the changes. September 2018