

Partnership between the Church of Scotland (Ministries Council and Mission and Discipleship Council) and Fresh Expressions: Mid-term Review

Background

This review explores the progress made in achieving the objectives identified at the outset of the partnership agreement with Fresh Expressions.

The Fresh Expressions agency

'seeks to transform communities and individuals through championing, resourcing and multiplying new ways of being church. [They] work with Christians from a broad range of denominations and traditions and the movement has resulted in thousands of new congregations being formed alongside more traditional churches.'¹

After a number of years of working together, a partnership between the Ministries and Mission and Discipleship Councils, and the Fresh Expressions agency was formalised on 1 October 2013, with an initial term of five years. The Ministries and Mission and Discipleship Councils committed to provide support of £70k per year (£35k from each Council), this to include provision for a full-time Fresh Expressions Development Worker (FEDW) in Scotland. The post was filled by David McCarthy in February 2014.

Objectives

The Fresh Expressions Partnership was intended to enable the Councils to achieve the following:

Further their commitment to this area of work, expressed in the report of the Joint Emerging Church Group to the 2013 General Assembly.	The first mapping exercise was carried out in Nov/Dec 2015, showing that there are now around 50 initiatives in the Church of Scotland who are on the way to becoming, or have the potential to become, Fresh Expressions of Church. This equates to approximately 23 new average sized congregations, or a whole presbytery.
Strengthen the collaborative partnership in this area between Ministries and Mission and Discipleship Councils.	The two Councils have continued to work well together, in both strategy and delivery of work.
Stimulate, support and resource congregations seeking to reach out effectively into their communities with the good news of the Gospel.	47% of the projects included in the mapping exercise felt they had been successful in reaching people who had never been to church, and 44% believed they had reached those who had been to church in the past.
Help congregations and presbyteries consider the post-modern context in which they operate and its meaning for and challenges to church practice today.	The Going for Growth programme is visiting every region of Scotland to explore what contextually appropriate mission and church would look like in their communities. The patterns of meeting demonstrate that these initiatives are sensitive to cultural changes over the past generation. Less than half meet on a Sunday, and over 20% do not use church buildings, but meet elsewhere, and the impact of digital engagement though the internet and social media platforms was evident.
Identify, network and support individuals and groups who work on the frontiers of existing church life and who challenge traditional understandings and practice of 'church'.	Fresh Expressions have recently moved to a Community Hub model of meeting where pioneering practitioners, educators and thinkers from all the partner agencies can gather to share knowledge and experience. The FEDW is working with four developing learning communities in different contexts across Scotland.

In addition, at the General Assembly of 2015, further objectives were identified.

To make one of the aims of the Decade for Ministry the training of no fewer than 100 members per year in the theology and practice of mission either through the mission shaped ministry course or similar, these to be delivered by presbyteries or groups of presbyteries in cooperation with Fresh Expressions and ecumenical partners wherever possible.	The mapping exercise revealed that the Going For Growth and Fresh Expressions training was the single most significant training which respondents had engaged with. 319 people have attended the regional Going for Growth conferences. 303 have attended the follow-up Fresh Expressions Vision Days (in addition to the 310 who had attended
--	--

¹ Fresh Expressions website www.freshexpressions.org.uk/

	<p>Vision Days in Scotland prior to the Going for Growth programme) 97 have attended the Summer School over the two years (with 16 attending both). Approximately 80 have attended Fresh Expressions mission shaped ministry courses.</p>
--	--

Costs

£35K per year from each Council, that is, a total of £350k over five years. The full costs of employing a Fresh Expressions Development Worker for the Church of Scotland are included in this sum.

Both Councils have also made significant investment in this area of work beyond work with Fresh Expressions (e.g. in Pioneer Ministry, supporting the Summer School on Mission, or additional administrative support), but the costs associated with the Fresh Expressions partnership have remained on budget from the outset.

The principal cost of the partnership to the Church of Scotland is the financial commitment of £350k over the five year period. It would not be accurate to say, however, that withdrawal from a partnership arrangement would equate to an equivalent saving for the church. The biggest portion of the funding is used to employ a Grade 6 Development Worker. Prior to the Partnership both Councils employed staff to deliver this area of work, which entailed extensive collaboration with Fresh Expressions on an informal basis.

Benefits

The benefits of doing this in partnership with Fresh Expressions are:

- Access to high quality training resources, modified specifically for the Church of Scotland context.
- Access to related research currently only available to Fresh Expressions partners, and which we do not have the resource to replicate.
- Increased reach of communications, due to the strength of the Fresh Expressions brand, and the existing communications and training networks.
- Drawing on the experience and skills of the wider Fresh Expressions team, both those directly employed by Fresh Expressions, and those in Fresh Expressions development roles in other Fresh Expressions partners (e.g. input to training programmes and events, consultation on research, etc).
- Allowing the Church of Scotland to become part of an extensive learning community of practitioners and strategists in this area of work.

Recommendations

Continue in Partnership with Fresh Expression under the current agreement until February 2019, when the Fresh Expressions Development Worker EDW will have been in post for five years.

That the Ministries Council and the Mission and Discipleship Council carry out a further review of the partnership in 2018, to determine the future beyond 2019.