

# Enhancing Diversity

## Research Report

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### Objectives

This study set out to investigate anecdotal suggestions that racial diversity was limited in leadership of children's/youth ministry. We carried out scoping research (a survey of existing literature and resources, a survey amongst UK churches and interviews and focus group discussions) and present findings and recommendations, alongside some resources to address this ongoing issue. We sent the survey invitation to over 1,000 churches and had 90 responses, from a broad range of denominations and urban/rural settings. The findings and recommendations are outlined here.

### Existing Literature & Resources

Although Racial Justice Sunday began 25 years ago in the Methodist church, there seem to have been many more developments over the past five years, seen primarily through more networking and dialogue events, seeking to strengthen understanding and awareness of issues and challenges regarding ethnic diversity. Some denominations and organizations have also carried out reviews of existing resources and commissioned new resources. Developments have included youth forums and racial awareness learning programmes. However, whilst there has been much discussion at strategic level, many report minimal change at grass roots level. Scoping and analysis of resources and tools reveals that these tools are minimal, but also not widely adopted. There is minimal academic research and literature in this field, particularly in the area of youth and children's ministry leadership.

### Interview Insights

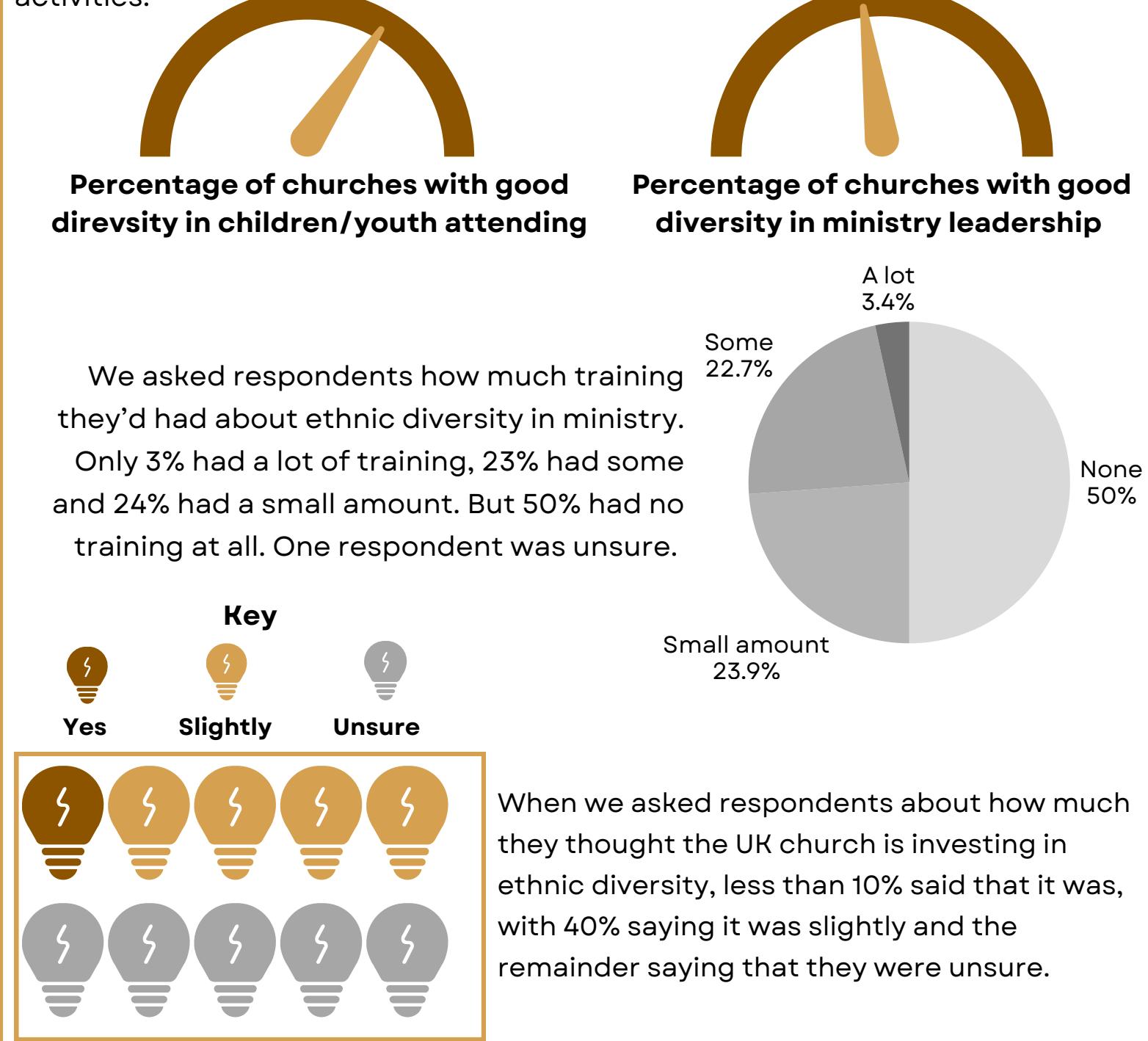
Many reported that this was a significantly overlooked issue, with many stating that there had been interest shown in recent years, although interest is now waning. Initial reviews and efforts to address the lack of racial diversity in churches seems to have not been maintained, even though it takes time to implement and embed systemic change. Many participants explained that it feels like the church has moved their focus onto other areas and set aside this issue, which is very disheartening for many who still feel overlooked and excluded. Others expressed that 'it doesn't feel like steps have been made towards us,' and they are tired of the debate and about constantly discussing this issue.

Some reported stories and experiences of being discriminated or verbally abused within church contexts due to skin colour. Furthermore, whilst vision and strategies have promoted the need to be more diverse, many interviewees observed that many church and denominational teams remain predominantly white. This perpetuates an underlying discourse that those of global majority heritage do not belong in ministry leadership.

Many interviewees expressed that they often do not feel 'at home' in their church, as they feel that it does not capture the essence of the diversity of God's kingdom. Churches often expect people to 'drop their cultural heritage the moment they step into church.' This pattern continues into youth and children's ministry also, where there is often a distinct lack of cultural diversity in the resources or activities offered. These practices and tendencies do not encourage those of global majority heritage to move forward into leadership positions within children's and youth ministry, particularly where they are 'used to being overlooked.'

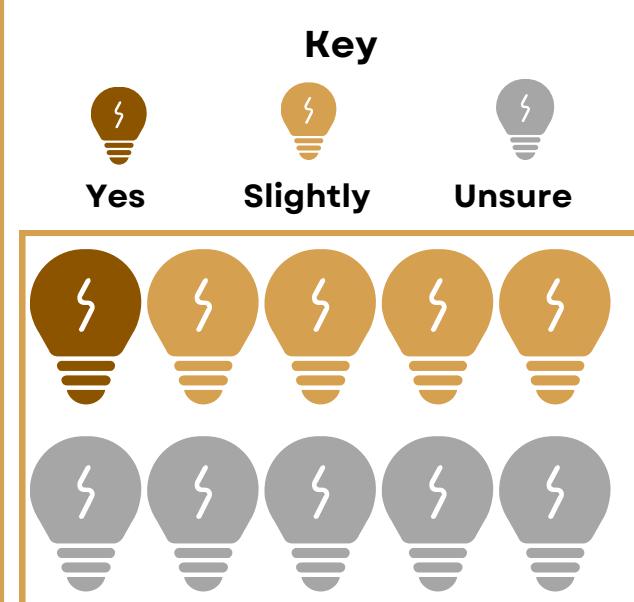
### Survey Findings

Our survey of churches revealed that 67% of respondent churches reported good levels of racial diversity in the children & young people attending. However, only 46% reported good racial diversity in the leadership of these activities.



We asked respondents how much training they'd had about ethnic diversity in ministry.

Only 3% had a lot of training, 23% had some and 24% had a small amount. But 50% had no training at all. One respondent was unsure.



When we asked respondents about how much they thought the UK church is investing in ethnic diversity, less than 10% said that it was, with 40% saying it was slightly and the remainder saying that they were unsure.

### Recommendations

- The church cannot think themselves immune from expectations and biases which are present, and often endemic, within society. This emphasizes the need for continuous intentional and deliberate steps towards diversity. And this needs to be modelled by and in leadership structures, to shape the norms and expectations within churches and denominations. There needs to be transparency and a 'level playing field' in the way that leaders are developed, to avoid tokenism and perpetuating problematic or inadvertently bigoted processes of team or leadership development.
- Alongside this, there is a need for a shift in language and expression to better communicate the beauty of intercultural connections and relationships to better reflect God's kingdom values. This flows from increased and ongoing conversations, awareness and relational connections amongst the church community. Resources such as CYM's 'Ongoing Conversations' help to illuminate language and behaviours which may be inadvertently unhelpful and counterproductive.
- There is a need to be intentional about recruiting, empowering and training those of global majority heritage, so that they feel both equipped and included as part of ministry leadership. This would help to break some of the vicious cycles of those from global majority heritage not becoming more involved because they lack confidence or 'do not see people who are like me.' This requires intentional sharing of power and leadership roles, as well as sharing inspiring stories and communicating positive ministry role models.