

A PASSION TO TRAIN



In an article aimed at anyone considering youth ministry training, Martin Saunders looks at how passion and skills are the hallmarks of balanced youth workers, and challenges training providers to ensure that's what their graduates look like. Includes a comprehensive listing of youth ministry training options.

For some it's simply the obvious choice; for others it's born out of an inescapable passion for young people. For the fortunate few, the decision to become a full-time youth worker comes as a response to a clear call from God. However it happens, the decision to enter the most rewarding, challenging, and important career in the world (and of course we would say that), presents two immediate questions:

Do you have the passion, and do you have the skills?

Passion

The word is thrown around almost indiscriminately in youth work circles. It is used both as a rallying cry to an apathetic generation, and as a defence to cover our shortcomings and mistakes. Yet from my perspective, God-fuelled passion is the element that elevates Christian youth work. It's the extra ingredient that enables us to

doesn't end until we do. That famous passage in Galatians 5, which talks about 'life by the Spirit', ends with Paul's encouragement to 'keep in step with the spirit' (v25). There's a strong theme in the Bible of ploughing on with the journey towards sustained maturity (Hebrews 6 v 1).

Youth ministry is not exempt from this, both in our own discipleship, and our need to keep learning and refining the tools for the job. There are many ways we can access this, through reading and studying resources; attending one-off and short-term courses; learning from mentors and of course, through longer-form training.

The skills we develop through these sources help us to create safe (and legal!) spaces for young people; encourage us to develop longer-term plans; equip us for setbacks; and give us a sturdy theology of youth ministry to underpin everything we do.

Yet imagine a youth worker who has a fully thought-through theology, shelves-full of theory

Davis' model, the final stage sees students hold 'a strong commitment to their profession.' Good training equips you with skills without knocking out your passion – and that's the challenge to every course provider.

Youth work across the board is continuing to move toward deeper professionalism and professionalisation, and Christian youth work – even that taking place solely in a faith-based context – is certainly not exempt. Providers continually have to manage and reassess their balance between theological input and hands-on practice, and satisfying professional requirements – especially in the case of JNC-qualifying courses. Those providers do carry out that ongoing reassessment though, and pay particular notice to the feedback of their graduates, to ensure they're not becoming skewed in one direction.

So if you do feel that unmistakable pull toward what the late, great Mike Yaconelli called 'the greatest calling any person could receive' and which Duffy Robbins refers to simply as an 'adventure'; then training could be the right way to lay firm foundations for it. The question then is: where do you train?

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respond to that 2am text; nod understandingly when a teenager tells us they've made that same mistake yet again; and plan another Bible study even though no-one turned up to the last one.

Passion is a part of the makeup of any Christian youth worker – a passion for young people; to see culture redeemed; to see justice increase; to see the kingdom come in and through them. If you don't have any passion, then maybe you're barking up the wrong calling. On its own however, passion isn't enough. We've all heard worst-case stories of youth work going wrong (or worse) because the leaders were intensely passionate, but didn't have any knowledge or skills to back that passion up. I'm not suggesting that the only route to developing those skills is through a professional youth work qualification. However, if you mix passion with undeveloped theology, a lack of plan and direction, and little awareness or regard for safety and best practice, then you could be baking a cake called disaster.

Skills

One of the amazing things about the Christian journey – for leaders as much as for young people – is that it's about continuing growth that

and a comprehensive file of best practice that is both ring-bound and laminated, and fully absorbed. Yet this youth worker has no passion. He is tired, slightly cynical; he has no vision for youth work or young people. He has the skills but not the passion. Would you want him in charge of the youth group in your church?

Passion + skills =

Some churches talk about how they would rather have someone who has 'a passion for Jesus and young people', than someone who has had that passion trained out of them. If you're considering youth ministry training, you probably have a desire neither to simply be the former, nor end up turning into the latter.

Writing in this magazine last year (Feb 2009), Centre for Youth Ministry's Jo Griffiths explained the six-stage transition model developed by Fred Davis in the 1960s, which charts the progress of development from a 'lay person' to a 'professional worker'. These include a period of soul-searching, and a stage during which students 'find it difficult to integrate their newly acquired knowledge and practice'. Training does knock the stuffing out of you – but hopefully not the passion. In

Finding a fit

For every person the answer is different. On the pages that follow, you'll find a pretty comprehensive (although we don't claim to be entirely exhaustive) listing of UK youth ministry training providers and their courses. We've tried to give you a small flavour of each institution and the various courses that they run, but we strongly recommend that you conduct your own research by visiting the websites listed. We've given them precious little space in which to express themselves here – to really understand what they're about, you'll need to ask them yourself.

Each entry in our listing includes an 'exit possibilities' section, which suggests some possible applications for the qualification you'll receive at the end. It's good to start with the end in mind, so hopefully this list will be helpful as you seek to find the best fit for your needs and career aspirations.

Training isn't the only way to ensure you're balancing passion and skills, but if you can afford to do it then it's arguably the primary one. There are huge range of training options for Christian youth workers; somewhere on this list there could be the perfect one for you.

Martin Saunders is the Editor of *Youthwork* magazine.

TRAINING COURSES FOR 2010/2011

Youthwork magazine has compiled this information with the help of David Howell, a consultant in youth work and ministry who runs the website cywt.org.uk which brings together details of the majority of courses available. We have attempted to ensure that all the details are accurate at the time of press, apologise for any courses missing, and advise you to consult the specific websites for more detailed information.