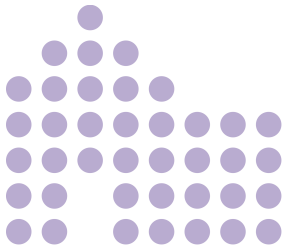


Church Society



An Analysis of

**Listening with Love & Faith:
Responses in More Detail**



Executive Summary

This analysis of the LLF research is intended to aid PCCs, Incumbents and Synod Representatives as they engage in debates over the coming months. What follows is a sustained engagement with *Listening with Love & Faith: Responses in More Detail*, the “more detailed technical report” issued in September 2022 alongside the summary report.¹

The aims of the LLF report are described in the introduction to “Listening with Love and Faith”:

*“Perhaps the best way to describe the first aim of this report, is to see it as a mirror. Its aim is to reflect back – as faithfully, impartially and accurately as possible – what those who have engaged with Living in Love and Faith have said by means of the questionnaire, the focus groups and creative submissions ... The second aim of the report is to ensure that the voices, perspectives and insights expressed through this churchwide engagement are listened to and heard by the bishops of the Church of England as they embark on the final stage of the journey in discerning a way forward for the Church of England during the autumn of 2022”.*²

Given this, it is essential that the research was academically robust and the survey reflective of the Church as a whole. The report has to be able to command confidence across the breadth of the Church of England, and be seen to be impartial. Unfortunately this is not the case.

It is notable that there is no overall methodology running throughout the report, which reduces its dependability. NVivo coding was used at some stages, but this was not pursued throughout the work.³ It is hard to see any link between the survey and the focus group questions, which is a serious weakness. There was no attempt to ensure that those who responded to the survey were within the Church of England, or that multiple submissions were not made by a single person.

The data analysis is questionable given that quotes are unattributed and there seems to be little consideration given to balance. Nationally, 96.1% of the population self-identifies as heterosexual and yet 89.4% of those who took part in the survey so identify. This is a statistically significant difference. When it comes to focus groups only 80.9% of those invited to participate were heterosexual. This was not addressed in the report.

The positionality of the researchers is not stated, but one comes from a denomination which has recently introduced same-sex Marriage, another was,

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith/listening>. Last accessed 22nd September 2022.

² *Listening with Love and Faith* (London: Church House Publishing, 2022), 6.

³ NVivo® is a specialist software package which facilitates the analysis of qualitative data by the allocation of specific categories or codes to statements from respondents and subsequent synthesis.

until recently, a trustee of a LGBTQ+ campaign group and another worships in a registered Inclusive Church. A single recent book, Guyan's *Queer Data* (2022), is used as a source for certain techniques such as amplifying areas on diagrams, and no contrasting positions were evaluated and compared before this approach was adopted.⁴ This all reduces the credibility of the work. One wonders why a well-established, independent firm was not used to conduct research which is supposed to bear the weight of guiding the bishops.⁵

Most crucially it should be noted that the question of whether the church should adopt same-sex Marriage was not raised in the survey. Any conclusions which some may draw from this report are mere suppositions. It is impossible from this research to conclude that "most" either want or do not want same-sex Marriage.

The Church of England appears to have made no effort to assess how many churches or deaneries ran the LLF course, or how many individuals participated. The design of LLF - wordy materials, online portal, discussion groups - privileged those from more affluent areas, and those who do not have English as their first language were at a disadvantage. It is telling that if you live amongst the most affluent 10% of England you were over seven times more likely to take part in the survey than if you live amongst the poorest 10%. This really should give the Church of England pause: why are we mainly listening to the well off? Why were there no black or Asian participants in the Focus Groups?⁶ Is this really good enough?

Of course, it is worth asking the question: are we really supposed to carry out doctrinal change by SurveyMonkey? The ordinal reminds us that it is the bishops who are ordained to be "guardians of the faith of the apostles", and General Synod is a body elected by the whole Church of England to represent views of the church. More fundamentally, Article XX reminds us that:

"THE Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another."

Moreover, our Canons state that: "The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures" (Canon A5). This should be the starting point for our debates.

In conclusion, even if the Church of England were to determine doctrine by survey, which is not its charism, this would not be the survey to use. It cannot command the confidence of the whole church. This is a real shame and an opportunity missed.

⁴ The report simply cites the book: "The queering of data ... [has] implications for whose stories are placed at the centre and on the margins" (p 24).

⁵ Brendan Research, who carried out the survey and assessed the independent submissions, was founded in 2020 (p 142).

⁶ Three persons identified as "mixed/multiple" and one did not respond to the question.



Online Survey

The online survey was carried out via SurveyMonkey and analysed by Brendan Research, which is headed by The Revd Dr Fiona Tweedie. She is the Church of Scotland's statistician and has lectured in Statistics at Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Church of Scotland performs same-sex Marriages, but this potential bias was not disclosed.

There were no questions concerning church attendance or faith so it is not possible to measure what percentage of respondents attend the Church of England (or any other church) or identify as Christians. This makes it difficult to gauge to what extent this represents the view of the Church of England.

There were no questions specifically addressing the issue of same-sex marriage, but one gave an opportunity for this to be raised:

18. How do you hope the church-wide engagement with this course will make a difference in the national Church? Please don't mention anyone's name or location in your response.

Given the context, one would expect answers along the lines of 'providing a model for how the church could discuss other issues such as climate change'. It does not cue anything about doctrinal change and so is of little value in assessing the mind of the church on the matter.

respondents

Just under 6,500 people completed at least part of the online survey, but the completion rate was not given.

The response rate varied widely across the Church of England. The report takes the total electoral roll of a diocese as a measure of its membership, and on that basis the percentage response rate varies from 1.77% (Exeter) to 0.175% (Carlisle). Only ten dioceses mustered more than 200 responses and fifteen had fewer than a hundred respondents.

The 2020 Statistics for Mission figures state that the Church of England has a Worshipping Community of 1,032,600. This means that just 0.6% completed at least some part of the survey. 99.4% have not engaged with the survey.

The full table can be found in Appendix A.

deprivation

When the postcodes of respondents were analysed it was found that there was less engagement in more deprived areas (using the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation as a measure). Figure 1 shows the responses from each decile (group of 10%). 2.6% of responses came from the most deprived tenth, whereas almost a fifth came from the most prosperous tenth.

It is true that this might reflect the demographics of the Church of England, but it is striking nonetheless. Arguably the nature of the resources and the course itself privileged those who were comfortable with long text-based documents and discussion groups. Moreover, to engage with the online resources, online focus groups and the survey itself required good IT access. In its review into learning during the pandemic, the government noted that “the proportion of students with little or no IT access in the least deprived schools (19%) is half that of students in the most deprived schools (39%)”.⁷ An online survey, especially one as lengthy as the LLF survey, is exclusionary to those from more deprived backgrounds. As the report noted:

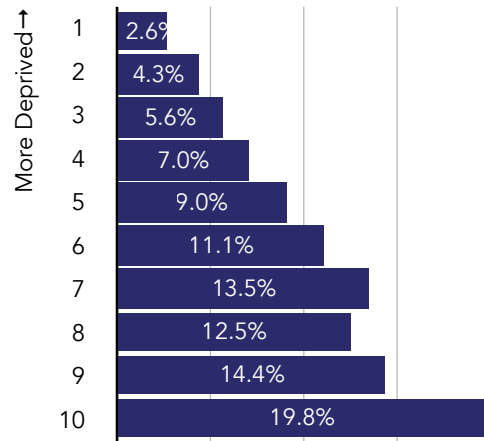


Figure 1. LLF and IMD

“The low numbers responding in areas of higher deprivation may be due to fewer CofE attenders living in those areas, people in areas of higher deprivation being less likely to complete an online feedback questionnaire, or reflect what has been described as the “wordy” nature of the resources which may be more difficult to engage with for people in such areas” (p 21).

As well as being a barrier to access for those from more deprived areas, the nature of the resources also disadvantaged those who do not have English as a first language.

Although the response rate was higher than expected from rural areas, the report concluded: “We investigated whether responses to the questionnaire differed between those in urban or rural areas and found no systematic difference” (p21).

age

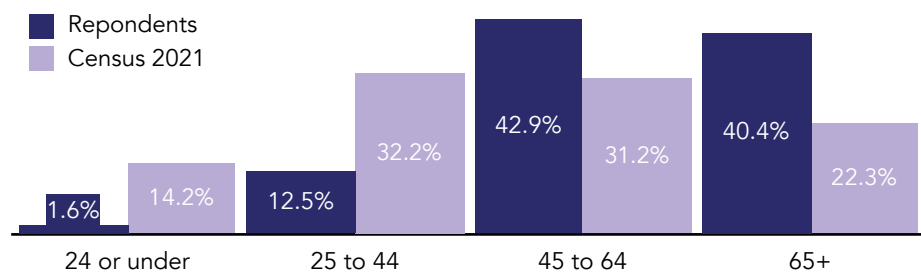


Figure 2: LLF and Age

Respondents were older than the national average as can be seen from the chart above. 83.3% of the respondents were over 45 as opposed to 53.5% of the population as a whole. 40.4% of those responding were 65 or older and only 1.6% were under 25 (around 100 people). This, of course, reflects the reality that congregations in the Church of England are older than the national average.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic/learning-during-the-pandemic-review-of-research-from-england#the-differential-experiences-of-learning-loss>. Last accessed 22nd September 2022.

gender

The majority of respondents were female (59.3%) with 40.9% being male. 3 defined themselves as intersex, with 6 being gender-fluid and 21 non binary. 34 identified as transgender.

sexuality

There are some issues with the statistics in this part of the report. Firstly, it is stated that 4,948 people responded to this question, but since respondents could give multiple answers the table provided in the report (p 26) totals 5,234 responses. This means percentages are impossible to ascertain with any level of certainty. The data in the report is reproduced in Table 1, and responses given in the "other" box are italicised.

The percentage figures given in the report assume the number of people giving the responses, rather than the number of responses given. Also, in the LLF report the graphical representation of these figures (p 26) contains a minor difference in the figure for gay/lesbian respondents.

Description	No.	%age
Asexual	35	0.7%
Bisexual	175	3.5%
<i>Demisexual</i>	3	0.1%
Gay/Lesbian	346	7.0%
Heterosexual	4,423	89.4%
<i>Pansexual</i>	7	0.1%
Queer	105	2.1%
Same-sex attracted	140	2.8%

Table 1: LLF Sexuality

Whilst the report notes that 6,400 people responded using the questionnaire (p3), only 4,948 responded to this question (77.3%). This raises the question of engagement: how many of the 6,400 actually completed the questionnaire?

There is a further problem with the national figures quoted in the report. These are referenced to the Office of National Statistics, and a link given in the footnote. However, it would seem that the LLF report uses the figures for the North East rather than England as a whole.⁸ Additionally, the LLF figures ignore those who didn't respond to the question, but the national figures *include* those who did not respond. This affects the percentages reported.

Table 2 overleaf uses the figures for England (ONS), which are then adjusted to remove the "don't knows" (Adjusted). This is compared with the complete LLF table (LLF), with Asexual, Demisexual, Pansexual, Queer and same-sex attracted all included in "Other". The ratio between LLF figures and national figures is given in the final column.

From this table, it is clear that the respondents to LLF differ greatly from the population as a whole. Nationally 96.1% of those who identified their sexuality were heterosexual, as opposed to 84.5% of those who did so in the LLF survey. This either suggests that 15% of the church is LGBTQ+, almost four times the national average, or that LGBTQ+ people were more likely to participate in the survey than non-LGBTQ+ people. Given the importance of this process, and the understandable desire for those who feel strongly about this matter to have their voice heard, the latter is more likely.

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2020>, Accessed 15th September 2022. Table 1b of finalsexualorientationtable.xlsx.

Description	ONS	Adjusted	LLF	Ratio
Heterosexual or straight	93.3%	96.1%	89.4%	0.93
Gay or lesbian	1.8%	1.9%	7.0%	3.70
Bisexual	1.3%	1.4%	3.5%	2.58
Other	0.6%	0.7%	5.9%	9.02
Don't know or refuse	2.9%			

Table 2: LLF Sexuality v National

LLF engagement

Of those who responded, 79% had been part of an LLF group and 11% had engaged with the material independently. The remainder were mainly group leaders or Diocesan Advocates. 71% had been to all five sessions.

On a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is terrible and 100 is wonderful, respondents had an average experience of 59. The report described this as “fairly positive”. Men had a less positive experience with a mean of 56, and women were more positive at 63. There was little difference between heterosexual and non-heterosexual people, but the lack of error bars or information on standard errors throughout the report does make it impossible to assess the statistical significance of the few stated differences.

The Story Films and Pastoral Principles were praised, but others found the course to be dense, confusing and wordy. Some criticised its blandness and felt it skirted around important issues. Several found the course to be biased, but that bias was felt to be both pro and anti the traditional views. Some felt the course led people away from orthodoxy, and that there was not enough theological engagement. Emotions, rather than scripture, were seen as the starting point and there was not enough time for discussion.

Group leaders tended to have a positive experience of leading the course, and found the material helpful. The Story Films provoked most of the discussion and their perceived (im)balance therefore becomes a matter of some question.

There were three questions which sought to measure the effect of the course on the thinking on participants. Respondents were asked to register their agreements with the three statements in the table overleaf (table 3), with 0 indicating strongly disagree and 100 strongly agree. As noted above, the lack of information on standard errors makes it hard to draw any statistical conclusions.

The table suggests that the biblical portion of the course was the weakest area, with more clarity being given to complexities of identity and sexuality etc. Taking the median figure, 42% of those who taking the course felt it did not deepen their understanding of the Biblical stance on these topics. This indicates a serious weakness in the material.

The report concluded: “in general people felt very safe regardless of the variety of people in the group” (p 48).

Statement	Mean	Median
I have a deeper understanding of what the Bible says about these topics.	54	58
I have a deeper understanding of the Church's inherited teaching and emerging Christian views on these topics.	59	62
I am more aware of the complexities of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.	66	68

Table 3: Affect on thinking

It was noted that same-sex marriage was a persistent theme in the survey, with most hoping that the church would either perform or bless such ceremonies. As has already been seen, the engagement from those within the LGBTQ+ community was much higher than the national average so this is to be expected. Also, as has been noted, the survey did not directly address this issue and it is therefore not possible to draw any safe conclusions.

A smaller number spoke against such change in doctrine, and it is interesting that the report acknowledges that "the 'acceptance of same sex marriage' or 'blessing of same sex partnerships'" is a "change in doctrine".⁹ Some were also concerned about a drift from orthodoxy, and felt traditional values were under threat. However, figures were not given, so it is hard to determine how many fell into each camp.

the way forward

When it comes to the way forward for the Church of England, the report noted that "prominent themes were welcome, and acceptance". Figures were not given, so it is hard to tell how prominent these were (or even if they were a majority view). "Many" hope that the church will be open to the views of others and remain united, but one of the five quotes given hoped that that unity would be around "ONE VIEW for all the Church". The others hoped for what Archbishop Justin would describe as disagreeing well. That said "some" felt that division was inevitable, and was a reality which should be faced. Again, no figures were given so it is hard to gauge how widespread these views were.

Some were hopeful for the future, with one responding "It has encouraged me that the church is trying to catch up with the rest of society in recognising that humankind is diverse". Others, however, felt this was an attempt to kick the whole issue into the long grass. Some thought LLF was indicative of the future plans of the church, which caused concern.

There was some frustration with a perceived slowness to change, with indicative quotes for those who wanted same-sex marriage in the church. Some sought more parish involvement in decision making.

In all, people felt it was important for this conversation to be had, particularly for public perception of the church. There were warnings that younger generations would be "put off joining the church or lost from the congregation".

⁹ p54.

Finally the report concluded that the LLF course will only have an impact if more engage with it.

As an exercise in listening to the Church of England, LLF and this survey are of very limited value.

- There is no way to be sure that respondents were members of the Church of England, or even professed Christian faith.
- The survey focussed on respondents' experience of LLF, and did not directly address the issue of whether the church should perform or bless same-sex marriages. No conclusions on this matter can responsibly be drawn from the report.
- There was a low level of participation (99.4% of the Church of England's 2020 worshipping community did not take part).
- The low level of participation makes the exercise vulnerable to campaign groups on all sides of the argument.
- There were widely varying participation rates across dioceses (Carlisle only mustered 27 responses) and the results are skewed towards those dioceses with a higher rate of participation.
- Exeter, Oxford Chester, Southwark and London between them provided 30% of the responses.
- The positionality of the researchers is not disclosed.

Those who responded came from the more affluent areas of the country. The wordiness of the materials, the need for online access to engage with the resource library, and the format of the course provided barriers to those from more deprived areas. It would appear that this was a bias in the way the LLF process was developed.

The participation of those categorised as LGBTQ+ was - understandably - high which was reflected in the findings. This should be taken into account when attempting to draw conclusions.

The breakdown of survey participants was also rather lacking (for example, it is not possible to tell how many surveys were actually completed). Moreover, there was no attempt to cross-tabulate the data to give richer results (e.g. distribution by age/gender/sexual orientation). The report notes that the NVivo package was used, but the codes and consequent analysis were not reported, which reduces the technical dependability of the work. There appears to have been no attempt to standardise responses against different population groups.

The survey itself was open for a considerable period of time, but there appears to have been no attempt to measure any difference in the responses over that time. This makes it impossible to gauge the impact of external factors on the responses. There is also no mention of any measures taken to check for duplicate entries, either made in error or in an attempt to skew the data.

There are a number of quotes given in the report, but their credibility is reduced by the lack of attribution given. Whether a person is, say, a young woman, from

the LGBTQ+ community or an older man is significant. There is also a high level of ambiguity in some of the quotes chosen, and it is not clear which questions have produced this data, which also diminishes their use.

The report notes that the graphical presentation of the data "deliberately focus on the numerically smaller groups, as per K. E. Guyan, *Queer Data*, Bloomsbury, 2022", (p 24). A justification for presenting data in this way would have been welcome, as would an explanation of the methodology advocated by *Queer Data*.

There was a commendable approach to the ethics of the research and also data security. It would have been interesting to know if anyone asked for their data to be deleted.

Underlying all these concerns is the very nature of the exercise itself: is SurveyMonkey the best way to form doctrine? Our canons state that:

"The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures.

In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal." (Canon A5)

This would be the best place to start any discussion of the doctrine of marriage, yet the report found that the biblical teaching was the weakest part of LLF, followed by the teaching of the church.

Moreover, the Ordinal (mentioned in Canon A5) states that:

"Bishops are ordained to be shepherds of Christ's flock and guardians of the faith of the apostles, proclaiming the gospel of God's kingdom and leading his people in mission."

It is the episcopate who should give the lead in all this, rather than a survey. The wise shepherd does indeed pay attention to the flock, but the flock should not determine the direction of travel. That is for those who, by virtue of their consecration, are to be "guardians of the faith of the apostles".

We also note that "the church" in this exercise is equated with a self-selecting group who responded to a questionnaire, rather than the global and historic church. There would appear to be no ecumenical engagement or attempt to engage with the tradition of the church. If we are truly part of the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" (Canon C 15) we should act accordingly and engage with the global church (or at least the Anglican Communion). To not do so raises the danger of the Church of England becoming merely a sect.¹⁰

¹⁰ In 2020, only 24.4% of churchgoers in England attended the Church of England. A higher number were to be found in Roman Catholic churches. *UK Church Statistics No.4 2021 Edition*, Brierley Consultancy.



Focus Groups

The Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) were asked to carry out qualitative research to support LLF, by means of focus groups. This is not intended as a guide to the church, but rather as a snapshot of views. One of the two writers of this section of the report was until recently (June 2022) a trustee of OneBodyOneFath, which describes itself as:

"a dynamic grassroots charity that enables LGBT+ Christians and advocates for change within the church, ecumenically and intentionally in partnership with likeminded organisation"¹¹

This trusteeship is not disclosed in the report.

methodology

CARU stated that:

"Our data collection processes and methodology have been designed with an acute awareness that as researchers we have a responsibility to hold the different perspectives with integrity whilst recognising that researchers have the power to amplify and/or silence data. We wanted to document as many voices as possible and thus have aimed to 'demarginalise the margins' so all participants, especially those from the LGBTQ+ community, are not just heard, but actively listened to." (p62-63).

This especial attention to the voices of the LGBTQ+ community echoes the high level of LGBTQ+ engagement in the online survey

CARU also make a fairly damning comment regarding the LLF process, which is contradicted by the data collected from the survey:¹²

"Likewise, we recognise that LGBTQ+ people who have engaged in the LLF process have faced significant barriers to participation due to the nature of the topics, fear of exclusion or discrimination and the personal vulnerabilities of having a lived experience that can be discussed and/or debated by others. We recognise the unequal power dynamics at play in the LLF process and in our research methodology we have attempted to challenge these by ensuring every voice is treated with utmost dignity, care and respect" (p63).

The report does not state quite how this was done. One might assume that such a "challenge" implies amplifying the voice of LGBTQ+ people, and it is noted that in a good number of sets of quotes the case for changing the church's doctrine comes first. Unfortunately, since these quotes are not attributed (to age, sexuality, gender etc) we are unable to tell.

¹¹ <https://www.onebodyonefaith.org.uk>. Accessed 3rd September 2022.

¹² The report earlier noted that "Almost everyone felt very safe in speaking in their group", p47.

The research is qualitative, and the report notes that “qualitative researchers attempt to find examples of behaviour, trends, and clarify thoughts and feelings of participants, and what these participants might be saying about the wider social context into which they are speaking” (p64). The report goes on to quote from *Queer Data*: “qualitative data can help plug the gaps and explain the why of quantitative data trends” (p64).

This would appear to be what Clifford Geertz (1973) referred to as ‘thick description’ but there has been no attempt, seemingly, to code responses using the same NVivo codes as for the surveys and draw any synthesis from them. This is a missed opportunity.

The research was carried out by means of four online focus groups and five onsite focus groups. As well as discussion, participants were invited to “create an artistic piece which used physical copies of the LLF Course resources as a creative medium” (p68). This is an exercise which assumes a good level of literacy, and also discriminates against those who do not have English as their first language. The online sessions ran in the evening, but four of the five onsite groups took place on weekday afternoons which would limit engagement from those in work or looking after children.

There has been no attempt at comparing outputs from the two different modes of meeting, and there seems to be no note of how data was recorded. Were full transcripts made? Were videos made and assessed (a rich data source)? We have examples of the questions, but not of the protocols followed. After all, the same questions asked in a different order can skew results.

It should also be noted that one of the five onsite groups operated as a pilot, and changes were made to methodology following that group meeting. This means that this group cannot be directly compared to the other four. Whilst one might assume that the pilot group would be made up of online survey respondents, at least one church (St John’s Church, Ranmoor, a registered Inclusive Church) advertised a pilot group in their parish newsletter.¹³ The newsletter item sought people for the pilot who had “participated in or completed the LLF course”, but there was no requirement that they were survey respondents. This undermines the notion that the focus groups give richer insight into the survey responses, and there is nothing in the report to suggest that the responses from this group were excluded from the report. A statement on the methodology of selecting the pilot group would be welcome.

Furthermore, the report notes that:

“Despite repeated attempts to facilitate a focus group in the southeast (including London), in an area of deprivation (UPA), or with participants who are from minority ethnic or global majority heritage backgrounds, we were unsuccessful in gaining these voices in an onsite focus group” (p74.)

¹³ Newsletter from 21st November 2021. <https://www.stjohnsranmoor.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=298389>. Last accessed on 23rd September 2022.

participants

This is a startling omission, and raises a whole host of questions. It is concerning that no group could be formed in the most populous part of the country, and it is disappointing that poorer and non-white voices were not heard. This suggests a serious defect in methodology which should have been addressed.

All those who, via the LLF questionnaire, said they were willing to participate in a focus group were invited to do so. Of the 1,655 who indicated their willingness, 112 responded to the invitation. There is no indication as to why the response rate was so low. The age profile of these 112 was a little younger than the survey respondents as a whole, as can be seen from table 4.

Description	No.	%age	LLF %
18-24 years old	2	1.8%	1.6%
25-44 years old	20	17.9%	12.5%
45-64 years old	51	45.5%	42.9%
65+ years old	39	34.8%	40.4%

Table 4: Focus Group Ages

Table 5 lists the sexual identities of the 112. It is not clear why “none of these” is combined with “heterosexual” but we will treat the whole group as heterosexual as that would seem to be the intent of the report.

Description	No.	%age
Gay / lesbian	9	7.8%
Same-sex attracted	8	6.9%
Bisexual	5	4.3%
Prefer not to say	1	0.9%
Queer	0	0.0%
None of these or heterosexual	93	80.2%

Table 5: Focus Group Sexuality

When it comes to gender breakdown a further question arises. 59.3% of those who took the online survey were female, but only 39.3% of the 112 invited to take part in the focus groups described themselves as female (i.e. “female”, “female; cis” or “Female; cis; asexual”).¹⁴ This is a significant difference which was not addressed, but it calls into serious question any claim that these focus groups were representative of the survey respondents as a whole.

In table 6 the sexuality of the 122 invitees is compared to both the nation as a whole and also the LLF respondents. The ONS column is the figure for England, and the Focus column is for the Focus groups.¹⁵ Those taking part in the focus groups were almost five times more likely to be non-heterosexual than England as a whole.

Description	ONS	LLF	Focus
Heterosexual or straight	96.1%	89.4%	80.9%
Gay or lesbian	1.9%	7.0%	7.8%
Bisexual	1.4%	3.5%	4.3%
Other	0.7%	5.9%	7.0%

Table 6: National v LLF v Focus

The theology of those invited is listed in table 7 overleaf.

¹⁴ 6.2% did not select any gender.

¹⁵ “Non-respondents” were removed from the ONS figures so that they can be compared to the LLF respondents. The LLF report removed the non-respondents from their figures.

However, not all the 112 invited took part. In all 42 people took part in the online groups, and 35 participated in the onsite groups (including the pilot). Unfortunately no figures are given for those 77 so it is not possible to determine the makeup of those groups. As a result it is impossible to determine how representative the focus groups are of the survey respondents, let alone the Church of England. This is a fundamental weakness in the methodology and results in a poor set of data, yet there appears to be no attempt to address this.

Description	No.	%age
Liberal	36	32.1%
Evangelical	29	25.9%
Central	22	19.6%
Conservative	12	10.7%
Catholic	11	9.8%
Charismatic	2	1.8%

Table 7: Focus Group Theology

We are also not privy to the topic guide (or 'script') used by the researchers so it is not possible to determine how much of the data they collected was spontaneous or a result of leading questions.

views

The groups reflected that a significant number of people failed to engage with the course, which had a negative effect. Deanery courses tended to work better than parish courses. Learning took place on the courses which did run, with the personal stories having most impact. Unsurprisingly, the course facilitators were instrumental in the quality of the course.

There was a discussion around the Bible with "strong views expressed by many participants that important parts of Scripture were not included or were not handled appropriately" (p83). Some "articulated there was perhaps a deliberate attempt to not present what some might refer to as a traditional biblical view, particularly about the institution of marriage" whilst "many others argued for a different understanding where the biblical approach is less traditional regarding the institution of marriage and/or LGBTQ+ equality".

There was a frustration that the LLF course did not develop its material more fully in the areas of sexuality and theology. Often the different viewpoints presented in the course made learning difficult. Some felt there was a hidden agenda, although the report noted: "that what the hidden agenda or unacknowledged standpoint was conflicted depending on the participants' own theology or personal convictions" (p88).

Whilst some participants felt that their churches were brought closer together, even though people held different views, others felt LLF increased the sense of disunity. This split was also evident when it came to a sense of safety, with many from LGBTQ+ and also conservative backgrounds saying they felt unsafe.

"Several" people said that they had been treated negatively by the church, and urged the church to change its view, whilst a "minority" felt that it was important not to "avoid challenging people regarding LGBTQ+ equality". It must be noted that the phrase "LGBTQ+ equality" did not appear in the subsequent quotations, which dealt with holiness and the unchanging nature of revelation. It would therefore appear to be the interpretation of the researchers rather than the words of the participants. This is an example of the problem which dogs much of this section of the report: numbers are not given (several could mean

5% or 55%, a minority could be 49%) and responses are summarised in a way which is far from neutral.

When it came to the way forward for the church, the participants were asked what they would say to the bishops. The report notes that “the majority of respondents understood that overall, the House of Bishops have a difficult but essential task, but a decision on moving forward needs to be made soon...Most people in the focus groups suggested that the decisions made by the House of Bishops needed to be bold, courageous and honest. This was the same for those who want change and for those who want to maintain current teaching”. Most understood the responsibility for leadership to lie with the bishops, and some sought unity rather than schism. That said, some understood truth to be more important than unity.

Church Society comment

Rather than a focus group drawn at random from the respondents, those invited to take part were a self-selecting group and, compared to national figures, there was a strong representation from LGBTQ+ persons. There are some unanswered questions: why did only 112 of the 1,655 people who offered themselves for a focus group respond? Might this indicate a failure in communication? Why did only 77 of those 112 actually take part, and why were no figures given for the make up of this group? Why is the voice of the celibate gay Christians almost entirely absent? Why was one of the onsite focus groups not selected from survey respondents?

Given the inevitably subjective nature of qualitative analysis, and the controversy surrounding the topic of sexuality in the church, it is disappointing that the report did not disclose that one of writers was at the time a trustee of a LGBTQ+ charity advocating for change. It would be helpful to know what steps were taken to mitigate bias since only selected responses were published, and a high level of trust in the researchers is required by the reader.

It is remarkable that the researchers failed to find enough people in the most populous part of the country to form a single focus group. The data shows that not a single black or Asian person took part, which hardly accords with the desire for the Church of England to be more racially diverse.¹⁶ Why was this?

In the end it might be that the research method, with its emphasis on artistic responses and pattern of meeting during working hours, might have been the problem. In any case it is hard to conclude that these focus groups are reflective of the Church of England as a whole and therefore the outputs cannot be deemed anything more than an assembly of random unattributed quotes. It is difficult to see how this section of the analysis can be considered as a credible basis for further discussion.

¹⁶ Three persons identified as “mixed/multiple” and one did not respond.



Independent Submissions

Alongside the focus groups and the questionnaire, people were invited to send in their own submissions to be considered as part of the process. Submissions came from both churches and individuals, some of whom had clearly engaged with the LLF material and some had not. As the report notes:

“This is an opportunity to hear some of the viewpoints of those that were underrepresented in survey and focus group data: churches in more deprived areas, those younger and older than the typical age of those completing the survey or contributing to the focus groups and those who did not identify as heterosexual. Please note these views are not representative of all in these categories” (p107).

The report selected a number of submissions as case studies, but acknowledged this was more of an art than a science. It notes that “it was impossible to select a small number of case studies to be fully representative of the whole” (p109). There was no attempt to correct for biases and no data on those making the submissions was collected. There appears to have been no mechanism to ensure multiple submissions were not received from a single individual, or to use NVivo coding (as was used in the first section). This appears rather haphazard. Given this, we will concentrate of the summaries given in the report.

The breakdown of the submissions was as follows:

	Evidence of engagement with material	No evidence of engagement with material
No. of submissions from churches	65	22
No. of submissions from individuals	114	38

Table 8: Independent Submissions

church submissions
(engaged LLF resources)

Seven church submissions did not specify the diocese from which they came, and the remaining 58 submissions came from 22 dioceses. Of these, 27 (71%) came from the dioceses of Chester, London, Rochester and Southwark.

Churches explicitly calling for change were broadly equal in number to those explicitly saying they were not in favour of change. Those seeking change called for different things: same-sex marriages in church; blessings; or discretion for churches/clergy to perform blessings. Some wanted immediate change, others called for a process. 9 of the 65 submissions (14%) came from churches who described themselves as inclusive churches, or working towards signing up to

Inclusive Church (a network of “well over 600 hundred churches”).¹⁷ No comparative analysis was made for submissions coming from churches which are under Extended Episcopal Oversight.

These opposing change nearly always referred to scripture as their guide, and often included concern for those in the LGBTQ+ community.

**individual submissions
(engaged LLF resources)**

Of the 114 responses from individuals who had engaged with the resources, 52 did not identify their diocese. Of those who did, 21 came from Rochester with the next highest number of submissions coming from London (6) and Chester (4). Of those who indicated whether they were lay or ordained, figures were roughly even.

Interestingly, of those respondents whose gender was recorded the large majority was male (the recorded figures are 44 male, 17 female, 5 mixed such as married couple) which might suggest that males were happier making individual responses than participating in the course. This is speculation, but given that the majority of churchgoers are female it might be that the prospect of discussing sexuality in a predominantly female group was something which was not an attractive prospect to men.

It is probably best to simply repeat the report’s findings:

Across the 114 individuals who engaged with the course, there were more submissions explicitly stating they were not in favour of change to the Church’s current teaching. Once again, those not in favour of changes to the Church’s current teaching often included comments such as ‘[LLF] helped me to understand more fully the problems which LGBT+ people face on a daily basis and the prejudice which some face in their local churches.’

There were slightly fewer submissions (a difference of seven) explicitly stating they were in favour of change to the Church’s current teaching and a minority acknowledged they still held mixed views. As indicated above, 25 submissions used the course booklet questions as a framework; these questions focused more on what participants felt they had learned during the course and did not explicitly ask for viewpoints on changes to the Church’s current teaching. (p120)

**church submissions
(did not engage with LLF)**

22 responses were received from churches which did not engage with the LLF course. Of these, half came from a single church in the Diocese of Peterborough which had created their own course. 12 churches, therefore, were represented in the responses. The report concluded:

Within the 22 submissions in this category of responses from churches who showed no evidence of having engaged with the course, the overwhelming majority wrote to express they were not in favour of changes to the Church’s current teaching. A small number were in favour of change to the Church’s current teaching and most of these identified themselves as part of the Inclusive Church network or working toward it. (p132)

¹⁷ A figure taken from the Annual Accounts and Report for the year ending 31st December 2021.

individual submissions
(did not engage with LLF)

There were 38 submissions from individuals who did not appear to have engaged with the course. The report noted:

Across the 38 submissions in this category, almost the same number of individuals wrote to say they were in favour of change to the Church's current teaching as those who wrote to explain they were not in favour of change. As in other categories, those not in favour of change often included phrases such as 'I welcome treating everybody with respect and sharing Jesus's love' (p136).

responses from dioceses and
other organisations

Just three dioceses made responses, two of which detailed discussions at diocesan synod. All reflected upon the varied viewpoints across their dioceses. Three national organisations seeking change and one not in favour of change also made submissions.

Church Society comment

In comparison to the LLF survey responses, these individual and church submissions are few in number. However, they are interesting in that they allow a more detailed engagement with the results than the survey allowed. Unsurprisingly, the responses reflected the split within the church on matters of sexuality.

The survey dealt with the LLF course rather than matters of doctrine, and therefore any comments as to how it points to the mood of the church on same-sex marriage is, at best, tendentious. These individual responses engaged with the presenting issues more effectively and were worthy of more proper analysis.

So to conclude, the material that has now been made available has been drawn from a wide range of responses to the original LLF materials, but has the following problems:

- The positionality of the researchers was not declared.
- There was no attempt to ensure that respondents were members of the Church of England.
- There was no mechanism to deter multiple submissions from a single user.
- Participation rates were patchy across the Church of England.
- The low response rate overall made the survey vulnerable to campaign groups.
- Amongst the respondents there was a bias towards more affluent people with a very high representation of those identifying as LGBTQ+.
- There was no effort to monitor the ethnic diversity of the respondents.
- There was no black or Asian member of a focus group.
- There is no methodological link between the survey and the focus groups, which render the latter of little use.

As with our conclusion on the LLF book, "Ultimately, there is absolutely nothing in LLF which warrants a change in the Church's doctrine or practice. It simply fails to present a sufficient case to justify revision, if that's what some were hoping it would do".¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://www.churchsociety.org/resource/initial-thoughts-on-llf/>

Appendix A: Response Rate per Diocese

