

# Analysis of JPIT research

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## Executive Summary

This report contains an analysis of the research undertaken by the West Midlands Joint Public Issues Team.

In preparation for the National Election in 2015, each church within Heart of England Baptist Association, West Midlands Synod of the URC, Birmingham Methodist District and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Methodist District was invited to complete a questionnaire on the kind of society that Christians might wish to build, and what they would want the next government to do in relation to a range of key public issues.

The first question began by asking for words to describe the society which Christians desire to help build. This delivered a high level of responses. The top five for this area were a society which is;

- Compassionate
- Caring
- Fair
- Just
- Honest

With these, over half of churches felt these were Christian ideals modelled by Jesus through the Bible.

Question two presented the church with ten areas which would be likely to involve policy or discussion at the National Election, with the requirement to choose at least five. From these, the top areas chosen were The NHS, Immigration and Education, with the lowest being Security and Europe.

Each church was encouraged to identify what they would want the next government to do in relation to the issues. Both the issues of Immigration and Europe divide opinions, whereas there was a greater consensus of opinion on the issues of The NHS, Education and Climate Change.

Please see the table below to identify the most common responses by each area.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Most popular response</b>	<b>Second most popular response</b>
<b>NHS</b>	Fewer targets, less bureaucracy	Less government interference
<b>Immigration</b>	Is necessary	Needs more stringent rules governing entry
<b>Benefits and Welfare</b>	Abolish "bedroom tax"	Ensure all basic needs are met
<b>Economy</b>	End tax avoidance	Increase manufacturing and exports.
<b>Education</b>	Fewer targets	Increase in teaching morals, ethics, religion and respect
<b>Security</b>	End exportation of arms	Abolish Trident
<b>Climate Change</b>	Explore new ways of carbon capture	Increase reliance on renewable energy resources.
<b>Overseas Aid</b>	Continue aid for current countries in need	Support for organisations not governments
<b>Housing and Families</b>	More housing for first time buyers	Improved management of social housing
<b>Europe</b>	Stay in Europe	Leave Europe
<b>Employment</b>	Into work training schemes	Increase in vocational training

## Introduction

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT - involving the United Reformed, Baptist and Methodist churches around the West Midlands region) work together to identify and work through public issues. In the time leading up to the 2015 National Election, the JPIT are looking to identify the views held by their churches in regard to a variety of political areas. This report identifies common themes from the JPIT research into the Election Manifesto.

## Methodology

### Research Method

The data for this research was gathered using a questionnaire, which was sent to Baptist, URC and Methodist churches around the wider West Midlands region. The letter accompanying the questionnaire gave suggestions as to how the responses and ideas from individuals could be gathered. These included:

- After a church service
- Through a specific small group
- Through existing small groups/house groups
- At a regular or special church meeting
- At an Elders' meeting (or similar)
- As part of a Lenten study group (or similar)

Lenten worship materials were included, both in a word and power point form, as well as a link to a Dropbox file containing information.

The questionnaire was formed of two main questions.

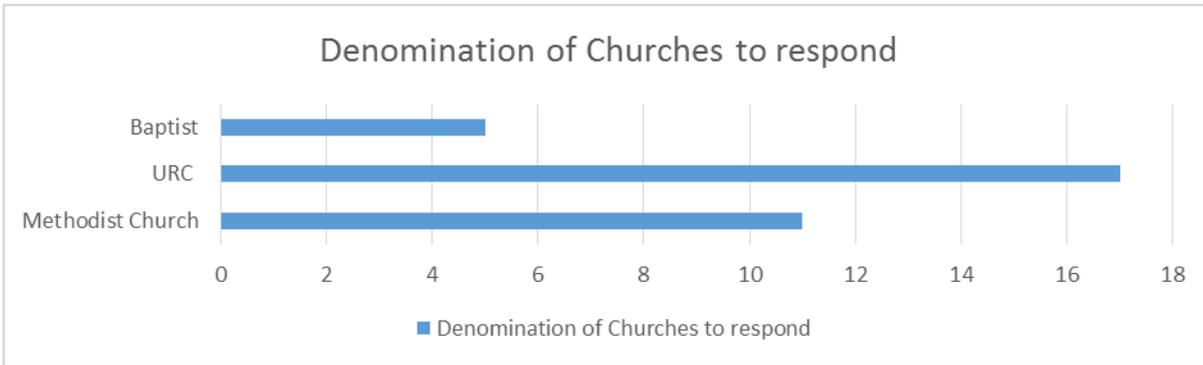
- 1) "What kind of society do Christians want to help build?" Churches were encouraged to think of five words which for them summed up the key qualities they desired for the United Kingdom. Examples were given as ideas, such as "fairness" and "being in it all together". The second half of this question asked participants to explain why they had chosen the qualities they did.
- 2) From a selection of key areas, what would Christians want Government to change or do? These included a list of *The NHS; Immigration; Benefits and Welfare; the Economy; Employment; Education; Housing; Families; Overseas Aid; Europe; Security; Climate Change*. Encouragement was also given to pick any issues not included.

As well as these, each church was asked how many people took part, how often they met and the name of the church.

The questionnaire offered a variety of ways to respond – both on paper or electronically. Completed questionnaires were returned by post, via an email or word document, and through the survey programme Survey Monkey.

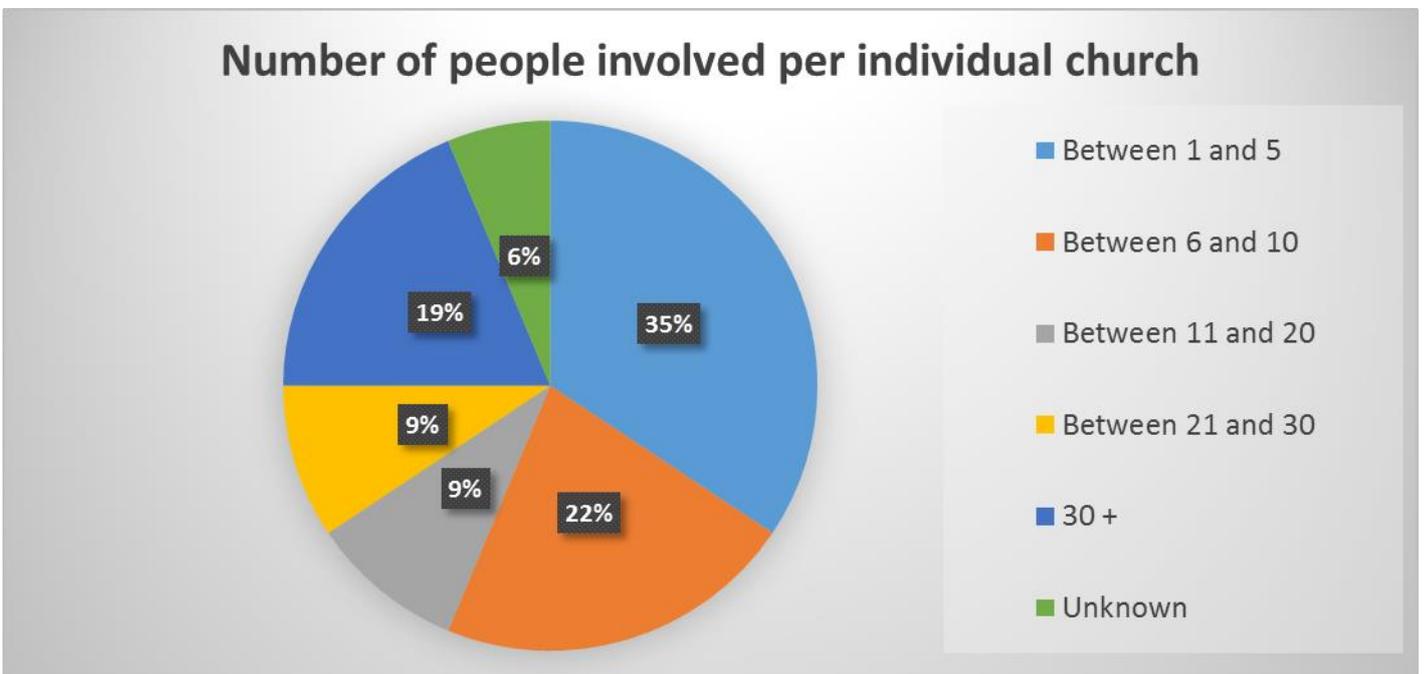
### Size of sample

Overall, 694 churches were invited to talk part. 170 were Baptist, 400 were Methodist and 124 were URC. From that amount, 34 did respond, with the following breakdown;

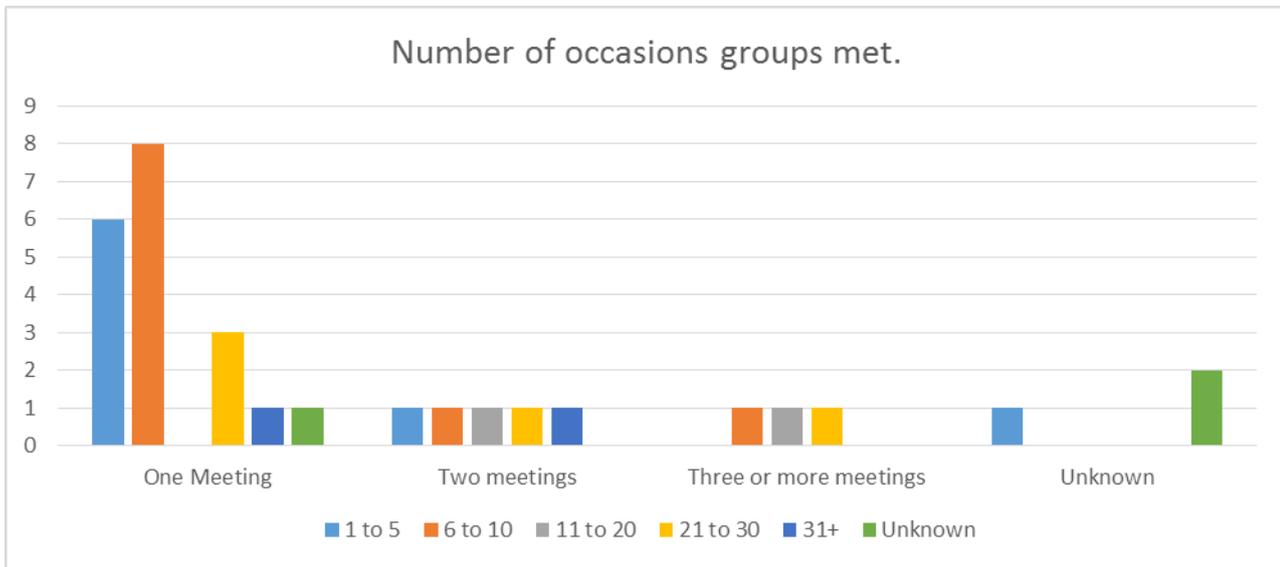


Of the churches which responded, three chose not to participate. Each cited their feeling that the research was too political, and that church and politics do not mix favourably.

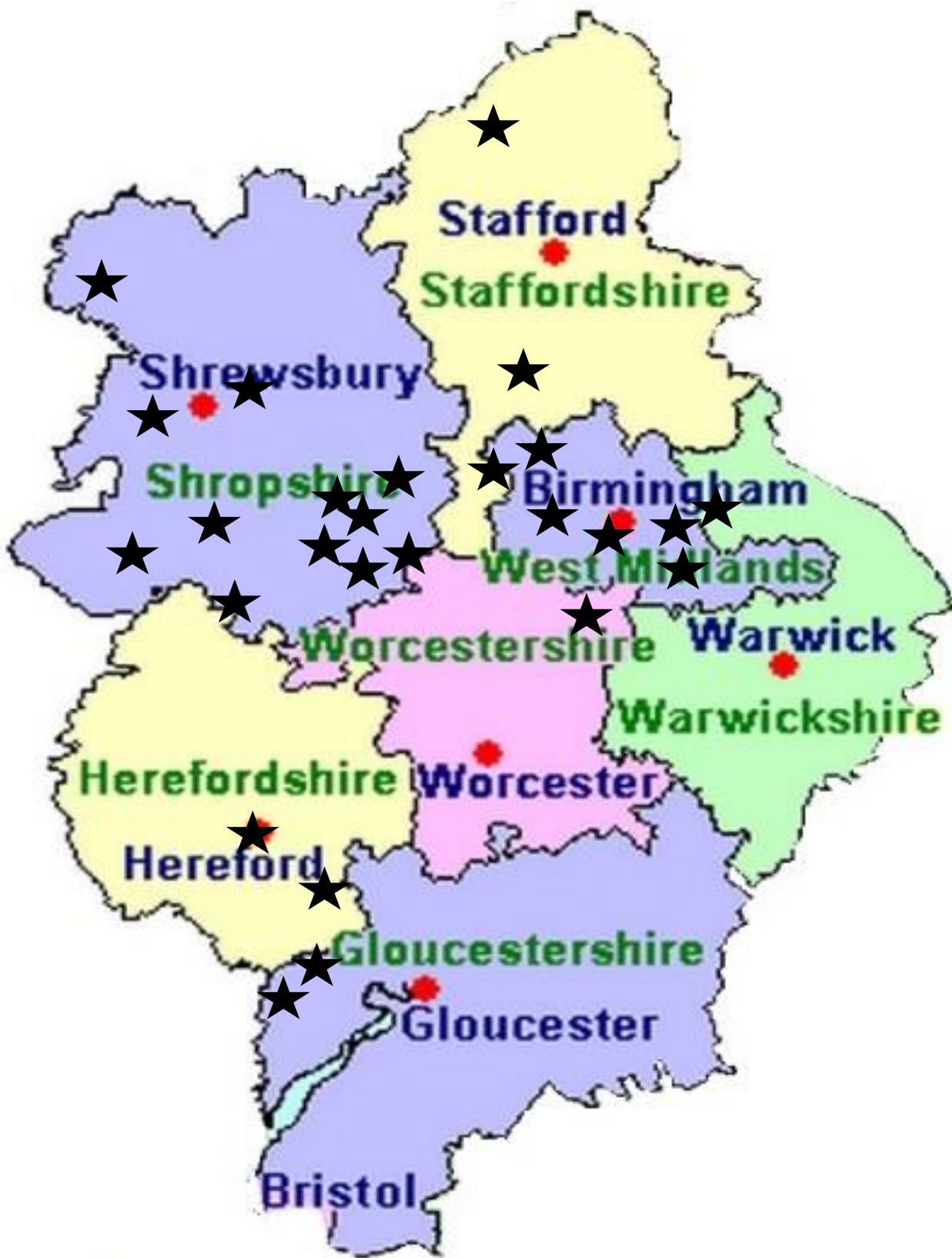
This leaves the results gathered from 31 churches. Of these, the majority involved ten or fewer people meeting to discuss the questions, with 8 stating that this took place during an Elders' meeting, or as the result of the church leaders or ministers meeting together.



Of those meetings, the majority met just once to discuss the questions. Only three churches met for three or more meetings, and five met for two meetings.



The following map shows the spread of responses from within the seven counties. The largest church responses came from churches within Shropshire, West Midlands and Warwickshire. All churches responding from Hereford and Staffordshire stated that five or less people had contributed suggestions and ideas.



**Analysis of results**

Question 1

The first question asked churches to respond with words describing the society they felt Christians should be helping to build. The following word cloud offers an introduction into the popularity of words given, and the frequency with which they were suggested.



From these, the most popular words are clear to see – people want a society which is compassionate, honest, fair, just, equal and caring. At least a quarter of churches suggested these words.

When asked why they had chosen these, churches responded in a variety of ways. 61% of the thirty-one who completed the questionnaire offered a fairly general response, with the other 39% giving a separate justification for each quality they selected. From the first group, one church said; “because these are a fundamental part of Jesus teaching”. The following graph shows the responses given by churches as to their reasoning behind the choice of words;



For those churches which chose to give a separate justification for each word in turn, the responses more commonly expressed general moral or ethical principles than offering explicitly theological justification – for example: “Equality and Fairness at the heart of the community so reducing the gap between rich and poor.” In fact, the words “rich and poor” or any of their synonyms occurred in the majority of these responses (71%).

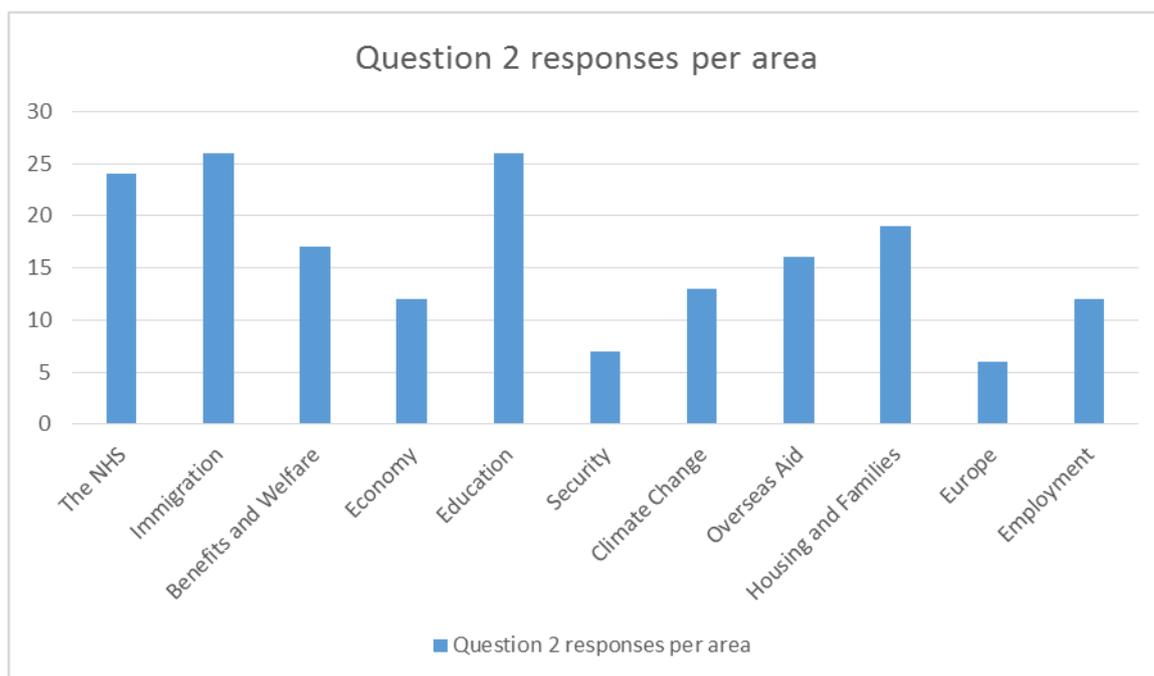
Some differences in ways of responding could partly be down to the way in which the paper is written. That which was circulated to the Methodist churches via paper copy has space to write a longer response than that which the URC churches received.

## Question 2

Question 2 set out to ask churches to pick at least five issues and discuss what they would want the next government to do in relation to them. Some churches chose to pick only two or three of the issues and discuss them, whereas others wrote about all twelve. It appears that those churches who hand-wrote their responses wrote much less than those who emailed the document. There were also more who emailed than completed the Survey Monkey online questionnaire.

Some churches (eight, from the thirty-one who answered the questions) attached extra documents to which they make reference within their responses.

The following graph shows the frequency of comments over the twelve issues;

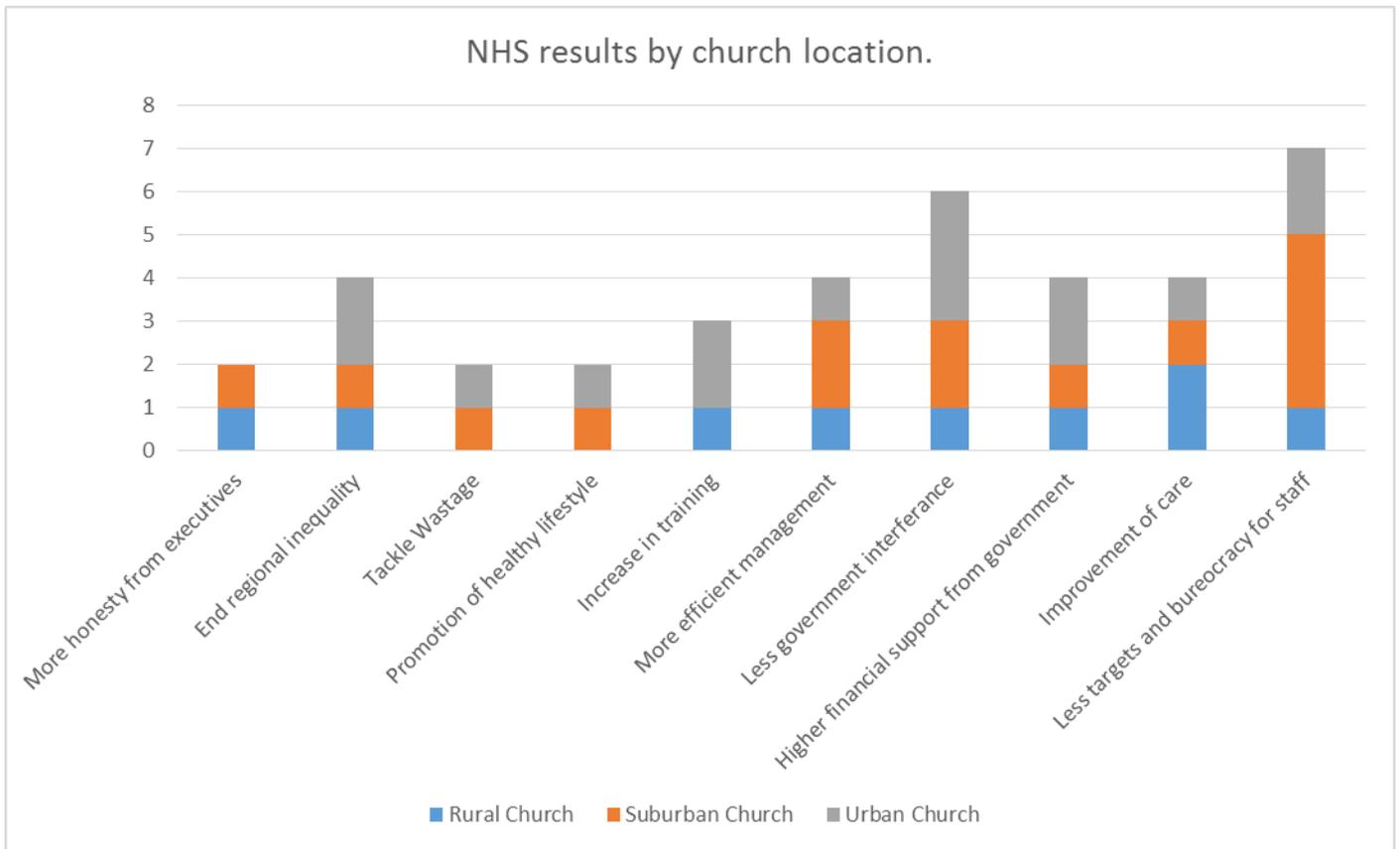


### NHS:

The responses given on the NHS are cohesive in their positivity for the service. It is described by one URC church as “Helping to keep the country together” and by another as “A marvellous institution”. Only one of the twenty-four churches which gave a response on the NHS offered the option of “An entire structural change needed”. A church of the same denomination and from a similar rural background requested “No more structural re-organisation”.

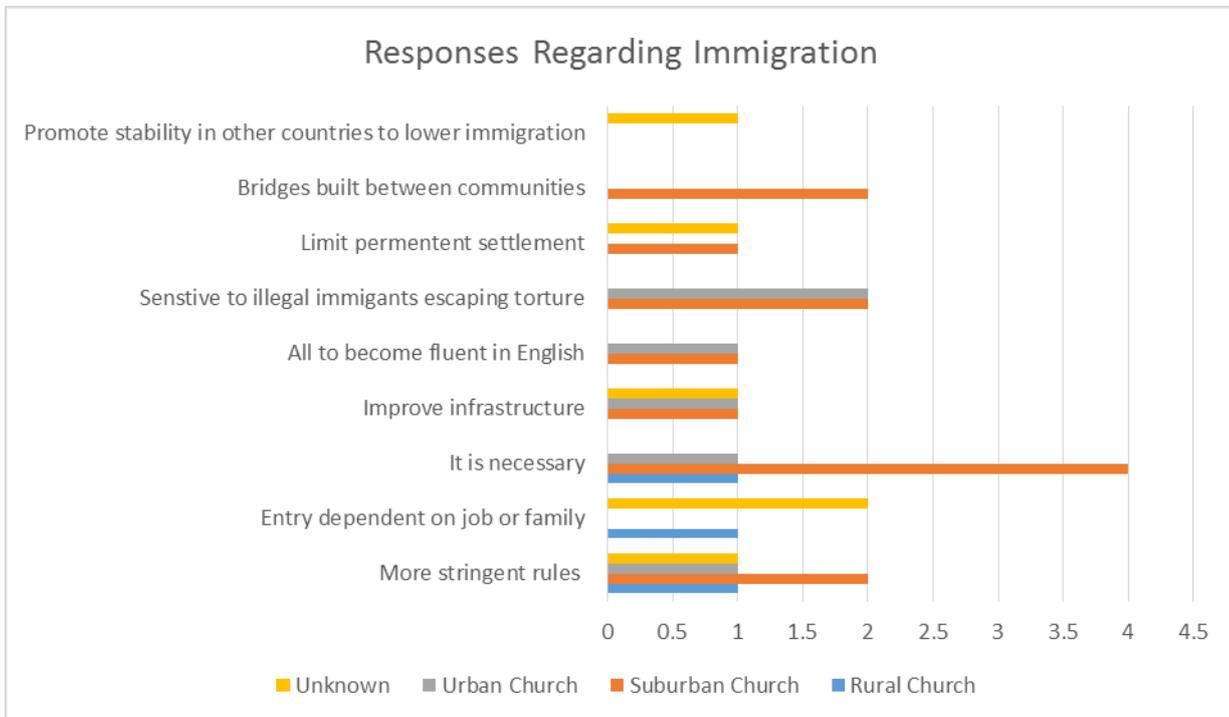
Over a quarter of churches requested that NHS staff would face less bureaucracy, either in the form of fewer targets for medical staff or in fewer managerial roles coupled with an increase in medical staff. This area merited the most responses within the area of the NHS. This was followed by two other areas with a high response - that of improvement to the efficiency of management and an ending of regional inequality - “the postcode lottery”.

The fear that the nation may lose the NHS in its current form appears to be an undercurrent to responses. Three churches spoke of keeping the NHS under the control of the state, however with a hands-off approach from government and also from PFIs. One suggestion is for individual hospitals to have their own budget.



**Immigration:**

The subject of immigration received the joint highest number of responses. Within this, it was possible to see where some churches drew upon the words they used in question one. The UK was described as being “caring and compassionate” towards those seeking asylum, as well as “the need for openness and transparency regarding stringent rules so there are no loopholes”.



As can be seen from this graph, churches in rural areas commented less on the area of immigration than those in suburban or urban areas. Those churches in urban areas – mainly cities in the West Midlands and Warwickshire - requested that people immigrating to the UK are required to become fluent in English. This was often accompanied by the requirement for bridges to be built between communities.

Four churches mentioned the importance of being sensitive to those seeking asylum from “tyrannical dictators” or “those facing terror or torture”. However one church added the caveat that this was for the UK to be a temporary place of asylum, rather than a new permanent home.

It is worth noting that no church chose to respond that immigration was both necessary and that there should be stricter rules governing entry. For those that mentioned it being necessary, concern was expressed over low pay or low qualification jobs. One church wrote: “(That the government) identifies why, with over 2 million unemployed, the UK needs immigrants to fill so many skilled and unskilled jobs”.

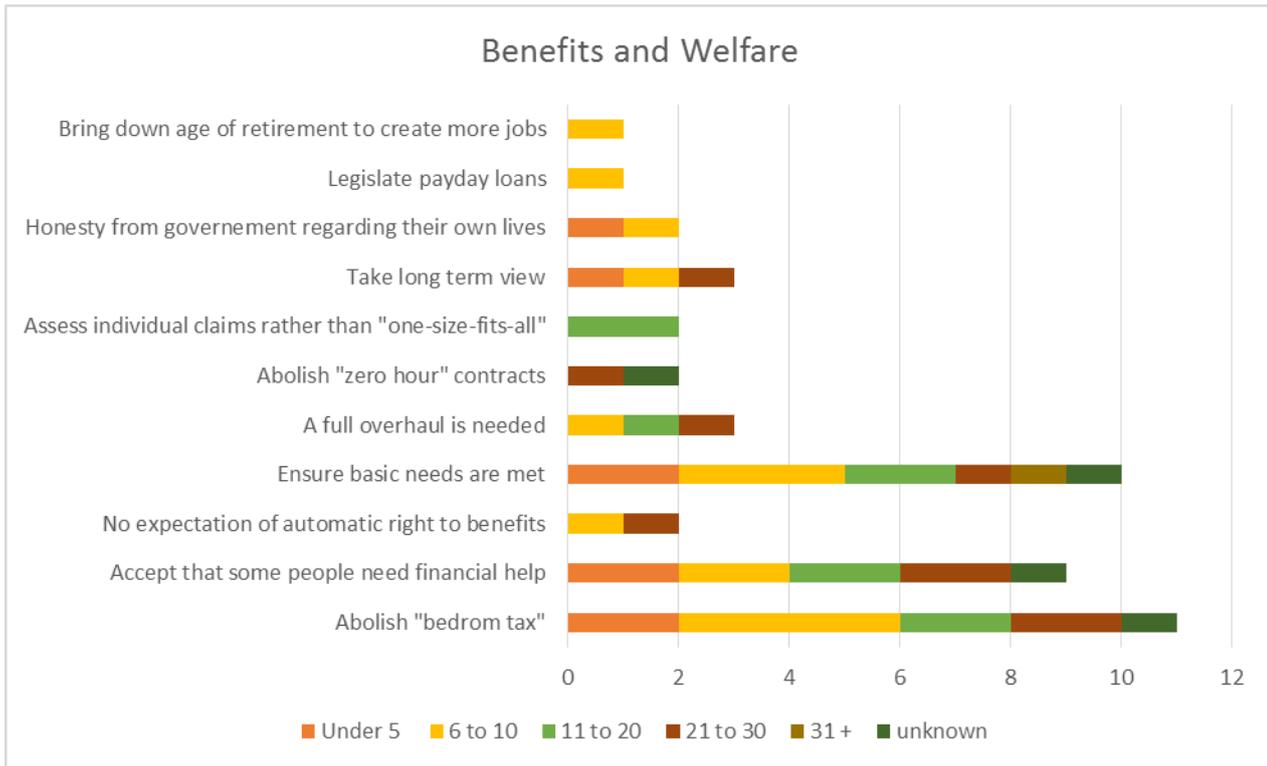
One church, which did not state its location, wrote: “Only British, No immigration”. This however, was the only church to express this view.

## Benefits and Welfare

The subject of benefits and welfare elicited high levels of response. Of all suggestions made, the most common came from churches wanting government to abolish the “bedroom tax” and to ensure that those most vulnerable are not losing out; especially those who are disabled. Several noted the need to increase acceptance that some people would need to receive benefits and to end the stigma for those individuals.

Within this section, two churches included extra material to back up their views. One came from Oxfam, and identified the level of need within the county, taking quotes from the Trussell Trust. It warned of 1.75 million of the poorest families having seen a cut in their income over the last three years, which had led to over 900,000 people using food banks during 2013-14.

The mention of food banks was documented by three churches, two of which said they support their local food bank. One of these in Worcestershire wrote; “...numbers [of people using the food bank] have doubled in the last twelve months, with 800 parcels in 2013/14 and 400 in 2012/13”.



This graph shows the breakdown of the most common responses grouped by the size of group participating. For some churches, the need to step back and look at the long term view is important, especially to identify whether a change or overhaul in the current benefits and welfare system is sustainable. One church wrote; “The current change to Universal Credit has caused the system to become muddled and will not be sustainable in the long term”.

Two churches commented that the characteristics identified in question one needed to be carried out through the Benefits and Welfare changes they named in question two. Both noted the need for compassion, dignity, respect and care to be shown to those applying for and receiving benefits.

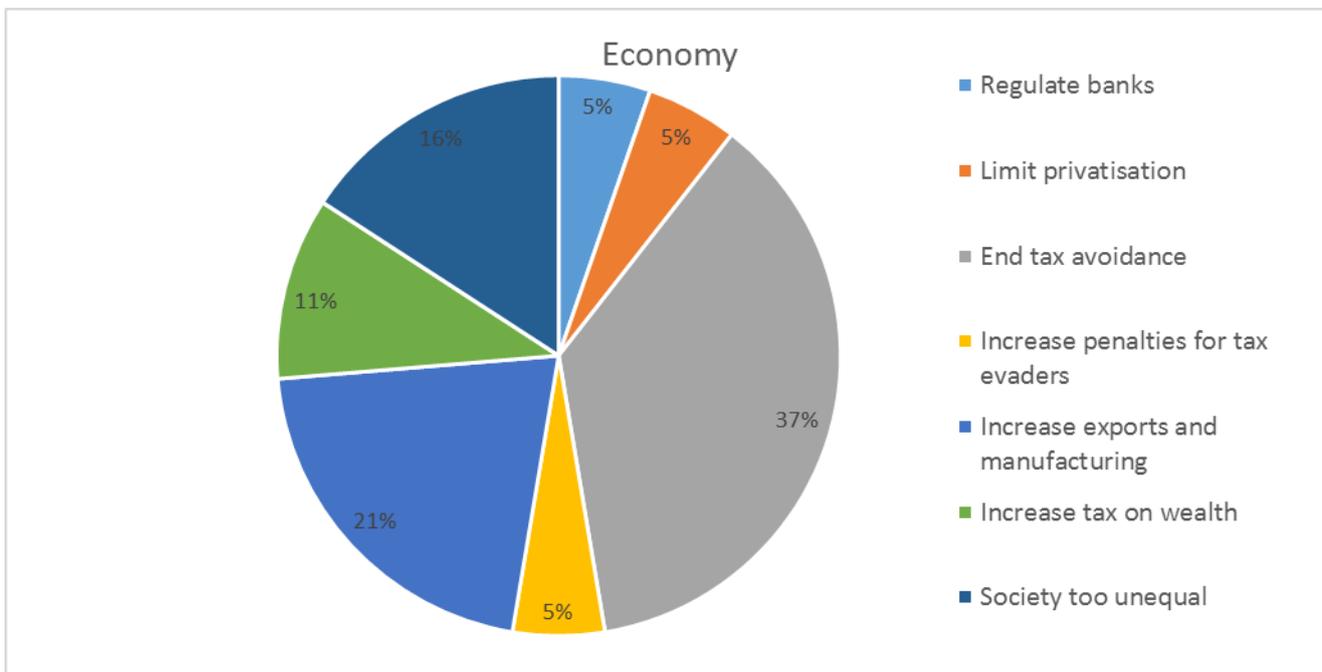
Only one church suggested bringing down the age of retirement to increase the number of jobs available, therefore bringing people off job-seeker benefits. Another church suggested bringing in employment training throughout schools, allowing young people to have a greater knowledge of the working world.

### Economy

The majority of churches who chose to comment on the area of Economy mentioned tax avoidance. For some, it was the only point that they made, but for others it was one of many ideas they had. Two churches included additional documentation backing up their opinions, each regarding tax avoidance by large companies.

The need to increase manufacturing and exports was suggested by churches in the hope that it would allow the UK to rely less on other countries. This, in turn would increase jobs within vocational areas.

Anger at companies who avoided paying the appropriate amount of tax occurred frequently in responses, although there were few suggestions as to what the Government could do to end this problem. The main suggestion was to increase fines.

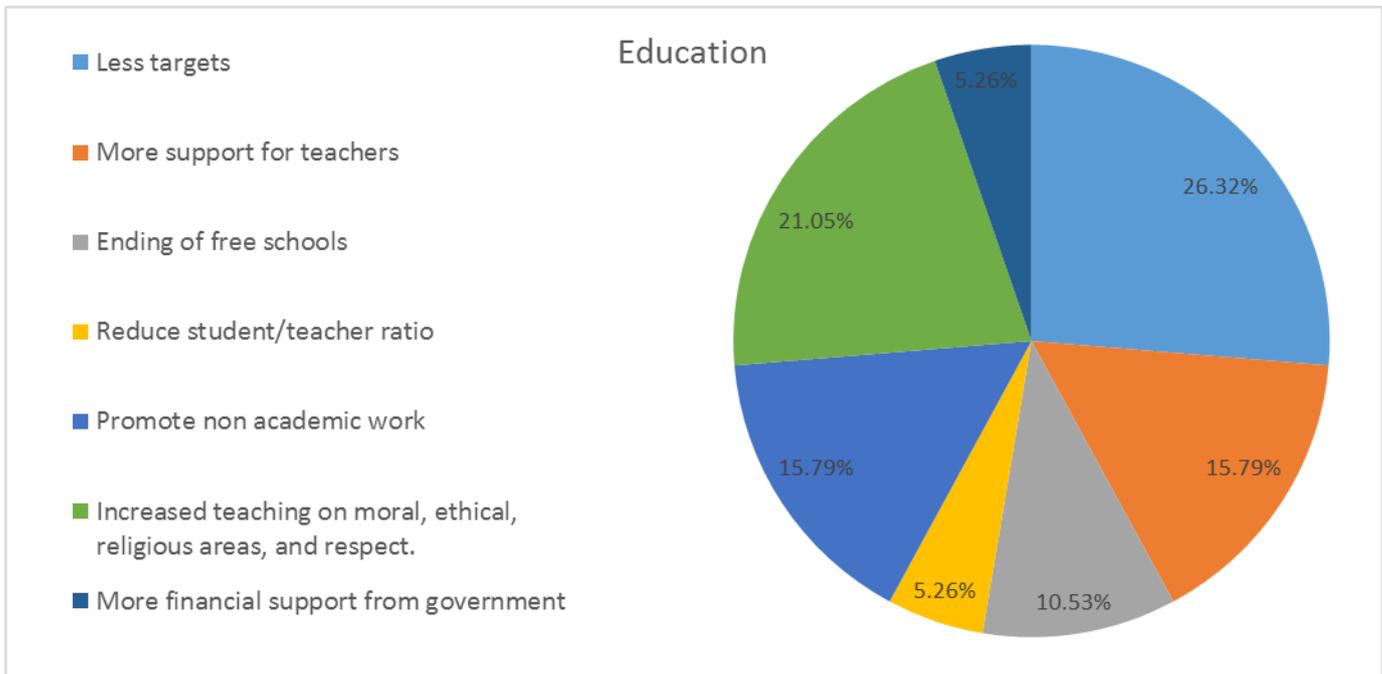


Of those churches which discussed the economy, 16% mentioned that they felt there was too wide a gap between rich and poor, with “people needing to turn to food banks and pay day loans as there is no other way to meet financial needs”. However, two suburban churches noted the need not to penalise those who do contribute to society by way of financial input.

Over half of churches which responded to the area of the economy mentioned their expectation that the economy would begin to improve as we enter 2015/16. One church wrote “[we hope that] mistakes made with the coalition will not be repeated”.

## Education

The area of education was one where many individuals spoke from personal experience (for example, as teachers). However, still over a quarter of churches mentioned the importance of fewer targets for schools, pupils and teachers. In this area came also the suggestion to “stop Government meddling” and “give schools more responsibility – take it away from Government”.



Two churches mentioned their ideas about the job of education minister. One said “Appoint an education minister with experience of teaching” whilst the other said “No Education minister for five years. Let the current changes settle”

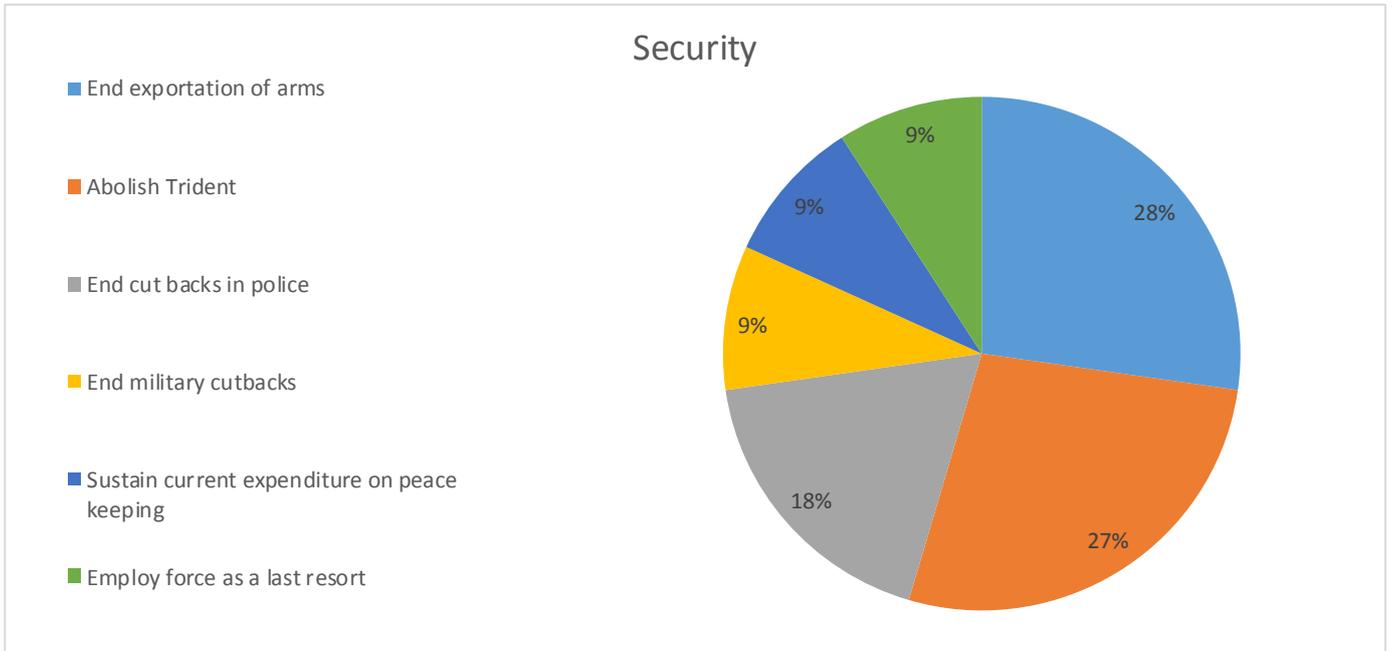
The concept of the current education system having too many changes was mentioned by one other church. They requested that education needed to go back to basics, ensuring all had equal opportunities at learning.

Although ending free schools was mentioned, there were no responses concerning Independent, Grammar or Public schools.

Only one church mentioned discipline, by writing “Corporal punishment allowed when necessary, under control” This was from a questionnaire completed by two people, rather than a larger group.

## Security

The responses and ideas given for security were lower than any other area – a quarter of the number of churches who responded regarding Education or Immigration.

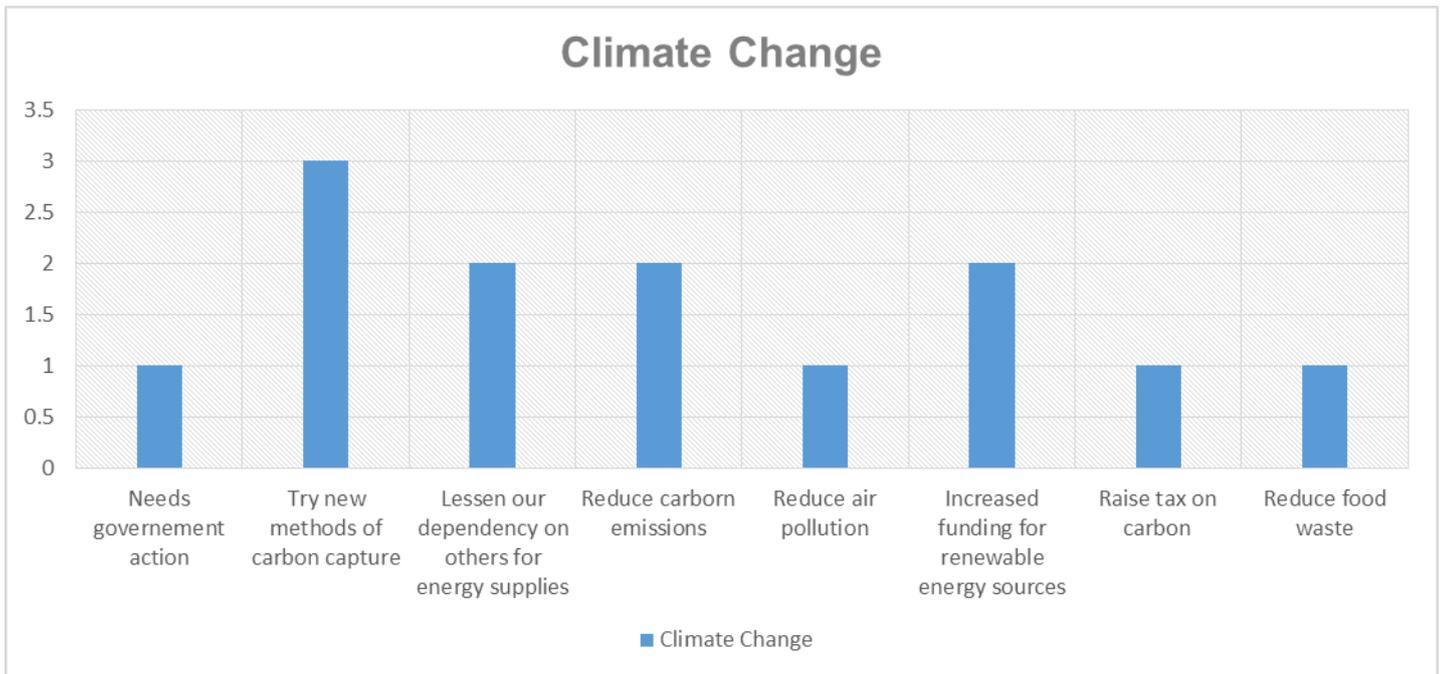


The chart above shows the main spread of responses. The abolition of trident and an end to exporting arms was mentioned by all but one of the churches who discussed security. Unlike some of the other areas, there were no differing views on this area.

Along with Europe, there was comparatively little commentary or additional information given to back up the views expressed. This could relate to a number of factors, one of which perhaps is the lack of involvement many people feel in the security of the UK. With this area, responses were generally shorter and more concise than those for The NHS, Education or Climate Change.

### Climate Change

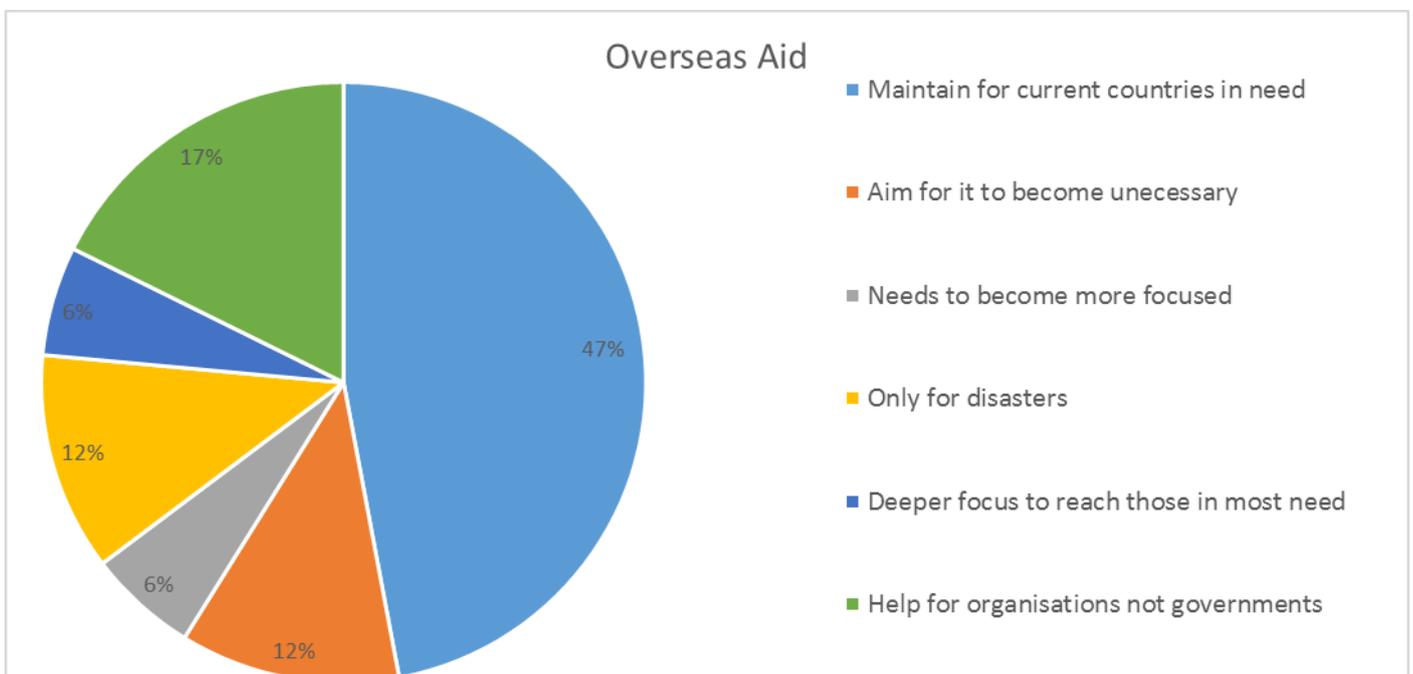
One church wrote that Government intervention into Climate Change was “A top priority”. A mixture of opinions was expressed from churches, mainly around what forms of renewable energy were most sustainable. There was not a consensus of opinion, however three churches attached additional documents promoting gas, solar or wind power



When looking at a variety of energy sources, one church wrote about the need for Government to “Promote fracking, rather than listening to ‘rent-a-crowd’ protesters”. In contrast, another church wrote “Put an end to fracking immediately”.

### Overseas Aid

Within the area of overseas aid, again churches continued to use some of the descriptive words from question one. Giving, in the form of help to other countries was seen as “Christian, Supporting, Caring and Loving”. It also was hoped that it would help to promote peace in some war-torn areas.

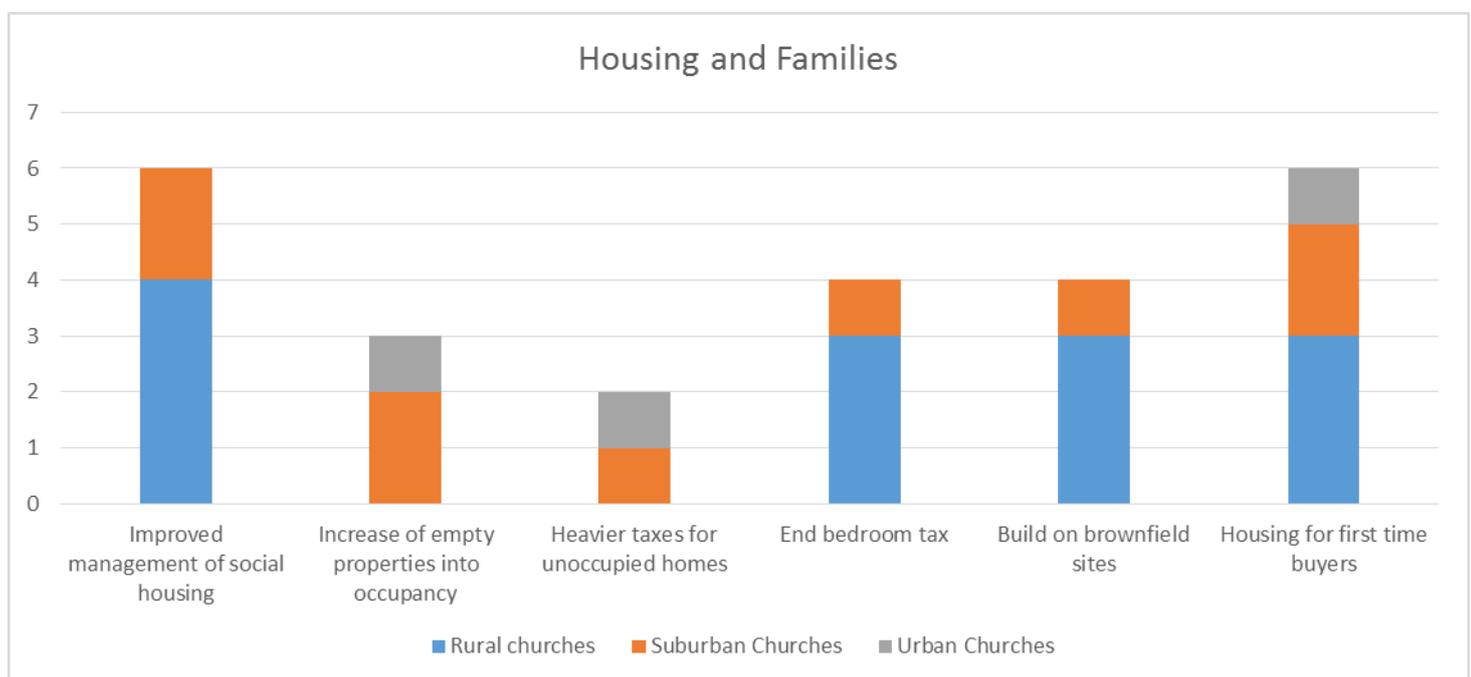


Within the area of Overseas Aid, 47% of responses were with regard to maintaining aid as it is currently given. One church wrote that this “[assisting another country with aid] embraced principles of fairness and justice.”

The third most popular response, with 12% of views, was that overseas aid should be saved just for disasters. This view was also coupled with a fear that any aid given often only reaches governments and not grass-roots organisations.

## Housing and Families

Although this area was named ‘Housing and Families’, all suggestions made by churches were around housing. It seemed from the responses that two groups seemed most disadvantaged by current housing issues; those living in social housing and those looking to buy for the first time. Over half of churches to consider the area of Housing and Families commented on the increasing population within the UK and the importance of ensuring there would be enough appropriate housing for future generations. One church wrote “No homes to be empty for % of time, when people are overcrowded already” with another saying “More social housing is needed for the next generation and to help young people afford not to live at home”.

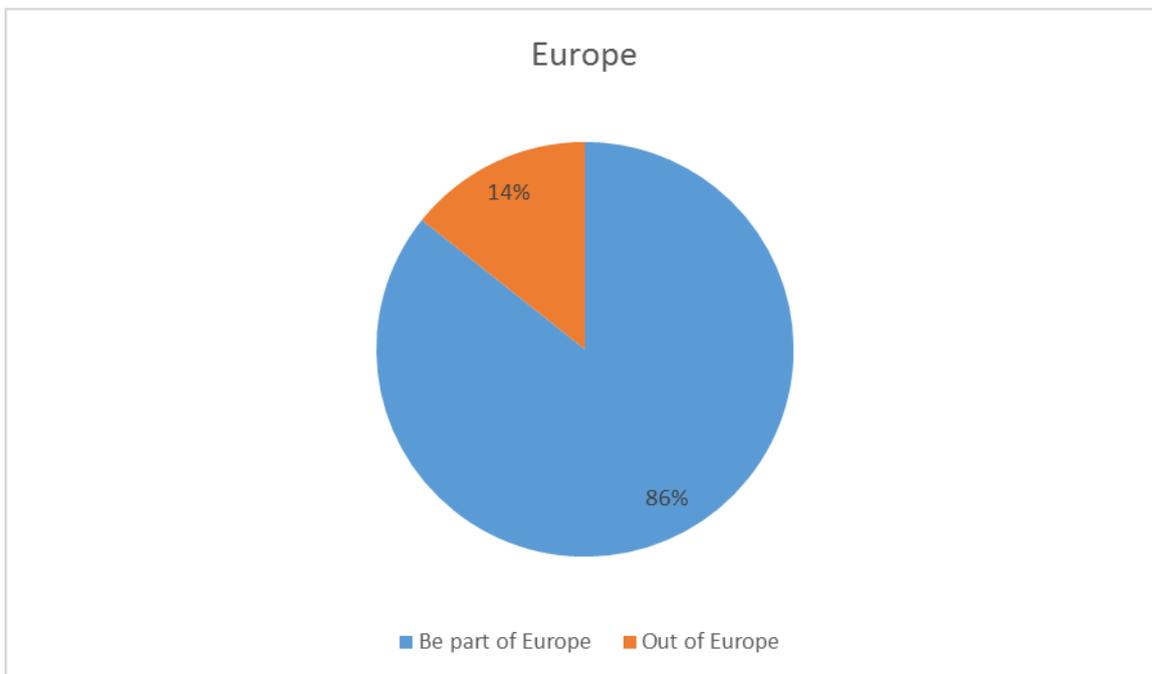


It appears that within this area, churches looked again at the words they had used in question 1. One church wrote “Housing to be dealt with in a compassionate way that allows for fairness and accountability.” This was written in relation to the bedroom tax, which, nearly a fifth of churches expressed concerns about.

Compared with other issues, urban churches commented less on Housing than those churches in suburban and rural areas. Without having a more equal mix of churches from different areas, it is not possible to know how typical this is.

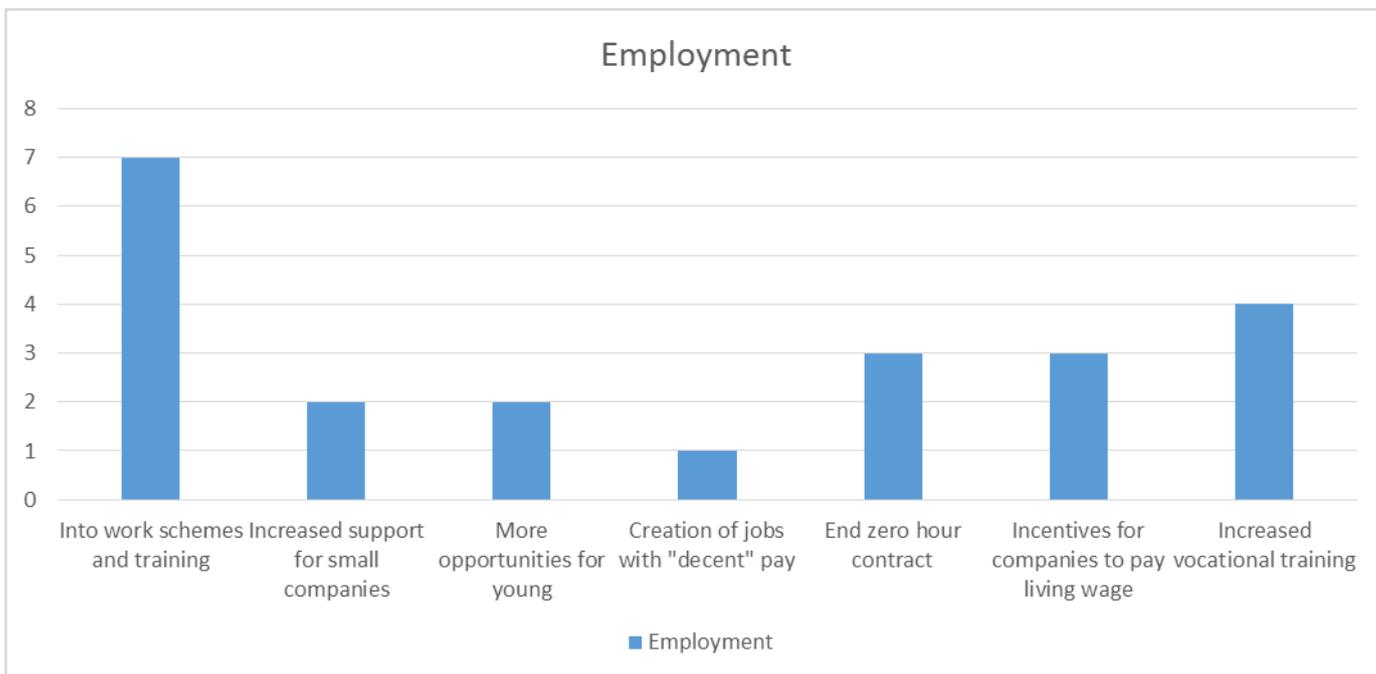
## Europe

Six churches responded to the area of Europe. Unlike all the other areas, only two types of response were made on this subject, with five of the churches feeling that “Staying in Europe” was important. Some however requested the UK to stay in Europe, although some did add caveats that European laws should not supersede UK laws.



## Employment

Within the area of Employment, there appeared to be a fairly equal split between churches in rural, suburban and urban churches. This could be due to increased awareness of unemployment throughout the UK or perhaps from personal experience.



The two most common views concerned the need for government support for those currently leaving school or unemployed. The suggestion to offer a variety of in-to-work schemes and/or training for work came from seven churches, with four feeling there was a need for an increase in vocational training.

Three churches commented on zero hour contracts, each with the view of ending them. One church said: "they [zero hour contracts] are grossly unfair and put people in worse positions".

## Summary

The results from this piece of research are gathered from a variety of churches within a pre-defined area of the West Midlands. Knowing this, perhaps it is worth considering how the responses may have varied if completed in other areas, by different size churches or by a larger scale of research.

For the churches taking part, the views were gathered from those who chose, or were invited to take part. Whilst this has delivered a wide range in results, it does however not necessarily represent the church as a whole. Some churches chose not to take part in the research due to not wishing to be represented this way.

It may be worth considering, should this research be repeated, asking how the churches describe themselves. Although it is possible to analyse the results with the information given, other data may have helped to identify patterns between church responses. Perhaps this information can be noted by church leaders who know and understand their congregations.

Although the twelve areas of questions covered a wide range of issues, comments were made on three more separate areas; HS2, Alcohol and Care of the Elderly. If research such as this is conducted in the future it may be worth considering these and other areas.