



# **Recruiting a next generation into mission**

**December 2020**

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## Introduction

In 2019, together with a number of other mission agencies, SIM-UK conducted pilot research in two cities to better understand how the UK Church seeks to cross racial, ethnic and cultural boundaries. As Ram Prasad Shreshtha, a mission worker to the UK, said in relation to the research: “The world is becoming a global village where people from different walks of life move from one place to another, searching for opportunities. Some are moved forcefully and some go willingly. Such a paradigm shift compels mission organisations to study and address the diverse people groups, strategically focusing on multi-ethnic mission exposure. The traditional stereotype of outreach is now outdated.”

Since this was published global travel has largely ceased in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, but mission has not, and the imperative to focus strategically to focus on intercultural mission (in, to and from the UK) has not. This listening exercise, as part of a wider strategic review for SIM-UK, explored this question: *“Given our limited resources, how should SIM UK pursue our vision within a range of possible ministry strategies to enable a greater diversity of evangelical churches to recruit, equip, send and receive the next generation of gospel workers in shared purpose and mission?”*

This breaks down into a number of interrelated areas: First, ‘limited resources’ acknowledges the questions of internal capacity not directly addressed here, but which relate to questions around effectiveness of service delivery. This explores direct questions about the fears and concerns of mission workers and staff, and what we think churches need from a mission agency. Second, ‘a greater diversity of evangelical churches’ draws in some of the far wider discourse around diversity within the UK church – issues of empire and patronage, diversity of ethnicity, diversity of theology and church culture, and class.

These are critical questions for UK churches to address across the nations in the UK, where there is a vision for global and cross-cultural mission. These are also areas that call for a new approach to church-centred mission, for agencies that break the present mould, meet genuinely unmet needs and advance God's mission in Christ amongst the nations.

These begin to be explored with recommendations for further work in the fuller versions of this report for SIM. This summary of findings, however, focuses on the key question related to raising the next generation: what will it take to increase awareness, provide mission-critical stimulus, and respond to our times with courageous faith and action?

The review took place over just one month in December 2020, comprising 6 online focus groups sessions, 22 interviews conducted on phone or Zoom, and 2 questionnaires, one to staff, one to SIM-UK mission workers and alumni. The listening project therefore had direct input from a total of 25 church leaders, 7 organisations working with young people, 8 younger people, 88 mission workers (79 via survey) and 21 staff: 149 people in total, directed and facilitated by Laura Treenor from Frank Analysis Ltd. We are very aware that this is not a fully comprehensive or representative sample, and even with a far wider research piece it would remain a challenge to reach a representation of the full diversity of the evangelical church in the UK.

These findings are being shared in the hope they may be of interest to other organisations exploring similar questions. SIM UK now has a number of areas to address alongside our global partners. We believe many opportunities before us all to implement significant changes. We welcome opportunities for further conversation and collaboration as we continue to find ways to share the good news of Jesus Christ amongst communities where Christ is least known and churches least resourced.

# Identifying, equipping, recruiting and sending a next generation: summary of key insights

The journey towards being sent in terms of active communication and recruitment could be viewed using the marketing framework 'AIDA': awareness, interest, desire, action. People start with an **awareness** of mission opportunities and/or SIM, most commonly through a personal relationship, their church or an event, then may demonstrate **interest** by going online and researching, **desire** by making contact or visiting someone or receiving training, then **action** by choosing an agency and service model. These all require different inputs, and some are best done in collaboration with others. SIM's influence upon the person increases through the journey.

This is some of what has been learned about in these different areas, many of which are directly related to the challenges above.

## Awareness: how do people first get a heart for mission?

1. If the church leader has a heart for global mission the congregation will follow
2. It starts younger than we think
3. Missionaries are more likely to raise awareness than churches
4. A high level of intentionality and networking is required to increase diversity

## Interest: what are the motivations and barriers for young people in particular?

5. There is a generational motivation to 'make a difference' in terms of social justice, and be part of something bigger
6. There is a generational expectation of being able to clearly visualise where I will go, what I will do and a team to do it with, ideally with other young people
7. For some, career 'fit' and FOMO (fear of missing out) can be a barrier
8. Prayer and church involvement make success more likely

## Desire: what 'next step' is most in line with what people are looking for?

9. Many churches would appreciate a 'pathway' or mentor for those interested, and it may be best if it is not agency specific.
10. It might require more of an active 'push', invitation or ask than we realise
11. Exposure visits (rather than short term mission) are considered essential by many that we spoke to, as part of testing through immersion and relationship building – either in the UK or overseas
12. Follow up after exposure visits is critical

## Action: what are the levers which cause someone to go on mission with SIM?

13. Assume enquirers are agency agnostic and are looking for the right personal fit
14. There is a growing expectation, opportunity and benefit in direct contact between mission workers on the field and enquirers
15. Mobilisers are one of the most influential factors in people choosing SIM over another agency, with vision as a priority reason alongside reputation of SIM

## Awareness: how do people first get a heart for mission?

1. If the church leader has a heart for global mission the congregation will follow

When I asked a long-term missionary in North Africa how to recruit the next generation she answered quickly: “It starts with the leader. A church without a mission focus is a church that has missed half the Bible. People need to see that it’s not everyone’s calling to go, but everyone has a part to play. For me the call was so clearly to the unreached.”

Voices of mission workers:

- “I think it is the local church's responsibility to set the vision for global/cross-cultural mission and so it is important that organisations such as SIM gain a voice within the denomination/networks etc. in a variety of ways.”
- “Preach God's word”; “Clear biblical preaching”; “Get the theology right”
- “Identify the issue clearly and the scale of the challenge. Needs to be consistent with the theology and cultural understanding of the next generation.”
- “The next generation of church leaders needs to be convinced of the need to engage in global mission, and not just as senders.”
- “Encourage churches to preach a series on mission rather than just a one-off Sunday, have it as focus for 4 or 5 weeks.”
- “Faithful teaching on the need to reach the least reached (Biblical mandate but also current statistics about people living and dying without the gospel) - e.g., in churches, Christian conferences/festivals, CUs etc.”
- “Make sure your church is on board from the outset and keep them involved and engaging the leadership at every possible opportunity. The local church needs to feel part of what the missionary is doing, not robbed of one of its valued members.”

A pastor of a large black majority church in London says “we have to give them the biblical basis for mission. Not everyone will catch it. We need to give them realistic expectation of the challenge involved.”

The church leaders we spoke to (as a self-selective group of those willing to engage in this study) were clear about their responsibility in this:

- “A key motivation is not losing sight of the urgency of the gospel, and keeping the world on the agenda”
- “Church leaders need to set the example of reaching out, in order to encourage others to reach out.”
- “The church leader shapes the culture, and therefore the key question is how we engage church leaders and get them to be passionate about mission so they can set the expectation for every church member to be involved in mission.”

- “There is a snowball effect of momentum of the church growing in caring about mission as people tell their stories about mission”

## 2. It starts younger than we think.

Six of the mission worker respondents mentioned childhood in their responses to how they first heard about SIM. SIM may be aware of a study that proves it, but based on anecdotal experience, children of missionaries are far more likely to go on to long-term service than their peers. One long-term mission worker to a North African country said all her four children were looking at going into mission there, some through professional roles that would enable them to gain access.

We spoke to a children’s charity leader who said he is “trying to encourage kids that even in this pluralistic world they still need to see their mission field around them, and to prepare them for the kickback they will get when they try to reach out to their schools; and to prepare them for the sacrifice which mission requires.” There is still a role for missionary biographies, which were mentioned by two interviewees as something that encouraged them into the adventure of mission.

However, they also pointed out that sometimes it’s the motivation from people rather than the resources that are the issue. There is no shortage of resources but, as one mission worker said in a group to broad agreement, “we still need to focus on planting the seed with children from a young age”, even if some fall on stony ground.

For young people, some strategies emerged from conversations. An interviewee from Youth for Christ said, “If an organisation wants to raise up a generation of world changers, imagine how you get to know people without them already signing up for what you do.” A leader from UCCF concurred: “It’s got to be relational, and that this isn’t always going direct to students themselves but maybe to connect with the staff/relay workers (because the turnover with students is so quick) and gain their trust.”

One church has found that medical and language students are the most likely recruits for mission, and another that “summer camps are very significant places for their faith, and university student groups (such as UCCF) are key because once people have started and invested in a career it is hard to intervene so reaching them at the beginning is big – have young, mission-focused people as poster kids for mission.”

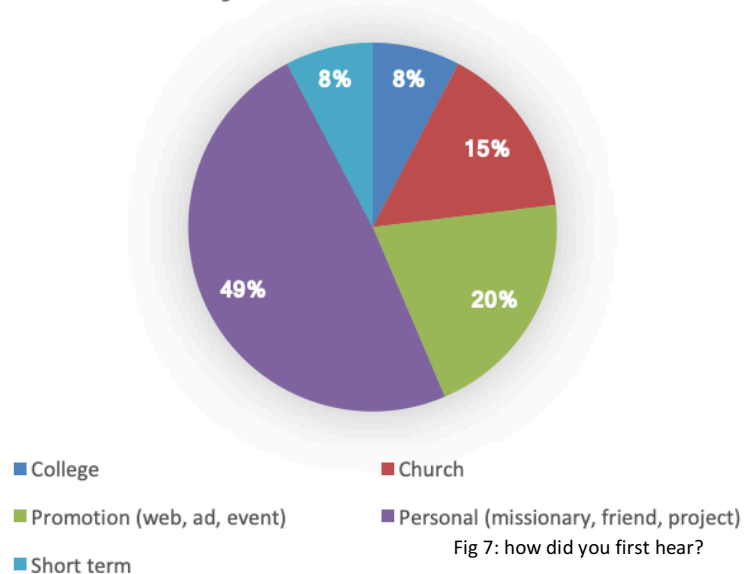
Tearfund reached out to the office of one large black majority church in London to contact the youth minister. The missions pastor says, “I went on a mission trip to Brazil with them because I can come back, report, tell youth (age 14-19) to stir their hearts to mission, hopefully take a few of them back to visit. They have targeted the youth church, which was wise, and there were plans to take it to the next level before Covid.”

## 3. Missionaries are more likely to raise awareness than churches

Of the 78 free text responses by mission workers to ‘how did you first hear about SIM?’, 33 mentioned missionary contacts, and almost half mentioned a personal relationship.

- Personal connections were almost all with serving missionaries, with some additional mentions of colleagues, or projects (e.g. Sports Friends) and a school chaplain.
- Within promotion, 3 mentioned magazines, 5 the website, and 8 events (Spring Harvest, Revive). 4 mentioned being a missionary kid, and 2 remembered hearing about SIM at church as a child or young person.
- All Nations was the only college specifically mentioned; 8 mentioned mergers with other organisations.
- Other organisations apart from AEF/MECO mentioned were CMF, Leprosy Mission, UCCF, Navigators, Tearfund.

## How did you first hear about SIM?



Responses showed a similar balance in 19 responses from staff, though with a higher proportion from church (5/19). The working group noted that older people often use word of mouth and talking to other missionaries before contacting SIM, while younger people are going through the website – and this is corroborated by the older longer-term missionaries being more like to have chosen SIM because of relationship with missionaries.

In focus groups, mission workers suggested "the best way of getting short-term workers out is through personal connections who they already know, because they know they'll be well mentored and protected with opportunity for serving." In one survey response, a mission worker suggested, "Help your long-term missionaries to thrive, so that they will be your recruiters through their prayer letters/example/deputation, etc."

One sending church leader summarised the that main motivator for people going on mission is "either having already gone themselves (with family or on short-term) or being able to make connections with current missionaries."

### 4. A high level of intentionality and networking is required to increase diversity

As described above, awareness will only grow throughout the breadth of the Evangelical Church through intentional steps to move towards others. On mission worker emphasised the need for SIM UK to "reach out and invest in relationships with the wider Church; if it's a directed approach then diversity can come from that." This extends beyond networking and events to all aspects of communication. As one mission worker observed, "we have diverse

ages on the field, and they all need to be visible on our media.” The same could be observed of representing a breadth of ethnicities in visual communication. Language can also include or exclude those of different church traditions.

One pastor of a diaspora church spoke of his desire for his church to be raise up ‘the next Hudson Taylors’, and encouraged mission agencies

“...to offer to come to speak, to tell their stories. For us we are not that much mission minded. We can learn this from established mission institutions. Approach a church to give a platform once a year, teach, do seminars, put some resource, ask ‘what is mission’... if the pastor doesn’t teach it, who can? The mission organisation. Approach the local church, the local leadership. Train the trainers. Then select a church with youngsters. There is that invisible barrier between the host and people who came from abroad. I want to see the host and the people who came to merge together and stand together. Maybe some will become full time missionaries!”

## Interest: what are the motivations and barriers, particularly for young people?

### 5. There is a generational motivation to ‘make a difference’ in terms of social justice, and be part of something bigger

The next gen working group has investigated this statement. One interviewee described the motivations for young people going into mission as “social justice, wanting to be involved in something bigger themselves and to join in what the Father is doing. [They] recognise how minorities are being and have been treated badly and want to make a difference.”

An example of this is this interviewee in her early twenties:

“I was at a church which had missionaries who were mentioned and talked about, which adds awareness of mission. The main thing [that got me into it] was just doing mission: me and my friend ended up going to ‘The Jungle’ in Calais when I’d just turned 18, and from there I had an awareness of what’s happening and that we can play a part and be involved. Primarily, I was moved by things I’d seen on the news - ‘this is bad, what can I do to help’. A friend had been told about a group who were going out. There wasn’t much thought - I just wanted to help, and here was an opportunity. I’m quite a restless person - if I have a job to do I want to do it there and then. I took a gap year and lived with a missionary family in Bulgaria for a few months and also lived on a boat in Greece and worked in a refugee camp through YWAM. I wasn’t a YWAMer but was a rogue volunteer. In Bulgaria it was a friend of a friend who said they needed help. I do have a heart for people affected by war or for refugees but I’m not sure whether that would be in the UK or someone else. My paramedic degree is quite practical, so I’d love to train people in first aid or being a paramedic or using that somewhere, but don’t know when or where or how.”

When Youth for Christ asked Gen Z ‘What are the things that make you feel that ideas or suggestions are worth exploring further?’ (<https://yfc.co.uk/rethinkingculture/>) the top answers were “It makes sense to me” (49%) “I think it could be worthwhile” (45%) “Presented in an interesting way” (34%) “Because it challenges me” (33%) and “It may offer a better way of living for me and those around me” (31%). The challenge is showing that mission fulfils these desires.

Another new young SIM mission partner said: “We need to show more of what missions really is because a lot of people have this idea that people is idea going out to wilderness place, an African tribe, that old fashioned view, and we need to open people’s eyes to what mission is - can be teachers, doctors, plumbers, not just theologians.”

These may be the kind of examples one church leader had in mind when they said, “the mentality of some young people is that mission isn’t something for them. Young people going on mission need to inspire other young people that they’re needed on the mission field and that it is an exciting life; young people need to shift their focus from their own career-driven life to see the urgency of mission.”

## 6. There is a generational expectation of being able to clearly visualise where I will go, what I will do and a team to do it with, ideally with other young people

We asked young church-based mission mobilisers with a background in UCCF what they saw as the factors in where young people go and what they do. They said:

- A good experience
- How well looked after they will be
- How well developed they will be
- A community to belong to
- A community to build

Other mission voices shared the view that young people want to know and be known. They are up for an adventure, but with others, and with, as Rory Bell from TNT described it, “a safety net.” This fits with findings from Church of England ‘Rooted’ research ([Church Of England - Rooted in the Church](#)).

- One interviewee from UCCF shared that, “Many students would have a deep fear of going somewhere by themselves, and I don’t see many students moving to the harder mission fields (in the UK or abroad) unless they already have a firm connection to people in that place – importance of having people that you know will have your back, particularly when making decisions post-university.”
- A mission worker suggested: ‘A clear outline of what a first experience might be like, what the expectations are, and so on is helpful for a generation who perhaps struggle more with independent decision making (without being facetious, studies have shown that many young adults are so used to being able to instantly access information, they are less likely to confidently make decisions on their own).’



- Another in interview said: “From everything that one does read it seems much more relationally orientated: community, belonging, challenge. How do we offer that in their journey of discovery in engaging with mission? Is it mentoring, or is it discovery group teams, mini families?”

Churches leaders suggested ways in which agencies could help with this:

- A SIM sending church leader said at his church one of the young people has led teams of younger people going to Romania; SIM could help in painting pictures of scenarios in which young people could get involved – this is why it’s so effective when missionaries come and share stories
- Personal accounts (from younger people) can be very important - e.g., talks to CUs. Younger people might find it easier to picture themselves taking the first step if they can see someone like them having done the same.
- A non-sending church leader said most people don’t think they can do mission– so agencies can give them role models, show missionaries as normal people and what everyday mission work is like. The church can play a key role in showing people this.

We asked at 15-year-old who has had exposure to mission since a young age whether she’d think about going out. She was enthusiastic about going back to where she’d been. When asked about the issues she’d think about, she responded: “First I’d look at who I’d know or who could I know? What would I do day to day? Can I visualise where I’d stay, how I’d travel, who’d be there?”

One young person post-university, said that on her gap year serving as a ‘rogue volunteer’ alongside a YWAM project in Greece, “the hardest bits weren’t cultural. More just being either lonely or unsure what you’re meant to do.”

This needs to sit with the reality experienced by many mission workers. One issue that continues to raise concern is the workload surrounding the facilitation of visitors/short-term teams/short-term workers. Providing staff and a healthy structure for this to happen is essential.

## 7. For some, career ‘fit’ and FOMO (fear of missing out) can be a barrier

We asked the same young, church-based mission mobilisers with a background in UCCF what they saw as the factors in where young people go and what they do. They said they are:

- Fearful of financial cost
- Fearful of personal costs: what will I miss out on? FOMO factor is big (what else could I be doing on a gap year?)
- Fearful of loneliness

They also suggested that career placement experiences and connections with field staff could increase understanding. Other focus group member said, “it would be helpful for

agencies to provide insight to people about how they could serve longer term and to link into their career, to be more forthcoming with opportunities.”

One interviewee shared a similar sentiment on barriers to young people engaging in mission: “they are scared they will take the wrong step, so it’s about reassuring to them that SIM has so many doors to walk through you won’t end up in the wrong place. Fear of missing out on what’s happening in the home country, which makes them pull back from taking that first step.”

One leader from a church in an affluent area observed that “in our context the focus is climbing the ladder in their job and on getting a house/family, being ‘career people’ – feeling like to be a missionary you have to live as a pauper and your kids have to go to boarding school.”

## 8. Prayer and church involvement make success more likely

Within our focus group for sending church leaders, one leader shared that his church tries to gather people who are “committed to standing alongside missionaries long-term as they go abroad” – providing both prayer and practical support. A young church-based mission mobiliser commented:

“We need to stop outsourcing mission to mission agencies and give people a taste within the church family. It is inspiring when people I know go out. We can build on these connections and hearing from them. What does life look like in mission overseas? What are the inspiring stories? They’re like me - I could do it too. Help with funding and prayers and contact while there: agencies should expect the church to do this. It should be a requirement for churches to do this.”

This was the experience of one young couple planning to go to France with a large agency (not SIM) next year:

“We had been planning to go out with Latin Link but paused when I became pregnant... in prayer my husband had been told that I would be the one to hear where we would go, and while we were in North Africa with a YWAM team just for a week there were lots of confirmations that it was France, which was then confirmed in more prayer and through talking to friends and family. We considered just moving there and getting jobs, but from talking to our church realised that then we wouldn’t be ‘sent’ out in quite the same way, and that there would be real benefits to having some organisational covering and being part of a team. Then we planned a trip... someone from church had a picture for us before we left, then one of the families we visited had the exact same picture. God has led really clearly, and it’s taken far longer than we expected, but if it hadn’t been for that we’d probably be in the wrong place and unhappy!”

One mission worker, given the survey scenario of someone considering long-term mission but not sure where or which agency, responded with this:

“I would want to back-track to explore what the person's underlying calling is before even getting to the question of which agency. If the sum total of the person's sense of call is a hope to go on long-term mission, then the question of agency is premature. Much more work needs to be done with/by the individual and in relationship to their church.”

Another encouraged enquirers to “Explore people and places your church already has a partnership with. Consider the priorities of the Great Commission (and the Bible as a whole - Romans 15 is a great summary starting point) and your experience, skills and gifts. What context might you fit in?” One finished their survey with this: “Remember you want people sent by the Lord and we are told to pray to that end. Clever recruitment strategies need to be set up and followed through by prayer.”

## Desire: what ‘next step’ is most in line with what people are looking for?

### 9. Many churches would appreciate a ‘pathway’ or mentor for those interested, and it may be best if it is not agency-specific

One interviewee suggested that the barriers to mission “are addressed by being patient with [young people]; walk with people on the journey and help them hear stories of other people who have been successful in mission work.”

This sense of a journey was evident in some of the conclusions of the EMCP (Evangelical Mission Collaboration Group, who met in 2018/2019).

The experience of one Youth for Christ group is that “you have to think about if you want to churn out 5 missionaries a year, how they get to that point. Provide a map. They don’t have to follow-up, but you need traction with people. You need a core together – the fulcrum around which everything turns.”

The church leaders we spoke with see the benefit of this approach:

- “Theological training is pretty universal, but mentorship has been crucial but lacking – I really look to see a quality of resilience in people before I send them out, they need to see the reality of what they’re going out to and have the stability to cope with it and having a mentor to share about what it’s really like is incredibly helpful.”
- “I want agencies to have a training course for both learning and practically doing evangelism – to educate the next generation, because the opportunities are already there.”
- “Mission agencies can produce resources to show people they can do mission, and churches can do intensive 1:1 support.”
- “It would be helpful for agencies to create a track for people, to give them a feel of whether mission is something for them (e.g., the Acts29 church planting course).

Church leaders don't always have the knowledge or confidence to support missionaries, but agencies can bring in this level of expertise."

There was enthusiasm for the idea of churches being provided with some kind of pathway to mission. The responses from mission workers could help with this, particularly the advice they would give to people considering mission on how to choose an agency. Some of them evidently gave this considerable thought on the order of priorities (see highlighted responses in appendix).

## 10. It might require more of an active 'push', invitation or ask than we realise

We might be overly optimistic if we think young people will 'drift' into mission, even when they are well placed to do this. A representative from Youth for Christ talked about the importance of 'coming to the front': "I think what I've learned it that culture is so toxic that unless we provide an alternative route, so we have to be stronger -stronger on sovereignty - otherwise we're giving away too much to the world." A former UCCF staff worker shared that, "The whole 'live your best life' thing is big, but young people both need to be convinced that following Jesus is living your best life, and that dying to that desire is needed, learning obedience. That's hard."

A mission worker observed "I think currently churches tend to wait for people interested in mission to come forward, rather than actively seeking to encourage it," and another suggested "giving an invitation to actively join God's mission to the world through sending or going."

Another mission worker exhorted: "Show them how much people need to hear the Gospel. Show them that you don't need to know everything to go and share your testimony and the gospel. Remind them of the bigger picture and encouraging them to look beyond the current restrictions and frustrations and focus on the future hope and the need to share that hope with people in a far more desperate position."

## 11. Exposure visits (rather than short-term mission) are considered essential by many as part of testing through immersion and relationship building – either in the UK or overseas.

'Short-term mission', despite the contentions surrounding it in the mission community, remains the mental default for discussions on recruitment of young people. The new shift seems to be in enthusiasm for cross-cultural trips in the UK as well as overseas, and for them to be communicated primarily as exposure, learning and testing.

One staff member observed in conversation: "The one thing short-term mission trips do is invest in individuals. It's very rare that someone comes later who hasn't [gone out short-term] earlier. The receiving offices see it as investing in future potential. There is a question about the ecosystem more generally: are we honest about what these trips are really about?"

One mission worker with experience of seeing short-termers through Sports Friends, was clear about the benefits:

“You can’t be prepared for cross-cultural ministry until you’re in it, you can’t love someone unless you’re in a relationship with them; our preparation will only go so far until we’re in the environment.... We encourage people to have an exposure trip as it gives them a chance to go, meet the team, see the situation; it’s not possible for everyone financially but it is a big help.”

Similarly, a interviewee from UCCF shared that “it’s important to help people understand that mission is not a theoretical thing that might happen someday in the future but it’s a lifestyle to be lived right now; a key thing for young people is seeing things modelled and having a go.” Being able to offer short term mission for Youth for Christ would be “a selling point, exciting and invigorating.”

Church leaders recognised this:

- “Short-term mission can be part of a mission worker’s preparation so they can know what life overseas is like before they go out again.”
- “Training for some abstract thing you may never do is hard to get excited about, but if you knew you were going to reach out to people in five weeks then people are very motivated to learn and take it in.”

Within this, there is an acknowledgement that finance will be a barrier for some, and some shared that this needs to start at home, which would also be lower cost:

- “Have mission workers do inter-cultural work in their own country before going out – or instead of going out”
- “If you haven’t been engaged in telling people about Jesus at home, you’re not going to do it somewhere with more challenge and pressures.”
- “People need to be serving interculturally in their church before they go overseas to mission workers.”

This can lead to a very personal and direct experience. We know from the Eido research how many churches offer English language conversation as a way to build relationships and offer a service to people from other cultures in their neighbourhood. We heard one story of a family helping with English conversation locally, who have now been invited out to stay with this Turkish family in their home country, a great example of family-to-family cross-cultural exposure.

## 12. Follow up after exposure visits is critical

One church leader said this:

“How people are looked after when they come back is really important. Teams are so excited when they come back. How could they do what they do here? When they’re away they try stuff outside their comfort zone and come back as valuable

members. There should be exit missionary interviews. The phrase 'short-term' is really unhelpful - it implies it stops when you come back. Actually it's part of our walk with God. When we're there we say we'll go back but we know we won't. How can I be fired up in that home mission field?"

As one interviewee put it: "when people go on mission trips, do we ask them what they've learned and not just whether they had fun, to try and be deliberate about funnelling people towards mission, and going on mission with an expectation of learning?" Exposure trips – rather than short-term trips – can be a next step, either to mission at home, preparation for going again to the same place, or recruiting others to fund, support and pray.

One couple in their early twenties went to Ethiopia on two or three team trips, recruited a family member to join them who subsequently became a Christian, and are considering going back longer-term (delayed by babies and careers). In the meantime, they have cemented their involvement by independently setting up a charity to enable UK-based fundraising for the projects they visited among their peers. Another we know, also in their twenties, did the same for a home for people with disabilities in the Middle East. This example demonstrates a level of independence, empowerment and ownership more likely of a younger generation. There are many small charities springing up to fundraise for specific overseas projects, as Eddie Arthur's research has shown. Although this could be seen as a threat to established organisations' processes and incomes, it is sometimes also evidence of young people who are invested and organised as a result of their experience. It demonstrates a heart for the world, a desire to embed a personal connection with a place or project and gives potential for mentoring and development.

## Action: what are the levers which cause someone to go out with SIM?

### 13. Assume enquirers are agency agnostic and are looking for the right personal fit.

The next gen working group found that in 2019-20 the most common new enquiries were either from the website or through the church they attended, but we know from the survey that personal relationships play a significant role before this. From these results, a third will consider going out without a mission agency. SIM then 'competes' with other agencies for a decision.

71 mission workers answered the multiple-choice question 'What were the most significant factors in choosing to go out with SIM?'

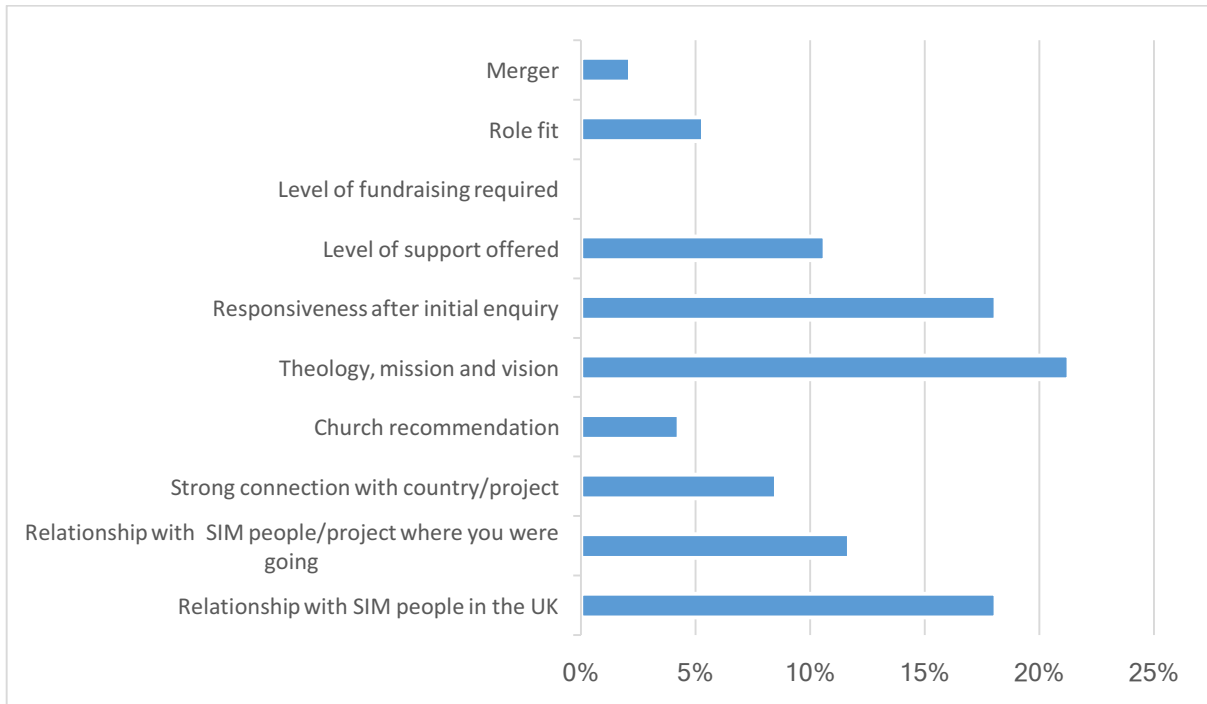


Fig 8: factors in choosing SIM

Of the 71 responses, 27 gave 'other' answers incorporated into this chart as follows:

- 'Merger' and 'good fit for role' have been added as additional categories,
- 'Reputation' is combined with 'theology/mission/vision'
- 'Family recommendation' is combined with 'friend recommendation'.

Role fit and flexibility due to scale are the strongest 'other' factors. Examples:

- 'SIM were the only group then looking for a dentist'
- 'I was specifically looking for a long-term leprosy nursing post in mission'
- 'My specific medical skills and my available timescale were what the hospital needed at the time. The hospital and country fitted my needs and language abilities.'
- 'Thought SIM would be flexible with letting me follow my call to Mandritsara (to respond to an urgent need for doctors) as rapidly as possible without needing to go through lengthy TIMO placements or consider lots of other placement possibilities.'
- 'And knowing that they were big enough to take care of my health'
- 'It is a respected international organisation that my family and church trusted'
- 'Well established 'mainstream' mission agency with a good reputation. Positively spoken of by existing SIM long term missionaries'

A third of mission workers/alumni said that theology was one of the factors in choosing SIM (together with relationship with people in UK and responsiveness). There was no notable correlation between theology as a reason to go and subsequent answers on effectiveness, or on sending church relationship with SIM.

Overall, 30% considered going out as independents, with a slightly higher proportion among those who had their church recommend SIM (4/7) or knew someone from SIM (13/19).

In mission worker results, those who are new to SIM in the last 5 years are more likely to have chosen SIM because of the theology, mission and values and level of support, but are equally as likely to have considered going out without an agency as those who have been around a long time.

The advice mission workers would give on choosing an agency is revealing on values:

- 'Choose the agency that believes in your call wherever you go, not just believing in your project.'
- 'Look into the vision and values first, then get in touch with the ones that fit what you value most, and then connect with those ones to discuss further'
- 'Fit' matters - ethos, theology, practical approach etc needs to fit the person/people going'
- 'Whilst I might strongly recommend SIM, having had a very positive experience serving with SIM, I would also encourage them to look at all possibilities'
- 'Speak to a few agencies, speak to their missionaries, see where their respective passions, experience and expertise lie. Pray about it with your local church'
- 'Look carefully at agencies' vision and purpose - are you fully in agreement? If you do know people in an agency, it may help, but remember that personnel change. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of both larger and smaller agencies'
- 'What is their vision? Do they aim to keep the gospel at the centre of all they do? Mission drift is so easy... I'm a medical professional, but see the gospel as absolutely the key, with other roles supporting this, but playing a lesser role. It depends on what your priorities are, so do your research and know where your agency stands on the fundamentals'
- 'SIM is not perfect, (or they wouldn't have ME!) but they do give good orientation into what to expect on the missionary field'
- 'Talk to different ones, pray about it and get advice from missionaries who are older. Also, I find that agencies which acknowledge their weaknesses tend to be better'
- 'Make a lot of enquiries of mission agencies and other people who have experience beforehand. Apply to more than one agency. Ask a lot of questions and pray and God will guide you'
- '[Mission agencies] are all pretty similar - find one that works well with the church you are being sent by'

There is a clear consensus across responses that going on long-term mission as an 'independent' is inadvisable and that people contemplating this path should reconsider.

Although, the restrictions and costs of an agency were briefly addressed, they were significantly outweighed by the benefits. The responses discussed multiple forms of preparation and support, both at home and in-country, which a formal agency partnership can provide. The responses mainly focused on the agency's role of a support network, again at home and in-country, and ability to manage the practical and logistical aspects - such as financial arrangements, insurance, medical cover, housing, orientation, and providing appropriate training and preparation for mission work. Responses also mentioned the importance of agencies accountability to individuals on mission, for their actions and the



actions of others around them, and frequently noted the benefit and support agencies provide when unexpected circumstances or crises arise.

Responses frequently discuss a Biblical basis for using an agency and going on mission with a team. It reflects God's vision of a Church body and as beneficial for supporting a wider vision and ministry strategy. An agency takes the pressure off individuals by providing services people may not consider and would otherwise take up their time and energy. This is beneficial for long-term missionaries to prevent burnout and allows for longevity and determination that will not reduce over time.

#### 14. There is a growing expectation, opportunity and benefit in direct contact between mission workers on the field and enquirers

The mindset and expectations from the days of long-distance, high-cost phone calls and limited internet are simply not there for a digital-native generation. Daily use of WhatsApp, Facebook and Zoom mean that geographical distances can hold little relevance in digital communication and relationship building, even without flights. The concept of the mission agency being a gatekeeper between the enquirer and the 'field' makes less sense.

Two examples of this:

- “We considered just moving there and getting jobs, but from talking to our church realised that then we wouldn't be 'sent' out in quite the same way, and that there would be real benefits to having some organisational covering and being part of a team. We then began research into different mission stations and church planting opportunities in France. We were looking for roles on websites, and personal connections through friends and family. We contacted a number of them and emailed or video called and asked if we could come to visit. Then we planned a trip, our first time overseas as a family, and it felt like a real step of faith to be doing it on our own. It felt like there was real push-back when we first arrived, which was its own confirmation in some ways.... After we returned, we saw that OM had a role which fitted our skills and what we wanted to do really well, in one of the places we'd visited. We carried on video calling those we'd met, and they gave us loads of advice which they said would help us whether or not we went [with OM].”
- “I went with Exodus in Northern Ireland on a team to Romania, and then to the Czech Republic, then went independently for 4-5 summers, because I had built local relationships. I saw the kids every year and wanted to do more but didn't have the skills or professional qualifications, so decided to come home and train to be a teacher, because you can teach anywhere. It was the difference between the desire to help of a keen 18-year-old, and a desire to actually be useful. When I went on my own, the church would let me speak and contribute to fundraising and they provided an informal mentor which was really useful and was the only person I spoke to while I was there who had English as a first language. The influence on me now is in cross-cultural experience.”

From this project it seems many mission workers have seen this be effective and would welcome it. Below are the voices of mission workers:

- One spoke of her experience of inviting a family to SIM's global gathering before they even started the application process: "That exposure, invitation into it before they've signed on the dotted line, done the deal, raised the thousands... Perhaps we need mentorship and apprenticeship, so that people are arriving already connected and already in a relationship because there's been something happening in advance so people can hit the ground running"
- One mission worker suggested SIM connect those interested with current or recently returned workers at an early stage - aiming for "if they can do that, maybe I could too" thinking
- Another, when given the opportunity in the final section of the survey, said "Touch base with serving SIM UK members on the field, as well as the field personnel department when considering potential placements for new UK folk. There's often unwritten emphases set by field directors which never make it into official documents but might make some potential new placements better suited to another field. Make more informal use of the people you have in place and try to build relationships between potential appointees and current missionaries earlier in the process"
- 'It would be good to put people in touch with missionaries on the field, who perhaps live in the country they're interested in going to, to answer questions and find out what it's like'
- 'Have a database of missionaries who would be prepared to Zoom/other potential missionaries along shared geographical/profession lines'
- 'Don't only focus on UK workers... think also about workers from other sending entities that the next generation in the UK would otherwise never have the chance to meet'

A staff member observed: "We double/treble interview, but receiving offices are not part of this, and rely on us to evaluate. They are not as involved as they ought to be or could be. There is too much weight on the decisions of the sending office. We could have an arrangement where we certify that the church has done requisite investigations, had health checks, and agree with the statement of faith."

### 15. Mobilisers are one of the most influential factors in people choosing SIM over another agency, with vision as a priority reason alongside reputation of SIM

Two thirds of mission workers/alumni said that the relationship with people in UK/responsiveness were among the most significant factors in choosing SIM.

Voices of mission workers:

- 'The role of mobiliser is so important - the ability to form strong relationships with sending churches and enquirers makes such a difference. It is important, despite the

- financial challenge it presents, to keep as many mobilisers on the ground as possible'
- 'When we first approached SIM-UK we contacted a number of other organisations at the same time. Most seemed disinterested (if I'm being honest). It was the enthusiasm and interest of our mobiliser that was really fundamental to us joining SIM. I know it's hard being a mobiliser, but don't underestimate the value of them!'
  - 'Mobilisers are key, they nurture the relationships with church and all the partnership participants'
  - 'I spoke to 3-4 different organisations as initial contact, but chose SIM because of the ease of the connection and contact'

In one mission worker focus group there was passionate agreement on this, not just for mission workers but also for church connection. They reflected the views expressed in this survey response: "A team of mobilisers etc. who love and are interested in us as people and value us personally is infinitely more valuable than the most comprehensive/best thought through 5-year strategy man could possibly conceive of!"

## Summary of suggestions (and almost all could be delivered in collaboration)

1. Start young in prayer and vision casting
2. Enable inter-cultural training in the UK in collaboration with others, and linked to personal evangelism
3. Intentionally network among leaders and online – possibly with intercultural training and expertise as an offer
4. Invest in digital communications, with storytelling by place and profession
5. Scope the possibility of shared efficiency ideas/platforms across agencies in early enquiry stage, including for signposting and response requests
6. Encourage short early exposure trips, even undertaken independently ('taste and test'), with online training and mentorship alongside
7. Explore (costed?) online training and mentorship options, in connection with the church, using volunteers, and, where possible, receiving entity
8. Enable intercultural mission opportunities in the UK in collaboration with others, and linked to mission training
9. Consider how opportunities can be presented in terms of professional skills and roles
10. Increased flexibility for different financial models
11. Communicate collaboration – it goes down well

## Additional resources

1. Summary of findings on missionary and agency relationship
2. Mission models discussion diagrams
3. Eight activities in mission diagram

# Summary of findings on missionary and agency relationship and support

This is the headline summary of the analysis and findings from on delivering services to mission workers, from 79 SIM mission workers and alumni via survey, and an additional 9 in interviews/focus group.

## 1. What are some of the fears and concerns expressed by mission workers?

- Too much change too fast
- Less personal care: losing personal support from 'my' mobiliser
- What about when we get home?
- Training being neglected
- My ministry downgraded in priority

## 2. What are some of the fears and concerns to hear from staff?

- We will be stretched too thin to care well, or communicate well
- Responding well to the changing needs/demands of receiving entities
- Too much cost at enquiry stage

## 3. What does it look like for a mission worker to feel connected?

- Accountability and family: part of something bigger
- Connections in the field
- Confidence in leadership
- Connections made between activity and strategy
- Ability to speak into vision and strategy
- Communication of the strategic role of services
- Regular news about people and places I know, continuing when home
- Communicating vision to church

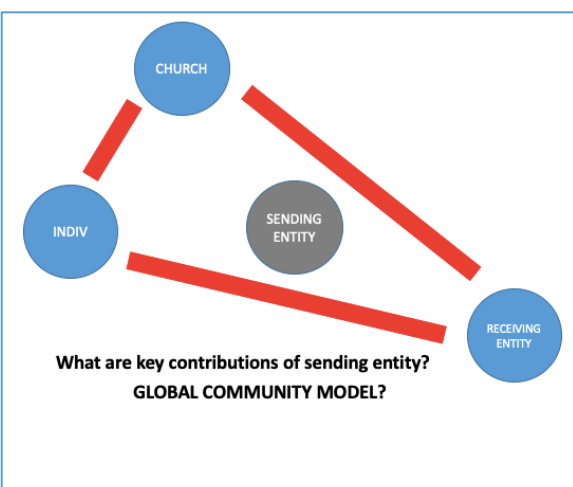
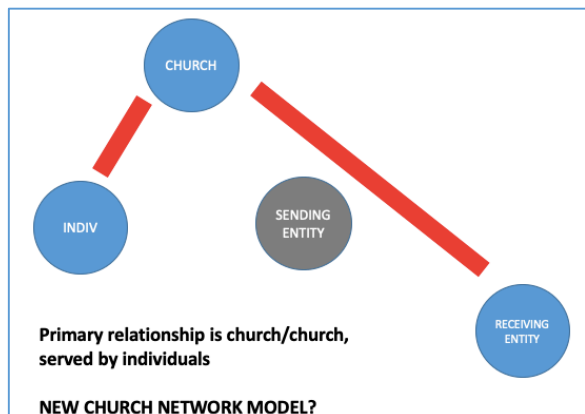
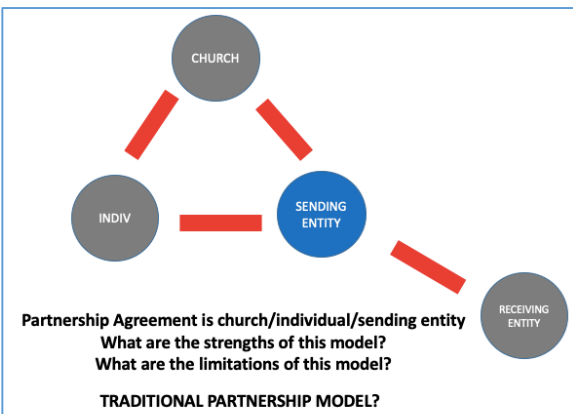
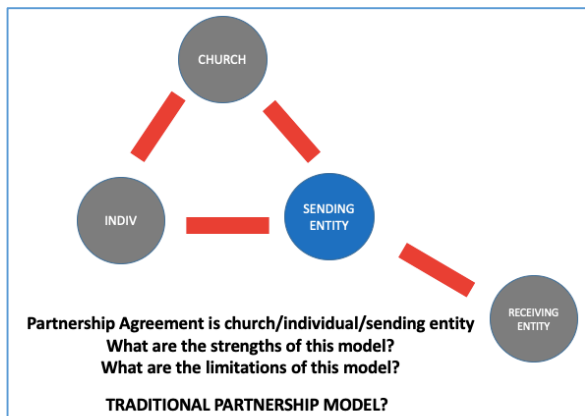
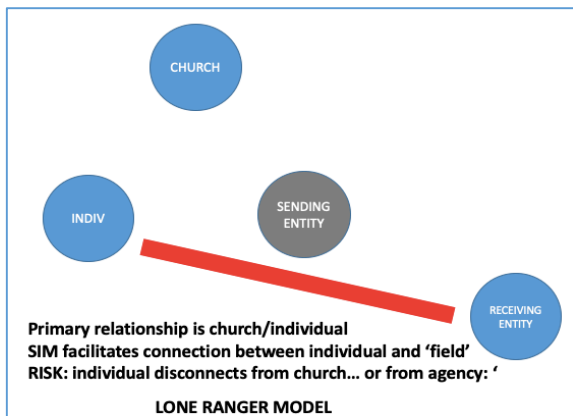
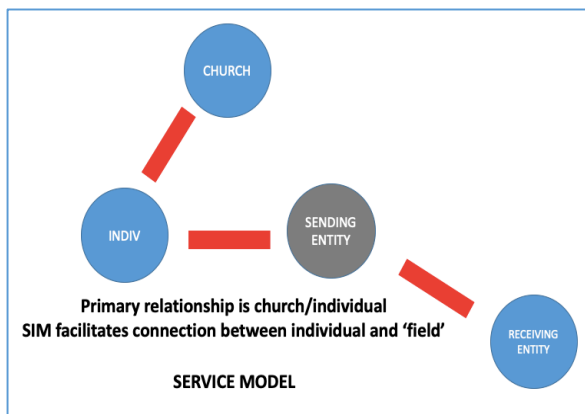
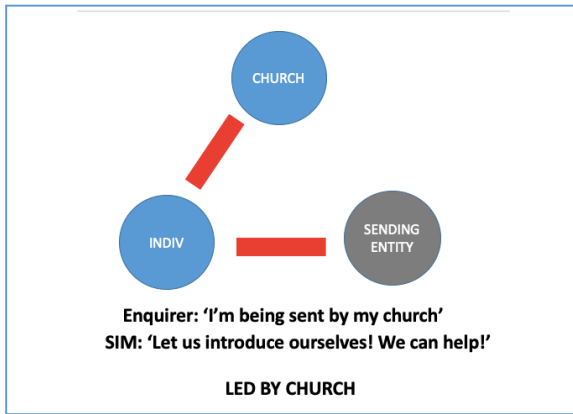
## 4. What does it look like for a mission worker to feel supported?

- Help in crisis
- Financial 'gold standard'
- An individual consistent relationship with a mobiliser
- Thoughtfulness in means of communication
- Body of support from local church

## 5. Where is clarity most needed on the role of church and agency?

- Churches really value the **specialist services and advice** (crisis care, health, finance) and would not know where else to access these (mission workers also may not know). As one interviewee puts it, 'the strength of the agencies is that they have a single focus, while churches are trying to disciple and equip in every area of life; the church provides the community and support.'

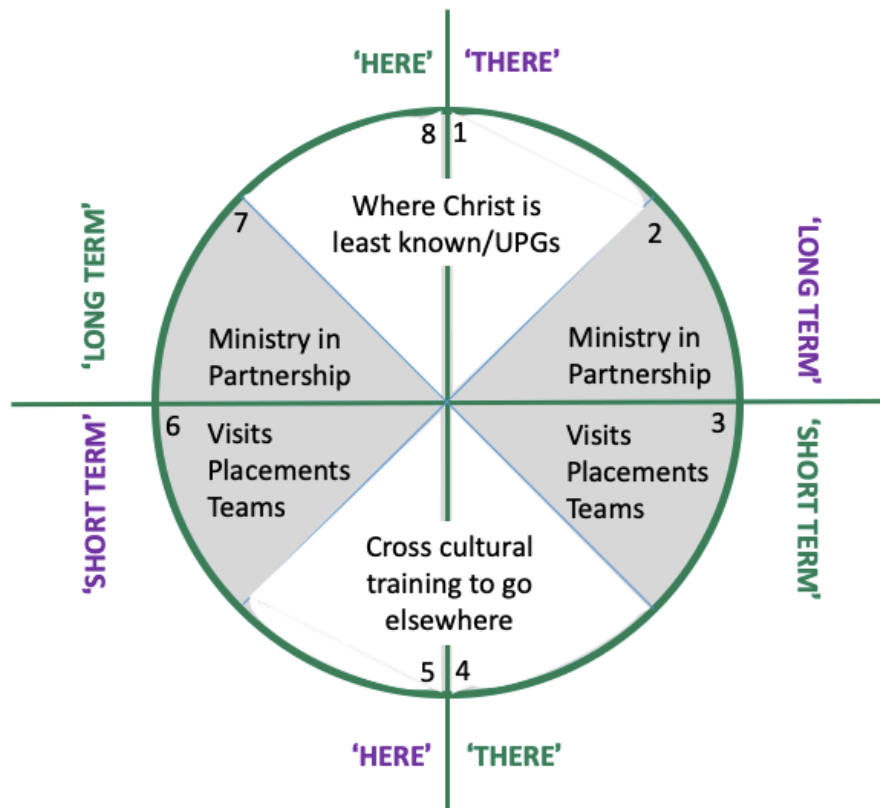
- There may be areas of **financial services** which can be outsourced to specialist third parties like Stewardship and CAF, but these were not raised.
- **Orientation and training** could be part-delivered by churches, if the right resources were available, or potentially in partnership with other agencies.
- On **prayer**, the sending churches echoed what is heard anecdotally, that “we receive prayer resources from the different agencies they send with, but we don’t usually read it, as we’re mostly interested in the specific missionaries so just read through our mission workers’ prayer letters.”
- It is **pastoral care** where there are least clear expectations. Churches we spoke to in focus groups "want to keep the pastoral care as the ultimate responsibility of the church: one stressed the importance of the agency being seen as facilitators while the church are the senders. Another said “agencies are best placed to deliver pastoral care, orientation, and connecting individuals with those already on mission to hear from their experiences.”



**APPENDIX 2: Frank Analysis Mission Models for Discussion** (colours only for emphasis when animated)

## Eight activities in mission circle

One observation during the listening exercise was the extent to which staff, churches and mission workers spoke interchangeably about mission as here, there, long term, short term, unreached, partnership etc. These often had potential cause confusion without definition of terms. This diagram was used as a tool to discuss these terms and ambiguities.



- 1: Going overseas long term to where Christ is least known. This is the model of mission most prevalent when traditional mission agencies were established.
- 2: Loosely termed ministry in partnership, this would include sending mission workers long term to work with local Christian institutions and churches, sometimes in countries which are majority Christian
- 3: Shorter time overseas, usually classified as less than two years.
- 4: An overseas placement to equip someone for work in their home country,
- 5: Cross cultural training in home country for the purpose of going overseas
- 6: Home country cross cultural placements.
- 7: Home country long term incarnational ministry, in partnership
- 8: Long term intercultural incarnational ministry here where Christ is least known.

**There are many questions from this tool:** Are long term/short term the right terms? In which segments do agencies demonstrate most strength/experience? In which is there least? Where do we want to grow in strength and focus? Where is 'here and there', and how significant should this divide be? Should our vision for certain segments areas be reflected in activity and resource? How will this picture shift over the next 5 years? Please contact [laura@frankanalysis.com](mailto:laura@frankanalysis.com) if you wish to develop, amend or use this diagram.