

HANDBOOK FOR PRESBYTERAL PROBATION

The Discipleship and Ministries Cluster
of the Connexional Team

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Introduction

The Methodist Church's system of a period of probation before ordination stems from John Wesley's practice of requiring of his preachers a period 'on trial' before they were received into Full Connexion. With the establishment of formal college-based training systems (the first being the Wesleyans' Theological Institution founded in 1836) the requirement of probation was still maintained. This reflects a deeply-felt need for Methodist preachers (presbyters) to be demonstrably effective before they are affirmed as 'worthy to be ordained'.

Probation is, however, not only a time of testing. As part of the life-long learning of the minister (presbyter or deacon) it marks a shift in the balance of the learning experience. In initial pre-ordination training greater emphasis was placed on theoretical learning, (although always in the context of practice); in probation the emphasis falls on practice, but always with the extension of theoretical knowledge and reflection on it. It is the time when the ability to be a theologically reflective practitioner undergoes its most rapid development. Although ordination marks the formal end of probation it does not mean the abandonment of the skills and practices acquired as a reflective learner – far from it. **The habits of probation should lay the foundation for continuing development for the rest of a person's life in ministry.**

Probation is a time for the rehearsal of activities and the acquisition of skills by practice under supervision. Once again, acquiring during probation **the habit of reflecting on one's practice in a context of supervision** should be seen as a support, not as a constraint to be joyfully abandoned after ordination: it should become an integral part of the minister's professional practice, whether through a co-consultancy group, the circuit staff meeting, the early years in ministry group, peer supervision, or other means. Reflective practice is at the heart of Ministerial Development Review.

Most probationers are stationed and appointed to serve full-time in the circuits after completing pre-ordination training. A few are stationed for 'in-service training' while completing their course. Some probationers serve in part-time circuit appointments, in other appointments 'within the control of the Church' (some chaplaincy appointments, evangelism enablers etc.) or in appointments 'outside the direct control of the Church' (other chaplaincies, employment etc.). **All probationer appointments are designed to have the same outcome: ministers who meet the criteria for acceptance into Full Connexion and ordination.** These criteria are to be found in later sections of this Handbook. Guidelines for designing and monitoring 'special' probationer appointments to ensure that they can deliver the outcomes are available from the Discipleship and

Ministries Cluster, as is information about the particular arrangements for probationers coming from outside the UK to serve the Methodist Church in Britain.

The Discipleship and Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team administers the Church's processes for the oversight of all student ministers, probationers and ordinands. Further information on all aspects of probation can be obtained by contacting:

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References to standing orders refer to the 2011 edition of CPD.

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Timetable for probation

These timetables set out the various stages and dates as they affect the different people involved in setting up a probationer appointment ('years' are connexional years beginning in September). They are set out on separate pages so they can be easily copied and distributed.

Student/probationer

Year Zero (before stationing)	
November	Completes initial stationing form
January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of the appointment
January	Visits the circuit
March-May	Meets superintendent at learning institution Is contacted by District Probationers Secretary (DPS)
Before end of April	With Oversight Tutor, completes form outlining learning and development needs, including application for funding for accredited theological study Returns form to Discipleship & Ministries (D&M), with copy to DPS
May	Completes transitional report and sends copies to chair of district, superintendent, DPS and D&M
May-July	Visits circuit and meets superintendent, circuit staff, circuit and church stewards
Year One	
September and ongoing	Agrees supervision contract and begins regular meetings for supervision
Ongoing as arranged	Takes part in district probationers' group
Ongoing as arranged	Undertakes probation studies
By Christmas	Completes 'Orientation Project'
By the end of December	Completes reflective journal of first three months
January, February, March	Takes part in district probationers' retreat
March	Meets the District Probationers Committee (DPC)
Year Two (or final year)	
By Christmas	Completes 'Gospel Context Project'
January, February, March	Takes part in district probationers' retreat
March	Meets the DPC for final assessment
March/April	Comes before ministerial synod
May	Attends the district ordinands' testimony service and gives testimony
June	Attends ordinands' retreat
June/July	Reception into Full Connexion and ordination

Superintendent

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Takes the lead in circuit plans to apply for a probationer appointment, discussed with district chair. Arranges to undertake supervision training if necessary
Year Zero	
End of September	Submits application for probationer to Discipleship & Ministries via district
Early January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of probationer from district chair
January	Meets probationer on visit to the circuit
As soon as necessary (ongoing)	Compiles diary for probationer
March-May	Meets with probationer at learning institution
May-July	Meets probationer with other circuit personnel
June-July	Receives copy of transitional report
August	(Together with circuit leadership team) ensures that manse is prepared and agreed repairs and/or alterations are carried out
Before September	Checks with DPS that a mentor is identified
Before September	Arranges welcome service (consulting Chair of District)
Before September	(Together with circuit leadership team) arranges welcome to circuit and induction
August	Meets probationer (and family) at manse
Year One	
September and ongoing	Agrees supervision contract and begins regular meetings for supervision
September-December	Supervises 'first' activities
February	Writes report for DPC
March	With a circuit steward, accompanies probationer to DPC
Year Two (or final year)	
February	Writes report for DPC
March	With a circuit steward, accompanies probationer to DPC
May	Encourages circuit to attend the district ordinands' testimony service

Circuit leadership team

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Takes part in circuit plans to apply for a probationer appointment, discussed with district chair
Year Zero	
January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of probationer from district chair
January	Meets probationer on visit to the circuit (but no invitation process)
May-July	Meets probationer with superintendent and circuit staff
June-July	Receives copy of transitional report
During Summer	(Together with superintendent) prepares manse and welcome arrangements
Before September	(Together with superintendent) arranges welcome to circuit and induction
Year One	
Ongoing	Offers practical and personal support
February	Contributes to superintendent's report to DPC
March	With the Superintendent, a circuit steward accompanies the probationer to the DPC
Year Two	
February	Contributes to superintendent's report to DPC
March	With the Superintendent, a circuit steward accompanies the probationer to the DPC
May	Together with superintendent, encourages circuit to attend the district ordinands' testimony service

District probationers secretary

Year Zero	
Spring	Receives details of probationer from district chair
March-May	Contacts probationer to make introductions
June	Attends connexional DPSs' consultation
June-July	Receives copy of transitional report
June-July	Receives copies of forms from Discipleship & Ministries regarding continuing theological study
July (after Conference)	Ensures circuits have the relevant information before probationer arrives
Summer	Arranges mentor
Summer/September	Sets up probationers'/under fives' group
Years One and Two	
Before September	Contacts probationer with dates for the year
Ongoing	Convenes district probationers' group
January	Arranges for probationers' projects to be assessed
January-February	Assembles reports for DPC
February	Writes report to DPC
March	Attends DPC
Early Spring	Reports at ministerial synod
May	Sends summarised reports (Form A) to MCPOC
June	Attends connexional DPSs' consultation

District chair

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Discusses with circuit their plans to apply for a probationer appointment.
Year Zero	
January	Sends details of probationer to circuit and superintendent
Spring	Passes information about probationer to DPS
June-July	Receives copy of transitional report
Summer (for September)	Arranges welcome service for probationer in conjunction with superintendent
Year One	
September	Takes part in welcome service
January, February or March	Attends probationers retreat (if possible)
March	Chairs DPC
Year Two	
January, February or March	Attends probationers retreat (if possible)
March	Chairs DPC
March	Meets ordinands as a group before ministerial synod
May	Meets ordinands and their partners individually
May	Coordinates the district ordinands' testimony service

The Discipleship & Ministries Cluster of the Connexional Team

Year Zero	
September / October	Collates initial stationing profiles for Scrutiny Panel
November	Collates student profiles for Initial Stationing Sub-Committee
January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Sends details of appointments to relevant oversight tutors
Late March	Sends out the form 'Learning and development needs' to students
May	Sends Handbook for Probation to DPS Receives 'learning and development needs' forms from students
June	Informs students about allocation of funding for accredited theological study
June	Hosts connexional DPSs' consultation
June-July	Receives copy of transitional report
Years One and Two	
December and February/March	Reports special issues to MCPOC
May	Reports on 'Form A's to MCPOC
June	Hosts connexional DPSs' consultation
June/July	Oversees reception into full connexion and ordination

Learning institution

Year Zero	
November	Works with student on their profile form
January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Sends details of circuit to student
Before end of April	Works with student on 'learning and development needs' form and ensures its return to Discipleship & Ministries
May	Draws up transitional report in conjunction with student and ensures it is copied to district chair, DPS, superintendent and D&M

Setting up a probationer appointment

A circuit wishing to set up a probationer appointment should begin planning with the district chair by May (16 months before the probationer will arrive in the circuit) at the latest. Reference should be made to the guidelines contained in the form for initial stationing, available from Discipleship & Ministries. Circuit staff and stewards, church stewards, superintendent and district chair should all be involved in developing, and should claim ownership of, the policies and arrangements described in the application for the appointment. It is very helpful to involve the District Probationers Secretary early on; they often have a wealth of experience in probationer appointments and can offer useful guidance in the initial planning stages.

A probationer appointment is not one that could otherwise be filled by an experienced minister. It should involve only about three-quarters of the workload expected of an experienced minister, not only to allow time for study but because all activities take longer when they are being learned. It is vitally important also that probationers learn good habits of personal devotion, rest and recreation. It follows therefore that it should be the normal expectation that the responsibilities of the appointment will be extended in some way (though not necessarily by increasing the number of churches for which a presbyter is responsible) after ordination: this must of course be planned well in advance and be done in consultation with the probationer.

SO 723(1) specifies that 'all ministerial and diaconal probationers (shall be) stationed in situations where due care and oversight can be given to the probationer by lay and ordained colleagues in accordance with criteria for such appointments recommended by the Ministerial or Diaconal Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committees'.

Criteria for a probationer appointment:

1. A suitably defined, appropriate and restricted workload
 - No sole responsibility without regular and close supervision
 - Assurance that the recommendations for holidays and breaks in CPD Guidance Section 2 will be observed
 - 1 full day each week for study/reflection/training, either individually or as a group activity, in addition to time necessary for preparation of ongoing work (worship, meetings etc.)
 - No more than 40 baptisms/weddings/funerals a year

- Not more than 175 members (fewer if more than 4 churches)
 - Chaplaincies to hospitals, prisons etc. and duties such as school governorships only when they have been accepted by the circuit and time allocated for them within the overall workload
 - LEP involvement only if written agreement between circuit and ecumenical partners about the probationer's involvement
 - Opportunities within the appointment for the development of mission.
2. Adequate induction: a suitable person (or persons) must be available to give sufficient time to the probationer to:
- Rehearse in advance the first major example of each type of activity (e.g.: liturgical, administrative, pastoral) he or she will undertake
 - Attend the first occasion when the probationer performs that activity, and a regular sample of subsequent occasions
 - De-brief the probationer afterwards and create a dialogue of affirmation, analysis and critical reflection with him or her.
3. Adequate supervision of circuit work.
- A suitably **skilled and trained** superintendent (or another appropriately qualified minister in the circuit to whom the superintendent is both willing and able to delegate this responsibility) to manage the work of the probationer and the supervision of her or his professional practice. (Meetings between the probationer and this person should take place weekly in the first instance, their frequency being adjusted as time goes on under the oversight of the DPC through the DPS.)
 - Adequate, supportive and accessible circuit leadership (lay and ordained).
 - Ministerial colleagues and lay people in the circuit willing and able to instruct probationers in some of the practical aspects of their craft, guide them in developing and applying their basic skills and provide models of reflective practice for them
 - A worship development group provided by the circuit
 - While the responsibility for arranging a probationer's mentor lies with the DPS, and the mentor should be independent of the circuit, the superintendent's oversight of the probationer should include checking that a mentor is in place.
4. Frequent circuit staff meetings (at least monthly) which cover:
- Regular business
 - Prayer and study
 - Mutual support, reflection and accountability
5. A clear understanding amongst the people of the circuit about the nature of the

appointment and about appropriate expectations of the probationer

6. A manse that is in accordance with Standing Orders and where any work recommended in quinquennial inspections will have been carried out by the time the probationer takes up the appointment.

The district chair must be satisfied that these criteria can be fulfilled before agreeing the application. The DPS should be involved in consultations about shaping a proposed appointment for a probationer.

Setting up a probationer appointment for a presbyter should include deciding whether it is desirable or permissible to apply for the probationer to be authorised to preside at Holy Communion. The criteria set out in CPD Book VI, Part 8, should be applied. Students about to be stationed are free to decide whether or not they are prepared to accept an authorisation to preside. Applying for, receiving or refusing authorisation is a matter of conscience (for people in the circuit as well as the probationer) and varying views must be sensitively handled.

Where it is desired to set up a probationer presbyteral appointment so different from the traditional circuit appointment that the criteria do not apply, the proposals should be discussed with Discipleship & Ministries and reference should be made to the Guidelines for Special Probationer Appointments.

On stationing

Beginning a probationer appointment represents an enormously significant transition point in the probationer's development. Research into comparable areas of professional formation suggests that such changes of role and lifestyle bring about a particular kind of openness, self-awareness and potential for growth.

The time between stationing and beginning the appointment is therefore an important time of preparation for this 'transition point'. The student will still necessarily be focused on their pre-ordination training programme and may well have significant assessed work to complete. However other parties can make use of this time to make preparations that will enable the probation experience to begin with maximum advantage. These preparations should include:

- The student and staff of the learning institution working towards a transitional report which is the agreed product of staff assessment and the student's self-

assessment. This report should include (1) formal learning and development needs (e.g.: application already made for funding for accredited theological study) (2) an outline of the student's likely needs and aspirations for further development, experience and study and (3) any circumstances that might indicate needs for special support. This report is confidential to the student/probationer, the learning institution, the district chair, the superintendent, the DPS and Discipleship & Ministries.

- An opportunity for the superintendent and the DPS to meet the student at the learning institution. This enables the developing transitional report to form the basis for a learning contract, personal to the student and drawn up in consultation between the student, the learning institution and the district, covering group participation, individual study and assessment.
- Contact between the district chair, the DPS, superintendent, stewards and probationers. This may result in all parties signing up to a probationers' charter developed by the district which spells out expectations about study, retreats, supervision, mentoring, use of time etc.
- Preparation by the circuit of a welcome pack including information about arrangements at the manse (e.g. suppliers of utilities, telephone, broadband etc, rubbish collection days), other local information about church and community (including maps), and details of circuit policies and key people (perhaps with photographs)

Preparation must include the superintendent taking the lead in ensuring:

- A welcome service is arranged
- Events and appointments are entered in a diary for the probationer
- The Supervisor of the probationer's work (if not superintendent) is identified
- A worship development group is set up

The circuit must also...

- ensure that the manse is up to standard and all necessary repairs and/or alterations have been carried out
- make arrangements for welcoming the probationer and their family both into the manse and circuit life in a friendly and encouraging way

The DPS is responsible for:

- discussing the orientation project with the probationer before arrival, and suggesting preliminary reading
- setting up meetings of the district probationers' group
- ensuring that each probationer is linked with a mentor from the start

- receiving the learning contract and beginning to work on an appropriate study programme for each probationer
- ensuring that probationer appointments are not changed from the original application without consultation with Discipleship & Ministries

In preparation for stationing the probationer should:

- have thoroughly discussed their training and personal support needs in probation with their training institution and made arrangements for any formal or accredited study including application to MCPOC for funding for accredited theological study
- have contributed to their final (transitional) report in conjunction with their training institution and communicated it to the DPS
- undertake any preliminary reading suggested by the DPS

On beginning the appointment

The district chair and the circuit should work together on the welcome service for the new probationer. This service has great spiritual and liturgical significance, given that the probationer is making the major transition from student to practising minister, yet without the support of ordination. Involvement of 'home' circuit(s), training institution(s) etc. should be encouraged and suitable forms of commitment and blessing (though nothing that purports to be ordination) incorporated in the service. Probationers in appointments not in the control of the Church should also have a welcome service that acknowledges their ministry.

Practical arrangements for the reception of the probationer and their family should be thorough, including a 'welcome pack' and whatever hospitality, picnic meals on moving day etc. are felt to be appropriate. It is to be hoped that practical support will not come to an end after the first week. Those responsible for care of the probationer should be aware that this person (and their family if appropriate) is moving into a whole new way of life and that many probationers will be making the transition from living in a home for which they have exclusive responsibility.

The Superintendent should ensure that there is an early meeting for supervision where the supervision contract can be agreed, and that all support arrangements are in place. Plans should be in place for the probationer to be accompanied by the superintendent (or someone delegated by the superintendent) to spend time in planning with the

probationer before each major event (Church Council, wedding, funeral, baptism etc.), to accompany them to it and to offer feedback afterwards. The DPS should be in touch very early with all dates for probationers' group meetings and meetings of the DPC for the year.

The roles of individuals

Superintendent

The superintendent has the key role in making probation a good experience or otherwise. S/he has the prime responsibility for ensuring that all arrangements are in place so that probation gets off to a good start, as well as for supervision throughout the period of probation. The role of supervisor may be delegated, but the superintendent is accountable for delegating it to the right person. The superintendent's role is not only that of a supervisor but also that of a role model for ministry with all that that entails. Negotiating the delicate balance between support, guidance and challenge, and between the probationer's autonomy and their accountability, calls for highly developed inter-personal skills.

The superintendent has a crucial role in enabling the circuit staff meeting to be a place of sharing, development and prayer as well as business.

Skills needed in the superintendent of a probationer include:

- Valuing differences and diversity
- The appropriate use of one's own experience
- Empathy
- Self-awareness
- Understanding of the particular contexts of the probationer's work
- Commitment to the development appropriate to the particular probationer
- Awareness of the broader needs of the Church
- Ability to deal with conflict
- Understanding of practical and reflective learning

These skills should be underpinned by appropriate training (e.g.: a course in supervision) and support (e.g.: membership of a co-consultancy group, supervision).

In relation to presbyteral probationers the superintendent is responsible for:

- ensuring appropriate pastoral care and support is provided within the circuit (SO 724(2))

- ensuring the agreed probationer's appointment profile is adhered to (SO 723)
- ensuring (in collaboration with the district chair and DPS) that a welcome service (SO 723(4)) and a testimony service (SO 728(3)) are held
- ensuring the provision of adequate induction, instruction in particular duties and regular close supervision of work (SO 724)
- supervising the work of the probationer and their professional practice
- establishing a worship development group (SO 725(4))
- ensuring that the probationer is enabled to attend the annual district retreat and the ordinands' retreat
- reporting on the probationer's development to the DPC

District chair

District chairs have a vital role in the stationing of probationers. The Initial Stationing Sub-Committee is reliant on the district chair's judgement as to the suitability of an appointment for a probationer. The importance of having the right superintendent cannot be overstated (see above): the pressures of needing to fill an appointment must not be allowed to jeopardise a probationer's whole future in ministry. The nature of the appointment (see criteria) is important, but the quality of superintendency is more so.

The district chair's role in knowing the probationers as individuals and providing a source of support outside the circuit is also of great importance.

Chairs are responsible for:

- ensuring that probationer appointments in the district are appropriate and not changed from the agreed profile without proper connexional consultation
- working with the superintendent, circuit leadership team and church stewards on circuit policy so that the probationer appointment is part of a coherent whole
- ensuring that superintendents and circuit stewards are appropriately informed and trained
- ensuring that probationers (and their families) are made welcome at an induction event
- wherever possible taking part in the welcome service
- maintaining general awareness and oversight of the probationer and the appointment
- attending and chairing the DPC
- attending as possible and appropriate the district probationers' or under fives group and the probationers' retreat
- meeting with ordinands to explore their theological understanding and readiness for ordination

- co-ordinating the district ordinands testimony service
- before ordination, meeting individually with each probationer (and their partner) to explore their hopes and dreams for the future, and ensuring that the appropriate person in the district works with the probationer to identify their future training and development needs.

Mentor

The role of mentor is unlike that of anyone else in the structures of probation. The mentor's relationship with the probationer is entirely confidential; the mentor does not make a report. The probationer may decide to use the mentor as the person with whom to discuss their self-assessment, a summary of which will be presented to the DPC, but the probationer is free to choose not to use the mentor in this way. The mentor should not be part of the structures within which the probationer's ministry is located: normally this will mean 'from a different circuit', but where the probationer's ministry is not primarily circuit-based different considerations will of course apply.

The mentor's primary role is to encourage personal growth in Christian maturity by helping the probationer to reflect and discover their own resources. Encouraging the probationer to seek help from others is an important part of the role. The content of meetings is set by the probationer: the mentor may offer advice but should focus on helping the probationer to discover their own answers. Meetings should take place at least every four to six weeks at first but may become less frequent as time goes on.

In arranging a mentor for a probationer two contradictory considerations need to be held together. The first is the need to have the mentor in place as near as possible to the beginning of the connexional year in order not only to provide support at a time of rapid change but also to take advantage of the 'window' for personal growth and learning constituted by beginning ministry. The second is the overriding need to provide a mentor to whom the probationer can relate well and who they can quickly come to trust, which may indicate a need for consideration and settling in. This contradiction can be most helpfully resolved by the Superintendent and DPS beginning to get to know the probationers well before 1st September and matching them with potential mentors. It should be noted that the mentor is not chosen by the probationer: 'critical distance' is essential to enable the mentor to be a 'critical friend'.

The mentor is not a counsellor, a therapist, a spiritual director or a friend. The closest parallel is the model of professional coaching, with the aims of:

- assisting the probationer in developing healthy, appropriate patterns of work and lifestyle, including the skills in and habit of theologically reflective practice

- focusing on the probationer's work agenda
- bringing an objective perspective to the work situation and the relationships it involves
- encouraging, challenging and supporting the probationer in considering, testing and reviewing different perspectives, options and strategies

There is also however an important element of personal development support, (the 'being' of ministry as well as the 'doing') with the aims of:

- assisting effective, healthy development in ministry through consultancy, encouragement, challenge and support
- modelling good practice and godly living.

This involves mutual accountability for the purpose, structure and content of meetings, and for planning and timekeeping.

District probationers' secretary

While the DPS is responsible for the processes of the DPC and for obtaining and collating reports on probationers, the administrative aspects of the role, though needing to be performed efficiently, are not the most important. The DPS plans and convenes the district probationers group, which occupies a vital place as the centre for group support, accountability and the development of theological reflection. The DPS is also responsible for seeing that probationers undertake appropriate study. Because the DPS's role is so varied and calls for such a range of skills it may be thought best to develop a 'DPS team' for the district. There should however be a named DPS as first point of contact and responsibility. The main responsibilities of the DPS in relation to presbyteral probationers (in conjunction with others as necessary) are:

- in collaboration with the Chair, to ensure that the DPC carries out its duties of oversight
- to convene the probationers' group and devise appropriate programmes
- to ensure that every probationer has a mentor and to check that the relationship continues to function well
- to oversee the balance between the different areas of the probationer's life and work
- to offer advice on an orientation project before the appointment begins and a 'gospel context' project in the second year, and to ensure that all probationers complete such projects, thus meeting the requirement that every probationer should engage with peers in theological analysis of the mission of the church in the world as encountered through their particular appointments (SO 724(3)(iii))
- to ensure that every probationer follows an appropriately designed and assessed study programme (other than the orientation and gospel context projects) (SO

724(3)(iv) and 724(4))

- to ensure the necessary resources are made available for any district-wide training and development activities (SO 724(3))
- in collaboration with district chairs and superintendents, to ensure that annual probationers' retreats and testimony services are organised
- to service the DPC, collating the various reports brought to it and reporting their main conclusions to MCPOC on Form A (SO 725 & 728)
- to liaise as necessary between probationers, circuits, the district chair and Discipleship & Ministries

Groups and their functions

Circuit

The whole circuit has a vital role in enabling the probationer to develop and flourish in ministry. All the members should be aware of the implications of asking for a probationer to be stationed with them. They should be expecting someone who will:

- bring their own gifts and experiences
- be different from an experienced minister
- bring fresh insights and ideas
- be in a learning situation which will necessitate more time and support
- be adjusting to a new way of life for themselves and their family
- have a day (additional to their 'day off') dedicated to continuing formal study, in which the circuit must support them as part of their developing a healthy way of life in ministry

Practical arrangements such as the preparation of the manse and the provision of a welcome pack are important, but so is continuing care and sensitivity as probationer and circuit develop their accountability to one another

Circuit staff meeting

All members of the circuit staff meeting have a particular responsibility for the collegiality they offer the probationer through its meetings, and for the nature of the meeting as a place of mutual accountability and personal, professional and spiritual development.

Worship development group

It is the responsibility of the superintendent to set up this group, whose function is to help the probationer develop as a presbyteral leader of worship and to report to the DPC on that development. As in so many aspects of probation, the relationship between these two functions needs careful handling.

The membership of the group is of crucial importance. It should include people with:

- experience as a preacher and leader of worship
- experience as a non-preaching church member
- ability to distinguish between essentials and lesser issues
- acceptance of variety, innovation and tradition
- understanding of Methodist theology and practice
- ability to offer constructive feedback and to criticise helpfully
- sensitivity to the spirituality of worship among leaders and congregations

Members of the group should be present at services (in different contexts) led by the probationer at least once a quarter. Immediate feedback should be given on the model of local preacher assessment, using the same criteria. The group should also meet the probationer for more extended and leisurely reflection, giving consideration to the full range of worship leading, including issues about acts of worship not observed by the group which the probationer wishes to discuss. The aim is to nurture the probationer's development as a worship leader by providing both affirmation and challenge in a loving context.

The group is also responsible for making a report to the DPC. The group may choose to base their report on specific acts of worship, or to summarise the year's experience and progress. In either case the probationer should be fully part of the process and conversation.

District probationers' group

Meeting together with other probationer deacons and presbyters, with support, facilitation and oversight from the district probationers' secretary and input from others as required, is an essential part of the probationer's development. Such a group should meet regularly, roughly every two months. Where numbers make it necessary it may be held jointly with a neighbouring district or districts, or as a combined group for all those in their first five years of ministry including probationers. In the latter case it is important

that probationers have some opportunities to meet as a distinct group. First-year probationers should have opportunities and should be encouraged to meet as a separate group in the first three months.

The role of the probationers' group is to be a place of:

- theological reflection on the stuff of ministry
- mutual support and encouragement
- mutual accountability, functioning as a collegial 'critical friend'
- learning from the sharing of experience, including that of experienced ministers and others

Attendance at the group should be a top priority for probationers: only extreme emergencies can be allowed to justify absence.

District probationers committee

SO 725 (2) describes the district probationers committee as sharing, under the co-ordination and guidance of MCPOC, in a work of oversight which 'shall include elements of both pastoral support and assessment'. Negotiating these two elements and holding them in pastoral tension is no easy task at times for the DPC, but it is an essential characteristic of its role. Care should be taken to ensure that everyone, both committee members and probationers, understands and fully carries out these two aspects. The DPC has a duty to oversee the provision of pastoral care for probationers and their families. It also has a disciplinary role in respect of the probationer. Ultimately however it has only one aim; to oversee the welfare and development in ministry of the probationers in the district and to link this with connexional oversight by reporting on their progress. Its role in continually upholding probationers and their families in prayer should be systematically addressed (e.g.: by a prayer diary or rota).

The DPC's reporting function is a vital link in the chain that enables the congregation at an ordination service to affirm with conviction that 'they are worthy' to be ordained. The DPC receives reports and evidence from a number of sources (see below), not least from conversation with the probationer, which it summarises and transmits to MCPOC, together with its recommendations as to continuance on probation, its length and terms, or discontinuance.

The committee should be balanced in its age and gender composition and should reflect the ethnic mix of the district. It should include people with expertise in education, HR

management, counselling, supervision, interviewing and assessment. Members of staff of training institutions, circuit colleagues of probationers and probationer mentors may be members of the DPC but should withdraw from the meeting when it is considering a probationer with whom they have a relationship outside the meeting. Probationers may be members of the DPC but may only be present when general business is being discussed and not for discussion of particular individuals, unless they are acting as supporter or representative of the probationer concerned.

Procedures

The DPC must interview all probationer presbyters at least once a year, usually in February/March, in order to report to the ministerial synod and MCPOC. In order to carry out its responsibility of general support of probationers the committee may wish to designate one of its members to maintain contact with each probationer between meetings. It may also wish to meet as a committee at other times than the main reporting meeting, which fits connexional but not necessarily circuit or district timetables. In this case a report of any earlier discussions from those meetings should be included with the reports submitted to MCPOC.

Committees may use a mixture of one-to-one interviews, triangle or panel interviews and full committee interviews. The use of triangle or panel interviews is strongly recommended: suggestions for assessment methods related to the learning outcomes for probation are available from Discipleship & Ministries. There must be a minimum of seven members present when a vote is taken on a major decision (this includes, for example, the decision to continue on probation a person about whom there are no great concerns).

Nothing should be said about a probationer in such a way that the person is not able to respond to what is said. If a new point is raised in discussion after the conclusion of an interview the probationer must be recalled or the interview adjourned. All reports at every stage must be shown to the probationer in reasonable advance of the meetings where they will be discussed; who should then have the opportunity to add comments (though not to amend the report) and must sign to confirm that it has been seen.

If there are serious concerns about a probationer that could lead to a recommendation for discontinuance (1) the probationer may be accompanied or represented at the committee (2) the committee must be given a record of oral and written warnings which have been given previously (3) no evidence should be used to support a recommendation for discontinuance which has not been seen by the probationer.

The committee is responsible for forming a judgement about the following areas:

- The probationer's general welfare including the effect of their development in ministry on dependants, close relationships and personal circumstances
- Progress and development towards the outcomes for probation (see below)
- Any particular concerns raised by those reporting on the probationer
- The probationer's development in the particular context of the appointment and its continuing suitability (or otherwise)

Evidence for making these judgements is gathered from:

- Reports submitted to the committee (see below) which have been collated by the DPS
- Interviews with the probationer

A summary of submitted reports, together with a record of the committee's response to the reports and its recommendations, and a note of any points of concern, is drawn up by the DPS. A report is made to the ministerial synod, which may wish to add comments. The report is then forwarded to the designated officer in Discipleship & Ministries who is responsible for identifying those concerns that should be specifically considered by MCPOC. This meeting compiles the lists which enable the responsible officer to recommend to the Conference that these people continue on probation or proceed to being received into Full Connexion and ordained. Adherence to the timetable for submitting the reports is essential.

Competencies and reflective practice

The DPC is looking for evidence that someone is developing the capacity to confidently 'inhabit' the role and being of a minister. It has its own part to play in enabling that development to take place. Attitudes, values, skills, behaviours and knowledge all combine to form a competent reflective practitioner. The DPC is responsible for monitoring a time of learning in which:

- self-understanding continues to develop in new and challenging settings
- generic skills such as the ability to think critically and work collaboratively undergo further development
- learning related to specific disciplines (e.g. biblical studies, doctrine) occupies less time proportionately than before but continues to be important
- particular skills of practice are developed through rehearsal and reflection
- all areas of learning are related to one another in the context of probation both through practical interaction and through sustained and systematic reflection.

Reflective practice is not an area to be separately assessed: it is a fundamental perspective and way of thinking that enables a person to bring together their personal attitudes and beliefs, their formal knowledge, other people's attitudes and expectations and the context within which they live and work, and out of all this to move on with changes in behaviour that lead to new questions, aims and areas to be explored.

Progress through this time of learning is assessed against particular competencies that have been identified as making up the kind of theologically reflective ministers that the Church needs today. These are set out in the table below:¹

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
Vocation (call and commitment)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability to discern which of their previously acquired skills and experience can be incorporated into ordained ministry, which need to be modified and which should be discarded 2. A confidence in the Church and the resources to resist the temptation to retreat into a personal or purely local ministry 3. Ability to give an account of their vocation to ministry and mission and their readiness to exercise public ministry as a probationer deacon or presbyter in the Methodist Church. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The capacity to bear the public roles and responsibilities of an ordained person and to perform credibly and maturely as a deacon or presbyter both in the Methodist Church and in the wider community 2. The capacity to bear a public and representative role in ministry and mission, and a readiness to exercise leadership in ordained ministry 3. Give an account of how personal commitment to Christ and discipleship is being shaped within the roles and expectations of public ministry

¹ These competencies originally formed part of the Methodist Church's contribution to the document Shaping the Future – New patterns of training for lay and ordained; The Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council; Church House Publishing, 2006.

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
Being in relationship (with God, self and others)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A developing spirituality and discipline of prayer consonant with their changing role and growth in learning 5. A developed self-awareness; an awareness of others; listening skills and basic pastoral understanding 6. Personal skills, including those involved in maintaining close relationships, standard courtesies, public politeness'; financial management etc. 7. Form and sustain relationships, both with those who differ, marked by empathy, respect and insight 8. Demonstrate good practice in a range of pastoral relationships, and learn from these experiences 9. Ability to exercise appropriate care of self, through developing sustainable patterns of life and work, and effective support networks 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Ability to form and sustain a life of prayer within the expectations of public ministry, corporate and personal worship and devotion 5. Ability to give an account of how personal commitment to Christ is being shaped within the roles and expectations of leadership and oversight of others 6. Ability to form and sustain relationship across a wide range of people, especially in situations of conflict and disagreement, marked by empathy, respect and insight 7. Good practice in a wide range of pastoral and professional relationships 8. Ability to show insight, openness, maturity and stability in the face of pressure and change and in the process of enabling change 9. Loving service in the Church, expressed in effective and collaborative leadership, in personal discipleship, in the practice of faith and in appropriate self-care

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
The Church's ministry in God's world	<p>10. A developing understanding of the Gospel and Mission of the Kingdom of God; basic skills of interpretation; the ability to relate faith and experience and to begin to think theologically about their context</p> <p>11. A specific understanding and experience of Methodism in its breadth and diversity and in relation to other churches</p> <p>12. Demonstrate awareness of the church's roles and opportunities in public life and institutions, and in relation to other agencies</p> <p>13. Show understanding of the insights and practices of other churches and traditions in worship, especially of ecumenical partners</p> <p>14. Participate in and reflect on the mission of God in a selected range of social, ethical, cultural and intellectual contexts in which Christian witness is to be lived out in acts of mercy, service and justice</p>	<p>10. Have gained understanding of the imperatives of the gospel and the nature of contemporary society and skills in articulating and engage in appropriate forms of mission in response to them</p> <p>11. Have developed a high level of skill in interpretation and a proven capacity to relate theology to context in a variety of situations</p> <p>12. Demonstrate engagement in mission and evangelism in a range of contexts, particularly in the local community and in relation to the local church</p> <p>13. Demonstrate understanding of the imperatives of the gospel and the nature of contemporary society and skills in articulating and engaging in appropriate forms of mission in response to them</p> <p>14. Demonstrate an ability to lead and enable others in faithful witness and to foster mission</p> <p>15. Demonstrate the ability to work ecumenically and to encourage ecumenical co-operation</p>
Leadership and collaboration	<p>15. An understanding, experience and proven capacity to handle working with people of different gifts and abilities and with various responsibilities in the life of the Church and the work of the kingdom (including some who are not chosen or approved by the student) and to exercise leadership as and when appropriate</p>	<p>16. Are able to act independently but collegially with other ministries and with the community of the whole Church</p> <p>17. Demonstrate appropriate use of authority in ways which enable and empower others in their mission and ministry, including colleagues</p>

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
Leadership and collaboration (continued)	<p>16. Show understanding of how children and adults learn and an ability to nurture others in their faith development</p> <p>17. Demonstrate effective collaborative leadership and ability to work in teams in a limited range of settings, and learn from these experiences</p> <p>18. Demonstrate commitment to loving service in the Church rooted in a sustained and growing love of God, discipleship of Christ, and pilgrimage in faith in the Holy Spirit</p>	<p>18. Exercise effective collaborative leadership, working effectively as a member of team, and as an ordained person.</p> <p>19. Demonstrate ability to support and supervise others in a limited range of roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>20. Demonstrate proficiency in a broad range of skills and abilities needed to exercise public ministry and leadership of a local church, and the ability to do this in relatively unsupervised settings. Show developed skills as an effective reflective practitioner</p>
Learning and understanding	<p>19. A proven ability in applying the relevant bodies of knowledge appropriately to particular situations</p> <p>20. A growing critical engagement with scripture and the traditions of Christian thought, characterised by faithful obedience and openness to new insights</p> <p>21. Ability to form a life of study and reflection within the demands and disciplines of initial training and the expectations shaped by public ministry</p> <p>22. Ability to interpret and use scripture across a wide range of settings, showing developed exegetical and hermeneutic skills, communicating an understanding and engagement with scripture in ways that enable others to learn and explore</p> <p>23. Continued and disciplined engagement with Christian beliefs and practices</p>	<p>21. Have developed a working knowledge and understanding of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church and an expertise in applying it practice</p> <p>22. Ability to form and sustain a life of disciplined study and reflection that sustains in leadership and public ministry</p>

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
Learning and understanding (continued)	<p>24. Skill as reflective practitioners, able to engage thoughtfully and critically across the spectrum of Christian tradition, in ways that deeply inform personal practices, and which enable others to learn and explore</p> <p>25. Ability to engage confidently with the Bible as text and as holy scripture, as skilled interpreters and communicators</p> <p>26. Basic awareness of and reflective engagement with beliefs, practices and spirituality of other faith traditions</p>	
Communication	<p>27. A basic understanding of preaching, hermeneutical principles and techniques of communication, and an ability to preach in a number of styles and contexts and to make positive use of feedback and assessment.</p> <p>28. An ability in leading public worship and preaching, showing understanding of and good practice in liturgy and worship in a wide range of settings.</p>	<p>23. Have learnt to work under discipline and to make effective use of supervision.</p>

Assessment and reporting

The dual role of the DPC in providing both support and appropriate discernment (which may need to be challenging) needs careful handling. It is recommended that:

- while the DPC (SO 484) must have a widely representative membership it must include members with the necessary skills and experience
- use should be made in interviewing of small groups with a specific remit
- informal committees may be held during the year, either as a regular feature or only as required, to address issues before they become critical
- care should be taken to ensure that all those taking part in interviews know who people are, why they are there and what their particular expertise or contribution might be

- church members (or equivalent) should have input into the assessment process, either at the DPC or at other stages
- training should be provided for individual members of the DPC and for the group as a whole
- DPCs should be clear, both among themselves and to the probationer, about the criteria on which they base their evaluations. The competencies should form the basis of these.

Each year the DPC reports to MCPOC (on 'Form A') on the probationer presbyters within the district. The overall report is based on a number of individual reports and other documents that cover specific areas, and on interviews with the committee. It concludes with an assessment of the general fitness of the probationer as someone who is:

- adequately formed in the being and role of a Methodist presbyter
- appropriately able to act as a representative person
- adequately able to perform the tasks of a presbyter.

The report is primarily a 'formative assessment' which presents a snapshot of the probationer's development so far, and their competencies at this point, in a way that will assist future development. It is not concerned only with assessing whether they have reached a required standard. At the same time it must present a judgement as to the probationer's fitness to continue on probation (first year) or to be ordained (final year). The final recommendation must therefore be written in a way that makes this clear and also makes brief reference to the areas which support the judgement. An overall final grade is no longer required.

Separate elements of assessment contribute to 'Form A'. Here again grades are no longer required, but it is essential that a clear description of the probationer's level of competence in each area is provided. The areas are:

- Form B – summary report from the worship development group.
The evaluation of worship leading and preaching should be a process of continual feedback and reflection in the worship development group, which must include participation by local congregations. The Local Preachers' worship evaluation structure should be used. Formal evaluation for report to the DPC may either be focused on a few designated occasions (on the LP model), or carried out by asking the group, together with the probationer, to provide the DPC with an agreed summary of the year's experience and learning to date.

- Form C – report from the Superintendent.
This report should be drawn up in consultation with the circuit leadership team.
- Form D – report on the orientation project from the DPS or the person designated by them
- Form E – report on study and disciplinary learning.
This includes a report either from a training institution or via the DPS from the person responsible for studies in the district. This form should also report on evidence presented by the probationer to the DPC of ongoing and developing engagement with theology and the wider culture. This need not necessarily be a complete ‘booklist’ but should include both theological and general elements at a level that is judged to be sufficiently challenging for the individual.
- Form F – report on a summary of the probationer’s self-assessment.
No more than 2 sides of A4, this is prepared by the probationer for the express purpose of submission to the DPC (SO 725(5)(a)). The full self-assessment should be carried out by the probationer with a mentor or support group and should remain confidential to the probationer.

Some particular issues about reporting

It is important to distinguish between the two functions of the probationer’s self-assessment. Its primary purpose is to encourage, enable and challenge the probationer to think and pray deeply about their developing life and ministry. Although it is a self-assessment it should not be a solitary exercise. The probationer should write it in consultation with a mentor or a support group. It is important also that the full version should be written: getting the thoughts onto paper is a necessary spiritual discipline. But the secondary purpose of the self-assessment is to provide evidence to the DPC of the probationer’s capacity to be self-aware and reflective. There may be an entirely proper difference between what the probationer is prepared to say about her/himself, and even to share with a mentor, and what she/he is prepared to share with the DPC. It is for this reason that the probationer is asked to prepare a summary of the self-assessment for submission to the DPC.

Reporting on study and required learning should have as evidence either a report from a training institution or at least one piece of assessed work undertaken in the district (see probationer studies). Evidence of engagement with theology and the wider culture can consist of activities (e.g. retreats, holidays, cinema, music-making) as well as reading (which should include journals as well as books) and should include theological study, spirituality and prayer, stimulation of imagination and creativity, hobbies and interests, and practicalities.

Probationer studies

All probationers must undertake study. This is not because when they are ordained they will no longer need to study: rather the new experiences of entering ministry form a uniquely rich context for absorbing, reflecting on and critiquing other people's ideas and for developing one's own. Probation is when the enduring behaviour-patterns of ministry are laid down, and study must be part of those patterns. Every probationer needs to reflect in conjunction with the DPS, the probationers' group and their superintendent to discover what is the best form of study for them in the context of the work of ministry: the 'study day' is a gift, not an imposition which prevents the probationer getting on with the 'real work'.

'Probationer studies' have two main elements – theological reflection on the Church's mission and ministry and the extension of formal knowledge through individual study.

The first of these elements, theological reflection, is addressed by means of:

- **the orientation project**
This is undertaken in the first three months of the appointment. Its aim is not only to ensure that probationers are familiar with the practicalities of the area in which they live (geography, history, social context, employment, transport etc.) but that they are beginning to reflect on it as a context for ministry and mission. It forms a major part of the agenda for the meetings of the probationers' group in the first three months. Reading, visits etc. to inform the project will be suggested by the DPS and those helping him or her. The project should be assessed.
- **the personal journal**
Probationers are required to keep a journal of the first three months. The journal should include first impressions, notes of key events and reflection on these experiences. The evaluation should include reflection on their spirituality and sense of calling as well as their 'performance'.
- **the probationers/early years/under fives group**
Theological reflection is of the essence of the programme of this group. Probationers may contribute to this by, for example, taking part in a seminar on a prepared topic, contributing to reflection on a particular area of work, presenting a 'case study' etc.
- **the 'gospel context' project**
During the second year each probationer should build on the orientation project by reflecting at greater depth on their neighbourhood or other work context as a context for the gospel: 'What is the good news for this place?' 'What does it

mean to be Church here?' This reflection should be assessed.

- **supervision**

This is provided by the superintendent or delegated person.

- **the worship development group**

This should take into account the context of the probationer's ministry in commenting on the effectiveness of the acts of worship.

- **self-assessment**

The person responsible for supporting the probationer in carrying out the self-assessment (usually the mentor) should encourage them to engage with the theological questions raised by their experience.

The second element, individual study, may be addressed through a prior commitment such as the completion of a degree course, or by a further course of advanced study recommended by the training institution. Students wishing to embark on further study must discuss it with their training institution in the first instance. The implications must be carefully considered in consultation with the superintendent and the DPS. It is important not to underestimate the time commitment required. The study must not be such as to take up more than eight hours a week, and sometimes less (to allow, for example, for the district probationers group) unless the probationer can realistically offer more from their leisure time. A probationer may find it advisable at certain points (e.g. when writing up a dissertation) to take several study days as a block rather than one a week: once again this possibility should be discussed with the superintendent and the DPS.

Connexional funding is available for probationers undertaking courses of advanced study that have been approved by MCPOC/DCPOC. At present this funding is set at the full fees up to £1,500 a year plus two-thirds of travel expenses. If the study continues after ordination the funding level is then two-thirds of the fees (up to £800) and no expenses. MCPOC will not approve funding for courses that do not have a significant theological element. Applications for funding must be made to the May meeting of MCPOC in the final year of pre-ordination training.

It is extremely important that the pursuit of accredited individual study does not prevent the probationer from taking part in the probationers' group. Expectations should be spelled out in the learning contract, and possible problems discussed between the learning institution, the district, the probationer and Discipleship & Ministries. The probationers' group is the place where all the elements of the individual's development come together in a context of support and accountability. It is not optional.

Probationers who do not undertake accredited study have the opportunity of pursuing studies relevant to their ministry that are agreed with the district. The likely area and

form of such studies should be indicated on the form, 'Learning and development needs as a probationer.' For courses which carry a fee and do not qualify for connexional funding under the advanced theological study criteria (e.g.: courses in counselling, Godly Play, music etc.) probationers have access to funding on the same basis as CDiM funding for ordained ministers, but at a slightly enhanced level. Further information may be obtained from Discipleship & Ministries.

All probationers should produce at least once a year a substantial piece of work which is capable of being assessed as evidence of their capacity to think theologically. This may be, but does not have to be, the traditional essay; it could be a presentation to the probationers' group, participation in a seminar or the production of artwork. It must however represent serious engagement with a theological topic and it must be supported by an adequate reading list. It is assessed by the DPS or someone to whom this task is delegated.

And finally...

The journey through probation may not always be comfortable either for probationers or for those around them. It is a time of adjustment not merely to a new role but to a new way of being: a time of heart-searching and questioning, of exploration and discovery. It is a time when expectations are challenged and frustrations encountered as Church and probationers undertake discernment together. At a time of rapid change in Church and society these tensions become all the more apparent. And yet it is a time of great joy. Probationers and those privileged to accompany them on their journey experience the flowering of potential as individuals learn to become who they are in response to God's call to ordained ministry in the Methodist Church. The district recognises and affirms the probationers' development at the DPC and the ministerial session of the synod. The ordinands' testimony service offers an opportunity for many people from the district to celebrate with the ordinands and send them on their way with God's blessing.

**Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for thee.
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up thy gift in me.**