

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
Oversight and Care of Candidates for Ministry
(Ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work)

1. Continuing Discernment

1.1 The journey from the exploration of a call to ministry, through selection, training and introduction, and then to ordination or commissioning is one of the most significant journeys that any Christian can make. It involves a willingness to open your life and your vocation to the testing of the Church. It demands a great deal in terms of commitment, vulnerability and openness. It is a journey that, at every point, has no assured outcome and no pre-determined end. In itself it is a test of a person's readiness to be shaped by the disciplines of the Church community and to engage in significant processes of discernment and searching. Anyone who is willing to set out on this journey needs and deserves the assurance that they will be treated with integrity and honesty, that their pastoral needs will be addressed with courtesy and care and that whatever the outcome, the Church will continue to hold them at every stage in faithful care. The issuing of a call to a pastorate or post, subsequent ordination/commissioning and induction can never be guaranteed.

1.2 At every step of the journey, both Church and candidate are engaged in testing a call and at every stage it may become apparent that a different path is the next step. At every point, both Church and candidate are seeking to work out what is right. There will be judgments to be made; about suitability or progress, about learning and personality, about availability and readiness. The Church is committed to making any judgments about vocation with care and rigour, in a spirit of prayer and discernment. Such decisions will need to be made by assessment conferences as they consider entry to training, by Resource Centres for Learning as candidates take and progress through courses, and by local congregations or communities as they ask whether someone is called to a particular post or pastorate. As decisions are made, and oversight is exercised, the greatest care will be taken to act with justice and wisdom. In every circumstance the Church will surround decision making, training and progression to new paths with appropriate and significant pastoral care. Those who engage in this journey are asked to be continually open to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, acting through the councils, teachers and processes of the Church, as God's people seek to listen for God's will and to act in God's name.

1.3 Those who oversee candidates for ministry (assembly committees, synod officers¹, college tutors, etc) also expect to care for these candidates. Discussions about oversight are inseparable from those about care. Nonetheless the two issues are distinct. Oversight reflects the church's responsibility to ensure, so far as it can, that those who enter its ministry are ready and suited to serve. Care aims to help those who have offered for

¹ All references to synod in this paper are taken to mean the synod through which a person has candidate or in occasional cases another synod to which responsibility for them has been formally transferred. In the latter case the Ministries' Assessment Board and Education and Learning committees need to be informed, through the Secretary for Education and Learning.

ministerial training to sustain and draw strength from their relationships - with God, family, friends, neighbours, church and self. Occasionally the two responsibilities must be dealt with quite separately. This paper, then, deals with both topics; they are linked, but they should not be confused.

1.4 The oversight and care of candidates for ministry should be exercised with due discretion and respect for the individuals involved. It is also important to recognize that all stages of candidating and Education for Ministry Phase 1 are subject to the Data Protection Act of 1998, which is a law designed to protect the privacy of individuals, in particular with regards to the processing of their personal information. It is therefore important that assembly committees, synods, and Resource Centres for Learning have clear protocols for keeping information on individuals, and understand the conditions under which candidates may have access to information on request.

2. Decisions to be taken about entry to Education for Ministry Phase 1

2.1 It is important to distinguish four separate issues:

- a. **WHETHER** someone should train for ministry. Since General Assembly 2007 this decision is taken by the Assembly Assessment Board acting on behalf of the United Reformed Church. Candidates only attend an Assessment Conference as a result of a synod decision following a synod interview.²
- b. **THROUGH** which Resource Centre for Learning someone should train for ministry. This is a decision of the Education and Learning Board at the Assessment Conference, following Resolution 40 on Assessment Procedure passed by the 2007 General Assembly. The decision is reached after the Board has interviewed the candidate and taken careful note of any training recommendation of the synod.
- c. **WHEN** someone should train for the ministry. For a few candidates, whose educational qualifications are marginal, there is a question about readiness to start training. This decision lies with the Assembly's Assessment Board following the General Assembly's decision in 1997 (Record for 1997, p 40: "such professional qualifications or experience of life and work as, in the opinion of the Assessment Panel ... provides a suitable foundation for training"). Where a candidate's educational background does not clearly match the United Reformed Church's declared standards, the Assessment Board will seek advice from the Education and Learning Board at Assessment Conference, in order to decide whether the candidate is ready to enter formal training straightaway or whether further preparatory work is needed. Synods are therefore asked to initiate early contact with the Church's Secretary for Education & Learning about any unusual cases, in order that there may be due and timely consideration of individual circumstances.

² Synods may not change the recommendation of the Assembly's Assessment Board. However, members of the Assessment Board will meet with representatives of the Synod should there be a difference between the decisions of the two groups in an attempt to reach a common mind.

- d. **WHO** tells the candidate whether they will be sent to train for ministry. Members of the Assessment Board will meet with the candidate and synod representatives in the second or third week after the Assessment Conference to meet the candidate and convey the decision. This is also an opportunity to talk to the synod about the final decision and, where the decision is to send the candidate for training, to discuss through which Resource Centre for Learning they will train, and the ongoing care and oversight of the candidate/student with synod representatives. If the decision is not to send the candidate for training or to defer training then the discussion needs to focus on the debriefing process and care of the candidate.

2.2 For the sake of simplicity and clarity the rest of this paper will refer to the “student”, to distinguish between the individual’s progress through the initial assessment process and their entry into Education for Ministry Phase 1. Assessment of an individual’s suitability for ministry does not end when a candidate is accepted as a student, since discernment continues throughout the Education for Ministry Phase 1.

3. Starting training - contact between relevant bodies

3.1 Copies of the Assessment Board and Education and Learning Board's decisions are sent to the synod in the week following an Assessment Conference. As soon as possible after the candidate has formally accepted the offer of training, a copy of their application papers is sent from Ministries, via Education and Learning, to the appropriate Resource Centre for Learning. These papers will also include the Assembly Assessment Board report, the Education and Learning Board report, any comments from the synod, the report of the Personal Development Officer, along with the reports of the pre-training health screening and psychological health screening conducted after the Assessment Conference. It is vital that any qualifications and comments made during the initial assessment process are kept in mind throughout training and are reviewed when the final decision on eligibility for a call is taken.

3.2 The Resource Centre for Learning will invite the student for a meeting to discuss their recommended course of study, financial support during training, and other practical matters such as housing and residential arrangements.

3.3 All students in Education for Ministry Phase 1 are expected to complete the Introductory Course (*An Introductory Course on the United Reformed Church - worship, structure, history, ministry*). This is tutored by their synod over a number of local sessions. It includes a residential weekend on the ethos and history of the United Reformed Church coordinated by the Secretary for Education & Learning.

3.4 Responsibility for keeping the Assessment Board updated on a student’s progress rests with the relevant Assembly Officers (Secretary for Education & Learning and Secretary for Ministries) working in conjunction with the Resource Centre for Learning and the synod.

4. Who cares?

4.1 The stresses of passing through a complex and extended process of training can be great, and the Church has a responsibility to offer its ministerial students pastoral care that both respects their needs and supports their training. The Church expects to honour that responsibility as follows:

- a. The synod has an anchor role in the care of the individual, beginning from the time they make their initial application to be considered as a candidate for ministry, sustained during the initial assessment process, and continuing throughout the training period and beyond, whether or not the completion of Education for Ministry Phase 1 results in the issuing of a call. If synod officers are not well placed to provide constant or close care themselves, they must satisfy themselves that this is being provided.
- b. The Resource Centre for Learning has a prime role through its regular contact with the student, and should seek to provide support through an assigned Tutor.
- c. Resource Centres for Learning should ensure that each student has a viable set of arrangements for pastoral care which is appropriate to their situation. This may, in some cases, include the appointment of a suitable person to the office of Chaplain to the Resource Centre for Learning. Arrangements for pastoral care should ensure that the student has someone to whom they can take concerns who is independent of the assessment and discernment processes and fully committed to confidentiality.
- d. A number of student families experience strain during the training years, and have not always found it easy to share their burdens. It is important that:
 - (i) the synod should initiate a pastoral contact with the family, as soon as the candidacy is confirmed. Thus, if a candidate is accepted many months before training formally begins, the need for contact and care may begin then and should include advice on related matters such as the financial implications of training and ministry;
 - (ii) when a family has relocated to live near a Resource Centre for Learning, the Centre should initiate a pastoral contact with the family soon after the move.
- e. How (and indeed whether) such an initial contact leads into a longer-term pastoral relationship will vary from family to family. Some responsibility lies with the person who has made the contact for sustaining it in ways that may be helpful.

4.2 Thus there are important expectations that pastoral care will start at a very early stage in candidacy, and that it will be available throughout Education for Ministry Phase 1. Nonetheless, no single system or practice will ever suit all candidates equally well. All who carry responsibility should expect to care for individuals in - to some extent - individual ways.

4.3 Should it become clear to either the synod or the Resource Centre for Learning that a student or student's family is experiencing extreme difficulty or stress they should, with

the permission of the individuals involved, inform the Secretary for Education and Learning in the first instance so that an appropriate response can be considered. The Secretary for Education and Learning will keep the Secretary for Ministries informed. There may be cases where pastoral necessity requires a decision to be taken about the continuation of Education for Ministry Phase 1. The decision would be taken by the Assessment Board, having consulted all parties including the student.

5. Education for Ministry Phase 1 - contact between relevant bodies

- 5.1 The Assessment Board has an oversight duty towards those who have been recommended for training. This needs to be exercised in close cooperation and consultation with the Assembly Officers, the synod and the Resource Centre for Learning because for much of a candidate's training period the Assessment Board's oversight will be exercised remotely through the receiving of summary reports.
- 5.2 Throughout training, the Assessment Board will delegate routine oversight responsibility, through the Secretary for Education and Learning, to the Resource Centre for Learning, which should have regular contact with the synod in relation to each student, on at least an annual basis and preferably at more frequent intervals. The Secretary for Education and Learning is eligible to attend key meetings of the Resource Centres for Learning and thereby hear and participate in deliberations about students' progress. It is primarily through the Resource Centre for Learning that the Assessment Board is represented in the training process as well as in the pastoral care of candidates.
- 5.3 The synod should be involved in the discussions leading to the preparation of the annual report, so that this becomes a shared production. Such contact and involvement from the synod will normally involve a personal visit to the training institution and to the candidate. The purpose is both to monitor and to affirm, and problems that arise will initially be addressed within these consultations involving the Resource Centre for Learning, the synod and the student. However, there may be some cases in which issues of discipline or performance begin to develop to a point at which formal procedures are initiated. It will then become necessary to separate the roles of pastoral care (synod) and oversight (Resource Centre for Learning /Assessment Board). This is discussed further in Paragraph 8.

6. Annual Reports

6.1 In 1998 the synod moderators offered a list of eleven headings which they hoped to see used in college and course reports on students:

1. Background and experience
2. Contribution to college
3. Placement work
4. Worship and preaching
5. Academic performance
6. Relationships
7. Leadership qualities

8. Spirituality
9. Theological perspective
10. Development objectives
11. Other matters to consider

6.2 Consistent use of these headings in annual reports from Resource Centres for Learning should enable all parties to see more clearly how the student is developing through Education for Ministry Phase 1, and how any difficulties have been addressed and dealt with. It is understood that individual Resource Centres for Learning have inherited reporting systems which may be shaped by ecumenical requirements and local practice. However, the spirit of the moderators' request in 1998 is that if at all possible the reporting pattern for all United Reformed Church students should be consistent.

6.3 It is essential that nothing in the annual reports, or indeed anything in placement reports or other reports which play a part in assessment, should be concealed from the student. Data protection is one issue - we cannot expect to deal in closed reports. Factors that eventually ought to influence placement in service need to be addressed openly as they arise by the Resource Centre for Learning with the student, in consultation with the sending synod, and if necessary with the Secretary for Education and Learning and Assessment Board. There should be no secrets and no surprises in any of the annual reports.

6.4 The RCL will send a copy of the student's annual report to the synod. The RCL will also send a copy of the report to the Secretary for Education & Learning, who will ensure that the Secretary for Ministries is aware that it has been received. The Secretary for Ministries will confirm the progress of students with the Convener of the Assessment Board, through a simple listing of reports received.

6.5 At any time during Education for Ministry Phase 1, a student may raise a personal matter that they wish to be handled with special discretion during the eventual introduction process. In such a case it is important that all concerned make clear to one another the expectations and boundaries that apply in dealing with such an issue. Making an introduction requires sharing of personal information; sharing of personal information requires consent.

6.6 The synod moderators begin to introduce candidates to vacant pastorates in their final year. Therefore the penultimate training report, if satisfactory, should be treated as a 'provisional certificate of completed training'. It implies that, so far as can be judged at this point, the candidate is expected to be ready and suitable for ministry at the completion of the course. The decision as to whether or not the penultimate training report is satisfactory rests with the Assessment Board.

6.7 It is important to be aware that two reports are written in succession at the end of the penultimate year of EM1 – a normal end of year report and a report specifically for the synod moderators.

- 6.8 The normal end of year review report emerges from the student's self-assessment, placement report(s), the tutor's report, and any other documentation which is a routine part of the RCL's review process for students. It is this penultimate year report which will inform the Assessment Board's decision on a student's progress towards ordination or commissioning.
- 6.9 The annual meeting of the Assessment Board takes place in the first half of September so, for reasons of timing, it may be that the Convener of the Assessment Board and the Secretary for Ministries will act on behalf of the board in declaring a student eligible to go forward to the next stage of the process, unless doubts have been raised about an individual's progress by the RCL. The process for dealing with such a case is covered in 8.1-8.6 below.
- 6.10 The report for the synod moderators, which is written once provisional readiness for ministry has been confirmed by the Assessment Board's officers, is written by the RCL and forwarded to the moderators for their meeting in October. Like the annual reports, this report is seen and signed off by the student. The moderators are particularly keen that this report for each student should address directly the eleven issues noted in the guidance sheet. Not only do these headings address the issues which are relevant when seeking an introduction to service, but consistent use of them will enable clarity and parity when students from different Resource Centres for Learning have to be considered together for introduction to service.
- 6.11 The Assessment Board or its officers should not be asked to make a decision about a student's readiness for ministry on the basis of incomplete information. Neither should synod moderators be asked to weigh factors of which the candidate has not been told, because otherwise their job becomes impossible. However, it is also important that all reports on a student should be dealt with discreetly and carefully.
- 6.12 As with other annual reports, the Assessment Board's officers should receive the penultimate year's report from the Resource Centre for Learning through the Secretary for Education and Learning. In the penultimate year this should be done in time to enable the next stages of the introduction process to proceed as scheduled. The Assessment Board, through the Secretary for Ministries, will ensure that the student, the Resource Centre for Learning, the synod, and the Secretary for Education and Learning are informed of its decision.
- 6.13 The Assessment Board's decision on readiness for ministry should be notified to the next convenient meeting of Ministries Committee acting on behalf of General Assembly.

7. Introductions to vacant posts

- 7.1 Once agreement to proceed to introductions to vacant pastorates or posts (Readiness for ministry) is given by the Assessment Board, the Secretary for Ministries should ensure that both the student and their Moderator are informed of this decision. This is a vital stage, and requires the utmost care by all parties, along with considerable frankness about any apparent difficulties. If this stage is tackled properly, the processes of the final year should run more smoothly for all concerned; but 8.1-6 below gives some guidance for the rare cases where they do not.

7.2 The process outlined in 6 above is based on a usual four year EM1 programme, and it may need to be adapted where completion is expected to be other than in the following summer. For students heading for stipendiary service agreement should, if possible, be given at least six months before completion of training. For those intending to serve in a non-stipendiary capacity agreement should preferably be given at least four months before the completion of training.

7.3 Pastorates to which students in their last year of EM1 are introduced, and students themselves, need to be told explicitly that entry to ministry is dependent on (i) the satisfactory completion of any academic courses which were included in the agreed training programme, subject to any amendments which may have been agreed with the Secretary for Education & Learning during the EM1 period; (ii) the receipt of a certificate of completed training from the Resource Centre for Learning (sometimes known as a “Leavers Certificate”); and (iii) the Assessment Board's agreement.

8. When problems emerge

8.1 All students, when accepting the United Reformed Church's offer of training, undertake to abide by the procedures and protocols of the Resource Centre for Learning to which they are assigned. Similarly, when registering for a particular course of study with a university as part of their agreed EM1 programme, they undertake to abide by the terms and conditions set by that institution. In the same way that universities have their own disciplinary and grievance procedures, it is expected that the Resource Centres for Learning will make clear their policies and procedures through their student handbooks and other guidance documents. Students should expect to be supplied with such documents, or given online access to them, when they join the Resource Centre for Learning.

8.2 Issues may arise for the student, or between the student and the Resource Centre for Learning which, whilst pressing, do not cast serious doubts about a student's progress towards ministry. In such cases the Assessment Board looks to the Resource Centre for Learning and the synod to liaise to resolve the issues. The Resource Centre for Learning and the synod should use their judgement as to whether the Secretary for Education and Learning needs to be informed, and the student should be aware that such action is being taken.

8.3 In exceptional cases, and where there are not serious doubts about a student's progress towards ministry as described in paragraph 8.4, the Resource Centre for Learning and the Education and Learning Committee³ may come to the view that the student and the United Reformed Church might be better served by the student transferring to another Resource Centre for Learning to complete their training. Requests for transfers should be made in the first instance to the Secretary for Education and Learning. Transfers can only be made with the agreement of the Assessment Board, Education and Learning

³ The Committee acts through its Studies Panel in order to make prompt decisions about amending the nature and duration of the educational programmes which individuals are undertaking in preparation for public ministry. It consists of the Convenor and Secretary of the Education & Learning Committee, the Coordinator of TLS, the Secretary for Ministries, the Assembly Leadership in Worship Advocate, and one other appointee.

Committee (through its Studies Panel), the current and potential Resource Centres for Learning, the synod, and the student. Transfers can be costly and disruptive for all concerned, and therefore will not be countenanced lightly.

8.4 If there are serious doubts about a student's progress towards ministry at any point, including at the time of the penultimate report, or during the final year of training, the RCL will instigate what is known as Stage 1 of the *Amber Light* procedure. The procedure is included in the student handbooks of each Resource Centre for Learning. It includes the requirement that the Resource Centre for Learning, after due consideration with the synod and the student, and with their knowledge, contacts the Secretary for Education and Learning to inform them that the procedure is to be operated. The Secretary for Education and Learning will inform the Secretary for Ministries that such a contact has been made.

8.5 The purpose of the *Amber Light* procedure is to determine what action is to be taken in response to the concerns regarding a student's readiness for ministry. The outcomes of Stage 1 of the procedure will be either:

- a. that action has been undertaken which has sufficiently addressed the concerns that were raised; or
- b. that the concerns have not been allayed. In this case a recommendation for the Assessment Board to instigate Stage 2 of the *Amber Light* procedure will be submitted through the Secretary for Education & Learning to the Secretary for Ministries.

There can be a number of outcomes from Stage 2 of the *Amber Light* procedure, including a decision by the Assessment Board to withdraw the offer of a place on EM1 and thus end a student's progress towards ministry.

8.6 If a student's EM1 is deferred or terminated for any reason, the Assessment Board and especially the synod should ensure that appropriate care, support and consideration are given. Any financial implications should be discussed with the Secretary for Education and Learning and the Secretary for Ministries. The receiving synod must be kept informed if the deferral or termination has taken place during the process of call to a pastorate. The receiving synod is responsible for informing the pastorate of developments, whilst taking into consideration the pastoral implications for the candidate and the pastorate of how this is to be done.

9. Entry to ministry

The moderator of the receiving synod should check before any ordination or commissioning that a Certificate of Completed Training has been issued. No ordination or commissioning should proceed without either the certificate being to hand or absolute assurance being given by the appropriate training institution or authority that it has been granted.

30 September 2014

Agreed by the Ministries Committee, Education & Learning Committee, and Assembly Assessment Board