



Candidating for Ministry

Education for Ministry

Phase 1 (EM1)

EDUCATION
FOR MINISTRY 

Ministries of Word
and Sacraments
and Church Related
Community Work

June 2024

Candidating for Ministry

Introduction

You may be reading this because you have been to an Enquirers' Event or had a chat with your local Minister or Synod Moderator, in which case you have already begun to test that sense that God is calling you to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work.

On the other hand, you may have picked up this leaflet at a synod event because you have already heard the call but have yet to share that with anyone else.

Whatever your situation, now is a good time to think about the series of conversations and interviews – in which you will share if you decide to test your call.

You will talk to your local Minister or Interim Moderator, Synod Moderator and/or Synod Candidating Secretary (where no Synod Moderator is in place). It is at this point you will need to meet the pre-assessment criteria (see page 5).

'... you will not exist in isolation from other Church members.'

Your candidacy will need to be approved by your local church and synod, after which you will attend

an Assessment Conference where the final decision will be taken on whether you will be sent for training.

The different Councils of the Church are all represented in the process. The whole Church is involved because, as a Minister of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Worker, you will not exist in isolation from other Church members. This is a



testing time in more ways than one. The purpose of the conversations and interviews is to seek God's will and calling in your life, not to interview you for a job.

The objects of the assessment of candidates are:

- To explore the sense of call
- To recognise individual qualities
- To identify the potential to acquire further skills and knowledge through training.

[General Assembly 1996]

Calling

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 and discernment 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.

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. The Church is committed to making any judgments about vocation with care and rigour, in a spirit of prayer and discernment, recognising that discernment is a two-way process. Such decisions will need to be made at the Assembly Assessment Conference 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. Those who engage in this journey are asked to be continually open to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, acting through the councils, people and processes of the Church, as God's people seek to listen for God's will and to act in God's name.



What do I do next?

The process for candidating falls broadly into two stages: the informal enquiry stage and the formal assessment stage.

STAGE 1 The enquiry stage

The enquiry stage is informal and has two parts:

- Meeting with your Minister or the Interim Moderator (where there is no Minister) to explore your call
- Meeting with Synod Moderator/or Moderator's deputy to give you further information about the process and to check eligibility for candidating. However, the Moderator has a responsibility to check that you, the potential candidate, fulfils the basic age, membership and educational criteria agreed by General Assembly as well as to hear your sense of vocation. If you do not meet any or all of the criteria, the Moderator should discuss with you what steps could be taken in order for you to satisfy the criteria or what other forms of service you might be encouraged to offer to the Church. You can contact the Synod Moderator via your Synod Office.

At any point during this stage of the process, you as the potential candidate should be encouraged to attend **an Enquirers' Event**. These are held twice a year on Zoom and will give you, the enquirer, the opportunity to meet with those exercising ministry as well as to ask questions of the Secretary for Ministries and also Education and Learning: ministries@urc.org.uk

So... what are the pre-assessment criteria?

All prospective enquirers and those who interview them must know which criteria have to be met before the formal process of assessment can begin.

The prospective enquirer needs to:

- have been in membership of the United Reformed Church for at least two years prior to candidating;
- conform to the age criteria applied in 2006 following the General Assembly resolution 1997 (the lower age criteria relate to training – 18 for Ministry of Word and Sacraments, 21 for Church Related Community work.) Candidates may begin the process before this lower age and young candidates should not be discouraged. The upper age criteria require application before a candidate's 53rd birthday for stipendiary service. There are no upper age criteria for non-stipendiary service;
- in the case of candidates for the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, provide evidence of having conducted at least one service and preached one sermon, to submit with your application. At the Assessment Conference the candidate will be asked to make a 10-minute presentation on their understanding of Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, answering the question 'In what ways can our faith produce the actions that make a positive difference to people and their communities?'
- in the case of candidates for Church Related Community Work, have evidence of experience of some form of community work. At the Assessment Conference these candidates will be asked to make a 10-minute presentation on their understanding of CRCW ministry, answering the question 'In what ways can our faith produce the actions that make a positive difference to people and their communities?'
- understand, accept and be committed to the Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church, in particular the ordination and commissioning promises and the statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church and;
- have attended Church Meeting and synod;
- supply a reflective account of Church Meeting and synod attended;
- satisfy the required medical examination indicating fitness for training, ordained or commissioned;
- complete the form relating to disclosure of criminal convictions and court orders.

In addition, prospective candidates must show they are able to undertake the academic aspects of ministerial training. The minimum requirements will be those agreed from time to time by General Assembly on the advice of the Education and Learning Committee. In order to be accepted as a candidate for training for both Stipendiary and Non-Stipendiary ministry, the candidate will need to have reached the following educational standard:

- GCSE (Grade 9-4) or Scottish National 5 certificate (Grades A-C) in English Language or the equivalent (IELTS 6.5) as an essential prerequisite.

‘Enquirers Event ... the opportunity to meet with those exercising ministry as well as to ask questions’

Plus one of the following:

- 2 ‘A’ Level’s;
- 2 Scottish ‘Highers’;
- A degree from a UK university or equivalent;
- 120 first degree credits from the Open University or other UK University working on a modular system;
- An advanced GNVQ, involving a substantial quantity of discursive work (Level 3 and above);
- A successful completion of the two-year Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching Course including the successful completion of the portfolio of evidence. Details of all the requirements can be found in the Handbook, available from: ministries@urc.org.uk
- A successful completion of the one-two year Foundation Award in Theology, Mission and Ministry with the University of Durham through Northern College or Westminster College. Please speak with the Secretary for Education and Learning for further information;
- Such professional qualifications or experience of life and work as, in the opinion of the Education and Learning Training Board, are of equivalent standard and provides a suitable foundation for training.

This pre-assessment phase needs to be undertaken carefully and unhurriedly and may take two or more years. The need to fulfil the pre-assessment criteria should not prevent prospective candidates from enquiring about the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work and beginning to explore their sense of calling.

Support and co-operation from the local church, and synod should begin from the time of the initial enquiry. The pre-assessment phase is a time of growth which can be encouraged in several ways eg synods can arrange opportunities for prospective candidates to ‘shadow’ one or more ministers.

Remember, the Synod Moderator/or their deputy is responsible for checking and confirming that the pre-assessment criteria have been satisfied before the formal assessment process begins with the Church Meeting commendation and report.

Once the pre-assessment criteria have been met, the Synod Moderator/or Moderator’s deputy will pass your name to the Candidating Secretary. The Candidating Secretary will then send you the application form and other paperwork. It is at this point that the formal candidating process begins.



STAGE 2

The formal assessment stage

The formal assessment process is made up of three decisions made by the three councils of the Church:

- **Church Meeting commendation.** If the Church Meeting recommends you, it will be asked to write a reference which is passed to the synod. If the decision is not to recommend, then you will not proceed to the next stage.
- **Synod interviews.** The structures of each synod will doubtless determine how the synod interviews are to be conducted. This means that the synods will need to oversee arrangements for any appropriate placement work or ‘shadowing’ for candidates for the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Visits to established CRCW posts and workers will need to be arranged for candidates for Church Related Community Work. Candidates will also be expected to attend both a Church Meeting and a synod meeting and to write a reflection on both. Guidelines will be provided for how this should be done.

If the synod recommends you, it will pass your application and associated papers onto the Secretary for Ministries for the next available Assessment Conference. If the decision is not to recommend, then you will not proceed to the next stage.

Therefore, any candidate who goes on to the Assessment Conference goes with the recommendation of the synod.

After the synod interview, the synod should ensure that, if you have not been accepted for training, you receive appropriate support. This may include an element of mentoring if you have been advised to reapply after completing some further, wider exploration of the United Reformed Church.

- **The Assessment Board** makes the final decisions about forwarding a candidate for training and the method of training taken after Assessment Conference interviews.

What kinds of questions will I be asked?

We don't provide a list of questions but what might be helpful is to know the areas you will be assessed on. This is a long list but everything in it is important in a life of Ministry. These criteria should be kept in mind by everyone involved in the assessment process and explored in depth at the Church Meeting, synod and Assessment Board interviews. The emphasis should be not on what is already known but on self-awareness and the desire and potential to learn more. If you are candidating for Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, reading the *Marks of Ministry* (Mission Council 2019) will be helpful. If you are candidating for Church Related Community Work ministry, reading the *Core Competencies* (2023) will be helpful. These papers can be obtained from your Candidating Secretary

'The emphasis should be ... on self-awareness and the desire and potential to learn more'

Faith

- Their Christian journey
- Their devotional life
- Their sense of call to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work
- How their understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith is developing
- Their awareness of their own doctrinal position
- Their acceptance of the diversity of positions held within the United Reformed Church.

Ministry of Word and Sacraments

- Their acceptance of the importance of worship, including all-age worship, preaching and the sacraments
- Their understanding of ministry and of the promises to be made at ordination
- Their awareness of the variety of ministerial situations and their willingness to serve in any of these
- Their understanding of, and response to, the expectations

placed on ministers

- Their awareness of the attitudes and skills needed in pastoral care.

Church Related Community Work

- Their understanding of being a community development worker and a practical theologian
- Their understanding of being an agent of local church transformation and change
- Their understanding of being a social analyst, cultural researcher and an interpreter of power relationships
- Their understanding of being an effective manager, collaborator, educator and storyteller
- Their understanding of being a facilitator of and participant in worship
- Their understanding of being an effective communicator, companion and listener.

Personal development and character

- Their concern for all creation
- Their sense of the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ and their experience of the Spirit's enabling and sanctifying power
- How they reflect on the implications of ministry in the context of all their significant relationships
- Their personal history and their ability to reflect on the way their experiences have influenced them
- Their response to any situation in which they have faced risk or difficulty
- How they handle conflict
- Their level of self-awareness, desire to grow towards human wholeness and their ability to learn from their own and others' beliefs and experience
- How they value people, including those from whom they perceive they are different
- Their potential to become competent in written and spoken communication
- Their awareness of their own training and development needs

- Their ability and willingness to respond positively to ministerial education and training
- How they organise and prioritise their present work and leisure time and their ability to relax
- Their understanding of different styles of leadership, and where each is most suitable.

The community of the Church

- Their reflective account of the Church, and synod meetings they have attended
- Their understanding and knowledge of the wider Reformed tradition
- Their awareness of local ecumenical relationships and regional/national ecumenical initiatives
- Their understanding of the ministry and mission of the whole people of God, with particular reference to their present church community.

The Church in the world

- Their understanding of the mission of the Church, and how their ministry could contribute to it
- Their understanding of issues in society, and how the Church might respond to them
- Their understanding of the relationship between Church, local and wider, and society.

Once your application form has been passed onto the Secretary for Ministries for the Assessment Board by the Synod Candidating Secretary, you will hear from the Ministries Office with details of the Assessment Conference and advising you that you will need to undergo psychometric testing with Ministries' preferred provider prior to the conference.

What happens at an Assessment Conference?

The **objective** is to reach a decision on behalf of the Church as to whether to send a candidate for training for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work. This is achieved by reaching a careful and balanced view of a candidate's potential for ministry in the United Reformed Church and advice about appropriate training. Reaching such a decision is easier said than done, because subjective and personal elements in any assessment or person cannot be eradicated and should in fact find their place. The question 'Can I see this person as my minister or CRCW?' is a valid one. However, it is important that a judgement on a person's suitability for ministry is more than just intuitive and is determined by an appraisal of a candidate's potential to display and develop qualities and skills deemed necessary for ministry.

The criteria for ministry have been a matter for continuing debate for the Assessment Board. Assembly 1996 agreed *Criteria for Assessment* but the fundamental qualifications identified in *Preparing Today for Tomorrow's Ministry* 1982 are still valid. Although originally written in relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments these fundamental qualifications apply equally to Church Related Community Work:

- i) A total commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and a growing experience of shared life in the Spirit so that the worship and service of God becomes the minister's central and controlling passion. We need radical dissenters from the false worship of our society, whose dissent does not drive them (timidly or defiantly) into a ghetto but out into the world.
- ii) A growing familiarity with an understanding of the Bible and the Christian tradition, especially – but not exclusively – in its Reformed development, constantly extended and enriched



by wide reading and by a study that neither evades the critical questions, nor allows them to silence the central message. We need men and women whose ears are accustomed to listening to the word of God in the scripture and who know how to nourish others with that same word.

- iii) An informed and passionate involvement in the issues of the contemporary world. Clearly this is not to ask for a pretended omniscience. It is to ask for men and women who are aware of the world they live in and committed to doing the will of God in its affairs.
- iv) Because we live in a society which is mobile and pluriform, the church must be as varied and open as the human situations to which it must minister. We need, therefore, not one style of ministry, but many, exercised by women and men, white and black, conservative and radical, working class and middle class, paid and unpaid. We need to look for and encourage very varied gifts, temperaments and abilities.
- v) It follows that one minister cannot fulfil all roles. Collaboration and teamwork will be the marks of a relevant ministry, not omniscience. The gifts for animating and enabling groups and teams of colleagues, and for evoking the skills of others and the readiness to take a subordinate place – these are the marks of a genuine leader and are more to be desired than the gifts which attract attention to an outstanding individual.
- vi) The church is a community of persons of very different ages and in different stages in their discipleship, seeking to share good news with others. The arts of interpersonal communication are fundamental to its life. We need ministers skilled in these arts, aware of the many different levels at which communication takes place, able to exercise and help others to exercise the arts of preaching, of teaching adults and children, of listening and counselling, and having enough sensitivity to be able to

encourage the use of music, drama, dance and visual symbol in worship and in the communication of the gospel.

- vii) We need ministers who know that they must be learners all through life, who recognise that their initial training can be only a small beginning, who remain to the end eager to reach out for fuller understanding, greater competence, deeper discipleship.

The **Assessment Panel** at an Assessment Conference is drawn from the Assessment Board appointed by the General Assembly. It includes experienced ordained, commissioned and lay members, those with particular gifts in counselling, personnel management, theological perception, those with personal knowledge of various styles of ministry, community development work and from differing theological stances.

A panel will normally consist of 4 members, balanced as far as possible in the various categories. Each candidate will have 2 in-depth interviews with members

of the panel working in pairs. The task is demanding, searching and at times deeply moving, and assessors are all too well aware of the responsibility laid upon them.

*‘Assessment Conference
... The task is demanding,
searching and at times
deeply moving’*

The panel receives all the paperwork in the candidate’s application. Interviewers read these papers before meeting the candidate so that the interview can be conducted in the light of the individual’s concerns and personal statement.

Interviews take account of previous experience in the church and the community, the circumstances of a call, a candidate’s devotional life, expectation of future ministry and views about the training they feel they need. The application form and various references, including a report from the Synod, form the basis of discussion,

but the conference provides the opportunity to go much deeper. Often the candidates are faced with questions about their faith or themselves which have never occurred to them before, and it is clearly a learning process for them, let alone the assessors. For all candidates, the interviews will include a 10 minute presentation on their understanding of faith producing actions which make a positive difference to people and their communities.

All candidates will undergo:

- **Psychometric testing** which evaluates their Personal Development. A professionally trained person in the field of Personal Development assists the Assessment Conference through appropriate tests and conversation in order to help evaluate potential and identify particular issues.



- **Participation in group exercises.** All candidates take part in two group exercises which help to demonstrate their awareness of current issues, pastoral sensitivity and the ability to work collaboratively.

All candidates will also have an educational interview with **the Education and Learning Board**. The Education and Learning Board at an Assessment Conferences consists of representatives of the Resource Centres for Learning and the Education and Learning Committee. Board members meet with each candidate to discuss the training programme appropriate for the ministry for which the candidate is applying. The following Code of Practice has been agreed by the General Assembly:

- i) The Assessment Conferences shall take careful account of any needs expressed by a candidate.

Factors to be taken into account will include: -

- a) The Resource Centre for Learning (RCL) milieu which will best enable the student to develop personally and spiritually
- b) The kind of course most suitable
- c) The size and balance of the student body at any particular time
- d) The final choice is without prejudice to the admission procedures of the college.

A subsequent change of Resource Centre at the request of the candidate will only be recommended if good reasons can be clearly stated to all concerned.

- ii) In the interest of all concerned, a candidate may contact or visit any of the three RCLs before the Assessment Conference.

Pastoral care is exercised by a chaplain, who is not part of the assessment process. The chaplain's role is to lead worship and be available to candidates for support and debriefing. The assessors

are very much aware of the role of synods both before and after the Assessment Conference in ensuring that pastoral support is offered to all candidates, whether or not they are commended for training.

Worship is an important part of the Assessment Conference and is led by the chaplain.

‘Assessment Conferences shall take careful account of any needs expressed by a candidate’



What happens after the Assessment Conference? When will I hear whether I have been accepted?

At the end of this Conference two decisions will have been made on behalf of the United Reformed Church, recognising that the Assessment Board has a mandate to do its work from General Assembly.

- The first decision taken by the Assessment Board will be whether the candidate may or may not go forward for training.
- If there is a positive decision, it will be accompanied by second decision based on the recommendation taken by the Education and Learning Board as to the Resource Centre for Learning



through which the candidate (now a student) will be trained. The Education and Learning Board will also outline the nature and length of that training.

No candidate will be informed immediately of the decisions of the Assessment and Education and Learning Boards. Arrangements need to be made with the Secretary for Ministries for a meeting between representatives of the Synod Ministries Committee (or equivalent) and the Assessment Board to discuss any implications of the decision reached regarding the candidate. This will take place within two weeks after the Assessment Conference and the candidate will be informed of the decision as soon as possible after that meeting, preferably on the same day.

Any offer of training is subject to satisfactory completion of the necessary medical screening (as agreed by Mission Council in May 2011), attendance at the You're Welcome: An Introduction to the Ethos and History of the United Reformed Church Course, and a satisfactory DBS/PVG.

Once a student, you will be sent to an RCL where all the processes of that RCL will apply to the student, whose continued assessment is held by the college under the overall care of the United Reformed Church. Students are referred to the *Oversight and Care* paper which will be provided to all students before they enter their Resource Centre for Learning.

Any appeal against the Assessment Board decision will be made by the candidate using the Assessment Board Appeal process within 14 days on hearing the decision and on the basis that the approved procedure has not been followed.

Candidates are free to reapply after two years.

A prayer for those exploring God's call

Loving God

guide me as I seek your way for me;

When I am overwhelmed by the thought of my future

help me to search openly

and listen for your call.

Set before me the example of Jesus Christ;

Fill me with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit

that I may respond generously in loving service

with the special gifts you have given me trusting in

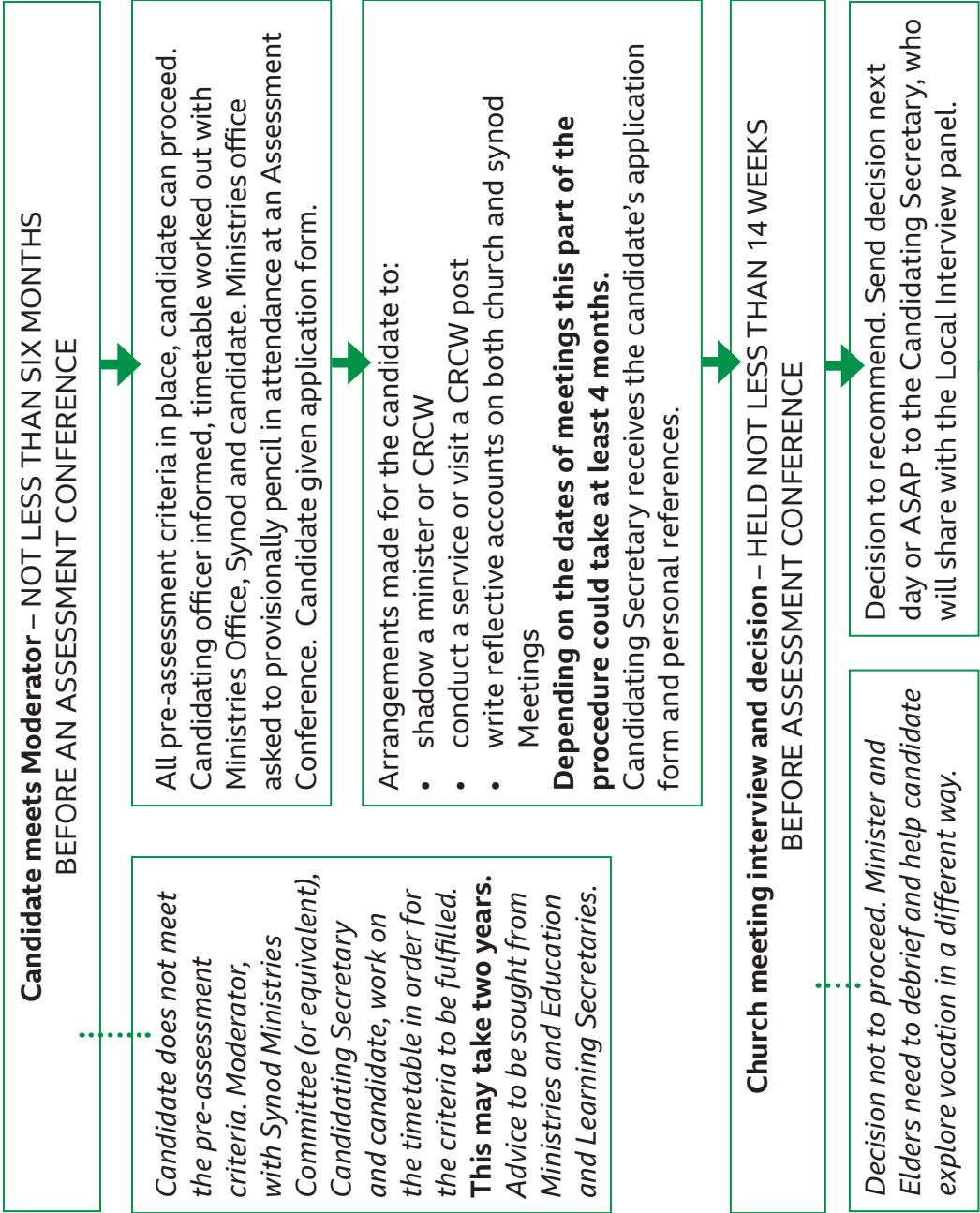
your grace.

Amen.

© 2020 Nicola Furley-Smith



Flow chart for the candidating process from the meeting with the Moderator



TAKES AT LEAST SIX MONTHS WITHOUT COMPLICATIONS

Local Interview on behalf of Synod (where held) – HELD NOT LESS THAN 13 WEEKS BEFORE THE ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE AND NOT SOONER THAN ONE WEEK AFTER CHURCH MEETING IN ORDER FOR ALL PAPERWORK TO BE SENT TO INTERVIEWERS. Send report to the Synod next day or ASAP.

Synod interview – requires application form, references, note of decisions, assessed service and reflective accounts. ALLOW ONE WEEK TO DISTRIBUTE PAPERS AFTER RECEIVING REPORT FROM LOCAL INTERVIEW AND HOLD THE INTERVIEW NOT LATER THAN 12 WEEKS BEFORE ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE.

*Decision not to recommend.
Candidate needs to be debriefed and helped to explore vocation in a different way. Ministries Office informed that the candidature has come to an end.*

Papers now include vocational report to Assessors following the Synod interview. Decision to recommend. Synod Candidating Secretary notifies Ministries office immediately so that candidates can be given at least **one month** notice of attendance at Assessment Conference with travel details etc. Candidate's papers sent to Ministries office at least 10 weeks before conference.

Assessment Conference. After the conference, members of the Assessment Board will meet the candidate at the relevant synod office on a date previously agreed with synod and candidate, **within 8-14 days** after the Conference.

Decision not to send for training, the candidate may appeal against process or reapply after two years.

Decision yes, candidate is offered a training place subject to completion of the required medical screening, attendance at the You're Welcome Course, and satisfactory DBS/PVG checks.

This is one in a series of booklets about the United Reformed Church's programme for Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1).

The booklets can be read and downloaded at:
www.bit.ly/EM1-info



© United Reformed Church 2024
Produced by the Communications Team of
the United Reformed Church on behalf of its
Education and Learning Committee.
The United Reformed Church, Church House,
86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT
020 7916 2020

www.urc.org.uk

