

A good practice guide to the stationing of probationers

The appointment

The criteria for assessing applications for the stationing of a probationer are included as an appendix to this document.

Attention is particularly drawn to the need for a skilled and trained supervisor (the superintendent or someone to whom this responsibility is delegated). Strained personal relationships between superintendent and probationer are the most common cause of difficulty in probationer appointments. While fault is just as likely to lie with the probationer as the superintendent, it is the superintendent who is in the position of power, with the responsibility of reporting on the probationer's fitness for ordination, and it is therefore the superintendent who has the greater responsibility for making the relationship work. **For these reasons, the District Chair, as Chair of the District Probationers Committee, is asked to submit with the application for the stationing of a probationer presbyter a letter of reference regarding the member of the circuit team (usually the superintendent) who will act as supervisor of the probationer. The letter should indicate either (1) that the supervisor has attended and satisfactorily completed a connexionally-sponsored Learning & Development in Supervision course (giving details of the course attended) or (2) that the supervisor has the knowledge, experience, skills and abilities to be enrolled on, and satisfactorily to complete, such a course.**

The need to help the probationer establish good time management, with time for prayer, study, personal relationships and the needs of everyday life, is also of critical importance and needs to be addressed in the early stages of setting up a probationer appointment, not only in the shape of the appointment itself but in the preparatory work done by the Chair and superintendent with the circuit.

The nature of probationer stationing

All parties should bear in mind that probationer stationing has particular boundaries and is not the same as 'normal' stationing. The discipline of probationer stationing requires that:

- The circuit does not operate an invitation process: applying for a probationer to be appointed carries the responsibility of accepting the Probationer Stationing Sub-Committee's decision. 'The stationing of probationer ministers must be a matter of special care ... The district, as well as the circuit, has an important role to play in the development of ministers both on probation and in the years after ordination. This is a responsibility of the whole Connexion.' (Conference agenda 1985, p.407). If, once the probationer has visited, the circuit has serious doubts these should be taken up with the Chair of the District.

- Students are told that if, once they have visited the circuit, they have serious doubts about the appointment, they should pursue the matter through their training institution and not enter into discussion with the circuit directly. The letter continues, 'Where this etiquette is not followed and student ministers say critical things directly to Circuit Stewards and Superintendents, relationships are soured, a problem is turned into a crisis – and it can be extremely difficult to find any alternative appointment for the student minister.'
- While oversight tutors must fully discuss with students the implications of their particular needs, 'gifts and graces' and availability for stationing, they should also protect the integrity of the stationing process and the needs of the Church. This means that they should not show probationer appointment profiles to students, nor discuss details of appointments with them, nor give any assurances that a particular appointment has been identified for them.
- The only exception to the above is where, because of the extremely limited geographical availability of a student, an appointment has been identified in advance by the processes described in the Guidelines for Special Probationer Appointments (available from the Connexional Team).

Sharing of information: students

Oversight tutors in the training institutions should work with students to ensure that what they write on the form conveys the appropriate information as fully as possible. In cases where a tutor from the student's own institution will not be present at the Probationers' Stationing Sub-Committee, those tutors should ensure either that a tutor from another institution is able to represent them, or that the Secretary for Initial Development is fully informed in order to do so. The development of regional oversight committees is to be encouraged as a means by which Methodist students in an isolated training situation may be linked with a tutor who is a member of the Committee. Tutors who are in any doubt as to how best to help students fill in the form should also consult the Connexional Team and encourage their students to do so.

Students should be made aware that conversation at the Committee may include matters that are not referred to, or not in such detail, on the form. Tutors must be able to assure them of the understanding, professional expertise and total confidentiality of the Committee. They should also be made aware that in the circuit context the stationing form is confidential to the superintendent.

Students should consult their tutors fully and should also feel free to contact the Connexional Team directly if there are issues they need to discuss. District Chairs and Lay Stationing representatives local to the institution may also be involved in consultation, but the initiative in doing this should rest with tutors.

Sharing of information: circuits

Circuits and Districts should ensure that all the information on the application form is up-to-date and that areas of unavoidable uncertainty (e.g. related to developments in progress) are clearly identified. The criteria for assessing an appointment's suitability should be carefully borne in mind and any areas of doubt discussed with the Connexional Team when the possibility of making an application is being considered.

It is particularly important that Chairs representing stationing regions should be as well informed as possible about the appointments in their region that are not in their own District, where inevitably they will not have the same level of detailed knowledge. Chairs representing stationing regions at the Committee have the responsibility of being as well informed as possible prior to the meeting. However, it specific questions sometimes arise about an appointment when a particular probationer is being considered for it at the Committee. The Committee's proceedings may be called to a halt at that point a halt to enable the District Chair to be consulted.

The student's stationing form is sent to the circuit on stationing. Unlike a minister's stationing profile, this form is confidential to the superintendent because it concerns the oversight of the probationer's ministry. Some of the information contained in the form must be, and much should be, shared with the circuit, but at the discretion of the superintendent.

Procedure at the Committee

There is a clear need for detailed information about appointments during the meeting itself. At the same time the composition of the Committee (Principals of training institutions, Chairs representing stationing regions and Connexional officers) is important in creating a dynamic which puts the needs of probationers at the forefront of the Committee's work. In order to meet both these needs as well as possible:

- The Connexional Team will send students' stationing forms to all Chairs
- All Chairs who are not members of the Committee should hold themselves available to be contacted by mobile phone when clarification of detail is required

While the main Stationing Matching Group operates on the principle of matching appointments, not stationing ministers, the balance in the Probationers Stationing Sub-Committee falls the other way. The Committee's primary responsibility is to station probationers appropriately. Procedure at the Committee must reflect this.

Appendix 1

Criteria for assessing applications for the stationing of a probationer

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 the 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 / 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 / her

3

Adequate supervision of circuit work:

- a superintendent (or another 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 his / her professional practice. The supervisor will be required to attend and

satisfactorily to complete a connexionally-sponsored Learning & Development in Supervision course before the beginning of the 2010/2011 connexional year, if he / she has not already attended and satisfactorily completed such a course. 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 District Probationers' Committee through the District Probationers' Secretary

- adequate and sympathetic 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