

18. Stationing Review Group

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Summary of Content

Main points	The Stationing Review Group (SRG) recommends changes to the processes related to the stationing of ministers in the Methodist Church. These recommendations follow a thorough review of existing processes and extensive consultation, taking account of the changing nature of ministry, the financial and environmental costs of our current way of working, and the need for the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) strategy to be embedded in all our ways of working. The review identified several areas of concern with existing practices and has established principles which should guide all processes regarding the stationing of ministers. The recommendations include changes to the committee structure that surrounds our stationing work and changes to the way in which presbyters and circuit appointments are matched.
Background context and relevant documents	2021 Conference Report 26, <i>Changing Patterns of Ministry</i> 1997 Conference Report 52, <i>Stationing Committee: Report of the Stationing Review Group</i>

At the April 2024 meeting of the Methodist Council, the Assistant Secretary of the Conference presented the Stationing Review Group Report [MC/24/42], alongside Dr Garry Young, chair of the review group. The Council felt that the work would benefit from being delayed so that wider consultation could be undertaken. It directed the Stationing Review Group (SRG) to undertake further consultations concerning the draft proposals and to bring recommendations to the Conference in 2025. In the light of this consultation the SRG brings the following resolutions:

***RESOLUTIONS

18/1. The Conference received the Report.

18/2. WITHDRAWN

18/3. WITHDRAWN

18/4. WITHDRAWN

18/5. WITHDRAWN

18/6. The Conference adopted the recommendations in paragraph 22.2 and directed the Law and Polity Committee to prepare draft Standing Orders for the Stationing Strategy Committee.

18/7. WITHDRAWN

18/8. The Conference adopted the recommendations in paragraph 25.1.

18/9. WITHDRAWN

18/10. WITHDRAWN

18/11. WITHDRAWN

18/12. The Conference thanked the Stationing Review Group for its work and referred the outstanding matters in the report to the Ministries Committee for consultation with the Stationing Committee and other bodies as appropriate and directed that a further report be brought to the Conference of 2026.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Ministries Committee at its meeting in February 2022 resolved that a thorough review of stationing processes be undertaken due to the number of concerns raised by the Ministries Committee, Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, Chairs' Meeting, Connexional Leaders' Forum and gatherings of superintendent ministers in Districts and connexionally. The Methodist Council and the Conference concurred with this view.
- 1.2 This review has involved consultation with the Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, circuit stewards, Chairs of District, the Warden of the Diaconal Order, lay stationing representatives, presbyters, deacons, and family members of those in ministry, as well as the Methodist Church in Ireland and ecumenical partners able to offer insights from different models of stationing practice. The terms of reference and membership of the review group were presented to the Methodist Council at its April 2022 meeting and can be found in Appendix 1.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The Stationing Review Group (SRG) recommends changes to the processes related to the stationing of ministers in the Methodist Church. These recommendations follow a thorough review of existing processes and extensive consultation, taking account of the changing nature of ministry, the financial and environmental costs of our current way of working, and the need for the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) strategy to be embedded in all our ways of working. The review identified several areas of concern with existing practices and has established principles which should guide all processes regarding the stationing of ministers. The recommendations include changes to the committee structure that surrounds our stationing work and extensive changes to the way in which presbyters and circuit appointments are matched.
- 2.2 In broad terms, the SRG recommends that presbyters are matched after expressing interest in available appointments that are first scrutinised connexionally. Deacons will continue to be directly stationed. Other recommendations relate to reinvitations and the work of Circuits. The aim of these recommendations is for our stationing methods to encourage both the flourishing of the work of God in circuits and the well-being of ministers and their families.
- 2.3 The recommendations take account of extensive consultation carried out throughout the review. This consultation has at various times included discussions with the Ministries Committee, the Stationing Committee, lay stationing representatives, the Methodist Council, District Chairs, and the Methodist Conference (in its Presbyteral Session). In 2023, the Stationing Review Group conducted a wide-ranging survey that gathered over 500 responses from members and ministers of the Church; its findings led to an initial report¹ which was presented to the Methodist Council in April 2024. The Methodist Council indicated that, whilst it was generally positive about the direction of travel of the recommendations in that report, further consultation should take place and that a final report be brought to the Methodist Conference in 2025.
- 2.4 The SRG invited comments on its preliminary recommendations by circulating a *Stationing Review Discussion Paper* in November 2024 to ministers, family members, circuit stewards, Chairs of District, lay stationing representatives, and others with responsibilities in the stationing process. Alongside the discussion paper, the SRG also sent a link to another survey. This second survey focused on specific sections of the initial report, which had been identified as needing more development. Over two hundred responses were received on this survey. Other feedback on the preliminary recommendations was collected in two meetings with District Chairs and a joint meeting with lay stationing representatives and members of the Stationing Committee. Detailed comments were also received from others in written submissions. While some of the SRG's recommendations have already come into effect through the Stationing Committee (e.g. the reduction in the number of stationing matching group meetings), overall the preliminary recommendations have been revised because of this extensive consultation.
- 2.5 The most significant revision to the initial recommendations is that the Stationing Matching Group (SMG) will continue with its current constitution, rather than becoming a smaller group made up of representatives of each stationing region. This change recognises the key oversight role of District Chairs and removes the need for an extra layer of processing in regional stationing groups. The

¹ [counc_MC24-42_Stationing_Review_Group_JB_JRH_April_2024.pdf](#)

Stationing Review Group remains of the view, however, that the role of lay stationing representatives within the Stationing Matching Group needs to be clearer and should allow full lay participation in decision making. The SRG continues to believe that decreasing numbers of presbyters and Circuits involved in matching raises serious questions about the costs, financial and environmental, of so many people being involved in the matching process, and therefore recommends that the constitution and ways of working of the SMG be reviewed by the Ministries Committee no later than 2030.

- 2.6 Members of the SRG believe that the recommended approach to stationing and matching best meets the need of the Methodist Church. Nevertheless, the feedback received has highlighted some challenges with the recommended approach. A Q&A section is included as an appendix which seeks to respond to the most frequently raised points. It is important to stress at the outset that no system of stationing and matching will solve the issue of a lack of available ministers for the number of appointments. With approximately 3000 Methodist churches and approximately 1200 active ministers, ten per cent of whom are in appointments outside the control of the Church, without appointment or with permission to study or serve in other churches and conferences, there is little doubt that our God-given human resource is stretched. If we note the number of ministers who are not well at any one time as well as those serving part time, we can see that the jam is even more thinly spread. Whilst we are a connexional Church, the authority to shape mission and ministry remains a local, circuit decision, which means the levers available to operate a strategic approach to appropriate deployment are limited.
- 2.7 One inevitable consequence of the shortage of available ministers is that, unless there is significant restructuring and reduction of circuit appointments, some appointments will not be filled. This is true of the current system where almost 30 per cent of appointments submitted into the system were not able to be filled in the last connexional year. The proposals for enhanced district and connexional scrutiny and careful use of a small number of priority appointments can help with those areas that are geographically and missionally challenged when it comes to attracting ministers. However, most Circuits will need to be realistic that they, at some point, may have to manage with fewer than the desired number of ordained ministers. Early and strategic planning for such circumstances will enable a creative and healthy approach to the development of a range of ministries, lay and ordained, ecumenical and community based.
- 2.8 Our recommendations are also sensitive to the workload faced by both lay and ordained members of the church. Overall, we believe that our recommendations are for streamlined processes that redirect and reduce the workload of circuit stewards, for example in the establishment of a more streamlined reinvitation process.

3. Deployment of Ministry by Ecumenical Partners and other Methodist Churches

- 3.1 Models of stationing or deployment of ministers used in other parts of the Methodist family and by our ecumenical partners vary from that of the Methodist Church in Britain with a range from entirely direct stationing, such as the Methodist Church of Zimbabwe, to almost all posts being advertised, as with our siblings in the Church of England. The Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI) has a small group, made up of District Superintendents and lay members, who meet throughout the year to consider which ministers might best match appointments as and when they arise. There is flexibility in terms of timing of moves in the MCI model and the size of the Connexion allows an in-depth knowledge of both Circuits and ministers.
- 3.2 The United Reformed Church model involves guidance from Moderators and Synods, particularly around the scoping of appointments (how much ordained ministry a particular church might receive); however, posts are usually advertised and the invitation of a particular minister to a local church or group of churches is made by the local congregation(s). A small number of appointments are centrally deployed where a mission priority has been identified. Appointments may not be advertised until the previous minister has left the context; this creates vacancies, which are usually managed locally, often with support through ecumenical relationships.
- 3.3 The Baptist Union model usually involves local churches advertising for ministers/pastors and, whilst churches may choose to appoint ministers recognised by the denomination, each church is a separate entity, free to appoint whomever they choose.
- 3.4 The responsibility for the stationing of ministers in the United Methodist Church usually rests with the Presiding Bishop of any particular Conference. Some bishops operate an 'Open List' policy where

ministers and churches can see what appointments and ministers are available; others operate a 'Closed List', where such information is limited.

- 3.5 The closer a system is to 'direct stationing', the more likely it is that all moves take place at once and, in such cases, there is less 'agency' for ministers and those in local contexts as to the outcome of the process. 'Planned vacancies'² tend not to feature in these models, though, in situations of a scarcity of ministers, inevitably vacancies have to be managed. It seems this is often by sharing the work across those who remain in ministry (lay and ordained) in a given context, which is unsustainable in the long term.

4. The Presbyteral Session of the Conference and the 2023 Stationing Review Survey

- 4.1 Those present at the Presbyteral Session of the Conference 2022 were asked to participate in a number of polls. We include two tables from that event below and have quoted some of the findings in the body of this report.

What one thing from our current practice would you want to retain? 1 2 8
(1/2)



What one thing from the current practice would you want to change? (Showing the most common suggestions, ordered by frequency from a sample of 103 presbyters)

Break link of deployment of ministers with a circuit's ability to pay	14
Length of appointment	9
Remove Critical Appointments	8
Length of process – too long	7
Single move date – introduce flexibility	6
Profiles – not adequate, not honest	5
All appointments open to all in Full Connexion	4
Remove 'secrecy'/lack of transparency	4
Itinerancy	3
Profiles	3
Discrimination in system	2
Honesty in Profiles	2
Chairs' involvement in matching	2
Move to prioritising presbyters rather than Circuits	2
Matching Visits	2

² We will avoid the terms '*interregna*' and '*interregnum*' in this report as it does not fit our ecclesiological understanding of the relationship between minister and congregation.

- 4.2 The Stationing Survey of 2023, designed by the Stationing Review Group, consisted of 62 questions across a wide spectrum of topics related to the invitation and stationing process of the Methodist Church in Britain. To ensure a range of voices, lay and ordained Methodists in a variety of roles - ministers, circuit stewards, lay stationing representatives, and partners and family of ministers - were polled for their thoughts on the current stationing process and possible changes to this process – from tweaks to radical shifts in thinking.

The Survey received 491 responses, and, in addition to these, thirteen further responses were submitted separately, some from individuals and others from groups who had discussed the matter at the Conference.

5. Issues Identified

- 5.1 Attitudes to the current stationing process are summarised in the word cloud taken from opinions collected at the 2022 Methodist Conference. Many of the words used to describe participants' experience of stationing can be described as positive (indeed 'positive' is quite prominent), but many words point to negative experiences.

What word best describes your experience of stationing?

1 2 4



6. Geographical Limitations to Stationing

- 6.1 One of the factors that affects both diaconal and presbyteral stationing is that of geographical limitation. The survey found that both deacons and presbyters shared similar top reasons for not feeling that they could be fully itinerant. The top three are limitations due to the vocation or career of their partner or spouse (31% of deacons and 30.9% of presbyters said this was 'often' or 'always' a factor); the support of vulnerable family members (39.5% compared to 31.8%); or the educational needs of family members (22.4% compared to 32.1%).
- 6.2 In addition to these needs, it was also identified that geographical limitations were set by some ministers due to being a part of a ministerial couple (five respondents) or because of needs regarding their own wellbeing, eg the importance of being in close proximity to a friendship support network (16).

7. Discrimination

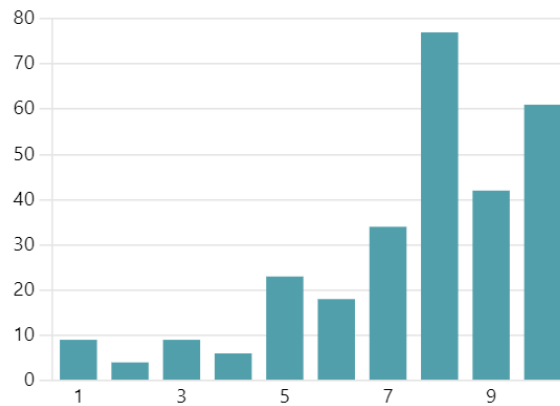
- 7.1 Four of the respondents referred to what they experienced as the bias of circuit officers against having a minister who was a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and two against those living with a disability. One respondent stated that 'Circuits that are disabled friendly are few and far between.'

Other ministers expressed that they are afraid to be stationed in some Circuits due to fear of ‘bullying by [certain] senior leaders.’

8. Training/Preparation for those involved in stationing processes

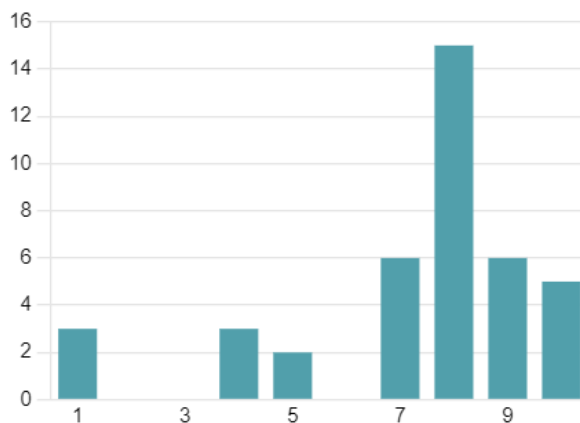
- 8.1 In Question 18 in the survey presbyters were asked: “In your most recent experience of stationing, how sufficiently equipped were you to play your part in the stationing process? On a scale from 1 - 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest).”

7.54
Average Rating



- 8.2 Of the 283 respondents (presbyters) to Q18, 230 also responded to the question of what they found helpful or unhelpful. Of those who were critical of the process, twenty participants had issues with church officers not following proper procedure or feeling unsupported in the process. Eighteen of the respondents highlighted a lack of transparency in the stationing process as being unhelpful in their appointment. Nine found it difficult due to feeling a total lack of control in the process. Circuit stewards were asked the same question and gave a 7.68 Average Rating.
- 8.3 Questions for deacons were designed to reflect the way in which their stationing process works, therefore deacons were asked: “In your most recent experience of stationing, on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is the least helpful and 10 the most) how helpful was your conversation with the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee?” Forty deacons responded as below, giving a 7.28 average rating. The Warden of the Order will share this with the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee and consider the detailed feedback that was offered in follow up to this question.

7.28
Average Rating



9. Family Members

- 9.1 Respondents were asked (Q20) “Were members of your household invited to be included in conversations with the Chair and Lay Stationing Representative?” Two hundred and seventy-seven answered:

Yes	182
No	74
I'm not sure	21



- 9.2 Almost a third felt that there was not enough consideration of their needs during the process, while some of those who felt that their needs were considered, felt this only marginally. One minister commented that 'My husband's experience was not positive. He felt he was just following me round, not really able to ask questions, yet expected to move his life and business and no one was interested in him only me.' There were some who were invited to be a part of the process, but who chose not to due to them feeling that it was a 'flawed' or 'confusing' process. Three were not invited to be a part of the process at all.
- 9.3 Six single ministers reported that an invitation was made to them to involve family in the process, while 11 reported that they were not offered a chance to bring someone else along with them, when that would have been helpful to them.

10. Circuit Stewards

- 10.1 Of the circuit stewards who responded to the question (24) asking what was helpful or unhelpful in equipping them for their role in the stationing process, many felt that the process was excessive, with much to be done by few workers in a short timescale. While those with prior experience had some confidence in what they were doing, others found the training poor. Many felt that longer forms would be required to explain fully their circuit's context and others wanted restructured profiles that would allow easier sifting of presbyters and circuits.

Helpful		Unhelpful	
Verbal instruction by church officer (Chair, LSR, etc.).	33	Poor training, excessive process.	15
Prior experience	30	Short timescale.	8
Written instruction (Code of Practice, training, MCB website, profile forms, etc.).	25	Too much work, not enough workers.	4
Competency and help of colleagues.	9	Code of Practice unwieldly.	3

11. Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences (MOCC)

- 11.1 Circuits have proved reluctant in accepting a minister of another Conference or Church (MOCC) with almost half of Circuits represented in the survey not even considering a MOCC appointment. Justice, Dignity and Solidarity issues are raised here as many unconscious biases and prejudices are reflected in these comments.

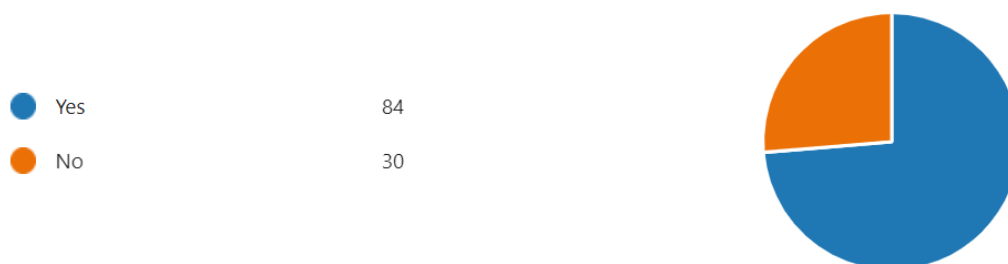
Q30 Please describe any barriers you believe prevent your Circuit from making such a request? (65)

Survey Comments	
<i>Did not want a MOCC directly stationed. "Fear of the unknown"</i> <i>"Fearful that someone unsuitable would be directly stationed."</i>	4
<i>Lack of understanding of the process for MOCC appointments</i>	4
<i>We have a large circuit with many churches, it might be too overwhelming for a probationer (or a MOCC).</i>	

	4
<i>Time restraints for filling out paperwork</i>	4
<i>Bad previous experience</i>	2
<i>It was never given to us as an option</i>	2
<i>We don't have the people or the time to mentor a probationer or a MOCC</i>	2
<i>They cost more.</i>	1
<i>The assumption that MOCCs would prefer "an urban/more diverse" environment</i>	1
<i>Lack of probationers available.</i>	1
<i>Potential language barrier (English), perception of the community.</i>	1

12. Profiles

- 12.1 Over a quarter of circuit stewards did not feel that they had enough information from ministers' profiles to be able to make a decision.



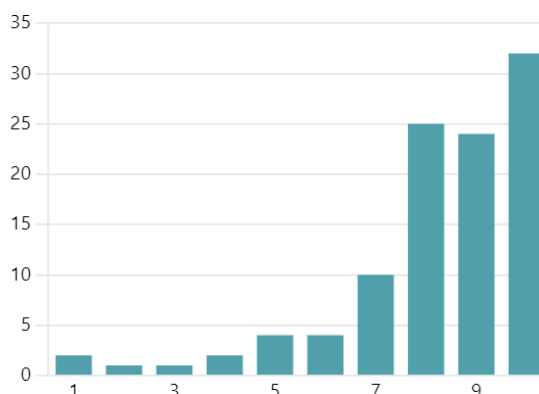
Of those who answered No, 25% felt that more specific questions were needed, eg preferred style of worship, views on same-sex marriage, particular personal strengths or hobbies and that moving geographical preference to the top of the form would save a lot of reading.

- 12.2 Ministers were not asked about circuit profiles, but during the consultation the SRG has identified issues with Circuits not being clear about their contexts and circumstances, for example, their financial stability and churches' theologies or particular styles of ministry (especially in terms of views on theology of human sexuality). A stark example of this can be seen in this comment: *'We have twice been matched with appointments which were Inclusive. 1) where we were informed of the match, then on the same day, told we could not visit as the Superintendent would not meet us because we were Gay. 2) we were matched, told the circuit were inclusive - moved - to find they were not at all and I was not allowed to preach, I was not included in meetings and no one in a LPs' meeting would shake my hand in the Peace.'*
- 12.3 The concerns here are around issues of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity, that, without clear circuit profiles, ministers could be sent to a circuit where contradictory convictions are not being appropriately managed and that this could impact their wellbeing and capacity to minister in that context.
- 12.4 81% of circuit stewards who did not find profiles helpful wanted more space on the forms to describe their Circuit: Overall, 37% of circuit stewards who responded wanted more space to describe their Circuit.
- 12.5 Circuit stewards provided feedback on how circuit profile forms could be improved; their suggestions included having longer forms, perhaps something similar to the URC, eg, with the insertion of photos or video links. Another frequent suggestion was that the forms could be restructured, eg manse descriptions could be a separate document and geographical preference should be moved closer to the top of the form.

13. Circuit Visits

13.1 Circuit visits are generally thought of as helpful in discerning a match to an appointment.

8.24
Average Rating



However, there were suggestions that the visits were not always long enough and were planned at too short notice for lay volunteers. Furthermore, the SRG is aware that ministers do not all receive information in the same way. For some, a short visit, packed with meeting many people, might be the right way to discern God's will for the match. For others, a longer visit, with time for reflection and prayer (and rest) built into the programme, would be the best way of discerning the match.

14. Transparency and Discrimination

- 14.1 A perceived lack of transparency in the stationing process is raised by a broad spectrum of respondents in the Survey. We can see this specifically from circuit stewards (Q19), family members of ministers (Q38), and ministers in the reinvitation process (Q43, Q46) who all desired more transparency in the process. We can see this summed up by a comment from a presbyter: *'Remove the responsibility for reinvitation process from circuit stewards. Move to a trained group of district people who lead in partnership with circuit stewards. I don't like saying this as I think it sits with circuit stewards but again, again and again this is where I hear the most pain and no amount of training changes this. After four years in a difficult but life-giving appointment my four years of hard work were reduced to seven bullet points and 57 words by a senior circuit steward who was adamant they'd done everything by the book. They then gave me four pages of unedited ecumenical feedback to placate me.'*³
- 14.2 Another quote: *'Honesty to the process as background discussions among chairs and matching groups are shrouded in secrecy and impacts greatly to the results.'*⁴
- 14.3 There is a feeling amongst some within the Church that current *"Unconscious Bias training is insufficient to address discrimination."*⁵

15. Issues Identified from Other Sources

Stationing Matching Group 2023/24

- 15.1 The work of stationing was profoundly challenging for members of the Stationing Matching Group in 2023/24. At the beginning of the process in November 2023, it became clear that SMG faced two major challenges: firstly, the common occurrence that there was a disparity between the number of available presbyters and the number of circuit appointments submitted for stationing and, secondly, that there were not enough ministers with sufficient experience or resilience to fill complex superintendent appointments and appointments designated 'critical'.
- 15.2 These two challenges made the stationing matching process very difficult, and the Stationing Matching Group often found itself on the horns of a dilemma, as it sought to be faithful to the needs

³ From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

⁴ From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

⁵ From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

of the Church and at the same time, give sufficient regard to the proper flourishing of presbyters through careful matching. When the Stationing Matching Group met for SMG 3 in early January, there remained a total of forty-four unmatched appointments, five of which were designated as 'critical', with a total of just nine presbyters available to be stationed.

- 15.3 The challenges to the process were compounded yet further by the sober reality that there were a diminishing number of presbyters who were able to be fully itinerant because of personal circumstances, needs of partners and spouses, dependents, and social networks of support. The Stationing Matching Group sought to exercise care and consideration in the face of these personal concerns, but in the process, it made it difficult to fill appointments in disparate places and geographical extremities. Consequently, it is difficult to sustain the view that the present Stationing Matching process is fully meeting the needs of the Church.
- 15.4 The category of 'Critical' appointments was removed prior to the SMG meetings of 2024/25 which created greater flexibility for those involved in matching and reduced a log-jam which had occurred the previous year.
- 15.5 In 2023/24 the number of diaconal appointments was close to the number of deacons available in stationing, which is helpful to an extent but does not allow much flexibility in terms of making the best matches. In Diaconal matching 2024/25 there were more appointments than available deacons, which created helpful flexibility in terms of achieving good matches. It did however mean that some circuits were disappointed not to have had a deacon matched.

Wellbeing, Housing and Itinerancy

- 15.6 In March 2024, the Wellbeing staff in the Connexional Team were handling 77 active cases, ranging from quickly dealt with enquiries to ten ministers being on Recuperative Years. There is a concern that this may be the tip of the iceberg in terms of a full understanding of the health of many deacons and presbyters. We do not hold central records of every time a minister is off work, nor do we have central records on how many are in counselling or are continuing to work whilst being unwell. The work of the Wellbeing Team is highly regarded across the Connexion and it may be that this has led to some cases which would have been handled locally being referred for expert help. The SRG is concerned that the wellbeing of many in ministry seems to be suffering.
- 15.7 Recent years have seen an increase in the number of ministers requesting part-time appointments, sometimes for their own wellbeing and sometimes to care for others. This has happened at the same time as an increase in the number of ministers offering significantly limited deployability due, in many cases, to caring for family members or for a need to be near particular friendship or cultural groups for their own support.

Time off

- 15.8 The SRG is interested in the possibility that, were it clear to both ministers and Circuits that arrangements for rest days are a *minimum* of 24 hours (as is clear in CPD), rather than 'one day off a week', fewer people would be looking for part-time appointments. Would ministers be willing to be stationed across larger geographies if they felt confident to ask for two days off a week, in order to visit friends and family further from the appointment? Would ministers enjoy better health if Circuit Leadership Teams were to advocate strongly for appropriate balance and time off? Would a clearly mandated 'two days off a week' move away from local interpretation and enable ministers to offer for full-time roles across a wider geography than seems to be the current trend? Survey results suggest a majority of people favour either a mandated two days a week off, or an emphasis on the flexibility that already allows for this to happen, as set out in Book VII part 3 of *CPD*.

Itinerancy

- 15.9 Until very recently the number of ministers requesting permission to live in their own home has been very small and permission has rarely been granted. The requirement to live in a manse is not just a matter of the tax status of ministers but is an embodiment of the principle of itinerancy that remains at the heart of our stationing system. In 2023/24 the Manses Sub-Committee of the Ministries Committee received twenty-six requests for ministers to live in their own home. Twenty permissions were granted, which is unprecedented. In most years the number of permissions granted is two or three.

- 15.10 In addition to these factors, increasing numbers of ministers are approaching the Stationing Advisory Committee to be without appointment, or to be in an appointment outside the control of the Church. Requests for permission to study or to reside abroad have not increased significantly.
- 15.11 As of April 2024, approximately 34 ministers had permission to be without appointment and 85 to be in an appointment outside the control of the Church. Seven ministers had permission to serve another church or conference, and 28 (some of whom are supernumeraries) had permission to reside abroad. Whilst recognizing that many of those appointments (eg various chaplaincies, community projects and ecumenical appointments) are expressions of the mission and ministry of the Methodist church, in the light of the pressures on the stations, this is difficult to justify strategically.
- 15.12 A number of respondents to the surveys and consultations of the SRG raised the possibility of revisiting the Church's understanding of itinerancy. The 2021 Conference Report, *'Changing Patterns of Ministry'*,⁶ set out principles regarding itinerancy which were adopted by the Conference, and the SRG does not believe it necessary to revisit that work at this time.

16. Theological Reflection and Previous Reports

- 16.1 The Stationing Review and the Conference Report from 1997⁷ set out the recommendations to the Church. In the opening paragraph of that report, the terms of reference are spelt out thus: *'Its terms of reference were to seek a system that is 'faithful to our traditions, serves the mission of the Church, is sensitive to the needs and aspirations of ministers and circuits, is easy to understand and operate, is economical in time and money and above all is felt to be sensible and fair.'*⁸
- 16.2 In seeking to be *'faithful to our traditions'* particular attention is given to the 'connexional principle' as a significant part of our tradition and a fundamental descriptor of our theological identity as Methodists. At best our stationing procedures reflect the concept of ministers being in Full Connexion, and entering a covenant relationship with the Conference which creates a relationship of mutual interdependence. This covenant relationship brings mutual obligations, responsibilities, gifts, and commitments.
- 16.3 Part of a minister's obligation is to be available to be stationed by the Conference so that the mission and ministry needs of the Church can be met. Part of the Church's obligation is to provide a manse and a stipend for the minister to engage in ministry in a particular context.
- 16.4 One of the perceived benefits of connexionalism, as a way of understanding how to be a Church, is the principle of itinerancy:
- 'The Church has a body of authorized and trained ministers whom, in theory, it can place in appropriate appointments, where their gifts can be used to advance the Church's work and mission.'*⁹
- 16.5 The connexional principle is fully set out in the Conference statement of ecclesiology, *Called to Love and Praise* (1999).
- 'The connexional principle, as we have seen, has been intrinsic to Methodism since its origins. Although this principle has not always come to expression in a complete or balanced way in Methodist structures and practice, it enshrines a vital truth about the nature of the Church. It witnesses to a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God himself. Whether the word 'connexion' is retained or not, the principle is fundamental.'*¹⁰
- 16.6 In 2017, the Conference received a report from the Faith and Order Committee, entitled *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century* in which there is a reaffirmation of the gift of connexionalism, whilst recognising some of the evident pressures upon the principle. The report highlights that one of those pressures is the upholding of the discipline of stationing and the commitment to ministerial

⁶ [Conference 2021 Agenda Volume 2](#) *Changing Patterns of Ministry*.

⁷ *Report of the Stationing Review Group*, 1997, 585.

⁸ *Report of the Stationing Review Group*, 1997, 585

⁹ *Report of the Stationing Review Group*, 1997, 587.

¹⁰ *Called to Love and Praise*, 1999, para. 4.6.1.

itinerancy. Despite these challenges, there is a bold assertion of the continuing vitality and significance of understanding ourselves in this way:

*'For Methodists connexionalism is not an abstract principle or a piece of historical baggage, but a way of being Christian. The overall conclusions of the working party's investigation were that connexionalism is still fundamental to how Methodists understand the Church.'*¹¹

- 16.7 Finally, it is useful to consult the 2021 Conference Report, *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, which includes a section on stationing and itinerancy. There is a sober recognition in this report about the pressures upon the practice of itinerancy and the extent to which this is truly lived out by ministers in the Methodist Church:

*'The 2018 Conference noted "the potential dissonance between the Methodist Church's understanding of itinerancy and experiences of the stationing processes. In practice many ministers are not available to be stationed anywhere within the Connexion and this has prompted questions about the role and place of itinerancy in the Methodist Church today.'*¹²

- 16.8 The *Changing Patterns of Ministry* report sets out the challenges to itinerancy that the Church and its ministers are experiencing.¹³ The present working group is aware of these factors, which have figured in our conversations thus far as can be seen in the section on 'Wellbeing, Housing and Itinerancy' above. Whilst recognising these challenges, *Changing Patterns of Ministry* continues to affirm the place and significance of itinerancy as part of the Methodist Church's understanding of ordained ministry and 'a pragmatic response to God's call to the Methodist Church for the sake of the world.'¹⁴ Itinerancy 'signifies that Methodist ministers are connexional people who are available to the Conference for deployment for mission according to the needs and priorities of the Methodist Church.'

- 16.9 However, alongside this definition, *Changing Patterns* recognises that ministers' ability to be fully itinerant will be seasonal in nature: there will be times – due to personal circumstances, family pressures, geographical restrictions according to family need – that will mean a minister is less able to be freely available to be deployed across the Connexion.

- 16.10 Whilst not a comprehensive theology of stationing, this brief review does signify the significant work of Conference Reports that provide the theological context in which the SRG has considered the process of stationing and perhaps some of the points that need to be considered if we are to be 'faithful to our traditions' (in the words of the 1997 report). Key points seem to be the *connexional principle* and the mutually interdependent nature in which we engage in the life of the divine and relate to one another in the body of Christ and that *itinerancy* is an outworking and embodiment of this relational way of being Christian disciples together. These relationships enable the whole Body of Christ to participate in the mission of God and for the Church to engage with the needs of the world as servants of Christ.

17. Principles Underpinning the Invitation and Stationing Processes

The quality of our Christian relating and relationships is key to the Church's ability to deploy ministry in a way that allows everyone to flourish. Drawing on the theological reflection above, as well as the Church's commitment to Justice, Dignity and Solidarity, the SRG worked together to identify a number of principles which it believes are 'faithful to our traditions' and should apply whatever models of stationing we might adopt.

I. Integrity, grace, care and prayer

As a reflection of our gospel calling and the nature of Christian identity, our processes should be marked by integrity and grace, underpinned by prayer and a deep care for the people involved. Discernment should be careful in every sense of the word.

II. Transparency

Whilst some parts of the stationing and invitation processes require the careful handling of personal information which should remain confidential, the processes themselves should be transparent,

¹¹ Conference Report No. 37, *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century*, 2017, para. 4.

¹² Conference Report No. 26, *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, 2021, 310.

¹³ *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, 2021, 311-312.

¹⁴ *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, 2021, 313.

enabling the confidence of all who take part. Particular attention should be paid to information disclosed about persons who are not present when information is shared and careful notes should be kept and be available to those persons referred to in conversations.

All processes should be open to independent (as in by someone outside the stationing process) scrutiny, paying particular attention to the Church's Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy.

Language used should be clear and unambiguous. Issues relating to a person's ministry should emerge and be dealt with through one or more of: 1-2-1s with ministers in oversight (superintendents and district Chairs), staff meetings, circuit leadership teams, supervision, ministerial development reviews, etc. Issues should not emerge as a surprise during the reinvitation process or by the sharing of information in the context of stationing matching.

III. **Safe and non-discriminatory processes and outcomes**

Training regarding unconscious bias and discrimination should continue to be mandatory for all involved in reinvitation and stationing processes. Any actions, decisions or statements that might be considered prejudicial against a particular individual should be reported and responded to, appropriate action taken and support offered to those harmed.¹⁵ Likewise any matters that affect the safety of a child or vulnerable adult should be referred to the appropriate Safeguarding Officer.

Processes should be based on best practice in discernment.

There should be open and equal access to all opportunities, for example, ministers of other conferences and churches accepted for transfer or to be Recognised and Regarded should be able to offer for appointments in the same way and at the same time as those in Full Connexion.

IV. **Agency for those participating**

Processes should enable presbyters (and deacons in terms of reinvitation consultations) to be fully engaged at every stage. In the case of the stationing of presbyters, the ability to offer to be matched to particular posts increases their agency and removes the sense of 'being done unto'.

Circuit stewards and invitation committees should have genuine agency in new processes, as currently the work of selecting a shortlist of 'preferences' offers a false sense of agency that bears little relation to the outcomes of stationing matching.

V. **Full lay participation**

There should be full and equal participation of lay people in the stationing matching process. Lay Stationing Representatives should have equal representation, freedom to speak and the right to vote, as that of Chairs of District on the Connexional Stationing Strategy Committee (SSC – see below) and likewise in Regional Stationing Groups (RSGs).

VI. **Appropriate subsidiarity**

Decision making needs to take place as close to the Circuit context as possible whilst not losing the connexional principle.

VII. **Ministry where it is 'Needed Most' – breaking the automatic link between a Circuit's ability to fund a post and a minister being stationed**

This particular principle was raised in a number of responses from the Survey. Both the Ministries Committee and the Mission Committee are also asking the question as to how resources might be shared in a way that reflects our connexional principle and enables ministry to be offered in places of greatest need.

'I'd want to see the stationing process encompass a much greater focus on need not ability to [pay a] stipend.' (Survey Q.39)"

*'I think there is a deep need to review the link between allocation of ministry and local financial resources, so that ministers are stationed where there is greatest need, rather than necessarily most money.'*¹⁶

¹⁵ Currently a process for dealing with such matters is set out in the Stationing Protocols and it is anticipated that this would be taken forward into a new process for stationing matching.

¹⁶ From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

The Conference of 2024 directed that an 'Economic Justice Task Group' be established to consider how funds might be released for mission and ministry in ways that reflect the Church's commitment to justice. That work is being overseen by the Ministries Committee and it is expected to report to the Conference of 2026.

18. Discernment

18.1 Where an Extension is Being Considered

The 2023 and 2024 Stationing Review Surveys demonstrated that the reinvitation process is almost universally disliked. Circuit stewards find it cumbersome and awkward and ministers find it a time of great stress and vulnerability. The SRG is clear that discernment about a person's ministry and the needs of a circuit should be an ongoing process and that supervision, 1-2-1s with ministers in oversight, circuit leadership meetings and Ministerial Development Review are the most appropriate places to raise matters pertaining to the length of time a minister might serve in an appointment. Whilst a process of consultation regarding reinvitation can be helpful, there was a general feeling that this should be streamlined and should never be the place for concerns and criticisms of an individual to be raised for the first time. Any concerns, issues or complaints regarding a minister should not come as a surprise to the minister or the circuit stewards. To that end, the SRG suggests a **staged vocational conversation** (explored further below) which would take place at the end of a minister's first year, in the middle year and in the penultimate year of an appointment, which would then connect with the reinvitation process. This leads to the question: How would staged vocational conversations fit in alongside MDR and Supervision?

18.2 Supervision

In 2015 the Methodist Church in Britain introduced a system of structured reflective supervision for all our clergy and selected lay people, the hope being to provide a regular space of supportive accountability for our ministers that would:

- support ministers in their vocation and practice of ministry,
- safeguard the interest of those amongst whom ministry is exercised, including children and vulnerable adults and
- ensure that ministry offered in the name of the church is collegially and accountably reflected upon in the light of God's mission and the purposes of the Methodist Church.¹⁷

The research conducted, which was reported to the 2021 Conference, indicated that the result of such an investment includes the following:

- Increased clergy wellbeing
- Reduced clergy anxiety
- Increased trust within the life of the church
- Strengthened boundaries and role clarity for ministers and those in oversight
- Increased clergy capability around dealing with conflict, change and other complex dynamics
- Emboldened clergy ready to take appropriate risks in mission
- Clergy who are encouraged to intervene at an early stage around challenging practices that cause harm.

Supervision, as outlined in the Supervision Policy of the Church (2021-26), offers an ongoing, dedicated space for a minister to reflect on experiences in their ministry and to formulate responses to them. The intention of such regular and focused reflection is to support a change of culture in the life of the Church – from one in which practice is often isolated and vulnerable to one of accountability, support and increased safety.

18.3 Ministerial Development Review (MDR)

MDR focuses more closely on specific aspects of ministry in context. It considers areas of ministry where a closer look can be taken at a particular element of the work. Ministers can often be embedded in a context for several years, and MDR offers the opportunity to look at aspects of the work over a period of time – with a different focus at each review. The elements of ministry that are selected for review should be carefully drawn from themes discussed during supervision (or indeed

¹⁷ *Supervision Policy*, 2017, Policy paragraph 1.3

those noticeably not discussed) and/or expectations outlined in the Ministerial Covenant, the Competencies for Ministry and those arising from the JDS Strategy.

MDR applies to all ministers (deacons and presbyters) in a circuit appointment or district appointment, and to all District Chairs. It also applies to every minister who has entered into an agreement with a circuit to undertake pastoral responsibility in one or more local church.

A key feature of MDR is the annual review meeting where each minister is supported by a lay contributor and an ordained contributor as they reflect on their ministry. This provides an important opportunity for ministers to share their reflections, insights and hopes with others who have a responsibility for their wellbeing and for their growth in ministry. They will often work with others to obtain feedback from local church members and circuit post holders around aspects of ministry and consider the responses together in the meeting.

Supervision and MDR, then, are interwoven, with subject areas and ideas for development passing between the two. Together they offer a springboard to new thinking and approaches to ministry. They ensure that the needs of the minister and those of the Church are met in a way that offers support and accountability.

Supervision and MDR – example process

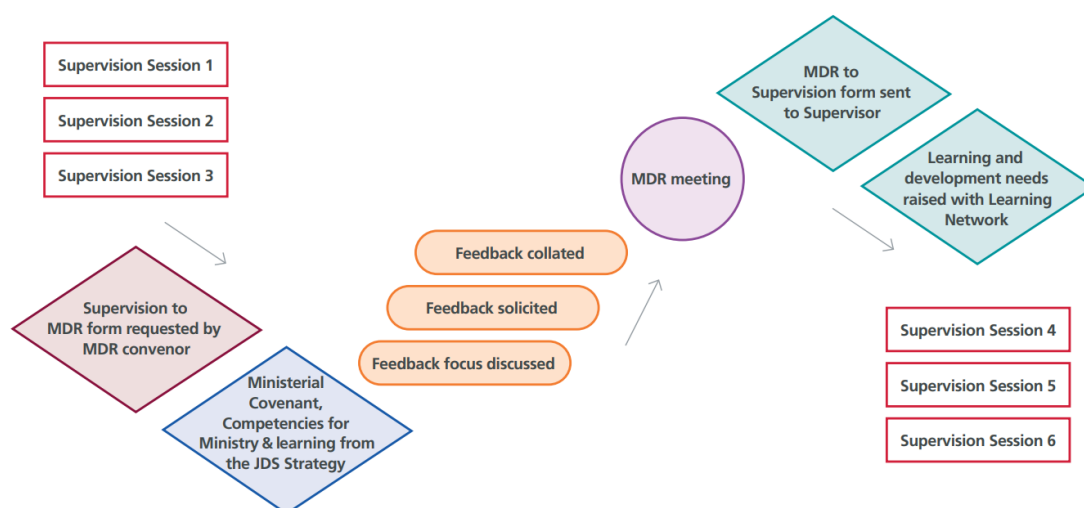


Diagram taken from *Ministerial Development Review: A Simple Guide*¹⁸

18.4 Staged Vocational Conversation (VC)

- 18.4.1 Staged vocational conversations (which might take place within the Ministerial Development Review process or separately from it) between the minister, their minister in oversight and at least one circuit steward are the appropriate way of enabling discernment for both ministers and Circuits. The SRG originally proposed an annual vocational conversation but having heard feedback, suggests that conversations take place at the end of the first year of an invitation, in the middle year and in the penultimate year, linking at this point into the reinvitation process. These conversations would provide an opportunity to share joys, hopes and aspirations. They would also provide space for ministers to offload any anxieties, difficulties and frustrations they are experiencing. Similarly, the minister could be made aware of positive comments and any issues arising about their ministry from around the Circuit. A mutually agreed record of the vocational conversation, confidential to those involved (in addition to the Chair of District, who would be sent a copy), should be retained by the parties to the conversation, for use in future stationing discernment.
- 18.4.2 Whilst it is recognised that some of these aspects of vocation might be explored by the minister within their Supervision or as suggested above as part of their MDR, the vocational conversation in this context is intended to be an opportunity for mutual exploration of mission and ministry in the

¹⁸ Available at https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/ministerialdevelopmentreview_final_Bc1lxRw.pdf

local context.

- 18.4.3 Because decisions on reinventions are ultimately made by the Circuit Meeting, it is crucial that members of the Circuit Meeting are informed of and trust the process by which discernment would take place through Vocational Conversations. If desired, they could then feed in their views to those involved. The themes of the VCs would be brought to the Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) early in the penultimate year of a current period of invitation, for careful consideration alongside the needs of the Circuit and the minister and their family/friends' situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With effect from 1 September 2025, Circuit Meetings should review annually the provision of ministry across the Circuit, linked to the Circuit Mission Plan, and offer space for ministers to reflect on their ministry.

With effect from 1 September 2026, a vocational conversation shall take place between each minister, their minister in oversight and at least one circuit steward, as described in this report. A mutually agreed record of the conversation, confidential to those involved (in addition to the District Chair and in the case of a deacon, the Warden of the Order, who should be sent a copy), should be retained by the parties to the conversation, for use in future stationing discernment.

- 18.4.4 The CLT and/or the minister might wish, when considering a reinvention, to seek perspectives from others in the Circuit and beyond the life of the Church (eg community groups, ecumenical partners) through a mutually agreed process of consultation.
- 18.4.5 The SRG recommends that should a consultation take place, feedback given in the reinvention process should be attributable. Feedback offered anonymously can be greatly damaging to a minister, as they have no way to have a helpful conversation with the person who has raised it, to understand better the effect of their own actions or to explain a misunderstanding. A sign of Christian maturity is to 'own' our point of view, particularly if we offer it to others. If people have significant concerns about the actions or inactions of a minister, they should be raised in a timely fashion, not through a process that may only happen every four or so years. Attributable feedback can be challenged, which enables an iterative process with the potential for transformation and the clearing up of misunderstandings. On a more positive note, to know who has found a minister helpful in their faith journey allows a flourishing and deepening of relationships. Whilst some circuit stewards are very wise in what they share with a minister following a consultation process, some feel duty bound to share everything and such a lack of filtering (enabled through anonymity) can be devastating to an individual's ministry.

RECOMMENDATION

With effect from 1 September 2025, where a consultation takes place regarding an extension to the length of an appointment, all feedback given should be attributable.

18.5 Suggested Simplified Reinvitation Process

The diagram below offers a simplified reinvention process, which is not reliant on a once in four-year conversation, rather on regular oversight conversations between stewards and minister, and staged vocational conversations. Wider consultation should only be undertaken if both parties agree that it would be helpful. The model and scope of consultation should be mutually agreed.

During the course of regular meetings and conversations the minister discerns that an extension to their current appointment would be helpful. Opinions of the Superintendent and others have been sought in the context of these meetings.



Statement prepared by the minister in consultation and with input from one or two Circuit Stewards and the Superintendent (or District Chair) giving the reasons for requesting reinvitation.



The statement is circulated to the Circuit Invitation Committee which then meets to consider the document.



The CIC meets with the minister to discuss the Statement and period of extension. The CIC works with the minister to consider if any feedback should be sought.



If decided that this is not necessary, at this point, the Minister leaves the meeting. The Committee decides whether or not it will recommend a reinvitation.



If consultation is to take place, the CIC will meet again with the minister and, based on feedback and that conversation, will make a recommendation to the Circuit Meeting.



The minister is informed of the decision immediately following the meeting. However, the decision should not be a surprise. All salient points including any doubts should have been discussed in the presence of the minister.



The CIC prepares a Reasoned Statement for the Circuit Meeting. This explains the reason for the recommendation to offer a reinvitation or not.



At the point when a Reasoned Statement is circulated to the Circuit Meeting, the current processes would remain in place.

RECOMMENDATION

The model of discernment and reinvitation described in the flowchart be adopted from the stationing year 2026/27.

19. Where an Appointment is Required

- 19.1 When a Circuit has decided that an appointment is required it will need to draw up a profile for the appointment setting out the role and the desired length of the appointment, in consultation with the District Chair and Lay Stationing Representative and, in the case of diaconal appointments, with the Warden of the Order. The appointment will need to be agreed by the District Policy Committee (DPC), which will have a view on where ministry is most needed in the District. Once it has been agreed by the DPC, the profile will be submitted to a newly formed Connexional Stationing Strategy Committee (SSC) for matching. DPCs will have the option to delegate this scrutiny to a specific group (e.g. a 'District Stationing Strategy Group').
- 19.2 Whilst the term *interregnum* does not fit with our Methodist understanding of the leadership of the Local Church and Circuit, the SRG acknowledges the number of correspondents who have used the term to suggest that a system of planned vacancies will reduce pressure on the stationing matching process. *Interregna* cannot take place in our Methodist polity, because because pastoral charge is exercised by presbyters in the active work who are appointed to a circuit (SO 700(7)). However, the day-to-day pastoral and missional work of a church can be held by a range of lay staff or volunteers, operating under the oversight of an identified presbyter. When an appointment comes to an end, rather than a Circuit automatically re-entering a profile for the same appointment in the same Circuit, discernment needs to take place to decide whether a vacancy should be filled immediately. Circuits should work with their District Policy Committee and representatives to the Regional Stationing Group in working out their own needs and how these fit strategically with ministerial deployment across a group of Circuits, a District or region. Such an approach could ease some of the pressure between the number of appointments and available ministry resources and would encourage Circuits to take the time properly to review ministry needs, to think about future staffing, and to think critically about what kind of ministry is needed. Such vacancies are common features in our sister Churches (the URC and CofE particularly) and the Churches concerned have become accustomed to this feature. At the present time this happens by accident or necessity not by design in our Methodist system of stationing.

RECOMMENDATION

With effect from 1 September 2026, a reasoned statement supporting the submission of a circuit profile into stationing be submitted to the relevant District Policy Committee (or their designated body). Only if the DPC agrees will that appointment enter stationing. A copy of the reasoned statement should be sent to the Stationing Strategy Committee and relevant Regional Stationing Group.

20. Circuit Profile

- 20.1 It is crucial that profiles accurately describe the appointments. This is both to help the SSC to prioritise appointments and to assist presbyters in making well-informed judgements about where they can best be deployed. The profiles should be accurate in the way that they describe and reflect the churches, the local community, and the vision for the appointment. Profiles should include a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/challenges identified). Profiles should also include factual information on membership and attendance trends, and describe how the churches in the appointment are living out or working towards the Methodist Church's commitment to being an evangelistic, growing, inclusive and justice-seeking church.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to design circuit and presbyteral profile forms as described in paragraph 20.1 of this report.

Circuits are encouraged to use modern technology in describing themselves and their contexts, using links in profiles to videos and within information packs sent to ministers prior to a visit.

21. Length of Appointments

- 21.1 The SRG recommends that the length of appointments be flexibly determined to reflect the needs of Circuits and presbyters. *Changing Patterns of Ministry* 5.2.5.b identified a need for ‘...greater flexibility in the length of appointments within the stationing matching process...’¹⁹ including the possibility of ministers indicating that they are willing to offer, for example, three, five or seven years in a particular appointment (instead of the current five) before there is a reinvitation process. This suggestion led to a change in SO 543(1) with the addition of the word “normally” when referencing the five year initial term. The SRG recommends a further development of this approach.
- 21.2 A number of factors informs this perspective. *Changing Patterns of Ministry* describes how church growth theory (which pertains to the study of the nature, function, and wellbeing of the Church, specifically in its efforts to fulfil Christ’s commandment to ‘go, and make disciples of all the nations’ (Matthew 28:19)) suggests that the minimum time for consistent leadership to enable change and lasting growth within a church community is seven years. ‘Some researchers in other denominations have proposed that...church growth is likely to happen best somewhere between the fifth and twelfth years of a ministry.’²⁰ Of course, growth and culture change are not only the work of the ordained in the life of the Church, but there can be significant benefits in a period of sustained and consistent leadership.
- 21.3 The survey highlighted similar perspectives, with the view that five years is too long if things are not working out but simply too short to embed sufficient culture change where that is needed.
- ‘Five years is too short, less stability for Circuits/only really working on mission for two years (two years getting your feet in, two years working on mission, and one year winding down).’*
- 21.4 The costs of ministers moving between manse has increased dramatically in the last few years, averaging at over £4,000. Ministers often bear personal expenses when moving, beyond the £600 grant available, and there are environmental costs involved in moving house which speak against our commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2030. In addition to this, disruption to family life, partners’ careers and the need to support grandchildren or aging parents all speak against too frequent moves in ministry. The first Stationing Review Survey offered a mixed picture of people’s perspectives on the length of a ‘standard appointment’ which suggests that Methodist ministers are still committed to itinerancy, at least in terms of the length of an appointment.
- 21.5 Longer appointments may lead to an increase in the number of curtailments: however, it can be hoped that greater flexibility in recognising the needs of ministers and families might mitigate against this. The word ‘curtailment’ retains an element of stigma about it, which is unfortunate, as appointments are curtailed for a number of reasons. Discernment as to whether a minister remains in an appointment until the end of the current invitation should be an ongoing matter as considered in the reinvitation section of this report.
- ‘Flexibility would address a minister’s (and their family’s) needs (desire to sit down, education) and the finances or needs of the Circuit/the need of other Circuits.’*
- ‘Some appointments don’t work, flexible approach would eliminate the need for (negatively viewed) curtailment and waiting for re-stationing.’*
- ‘Flexibility would allow a minister/circuit to say let’s give this a go and see or alternatively it would allow longer appts. - especially helpful where there are children in education etc.’*
- ‘With the fragility of Circuit Finances, I think we need more flexibility. Clearly, this has to work for presbyters (and especially those with dependents, eg children at schools), before shorter than 5 years are offered. But, the possibility of a shorter appointment (for a presbyter who is content with this) may help Circuits apply for a presbyter who will, for example, take on a new Missional-based project, and to be bold, and help ensure finance is less of an obstacle.’²¹*
- 21.6 The SRG proposes the following approach:
- That an appointment can be up to seven years in the first instance.

¹⁹ *Changing Patterns* 5.2.5b.T

²⁰ *Changing Patterns*: 5.1.3.

²¹ Quotes taken from the 2023 Survey, Q51.

- That a circuit states on its appointment profile the length of the appointment they are looking to be filled and declares that the appointment can be funded for that period.
- That presbyters and deacons indicate the length of appointment they are looking for at that stage in their ministry (e.g. three years until they wish to sit down, seven years to give stability to their children's education, flexible between four and six years, etc.).
- Matches may still be made when there is not a direct correlation between the lengths of time offered.
- In the case of presbyters, the matching visit will include a conversation about the length of appointment prior to an invitation being offered. For presbyters and deacons an agreed length of appointment will be stated in the Letter of Understanding.
- Subsequent appointment periods would normally not exceed a further five years. In any case where a minister would be in an appointment for more than 10 years, the current requirement for a 75% vote in favour at the Circuit Meeting (in cases where a vote is required) should be retained.

RECOMMENDATION

With effect from 1 September 2025, the length of appointments be determined according to the approach outlined in paragraph 21.6 of the report.

22. Stationing Strategy Committee (SSC)

- 22.1 Once appointment profiles have been agreed by DPCs they should be submitted to a newly formed Stationing Strategy Committee. The SSC will replace the Stationing Committee and will have a strategic overview of stationing across the Connexion, with all the necessary data available to it to make informed decisions. It will also take on the responsibilities of the Stationing Advisory Committee (SAC) in setting up panels to consider applications from presbyters and deacons in Full Connexion and probationers for full-time service in chaplaincies and appointments not within the control of the Church, and to make recommendations to the Conference or to the President, ensuring that decisions regarding permissions given to presbyters and deacons will be made with a strategic overview of the stationing needs of the Church.
- 22.2 Current Standing Orders describe work of the SAC in broad strategic terms. In reality most of the work of the SAC has been in carefully working with ministers to help them discern vocational direction, whilst the Stationing Committee has been the place for the broad strategic thinking. The SRG believe that the new SSC is the appropriate place to hold a strategic overview of all stationing matters and that, through a panel convenor, reporting to the SSC, the essential work currently done by the SAC can be carried out.

Terms of Reference for the Stationing Strategy Committee

- (1) There shall be a connexional Stationing Strategy Committee appointed annually by the Conference, which shall consist of:
 - (i) a lay chair, being the person for the time being appointed to that office in accordance with clause (2) below;
 - (ii) a lay deputy chair, being appointed by the Ministries Committee
 - (iii) the Secretary of the Conference, and the Assistant Secretary of the Conference who shall act as convener;
 - (iv) seven district Chairs, appointed with a view to the representation of suitable regional groupings of Districts; one of whom shall be the district Chair appointed under Standing Order 286 to be a member of the Forces Board, and one of whom shall be Chair of the Diaconal Stationing Sub-committee;
 - (v) seven district Lay Stationing Representatives appointed with a view to the representation of suitable regional groupings of Districts;
 - (vi) the Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministry (MCOOM)
 - (vii) the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order;
 - (viii) a lay member of the Diaconal Stationing Sub-committee;
 - (ix) the chair of the group responsible on behalf of the Stationing Strategy Committee for overseeing the matching of particular presbyters to appointments (Stationing Matching Group);
 - (x) The Convenor of panels which offer vocational discernment support for ministers in accordance with clause (8) below.
- (2) A lay person shall be appointed by the Conference as chair of the committee. The chair shall be appointed for a period not exceeding three years in the first instance and may be appointed

for further periods of one or more years thereafter. Any nomination for appointment beyond six years shall require a resolution of the Ministries Committee carried by a majority of 75% of those present and voting and reported, with a reasoned statement, to the Conference. No person shall hold office as chair for more than nine years consecutively.

- (3) The chair of the committee and the Assistant Secretary of the Conference shall attend the committee only in their official character as specially charged with the general interests of the whole Church and shall not be eligible for appointment in any other capacity.
 - (4) The committee shall, as prescribed in Section 78, recommend to the Conference the stations for the ensuing year of presbyters, deacons and probationers to the several Districts and Circuits, including presbyters and deacons in chaplaincies and appointments not within the control of the Church. Reporting to the Ministries Committee as provided in Standing Order 311 it shall advise on stationing policy, and in particular shall assess priorities for the appointments to be made by the Conference of the next connexional year and, after appropriate consultation, for the appointment of additional presbyters and deacons in the Circuits and Districts. It shall obtain and consider information and opinions offered by district Policy Committees and the Connexional Team. It shall keep under review the stationing code of practice and shall determine the number of stations available to ministers of other Conferences and Churches not already serving the Church.
- As to the appointment of additional presbyters and deacons to Circuits, see S.O. 529, 438(1).
- (5) Discussion in the committee about particular ministers and appointments shall be absolutely confidential.
 - (6) The committee shall appoint a Diaconal Stationing Sub-committee to advise the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order upon the recommendations to be made for diaconal stationing under Standing Order 783 and related matters.
 - (7) The committee shall appoint an Action Group to deal with stationing difficulties and emergencies as they arise.
 - (8) The committee shall appoint panels to consider applications from presbyters and deacons in Full Connexion and probationers for full-time service in chaplaincies and appointments not within the control of the Church
 - (10) The committee shall have power to appoint other sub-committees to carry out aspects of its work. All actions of such sub-committees shall be subject to the approval of the committee.
 - (11) The committee shall decide which appointments submitted into the stationing matching process, fall into particular categories (for example Priority, Probationer, Diaconal, 'too small').
 - (12) The committee shall:
 - (i) perform the functions prescribed by Standing Order 802 in relation to part-time appointments;
 - (ii) perform the functions prescribed by Standing Orders 790(3) and 793(1) in relation to applications to become a supernumerary or to return to the active work;
 - (iii) advise the President or the Vice-President on behalf of the President on recommendations which would involve a presbyter's or deacon's moving during the course of the connexional year;
 - (iv) perform such other functions as may be required from time to time by Standing Orders

RECOMMENDATIONS

With effect from 1 September 2026, a Stationing Strategy Committee should be established according to the Terms of Reference set out above.

With effect from 1 September 2026, the Stationing Advisory Committee will cease to meet.

With effect from 1 September 2026, the Stationing Committee will cease to meet.

- 22.3 The SRG proposes that the SSC meet in early October to decide which appointments fall into the following categories:
- Priority appointments based on agreed criteria and expected to be no more than ten per cent of appointments. Criteria as to which appointments are to be priority appointments will be determined by the Ministries Committee and are likely to include island and other traditionally hard to fill appointments.
 - Diaconal appointments (in consultation with the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee): Circuits may submit profiles specifically for diaconal appointments, presbyteral appointments, or open profiles – open to both. Deacons will continue to be directly stationed.
 - Standard presbyteral appointments which will be open to those in stationing in a particular year, including Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences.

- Presbyteral probationer appointments (all diaconal appointments can be deemed to be suitable for probationer deacons).
- Too small' appointments. These may be sent back for reshaping, recommendations to be part time, included in the next round of matching or rejected. The number of members in a particular appointment will not be the only criterion when considering this category. The Ministries Committee will agree what factors need to be taken into account in this category, in consultation with the Chair of SSC (who will be a member of the Ministries Committee as per SO310).

22.5 Regional Stationing Representatives and the Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministries will engage with District Chairs and/or circuit stewards regarding the appropriateness of appointments identified as probationer appointments. Once agreed, those profiles go forward into Initial Stationing.

Accepted presbyters from other Conferences and Churches will be able to offer for any standard presbyteral appointment in the same ways as any other presbyter in the stationing system from the point of their acceptance by a transfer panel. Such acceptance remains, as is currently the case, dependent on a successful match being made.

23. Presbyteral Expressions of Interest and Profiles

- 23.1 Once the SSC has categorised them, profiles describing the requirements of circuit presbyteral appointments (of either type – priority or standard) will be published and visible to all presbyters currently in stationing. Priority appointments would be published and visible to all presbyters in Full Connexion.
- 23.2 This approach encourages presbyters to identify and express interest in the appointments where they believe they are most likely to flourish. They will then be matched to a single appointment by the Stationing Matching Group working in accordance with the principles set out earlier.
- 23.3 It is anticipated that presbyters would be attracted to priority appointments as places where they could best be used. As well as those in stationing, expressions of interest in **priority** appointments would also be welcomed from all presbyters, regardless of whether they would normally be moving in a particular year. If such presbyters were matched in this way then their existing appointment would be eligible to enter the stationing process in a subsequent round.
- 23.4 Presbyters 'in stationing' would be invited to express interest in up to three appointments where they believe they best match what the circuit is looking for. This information would be used by Circuit Invitation Committees in considering presbyters interested in their appointments.
- 23.5 The SRG recommends that presbyters offering to be stationed submit three-part profile forms. The first part would consist of an expression of interest for each appointment where they would like to be stationed. Such expressions of interest should state why they are attracted to the appointment and describe how their skills and experience match any specific requirements of the appointment. The second part would be similar to existing presbyteral profiles and list their skills and experience. The third part would be for the use only of those representing the minister in matching. This would contain further information which would be useful to be shared with SSC but does not need to be available to all (eg training and development needs that have been identified, reasonable adjustments that may be required (both in the appointment and in any stationing visit), pertinent family and personal matters and matters pertaining to why a particular geography or context may be helpful, with anything else that the minister believes is relevant to their stationing process).
- 23.6 The Stationing Review Survey offered a range of perspectives as to the appropriate length of profiles.²² The SRG recommends that presbyter and presbyteral appointment profiles be in electronic format, each section having a word limit (rather than a two sides of A4 restriction as now) enabling those discerning what are appropriate matches to have more information available to them.
- 23.7 The idea of 'live' profiles, held in a safe online format and updated regularly by ministers, was discussed by the SRG. The Group is aware that this concept was considered previously by the Ministries Committee and understands that complexity and cost prevented implementation. Whilst the SRG does not, at this time, recommend a centralised approach to the storage and use of

²² NB diaconal profile forms differ in length from those of presbyters.

profiles, it does recommend that each minister review their own profile each year, as part of their Ministerial Development Review, and update it accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Stationing Committee prepare Profile forms for presbyters as described in paragraphs 23.5 to 23.6 of this report.

That Diaconal and Presbyteral Appointment Profiles should be available in a suitable electronic format.

24. Matching Presbyters to Appointments

- 24.1 Having carried out a review of the ecumenical information, the SRG considered a number of different approaches to stationing. These ranged from direct stationing at one extreme to an entirely free market approach at the other.
- 24.2 Among the reasons for rejecting the direct stationing approach were, firstly, the survey results. Circuit stewards did not favour direct stationing, 72% against with 38% of those polled arguing that the possibility of either the Circuit or the presbyter to be able to say yes or no based on a variety of factors including visits, is paramount to successful stationing. Secondly, direct stationing contradicts some of the principles we have identified, particularly giving agency to presbyters and Circuits. Thirdly, we doubt that any group could be sufficiently well informed to match successfully so many presbyters and appointments.
- 24.3 In terms of the Diaconal Order, the expectation is that deacons will continue to be directly stationed by the Conference on the recommendation of the Warden, following discernment by the Diaconal Stationing Sub Committee. This complementary approach regarding stationing processes for both orders of ministry can be seen to honour the distinctive nature of diaconal ministry and the commitment to membership of a religious order which deacons enter when received into full connexion.
- 24.4 Whilst some may be drawn to the idea of an entirely free market in terms of advertising appointments in the way that many Church of England appointments are dealt with, this speaks against our connexional approach. Indeed, the 1997 Report of a previous Stationing Review Group reported that when a similar free market approach was used 'it has become an undignified stampede, a free-for-all based on competition'.
- 24.5 The SRG's recommended approach is one where presbyters express interest in appointments that are first scrutinised connexionally, then are matched by a connexional matching group, prior to a visit to a circuit, which continues to be the body that issues the invitation. The recommended approach differs from the current approach to stationing in that it uses information more efficiently and reduces work for circuit stewards in that they do not need to engage with many pages of profiles of those who are unlikely (for various reasons) to be matched with them. Rather than providing indicative lists, presbyters explain why they are well matched to particular appointments, Circuits are then invited to review only the presbyters who have expressed an interest in their appointments.
- 24.6 **Initial Screening by SSC**
Once all presbyteral appointments have been published and expressions of interest received from presbyters, the SSC would check that connexional priorities could be achieved. In particular, whether sufficient expressions of interest had been received to fill priority appointments. If this was not the case SSC would liaise with Regional Stationing Groups to see if presbyters who were well matched to hard-to-fill priority appointments could be encouraged to express interest. The SSC should also check that expressions of interest are not weighted in favour of particular regions. If that were the case SSC could recommend that disadvantaged regions are prioritised in the matching process.
- 24.7 **Views of Circuit Invitation Committees Sought**
Once this initial screening had taken place, Circuit Invitation Committees would be asked to review the profiles of those presbyters who had expressed interest in their appointments and provide perspectives through Chairs and Lay Stationing Representatives (LSRs) to SSC on their suitability as a key component of the matching process. An important role for the Chairs and LSRs here would be to ensure that choices are non-discriminatory and that personal information is protected. CICs would not see any information about presbyters who had not expressed interest in their

appointments. No conversation about a minister should take place without their knowledge and careful notes should be kept of such a conversation.

24.8 Matches are Made

- 24.8.1 The SMG would match presbyters to appointments by following agreed and transparent protocols.
- 24.8.2 It is important to be aware that, when presbyters are able to express interest in more than one appointment and several presbyters are interested in the same appointment, the protocols used in the matching process will influence the matches that are made. In particular, the matches made will depend upon the order in which appointments are considered: appointments that are considered early in the matching process are more likely to be matched.
- 24.8.3 When completing 'Part three' of their profile form, presbyters should state if they are willing to be matched to appointments other than those in which they have expressed interest in a particular matching round. This gives a Chair of District/LSR discretion when making matches, should a minister not be matched with one of their three expressions of interest. Some presbyters may choose to decline this possibility and wait until a subsequent round, when they will be able to express interest in remaining appointments.
- 24.8.4 What follows is an approach to matching that embeds the principles set out earlier. Appendix 3 contains a stylised example of how the approach would work.
- 24.8.5 To encourage ministry where it is most needed, Priority appointments would be considered first. Following the initial screening by SSG, some standard appointments could also be prioritised to ensure that regions that had received few expressions of interest are not left with too few presbyters. It is hoped that there are sufficient expressions of interest from presbyters that all Priority and prioritised appointments can be matched. Assuming this is the case, then the recommended protocol is to match the appointment with the lowest number of expressions of interest first. If more than one presbyter has offered for this appointment, then the match would be made with the presbyter preferred by that appointment's CIC but taking into account any particular pastoral needs or limited deployability of those offering for particular appointments. Once the first match is made, the Priority appointment with the next lowest number of expressions of interest would be matched next using the same procedure. This process would continue until all Priority and prioritised appointments are matched.
- 24.8.6 If some Priority and prioritised appointments remain unmatched at this stage then the SMG could propose that well-matched presbyters are stationed to such appointments even if they have not offered for them. It would clearly not be desirable for Priority and prioritised appointments not to be filled and for well-matched presbyters to be stationed elsewhere without good reason.
- 24.8.7 Once all Priority and prioritised appointments are matched, the SMG would turn to matching Standard appointments. Given the likely continuing shortfall of presbyters, some of these appointments will not be matched in this round. These will include appointments that received no interest as well as appointments to which presbyters had expressed interest but who were matched to other appointments earlier in the matching process.
- 24.8.8 The recommended protocol is the same as for Priority and prioritised appointments - in other words, to start matching from the appointments where only one presbyter has expressed an interest. It is possible that SMG may also wish to prioritise certain types of presbyteral appointments, such as superintendencies, in which case they could be considered first, but otherwise all appointments at this stage should be treated as of equal priority and none more favoured than others.
- 24.8.9 As stated earlier the SRG is clear that no system of matching will address the shortfall of ministers to appointments. It is hoped that careful prioritisation will enable key appointments to be matched. The possibility of planned vacancies (within our understanding of oversight) and flexibility in the length of appointments would also help in sharing scarcity across the Connexion in a fair and missionally focussed way. It is hoped that opening Priority appointments to all presbyters in Full Connexion will create a fluidity in the system that allows people to respond vocationally.
- 24.8.10 Nevertheless, it will be important for SMG to check that the matches generated by this approach result in a distribution of unfilled appointments that is equitable across the Connexion. If this is not the case, then it should re-examine the suggested matches.

- 24.8.11 Unmatched appointments will be re-published once the first round of matching visits has taken place and those presbyters remaining in the system will be able to express interest in those.
- 24.8.12 Appendix 3 contains a worked example of how the recommended matching process would work. In the case considered, there is a built-in shortage of presbyters and expressions of interest are well spread across appointments. This means that not all appointments can be matched though all presbyters are.
- 24.8.13 In practice, some presbyters who express interest in only the more popular appointments may find themselves unmatched at first. In that case those presbyters would be invited to express interest in unfilled appointments. This process would continue until all are matched.
- 24.8.14 There is potentially an issue with this approach for presbyters with geographical limitations. While the SRG's preferred system gives presbyters 'agency' in where they offer to go, and so should be helpful to presbyters with geographical limitations, they could face challenges when too many presbyters offer in the same geographical area and the circuits prefer presbyters who would like to be there rather than those that need to be there. In cases like this it would be important for SMG to consider whether it would be beneficial from a connexional perspective to prioritise presbyters with geographical limitations over those who are fully itinerant. If SMG judged that this was the case then it could intervene in the matching process by prioritising presbyters with geographical limitations over those who might have been preferred by Circuit Invitation Committees. Given the ongoing shortage of ministers throughout the Connexion, it should be quite rare for presbyters not to be able to find an appointment in the vicinity of their preferred geographical area, so this issue should not arise very often.
- 24.8.15 As in current practice, presbyters and Circuits will be asked to complete feedback forms where a match has not stuck. These are to be sent to the relevant Chair of District, lay stationing representatives, Assistant Secretary of the Conference, Chair of SMG and Chair of the Stationing Strategy Committee.

25. Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences (MOCC)

- 25.1 The Methodist Church has been greatly enriched and blessed by the ministries of those who have been granted Recognised and Regarded status or transferred into Full Connexion, from other Churches and Conferences. The Stationing Committee, supported by the Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministries, has carefully considered the number of ministers of other conferences and churches that might be stationed each year – currently agreeing a maximum of twelve such appointments in addition to a Global Communities Chaplain. Matters around the costs of visas for those wishing to transfer who do not have the automatic right to work in Britain have been complex, as has the status of the Church as a sponsoring body for such visa holders. A pause on the MOCC transfer process was put in place for the connexional years 2020-2023 to enable time to consider further the complexities and costs of the current system. The Stationing and Ministries Committees, on hearing the significant number of those offering to transfer and recognising both the backlog this created and the severe shortage of ministers available to fill circuit appointments, agreed that MOCC applicants who had the right to work in Britain should be able to apply for transfer and stationing in 2024. The whole process has now reopened (with the cap on the number of appointments retained) for stationing in 2025. The costs of visas and questions of how many members of a minister's family and what other costs the MCB should pay for remain unresolved. A question remains as to what we can afford as a Church (recognising that other Churches and Conferences will have paid for the training of the applicants and so overall costs may not be preventative).

RECOMMENDATIONS

With effect from 1 September 2026, an annual conversation should take place between representatives of the Resourcing Committee and the Stationing Strategy Committee (SSC) to agree what is affordable for the subsequent year's stationing of MOCCs requiring visa support.

The SSC will establish the number of MOCC appointments to be accepted based on the projected stationing needs for the year concerned and taking affordability into account.

26. Stationing Visits

- 26.1 Stationing visits take place once the matches have been made. These would generally be expected to 'stick' because both presbyters and CICs had 'agency' in the matching process.
- 26.2 Nevertheless, in practice there may need to be additional rounds of matching if visits do not result in a match sticking, or other eventualities, such as when the existing appointments of not-in-stationing presbyters matched to priority appointments are entered into the process.
- 26.3 Guidance for those arranging visits should include awareness that people differ in what works for them; therefore, remembering to ask ministers what will help them to discern and be comfortable whilst on a visit is important. Matters of accessibility, personality preferences (eg for a busy visit with lots of people, or a longer visit with space to reflect), neurodiversity and the possibility of family/friends being part of the visit, all need to be carefully considered.
- 26.4 An agreed deadline will apply as to when reports of matches are sent to the Stationing Strategy Committee. The SSC will meet to review what appointments remain unfilled and what ministers remain available. They will agree at which point to publish to those remaining in stationing the posts as yet unfilled. Once a second round of matching and visits has taken place, the SSC will then meet monthly to agree matches of any remaining ministers and appointments (as the Stationing Action Group currently undertakes).

RECOMMENDATION

That from the stationing year 2027/28, the matching of ministers to appointments takes place using the process described in paragraphs 24.1 to 24.8.15 and paragraphs 26.1 to 26.4 above.

- 26.5 The SRG recommends that a Stationing Newsletter be circulated connexionally after the first round of matches has been agreed. This should include statistics on the number and type of appointments, the number of presbyters in the process, and the number of appointments remaining unfilled, as well as reflections on the process. This is intended to inform the Connexion of the challenges in stationing and assist with planning for future appointments.

RECOMMENDATION

That from the stationing year 2027/28, a Stationing Newsletter be issued as described in paragraph 26.5 above.'

27. Overall Approach

- 27.1 The recommended approach in this report aligns with the principles set out earlier. It is fully transparent in that all presbyters in stationing can see the details of any appointment, all in Full Connexion can see the details of Priority appointments and offer for them if they wish, and all will know the process by which decisions are made. The matching process itself is open to external scrutiny and personal information will be circulated only to those who need to see it. Lay participation is fully part of the process. Connexional oversight can help ensure non-discriminatory practices are adhered to. The identification of a limited number of Priority appointments helps ensure that ministry is where it is needed most. Decisions about the timing of particular recommendations coming into effect depend on the amount of work that needs to be done in preparation. For example, District Policy Committees will need guidance in helping them review all appointments and time will be needed to write such guidance and offer training where needed.
- 27.2 Many of the recommendations in this report do not require Standing Order changes, but a number do. Therefore, the SRG asks the Conference to direct the Law and Polity Committee to bring any necessary Standing Order revisions to the Conference of 2026.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

18/1. The Conference received the Report.

18/2. WITHDRAWN

18/3. WITHDRAWN

18/4. WITHDRAWN

- 18/5. WITHDRAWN**
- 18/6. The Conference adopted the recommendations in paragraph 22.2 and directed the Law and Polity Committee to prepare draft Standing Orders for the Stationing Strategy Committee.**
- 18/7. WITHDRAWN**
- 18/8. The Conference adopted the recommendations in paragraph 25.1.**
- 18/9. WITHDRAWN**
- 18/10. WITHDRAWN**
- 18/11. WITHDRAWN**
- 18/12. The Conference thanked the Stationing Review Group for its work and referred the outstanding matters in the report to the Ministries Committee for consultation with the Stationing Committee and other bodies as appropriate and directed that a further report be brought to the Conference of 2026.**

Appendix 1 - Terms of Reference

The Council in April 2022 adopted the following terms of reference for the review:

1. *The Ministries Committee at its meeting in February 2022 resolved that a thorough review of stationing processes be undertaken due to the number of concerns raised by the Ministries Committee, Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, Chairs' Meeting, Connexional Leaders' Forum and gatherings of superintendent ministers in districts and connexionally.*
2. *This review will report to the Methodist Conference in 2023 and will involve consultation with the Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, Circuit Stewards, Chairs of District, The Warden of the Diaconal Order, Lay-Stationing Representatives, ministers with recent experience of being stationed; as well as the Methodist Church in Ireland and ecumenical partners able to offer insights from different models of stationing practice.*

Task

3. *To undertake a root and branch review of all processes related to the stationing of ministers in the Methodist Church.*
4. *To report to the 2023 Conference with recommendations for changes to those processes and the necessary changes to Standing Orders.*

To Take into Account

5. *The review group will address a number of concerns that have arisen in recent years that affect the Church's ability to offer ministry effectively and fairly. These include:*
 - 5.1 *Ministers retiring, resigning, curtailing and transferring to other churches.*
 - 5.2 *A rising number of ministers (both lay and ordained) taking recuperative years.*
 - 5.3 *A reduction in the number of those candidating for ministry; the shortage of ministers available for the number of appointments submitted to stationing; changing roles and responsibilities for those in ministry (lay and ordained). Particular notice to be taken of factors affecting diaconal stationing, which seems less impacted by numbers candidating and at times has seen insufficient appointments available for the number of deacons in stationing.*
 - 5.4 *How our stationing processes can best meet the needs of mission and ministry on the ground, without a skewing of allocated resources to only those places that can afford them.*
6. *The 2021 Conference Report 'Changing Patterns of Ministry' is a key resource for the stationing review process, as the Review Group explores:*
 - 6.1 *The decrease in the commitment to itinerancy amongst those in active work, possibly due to an increase in pressure around the support of family members. An apparent unwillingness of many of those being stationed to take up ministry in rural, island, 'outlying' (e.g. North of Scotland, Cornwall) areas.*
 - 6.2 *The decrease of a physical presence in churches due to the ongoing pandemic and the increase of virtual worship.*
7. *The Review Group will also review the stationing process for Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences (MOCCs) for, while there is an increase in ministers wishing to be stationed, this is not matched by enthusiasm of a number of circuits to receive such ministry. This process has been further complicated by immigration policies and our responsibility as a sponsoring body.*
 - 7.1 *This review will also explore the reluctance of some circuits to receive probationary ministers.*
 - 7.2 *The review group will explore how the implementation of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Strategy; the adoption by the Conference of the Connexional Safeguarding policies and the God In Love Unites Us report impacts on our stationing process.*

Outcomes and Ways of Working

8. *The Stationing Review Group will propose revisions to the stationing matching process that take into account the changing nature of ministry, the costs both financial and environmental of our current way of working and the need for the JDS strategy to be embedded in all our ways of working.*
- 8.1 *The group will consider the length of a standard appointment and offer recommendations for changes as appropriate.*
9. *The Review Group is encouraged to consult widely, as described in paragraph 2 above; to be willing to think creatively and to co-opt or consult with those persons most able to assist it in its work.*

Membership of the Stationing Review Group

Chair of the Review Group: (The Revd David Emison until 2023)	Dr Garry Young
Convener:	The Revd Michaela Youngson (ASC)
Head of Ministries and Learning:	Mr Richard Armiger
Warden of the Diaconal Order:	Deacon Karen McBride
A current or former Circuit Steward:	Mrs Ann Lyons
Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee:	The Revd Naomi Kaiga (from Sept 2024) The Revd Delyth Liddell (until Aug 2024)
Chair of District:	The Revd Dr David Hinchliffe (from Sept 2024) The Revd Dr Julian Pursehouse (until Aug 2024)
Former or current District Lay Stationing Rep:	Dr Garry Young
Minister with experience of being stationed:	The Revd Manoa Ratubalavu

Appendix 2 - Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

The SRG has analysed the feedback that was collected on its preliminary recommendations. In this section we respond to many of the challenges that have been identified, including how we have revised our recommendations in the light of this feedback.

Q1: In what ways is the recommended system of stationing and matching better than the current approach?

A1: The Stationing Review Group fully recognises that no system of matching ministers with appointments can change the fundamental arithmetic that at present there are more appointments to be filled than presbyters or deacons to fill them. The proposals contained in this report cannot change that. So how do the recommendations seek to improve on the present system of stationing matching for presbyters?

- Increased agency to presbyters. Presbyters are able to identify and apply for appointments which seem to resonate with their gifts and skills.
- Priority appointments will be open to all presbyters to apply for, whether they are presently in stationing or not – increasing the potential pool of ministers able to apply for a priority appointment.
- Reduced frustration for circuit stewards. Circuit stewards have often fed back their feelings of frustration that they have to read all the stationing profiles, yet feel disempowered by the process because very often presbyters are not willing or able to serve in their area, and that even those presbyters highlighted on the circuit's indicative list are often not matched with them. This new system will mean that unnecessary work can be dispensed with, and circuits can ultimately focus on presbyters who have expressed a direct interest in their circuit.
- The District Policy Committee will play a significant role in robustly scrutinising draft appointments – nearer to source, rather than later down the line.
- The new model continues to highly value the close working of Chairs and Lay Stationing Reps. This will be reflected in numerous ways: as now, in briefing the circuits and ministers each year, in engaging in pastoral and discernment conversations with ministers and those close to them, and circuits, as they reflect on the future.

- It acknowledges that sometimes, circuits are not clear whether an appointment would be best filled by a presbyter, deacon, MOCC or probationer presbyter. The new process enables that discernment to carry on through the stationing process.
- It streamlines the stationing process more generally.

Q2: What is the difference between the recommended Vocational Conversations and existing Ministerial Development Review and supervision.?

A2: A more complete answer can be found to this question in paragraphs 18.4.1 to 18.4.2 above, however we can note that while the three processes appear similar in some ways, they serve different purposes and can occur at different times. Supervision is an ongoing oversight of a minister's whole appointment, the MDR is an annual conversation in which various foci of the minister's development of skills are discussed. While the Vocational Conversations are recommended to occur three times in a minister's appointment (and may be incorporated into the MDR) and are connected with receiving feedback from the community. The VCs are also connected with the reinvitation process.

Q3: Won't the recommendations mean more work for circuit stewards?

A3: Circuit stewards will not be required to do more work. The significant workload engendered by the current Consultation process will be replaced by the Staged Vocational Conversations that will take place at the end of the first year, during the middle year and during the penultimate year of a Minister's appointment.

Reinvitation

Survey results show that the current process of reinvitation is overwhelmingly disliked by ministers and circuit stewards. The Consultation process is lengthy, time consuming and creates an inordinate amount of work for circuit stewards especially when more than one minister is involved in a particular year.

Staged Vocational Conversations throughout a minister's appointment are a more appropriate, sensitive and helpful way of enabling discernment for both Ministers and Circuits. Circuit stewards will be responsible for organising and conducting these conversations. Not all circuit stewards will feel able to do this but, as with all circuit stewards' duties, responsibilities are shared out according to gifts, skills and inclination.

Stationing

From a circuit steward's perspective, the recommended stationing process will mean less work. Those on the Circuit Invitation Committee will not have to read through all the Presbyter Profiles to make an indicative list, time will not be wasted in making plans for a visit that might not happen and more time has been made available for visits so that arrangements need only to be made when a match is confirmed.

Q4: The proposed approach appears to prioritise the needs of presbyters over circuits. Is this correct?

A4: The short answer is 'No.' The intention remains for the system to serve the mission of the church while being 'sensitive to the needs and aspirations of ministers and circuits'. This is reflected in the principle that ministry should be where it is needed most. Districts, circuits, churches and presbyters all have a role to play in prayerfully discerning where ministry is most needed and for the most appropriate ministers to serve there. The proposed approach scrutinises and prioritises appointments and gives agency to presbyters in offering for appointments where they believe they can flourish as ministers. It also gives agency to circuits in choosing among the presbyters that might be available to them. While it will not be possible to satisfy everyone, in our view this approach has a better chance than the current system of achieving matches that best meet the needs of the Church.

The SRG is also acutely aware of the shortage of ministers relative to the number of available appointments. It also recognises that the well-being of many in ministry has been suffering and that this has negatively affected the mission of the church. For both reasons the needs of presbyters must be taken extremely seriously, and a priority will be for ministers to be stationed to appointments where they can flourish.

The recommended approach will have failed if it only meets the needs of presbyters and not circuits. If the proposed approach is implemented, it is important that there is regular monitoring of stationing to ensure that it is serving the mission of the church.

Q5: What about Circuits that will struggle to attract interest from ministers under the new system?

A5: With an ongoing shortage of ministers relative to the number of appointments, there are bound to be Circuits that will be disappointed. This also happens under the current system. Nevertheless, it is important that appointments where ministry can flourish are not unfairly disadvantaged by geographical remoteness or shortage of funding. This is reflected in the principle that ministry should be where it is needed most. By scrutinising and prioritising appointments, it is to be hoped that presbyters will express interest in priority appointments. If this does not happen then SMG will propose that well-matched presbyters are stationed to priority appointments even if they have not expressed interest in them. It would clearly not be desirable for priority appointments not to be filled and for well-matched presbyters to be stationed elsewhere without good reason.

Q6: Is there really greater agency for presbyters in the proposed system? Aren't decisions being transferred from a Connexional context to non-transparent Circuit Invitation Committees?

A6: There is greater agency for presbyters in the proposed system in that they are encouraged to express interest in up to three appointments, and to explain why they have the skills and experience to flourish in those appointments. Every effort will be made to match them to one of these appointments if they have the right skills and experience. Nevertheless this will depend on who else has expressed interest in the appointment and on the views of circuit invitation committees. Circuit Invitation Committees may prefer others and ultimately, as in the current system, following a visit, they will be able to discern whether a match is right.

Q7: How can the connexional principle be upheld if the principle of subsidiarity is to be the primary consideration in stationing of ministers?

A7: The principle of subsidiarity means that tasks should only be undertaken centrally if they cannot be performed at a more local level. In our Church the principle of subsidiarity cannot be the primary consideration in stationing of ministers. This is because decisions about the appropriate allocation of ministerial resources across alternative priorities need to be made at a Connexional level that is not constrained by regional boundaries. This is why the SRG did not advocate stationing ministers to districts (or regions) and leaving regions to station them to circuits. The principle of subsidiarity justifies reinventions being decided at a circuit level and the new strategic role for DPCs in scrutinising and submitting circuit profiles

Q8: Have you tested out the proposed approach to stationing?

A8: The most convincing test of the proposed approach is to run it for a year or two and rigorously evaluate the outcomes. The best practical alternative is to use available evidence to assess how the proposed system would have worked had it been in operation in a recent stationing year. Appendix 4 below reports an exercise that did this for SMG2 in January 2025. It highlights that better information for matching would be available under the proposed system. While it is not possible to know exactly how the proposed method of matching would have worked in practice, a trial using indicative lists available at SMG2 suggests it would have proposed alternative matches that would be considered as good as or better than the actual ones proposed at SMG2.

Q9: Is the proposed approach to stationing and matching more efficient than the current approach?

A9: We hope so. There is a lot of wasted time and effort in the current system. Examples include the current 'one size fits all' approach to reinventions that recommends a detailed consultation in every case and circuit stewards trawling through presbyteral profiles even though only a small number are likely to be interested in their appointments.

Q10: Because of the risk of discrimination, should profiles be anonymised?

A10: This was a question that the SRG carefully considered as the results of the surveys indicated that bias of Circuit officers was perceived from ministers of the LGBTQIA+ community, some living with disabilities and others with names that suggested a 'not-traditional' British name. Therefore, it was considered that profiles become anonymised in the hope that those who are involved in the process would pay more attention to the profiles themselves rather than the personality.

The conclusion by the Group was that profiles should remain non-anonymised for two reasons. Firstly, due to our proposed principle of transparency it was felt that a profile cannot be fully transparent and anonymous. Secondly, due to the shrinking size of the Church, Circuits and RSGs could quite easily figure out the identity of the minister who had expressed interest in the Circuit.

What was proposed instead is:

- That all processes will be open to independent scrutiny, paying particular attention to the Church's Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy.
- The training regarding unconscious bias and discrimination should continue to be mandatory for all involved in the reinvitation and stationing processes.
- The members chosen for the Regional Stationing Groups should represent the make-up of the Church.

Q11: Should deacons be stationed in the same way as presbyters?

A11: This is related to the Church's wider understanding which upholds diaconal ministry, the loving service modelled by Jesus, to be the pattern and calling of every disciple and that of the whole Church.

All deacons are under the discipline of direct stationing and commit to being itinerant through their period of 'active' service in order to serve where they are needed. The Order's Rule of Life states that deacons as members of the MDO commit to 'offer a lifetime of service which typically includes the discipline of itinerancy and direct stationing'.²³ Although, within this discipline it is recognised there may be some particular circumstances which may arise and these are born in mind within the stationing process for deacons.

Deacons, probationers and ordained alike, are matched to their appointments after a period of discernment by the Warden supported by the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee. These matches are recommended to The Conference who stations all the Church's ministers.

Appendix 3 - An example of the recommended matching protocol

The recommended matching protocol is to match Priority appointments first by proceeding in the following steps:

Step 1 The Priority appointment that received the least number of expressions of interest would be matched first to the interested presbyter preferred by the appointment's CIC. Any expressions of interest for other appointments by the matched presbyter would be withdrawn. If more than one Priority appointment had received the least number of expressions of interest, the order of matching would be determined by SMG.

Step 2 The Priority appointment that received the next lowest number of expressions of interest would then be matched to the presbyter preferred by that appointment's CIC. Any expressions of interest for other appointments by the matched presbyter would be withdrawn. If there is more than one Priority appointment with the same number of expressions of interest, the order of matching would be determined by SPMC.

Steps 3 on This process would continue until all Priority appointments have been considered.

If there are unfilled priority appointments at this stage, SMG should consider whether a different allocation ordering would have delivered an outcome where all priority appointments are filled. Standard appointments would then be matched.

Step 1 Those Standard appointments that received one expression of interest only would be matched first to those interested presbyters. Any other expressions of interest by these matched presbyters would be withdrawn. In the case that the same presbyter had offered for more than one of these Standard

²³ "Rule of Life of the Methodist Diaconal Order," CPD 2024 Part 5 p: 781-784.

appointments with only one expression of interest, the choice of which appointment to match them to would be made by SMG.

Step 2 Any standard appointments with two expressions of interest would then be matched to the presbyter preferred by that appointment's CIC. Any other expressions of interest by these matched applicants would be withdrawn.

Steps 3 on Continues until all presbyters are allocated.

As an example of how this process would work, Table A sets out in a highly stylised form the type of information that would be available to SMG assuming 12 appointments in 4 equal sized regional groups and 10 available presbyters who have each offered for 3 appointments. The priority appointments are indicated by *s. The expressions of interest made by each presbyter are indicated by √s (these have been generated randomly). For the purpose of this example, it is assumed that when more than one presbyter is available for an appointment, the appointment is filled with the lowest-numbered presbyter. In practice it would be filled in line with the preferences of the appointment's CIC.

Table A Stylised Example of Distribution of Expressions of Interest and Matching

Appointments:	Region A			Region B			Region C			Region D		
Presbyters:	1	2*	3	4	5	6	7	8*	9	10	11	12
1		√			√				√			
2				√				√				√
3					√			√	√			
4										√	√	√
5					√		√				√	
6	√							√			√	
7						√	√			√		
8	√							√				√
9						√				√	√	
10				√					√		√	
Total expressions of interest	2	1	0	2	3	2	2	4	3	3	5	3

According to the matching approach set out in the paper appointment 2 would be matched first as it is the priority appointment with only one expression of interest and it would be matched to presbyter 1. Appointment 8, with 4 expressions of interest, would then be matched to presbyter 2 (since lower numbered presbyters are assumed to be preferred). So both priority appointments would be matched in this case.

Turning to the standard (non-priority) appointments, the first to be matched would be appointment 4, as it has only one remaining interested presbyter (presbyter 10) once presbyter 2 has been matched to appointment 8.

The next appointments to be considered would be those with two remaining expressions of interest. These are appointments 1, 6, 7. Matching these in numerical order (lowest first) would result in presbyter 6 being matched with appointment 1, 7 with 6, and 5 with 7.

Continuing in this manner would result in presbyter 3 being matched with appointment 5, 4 with 10, 8 with 12 and 9 with 11.

Appointment 9 would be unmatched even though it originally received three applications because the presbyters interested in the appointment had already been matched by the time it was considered.

One appointment (3) had received no expressions of interest so it would also be unmatched.

Appendix 4 - Evidence from Stationing and Matching 2024-25

This appendix uses some statistics collected at SMG1 and SMG2 to assess how the proposed method of matching might work in practice. It highlights that many of the challenges raised about the proposed method are also relevant to the current method. It also highlights that better information for matching would be available under the proposed system. While it is not possible to know exactly how the proposed method of matching would have worked in practice, a trial using indicative lists available at SMG2 suggests it would have resulted in alternative matches that would be considered as good as or better than the actual ones proposed at SMG2.

Indicative lists

Under the current system of stationing and matching presbyters provide indicative lists of the appointments that they are most interested in and similarly circuits provide indicative lists of the presbyters that they think would best suit their appointments. This information is then used in guiding the matches proposed by SMG.

SMG1

At SMG1 in 2024 there were 107 appointments and 79 presbyters available for matching. The shortage of presbyters inevitably meant that only around three-quarters of all appointments would be offered a match at SMG1.

The chances of being offered a match and that match being agreed following the visit were much higher for appointments that appeared on the indicative lists of several presbyters. Only two out of the 13 appointments (15 per cent) that were on no presbyter's list and nine out of the 23 appointments (39 per cent) that were on one presbyter's list received a match that stuck. Whereas 76 per cent of the circuits that were named on two or more presbyters' lists received matches that stuck.

Of the 64 agreed matches at SMG1, 45 per cent were 'double' matches where both parties to the match had appeared on the other's indicative list, and a further 37 per cent had appeared on presbyters' lists only. Only 17 per cent of matched appointments had not been on the indicative lists of the presbyters they were matched with.

Twelve of the matches proposed at SMG1 were declined following the visits. Of the declined matches, 50 per cent were where neither party to the match had appeared on the other's indicative list.

These statistics tell us that under the current system agreed matches are primarily driven by the preferences of presbyters as revealed by their indicative lists. This means that a lot of time is currently wasted by CICs in trawling through the profiles of presbyters that they never get the opportunity to meet. The proposal to send CICs the profiles of only those presbyters that are interested in their appointment would save circuit stewards a lot of time, as well as reducing the amount of information that is circulated. In addition, the question that is often asked about the current proposal of what happens to those circuits that receive no interest from presbyters is also relevant to the current system.

SMG2

At SMG2 in 2025 there were 48 appointments and 14 presbyters available for matching. 33 of the appointments appeared on at least one presbyter's list and 11 of the presbyters appeared on at least one circuit's indicative list. Some of the presbyters appeared on multiple circuit lists (one was on 29 circuit lists) and several appointments were listed by more than one presbyter (12 were listed by two presbyters and two by three presbyters).

There was at least one double match available for ten of the presbyters and for 21 of the appointments. Four presbyters and 27 appointments did not have a double match available.

SMG2 proposed 14 matches, being constrained by the number of presbyters available. Eight presbyters were allocated to appointments where there was a double match, three presbyters were allocated to appointments that were on their list but not on the list of the receiving circuits and three were allocated to appointments that were on neither's list.

Overall, six of the proposed matches were to circuits that had not included the matched presbyters on their indicative lists (two of the presbyters could have instead been allocated to circuits that had listed them and were ultimately not matched).

One disadvantage of the current system is that there is no information at SMG about how circuits viewed presbyters who were not on their list. Were they people that were not acceptable to them or people they did

not know and had not considered? The proposed system would not suffer from this lack of information to the same extent as circuits would have reflected on all presbyters who were interested in their appointments.

What outcome would the proposed system have delivered at SMG2?

It is not possible to know precisely what outcome would have been delivered had the proposed system been in operation instead. This is because different information would have been collected in that case. Rather than indicative lists, presbyters would have expressed interest in appointments and explained why they suited them, and circuits would have said which of the presbyters who had expressed an interest in their appointment were acceptable to them. It is our opinion that the proposed system would provide better information for matching.

We also do not know if any appointments would have been designated as priority appointments under the proposed system.

Nevertheless, we can carry out a trial to try to answer the question of how the proposed system would have worked at SMG2 by using the indicative lists as a guide to presbyter and circuit preferences. In this trial we also use the three 'round 0 calls' at SMG2 to indicate which appointments would have been considered as priority appointments.

As it happens, the three round 0 appointments at SMG2 all had one distinct double match available to them. The presbyters in these distinct double matches were the ones 'called' by the district chairs. The proposed approach would have chosen exactly the same presbyters for these three appointments.

In addition, three appointments had unique double matches in that neither the circuit nor the presbyter had another double match available to them. In this case too, the proposed approach would have chosen exactly the same presbyters for these three appointments.

So these six presbyters would have been allocated to the same appointments by the proposed system had it been in operation. Having allocated six presbyters in this way, there would have remained 42 appointments with only eight presbyters available. How would the remaining eight presbyters have been allocated under the proposed approach?

There would have been double matches available for eight out of the 42 remaining appointments (two of these appointments had two double matches available), involving four out of the eight remaining presbyters (one of whom was double matched with five appointments). This meant that there were several ways in which the presbyters could be allocated across the appointments.

Using the approach suggested in the paper, we would have first considered matching the six appointments with a single double match. Because there were only four double-matched presbyters available the order in which the appointments were considered would matter. In a trial exercise, the first appointment to be matched was chosen at random and this resulted in the presbyter with five double matches being allocated. Once this person was allocated there were only five appointments with single double matches to be filled. These were matched sequentially using the same process.

The remaining four presbyters who did not have a double match available could have been allocated at the discretion of SMG2. They could each have been allocated as they were in fact allocated at SMG2. This trial approach resulted in four different matches to those proposed at SMG2. These all involved presbyters who were included on multiple indicative lists. It is not easy to judge whether these matches suggested by a trial run of the proposed new method were better or worse than those proposed by SMG2. But a case can be made that these would have been at least as good as the matches made at SMG2 as all four were double matches whereas only two of the matches made for these presbyters at SMG2 were double matches.