

Handbook for **MINISTERIAL PROBATION**

2025/2026 Connexional Year

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Introduction

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

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

Probation is a time for the rehearsal of activities and the acquisition of skills by practice under supervision. Acquiring during probation the habit of reflecting on one's practice in a context of supervision should be seen as a resource for the whole of ministry. It will become an integral part of the minister's professional practice, through the reflective supervision programme required for all ministers.

Most presbyteral probationers are directly stationed by the Conference on the recommendation of the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee and appointed to serve full-time in the circuits after completing pre-ordination training. A few are stationed for 'in-service training' while completing their course. Some probationers serve in part-time circuit appointments, in other appointments 'within the control of the Church' (for example: some chaplaincy appointments or evangelism enablers or in appointments 'outside the direct control of the Church' (for example: other chaplaincies, or employment). Diaconal probationers are all directly stationed by the Conference on the recommendation of the Warden. All probationer appointments are designed to have the same outcome: ministers who meet the criteria for reception into Full Connexion and ordination. These criteria are to be found in later sections of this Handbook.

The Connexional Team, in conjunction with the Methodist Diaconal Order where appropriate, administer the Church's processes for the oversight of all student ministers, probationers and ordinands.

April 2025

Timetables and roles involved for probation

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

Standing Order 721(2) requires that the probationary period lasts for a minimum of two years for those in full time appointments and three years for those in part time appointments. In some situations, it is helpful to extend this period by a further one or two years to ensure that sufficient time and space is allowed for formational activity.

Should a probationer change appointment in the course of their probation, it is usual (particularly if the move is to another district) for them to serve two years in the new appointment. This allows time to engage with the Orientation Project and the Gospel in Context Project and means that the District Probationers' Committee does not need to form a judgment on the basis of only six months experience.

IMPORTANT DATES:

Induction day for circuits receiving probationers : Thursday 26 February 2026 at Nuthall Methodist Church, Nottingham, 10 for 10.30am to 3.30pm.

The Religious Order Advisory Committee (ROAC): 28-29 January 2026 at Yarnfield Park Conference Centre. Probationer deacons are required to attend this.

Residential studies at Queen's for probationers:

Year One Orientation Project - 3 to 6 November 2025

Year Two Gospel in Context Project - 20 to 23 October 2025

Both years, for those doing a second residential module through Queen's - 1 to 4 June 2026

ABBREVIATIONS:

DPS = District Probationers' Secretary

DPC = District Probationers' Committee

MCOOM = Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministries

MCPOC = Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee

MDO = Methodist Diaconal Order

ROAC – Religious Order Advisory Committee

SO = Standing Order

Student/probationer timetable

Year Zero (before stationing)	
November	Submits stationing profile to the Connexional Team (with a copy to the Warden, for diaconal students/probationers).
January	Receives details of the appointment and visits the circuit.
Before the end of March	With Oversight Tutor, completes form outlining learning and development needs, including an application for funding for the accredited theological study. Returns form to the Connexional Team
April-July	Meets Superintendent (and minister in oversight if different) at The Queen's Foundation. Is contacted by District Probationers' Secretary (DPS).
May	With Oversight Tutor, completes the end of year report. Student deacon – attends Convocation. Student will have received a briefing on supervision and how best to approach the supervision relationship.
July	MDO Student Conference.
July	Presbyteral probationers identify the person they wish to be their befriender. Advice is available. Diaconal probationers identify a spiritual director. Advice is available.
Year One	
September and ongoing	Signs Form P8 Covenant for Probation Begins weekly meetings with their Minister in Oversight. These will reduce in frequency as time goes on as appropriate. Agrees on supervision contract (with a signed copy to DPS) and begins regular meetings for supervision. Arranges regular meetings with their befriender (presbyteral probationers). Arranges regular meeting with their spiritual director (diaconal probationers). Diaconal probationers also make contact with their Wise Senior and arrange regular contact.
Ongoing as arranged	Takes part in district probationers' group. Diaconal probationers also take part in their Area Group.
Ongoing as arranged	Undertakes probation studies.
December	Diaconal Probationers' Gathering (residential)

By 31 December	<p>Presbyteral probationers – complete the reflective journal of the first three months.</p> <p>Diaconal probationers – complete and submit Reflection 1 on ‘Being a Member of a Religious Order’, to the Deputy Warden.</p> <p>All probationers - complete ‘Orientation Project’</p>
January	<p>Diaconal probationers have a formal vocational conversation at Religious Order Advisory Committee. (residential)</p> <p>All probationers complete their summary of self-assessment to go to DPS</p>
January, February, or March	Takes part in district probationers’ retreat.
March	Meets the district Probationers’ Committee (DPC).
March/April	Presbyteral probationers –appear before the presbyteral synod.
April	Receives notification from MCPOC regarding their continuation on probation.
May	Diaconal probationers – attend Convocation.
Final year	
January	Diaconal probationers have a formal vocational conversation at Religious Order Advisory Committee.
By mid-January	Completes ‘Gospel in Context Project’.
January	<p>Diaconal probationers – complete and submit Reflection 2 on ‘Being a Member of a Religious Order’ to the deputy Warden</p> <p>All probationers complete their summary of self-assessment to go to DPS.</p>
January, February, March	Takes part in district probationers’ retreat.
March	Meets the DPC for assessment.
March/April	Presbyteral probationers – appear before the presbyteral synod.
April	Receives notification from MCPOC that regarding a recommendation to proceed to ordination.
May	<p>Diaconal probationers – appear before Convocation.</p> <p>Attend the district ordinands’ testimony service and give testimony.</p>
June	Attend ordinands’ retreat (presbyteral or diaconal as appropriate).
June/July	Reception into Full Connexion and ordination. Diaconal probationers are also received into full membership of the Methodist Diaconal Order.

Superintendent role:

The Superintendent has the key role in making probation a good experience. They have the prime responsibility for ensuring that all arrangements are in place so that probation gets off to a good start.

The Superintendent may, or may not, hold either, or both, of the roles :

- The Minister in Oversight
- The Supervisor.

The roles of Minister in Oversight and Supervisor should not be held by the same person.

The Supervision Implementation Plan holder (who is usually the District Chair) should agree with the Superintendent who the Supervisor for the probationer will be and ensure that supervision happens effectively. The supervisor and Minister in Oversight will have been named in the appointment profile and approved by the Initial Stationing Scrutiny Group.

Where the Superintendent appoints a deputy to be the Minister in Oversight, the Superintendent should ensure that regular meetings (initially weekly) take place and that the deputy provides a positive role model for the probationer.

Whether or not they are the Minister in Oversight, the Superintendent still needs to negotiate the delicate balance between support, guidance and challenge, and between the probationer's autonomy and their accountability.

The Superintendent ensures that Form P8 Covenant for Probation is completed by all parties at the outset of probation. They are asked to pay particular attention to the section where dual relationships are described.

The Superintendent may attend the District Probationers' Committee with the Probationer but is only invited into the actual interviews if they are also the Minister in Oversight.

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

Skills needed by the Superintendent of a probationer include:

- Valuing differences and diversity
- The appropriate use of one's own experience
- Empathy
- Self-awareness
- Understanding of the particular contexts of the probationer's work
- Awareness of the broader needs of the Church
- Ability to deal with conflict
- Understanding of practical and reflective learning
- An appreciation of the Methodist Diaconal Order and the obligations of membership.

In relation to presbyteral probationers the Superintendent is responsible for:

- ensuring appropriate pastoral care and support is provided within the circuit (SO 724(2))
- ensuring the agreed probationer's appointment profile is adhered to (SO 723) and consulting with MCPOC if any changes to the appointment become likely.
- ensuring (in collaboration with the District Chair and DPS) that a welcome service (SO 723(4)) and a testimony service (SO 728(3)) are held
- ensuring the provision of adequate induction, instruction in particular duties and regular close supervision of work (SO 724)
- establishing a worship development group
- ensuring that the probationer is enabled to attend the annual district retreat and the ordinands' retreat
- reporting (in consultation with the circuit leadership team and the supervisor) on the probationer's development to the DPC.
- completing the covenant form P8 which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Supervisor, Minister in Oversight and Befriender and sending this form to the DPS by September 30 in each year of probation.

In relation to diaconal probationers the Superintendent is responsible for:

- ensuring appropriate pastoral care and support is provided within the circuit (SO724(2))
- ensuring the agreed probationer's appointment profile is adhered to (SO 723) and consulting with MCPOC and the Warden of the MDO if any changes to the appointment become likely.
- ensuring (in collaboration with the District Chair and DPS) that a welcome service (SO 723(4)) and a testimony service (SO 728(3)) are held
- ensuring the provision of adequate induction, instruction in particular duties and regular close supervision of work (SO 724)
- establishing a worship development group
- ensuring that the probationer is enabled to attend diaconal Area Group, the annual Convocation, district retreat and the ordinands' retreat
- submitting (after consultation with the CLT and the supervisor) a report on the probationer's development to the DPS for submission to the Warden and then the DPC.
- completing the covenant form P8 which outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Supervisor, Minister in Oversight, Spiritual Director and Wise Senior and sending this form to the DPS by September 30th in each year of probation.

(Note: these are responsibilities that the Superintendent holds but may be shared with the Circuit Leadership Team and others especially if there is a change of Superintendent.)

Superintendent timetable:

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	<p>Takes the lead in circuit plans to apply for a presbyteral probationer (in discussion with the District Chair).</p> <p>Ensures there is a district manse inspection report available for the intended manse from within the last 5 years, or arranges for a new inspection to be carried out.</p> <p>Takes the lead in circuit plans to shape a diaconal appointment that may be suitable for a probationer (in discussion with the District Chair and the Warden).</p> <p>Nominates supervisor (a different person from themselves) in conjunction with the District and arranges for him/her to undertake supervision training if necessary.</p> <p>Nominates Minister in Oversight (who may be self).</p>
Year Zero	
Mid-September	Submits an application for the presbyteral probationer and/or circuit profile for a diaconal appointment to the Connexional Team via District Chair and Lay Stationing Representative.
October	Receives notification from scrutiny panel as to whether an appointment for a presbyteral probationer has been approved.
Early December	Receives notification from the Warden if the circuit will be receiving a diaconal probationer.
Early January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of probationer (deacon or presbyter) to be stationed from District Chair (or indication that no suitable probationer was available).
January	Meets probationer on a visit to the circuit.
February	<p>Attends Connexional briefing with another member of the CLT or ensures 2 other members of CLT attend (one ordained, one lay)</p> <p>Makes arrangements to attend preparation day at the Queen's Foundation (with Minister in Oversight if different).</p>
As soon as necessary (ongoing)	Compiles diary for the probationer.
April-July	<p>Meets with probationer at The Queen's Foundation,</p> <p>Appoints steering group for diaconal probationers</p>
By April	(Together with circuit leadership team) ensures that manse is prepared and agreed repairs and/or alterations are carried out. If the manse has been let, it needs to be free from tenants by April to ensure there is time for necessary repairs.
July	Receives a copy of the end of year report and the Learning and

	Development Form.
Before September	Receives dates for probationer's diary from DPS
Before September	Checks with presbyteral probationer that they have identified a befriender. Checks with diaconal probationer that they have identified a spiritual director.
Before September	Arranges welcome service (consulting Chair of District). Presents the authorisation permission (where appropriate) to the probationer at the welcome service.
Before September	(Together with circuit leadership team) arranges welcome to circuit and induction.
August	Meets probationer (and family) at the manse. Establishes Worship Development Group
Year One	
By 30 September	Sends completed covenant form P8 to DPS
September-December	Oversees 'first' activities (in consultation with the Minister in Oversight, if this is not the superintendent).
31 January	With circuit leadership team (and supervisor, if separate), writes a report for DPC and Warden on diaconal probationers
February	With circuit leadership team (and supervisor, if separate), writes a report for DPC on presbyteral probationers.
March	May attend the DPC with the probationer
April/May	Receives from MCPOC notification that the probationer has been recommended to continue on probation.
Final year	
31 January	Diaconal reports to the DPC/Warden
February	With circuit leadership team (and supervisor, if separate), writes a report for DPC.
March	May attend the DPC with the probationer
April/May	Receives from MCPOC notification that the probationer has been recommended to proceed to ordination.
May	Encourages circuit to attend the district ordinands' testimony service.
June/July	Celebrates reception into Full Connexion and ordination. For Deacons celebrate becoming full members of the Methodist Diaconal Order

Supervisor Role:

The role of the supervisor is critical in probation in enabling the probationer to reflect theologically on her or his practice. The supervisor should not be the same person as the Superintendent.

The supervisor will be an experienced practitioner who is approved to supervise under the Methodist Church's supervision policy and who is recommended by the District Chair.

The supervisor:

- Enables the probationer to reflect theologically on the normative, formative and restorative dimensions of her or his vocation and practice as defined in the Methodist Church's supervision policy.
- Encourages personal growth in Christian maturity by helping the probationer to reflect and discover their own resources.
- Assists the probationer in developing healthy, appropriate patterns of work and lifestyle, including the skills in, and habit of, theologically reflective practice.
- Encourages, challenges and supports the probationer in considering, testing and reviewing different perspectives, options and strategies.
- Assists effective, healthy development in ministry through consultancy, encouragement, challenge and support.
- Is able to negotiate the delicate balance between support, guidance and challenge, and between the probationer's autonomy and their accountability.
- Contributes significantly to the Superintendent's report to the District Probationers' Committee, by commenting on the probationer's ability to engage fully with supervision and to make the best use of the supervisory space, but is not expected to divulge the contents of supervision conversations unless necessary (e.g. due to an identified risk).

Skills needed in the supervisor of a probationer include:

- Valuing differences and diversity
- The appropriate use of one's own experience
- Empathy
- Self-awareness
- Understanding of the particular contexts of the probationer's work
- Awareness of the broader needs of the Church
- Ability to deal with conflict
- Understanding of practical and reflective learning
- An appreciation of the Methodist Diaconal Order and the obligations of membership.

The probationer should receive not less than 9 hours of reflective supervision regularly spaced throughout each year of probation. This will become six sessions of 90 minutes or nine sessions of 60 minutes duration after ordination.

These skills should be underpinned by appropriate support; it is vital that the supervisor is someone who is him or herself under supervision.

Supervision will operate with a covenant and agreed records in exactly the same

way as the supervision for ordained ministers operates. Records will be sent to the Minister in Oversight. In addition a copy is sent to the District Probationers Secretary during the probationary period in line with the current Supervision Policy.

Supervisor Timetable:

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Accepts nomination. Arranges to attend training (if necessary) in order to be approved to supervise under the Methodist Church's supervision policy.
Year Zero	
January	Meets probationer on a visit to the circuit.
May-July	The allocated Supervisor (if not the superintendent) is notified to confirm that a comprehensive briefing has happened explaining supervision in summary. They will also be invited to get in touch with their probationer to introduce themselves, fix a date to build the covenant and double check they are aware of the relevant probation-specific forms. This will mean that they will not need to attend any kind of meeting with supervisees as a cohort.
June-July	Receives a copy of the end of year report.
Year One	
September and ongoing	Signs form P8 Covenant for Probation Agrees on supervision contract (with a signed copy to DPS) and begins regular meetings for supervision.
January/February	Contributes to report for DPC by indicating whether the probationer makes good use of the supervision space and engages fully with the process.
Final year	
September and ongoing	Revises supervision contract (with a signed copy to DPS) and continues regular meetings.
January/February	Contributes to report for DPC by indicating whether the probationer makes good use of the supervision space and engages fully with the process.
June/July	Celebrates reception into Full Connexion and ordination. For Deacons celebrate becoming full members of the Methodist Diaconal Order

Minister in Oversight Role

The role of the Minister in Oversight is to be a role model to the probationer. In most cases this will be the superintendent, but in larger circuits or for other reasons, it may be necessary for the superintendent to appoint a deputy into this role.

The Minister in Oversight will be a member of the Circuit Leadership Team or someone who reports on the probationer to the Leadership Team and who will contribute significantly to the Superintendent's report to the District Probationers' Committee.

The Minister in Oversight:

- Will be an effective role model to the probationer and therefore will be careful and honest about the way they speak of their own ministry and that of others
- An experienced minister who is able to help the probationer to make the transition from being a student minister to being a probationer minister.
- Able to adjust to the particular needs of the probationer and strike the balance between sitting alongside and leading by example.
- Able to give time appropriately to help the probationer to deal with new experiences in ministry and to debrief afterwards.

Skills needed in the Minister in Oversight of a probationer include:

- Patience
- Valuing differences and diversity
- Empathy
- Self-awareness
- Understanding of the particular contexts of the probationer's work
- Ability to deal with conflict
- Able to reflect on observations of the probationer's ministry
- An appreciation and understanding of both orders of ordained ministry

The Minister in Oversight and the Probationer will meet weekly in the initial months of the probationer's appointment. These meetings will become less frequent as the needs change, but the Minister in Oversight remains in close contact with the probationer throughout their probation.

The Supervisor role and Minister in Oversight role should not be held by the same person.

Minister in Oversight Timetable:

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Accepts nomination.
Year Zero	
January	Meets probationer on a visit to the circuit.
April-July	Meets with probationer at The Queen's Foundation.
July	Receives a copy of the end of year report and learning and development needs form.
Year One	
September and ongoing	Signs Form P8 Covenant for Probation Meets weekly with the probationer, then less frequently as appropriate Undertakes a regular review of progress.
September-December	Oversees 'first' activities in consultation with the Superintendent.
January/February	Contributes to report for DPC
March	With a circuit steward, accompanies probationer to DPC.
Final year	
September and ongoing	Continues regular meetings.
January/February	Contributes to report for DPC
March	With a circuit steward, accompanies probationer to DPC.
June/July	Celebrates reception into Full Connexion and ordination. For Deacons celebrate becoming full members of the Methodist Diaconal Order

Spiritual Director role (diaconal probationers only):

All diaconal probationers must identify a Spiritual Director. The Spiritual Director's relationship with the probationer is entirely confidential: they do not make a report.

It is the probationer's own responsibility to identify a Spiritual Director. Ideally this is done before they start the appointment so that they can provide support at a time of rapid change but also to take advantage of the 'window' for personal growth and learning constituted by the beginning of ministry. Advice can be given by the MDO if the probationer is struggling to find such a person. It is important that this is not someone the probationer already has a close friendship with – but a person with an objective view of the probationer and their ministry.

The Spiritual Director:

- Understands the demands of ordained ministry but need not be ordained.
- Makes regular time to listen to the probationer using skills of active listening
- Supports the probationer in developing healthy patterns of life and faith during this transition period
- Prays for and with the probationer
- Brings an external perspective to the work situation and the relationships it involves as appropriate

The probationer will be asked to comment on their meetings with their Spiritual Director in their written theological reflection.

There should be mutual accountability for the purpose, structure and content of meetings, and for planning and timekeeping.

Meetings should take place every six to eight weeks for at least the first six months, and may then become less frequent as time goes on.

Responsibility for initial contact lies with the probationer.

Wise Senior role (diaconal probationers only):

Within the monastic tradition, there is the practice of appointing a wise senior to accompany the novice. The wise senior is one whose life and ministry have been proven and whilst they are not perfect, they are sufficiently experienced and mature in their vocation to be able to guide, assist and, if required, challenge those who are still new and inexperienced in their vocation.

“A senior shall be assigned to them who is skilled in winning souls, to watch over them with the utmost care.

Let them examine whether the novice is truly seeking God,

and whether they are zealous for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials.

Let the novice be told all the hard and rugged ways by which the journey to God is made.” (ch. 58 Rule of Benedict – *On the Manner on Receiving Sisters*)

For each diaconal probationer, the Order appoints a Wise Senior, someone who:

- is in good standing in the Order and the wider Church
- participates fully in the life of the Order
- has travelled for at least five years
- has a working knowledge of the connexional candidating, training and probation processes
- is a person of prayer, personal integrity and who can offer a critical ear
- follows and adapts the rule of life according to their needs and experiences
- has a spiritual director/accompanist and meets with them regularly
- is a member in a different district and area group to the probationer
- is willing to commit time and attention to the role
- is willing to attend regular training facilitated by the Order.

The Wise Senior:

- Enables and encourages the probationer’s development and understanding of being a member of a religious order.
- Brings an external perspective to the work situation and the relationships it involves

The Wise Senior does not have a formal reporting role but enables and encourages the probationer’s development and understanding of being a member of a religious order. However if the Wise Senior is concerned about anything, they should contact the Warden, with the consent of the Probationer.

The probationer will be asked to comment on their meetings with their Wise Senior in their written theological reflection.

The probationer is responsible for initiating contact with the Wise Senior and ensuring regular contact.

Communication should take place every six to eight weeks through a mixture of media such as face to face meetings, video conferencing and phone calls. The Wise Senior will be required to indicate to ROAC that communication has taken place as expected.

Befriender role (presbyteral probationers only):

All presbyteral probationers must identify a befriender. The befriender's relationship with the probationer is entirely confidential; the befriender does not make a report. The probationer may decide to use the befriender as the person with whom to discuss their self-assessment, a summary of which will be presented to the DPC, but the probationer is free to choose not to use them in this way. The befriender should not be part of the structures within which the probationer's ministry is located.

The befriender's primary role is to encourage personal growth in Christian maturity by helping the probationer to reflect and discover their own resources. Encouraging the probationer to seek help from others is an important part of the role. The content of meetings is set by the probationer: the befriender may offer advice but should focus on helping the probationer to discover their own answers.

It is the probationer's own responsibility to identify a befriender. Ideally this is done before they start the appointment so that the befriender can provide support at a time of rapid change but also to take advantage of the 'window' for personal growth and learning constituted by the beginning of ministry. Advice can be given by the District if the probationer is struggling to find such a person. It is important that this is not someone the probationer already has a close friendship with – but a person with an objective view of the probationer and their ministry.

The befriender:

- Understands the demands of ordained ministry but need not be ordained.
- Makes regular time to listen to the probationer using skills of active listening
- Supports the probationer in developing healthy patterns of life and faith during this transition period
- Supports the probationer in understanding the cultural context in which they are ministering and helps identify any cross cultural issues needing attention
- Prays for and with the probationer
- Brings an external perspective to the work situation and the relationships it involves
- May advocate for the probationer with the Superintendent/District Chair should this become necessary. If this is not appropriate for the particular befriender, and such advocacy is needed, the befriender helps the probationer to identify another advocate.

There should be mutual accountability for the purpose, structure and content of meetings, and for planning and timekeeping.

Meetings should take place at least every four to six weeks at first but may become less frequent as time goes on.

Responsibility for initial contact lies with the probationer.

Circuit leadership team timetable:

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Takes part in circuit plans to apply for a presbyteral probationer, discussed with District Chair. Takes part in circuit plans to shape a diaconal appointment that may be suitable for a probationer, discussed with the District Chair and the Warden.
Year Zero	
Early January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of probationer from District Chair.
January	Meets probationer on a visit to the circuit but, as this is direct stationing, there is no invitation process – see guidance in Code of Practice: Stationing forms and guidelines (methodist.org.uk) Draws up a Letter of Understanding following the template in the Stationing Code of Practice.
February	Two members of CLT attend Connexional induction for circuits receiving probationers.
During Summer	(Together with Superintendent) prepares manse and welcome arrangements.
Before September	(Together with Superintendent) arranges welcome to circuit and induction.
Year One	
Ongoing	Offers practical and personal support.
January/February	Contributes to Superintendent's report to DPC.
March	With the Minister in Oversight, a circuit steward accompanies the probationer to the DPC.
Year Two	
January/February	Contributes to Superintendent's report to DPC.
March	With the Minister in Oversight, a circuit steward accompanies the probationer to the DPC.
May	Together with Superintendent, encourages circuit to attend the district ordinands' testimony service.
June/July	Celebrates reception into Full Connexion and ordination. For Deacons celebrate becoming full members of the Methodist Diaconal Order

District Probationers' Secretary role:

While the DPS is responsible for the processes of the DPC and for obtaining and collating reports on probationers, the administrative aspects of the role, though needing to be performed efficiently, are not the most important.

The DPS plans and convenes the district probationers' group, which occupies a vital place as the centre for group support, accountability and the development of theological reflection. The DPS is also responsible for seeing that probationers undertake the appropriate study.

Because the DPS' role is so varied and calls for such a range of skills it may be thought best to develop a 'DPS team' for the district. There should, however, be a named DPS as the first point of contact and responsibility.

The main responsibilities of the DPS in relation to probationers (in conjunction with others as necessary) are:

- in collaboration with the Chair, to ensure that the DPC carries out its duties of oversight
- to convene the probationers' group and devise appropriate programmes, thus meeting the requirement that every probationer should '*engage with peers in theological analysis of the mission of the Church in the world as encountered through their particular appointments*'. (SO 724(3)(iii))
- to ensure that every presbyteral probationer has a befriender and to check that the relationship continues to function well
- to ensure that every diaconal probationer has a spiritual director and, in conjunction with the MDO, to check that the relationship continues to function well
- to oversee the balance between the different areas of the probationer's life and work
- to offer such support and advice as is required on the Orientation Project before the appointment begins and the Gospel in Context project in the second year, and to ensure (normally in partnership with Queen's) that all probationers complete such projects
- to ensure that every probationer follows an appropriately designed and assessed study programme (other than the Orientation and Gospel in Context projects) (SO 724(3)(iv) and 724(4))
- to ensure the necessary resources are made available for any district-wide training and development activities (SO 724(3))
- in collaboration with District Chairs and Superintendents, to ensure that annual probationers' retreats and testimony services are organised
- to collate reports on diaconal probationers and forward them to the Warden (SO 725(5))
- to service the DPC, collating the various reports brought to it (on both presbyteral and diaconal probationers) and reporting their main conclusions to MCPOC on Form P2 (SO 725 & 728) . Note that when the probationer is a deacon, an additional deacon (a member of the Religious Order Advisory Committee) attends the DPC on behalf of MCPOC.
- to liaise as necessary between probationers, circuits, the District Chair, the Queen's Foundation, the Warden, MCPOC and the Connexional Team.

District Probationers' Secretary timetable:

Year Zero	
Spring	Receives details of probationer from District Chair.
March-May	Contacts probationer to make introductions. Gives the probationer dates for the year (include ROAC, probationers' committees, retreat, area group meetings and Convocation)
April or May	Attends connexional DPS consultation.
June-July	Receives a copy of the end of year report.
June-July	Receives copies of forms from the Connexional Team regarding continuing theological study.
July (after the Conference)	Ensures circuits have the relevant information before probationer arrives.
Summer	Checks that presbyteral probationers have identified their befriender and diaconal probationers have identified their spiritual director.
Summer/September	Sets up probationers'/under fives' group.
Years One and ongoing	
September	Informs the Connexional Team of dates of DPC, presbyteral synod and probationers' retreat.
Autumn	Possible preliminary District Probationers' Committee
Ongoing	Convenes district probationers' group.
January	Arranges for probationers' projects to be assessed, or receives the assessment of them from Queen's.
31 January	Assembles reports on diaconal probationers and forwards these to the Warden.
February	Assembles reports on presbyteral probationers for DPC.
March	Receives a report on diaconal probationers from the Warden. Assembles a report on diaconal probationers for the DPC. Services and attends DPC. Alerts the MCOOM of any difficult decisions immediately (prior to Presbyteral Synod)
Spring	Reports on presbyteral probationers at Presbyteral Synod.
March	Sends summarised reports (Form P2) to the Connexional Team for MCPOC
April/May	Receives from MCPOC notification of recommendation.
April or May	Attends connexional DPS consultation.

District Chair role:

District Chairs have a vital role in the stationing of probationers. The Initial Stationing Sub-Committee and the Warden (as appropriate) are reliant on the District Chair's judgement as to the suitability of an appointment for a probationer. The importance of having the right Superintendent is vital. The nature of the appointment is important, but the quality of superintendency is more so.

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

Chairs are responsible for:

- ensuring that probationers' appointments in the district are appropriate, are approved by the District Policy Committee, and are not changed from the agreed profile without proper consultation with the connexional officer.
- working with the Superintendent, circuit leadership team and church stewards on circuit policy so that the probationer's appointment is part of a coherent whole.
- ensuring that Superintendents, supervisors, Ministers in Oversight (if separate) and circuit stewards are appropriately informed and trained.
- Ensuring, alongside the District Supervision Implementation Policy holder (if this is a different person) that appropriate supervision arrangements are put in place for the probationer.
- ensuring that probationers (and their families/households) are made welcome at an induction event.
- wherever possible taking part in the welcome service and for diaconal probationers ensure appropriate diaconal representation.
- maintaining general awareness and oversight of the probationer and the appointment.
- attending and chairing the DPC and ensuring it is representative in nature.
- attending as possible and appropriate the district probationers' or under fives' group and the probationers' retreat.
- meeting with ordinands to explore their theological understanding and readiness for ordination.
- coordinating the district ordinands' testimony service.
- before ordination, meeting individually with each probationer (and their partner) to explore their hopes and dreams for the future, and ensuring that the appropriate person in the district works with the probationer to identify their future training and development needs.

District Chair timetable:

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Discusses plans with a circuit to apply for a presbyteral probationer. Discusses plans with a circuit to shape a diaconal appointment that may be suitable for a probationer and liaises with the Warden. Ensures approval of the appointment by the District Policy Committee.
Year Zero	
Mid-September	Forwards diaconal appointment profile to the Warden. Receives application for presbyteral probationer from Superintendent and forwards to the Connexional Team with a letter of reference for supervisor and Minister in Oversight, date of approval by District Policy Committee and District Manse reports
Early December	If receiving a diaconal probationer, submits a letter of reference for supervisor and Minister in Oversight. Check the manse inspection is complete
January	Sends details of probationers (presbyteral and diaconal) to circuit and Superintendent.
Spring	Passes information about probationers to DPS.
June-July	Receives a copy of the end of year report.
Summer (for September)	Arranges welcome service for probationer in conjunction with Superintendent. Informs MDO of dates for welcome service, as appropriate.
Year One	
September	Takes part in welcome service.
Autumn	Possible preliminary DPC
January, February or March	Attends probationers' retreat (if possible).
March	Chairs DPC and consults MCOOM about difficult decisions prior to Presbyteral Synod
April/May	Receives from MCPOC notification that the probationer has been recommended to continue on probation.
Final year	
Autumn	Possible preliminary DPC
January, February or March	Attends probationers' retreat (if possible).
March	Chairs DPC.
March	Meets final-year presbyteral probationers as a group before the presbyteral synod.

April	Receives from MCPOC notification that the probationer has been recommended to proceed to ordination.
May	Meets ordinands individually (with their partners).
May	Coordinates the district ordinands' testimony service.

Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order role:

The Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order has overall responsibility for the oversight of the religious order and is accountable to the Conference for the observance of matters related to discipline, character and fidelity of deacons, diaconal probationers and students, as well as ensuring that adequate pastoral care is available (SO 754).

The main responsibilities of the Warden in relation to probationers are:

- appointing a wise senior for each probationer
- advising any diaconal probationer regarding identification of a spiritual director
- ensuring that probationers meet annually for the vocational conversation with the Religious Order Advisory Committee
- receiving reports on the probationer's development from the DPS
- the preparation of an annual report (form P7), in light of the reports from ROAC and the DPS, which will be submitted to the DPS and will give an account of a probationer deacon's conduct in terms of their developing understanding and behaviour and note any areas of concern or need which require addressing before recommendations regarding ordination can be made
- arranging the diaconal ordination retreat
- provision of pastoral care
- informing Diaconal Area Group Secretaries of new probationers in the area
- working with MCPOC to ensure that the DPC is representative.
- Many of these responsibilities may be delegated to the Deputy Warden under SO 754(2A).

Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order timetable:

Year Zero	
September/November	<p>Liases with The Queen's Foundation with regard to potential matches for diaconal students.</p> <p>Arranges for Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee to meet with final-year diaconal students.</p> <p>Meets with Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee to match diaconal probationers to appointments.</p>
December	<p>Diaconal Stationing Sub Committee 1 to meet with Students (and any household/support people) for conversation</p>
January	<p>Diaconal Stationing Sub Committee 2 meet with Warden to station Students to their appointments.</p> <p>The Students will be contacted by the Warden and the Diaconal Tutor</p>
July/August	<p>Allocates probationer a Wise Senior and arranges MDO representation at welcome service.</p> <p>Provides advice where requested for probationers on identifying a spiritual director</p>
Year One	
January	<p>Sends feedback on theological reflection</p> <p>Arrange for the probationer to have a formal vocational conversation with Religious Order Advisory Committee.</p>
February/March	<p>Before DPC, submits report to DPS</p>
February/March	<p>Liases with MCPOC to ensure DPC is suitably representative</p>
Final year	
January	<p>Arrange for the probationer to have a formal vocational conversation with Religious Order Advisory Committee.</p>
January	<p>Submits a report to DPS.</p>
February/March	<p>Liases with MCPOC to ensure DPC is suitably representative.</p>
May	<p>Presents reports to Conference Diaconal Committee.</p>
June	<p>Arranges and attends the diaconal ordinands' retreat.</p>
June/July	<p>Oversees, in conjunction with the Connexional Team, Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination.</p> <p>Receives ordinands into full membership of MDO.</p>

The Connexional Team timetable:

Year Zero	
September / October	Collates presbyteral initial stationing profiles for Scrutiny Panel.
November	Collates presbyteral student profiles for Initial Stationing Sub-Committee. MCPOC agrees on the list of students (presbyteral and diaconal) for initial stationing.
January	Coordinates Initial Stationing Sub-Committee meeting. Sends details of appointments to relevant oversight tutors. Sends details of students to Chairs. Sends out the form 'Learning and Development Needs' to students.
February	Start review of the Handbook for Probationers for the following year Review amount allocated to course fees Holds an induction meeting for 2 members of circuit leadership teams for circuits who will be receiving probationers
March/April	Receives 'Learning and Development Needs' forms from students and makes recommendations to MCPOC for approval.
April	Hosts connexional DPS consultation. MCPOC to approve updates to forms and handbook for following year
May	Sends Handbook for Probation to DPS for following year and puts the Handbook and all updated forms onto the website.
June	Informs students about the allocation of funding for the accredited theological study and forward approved proposals to DPS. Receives end of year report and circulates to MCPOC.
July	Circulates end of year report to DPS, District Chair, Superintendent, Minister in Oversight and Supervisor.
Years One and ongoing	
November	Reports special issues to MCPOC.
April	Reports on Forms P2 to MCPOC.
April	Hosts connexional DPS consultation.
April	Writes to probationers, copying in Superintendent, Warden (as appropriate) DPS and Chair, with the recommendation of MCPOC.
May	Reports to Conference diaconal committee
June/July	Oversees Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination services. Reports to the Presbyteral session of the Conference

The Queen's Foundation timetable:

Year Zero	
September/November	<p>Works with a student on their profile form.</p> <p>Diaconal students – Liaises with Warden regarding potential matches.</p> <p>Is represented in conversations between student deacons and the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee (see Code of Practice).</p> <p>November: Residential courses for Orientation, and Gospel in Context, projects</p>
January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	<p>Discusses details of circuit appointment with each student.</p> <p>Invites Superintendents and Ministers in Oversight to meet students at Queen's April-July.</p>
Before the end of February	<p>Sends Form P5 to DPSs for current probationers (where they are carrying out all of their studies through Queen's. Otherwise the P5 is produced by the DPS).</p>
Before the end of March	<p>Works with a student on 'Learning and Development Needs' form and ensures its return to the Connexional Team.</p>
April-July	<p>Arranges meetings between Ministers in Oversight and superintendents and leaving students.</p> <p>Arranges a briefing for students on the process of Supervision and how best to use the space offered.</p>
May-June	<p>Draws up an end of year report in conjunction with the student and sends to the Connexional Team for circulation to MCPOC and others.</p> <p>Writes to allocated Supervisors confirming the supervision briefing has taken place and inviting them to make contact with the probationer to make a supervision covenant</p>
June	<p>Residential courses for those on the Queen's Pathway for Probation</p>

Setting up a probationer appointment

A circuit wishing to set up a probationer appointment should begin planning with the District Chair and the Warden, where appropriate, by May (16 months before the probationer will arrive in the circuit) at the latest. Reference should be made to the guidelines contained in the form for initial stationing, available from the website [Stationing forms and guidelines \(methodist.org.uk\)](http://methodist.org.uk). Circuit staff and stewards, church stewards, the Superintendent and District Chair should all be involved in developing and should claim ownership of, the policies and arrangements described in the application for the appointment. It is very helpful to involve the District Probationers' Secretary early on; they often have a wealth of experience in probationer appointments and can offer useful guidance in the initial planning stages. Advice can also be sought from the Connexional Team.

A probationer appointment is not one that could otherwise be filled by an experienced presbyter or deacon. It should involve only about three-quarters of the workload expected of an experienced minister, not only to allow time for study but because all activities take longer when they are being learned. It is vitally important also that probationers learn good habits of personal devotion, rest and recreation and for diaconal probationers, being members of a religious order. It follows therefore that it should be the normal expectation that the responsibilities of the appointment will be extended in some way after ordination: this must of course be planned well in advance and be done in consultation with the probationer. For more details, please see the criteria for presbyteral and diaconal probationer appointments.

SO 723(1) specifies that: 'In making their recommendations to the Stationing Committee concerning the stationing of probationers, the Connexional Team member responsible for presbyteral probationers and the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order shall seek to have all presbyteral and diaconal probationers stationed in situations where due care and oversight can be given to the probationer by lay and ordained colleagues in accordance with criteria for such appointments recommended by the Ministerial Candidates and Probationers Oversight Committee.'

In 2021, the Conference received the 'Changing Patterns of Ministry' report. Circuits are reminded of the following section of that report:

5.1.9. The Conference is asked to adopt the following understanding of itinerancy:

a. Itinerancy is a characteristic of the Methodist Church's ordained ministry. It 314 26. Changing Patterns of Ministry Conference Agenda 2021 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. It indicates that no appointment is open-ended and that a minister will serve in a particular context only for a period of time;

b. Itinerancy is one aspect of the covenant relationship that ministers have with the Conference. The Conference stations ministers on an annual basis, but within the current stationing processes only a portion of ministers are available for deployment each year, and account is taken of legitimate

limitations on where they might be deployed. At the same time, the covenant relationship implies a readiness upon the part of the individual minister to be open to the needs of the Connexion as a whole at any point in their ministerial journey;

c. Itinerancy indicates that a minister's primary relationship is with the Conference and not the context to which they are deployed. On reception into Full Connexion Methodist ministers enter into the covenant relationship with the Conference in which they are held accountable by the Church in respect of their ministry and Christian discipleship, and are accounted for by the Church in respect of their deployment and the support they require for their ministry. Presbyters and deacons who are temporarily released from appointment in order to study or serve in a different context are not released from being stationed, nor from the covenant relationship of being in Connexion.

As the Conference discerns where it will station its ministers it will pay attention to the needs of the Church and to the ministers' gifts, graces, experience, sense of calling, and any particular needs including family circumstances, health and legitimate geographical limitations. It recognises that there will be points in many ministers' lives when they will be freer to travel anywhere in the Connexion than at others. It is, however, the Conference that sends ministers to particular appointments. How the Conference decides where ministers are deployed, how it takes these particular things into consideration, and how it ensures that any call to a specific context or particular kind of ministry is a matter of shared discernment by the individual and the Church through its processes of stationing matching.

The full report can be found here: [Conference 2021 Agenda Volume 2 \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk/conference-2021-agenda-volume-2)

Criteria for a presbyteral probationer appointment:

The criteria can be found as an appendix on profile form S14 for presbyteral probationers.

This form can be found here : [Stationing forms and guidelines \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk)

It is important that a proposed appointment is checked against these criteria.

Where it is desired to set up a probationer presbyteral appointment so different from the traditional circuit appointment that the criteria do not apply, the proposals should be discussed with the Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministries before the profile is submitted.

The District Chair must be satisfied that these criteria can be fulfilled before agreeing the application. The District Probationers' Secretary should be involved in consultations about shaping a proposed appointment for a probationer.

Criteria for a diaconal probationer appointment:

The criteria can be found as an appendix on profile form S13 for diaconal appointments.

This form can be found here : [Stationing forms and guidelines \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://methodist.org.uk)

Worship Development Groups for diaconal probationers need to focus on the deacon's ministry of proclamation in line with the Conference report of 2019 'The Theology and Ecclesiology of the Diaconate'.

The Stationing Committee has agreed that all diaconal appointments should be suitable for a probationer with certain adjustments as specified on the profile form. If the circuit has good reason to think that an appointment is not suitable for a probationer deacon, this must be clearly explained and agreed by the Chair of District in conjunction with the Warden of the MDO.

On Stationing

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

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

- The drafting, issuing and signing of a Letter of Understanding
- The student and staff of the Queen's Foundation working towards an end of year report which is the agreed product of staff assessment and the student's self-assessment. This report should include (1) formal learning and development needs (eg application already made for funding for accredited theological study) (2) an outline of the student's likely needs and aspirations for further development, experience and study and (3) any circumstances that might indicate needs for special support. This report is confidential to the student/probationer, the Queen's Foundation, the Warden (as appropriate), the District Chair, the Superintendent, supervisor, Minister in Oversight, the DPS and MCPOC.
- An opportunity for the Superintendent and Minister in Oversight to meet the student at the Queen's Foundation.
- Contact between the District Chair or Warden, the DPS, Superintendent, stewards and probationers.
- Preparation by the circuit of a welcome pack including information about arrangements at the manse (eg suppliers of utilities, telephone, broadband etc, rubbish collection days), other local information about church and community (including maps), and details of circuit policies and key people (perhaps with photographs)

Preparation must include the Superintendent taking the lead in ensuring:

- A welcome service is arranged
- Events and appointments are entered in a diary for the probationer
- The supervisor of the probationer's work and Minister in Oversight (if not the Superintendent) are identified
- A worship development group is set up that is appropriate for the probationer's order of ministry
- That the probationer's appointment is not changed from the original agreed application without the consent of the Chair, who shall consult the district Policy Committee, MCOOM, the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order (where appropriate), and the Chair of MCPOC. If the change is proposed before the Conference at which the match is agreed, the change must be agreed between the Chair of the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee, the Chair of MCPOC, the District Chair, MCOOM and the Warden (if appropriate).

The circuit must also:

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

The DPS is responsible for:

- discussing the Orientation Project with the probationer before arrival, and suggesting preliminary reading in addition to that offered by Queen's
- setting up meetings of the district probationers' group
- ensuring that each presbyteral probationer has identified a befriender from the start
- ensuring that each diaconal probationer has identified a spiritual director from the start (in conjunction with the MDO)
- receiving the approved Learning & Development Needs form and beginning to work on an appropriate study programme for each probationer if necessary.

In preparation for stationing the probationer should:

- have thoroughly discussed their training and personal support needs in probation with The Queen's Foundation and made arrangements for any formal or accredited study including application to MCPOC for funding for the accredited theological study
- have contributed to their final end of year report in conjunction with the Queen's Foundation and communicated it to the DPS
- undertake any preliminary reading suggested by the DPS
- identify a befriender (presbyteral probationers)
- identify a spiritual director (diaconal probationers)

On beginning the appointment

The District Chair and the circuit should work together on the welcome service for the new probationer. This service has great spiritual and liturgical significance, given that the probationer is making the major transition from student to practising minister yet without the support of ordination. The service shall include the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Standing Order 723(4)). Suitable forms of commitment and blessing (though nothing that purports to be ordination) may be incorporated in the service and involvement of 'home' circuit(s), training institution(s) etc should be encouraged. Where appropriate, the MDO should be informed of the date of the service in order that a representative might be sent. Presbyteral probationers in appointments not in the control of the Church should also have a welcome service that acknowledges their ministry.

Practical arrangements for the reception of the probationer and their family should be thorough, including a 'welcome pack' and whatever hospitality, meals on moving day etc are felt to be appropriate. It is to be hoped that practical support will not come to an end after the first week. Those responsible for care of the probationer should be aware that this person (along, possibly, with family members) is moving into a whole new way of life and that many probationers will be making the transition from living in a home for which they have exclusive responsibility. Some may encounter financial difficulties if they find themselves needing to purchase furniture and a car; if such issues arise, please contact the Connexional Team. Please remember the family members too and consider connecting them with other church families for support.

The supervisor should ensure that there is an early meeting for supervision at which the supervision covenant can be agreed and that all support arrangements are in place. The Minister in Oversight should ensure that support arrangements are in place and, should support the probationer by sharing in their planning before each major event (Church Council, wedding, funeral, baptism etc), accompanying them to it, and offering feedback afterwards. It is helpful if named photographs of the key office holders in the churches are given to the probationer on their arrival to help them to identify people quickly.

The DPS should be in touch very early with all dates for probationers' group meetings and meetings of the DPC for the year.

Groups and their functions

Circuit

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

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

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

Circuit staff meeting

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

Worship development group

All probationers (presbyteral and diaconal) should meet with a worship development group. It is the responsibility of the Superintendent to set up this group, who have a vital function to help the probationer develop as a leader of worship and to report to the DPC on that development.

The group aims to offer each probationer a framework to support reflection on the regular pattern of the leading of worship, and on the changes in style, role and method that the move into a ministerial appointment will demand.

The expectation is that all deacons will lead God's people in worship and engage in proclamation of the word; therefore, they should be competent in leading worship in both informal settings, whether impromptu or planned, or a more formal setting such as Sunday worship or the pastoral offices.

Suggested composition

People in the following roles should be included in Worship Development Groups:

- An ordained minister
- A convener - see below for the skills required.
- A representative from each church where the probationer has pastoral responsibility

Within the group, **at least one should have experience as a local preacher and leader of worship and at least two should be non-preaching church members.** It may be the experienced local preacher or worship leader is drawn from the church representative group but this does not necessarily have to be the case.

The **ordained minister** may be in the active work or a supernumerary. Skills in leading reflective conversations are required. The ordained minister may, or may not, be the Minister in Oversight and this should be left to the Circuit to decide what the most appropriate course of action is.

The WDG would normally no less than 4 people and no more than 8 in total. Additionally, at least one member of the group should not be under the probationer's pastoral care.

The Convener of Worship Development Groups: (this may or may not be the same person who is chairing it). The convener will write the report and gather together all the ongoing information, organise meetings etc. It may be appropriate for someone else from the group to chair the meetings to allow the convener to concentrate on the information gathering.

Skills and qualities required of those on the Worship Development Groups:

- ability to distinguish between essentials and lesser issues
- accepting of variety, innovation and tradition
- understanding of Methodist theology and practice
- sensitive to the spirituality of worship among leaders and congregations
- ability to critique worship sensitively and helpfully
- ability to offer sensitively appropriate feedback, bearing in mind our responsibilities to watch over one another in love.
- highly reflective practitioners who are open and thoughtful
- to have undertaken unconscious bias training

How Worship Development Groups operate

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

The group is also responsible for making a report to the DPC. The group may choose to base their report on specific acts of worship, or to summarise the year's

experience and progress. In either case, the probationer should be fully part of the process and conversation. The superintendent should not write reports from the worship development group.

The worship development group must take into account the probationer's order of ministry noting the ministry of proclamation in diaconal ministry and the ministry of word and sacrament in presbyteral ministry.

Between them, the group should observe and then discuss a variety of forms of worship, both in the churches to which the probationer has been appointed (if applicable) and in other sections of the circuit. These should include:

- A service with a traditional sermon
- Worship with people of all ages present
- Holy Communion (where the probationer is either presiding or assisting)
- Devotions for business meetings (if appropriate)
- Some special occasions, eg harvest, Christmas, anniversary, etc.
- Some less traditional, more creative services, eg a midweek service
- A baptism, a wedding or a funeral.

Their discussion and their report should include:

- Evidence of development in the probationer's leading of worship
- What the group discern to be his/her particular strengths in leading worship
- Areas to which s/he should give particular attention for development
- Observations on the probationer's ability to take part in a process of feedback and to hear and receive suggestions and criticism.

They should indicate if they are satisfied or not that sufficient progress is being made, and if there is evidence of exceptional gifts or skills in any area. The group's assessment of the probationer's development relates to the competencies that the Church looks for:

1. in the first year of stationing, to assess how the probationer is able to put training into practice:
 - by understanding of worship and of liturgical principles
 - by being able to lead worship as required in a variety of styles
 - by understanding preaching, hermeneutical principles and techniques of communication
 - by being able to preach in a number of styles and contexts
 - by being able to make positive use of feedback and assessment
2. in the second and (if any) subsequent years, to assess how the probationer is showing readiness to proceed to ordination and reception into Full Connexion:
 - by demonstrating the capacity to bear the public roles and responsibilities of an ordained person and to perform credibly and maturely as a presbyter or deacon
 - by having gained experience in a variety of the specific roles that fall to a presbyter or deacon in the worship context

Steering Group (Diaconal appointments)

All diaconal appointments have a Steering Group (2/3 people). Their function is to act as a sounding board for the Deacon to reflect on how the work is developing. It is important to note that they are not there to manage the Deacon, and so the membership of this group needs to include people who are able to reflect objectively, offer wise counsel and encouragement. This group is not required to report to the DPC. It is the responsibility of the Superintendent to set this group up.

District probationers' group

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

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

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

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

It is the responsibility of the DPS to ensure that this valuable time is used for structured theological reflection and support.

Religious Order Advisory Committee

The Religious Order Advisory Committee (ROAC) is a small group which is appointed annually to aid all deacons in reflecting on their vocation, development and ministry as members of a religious order and an order of ministry. The Warden or Deputy Warden will arrange for each probationer to receive feedback on the theological reflection, will encourage each probationer to reflect appropriately on feedback and will arrange a formal vocational conversation with the ROAC on an annual basis to explore and assess the probationer's development in their understanding of the obligations and privileges involved in being a member of the MDO which will then be reflected in the Warden's report to the DPC.

District Probationers' Committee

SO 725(2) describes the district Probationers' Committee as sharing, under the

coordination and guidance of the connexional oversight committee (MCPOC), in a work of oversight which 'shall include elements of both pastoral support and assessment'. Guidance in this area will be made available via the DPS. Negotiating these two elements and holding them in pastoral tension is no easy task at times for the DPC, but it is an essential characteristic of its role. Care should be taken to ensure that everyone, both committee members and probationers, understands and fully carries out these two aspects. The DPC has a duty to oversee the provision of pastoral care for probationers and their families. It also has a disciplinary role in respect of the probationer. Ultimately it exists to oversee the welfare and development in ministry of the probationers in the district and to link this with connexional oversight by reporting on their progress. Its role in continually upholding probationers and their families/households in prayer should be systematically addressed (eg by a prayer diary or rota).

It is permitted for several districts to operate together with one District Probationers' Committee.

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

The committee should be balanced in its age and gender composition and should reflect the ethnic mix of the district. It should include people with expertise in education, HR management, counselling, supervision, interviewing and assessment. Members of staff of The Queen's Foundation, circuit colleagues of probationers, probationer befrienders, supervisors and spiritual directors may be members of the DPC but should withdraw from the meeting when it is considering a probationer with whom they have a relationship outside the meeting. Diaconal probationers' Wise Seniors are not permitted to be members of the DPC in the same district as they are serving as a Wise Senior.

If the DPC has oversight of a diaconal probationer this should be reflected in its membership in consultation with MCPOC. Guidance is available from the Methodist Diaconal Order for district Probationers' Committees meeting with diaconal probationers with suggestions for questions and opportunities for reflection. Guidance is also available (in this handbook) regarding diaconal probationers' engagement with CPD and Wesley's sermons.

Procedures

The DPC must interview all probationers at least once a year, usually in February/March, in order to report to the presbyteral synod (for presbyteral probationers only) and MCPOC. In order to carry out its responsibility of general support of probationers the committee may wish to designate one of its members to maintain contact with each probationer between meetings. It may also wish to meet as a committee at other times than the main reporting meeting. Some districts find it helpful to meet with probationers in November/December to ensure any concerns are highlighted and followed up at an early stage. In this case a

report of any earlier discussions from those meetings should be included with the reports submitted to MCPOC – any concerns highlighted should be raised with MCPOC immediately.

Committees may use a mixture of triangle or panel interviews and full committee interviews. The use of triangle or panel interviews is strongly recommended.

The decision that the DPC makes will be to recommend:

- at the end of year one that the probationer continue for a further year on probation
- at the end of year two (or subsequent) that the probationer proceed to Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination or that s/he continue on probation for another year, or
- that the probationer's training be discontinued.

When a vote is taken on any of the recommendations above, at least seven members of the committee must be present.

Nothing should be said about a probationer to which s/he is not able to respond. If a new point is raised in discussion after the conclusion of an interview the probationer must be recalled or the interview adjourned. All reports at every stage must be shown to the probationer in reasonable time before the meetings at which they will be discussed; the probationer should then have the opportunity to add comments (though not to amend the report) and must sign to confirm that s/he has read it.

If there are serious concerns in the reports about a probationer that could lead to a recommendation for discontinuance (1) the probationer may be accompanied or represented at the committee (2) the committee must be given a record of oral and written warnings which have been given previously (3) no evidence should be used to support a recommendation for discontinuance which has not been seen by the probationer. Again, it is helpful if the Secretary of MCPOC is alerted before the event if the Chair and/or DPS think that a recommendation of discontinuance is likely.

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

- The probationer's general welfare including the effect of their development in ministry on dependants, close relationships and personal circumstances
- Progress and development towards the expected competencies for Reception into Full Connexion and Ordination (see below)
- Any particular concerns raised by those reporting on the probationer
- The probationer's development in the particular context of the appointment and its continuing suitability (or otherwise)
- For diaconal probationers, their development as a member of the religious order.

Evidence for making these judgements is gathered from:

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

A summary of submitted reports, together with a record of the committee's response to the reports and its recommendations, and a note of any points of concern, is drawn up by the DPS. (For presbyteral probationers a report is made

to the presbyteral synod, which may wish to add comments.) The report is then forwarded to the designated officer in the Connexional Team (MCOOM) who is responsible for identifying those concerns that should be specifically considered by MCPOC. This meeting compiles the lists which enable the responsible officer to recommend to the Conference that these people continue on probation or proceed to being received into Full Connexion and ordained.

Additional information for diaconal probationers

Expectations, obligations and religious life

Members of the MDO are people living under a common discipline expressed through our Rule of Life. Specifically, this means that all probationers are:

- expected to attend their local Area Group Meeting;
- expected to take an active part in their District Probationers' Group meetings including probationer retreats;
- under obligation to attend Convocation each year unless a dispensation is obtained from the Warden;
- expected to meet with their spiritual director and wise senior;
- expected in all ways to behave in such a way as befitting their office as public representative ministers of the Methodist Church.

Theological reflections

This is not designed to be an onerous task but is an opportunity for diaconal probationers to demonstrate how as members of a religious order they are developing as reflective practitioners.

The reflection should be no less than 1200 and no more than a 1500 words.

Diaconal probationers will be offered feedback on the reflection which will form the basis of their conversation with ROAC

Year1

*What does it mean to you to be a member of a Religious Order? (1500 words)
Please comment on your experiences of area group/wise senior/spiritual director*

Year 2

*What does it mean to you to be a member of a Religious Order and how does this impact upon your ministry? (1500 words)
Please comment on your experiences of area group/wise senior/spiritual director*

Probationers are asked to look back on last year's assignment and reflect on how they have grown over the year.

Wesley's sermons

Probationers should be able to understand and reflect critically on their Wesleyan historical roots which include an appreciation of Wesley's sermons.

The sermons, which MCPOC suggest as appropriate for a deacon to read, reflect and give an account of at their meeting with DPC (which will be assessed in the probationer's final year), would be from Wesley's several sermons on the Sermon on the Mount – a sermon of Jesus with much practical and spiritual wisdom, in which a deacon who is called to minister through witness and service, can find much food for thought both from Jesus' own sermon and from Wesley's reflections on it.

The following sermons are suggested as an appropriate list, from which a probationer should choose one to read, reflect and give account of, in light of their calling to be a deacon in the Methodist Church.

- Sermon 4 Scriptural Christianity
- Sermon 17 Humble, Righteous and Merciful (Sermon on the Mount 2)
- Sermon 19 Salt and Light (Sermon on the Mount 4)
- Sermon 21 On Prayer (Sermon on the Mount 6)

CPD

All deacons should have a working understanding of CPD, as ministers in Full Connexion and under the discipline of the Methodist Church, even if their appointment is largely not local church-based.

In particular, deacons should have a good understanding and working knowledge of the following:

Book III Standing Orders

Part 6 The Local Churches: Sections: 60 to 69

Part 7 Presbyters and Deacons Section: 75 The Methodist Diaconal Order and its Convocation

Principles: 701

Part 11 Complaints and Discipline: Section: 110 General

Book VII Guidance

Part 14 Guidelines in Good Practice in Confidentiality and Pastoral Care

The Warden's report

The Warden contributes to the probationer oversight process by preparing a report for the district Probationers' Committee and MCPOC which will reflect feedback from the Religious Order Advisory Committee alongside material provided by the district.

The report forms part of the DPC's paperwork and identifies areas of exploration and highlights areas of potential or perceived strengths and weaknesses.

Additional information for presbyteral probationers

Wesley's sermons

Probationers should be able to understand and reflect critically on their Wesleyan historical roots which include an appreciation of Wesley's sermons.

Presbyteral Probationers should read Wesley's sermons as part of their preparation for preaching. They should be able to reflect and give an account of their reading at their meeting with DPC (which will be assessed in the probationer's final year).

CPD

All presbyters should be able to demonstrate that they have a working understanding of CPD, as ministers in Full Connexion and under the discipline of the Methodist Church (this is tested by the DPC in the probationer's final year)

Competencies and reflective practice

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

- self-understanding continues to develop in new and challenging settings
- generic skills such as the ability to think critically and work collaboratively undergo further development
- learning related to specific disciplines (eg biblical studies, doctrine) occupies less time proportionately than before but continues to be important
- particular skills of practice are developed through rehearsal and reflection
- all areas of learning are related to one another in the context of probation both through practical interaction and through sustained and systematic reflection. Reflective practice is not an area to be separately assessed: it is a fundamental perspective and way of thinking that enables a person to bring together their personal attitudes and beliefs, their formal knowledge, other people's attitudes and expectations and the context within which they live and work, and out of all this to move on with changes in practice that lead to new questions, aims and areas to be explored.

Progress through this time of learning is assessed against particular competencies that have been identified as making up the kind of theologically reflective ministers that the Church needs today. These were adopted by the Conference of 2016 and reviewed in 2024. These can be found in forms P1.1 and P1.2 which are with the other probation forms on the Methodist Church website here : [Probationer assessment forms - The Methodist Church](#).

Assessment and reporting

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

- the DPC (SO 484) must have a widely representative membership including members with the necessary skills and experience
- use should be made in interviewing of small groups with a specific remit
- informal committees may be held during the year, either as a regular feature or only as required, to address issues before they become critical
- probationers should be encouraged to feel at ease with the committee and should be made aware who its members are
- those who have responsibility for writing reports should consult with those who have experience of the probationer's ministry and should detail who has been consulted
- training should be provided for individual members of the DPC and for the group as a whole
- DPCs should be clear, both among themselves and to the probationer, about the criteria on which they base their evaluations. The competencies should form the basis of these.

Each year the DPC reports to MCPOC (on Form P2) on the probationers within the district. The overall report is based on a number of individual reports and other documents that cover specific areas and on interviews with the committee. It concludes with an assessment of the general fitness of the probationer as someone who is:

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

The report is primarily a formative assessment which presents a snapshot of the probationer's development so far, and their competencies at this point, in a way that will assist future development. It is not concerned only with assessing whether he or she has reached a required standard. At the same time, it must present a judgement as to the probationer's fitness to continue on probation (first year) or to be ordained (final year). The final recommendation must, therefore, be written in a way that makes this clear and also makes brief reference to the areas which support the judgement.

Separate elements of assessment contribute to the Form P2. It is essential that a clear description of the probationer's level of competence in each area is provided. Note that each form is designed to be used for reporting on both presbyteral and diaconal probationers.

The areas are:

- Form P3 – conduct of worship and preaching
The evaluation of worship leading and preaching should be a process of continual feedback and reflection in the worship development group, which must include participation by local congregations.

- Form P4 – report from the Circuit
This report should be drawn up in consultation with the circuit leadership team, supervisor and Minister in Oversight
- Form P5 – report of studies
This includes a report on the Orientation / Gospel in Context Project from the DPS or Queen’s Foundation and a report on the probation studies by Queen’s, or the district, or another institution (depending on the agreed course of studies being undertaken).
- Form P6 – the probationer’s self-assessment.
This is prepared by the probationer for the express purpose of submission to the DPC (SO 725(4)(a)). The full self-assessment should be carried out by the probationer with the help of others they choose and remains confidential to the probationer. The probationer completes form P6 from this full self-assessment.
- Form P7 - Warden’s report
This reports on the development of diaconal probationers as members of a religious order, and comments on other reports.
- Form P8 – Covenant for Probation
This sets out the particular support roles for each probationer, and the commitment of each. This must be completed at the outset of probation and whenever any of the personnel change during probation, but it is not an assessment form.

Some particular issues about reporting

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

Where the probationer is a deacon, forms P3-P6 must be submitted to the Warden in time for the Warden’s report to be drawn up in light of these reports and submitted to the DPC, no later than 31 January.

Reporting on study and required learning should have as evidence either a report from The Queen’s Foundation (or another institution) or at least one piece of assessed work undertaken in the district (see probationer studies). Evidence of engagement with theology and the wider culture can consist of activities (eg retreats, holidays, cinema, music-making) as well as reading (which should include journals as well as books) and should include theological study, spirituality

and prayer, stimulation of imagination and creativity, hobbies and interests.

Continuing studies during probation

It's important to see probation as the second phase of initial ministerial training and formation, which builds on and continues the patterns, rhythms and habits of time at Queen's (via whichever pathway a student minister has followed), whilst further shifting the context to a local circuit appointment and the emphasis to the practice of ministry. That means that study, even if not given the same prominence as before, is still a critical aspect of probation. It's crucial to start to build on the learning gained through the college phase of training, to reflect further on ministry, and to continue to inform and enable ministerial life with deepening knowledge and enriched reflection. It's also critical to see the habits of mind and heart, in study, reading and reflection, cultivated in probation as an essential establishing of a rhythm which will continue past ordination as the firm foundation of all ministry.

For these reasons, the weekly study day is absolutely essential and to be regarded as sacred. This is a solemn obligation laid on a circuit in seeking, and being accepted for, a probationer appointment; and it is incumbent on everyone, and not just the probationer, to ensure that it is in place, and taken every week. It is also vital for probationers to continue to reflect on their studies and their value in ministry, both individually and with others: those in oversight, supervisors, befrienders, colleagues, the DPS and the district probationers' group. It is a spiritual practice: a gift of space in which to deepen learning, reflect theologically on practice, cultivate sustaining habits and seek refreshment and renewal.

Before beginning probation, student ministers complete a Learning and Development form, in consultation with tutors, which maps out their hopes and priorities for continued learning, building on what has been learned as a student minister and identifying areas for growth and the development of skills and insight. This will also chart the pattern of their studies during probation. This form is shared with DPSs, Superintendents and Ministers in Oversight (where they are not the superintendent) as the student moves from college to circuit.

Continuing Ministerial Training and Formation in Probation

For all probationers, there are two mandatory projects, one in each year, which undergird their ongoing exploration of ministry and mission:

In **Year One**, the **Orientation Project**, undertaken during the first four months of the appointment, provides a framework of exploration and accountability in a number of areas:

- Familiarisation with their context for ministry: geography, history, social context, demography and so on;
- 'Pastoral Ethnography': i.e., reflection on the ways in which they are beginning to assemble a sense of the stories – and thereby the Story – of this place as a setting for ministry and mission;
- Theological Reflection: an intentional, continued, deepening of material from college, reaching back to courses and classes and 'applying' learning

to this place, and their task; but also augmenting that learning with new insights and further reading, as they seek to inform their response to congregation, context, and community.

This reflection and learning will form a part of the agenda for meetings of the probationers' group, supported by the DPS, as well as by tutors at Queen's or within the district (see also 'Pathways for Probationer Studies', below). To aid in their reflection and exploration, probationers are also required to keep a **personal journal**, which should include first impressions, notes of key events, and reflections on these experiences. This is not to be submitted, shared or evaluated, but it is a crucial tool for the completion of the Orientation Project, and a hugely valuable resource in reflecting on vocation, ministerial formation, spiritual development and personal growth.

In **Year Two**, the **Gospel in Context Project** asks probationers to build on their Orientation Project by reflecting in greater depth on their context as a place for the proclamation and enacting of the Good News of Christian faith. They are asked to consider the question being posed to them and their congregations, what it means to be the Church in that place, and what theological insights, resources and approaches are helping them to address the needs of that place. There is a practical edge to this too, in suggesting future pathways of mission and ministry to carry forward these insights.

These two 'formational' projects in particular, and the cultivation of new insights during probation in general, are undergirded too by other processes, relationships and gatherings:

- The **District Probationers' Group**, which is, among other things, a forum for mutual theological reflection, in which there is the opportunity for shared exploration and the informing of one another's thinking and ministry;
- **Supervision**, in which theological, pastoral and other insights may be brought to bear on particular challenges and joys of ministry;
- The **Worship Development Group**, which ought in its accompanying of a probationer to take context into account in making its comments and accounting for its conclusions;
- The **self-assessment** process, in which theological questions ought to be a part of accompanied reflection on ministry and growth.

For diaconal probationers, there are two further aids to this work:

- The reflection with the **Religious Order Advisory Committee**, which is required annually and includes a formal vocational conversation to include spirituality, the Rule of Life, and an assessment of how being a member of a religious order impacts upon their life and ministry;
- An additional brief **theological reflection** on these themes (see Additional Information for Diaconal Probationers).

Probationer Studies

In addition to this, student ministers will map out, in the Learning and Development Needs form, before leaving initial training, their own pathways of continuing learning and development. One key component of this is formal studies, and the conversations that take place with tutors in completing this form are essential, in ensuring that what is laid out there is achievable, helpful, and properly resourced. It will also be important for this to be shared with Superintendents and DPSs on entering circuit, to enable the proper support and encouragement to be given. This study should not normally be more than will occupy eight hours a week, and less than that in some weeks (for instance when the district group meets), but a heavier commitment is sometimes acceptable where a probationer can demonstrate the ability to undertake it. Circuits are also encouraged to be flexible in discussing with probationers helpful patterns for this: for instance, allowing the taking of several weeks' study days at once for attendance at residential courses or for the writing up of longer piece of work.

Pathways for Probationer Studies

The norm for those leaving initial training is to continue their formal studies by following the **Queen's Pathway for Probation**. This means that they can continue to build on the learning and insights of their college training, and experience a degree of coherence and consistency between the two phases of their initial formation. They can also do so in the continuing company of those with whom they trained, and whose experiences and questions, from all across the Connexion, are in and of themselves a huge resource and gift in the gathered residential courses which happen in November and June. Those who undertake this course of study for an accredited award can complete the Durham University B.A. in Theology, Ministry and Mission which they have begun in college, or, in a few cases each year, begin the M.A. in Theology and Transformative Practice from Newman University, but within the same cohort of probationer students at Queen's. In both cases, the work towards the Orientation and Gospel in Context projects also counts towards the degree itself, via modules created to make that possible. The Methodist Co-Director of the Centre for Continuing Ministerial Development at Queen's will be a point of contact for DPSs, and ensure that Form P5 is completed for all continuing probationers.

Others may choose to pursue the same pattern of studies as those of their peers working towards an accredited degree or award, but on a *not-for-credit* basis, learning with their cohort, and producing the same or very similar written work for assessment at Queen's, the feedback for which will also be shared with DPCs via Form P5, completed by tutors at Queen's. There is also the possibility of working on an *audit* basis, by which the probationer attends the residential courses at Queen's, but is then asked to be accountable for their learning directly to the DPS and DPC. This is a route to be taken only after consideration by MCPOC, who will also liaise with the DPS, to ensure that the resources are available in the district for this sort of assessment.

It is also possible to undertake the work for the 'formational' elements, the two annual projects, on a not-for-credit basis at Queen's, and then to pursue further studies through an individual pathway, designed in consultation with tutors when completing the Learning and Development Needs form. A variety of possibilities

exist for this, including but not limited to:

- Undertaking a short course at Cliff College, with appropriate assessment to be shared in the district afterwards;
- Participating in some other short course or series of study days at a Methodist-related institution such as Wesley House, Cambridge, the Wesley Study Centre in Durham, Luther King House, Sarum College or the University of Roehampton;
- A tailored reading list pursuing a particular interest or specialism (it is possible to provide some tutorial input to such an exercise, so that there is space for reflection and growth);
- Some other accredited or non-accredited pathway for study, approved by Queen's tutors and the district.

It is, again, important to ensure that non-Queen's pathways for studies are properly able to be assessed, and that the district is confident that the probationer can be helped to be adequately accountable for what they have gained to the DPC, via a written report, or an assessed conversation. Superintendents and DPSs are welcome to be in touch with Queen's if they wish, if help in structuring the project would be valuable, or to inform a reading list or an approach to assessments.

Costs

The costs for probationers studying on the Queen's pathway, on whatever basis, are covered in the arrangements already in place between the Connexion and the Foundation. Connexional funding is available for probationers undertaking courses at other institutions, which have been approved by MCPOC via the Learning and Development Needs form. At present, this funding is set at the full fees, up to £1750 a year, plus two-thirds of travel expenses (which those studying at Queen's may also claim). MCPOC will not approve funding for courses that do not have a significant theological element. The Learning and Development Needs form will constitute the application to MCPOC for the funding required for non-Queen's pathways when it comes before the spring meeting.

Other Guidelines

As stated earlier, the district probationers' group is always a priority, a mandatory gathering in which conversations and relationships can be built, and growth into inhabiting public ministry fostered.

Where a course of study is indicated on the Learning and Development Needs form, and agreed by MCPOC, but is not primarily theological but rather about the acquisition of skills (e.g. Godly Play training, or for counselling skills), district funding should be sought in the first instance. The Connexional Team will be happy to help with this if required: contact MCPOCadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk.

Whatever course or pattern of study they choose, all probationers should be asked to produce a substantial piece of reflective work at least once in the year, which can be used as a means of assessing the evidence of their ability to think theologically. For diaconal probationers, the written reflection for the ROAC fulfils this requirement. Presbyteral probationers not otherwise producing work for formal assessment might offer an essay, a presentation, perhaps to the

probationers' group, or some other medium by which they can show engagement. It should be on a theological topic, and supported by an appropriate reading list.

At ordination, ministers promise that they will "be faithful...in those studies which will equip you for your ministry". This is not a luxury, or a dispensable extra, but an integral and essential part of ensuring ongoing vitality, renewal, and creativity in the practice of ministry, attentiveness to God's call, and fidelity to God's people in mission. In probation, we lay firm foundations for all future ministry, and do what we can to ensure that we take into ordained ministry frameworks and patterns which will endure, and thus sustain, encourage and renew us for all the years to come.

And finally...

The journey through probation may not always be comfortable either for probationers or for those around them.

It is a time of adjustment not merely to a new role but to a new way of being: a time of heart-searching and questioning, of exploration and discovery.

It is a time when expectations are challenged and frustrations encountered as the Church and probationers undertake discernment together.

At a time of rapid change in the Church and society, these tensions become all the more apparent.

And yet it is a time of great joy.

Probationers and those privileged to accompany them on their journey experience the flowering of potential as individuals learn to become who they are in response to God's call to ordained ministry in the Methodist Church.

The district recognises and affirms the probationers' development at the DPC.

On this basis, the connexional oversight committee (MCPOC) makes its recommendations to the Conference.

The ordinands' testimony service offers an opportunity for many people in the district to celebrate with the ordinands and send them on their way with God's blessing to be received into Full Connexion and ordained.