

Stationing Review Report

MC/24/42

Date of meeting	13-15 April 2024
Contact name and details	The Revd Michaela A Youngson, Assistant Secretary of Conference asc@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	For Decision
Resolutions	42/1. The Council receives the report. 42/2. The Council endorses each of the recommendations and commends them to the Conference for implementation.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	The Ministries Committee resolved that a thorough review of stationing processes be undertaken due to the number of concerns raised.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To undertake a root and branch review of all processes related to the stationing of ministers in the Methodist Church. To report to the Methodist Conference with recommendations for changes to those processes and the necessary changes to Standing Orders. To take into account concerns that have arisen in recent years that affect the Church's ability to offer ministry effectively and fairly.
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	<p>The 2021 Conference Report <i>Changing Patterns of Ministry</i> has been a key resource for the stationing review process, as the Review Group has explored:</p> <p>An apparent decrease in the commitment to itinerancy amongst those in active work.</p> <p>An apparent unwillingness of many of those being stationed to take up ministry in rural, island, and outlying contexts.</p> <p>The decrease of a physical presence in churches due to the ongoing pandemic and the increase of virtual worship.</p>
Consultations	<p>This review has involved consultation with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stationing committee stationing matching group circuit stewards chairs of district the warden of the diaconal order lay stationing representatives presbyters deacons family members of those in ministry the Methodist Church in Ireland ecumenical partners

Stationing Review Report

MC/24/42

1. Introduction

The Ministries Committee at its meeting in February 2022 resolved that a thorough review of stationing processes be undertaken due to the number of concerns raised by the Ministries Committee, Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, Chairs' Meeting, Connexional Leaders' Forum and gatherings of superintendent ministers in districts and connexionally. The Council and the Conference concurred with this view.

This review has involved consultation with the Stationing Committee, Stationing Matching Group, Circuit Stewards, Chairs of District, The Warden of the Diaconal Order, Lay Stationing Representatives, presbyters, deacons, and family members of those in ministry, as well as the Methodist Church in Ireland and ecumenical partners able to offer insights from different models of stationing practice. The terms of reference and membership of the review group were presented to the Methodist Council at its April 2022 meeting.

2. Task

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

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

Task

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

To Take into Account

- 5. The review group will address a number of concerns that have arisen in recent years that affect the Church's ability to offer ministry effectively and fairly. These include:*
 - 5.1 Ministers retiring, resigning, curtailing and transferring to other churches.*
 - 5.2 A rising number of ministers (both lay and ordained) taking recuperative years.*
 - 5.3 A reduction in the number of those candidating for ministry; the shortage of ministers available for the number of appointments submitted to stationing; changing roles and responsibilities for those in ministry (lay and ordained). Particular notice to be taken of factors affecting diaconal stationing, which seems less impacted by numbers candidating and at times has seen insufficient appointments available for the number of deacons in stationing.*
 - 5.4 How our stationing processes can best meet the needs of mission and ministry on the ground, without a skewing of allocated resources to only those places that can afford them.*
- 6. The 2021 Conference Report 'Changing Patterns of Ministry' is a key resource for the stationing review process, as the Review Group explores:*
 - 6.1 The decrease in the commitment to itinerancy amongst those in active work, possibly due to an increase in pressure around the support of family members. An apparent unwillingness of many of*

those being stationed to take up ministry in rural, island, 'outlying' (e.g. North of Scotland, Cornwall) areas.

6.2 The decrease of a physical presence in churches due to the ongoing pandemic and the increase of virtual worship.

7. The Review Group will also review the stationing process for Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences (MOCCs) for, while there is an increase in ministers wishing to be stationed, this is not matched by enthusiasm of a number of circuits to receive such ministry. This process has been further complicated by immigration policies and our responsibility as a sponsoring body.

7.1 This review will also explore the reluctance of some circuits to receive probationary ministers.

7.2 The review group will explore how the implementation of the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Strategy; the adoption by the Conference of the Connexional Safeguarding policies and the God In Love Unites Us report impacts on our stationing process.

Outcomes and Ways of Working

8. The stationing review group will propose revisions to the stationing matching process that take into account the changing nature of ministry, the costs both financial and environmental of our current way of working and the need for the JDS strategy to be embedded in all our ways of working.

8.1 The group will consider the length of a standard appointment and offer recommendations for changes as appropriate.

9. The Review Group is encouraged to consult widely, as described in paragraph 2 above; to be willing to think creatively and to co-opt or consult with those persons most able to assist it in its work.

3. Summary

In this Report, the Stationing Review Group (SRG) proposes revisions to the stationing matching process that take into account the changing nature of ministry and the financial and environmental costs of our current way of working and the need for the JDS strategy to be embedded in all our ways of working. The report also raises questions about the current committee structure that surrounds our stationing work, how best our methods of stationing ministers impact on their well-being and the flourishing of the work of God in circuits.

4. Membership of Review Group

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

Observers/Advisors/Consultants

The Director for Inclusion:	Mr Bevan Powell
The Chair of the Stationing Matching Group:	The Revd Jenny Impey
The Chair of the Stationing Committee:	Ms Jenny Jackson
Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries:	The Revd Dr Claire R Potter
Representative of 'Belonging Together':	The Revd Naomi Kaiga

5. Research

Various areas of research were explored that have influenced the findings and recommendations of the Stationing Review Group. These include input from our ecumenical partners, feedback from 124 ministers at the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Methodist Conference, and results from the Stationing Review Survey which yielded over five hundred responses.

6. Ecumenical and other Methodist Churches

Models of stationing or deployment of ministers used in other parts of the Methodist family and by our ecumenical partners vary from entirely direct stationing, such as the Methodist Church of Zimbabwe, to almost all posts being advertised, as with our siblings in the Church of England. The Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI) has a small group, made up of District Superintendents and lay members, who meet throughout the year to consider which ministers might best match appointments as and when they arise. There is flexibility in terms of timing of moves in the MCI model and the size of the Connexion allows an in-depth knowledge of both Circuits and ministers.

The United Reformed Church model involves guidance from Moderators and Synods, particularly around the scoping of appointments (how much ordained ministry a particular church might receive); however posts are usually advertised and the invitation of a particular minister to a local church or group of churches is made by the local congregation(s). A small number of appointments are centrally deployed where a mission priority has been identified. Appointments may not be advertised until the previous minister has left the context; this creates vacancies, which are usually managed locally, often with support from ecumenical relationships.

The Baptist Union model usually involves local churches advertising for ministers/pastors and, whilst churches may choose to appoint ministers recognised by the denomination, each church is a separate entity, free to appoint whomever they choose.

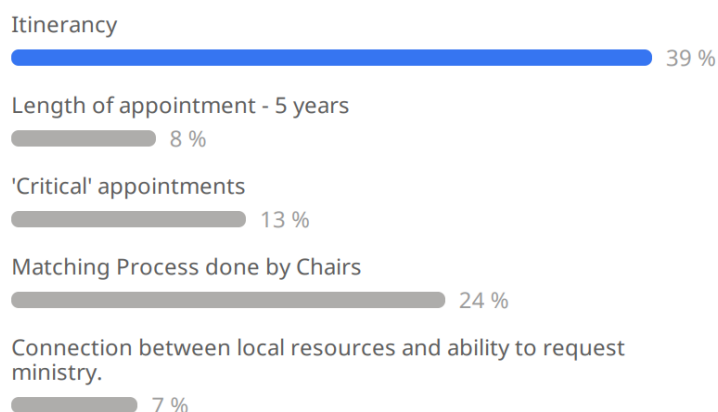
The responsibility for the stationing of ministers in the United Methodist Church usually rests with the Presiding Bishop of any particular Conference. Some bishops operate an 'Open List' policy where ministers and churches can see what appointments and ministers are available; others operate a 'Closed List', where such information is limited.

The closer a system is to 'direct stationing', the more likely it is that all moves take place at once and, in such cases, there is less 'agency' for ministers and those in local contexts as to the outcome of the process. 'Planned vacancies'¹ tend not to feature in these models, though in situations of a scarcity of ministers, inevitably vacancies have to be managed. It seems this is often by sharing the work across those who remain in ministry (lay and ordained) in a given context, which is unsustainable in the long term.

7. The Presbyteral Session of the Conference and The Stationing Review Survey

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

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



¹ We will avoid the terms 'interregna' and 'interregnum' in this report as it does not fit our ecclesiological understanding of the relationship between minister and congregation.

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

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

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

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

8. Issues Identified

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



9. Geographical limitations to stationing

One of the factors that affects both diaconal and presbyteral stationing is that of geographical limitation. The survey found that both deacons and presbyters shared similar top reasons for not feeling that they could be fully itinerant. The top three are limitations due to the vocation or career of their partner or spouse (31% of deacons and 30.9% of presbyters said this was 'often' or 'always' a factor); the support of vulnerable family members (39.5% compared to 31.8%); or the educational needs of family members (22.4% compared to 32.1%).

In addition to these needs, it was also identified that geographical limitations were set by some ministers due to being a part of a ministerial couple (5 respondents) or because of needs regarding their own wellbeing, eg the importance of being in close proximity to a friendship support network (16).

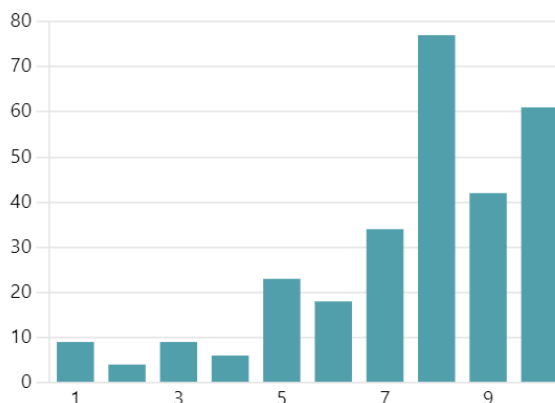
10. Discrimination

Four of the respondents referred to what they experienced as the bias of circuit officers against having a minister who was a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and two against those living with a disability. One respondent stated: "Circuits that are disabled friendly are few and far between." Other ministers expressed that they are afraid to be stationed in some Circuits due to fear of "bullying by [certain] senior leaders."

11. Training/Preparation for those involved in stationing processes

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

7.54
Average Rating



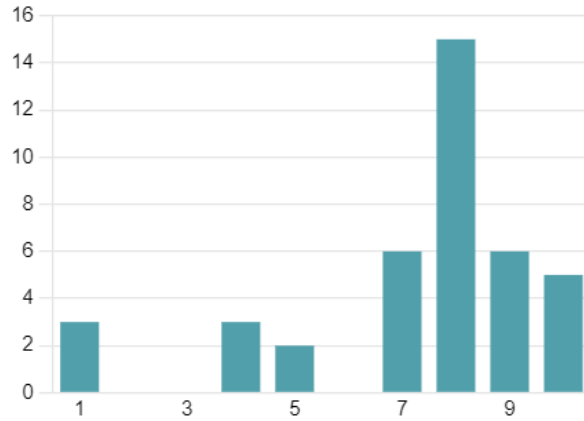
Of the 283 respondents (presbyters) to Q18, 230 also responded to the question of what they found helpful or unhelpful. Of those who were critical of the process, twenty participants had issues with church officers not following proper procedure or feeling unsupported in the process. Eighteen of the respondents highlighted a lack of transparency in the stationing process as being unhelpful in their appointment. Nine found it difficult due to feeling a total lack of control in the process.

Circuit Stewards were asked the same question and gave a 7.68 Average Rating.

Questions for deacons were designed to reflect the way in which their stationing process works, therefore deacons were asked:

"In your most recent experience of stationing, on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is the least helpful and 10 the most) how helpful was your conversation with the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee?"

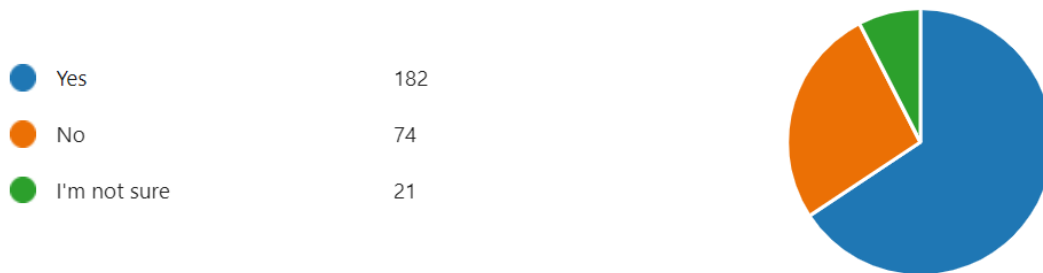
7.28
Average Rating



40 deacons responded as below, giving a 7.28 average rating. The Warden of the Order will share this with the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee and consider the detailed feedback that was offered in follow up to this question.

12. Family Members

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



Almost a third felt that there was not enough consideration of their needs during the process, while some of those who felt that their needs were considered, felt this only marginally. One minister commented that “My husband’s experience was not positive. He felt he was just following me round, not really able to ask questions, yet expected to move his life and business and no one was interested in him only me.” There were some who were invited to be a part of the process, but who chose not to due to them feeling that it was a ‘flawed’ or ‘confusing’ process. Three were not invited to be a part of the process at all.

Six single ministers reported that an invitation was made to them to involve family in the process, while 11 reported that they weren’t offered a chance to bring someone else along with them, when that would have been helpful to them.

13. Circuit stewards

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

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

Competency and help of colleagues.	9	Code of Practice unwieldy.	3
------------------------------------	---	----------------------------	---

14. Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences (MOCC)

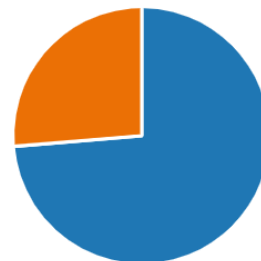
Circuits have proved reluctant in accepting a MOCC with almost half of circuits represented in the survey not even considering a MOCC appointment. Justice, Dignity and Solidarity issues are raised here as many unconscious biases and prejudices are reflected in these comments.

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

Survey Comments	
<i>Did not want a MOCC directly stationed. "Fear of the unknown" "Fearful that someone unsuitable would be directly stationed."</i>	4
<i>Lack of understanding of the process for MOCC appointments</i>	4
<i>We have a large circuit with many churches, it might be too overwhelming for a probationer (or a MOCC).</i>	4
<i>Time restraints for filling out paperwork</i>	4
<i>Bad previous experience</i>	2
<i>It was never given to us as an option</i>	2
<i>We don't have the people or the time to mentor a probationer or a MOCC</i>	2
<i>They cost more.</i>	1
<i>The assumption that MOCCs would prefer "an urban/more diverse" environment</i>	1
<i>Lack of probationers available.</i>	1
<i>Potential language barrier (English), perception of the community.</i>	1

15. Profiles

Over a quarter of Circuit Stewards did not feel that they had enough information from ministers' profiles to be able to make a decision.



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

Ministers were not asked about Circuit profiles, but during the work of the SRG we have identified issues with circuits not being clear about their contexts and circumstances, for example, their financial stability, churches' theologies or particular styles of ministry (especially in terms of views on theology of human sexuality). A stark example of this can be seen in this comment: "We have twice been matched with

appointments which were Inclusive. 1) where we were informed of the match, then on the same day, told we could not visit as the Superintendent would not meet us because we were Gay. 2) we were matched, told the circuit were inclusive - moved - to find they were not at all and I was not allowed to preach, I was not included in meetings and no one in a LPs meeting would shake my hand in the peace.”

The concerns here are around issues of Justice, Dignity and Solidarity, that, without clear circuit profiles, ministers could be sent to a circuit where contradictory convictions are not being appropriately managed and that this could impact their wellbeing and capacity to minister in that context.

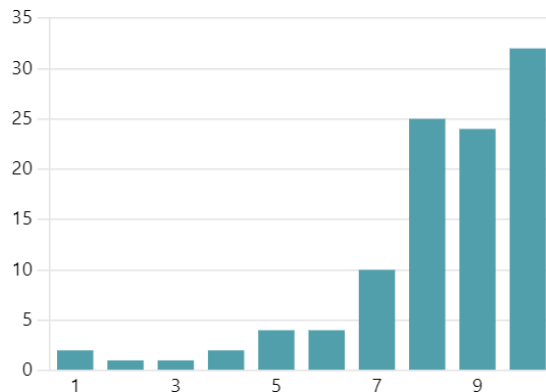
81% of Circuit stewards who did not find profiles helpful wanted more space on the forms to describe their circuit: Overall, 37% of circuit stewards who responded, want more space to describe their Circuit.

Circuit Stewards provided feedback on how Circuit profile forms could be improved including longer forms, perhaps something similar to the URC, eg, the insertion of photos or video links. Another frequent suggestion was that the forms could be restructured, eg manse descriptions could be a separate document and geographical preference should be moved closer to the top of the form.

16. Circuit Visits

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

8.24
Average Rating



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

17. Transparency and discrimination

A perceived lack of transparency in the stationing process is raised by a broad spectrum of respondents in the Survey. We can see this specifically by Circuit Stewards (Q19), family members of ministers (Q38), and ministers in the re-invitation process (Q43, Q46) who all desired more transparency in the process. We can see this summed up by a comment from a presbyter:

“Remove the responsibility for re-invitation process from circuit stewards. Move to a trained group of district people who lead in partnership with circuit stewards. I don’t like saying this as I think it sits with circuit stewards but again, again and again this is where I hear the most pain and no amount of training changes this. After 4 years in a difficult but life giving appointment my four years of hard work were reduced to 7 bullet points and 57 words but a Senior Circuit steward who was adamant they’d done everything by the book. They then gave me 4 pages of unedited ecumenical feedback to placate me.”²

Another quote:

² From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

“Honesty to the process as background discussion among chairs and matching groups are shrouded in secrecy and impacts greatly to the results”³

There is a feeling amongst some within the Church that current *“Unconscious Bias training is insufficient to address discrimination.”⁴*

Issues Identified from Other Sources

18. Stationing Matching Group 2023/24

The work of stationing has been profoundly challenging this year for members of the Stationing Matching Group. At the beginning of the process in November 2023, it became clear that we were facing two major challenges; firstly, the common occurrence that there was a disparity between the number of available presbyters and the number of circuit appointments submitted for stationing and, secondly, that there were not enough ministers with sufficient experience or resilience to fill complex superintendent appointments and appointments designated ‘critical’.

These two challenges made the stationing matching process very difficult, and the Stationing Matching Group often found itself on the horns of a dilemma, as it sought to be faithful to the needs of the Church and at the same time, give sufficient regard to the proper flourishing of our presbyters through careful matching. When the Stationing Matching Group met for SMG 3 in early January, there remained a total of forty-four unmatched appointments, five of which were designated as ‘critical’, with a total of just nine presbyters available to be stationed.

The challenges to the process have been compounded yet further, by the sober reality that there is a diminishing number of presbyters who are able to be fully itinerant because of personal circumstances, needs of partners and spouses, dependents, and social networks of support. The Stationing Matching Group has sought to exercise care and consideration in the face of these personal concerns, but in the process, it has made it difficult to fill appointments in disparate places and geographical extremities. Consequently, it is difficult to sustain the view that the present Stationing Matching process is fully meeting the needs of the Church.

The number of diaconal appointments was close to the number of deacons available in stationing, which is helpful to an extent but does not allow much flexibility in terms of making the best matches.

19. Wellbeing, Housing and Itinerancy

At the time of this report being written, the Wellbeing staff in the Connexional Team are handling 77 active cases, ranging from quickly dealt with enquiries to ten ministers being on Recuperative Years. There is a concern that this may be the tip of the iceberg in terms of a full understanding of the health of many deacons and presbyters. We do not hold central records of every time a minister is off work, nor do we have central records on how many are in counselling or are continuing to work whilst being unwell. The work of the Wellbeing Team is highly regarded across the Connexion and it may be that this has led to some cases which would have been handled locally being referred for expert help. The SRG is concerned that the wellbeing of many in ministry seems to be suffering.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of ministers requesting part-time appointments, sometimes for their own wellbeing and sometimes to care for others. This has happened at the same time as an increase in the number of ministers offering significantly limited deployability due, in many cases, to caring for family members or for a need to be near particular friendship or cultural groups for their own support.

The SRG is interested in the possibility that, were it clear to both ministers and circuits that arrangements for rest days are a *minimum* of 24 hours (as is clear in CPD), rather than ‘one day off a week’, fewer people would be looking for part-time appointments. Would ministers be willing to be stationed across larger geographies if they felt confident to ask for two days off a week, in order to visit friends and family further from the appointment? Would ministers enjoy better health if Circuit Leadership Teams advocate strongly for appropriate balance and time off? Would a clear ‘two days off a week’ move away from local interpretation and enable ministers to offer for full-time roles across a wider geography than seems to be the current trend?

Until very recently the number of ministers requesting permission to be in their own home has been very small and permission has rarely been granted. The requirement to live in a manse is not just a matter of the tax status of ministers but is an embodiment of the principle of itinerancy that remains at the heart of

³ From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

⁴ From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

our stationing system. In the last eighteen months the Manses Sub-Committee of the Stationing Committee has received twenty-six requests for ministers to live in their own home. Twenty permissions were granted, which is unprecedented.

In addition to these factors, increasing numbers of ministers are approaching the Stationing Advisory Committee to be without appointment, or to be in an appointment outside the control of the Church. Requests for permission to study or to reside abroad have not increased significantly.

Currently 38 ministers have permission to be without appointment and 74 to be in an appointment outside the control of the Church. In the light of the pressures on the stations, this is difficult to justify strategically.

Itinerancy seems, despite a commitment to it from those who responded to the survey, to be under pressure, if not threat.

20. Theological Reflection and Previous Reports

The Stationing Review and the Conference Report from 1997⁵ set out the recommendations to the Church. In the opening paragraph of that report, the terms of reference are spelt out thus:

*'Its terms of reference were to seek a system that is 'faithful to our traditions, serves the mission of the Church, is sensitive to the needs and aspirations of ministers and circuits, is easy to understand and operate, is economical in time and money and above all is felt to be sensible and fair.'*⁶

In seeking to be 'faithful to our traditions' particular attention is given to the 'connexional principle' as a significant part of our tradition and a fundamental descriptor of our theological identity as Methodists. At best our stationing procedures reflect the concept of ministers being in Full Connexion, and entering a covenant relationship with the Conference which creates a relationship of mutual interdependence. This covenant relationship brings mutual obligations, responsibilities, gifts, and commitments.

Part of a minister's obligation is to be available to be stationed by the Conference so that the mission and ministry needs of the Church can be met. Part of the Church's obligation is to provide a manse and a stipend for the minister to engage in ministry in a particular context.

One of the perceived benefits of connexionalism, as a way of understanding how to be a Church, is the principle of itinerancy:

*'The Church has a body of authorized and trained ministers whom, in theory, it can place in appropriate appointments, where their gifts can be used to advance the Church's work and mission.'*⁷

The Connexional Principle is fully set out in the Conference statement of ecclesiology, Called to Love and Praise (1999).

*'The connexional principle, as we have seen, has been intrinsic to Methodism since its origins. Although this principle has not always come to expression in a complete or balanced way in Methodist structures and practice, it enshrines a vital truth about the nature of the Church. It witnesses to a mutuality and interdependence which derive from the participation of all Christians through Christ in the very life of God himself. Whether the word 'connexion' is retained or not, the principle is fundamental.'*⁸

In 2017, the Methodist Conference received a report from the Faith and Order Committee, entitled 'The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st. Century' in which there is a reaffirmation of the gift of connexionalism, whilst recognising some of the evident pressures upon the principle. The report highlights that one of those pressures is the upholding of the discipline of stationing and the commitment to ministerial itinerancy. Despite these challenges, there is a bold assertion of the continuing vitality and significance of understanding ourselves in this way:

*'For Methodists connexionalism is not an abstract principle or a piece of historical baggage, but a way of being Christian. The overall conclusions of the working party's investigation were that connexionalism is still fundamental to how Methodists understand the Church.'*⁹

⁵ Conference Report No: 52, Stationing Committee, Report of the Stationing Review Group, 585

⁶ Report of the Stationing Review Group, 585

⁷ Report of the Stationing Review Group, 587

⁸ Called to Love and Praise (1999), 4.6.1

⁹ Conference Report No:37, The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st. Century, 2017, paragraph 4

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

*'The 2018 Conference noted "the potential dissonance between the Methodist Church's understanding of itinerancy and experiences of the stationing processes. In practice many ministers are not available to be stationed anywhere within the Connexion and this has prompted questions about the role and place of itinerancy in the Methodist Church today."*¹⁰

The report sets out the challenges to itinerancy that the Church and its ministers are experiencing and these are set out clearly on pages 311-312. The present working group is aware of these factors, which have figured in our conversations thus far as can be seen in the section on 'Wellbeing, Housing and Itinerancy' above. Whilst recognising these challenges, *Changing Patterns of Ministry* continues to affirm the place and significance of itinerancy as part of the Methodist Church's understanding of ordained ministry and 'a pragmatic response to God's call to the Methodist Church for the sake of the world.'¹¹

Itinerancy 'signifies that Methodist ministers are connexional people who are available to the Conference for deployment for mission according to the needs and priorities of the Methodist Church.'

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

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

21. Principles Underpinning the Invitation and Stationing Processes

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

22. Integrity, grace, care and prayer

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

23. Transparency

Whilst some parts of the stationing and invitation processes require the careful handling of personal information which should remain confidential, the processes themselves should be transparent, enabling the confidence of all who take part. Particular attention should be paid to information disclosed about persons who are not present when information is shared and careful notes should be kept and be available to those referred to in conversations.

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

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

¹⁰ Conference Report No:26, *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, 2021, 310

¹¹ *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, 2021, 313

24. Safe and Non-Discriminatory Processes and Outcomes

Training regarding unconscious bias and discrimination should continue to be mandatory for all involved in re-invitation and stationing processes. Any actions, decisions or statements that might be considered prejudicial against a particular individual should be reported and responded to, appropriate action taken and support offered to those harmed.¹² Likewise any matters that affect the safety of a child or vulnerable adult should be referred to the appropriate Safeguarding Officer.

Processes should be based on best practice in discernment processes (as modelled in recruitment processes run by the Connexional Team's HR team).

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

25. Agency for those participating

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

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

26. Full Lay Participation

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

27. Appropriate Subsidiarity

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

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

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

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

"I think there is a deep need to review the link between allocation of ministry and local financial resources, so that ministers are stationed where there is greatest need, rather than necessarily most money."¹³

This is a particularly challenging question for the church and, whilst the SRG might offer suggestions as to how funds be released for mission and ministry, we believe that for this to be properly considered, a task group needs to be established by the Conference, with the appropriate expertise, to look in detail at this question. The Ministries and Missions Committees are of the same mind and, in what seems like a movement of the Holy Spirit, each has come to this conclusion separately. A recommendation is to be sent to the Methodist Council in April (jointly from SRC and the Ministries and Missions Committees) that the Council request the Conference to form such a group and for the work to be completed by the Conference of 2026.

¹² Currently a process for dealing with such matters is set out in the Stationing Protocols and it is anticipated that this would be taken forward into a new process for stationing matching.

¹³ From the Presbyteral Session of the 2022 Conference.

Short Term Recommendations effective from May 2024

(Stationing Committee Sign Off at their February meeting)

29. Briefings for those participating in the Invitation and Stationing Processes

Responses to the Stationing Review Survey indicated a lack of consistency in terms of the quality and effectiveness of briefings taking place in districts ahead of the Invitation and Stationing processes beginning in May of each year. It is recommended that, to support the training delivered in Districts, a set of Connexionally prepared resources be made available to District Chairs and Lay Stationing Reps.

Resources would include, for example, an introductory video, circulated to Districts who may wish to use it in delivering training to Circuit Stewards, ministers etc. In addition a set of PowerPoint slides based on the live Code of Practice (as agreed in February each year) should be distributed to Districts, as well as a summary of any changes made to the Code of Practice since the previous year. These resources to be developed by representatives of the Chairs' Meeting, working with the Head of Ministries and Learning. Resources produced will bear in mind access needs and learning styles of those being trained.

*****Recommendation 1SC** (Agreed by the Stationing Committee 1 February 2024)

A set of connexionally prepared resources be made available to Districts for their use in the training of those involved in stationing processes.

30. Stationing Matching Group and Stationing Action Group Timetable

The timetable for stationing has become increasingly pressured as extra elements of scrutiny have been introduced (eg the work of the Critical Scrutiny Group). This has put a great deal of pressure on circuit stewards, Chairs of District, lay stationing reps and, not least, those responsible for the administration of the systems.

The results from the Stationing Review Survey demonstrate that there is a willingness amongst respondents for a system that allows appropriate space for reflection and greater time for visits to prospective appointments to take place.

A revised timetable was offered to the Stationing Committee, the most significant changes being the suggestion of an earlier deadline for Circuit Meetings (ideally in the summer) and crucially, that the Stationing Matching Group meets twice only, in mid-November and mid-January. The work of matching would then be undertaken (as now after SMG3) by the Stationing Action Group, meeting monthly until May, after which the Unmatched Ministers Group takes over. This approach offers more time for discernment conversations to take place in Districts before the matching process begins. It allows more time for visits to be made to circuits by ministers matched to them and it enables the careful and detailed administrative processes required to be done in a timely way, reducing pressure on staff. These changes take into account that in most years between 80-85% of the matches made at Stationing Matching Group 1 are successful. Stationing Matching Group 2 deals with a small number of matches.

The Stationing Committee recognised the reasoning behind the suggestions of a radically altered timetable but did not feel able to accept the full revised timetable suggested for two reasons. Firstly that Standing Orders require the Circuit Meeting that makes a decision on re-invitation to be within the connexional year in which the person would move (if not re-invited); and, secondly, that many of the meetings required are already in diaries for the next year. They were minded to look again at a revised timetable for 25/26 and onwards (if the fuller recommendations of the SRG for a new matching system are not implemented.)

The Stationing Committee however did accept the idea of moving SMG2 into January and not holding an SMG3 but moving in February to the Stationing Action Group. The removal of 'Critical Appointments' for the stationing year 2024/25 combined with the moving of SMG2, will allow more space within the processes.

*****Resolution 2SC** (Agreed by Stationing Committee 1 February 2024). **The Stationing Timetable to be altered, in that Stationing Matching Group (SMG) 2 be moved to January and no SMG3 take place.**

31. Circuit Profiles and Visits

The Stationing Review Group recommends that circuits be encouraged to use modern technology in describing themselves and their contexts, using links in profiles to videos and within information packs sent to ministers prior to a visit.

“Profile forms to match actual circumstances; do not say you want change if you don’t. Problems in the Circuit often not really explained.” (Survey Q39)

*****Resolution 3SC** (Agreed by Stationing Committee 1 February 2024) **Circuits are encouraged to use modern technology in describing themselves and their contexts, using links in profiles to videos and within information packs sent to ministers prior to a visit.**

Medium Term Recommendations (Implementation from September 2024)

32. Profiles

The Stationing Review Survey offered a range of perspectives as to the appropriate length of profiles.¹⁴ The SRG recommends that presbyters have two parts to a profile form, one which is available in ‘the book’ to Circuit Stewards etc. The second part of the form is for the use only of those representing the minister in matching. This would contain further information which would be useful to be shared with SMG but does not need to be available to all (eg training and development needs that have been identified, reasonable adjustments that may be required (both in the appointment and in any stationing visit), pertinent family and personal matters and matters pertaining to why a particular geography or context may be helpful, with anything else that the minister believes is relevant to their stationing process.

The SRG recommends that presbyter and presbyteral appointment profiles be in electronic format, each section having a word limit (rather than a two sides of A4 restriction as now) enabling those discerning what are appropriate matches to have more information available to them.

The idea of ‘live’ profiles, held in a safe online format and updated regularly by ministers, was discussed by the SRG. The Group is aware that this concept was considered previously by the Ministries Committee and understands that complexity and cost prevented implementation. Whilst the SRG do not, at this time, recommend a centralised approach to the storage and use of profiles, it does recommend that each minister review their own profile each year, as part of their Ministerial Development Review, and update it accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Profile Forms for presbyters will be made up of two parts. One available to all involved in the stationing process, the second part only available to the person representing the minister in stationing and, where appropriate, to others involved in the matching process. The second part will contain information relevant to the needs of the presbyter.**
- 2. Presbyteral and Presbyteral Appointment Profiles should be in a suitable electronic format, with a word limit for the answer to each question.**

33. Reinvitation

The Stationing Review Survey demonstrated that the reinvitation process is almost universally disliked. Circuit Stewards find it cumbersome and awkward and ministers find it a time of great stress and vulnerability. The SRG is clear that discernment about a person’s ministry and the needs of a circuit should be an ongoing process and that supervision, 1-2-1s with ministers in oversight, circuit leadership meetings and MDR are the most appropriate places to raise matters pertaining to the length of time a minister might serve in an appointment. Whilst a process of consultation regarding reinvitation can be helpful, there was a general feeling that this should be streamlined and should never be the place for concerns and criticisms of an individual to be raised. Any concerns, issues or complaints regarding a minister should not come as a surprise to the minister or the circuit stewards.

Annual vocational conversations (which might take place within the Ministerial Development Review process or separately from it) between the minister and at least two Circuit Stewards (similar to the meetings that currently take place before the Re-invitation process starts) are the appropriate way of enabling discernment for both Ministers and Circuits. They would provide space for Ministers to offload any anxieties, difficulties and frustrations they are experiencing. They would also be an opportunity to share joys, hopes and aspirations. Similarly, the Minister could be made aware of positive comments and any issues arising about their ministry from around the Circuit. A mutually agreed record of the annual

¹⁴ NB Diaconal profile forms differ in length from those of presbyters.

vocational conversation, confidential to those involved (in addition to the Chair of District, who would be sent a copy), should be retained by the parties to the conversation, for use in future stationing discernment.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3. An annual vocational conversation shall take place between each minister and at least two Circuit Stewards, on the basis of paragraph 33 above. A mutually agreed record of the conversation, confidential to those involved (in addition to the District Chair, who should be sent a copy), should be retained by the parties to the conversation, for use in future stationing discernment.**

The fruit of such an annual meeting would be brought to the CIC, working with the minister, to carefully consider the needs of Circuit and the minister and their family/friends situation. The CIC and/or the minister might wish on occasion to seek perspectives from others beyond the life of the Church (eg community groups, ecumenical partners) through a mutually agreed process of consultation.

We recommend that CICs meet every year to review ministry across the Circuit and to offer a space for ministers to reflect on their ministry and for them to seek feedback on particular aspects, should they wish.

RECOMMENDATION

- 4. Circuit Invitation Committees should meet every year to review ministry across the Circuit and to offer space for ministers to reflect on their ministry and for them to seek feedback on particular aspects, should they wish.**

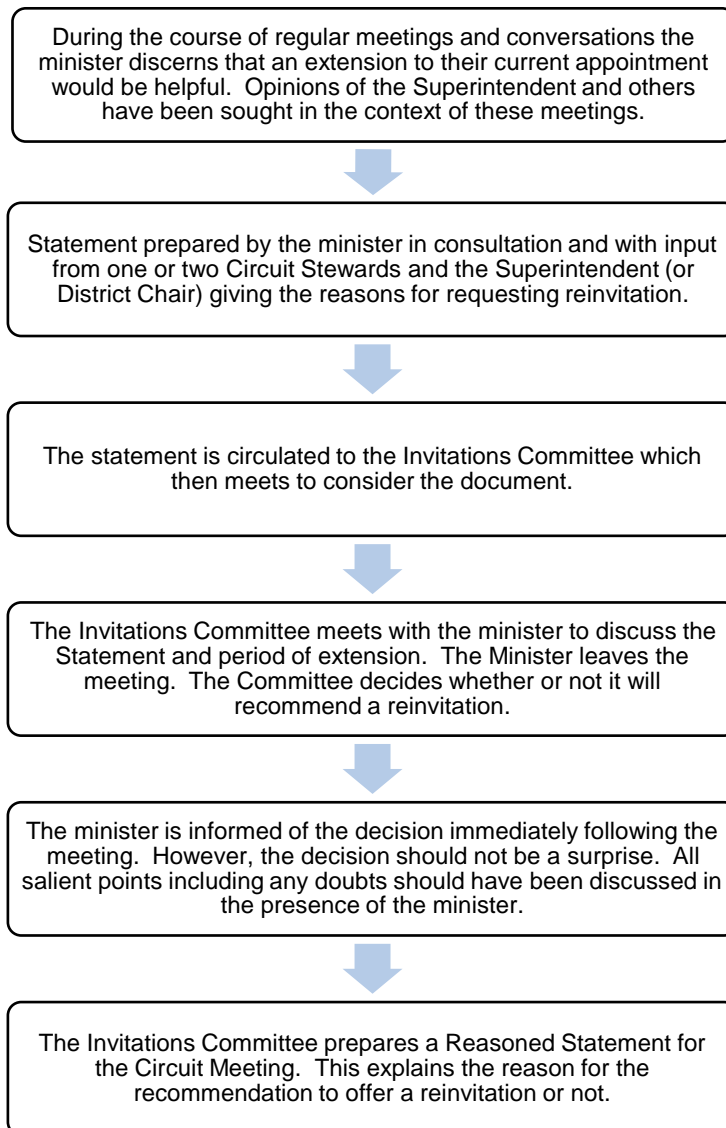
The SRG recommends that should a system of consultation continue, feedback given in the reinvitation process should be attributable. If a minister receives an anonymous letter, they are encouraged to dispose of it. Feedback offered anonymously can be greatly damaging to a minister, as they have no way to have a helpful conversation with the person who has raised it, to better understand the effect of their own actions or to explain a misunderstanding. A sign of Christian maturity is to 'own' our point of view, particularly if we offer it to others. If people have significant concerns about the actions or inactions of a minister, they should be raised in a timely fashion, not through a process that may only happen every five or so years. Attributable feedback can be challenged, which enables an iterative process with the potential for transformation and the clearing up of misunderstandings. On a more positive note, to know who has found a minister helpful in their faith journey allows a flourishing and deepening of relationships. Whilst some circuit stewards are very wise in what they share with a minister following a consultation process; some feel duty bound to share everything and such a lack of filtering (enabled through anonymity) can be devastating to an individual's ministry.

RECOMMENDATION

- 5. Should a system of reinvitation consultation continue, all feedback given should be attributable.**

Suggested Simplified Reinvitation Process

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



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

RECOMMENDATION

6. That the model of discernment and reinvitation described in the flowchart above be adopted from the stationing year 2024/25.

34. Length of Appointments

Changing Patterns of Ministry 5.2.5.b identified a need for "...greater flexibility in the length of appointments within the stationing matching process..." including the possibility of ministers indicating that they are willing to offer, for example, three, five or seven years in a particular appointment (instead of the current five) before there is a re-invitation process. This suggestion led to a change in SO 543(1) with the addition of the word "normally" when referencing the five year initial term. The SRG wishes to recommend a further development of this approach.

A number of factors inform this perspective. *Changing Patterns of Ministry* describes how church growth

theory, which pertains to the study of the nature, function, and well-being of the Church, specifically in its efforts to fulfil Christ's commandment to "go, and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19) suggests that the minimum time for consistent leadership to enable change and lasting growth within a church community is seven years. "Some researchers in other denominations have proposed that...church growth is likely to happen best somewhere between the fifth and twelfth years of a ministry."¹⁵ Of course, growth and culture change are not only the work of the ordained in the life of the Church, but there can be significant benefits in a period of sustained and consistent leadership.

The survey highlighted similar perspectives, with the view that five years is too long if things are not working out but simply too short to embed sufficient culture change where that is needed.

"Five years is too short, less stability for Circuits/only really working on mission for two years (two years getting your feet in, two years working on mission, and one year winding down)."

The costs of ministers moving between manses has increased dramatically in the last few years, averaging at over £4,000, ministers often bear personal expenses when moving beyond the £600 grant available and there are environmental costs involved in moving house which speak against our commitment to achieve Net Zero by 2030. In addition to this, disruption to family life, partners' careers and the needs to support grandchildren or aging parents, all speak against too frequent moves in ministry. The Stationing Review Survey offered a mixed picture of people's perspectives on the length of a 'standard appointment' which suggests that Methodist ministers are still committed to itinerancy, at least in terms of the length of an appointment.

Longer appointments may lead to an increase in the number of curtailments: however, it can be hoped that greater flexibility in recognising the needs of ministers and families might mitigate against this. The word 'curtailment' retains an element of stigma about it, which is unfortunate, as appointments are curtailed for a number of reasons. Discernment as to whether a minister remains in an appointment until the end of the current invitation should be an ongoing matter as considered in the reinvitation section of this report.

"Flexibility would address a minister (and their family's) needs (desire to sit down, education) and the finances or needs of the Circuit/the need of other Circuits. "

"Some appointments don't work, flexible approach would eliminate the need for (negatively viewed) curtailment and waiting for re-stationing."

"Some appointments just aren't working - let them end without the need for a formal curtailment process. Flexibility would allow a minister/circuit to say let's give this a go and see or alternatively it would allow longer appts. - esp helpful where there are children in education etc."

"With the fragility of Circuit Finances, I think we need more flexibility. Clearly, this has to work for Presbyters (and especially those with dependents, e.g children at schools), before shorter than 5 years are offered. But, the possibility of a shorter appointment (for a Presbyter who is content with this) may help Circuits apply for a Presbyter who will, for example, take on a new Missional-based project, and to be bold, and help ensure finance is less of an obstacle."¹⁶

The SRG proposes the following approach.

- That an appointment can be up to seven years in the first instance.
- That a circuit states on its appointment profile the length of the appointment they are looking to be filled and declares that the appointment can be funded for that period.
- That presbyters and deacons indicate the length of appointment they are looking for at that stage in their ministry. (e.g. three years until they wish to sit down, seven years to give stability to their children's education, flexible between four and six years, etc.)
- Matches may still be made when there is not a direct correlation between the lengths of time offered.
- In the case of presbyters, the matching visit will include a conversation about the length of appointment prior to an invitation being offered. For presbyters and deacons an agreed length of appointment will be stated in the Letter of Understanding.

¹⁵ *Changing Patterns*: 5.1.3.f

¹⁶ Survey – Q51

- Subsequent appointment periods would normally not exceed a further five years. In any case were a minister would be in an appointment for more than 10 years, the current requirement for a 75% vote in favour at the Circuit Meeting should be retained.

RECOMMENDATION

- 7. That the length of appointments be determined according to the approach outlined in paragraph 34.**

35. Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences

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

The SRG recommend that the Methodist Church should be responsible only for the cost of the MOCC applicant's visas and for that of one other family member, for the duration of their length of service as a Recognised and Regarded Minister. Those transferring into Full Connexion would receive visa support for themselves and one other family member for the length of their first appointment.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8. The Methodist Church will be responsible, where essential, for the cost of an accepted MOCC applicant's visa and that for one other family member, for the duration of their length of service as a recognised and Regarded Minister. Those transferring into Full Connexion would receive visa support for themselves and one other family member for the length of their first appointment.**

The SRG recommends that an annual conversation take place between representatives of the Resourcing Committee and the Ministries Committee to agree what is affordable for the subsequent year's stationing of MOCCs requiring visa support. The Ministries Committee will then determine the cap on the number of MOCCs.

RECOMMENDATION

- 9. An annual conversation will take place between representatives of the Resourcing Committee and the Ministries Committee to agree what is affordable for the subsequent year's stationing of MOCCs requiring visa support. The Ministries Committee will then establish the cap on the number of MOCCs to be accepted based on the projected stationing needs for the year concerned and taking affordability into account.**

Long Term Recommendations (implemented September 2026)

36. Form of Stationing

After having considered a number of suggested approaches to future stationing, including a review of the ecumenical information, the SRG narrowed the options down to two. In terms of the Diaconal Order, the expectation is that deacons will continue to be directly stationed by the Diaconal Stationing Sub Committee.

In regard to presbyters, the two models suggested and explored in depth by the Group were that all ministers should be directly stationed or that presbyters should be able to see available appointments and

offer for them, then be matched by a connexional matching group, prior to a visit to a circuit, which continues to be the body that issues the invitation.

We focus below on our preferred approach whereby presbyters offer for available appointments that are first scrutinised connexionally. Among the reasons for rejecting the direct stationing approach were, firstly, the survey results. Circuit Stewards did not favour direct stationing, 72% against with 38% of those polled arguing that the choice of either the Circuit or the presbyter to be able to say yes or no based on a variety of factors including visits, is paramount to successful stationing. Secondly, that direct stationing contradicts some of the principles we have identified, particularly giving agency to presbyters and circuits. This complementary approach regarding stationing processes for both orders of ministry can be seen to honour the distinctive nature of diaconal ministry and the commitment to membership of a religious order which deacons enter into upon ordination.

37. Initial Stage

Circuit profiles for all appointments should be submitted to a newly formed Stationing Appointments Advisory Board (SAAB). This board will replace the Stationing Committee and will have a strategic overview of stationing across the Connexion, with all the necessary data available to it to make informed decisions. It will work closely with the Stationing Advisory Committee to ensure that decisions regarding permissions given to presbyters and deacons will be made with a strategic overview of the stationing needs of the Church.

SAAB would consist of the Warden of the Diaconal Order, one Lay Stationing Rep and one District Chair (or Deputy Chair) from each of the stationing regions, as well as a SAAB Chair and a representative of the Secretary of the Conference (normally the ASC). In attendance will be the Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries (MCOOM), appropriate administrative support staff and, from time to time, an independent person appointed by the Connexional Council, with a view to ensuring transparency and fairness in all elements of decision making in keeping with the Church's commitment to the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy.

SAAB will be smaller than current SMG, consistent with the general view that SMG is too large (see responses to question 56 of the Stationing Review Survey).

SAAB will meet in September to decide which appointments fall into the following categories:

- Priority appointments (moving away from 'critical' language). To be based on agreed criteria. No more than 3-4 a year. Criteria as to which appointments are to be priority appointments will be determined by the Ministries Committee and are likely to include island and other traditionally hard to fill appointments.
- Diaconal appointments (in consultation with the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee). Circuits may submit profiles specifically for diaconal appointments, presbyteral appointments, or open profiles – open to both.
- Standard presbyteral appointments
- Presbyteral probationer appointments
- 'Too small' appointments – these may be sent back for reshaping, recommendations to be part time, or rejected for inclusion in the next round of matching. The number of members in a particular appointment will not be the only criteria when considering this category. The Ministries Committee will agree what factors need to be taken into account in this category, in consultation with the Chair of SAAB (who will be a member of the Ministries Committee).

Regional Stationing Representatives and MCOOM will engage with District Chairs and/or Circuit stewards regarding the appropriateness of appointments identified as probationer appointments (diaconal and presbyteral). Once agreed, those profiles go forward into Initial Stationing.

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

38. Advertised Appointments

Once SAAB has categorised them, profiles describing the requirements of circuit presbyteral appointments will be published. Our preferred approach encourages presbyters to identify and offer for the appointments where they believe they are most likely to flourish. They will then be matched to a single appointment by SAAB working in accordance with the principles set out earlier.

Whilst some may be drawn to the idea of an entirely free market in terms of advertising appointments in the way that many Church of England appointments are dealt with, this speaks against our connexional approach. Indeed, the 1997 Report of the Stationing Review Group reported that when a similar free market approach was used 'it has become an undignified stampede, a free-for-all based on competition'.

All appointments go 'live' via a stationing portal.

In our preferred approach, all circuit profiles would go live at the same time.

Circuit profiles

In order for our preferred approach to work well, it is crucial that the profiles accurately describe the appointments so that presbyters can make well-informed judgements about where they can best be deployed. The profiles should be accurate in the way that they describe and reflect the churches, the local community, and the vision for the appointment. Profiles should include a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/challenges identified). Profiles should also include factual information on membership and attendance trends, the number of churches in the circuit that are registered for same-sex weddings, the proportion of office holders that have completed EDI training, the diversity of the circuit leadership team in terms of gender/ethnicity etc, the diversity of the congregations. Conversations with District Chairs should encourage honesty and openness around the weaknesses and challenges that the circuit faces so a minister understands the context prior to a matching visit and the beginning of an appointment.

Applications are made

Once appointments (of either type – priority or standard) are advertised, presbyters 'in stationing' would be invited to submit applications for up to [three] appointments. Such applications would replace presbyteral profiles and be specific to the appointment in question. They should state why the presbyter is attracted to the appointment and describe how their skills and experience match any specific requirements of the appointment.

As well as those in stationing, applications to Priority appointments would also be welcomed from all presbyters, regardless of whether they would normally be moving in a particular year. If such presbyters were matched in this way then their existing appointment would be eligible to enter the stationing process in a subsequent round.

Appointments categorised as 'Priority' by SAAB would be given priority in the matching process. It is anticipated that presbyters would be attracted to Priority appointments as places where they could best be used.

Initial screening of applications by SAAB

Once all applications have been made, the distribution of applications would be reviewed by SAAB to check that sufficient applications had been received to fill priority appointments. If this was not the case SAAB would liaise with Regional Stationing Groups (made up of District Chairs and Lay Stationing Reps from that stationing region) to see if presbyters who were well matched to hard-to-fill priority appointments could be encouraged to apply.

Views of Circuit Invitation Committees sought

Once this initial screening had taken place, Circuit Invitation Committees (CICs) would be asked to review the applications of those ministers who had offered for their appointments and offer perspectives through the RSG to SAAB as a key component of the matching process. An important role for the RSG here would be to ensure that choices are non-discriminatory and that personal information is protected. CICs would not see any information about presbyters who had not offered for their appointments.

If a presbyter is offering from outside of a particular stationing region, their Chair of District or Lay Stationing Rep will be invited to send a reference (seen by the presbyter) as to the particular gifts and graces they bring in general or to a particular appointment. If there are matters that would previously have been shared in a reference group at SMG, the presbyter's chair should inform the Chair of SAAB at the point the presbyter enters stationing (or as soon after that date as an issue emerges), so that an appropriate conversation can take place. No conversation about a minister should take place without their knowledge and careful notes should be kept of such a conversation.

Matches are made

Once all applications have been screened and RSGs consulted, SAAB would match presbyters to appointments by following agreed and transparent protocols.

It is important to be aware that when presbyters are able to make more than one application and several presbyters are interested in the same appointment that the protocols used in the matching process will influence the matches that are made. In particular, the matches made will depend upon the order in which appointments are considered: appointments that are considered early in the matching process are more likely to be matched.

In what follows we set out an approach to matching that embeds the principles set out earlier. Appendix 2 contains a stylised example of how the approach would work.

To encourage ministry where it is most needed, Priority appointments would be considered first. Following the initial screening by SAAB, it is hoped that there are sufficient applications from presbyters that all Priority appointments can be matched (if this is not the case then the appointments without presbyter interest may need to be reconfigured). Assuming this is the case, then the recommended protocol is to match the appointment with the lowest number of applications first. If there is more than one application for this appointment, then the match would be made with the presbyter preferred by that appointment's CIC and bearing in mind any particular pastoral needs, limited deployability of those offering for particular appointments. Once the first match is made, the Priority appointment with the next lowest number of applications would be matched next using the same procedure. This process would continue until all Priority appointments are matched.

Once all Priority appointments are matched, SAAB would turn to matching Standard appointments. Given the likely continuing shortfall of presbyters, some of these appointments will not be matched in this round. These will include appointments that received no applications as well as appointments that had applicants who were matched to other appointments earlier in the matching process.

The recommended protocol is the same as for Priority appointments. In other words, start matching from the appointments with only one application. It is possible that SAAB may wish to prioritise certain types of presbyteral appointments, such as superintendencies, in which case they could be considered first, but otherwise all appointments should be treated as of equal priority and none more favoured than others.

The appendix contains a worked example of how the recommended matching process would work. In the case considered there is a built-in shortage of presbyters and applications are well spread across appointments. This means that not all appointments can be matched though all presbyters are.

In practice some presbyters who apply only for the more popular appointments may find themselves unmatched at first. In that case those presbyters would be invited to submit applications to unfilled appointments. This process would continue until all are matched.

There is potentially an issue with this approach for presbyters with geographical limitations. While our preferred system gives presbyters 'agency' in where they offer to go, and so should be helpful to presbyters with geographical limitations, they could face challenges when too many presbyters offer in the same geographical area and the circuits prefer presbyters who would like to be there rather than those that need to be there. In cases like this it would be important for SAAB to consider whether it would be beneficial from a connexional perspective to prioritise presbyters with geographical limitations over those who are fully itinerant. If SAAB, taking advice from RSG members, judged that this was the case then it could intervene in the matching process. Given the ongoing shortage of ministers throughout the connexion, it should be quite rare for presbyters not to be able to find an appointment in the vicinity of their preferred geographical area, so this issue should not arise very often.

Members of SAAB will complete feedback forms regarding matches made and regarding ministers not yet matched, these latter are for use by the District Chairs when supporting ministers who have not been matched to one of the three circuits to which they have applied.

39. Stationing Visits

Stationing visits could take place once the matches had been made. These would generally be expected to 'stick' because both presbyters and CICs had 'agency' in the matching process.

Nevertheless, in practice there may need to be additional rounds of matching if visits do not result in a match sticking, or other eventualities, such as when the existing appointments of not-in-stationing presbyters matched to priority appointments are entered into the process.

An agreed deadline will apply as to when reports of matches are sent to SAAB. SAAB will meet to review what appointments remain unfilled and what ministers remain available. They will agree at which point to

advertise to those remaining in stationing the posts as yet unfilled. Once a second round of matching and visits has taken place, the SAAB will then meet monthly to agree matches of any remaining ministers and appointments (as the Stationing Action Group currently undertakes).

Our recommended approach aligns with the principles set out earlier. It is fully transparent in that all presbyters in Full Connexion can see the details of any appointment, apply for Priority appointments if they wish, and know the process by which decisions are made. The matching process itself is open to external scrutiny. Personal information is circulated only to those who need to know it. Lay participation is fully part of the process. Connexional oversight can help ensure non-discriminatory practices are adhered to. The identification of a limited number of Priority appointments helps ensure that ministry is where it is needed most.

RECOMMENDATION

- 10. That from the stationing year 2025/26, the matching of ministers to appointments takes place using the process described in paragraph 39.**

40. Planned Vacancies

Whilst the term *interregnum* does not fit with our Methodist understanding of the leadership of the local church and circuit, the SRG acknowledges the number of correspondents who have used the term to suggest that a system of planned vacancies will reduce pressure on the stationing matching process. Interregna cannot take place in our Methodist polity, because each church requires a presbyter to be in pastoral charge. However, the day to day pastoral and missional work of a church can be held by a range of lay staff or volunteers, operating under the oversight of an identified presbyter. When an appointment comes to an end, rather than a Circuit automatically re-entering a profile for the same appointment in the same Circuit, discernment needs to take place to decide whether a vacancy should be filled immediately. Circuits should work with their representatives to the Regional Stationing Group in working out their own needs and how these fit strategically with ministerial deployment across a group of circuits, a district or region. Such an approach could ease some of the pressure between the number of appointments and available ministry resources and secondly, it would encourage Circuits to take the time to properly review ministry needs, think about future staffing, and think critically about what kind of ministry is needed. Such vacancies are common features in our sister churches (URC & CofE particularly) and the churches concerned have become accustomed to this feature. At the present time this happens by accident or necessity not by design in our Methodist system of stationing. District Policy Committees should receive reasoned statements from circuits considering submitting an appointment profile. No profile should be submitted to SAAB unless a DPC has agreed and copies of the reasoned statements should be sent to the Regional Stationing Group to allow a strategic perspective of the appointment and its place in the priorities of the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11. That a reasoned statement supporting the submission of a circuit profile into stationing be submitted to the relevant District Policy Committee (or equivalent). Only if the DPC agree will that appointment be forwarded to the Stationing Appointments Advisory Board. A copy of the reasoned statement should be sent to the relevant Regional Stationing Group.**
- 12. That the Law and Polity Committee be requested to draft necessary Standing Orders, enacting the changes agreed above and bring such amendments to the Conference of 2025.**

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 42/1. The Council receives the report.**
- 42/2. The Council endorses each of the recommendations and commends them to the Conference for implementation.**

Appendix 1

Work from the 2022 Conference

Ministries Committee		To the Council	To the Conference	Team / Officer	Notes / Consultations
	Memorials				
M17	<p>The Conference directs</p> <p>a) The Ministries and Stationing Committees to consider in their review of stationing processes the issues raised in this memorial, including to:</p> <p>i) Develop and publish criteria for enabling the consistent consideration of posts that require permission to advertise (or any similar process), and to</p> <p>ii) Ensure that such adjustments are allowed for or made as may be needed to allow for recruitment and appointment to joint ecumenical ministerial posts (and not merely on a rotational basis), so as to respect and embody the Methodist Church's Priorities.....including to enable working "in partnership with others wherever possible". [DR 5/4/6]</p>		2023	ASC	<p>With the Stationing Review</p> <p>Further work to be done once it is clear the direction of travel post Council and Conference of 2024.</p>

Work from the 2021 Conference

Stationing Committee		To the Council	To the Conference	Team / Officer	Notes / Consultations
56.	Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity: working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church				
NoM 2021/11	The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to continue to work with the EDI Officer and EDI Committee (in whatever form it may be after Conference discusses Report 56: The strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity) to ensure that the structures and procedures of the stationing processes are equally accessible to all. [DR 8/4/12]			ASC	Include in the stationing review This has informed the work of the SRG and the group has included a representative of the JDS Committee and been attended by a member of the 'Belonging Together' group.
26.	Changing Patterns of Ministry				
26/15	The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to review the aspects of the stationing matching process described in paragraph 5.2.5 and report to the 2022 Conference. [DR 8/7]	n/a	2022	ASC	Stationing review Within the SRG Report.

26/16	The Conference directs the Stationing Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to review Standing Order 780 and report to the 2022 Conference. [DR 8/7]	March 2023	2023	ASC	Paper to go to Ministries Committee Pending
--------------	--	------------	------	-----	--

Ministries Committee		To the Council	To the Conference	Team / Officer	Notes / Consultations
26.	Changing Patterns of Ministry				
26/16	The Conference directs the Stationing Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to review Standing Order 780 and report to the 2022 Conference. [DR 8/7]	March 2023	2023	ASC	See above – with stationing review

The Secretary of the Conference		To the Council	To the Conference	Team / Officer	Notes / Consultations
26.	Changing Patterns of Ministry				
26/5	The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to consider whether any further work is required on the matters raised in section 3 of this report and to report to the Methodist Council in October 2022. [DR 6/13/3]	October 2022			

Work from the 2018 Conference

Methodist Council		To the Council	To the Conference	Team / Officer	Notes / Consultations
NoM 2018/205	<p>Stationing Matching</p> <p>The Conference directs the Stationing Committee to consider:</p> <p>(b) how the broader stationing issues that the Methodist Church is currently facing might be tackled - in particular, the funding of ministerial appointments and the needs of the most deprived parts of the Connexion, and report to the Conference of 2019.]</p> <p>The Conference further directs the Methodist Council to work with the Stationing Committee in consideration of part (b) so as to ensure coherence with the work being undertaken on a Connexional Financial Strategy. [DR 8/9] [DR 8/9]</p>			Stationing Committee	<p>The Council received a report on this in January 2022, noted the challenges, and referred it to the Stationing Committee for further consideration.</p> <p>Refer to Stationing review.</p> <p>Contained within the recommendations of the SRG and in the combined resolution from SRG, Ministries and Missions Committees.</p>

Appendix 2

An example of the recommended matching protocol

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

- Step 1 The Priority appointment that received the least number of applications would be matched first to the applicant preferred by the appointment's CIC. Any applications for other appointments by the matched presbyter would be withdrawn. If more than one Priority appointment had received the least number of applications, the order of matching would be determined by SAAB.
- Step 2 The Priority appointment that received the next lowest number of applications would then be matched to the presbyter preferred by that appointment's CIC. Any applications for other appointments by the matched presbyter would be withdrawn. If there is more than one Priority appointment with the same number of applications, the order of matching would be determined by SAAB.
- Steps 3 on This process would continue until all Priority appointments have been considered.

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

Standard appointments would then be matched.

- Step 1 Those Standard appointments that received one application only would be matched first to those applicants. Any other applications by these matched applicants would be withdrawn. In the case that the same applicant had applied to more than one of these Standard appointments with only one application, the choice of which appointment to match them to would be made by SAAB.
- Step 2 Any standard appointments with two applications would then be matched to the presbyter preferred by that appointment's CIC. Any other applications by these matched applicants would be withdrawn.
- Steps 3 on Continues until all presbyters are allocated.

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

Table A Stylised Example of Application Distribution and Matching

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

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

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

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

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

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

One appointment (3) had received no votes so it would also be unmatched.