

HANDBOOK FOR MINISTERIAL PROBATION

2019/2020 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, and for deacons permits entry into full membership of the Methodist Diaconal Order, 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. Once again, acquiring during probation the habit of reflecting on one's practice in a context of supervision should be seen as a support, not as a constraint to be joyfully abandoned after ordination: it should become an integral part of the minister's professional practice, whether through a co-consultancy group, the circuit staff meeting, the early years in ministry group, peer supervision, or other means. Reflective practice is at the heart of Ministerial Development Review.

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' (some chaplaincy appointments, evangelism enablers etc.) or in appointments 'outside the direct control of the Church' (other chaplaincies, employment etc). Diaconal probationers are 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.

Handbook for Ministerial Probation 2019/2020

The Conference Office and the Discipleship & Ministries Cluster of 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. Further information on all aspects of probation can be obtained by contacting:

The Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries (MCOOM)

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London NW1 5JR

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September 2019

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 – in some cases, it is helpful to extend this period by a further year (or very occasionally two years) to ensure that sufficient time and space is allowed for formational activity.

Should a probationer change appointment in the course of her/his probation, it is usual (particularly if the move is to another district) for her/him to serve two years in the new appointment. This allows time to engage with the orientation project and the gospel in context and means that the District Probationers Committee does not need to form a judgment on the basis of six months experience.

Please note the dates of the Religious Order Advisory Committee (ROAC) is 21-24 January and probationer Deacons are required to attend this.

Student/probationer

Year Zero (before stationing)	
November	Submits stationing profile to the Conference Office (with a copy to the Warden, as appropriate).
December for Deacons January for Presbyters (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of the appointment and visits the circuit.
March-May	Meets Superintendent at training institution. Is contacted by District Probationers' Secretary (DPS).
Before the end of April	With Oversight Tutor, completes form outlining learning and development needs, including an application for funding for the accredited theological study. Returns form to the Conference Office.
May	With Oversight Tutor, completes the transitional report. Student deacon – attends Convocation.
July	MDO Student Conference.
Year One	
September and ongoing	Agrees on supervision contract (with a signed copy to DPS) and begins regular meetings for supervision. Arranges regular meetings with a mentor. Diaconal probationer also makes contact with Wise Senior and arranges regular contact. Diaconal probationers must find a spiritual director if they do not already have one. Presbyteral probationers are strongly advised to do so.
Ongoing as arranged	Takes part in district probationers' group (diaconal probationers also take part in their Area Group).
Ongoing as arranged	Undertakes probation studies.
By 31 st December	Presbyteral probationer – completes the reflective journal of the first three months. Diaconal probationer – completes and submits to the deputy Warden Reflection 1 on Being a Member of a Religious Order. All probationers - completes 'Orientation Project'
21-24 January	Diaconal probationer to have a formal vocational conversation. Religious Order Advisory Committee. Completes summary of self-assessment to go to DPS

January, February, March	Takes part in district probationers' retreat.
March	Meets the district Probationers' Committee (DPC).
March/April	Presbyteral probationer – appears before the presbyteral synod.
April	Receives notification from MCPOC that he or she has been recommended to continue on probation.
May	Diaconal probationer – attends Convocation.

Final year	
By mid-January	Completes 'Gospel in Context Project'.
By 6 th January	Diaconal probationer – completes and submits to the deputy Warden Reflection 2 on Being a Member of a Religious Order.
21-24 January	Diaconal probationer to have a formal vocational conversation Religious Order Advisory Committee. Completes summary of self-assessment to go to DPS
January, February, March	Takes part in district probationers' retreat.
March	Meets the DPC for assessment.
March/April	Presbyteral probationer – appears before the presbyteral synod.
April	Receives notification from MCPOC that he or she has been recommended to proceed to ordination.
May	Diaconal probationer – appears before Convocation. Attends the district ordinands' testimony service and gives testimony.
June	Attends 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. S/he has the prime responsibility for ensuring that all arrangements are in place so that probation gets off to a good start, as well as for supervision throughout the period of probation (unless another supervisor has been appointed). Where it is agreed with the District Chair that the Superintendent is not the most appropriate person to offer supervision, the Superintendent should agree with the Chair who will take that role and for ensuring that supervision happens effectively. Whether or not she or he is the supervisor, the Superintendent acts as a role model for ministry with all that that entails. Negotiating the delicate balance between support, guidance and challenge, and between the probationer's autonomy and their accountability, calls for highly developed inter-personal skills.

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 in 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)
- 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.

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)
- 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.

(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>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 (who may be self) and arranges for him/her to undertake supervision training if necessary.</p>
Year Zero	
Mid-September	Submits an application for the presbyteral probationer and/or circuit profile for a diaconal appointment to the Conference Office 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. If required, arranges manse inspection.
Early December	Receives notification from the Warden if the circuit will be receiving a diaconal probationer. If required, arranges manse inspection.
Early January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of probationer (deacon or presbyter) to be stationed from District Chair (or letter from the MCOOM indicating that no suitable probationer was available).
January	Meets probationer on a visit to the circuit.
February	Attends Connexional briefing or ensures 2 members of CLT attend (one ordained, one lay)
As soon as necessary (ongoing)	Compiles diary for the probationer.
March-May	Meets with probationer at a training institution.
March-August	(Together with circuit leadership team) ensures that manse is prepared and agreed repairs and/or alterations are carried out.
June-July	Receives a copy of the transitional report.
Before September	Received dates for probationer's diary from DPS
Before September	Checks with DPS that a mentor is identified.
Before September	Arranges welcome service (consulting Chair of District).
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	
September-December	Oversees 'first' activities (in consultation with the supervisor, if separate).
31 st January	Diaconal reports to the DPC/ Warden
February	With circuit leadership team (and supervisor, if separate), writes a report for DPC.
March	With a circuit steward (and supervisor, if separate), accompanies probationer to DPC.
April/May	Receives from MCPOC notification that the probationer has been recommended to continue on probation.
Final year	
31 st January	Diaconal reports to the DPC/Warden
February	With circuit leadership team (and supervisor, if separate), writes a report for DPC.
March	With a circuit steward (and supervisor, if separate), accompanies probationer to DPC.
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 (who may or may not be the Superintendent):

The role of the supervisor is critical in probation in enabling the probationer to reflect theologically on her or his practice. The supervisor may be the Superintendent, but in a number of instances, someone else (with whom the Superintendent is content) will be appointed to this role. The supervisor must be an experienced practitioner who has successfully completed a connexionally-approved course of training in supervision skills and who has the recommendation of the District Chair. Negotiating the delicate balance between support, guidance and challenge, and between the probationer's autonomy and their accountability, calls for highly developed interpersonal skills.

The supervisor 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.

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.

At least initially, the supervisor should meet the probationer every week.

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

Supervisor Timetable:

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	Accepts nomination. Arranges to attend training (if necessary)
Year Zero	
January	Meets probationer on a visit to the circuit.
March-May	Meets with probationer at training institution.
May-July	Meets probationer with other circuit personnel.
June-July	Receives a copy of the transitional report.
Year One	
September and ongoing	Agrees on supervision contract (with a signed copy to DPS) and begins regular meetings for supervision. Undertakes a regular review of progress.
September-December	Oversees 'first' activities in consultation with the Superintendent.
January/February	Contributes to report for DPC and attends DPC.
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 and attends DPC.
June/July	Celebrates reception into Full Connexion and ordination. For Deacons celebrate becoming full members of the Methodist Diaconal Order

Circuit leadership team timetable:

Year Minus One (16 months before stationing)	
May onwards	<p>Takes part in circuit plans to apply for a presbyteral probationer, discussed with District Chair.</p> <p>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.</p>
Year Zero	
Early January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Receives details of probationer from District Chair.
January	<p>Meets probationer on a visit to the circuit but no invitation process – see guidance in Code of Practice: http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/leadership-and-ministry/stationing</p> <p>Draws up a letter of understanding.</p>
February	One circuit steward attends Connexional Briefings as one of two members of CLT
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 Superintendent, a circuit steward accompanies the probationer to the DPC.
Year Two	
January/February	Contributes to Superintendent's report to DPC.
March	With the Superintendent, 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
- to ensure that every probationer has a mentor and 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 advice on an Orientation Project before the appointment begins and a Gospel in Context project in the second year, and to ensure that all probationers complete such projects, 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 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 and reporting their main conclusions to MCPOC on Form A (SO 725 & 728)
- to liaise as necessary between probationers, circuits, the District Chair, the Warden, and Ministries: Vocation and Worship[/the Conference Office

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, probationer's committees, retreat)
July	Attends connexional DPS consultation.
June-July	Receives a copy of the transitional report.
June-July	Receives copies of forms from the Conference Office regarding continuing theological study.
July (after the Conference)	Ensures circuits have the relevant information before probationer arrives.
Summer	Arranges mentor for the probationer.
Summer/September	Sets up probationers'/under fives' group.
Years One and ongoing	
September	Informs the Conference Office 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.
31 st 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. Attends DPC. Alerts the ministerial coordinator of any difficult decisions immediately (prior to Presbyteral Synod)
Spring	Reports on presbyteral probationers at Presbyteral Synod.
March	Sends summarised reports (Form A) to the Conference office for MCPOPC by deadline of 23 March 2020
April/May	Receives from MCPOPC notification of recommendation.
July	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 cannot be overstated (see above): the pressures of needing to fill an appointment must not be allowed to jeopardise a probationer's whole future in ministry. The nature of the appointment (see criteria) 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 probationer 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 appointment is part of a coherent whole
- ensuring that Superintendents, supervisors (if separate) and circuit stewards are appropriately informed and trained
- ensuring that probationers (and their families/households) are made welcome at an induction event
- wherever possible taking part in the welcome service and for Deacon 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 Conference Office with a letter of reference for supervisor, 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. 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 transitional 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.

Mentor role:

All probationers (presbyteral and diaconal) must be allocated a mentor, whose role is unlike that of anyone else in the structures of probation. The mentor's relationship with the probationer is entirely confidential; the mentor does not make a report. The probationer may decide to use the mentor 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 the mentor in this way. The mentor should not be part of the structures within which the probationer's ministry is located: normally this will mean 'from a different circuit', but where the probationer's ministry is not primarily circuit-based different considerations will of course apply.

The mentor'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 mentor may offer advice but should focus on helping the probationer to discover their own answers. Meetings should take place at least every four to six weeks at first but may become less frequent as time goes on.

In arranging a mentor for a probationer two contradictory considerations need to be held together. The first is the need to have the mentor in place as near as possible to the beginning of the connexional year in order not only to 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. The second is the overriding need to provide a mentor to whom the probationer can relate well and whom they can quickly come to trust, which may indicate a need for consideration and settling in. This contradiction can be most helpfully resolved by the Superintendent and DPS beginning to get to know the probationers well before 1 September and matching them with potential mentors. It should be noted that the mentor is not chosen by the probationer: 'critical distance' is essential to enable the mentor to be a 'critical friend'.

The mentor is not a counsellor, a therapist, a spiritual director or a friend. The closest parallel is the model of professional coaching, with the aims of:

- assisting the probationer in developing healthy, appropriate patterns of work and lifestyle, including the skills in and habit of theologically reflective practice
- focusing on the probationer's work agenda
- bringing an objective perspective to the work situation and the relationships it involves
- encouraging, challenging and supporting the probationer in considering, testing and reviewing different perspectives, options and strategies.

There is also, however, an important element of personal development support (the 'being' of ministry as well as the 'doing') with the aims of:

- assisting effective, healthy development in ministry through consultancy,

- encouragement, challenge and support
- modelling good practice and godly living.

This involves mutual accountability for the purpose, structure and content of meetings, and for planning and timekeeping. Responsibility for initial contact lies with the mentor.

For diaconal probationers, their mentor will be the person with whom the probationer focuses on his or her development as a practical theologian while the Wise Senior (below) will focus on membership of a religious order.

The Connexional Team timetable:

Year Zero	
September / October	Collates presbyteral initial stationing profiles for Scrutiny Panel.
November	Collates student profiles for Initial Stationing Sub-Committee. MCPOC agrees on the list of students for initial stationing.
January	Coordinates Initial Stationing Sub-Committee meeting. Sends details of appointments to relevant oversight tutors. Sends details of students to Chairs.
February	Start review of the Handbook for Probationers for the following year Review amount allocated to course fees
March/April	Sends out the form 'Learning and Development Needs' to students. Receives 'Learning and Development Needs' forms from students and makes recommendations to MCPOC for approval.
May	Sends Handbook for Probation to DPS for following year.
June	Informs students about the allocation of funding for the accredited theological study and forward approved proposals to DPS. Receives transitional report and circulates to MCPOC.
July	Hosts connexional DPS consultation. Circulates transitional report to DPS, District Chair, Superintendent and Supervisor.
Years One and ongoing	
November	Reports special issues to MCPOC.
April	Reports on 'Forms A' to MCPOC.
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 in reception into full connexion and ordination services Sends out details on ongoing supervision and MDR Reports to the Presbyteral session of the Conference
July	Hosts connexional DPS consultation.

The Queen's Foundation timetable:

Year Zero	
September/November	Works with a student on their profile form. Diaconal students – Liaises with Warden regarding potential matches. Is represented in conversations between student deacons and the Diaconal Stationing Sub-Committee (see Code of Practice).
January (after Initial Stationing Sub-Committee)	Discusses details of circuit appointment with each student. Offers supervision training
Before the end of April	Works with a student on 'Learning and Development Needs' form and ensures its return to the Conference Office. Arranges meetings between supervisors/superintendents and leavers
May	Draws up a transitional report in conjunction with the student and sends to the Conference Office for circulation to MCPOC and others.

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 (communicating with the probationer regularly – ie every 6-8 weeks through a mixture of media such as face to face meetings, Skype and phone calls)
- is willing to attend regular training facilitated by the Order.

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. 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.

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
- 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, 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>Liaises with training institution 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>
2-3 January	Reports initial diaconal matches to the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee.
July/August	Allocates probationer a Wise Senior and arranges MDO representation at welcome service.
Year One	
21-25 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>
March	Submits a report to DPS.
February/March	Liaises with MCPOC to ensure DPC is suitably representative
Final year	
21-25 January	Arrange for the probationer to have a formal vocational conversation Religious Order Advisory Committee.
March	Submits a report to DPS.
February/March	Liaises with MCPOC to ensure DPC is suitably representative.
May	Presents reports to Conference Diaconal Committee.
June	Arranges and attends the diaconal ordinands' retreat.
June/July	<p>Oversees, in conjunction with the Conference Office, reception into Full Connexion and ordination.</p> <p>Receives ordinands into full membership of MDO.</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 (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/leadership-and-ministry/stationing>). 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.

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.'

Criteria for a presbyteral probationer appointment:

- 1 A suitably defined, appropriate and restricted workload:**
 - no sole responsibility without regular and close supervision
 - assurance that the recommendations for holidays and breaks in CPD Guidance Section 2 will be observed
 - 1 full day each week for study/ reflection/training, either individually or as a group activity in addition to time necessary for preparation of ongoing work (worship, meetings etc.)
 - no more than 40 baptisms/ weddings/funerals a year
 - not more than 175 members (fewer if more than 4 churches)
 - not less than 90 members unless there are special factors. If this is the case please attach a reasoned statement approved by DPC.
 - preferably no management responsibilities for lay staff, or, where necessary, this should not be their sole responsibility and it should be limited.
 - chaplaincies to hospitals, prisons etc. and duties such as school governorships only when they have been accepted by the circuit and time is allocated for them within the overall workload
 - If there is a major pioneering element to this role, a prior discussion should have been held with the Pioneering and Church Planting officer, and a statement from that discussion must be attached to this profile.
 - LEP involvement only if there is a written agreement between the circuit and ecumenical partners about the probationer's involvement
 - opportunities within the appointment for the development of mission
 - clarity that a probationer can have pastoral responsibility but not pastoral charge

- 2 Adequate induction:**
 - A suitable person (or persons) must be available to give sufficient time to the probationer to:
 - rehearse in advance the first major example of each type of activity (e.g. liturgical, administrative, pastoral) he/she will undertake
 - attend the first occasion when the probationer performs that activity, and a regular sample of subsequent occasions
 - de-brief the probationer afterwards and create a dialogue of affirmation, analysis and critical reflection with him/her

- 3 Adequate supervision of circuit work:**
 - a superintendent (or someone to whom the superintendent is both willing and able to delegate this responsibility) to manage the work of the person appointed and the supervision of his / her professional practice. The supervisor will be required to attend and satisfactorily to complete a connexionally sponsored Learning & Development in Supervision course before the probationer begins in the appointment if he/she has not already attended and satisfactorily completed such a course. Meetings between

the person appointed and the supervisor should take place weekly in the first instance, their frequency being adjusted as time goes on under the oversight of the District Probationers Committee through the District Probationers Secretary. If the appointment includes the probationer acting as an assisting or second minister to an experienced colleague, that colleague should not be the supervisor.

- adequate and sympathetic circuit leadership (lay and ordained)
- ministerial colleagues and lay people in the circuit willing and able to instruct the person appointed in some of the practical aspects of their craft, guide them in developing and applying their basic skills and provide models of reflective practice for them
- a Worship Development Group provided by the circuit
- while the responsibility for arranging a probationer's mentor lies with the DPS, and the mentor should be independent of the circuit, the superintendent's oversight of the probationer should include checking that a mentor is in place

4 Frequent circuit staff meetings (at least monthly) which cover:

- regular business
- prayer and study
- mutual support, reflection and accountability

5 A clear understanding amongst the people of the circuit about the nature of the appointment and about appropriate expectations of the person appointed

6 A manse that is in accordance with Standing Orders and where any work recommended in quinquennial inspections will have been carried out by the time the probationer takes up the appointment

7 Once accepted a probationer's appointment cannot be changed

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

Setting up a probationer appointment for a presbyter should include deciding whether it is desirable or permissible to apply for the probationer to be authorised to preside at Holy Communion. The criteria set out in CPD Book VI, Part 8, should be applied. Students about to be stationed are free to decide whether or not they are prepared to accept an authorisation to preside. Applying for, receiving or refusing authorisation is a matter of conscience (for people in the circuit as well as the probationer) and varying views must be sensitively handled.

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 Conference Office.

Criteria for a diaconal probationer appointment:

1 A suitably defined, appropriate and restricted workload:

- no sole responsibility for project work without regular and close supervision
- assurance that the recommendations for holidays and breaks in CPD Guidance Section 2 will be observed
- 1 full day each week for study/reflection/training, either individually or as a group activity in addition to the time necessary for preparation of on-going work.
- realistic boundaries set to circuit-wide projects in the initial period
- reasonable expectations of what can be achieved in the initial period.
- chaplaincies to hospitals, prisons etc. and duties such as school governorships only when they have been accepted by the circuit and time allocated for them within the overall workload
- responsibility for no more than 8 preaching responsibilities per quarter
- opportunities within the appointment for the development of mission
- Opportunity to maintain the obligations associated with being a member of the MDO – maintaining the Diaconal Rule of Life, attendance at Convocation and Area groups and Wise Senior.

2 Adequate induction:

- A suitable person (or persons) must be available to give sufficient time to the probationer to:
- become familiar with the context and the nature of the community. To facilitate community relations and locate existing community networks.
- attend the first occasion when the probationer performs an activity and a regular sample of subsequent occasions.
- de-brief the probationer afterwards and create a dialogue of affirmation, analysis and critical reflection with him/her

3 Adequate supervision of circuit work:

- A superintendent (or someone to whom the superintendent is both willing and able to delegate this responsibility) to manage the work of the person appointed and the supervision of his/her professional practice. The supervisor will be required to attend and satisfactorily to complete a connexionally-sponsored Learning & Development in Supervision course before the probationer begins in the appointment if he/she has not already attended and satisfactorily completed such a course. Meetings between the person appointed and the supervisor should take place weekly in the first instance, their frequency being adjusted as time goes on under the oversight of the District Probationers Committee through the District Probationers Secretary.
- adequate and sympathetic circuit leadership (lay and ordained)
- ministerial colleagues and lay people in the circuit willing and able to instruct the person appointed in some of the practical aspects of their craft, guide them in developing and applying their basic skills and provide models of reflective practice for them
- a Worship Development Group provided by the circuit (whether or not the probationer deacon is a local preacher. All deacons are worship leaders. Probationer Deacons should gain experience of rites of passage, the proclamation of the gospel, informal and formal worship leading)

- while the responsibility for arranging a probationer's Wise Senior lies with the MDO, the DPS is responsible for arranging a mentor who should be independent of the circuit, and the superintendent's oversight of the probationer should include checking that a mentor is in place
- 4 Frequent circuit staff meetings (at least monthly) which cover:**
- regular business
 - prayer and study
 - mutual support, reflection and accountability
- 5 A clear understanding amongst the people of the circuit about the nature of the appointment and about appropriate expectations of the person appointed and an understanding of distinctive diaconal ministry and membership of the MDO.**
- 6 A manse that is in accordance with Standing Orders and where any work recommended in quinquennial inspections will have been carried out by the time the probationer takes up the appointment**

The need has been noted to ensure that Worship Development Groups for prebysyteral and diaconal probationers are distinct. Guidance is currently being developed for Worship Development Groups for diaconal probationers.

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 student and staff of the training institution working towards a transitional 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 training institution, the Warden (as appropriate), the District Chair, the Superintendent, the DPS and MCPOC.
- An opportunity for the Superintendent and the DPS to meet the student at the training institution. This enables the developing transitional report to form the basis for a learning contract, personal to the student and drawn up in consultation between the student, the training institution and the district, covering group participation, individual study and assessment.
- Contact between the District Chair or Warden, the DPS, Superintendent, stewards and probationers. This may result in all parties signing up to a probationers' charter developed by the district which spells out expectations about study, retreats, supervision, mentoring, use of time etc.
- 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 (if not the Superintendent) is identified
- A worship development group is set up that is appropriate for the

probationer's order of ministry

- That the probationer appointment is not changed from the original agreed application without the consent of the Chair, who shall normally consult the district Policy Committee, and of the Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries or the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order, who shall normally consult MCPOC (this applies after the Conference at which the match is agreed – prior to this, changes must be agreed between the Chair of the Initial Stationing Sub-Committee, the District Chair, the Ministerial Coordinator for Oversight of Ordained Ministries 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
- setting up meetings of the district probationers' group
- ensuring that each probationer is linked with a mentor from the start
- receiving the approved Learning & Development Needs form and beginning to work on an appropriate study programme for each probationer.

In preparation for stationing the probationer should:

- have thoroughly discussed their training and personal support needs in probation with their training institution 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 (transitional) report in conjunction with their training institution and communicated it to the DPS
- undertake any preliminary reading suggested by the DPS
- Arrange for spiritual direction (obligatory for diaconal and advised for presbyteral 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, picnic 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 younger probationers may encounter financial difficulties if they find themselves needing to purchase furniture and a car; if such issues arise, please contact the Connexional Team.

The supervisor should ensure that there is an early meeting for supervision at which the supervision contract can be agreed and that all support arrangements are in place. The Superintendent should ensure that support arrangements are in place and, in consultation with the supervisor, 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.

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 'day off') 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 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, whose functions are to help the probationer develop as a leader of worship and to report to the DPC on that development. As in so many aspects of probation, the relationship between these two functions needs careful handling.

The expectation is that all deacons will lead God's people in worship; 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.

The membership of the group is of crucial importance. It should include people with:

- experience as a preacher and leader of worship
- experience as a non-preaching church member
- ability to distinguish between essentials and lesser issues

- acceptance of variety, innovation and tradition
- understanding of Methodist theology and practice
- ability to offer constructive feedback and to criticise helpfully
- sensitivity to the spirituality of worship among leaders and congregations

Members of the group should be present to witness the probationer leading worship (in different contexts) at least once a quarter. Guidance regarding the model of assessment and feedback will be made available by the Conference Office. 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 (if applicable) 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 worship development group must take into account the probationer's order of ministry. Separate versions of Form B exist for presbyteral and diaconal probationers. Please see the further information contained in Form B.

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 here 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, however their insight will be extremely valuable. 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. Guidance on the programme for the group is available from the Conference Office.

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, 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).

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 training institutions, circuit colleagues of probationers and probationer mentors 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 Conference Office for district Probationers' Committees meeting with diaconal probationers with suggestions for questions and opportunities for reflection. Guidance is also available 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, which fits connexional but not necessarily circuit or district timetables. 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 a 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 Conference Office 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 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

Please note that these are the previous set of criteria/competencies and not those agreed by Conference at 2016. This is because these probationer ministers candidated using the previous criteria/competencies. The Ministries Committee are in the process of reviewing the timetable for bringing in the new competencies for the reports of probationers. Any changes will not come into operation until 2020-2021 Connexional year.

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 are set out in the table below:¹

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
Vocation (call and commitment)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability to discern which of their previously acquired skills and experience can be incorporated into ordained ministry, which need to be modified and which should be discarded 2. A confidence in the Church and the resources to resist the temptation to retreat into a personal or purely local ministry 3. Ability to give an account of their vocation to ministry and mission and their readiness to exercise public ministry as a probationer deacon or presbyter in the Methodist Church. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The capacity to bear the public roles and responsibilities of an ordained person and to perform credibly and maturely as a deacon or presbyter both in the Methodist Church and in the wider community 2. The capacity to bear a public and representative role in ministry and mission, and a readiness to exercise leadership in ordained ministry 3. Give an account of how personal commitment to Christ and discipleship is being shaped within the roles and expectations of public ministry
Being in relationship (with God, self and others)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. A developing spirituality and discipline of prayer consonant with their changing role and growth in learning 5. A developed self-awareness; an awareness of others; listening skills and basic pastoral understanding 6. Personal skills, including those involved in maintaining close relationships, standard courtesies, public politeness'; financial management etc. 7. Form and sustain relationships, both with those who differ, marked 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Ability to form and sustain a life of prayer within the expectations of public ministry, corporate and personal worship and devotion 5. Ability to give an account of how personal commitment to Christ is being shaped within the roles and expectations of leadership and oversight of others 6. Ability to form and sustain relationship across a wide range of people, especially in situations of conflict and

¹ These competencies originally formed part of the Methodist Church's contribution to the document Shaping the Future – New patterns of training for lay and ordained; The Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council; Church House Publishing, 2006.

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
	<p>by empathy, respect and insight</p> <p>8. Demonstrate good practice in a range of pastoral relationships, and learn from these experiences</p> <p>9. Ability to exercise appropriate care of self, through developing sustainable patterns of life and work, and effective support networks</p>	<p>disagreement, marked by empathy, respect and insight</p> <p>7. Good practice in a wide range of pastoral and professional relationships</p> <p>8. Ability to show insight, openness, maturity and stability in the face of pressure and change and in the process of enabling change</p> <p>9. Loving service in the Church, expressed in effective and collaborative leadership, in personal discipleship, in the practice of faith and in appropriate self-care</p>
The Church's ministry in God's world	<p>10. A developing understanding of the Gospel and Mission of the Kingdom of God; basic skills of interpretation; the ability to relate faith and experience and to begin to think theologically about their context</p> <p>11. A specific understanding and experience of Methodism in its breadth and diversity and in relation to other churches</p> <p>12. Demonstrate awareness of the church's roles and opportunities in public life and institutions, and in relation to other agencies</p> <p>13. Show understanding of the insights and practices of other churches and traditions in worship, especially of ecumenical partners</p> <p>14. Participate in and reflect on the mission of God in a selected range of social, ethical, cultural and intellectual contexts in which Christian witness is to be lived out in acts of mercy, service and justice</p>	<p>10. Have gained an understanding of the imperatives of the gospel and the nature of contemporary society and skills in articulating and engage in appropriate forms of mission in response to them</p> <p>11. Have developed a high level of skill in interpretation and a proven capacity to relate theology to the context in a variety of situations</p> <p>12. Demonstrate engagement in mission and evangelism in a range of contexts, particularly in the local community and in relation to the local church</p> <p>13. Demonstrate an understanding of the imperatives of the gospel and the nature of contemporary society and skills in articulating and engaging in appropriate forms of mission in response to them</p> <p>14. Demonstrate an ability to lead and enable others in faithful witness and to foster mission</p> <p>15. Demonstrate the ability to work ecumenically and to encourage ecumenical co-operation</p>

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
Leadership and collaboration	<p>15. An understanding, experience and proven capacity to handle working with people of different gifts and abilities and with various responsibilities in the life of the Church and the work of the kingdom (including some who are not chosen or approved by the student) and to exercise leadership as and when appropriate</p> <p>16. Show understanding of how children and adults learn and an ability to nurture others in their faith development</p> <p>17. Demonstrate effective collaborative leadership and ability to work in teams in a limited range of settings, and learn from these experiences</p> <p>18. Demonstrate commitment to loving service in the Church rooted in a sustained and growing love of God, discipleship of Christ, and pilgrimage in faith in the Holy Spirit</p>	<p>16. Are able to act independently but collegially with other ministries and with the community of the whole Church</p> <p>17. Demonstrate appropriate use of authority in ways which enable and empower others in their mission and ministry, including colleagues</p> <p>18. Exercise effective collaborative leadership, working effectively as a member of the team, and as an ordained person.</p> <p>19. Demonstrate the ability to support and supervise others in a limited range of roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>20. Demonstrate proficiency in a broad range of skills and abilities needed to exercise public ministry and leadership of a local church, and the ability to do this in relatively unsupervised settings. Show developed skills as an effective reflective practitioner</p>
Learning and understanding	<p>19. A proven ability in applying the relevant bodies of knowledge appropriately to particular situations</p> <p>20. A growing critical engagement with scripture and the traditions of Christian thought, characterised by faithful obedience and openness to new insights</p> <p>21. Ability to form a life of study and reflection within the demands and disciplines of initial training and the expectations shaped by public ministry</p>	<p>21. Have developed a working knowledge and understanding of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church and an expertise in applying it in practice</p> <p>22. Ability to form and sustain a life of disciplined study and reflection that sustains in leadership and public ministry</p>
Learning and		

	Expected competencies for presbyters and deacons about to be stationed are:	Expected competencies for those ready for ordination and to be received into Full Connexion:
understanding (continued)	<p>22. Ability to interpret and use scripture across a wide range of settings, showing developed exegetical and hermeneutic skills, communicating an understanding and engagement with scripture in ways that enable others to learn and explore</p> <p>23. Continued and disciplined engagement with Christian beliefs and practices</p> <p>24. Skill as reflective practitioners, able to engage thoughtfully and critically across the spectrum of Christian tradition, in ways that deeply inform personal practices, and which enable others to learn and explore</p> <p>25. Ability to engage confidently with the Bible as text and as holy scripture, as skilled interpreters and communicators</p> <p>26. Basic awareness of and reflective engagement with beliefs, practices and spirituality of other faith traditions</p>	
Communication	<p>27. A basic understanding of preaching, hermeneutical principles and techniques of communication, and an ability to preach in a number of styles and contexts and to make positive use of feedback and assessment.</p> <p>28. An ability in leading public worship and preaching, showing understanding of and good practice in liturgy and worship in a wide range of settings.</p>	<p>23. Have learnt to work under discipline and to make effective use of supervision.</p>

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:

- while the DPC (SO 484) must have a widely representative membership it must include 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 A) 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 A. Grades are not required, but it is essential that a clear description of the probationer's level of competence in each area is provided.

The areas are:

- Form B (presbyters) or Form B (deacons) as applicable
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. Please refer to the guidance for worship development groups for the relevant order of ministry.
- Form C – report from the Superintendent.
This report should be drawn up in consultation with the circuit leadership team and supervisor if not the superintendent
- Form D – report on the Orientation / Gospel in Context Project from the DPS or the person designated by them
- Form E – report on study and disciplinary learning.
This includes a report either from a training institution or via the DPS from the person responsible for studies in the district. This form should also report on evidence presented by the probationer to the DPC of ongoing and developing engagement with theology and the wider culture. This need not necessarily be a complete ‘booklist’ but should include both theological and general elements at a level that is judged to be sufficiently challenging for the individual.
- Form F – report on a summary of the probationer’s self-assessment.
No more than 2 sides of A4, 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 a mentor or support group and should remain confidential to the probationer.
- Form G (deacons only) – Warden’s report on development as a member of a religious order, and comments on other reports.

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 a mentor 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 her/himself, and even to share with a mentor, and what she/he is 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 B-F 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 the 31st of January.

Reporting on study and required learning should have as evidence either a report from a training 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.

Probationer studies

All probationers must undertake study. This is not because when they are ordained they will no longer need to study: rather the new experiences of entering ministry form a uniquely rich context for absorbing, reflecting on and critiquing other people's ideas and for developing one's own. Probation is when the enduring behaviour-patterns of ministry are laid down, and study must be part of those patterns. Every probationer needs to reflect in conjunction with the DPS, the probationers' group and their Superintendent to discover what is the best form of study for them in the context of the work of ministry: the study day is a gift, not an imposition which prevents the probationer from getting on with the 'real work'.

Probationer studies have two main elements – a theological reflection on the Church's mission and ministry and the extension of formal knowledge through individual study.

The first of these elements, theological reflection, is addressed by means of:

- **the Orientation Project**

This is undertaken in the first four months of the appointment. Its aim is not only to ensure that probationers are familiar with the practicalities of the area in which they live (geography, history, social context, employment, transport etc) but that they are beginning to reflect on it as a context for ministry and mission. It forms a major part of the agenda for the meetings of the probationers' group in the first three months. Reading, visits etc to inform the project will be suggested by the DPS and those helping him or her. The project should be assessed according to the competencies in order to inform the DPC's discussions. Where the probationer undertakes this as part of a continuing programme of studies with the Queen's Foundation, it will be assessed by tutors there.

- **the personal journal (obligatory for presbyters)**

Probationers are required to keep a journal of the first three months. The journal should include first impressions, notes of key events and reflections on these experiences. The evaluation should include reflection on their spirituality and sense of calling as well as their performance.

- **Reflection with Religious Order Advisory Committee (deacons only)**
Probationer deacons are required to meet with the Religious Order Advisory Committee annually for a formal vocational conversation reflect on their spirituality, the Rule of Life and assess how being a member of a religious order impacts on their life and ministry.
- **the probationers'/early years'/under-fives' group**
Theological reflection is of the essence of the programme of this group. Probationers may contribute to this by, for example, taking part in a seminar on a prepared topic, contributing to reflection on a particular area of work, presenting a case study etc.
- **the 'Gospel in Context' project**
During the second year, each probationer should build on the Orientation Project by reflecting at greater depth on their neighbourhood or another work context as a context for the gospel: 'What is the good news for this place?' 'What does it mean to be Church here?' This reflection should be assessed according to the competencies in order to inform the DPC's discussions. Where the probationer undertakes this as part of a continuing programme of studies with the Queen's Foundation, it will be assessed by tutors there.
- **supervision**
This is provided by the Superintendent or delegated person.
- **the worship development group**
This should take into account the context of the probationer's ministry of word and sacrament (for presbyteral probationers) and leading of worship (for all probationers) in commenting on the effectiveness of the acts of worship.
- **self-assessment**
The person responsible for supporting the probationer in carrying out the self-assessment (eg the mentor) should encourage them to engage with the theological questions raised by their experience.
- **theological reflections (for deacons)**
Diaconal probationers complete one written theological reflection each year (see 'additional information for diaconal probationers').

The second element, individual study, may be addressed through a prior commitment such as the completion of a degree course, or by a further course of advanced study recommended by the training institution. Students wishing to embark on further study must discuss it with their training institution in the first instance. The implications must be carefully considered in consultation with the Superintendent and the DPS. It is important not to underestimate the time commitment required. The study must not be such as to take up more than eight hours a week, and sometimes less (to allow, for example, for the district probationers' group) unless the probationer can realistically offer more from their leisure time. A probationer may find it advisable at certain points (eg when writing up a dissertation) to take several study days as a block rather than one a week: once again this possibility should be discussed with the

Superintendent and the DPS.

Connexional funding is available for probationers undertaking courses of advanced study that have been approved by MCPOC. At present, this funding is set at the full fees up to £1,500 a year plus two-thirds of travel expenses. MCPOC will not approve funding for courses that do not have a significant theological element. Applications for funding must be made to the spring meeting of MCPOC in the final year of pre-ordination training.

It is extremely important that the pursuit of accredited individual study does not prevent the probationer from taking part in the probationers' group. Expectations should be spelled out in the approved Learning & Development Needs form, and possible problems discussed between the training institution, the district, the Warden (where appropriate), the probationer and the Connexional Team. The probationers' group is the place where all the elements of the individual's development come together in a context of support and accountability. It is not optional.

Probationers who do not undertake accredited study have the opportunity of pursuing studies relevant to their ministry that are agreed with the district. The likely area and form of such studies should be indicated on the 'Learning and Development Needs' form. For courses which carry a fee and do not qualify for connexional funding under the advanced theological study criteria (eg courses in counselling, Godly Play, music etc) probationers have access to funding on the same basis as CDiM funding for ordained ministers. Further information may be obtained from the Conference Office.

All probationers should produce at least once a year a substantial piece of work which is capable of being assessed as evidence of their capacity to think theologically. For diaconal probationers, this requirement is met through the theological reflection submitted to the Religious Order Advisory Committee. For presbyteral probationers this may be, but does not have to be, the traditional essay; it could be a presentation to the probationers' group, participation in a seminar or the production of artwork. It must, however, represent serious engagement with a theological topic and it must be supported by an adequate reading list. It is assessed by the DPS or someone to whom this task is delegated.

Studies agreed within the District are the normal pattern for all probationers who do not wish to pursue further academic courses. It is such a pattern of study designated by the District that probationers whose academic course is interrupted or deferred for any reason, should adopt, until such time as they are able to pick up their academic course again.

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 you to demonstrate how as a members of a religious order you are developing as a reflective practitioner.

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

You will be offered feedback on the reflection which will form the basis of your 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.

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 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.
