

Flexible working for ministers in appointments in the control of the Church

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Helen D Cameron Assistant Secretary of the Conference
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	For decision
Draft Resolutions	42/1. The Council receives the report. 42/2. The Council directs that the guidelines contained within the report are published on the Methodist Church website.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	n/a

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The paper offers guidelines to circuits and ministers in good practice regarding flexible patterns of working
Main Points	This guidance both recognises the current flexibilities available to ministers and acknowledges the boundaries or parameters to those flexibilities which of necessity exist.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	n/a
Consultations	The Wellbeing Adviser, Mr Tony Tidey Stationing Committee

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1. Introduction

It is recognised that ministers often have considerable flexibility in how they carry out their day to day ministerial duties, and that the constraints of a regular pattern of working hours do not usually apply to them. Potentially this may provide additional flexibility for those with caring responsibilities, although it is acknowledged that it may also lead to additional pressures where the demands of ministerial duties may result in unpredictable working patterns and even unrealistic expectations.

Provisions have existed for some time in UK law for employees with caring responsibilities to request that they might work more flexibly by varying their hours or working pattern. Clearly, the particular status of ministers as office holders means that these provisions do not apply to them, and it is acknowledged that considerable flexibility already exists in how the ministerial role is carried out. That said, the legislative provisions enable employees, regardless of whether they have caring responsibilities, to request the right to work more flexibly. In light of these changes it is useful to review our current arrangements to ensure that they are appropriate and helpful in responding to the needs of ministers as they seek to live out their call.

This guidance below both recognises the current flexibilities available to ministers and acknowledges the boundaries or parameters to those flexibilities which of necessity exist.

2. The current position

Within the context of a six day working week ministers may organise their work to take account of issues such as child and elder care arrangements, provided that they are able to meet the demands of their appointment. There is also flexibility concerning issues such as designation of a regular day off and taking annual leave. In addition, opportunities are sometimes available within an appointment for an individual to reduce their working week provided cover is available. However, within the stationing matching process itself it is acknowledged that one of the constraints to greater flexible working (particularly part time or job sharing) is the availability of only one manse per station. Finally, there are also provisions in place for flexible retirement, whereby a phased approach to retirement may be adopted.

3. Patterns of flexible working

Given the flexibility available to ministers, it is useful to benchmark some common approaches to flexible working in order to determine whether there is scope for these to be applied in the context of ministers in the Methodist Church.

- a) **Annualised hours** - this is where working time is organised on the basis of the number of hours to be worked over a year, rather than week, providing flexibility to respond to peaks and troughs in demands. Given that there are no defined working hours for ministers this approach would not be applicable *per se*. However, the principle of ensuring that a period of intense work activity is followed by appropriate rest is to be commended, as a way of ensuring balance and recuperation. These matters are explored in the two 'Good Practice Guides to supporting ministers with ill health'.
- b) **Compressed hours** - this involves working the total number of agreed hours over a shorter period: for example, working full time hours over four days instead of five. With this approach we run into the difficulty that there are no defined working hours for

ministers, so it would be difficult to see how this could apply. That said, in some situations it might be helpful to examine the broader principle of looking at whether the required range of ministerial *duties* could be carried out over a five day week instead of six days, as a way of enabling greater flexibility.

- c) **Flexitime** - where working hours may take place outside of a standard or notional '9-5' working day to provide flexibility for activities outside work, subject to work demands. In essence, this level of flexibility already exists for ministers as noted above.
- d) **Home working** - where duties are carried out at the individual's home for some or all of the working week rather than in a designated place of work. Essentially this provision already exists for ministers for a part of their working week.
- e) **Job sharing** - this involves two people working part time to carry out a full time job, and requires regular handover arrangements to ensure consistency. Across the Connexion there are often informal arrangements whereby (for example) more than one supernumerary minister covers the work of a full time minister when absent on sick leave. This way of working would be feasible on a more formal basis were it not for the fact that both job share partners are likely to require a manse, thus presenting a practical obstacle. Where job shares take place it is essential that the full duties of the appointment are covered across the whole week.
- f) **Staggered hours** - allowing for altered start and finish times. Effectively ministers already have the scope to work in this way, subject to the demands of their role.
- g) **Term time working** - under this arrangement individuals are allowed to take unpaid leave of absence during school holidays. Salary is paid throughout the year but at a lower level to reflect the fact that leave during school holidays is unpaid. Potentially this would be feasible in the ministerial context but would be subject to the provision of appropriate cover during the school holidays. It may also raise issues of the continuity of pastoral and other care.

This analysis shows that in many key respects, ministers already have the ability to work very flexibly. Perhaps the key obstacle is the availability of only one manse per station, which precludes arrangements such as job sharing or part time working in many situations.

4. Making a request to work more flexibly - within the context of an existing station

As noted above, there is considerable scope for flexibility within the ministerial role and very often flexible arrangements are easy to put in place, indeed this way of working is a normal way of working for a minister. Where necessary these are worked out amicably within the appointment, and take place within the context of ministers being stationed annually, and any arrangement agreed must recognise this. Where an individual wishes to work in a more flexible way than their current context allows they should have an informal discussion with the body responsible for the appointment. In Circuit ministry this will be the Superintendent and Circuit Stewards or where the Superintendent is seeking to work flexibly, the District Chair and Circuit Stewards. The purpose of this discussion is to explore positively and constructively the minister's request with a view to finding ways to be supportive if this is practicable, mindful of any impact the proposal may have on colleagues. Whilst the emphasis is on taking a positive and supportive approach, any request must be considered in light of the following criteria:

- a) whether cover for the minister is required when s/he is not working and whether this could be provided by colleagues or elsewhere;

- b) the cost of providing any such cover, particularly if the proposal does not include a reduction in stipend for the minister;
- c) the impact of the proposal on the provision of a manse;
- d) the impact of the proposal on continuity of pastoral care and other aspects of the appointment;
- e) when a minister is in a circuit appointment the impact of the proposal on the life of the Circuit and particularly the ability to fulfil the requirements of the Plan; and
- f) If an outcome of the proposal is that the minister will be absent from the Circuit regularly on Sundays, how this will impact on the life of the Circuit, and the minister's relationships within the Circuit.

Once agreement has been reached concerning a request to work more flexibly the Superintendent (in the case of a circuit appointment) will record the terms of the agreement in writing and will send a copy to the minister for signature. (If the Superintendent makes the request to work more flexibly the District Chair will take this role.) The signed copy of the agreement must be returned to the Superintendent (or Chair if the Superintendent has made the request) who will retain this. In appointments other than circuit ones the designated representative of the body responsible for the minister's appointment will undertake this task.

5. Making a request to work more flexibly - within the context of the stationing process

As a minister prepares to enter the stationing matching process s/he may be seeking to discern issues which encompass both their ministry and wider life. This may lead them to seek to work more flexibly in their next appointment. If this is the case early discussions must take place with the Chair so that the profile can reflect their wishes, within the constraints described above. This will enable sensitive and timely conversations to take place during the stationing matching process.

It is important to note that requests to work more flexibly when seeking a new appointment will be subject to the criteria set out at paragraph 4 a to f above, and whilst they will be considered sensitively and carefully, it may not be possible to accommodate them.

6. Some examples of flexible working

A married couple –in two discrete appointments

Jill and David each have full time appointments in the same Circuit. They both have the same day off each week (Friday) in order to ensure that they are able to spend time together. They also seek to arrange their diaries so that they have one evening per week when they are both free from meetings. Given the demands of the Circuit they recognise that this will not be the same evening each week, but plan their diaries to ensure that space is protected each week.

A married couple – sharing the same appointment

Sylvie and Peter share an appointment and a manse. This enables them to cover the caring needs of Sylvie's elderly mother who lives with them. In organising their work they have agreed with their Superintendent that they have the same day off each week, which they have designated as each Monday. In order to ensure that they are both available to their congregations on Sundays, they have an arrangement where they alternate working Saturdays and Sundays between them. Their working pattern is as follows:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Sylvie	Day off	Working	Working	<i>Not working</i>	<i>Not working</i>	Working every other week	Working every other week
Peter	Day off	<i>Not working</i>	<i>Not working</i>	Working	Working	Working every other week	Working every other week

This working pattern ensures that they have the same day off together, but that their churches have full 6 day cover, and they are both regularly available to their churches on Sundays, thus providing continuity of care.

A single minister with children who lives with a former spouse

Joel is recently divorced. His ex-wife and 6 year old twin boys live a short distance from the manse. The demands of his appointment and the boys' schedule mean that Joel rarely sees his sons in the evening and in term time is only able to see them at weekends. He has designated his day off as Saturday so that he can be with his sons then, but wishes to spend more time with them at the weekends. He asks his Superintendent whether it would be possible for him to have regular additional days off on two Sundays per month, arguing that he works extremely hard in the week and would ensure that he finds cover.

The Superintendent is very sympathetic and is aware of how much Joel misses his sons. In considering the proposal he is however mindful of the need for Joel to provide continuity and presence to a Circuit which has had a number of difficulties due to being without a minister until recently. In light of these considerations the Superintendent is unable to agree the request. However, she encourages Joel to think about other ways that he may spend time with his sons during the week, for example arranging his work so that he regularly meets them from school.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

42/1. The Council receives the report.

42/2. The Council directs that the guidelines contained within the report be published on the Methodist Church website.