

Self-Supporting Ordained Ministry

Best Practice Guidance

as agreed by the Ministry Council of the Church of England and the National Network of Self-Supporting Ministry Officers and Advisers
November 2022

Self-Supporting Ordained Ministers (SSOMs) are licensed clergy not in receipt of a stipend, and retired clergy with PTO who have previously been SSOM. Some House for Duty clergy, chaplains, those working outside parochial ministry and others not in receipt of a full stipend also consider themselves to be SSOM.

2023 marks 60 years since the first SSOMs were ordained in the Church of England. SSOMs make an important contribution to the life of the Church of England and gain significant fulfilment from their ministry. However, concerns remain about the extent to which SSOMs are recognised and offered opportunities for development so that the mission and ministry of the Church thrives. Ordained ministers need to have confidence that their ministry is valued regardless of whether they receive a stipend. As the Church of England together seeks to deliver the outcomes of its Vision and Strategy, it is clear that a 'mixed ecology' of ministry will be a key element.

Under each heading, we indicate an outcome which we would hope to see by the end of 2023, and at the end of each section, a way in which progress could be measured. The National Network proposes to conduct a baseline study across all dioceses in order to set benchmarks and targets and to measure progress in subsequent years.

1: RECOGNITION

Outcome: Dioceses include SSOMs more effectively in communication and consultation

Many dioceses celebrate the contribution SSOMs make to the life of the Church. The Church has expressed a clear priority embracing a broad range of ministry as part of its Vision and Strategy. This includes lay and ordained ministry, paid and unpaid. Self-supporting ordained ministry offers a critical contribution to this objective. Consequently, the Church will want to recognise in meaningful ways the valuable ministerial resource represented by SSOMs for example by featuring SSOM in vocations web pages and outlining key SSOM contributions in communications.

Many dioceses have statements stressing that all clergy are equal – which in itself is helpful. However, in practice this view can result in a lack of creative thought on how best to support and develop ministry by failing to recognise where SSOM needs and perspectives may differ from the 'default', normative position of stipendiary clergy.

It is recommended that:

- The National Church Institutions (NCIs) and Dioceses review how they recognise the contributions of SSOMs nationally and locally and seek to understand the differing contexts in which they operate, including less visible, non-parochial positions such as Ministers in Secular Employment;

- Bishops consider how they might regularly involve Bishop’s Officers/Advisors for SSOM in senior staff meetings;
- Creative thought is given to making key diocesan meetings more accessible and flexible for SSOMs who are often employed in other jobs;
- Each diocese keeps an up-to-date, accessible and searchable database of SSOMs;
- Regularly updated information for and about SSOMs is posted on diocesan websites, including vocations pages.

Measure: A significantly increased proportion of SSOMs report that their ministry is recognised in diocesan communications and they are routinely involved in the same conversations as similarly deployed stipendiary clergy.

2: DISCERNMENT AND VOCATIONS

Outcome: More focus is given to SSOM as a valued and recognised expression of ministry

The following is recommended:

- Widespread reflection on the theology of SSOM, acknowledging the positive model of self-supporting ministry in the New Testament.
- Acknowledgement of many SSOM’s being employed outside the church. In particular Dioceses are encouraged to value and support MSEs.
- The continued expansion of specific initiatives to attract potential SSOMs. While we acknowledge that this is becoming less prevalent, a continuing and sometimes explicit assumption that SSOMs are second class clergy persists in some places, which discourages SSOM vocations, and is entirely inappropriate in the 21st century Church.
- Bishops and DDOs are urged to discourage any such assumptions, and to develop policies that reinforce contrary perceptions, demonstrating that SSOMs are valued equally with stipendiary colleagues.
- Diocesan and national communications should exemplify the ways in which SSOMs already make an important contribution to Church leadership, ensuring that all understand that SSOMs are not ‘gap fillers’ whose role is simply to assist incumbents or provide affordable ministry for stringent times.
- DDO’s should discuss with the majority of candidates discerning a call to ordained ministry whether they have considered serving in an SSOM capacity. Ideally this would be a holistic vocational conversation discerning whether God could be calling the person to continue in an existing calling alongside training for and serving in ordained ministry. The exception to this is where, in the discretion of diocesan staff, to do so would leave candidates (and especially candidates from historically underrepresented groups) feeling pressured into making a choice which is not their preference.
- That assumptions about age and focus of ministry should be challenged so that greater numbers of younger people consider a call to ordained ministry on an SSOM basis whilst being facilitated to remain in other jobs or careers. Dioceses should freely offer information on both stipendiary and SSOM routes and not indicate that one pathway is assumed because of age, gender or background.
- Dioceses sponsor more SSOM candidates for incumbent-level ministry.
- That every diocese should include SSOMs in its vocations and discernment processes e.g as vocations advisers or ADDOs (and not just for those considering self-supporting roles).

Measure: A significantly increased proportion of SSOMs in each Diocese report that SSOM vocations are featured clearly and positively in vocations materials and processes.

3: CLARITY ABOUT ROLES

Outcome: All expressions of ministry are required to have clarity and purpose.

There are good examples across dioceses of detailed and sensitive deployment conversations, collaborative working, and appropriately enabling Working Agreements. Examples of less good practice also exist, resulting in lack of clarity about expectations, discomfort and sometimes distress.

The definition of SSOM is not as clear-cut as may be thought, since some clergy are partly supported financially by the Church, while not being in receipt of a full stipend.

The following is recommended:

- Regular and meaningful conversations between SSOMs and colleagues leading to the universal use of realistic, properly reviewed Working Agreements (a template is available at SSOMnetwork.org.uk);
- Working Agreements should start with the focus of ministry deemed most significant by the SSOM, rather than parochial ministry being the default, and sometimes the only, context considered.
- All active clergy not in receipt of a full stipend (unpaid, part-stipended, House for Duty, employed by the diocese, retired SSOM on PTO or in some forms of chaplaincy) are invited to be on diocesan SSOM lists if they find this useful.

Measure: All SSOMs on the diocesan list agree that they belong there, no one who would like to be on it is excluded, and a significantly increased proportion of (and ultimately all) SSOMs in each Diocese have relevant and regularly reviewed Working Agreements.

4: MINISTERIAL DEVELOPMENT REVIEW (MDR)

Outcome: SSOMs are offered relevant MDR processes.

MDR practice varies enormously across dioceses, with some well-adapted processes, and others appearing to have little relevance to SSOMs, particularly those whose focus of ministry is not mainly parochial.

It is recommended that dioceses review MDR processes to ensure they match the needs of SSOMs and offer appropriate development support as a result. MDR conversations relevant to the focus of ministry and context of SSOMs, with specific development objectives outlined, are encouraged.

Measure: All dioceses have an MDR process which enables all SSOMs to reflect fully their ministry, and that the process includes mechanisms to ensure that recommendations and any areas of concern are followed up.

5: DEPLOYMENT

Outcome: Ministerial deployment takes full account of the potential contribution of SSOMs.

In recent years some SSOMs have been invited to take on incumbent positions and other leadership and advisory roles (for instance, Area/Rural Dean). Research suggests that a greater proportion of SSOMs are open to discussion about redeployment than is often assumed to be the case. Not all SSOMs are given opportunities for development or redeployment after completing their curacy, and many are not made aware of or encouraged to progress to leadership roles within the Church at diocesan and national levels. SSOMs may well have considerable relevant experience and skills gained in secular fields, a resource of which the Church could avail itself to a greater extent than is currently the case.

The following is recommended:

- More flexible models of deployment are considered, taking into account both local needs and the experience and skills of SSOMs.
- That all SSOMs have the opportunity to discuss their deployment with a member of diocesan staff at regular intervals, perhaps as part of the MDR process;
- Work is undertaken at all levels of the Church including the Archbishops' Council and the Archbishops' Advisers for Appointments to establish how they could encourage SSOMs into all roles within the Church, including episcopal, to avoid the impression that any level of leadership is restricted to stipendiary clergy, or those who have been stipended at some point.

Measure: An significantly increased proportion of SSOMs have been involved in a conversation about deployment within the last 5 years.

6: CONTINUING MINISTERIAL DEVELOPMENT

Outcome: SSOMs are provided with appropriate support in terms of CMD.

Although dioceses can demonstrate creativity and flexibility in training programmes, IME 1 and 2 are not always well-tailored to SSOMs.

The following is recommended:

- All levels of training regularly refer to the theology and practice of SSOM as well as other forms of ministry.
- Training for all new Training Incumbents includes a refresher course in forms of ministry, including SSOM and the reasonable outcomes anticipated of teamwork within a mixed ecology.
- The introduction of evidence-based training on collaborative ministry in which stipendiary clergy and SSOMs are encouraged to explore potential issues together.
- Creative discussion in dioceses and deaneries to make it easier for SSOMs to attend chapter meetings and learning events at times which suit their commitments – that may or may not mean evening meetings, but it will require consulting with SSOMs.
- Study leave and sabbaticals, with appropriate grants, are equally available to SSOM and stipendiary clergy.

Measure: An increased proportion of SSOMs in each Diocese feel they have been offered relevant CMD.

7: WELLBEING

Outcome: SSOMs are provided with appropriate support in terms of wellbeing in ministry and into retirement

The following is recommended:

- The development, nationally and locally, of new ways of supporting all clergy, including SSOMs, at key transitional points, such as completing their curacy, taking on a post with more responsibility, or coming up to retirement.
- Particular attention is given to the challenges faced by SSOMs during and after vacancies, especially where workload increases and they subsequently feel side-lined.
- Attention is given to retirement planning and pastoral care for SSOMs moving to retirement/PTO status. This transition for SSOMs can often go unnoticed and unsupported. Liturgical committees are invited to develop appropriate liturgy to make this transition.
- Support for the wellbeing of SSOMs should be offered as part of the overall care of all clergy in the diocese.

Measure: An increased proportion of SSOMs in each Diocese feel their wellbeing is supported by the Diocese.

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<http://SSOMnetwork.org.uk/>

The National Network of SSOM Officers and Advisers, formed in 2020, has over 60 members representing almost all English dioceses and several other provinces.

We are grateful to God for the significant contribution of the Revd Dr Jenny Gage who sadly passed away during the development of this work.