

When there are concerns about a student's progress towards ministry (The Amber Light Policy)

1. INTRODUCTION

This document sets out the processes by which concerns about a student's progress towards ministry will be handled. The first parts of this document relate to processes that are essentially internal to Westminster College. These processes, however, mirror in intent similar processes used at other RCL's within the United Reformed Church. Stage two is a process of the Assessment Board of the United Reformed Church, paralleling exactly that used in other RCL's. The only difference between the RCL policies is in the titles of the relevant people who take part in processes, which vary according to the structures and practices of the different institutions.

Where, by prior agreement, a student studying at Westminster from a sister denomination is under the discipline of the college, these processes will be an informal guide to the nature and ethos of any process that may be required.

1.1 "Oversight and Care of Candidates for Ministry"

An important principle is clearly set out in this paper, namely that Education for Ministry phase 1 (EM1) is part of a continuing process of discernment for the URC and for the student. Training at a College is not a goal in and of itself, nor is it a 'right' that can be claimed by all who discern within themselves a call to Word and Sacrament (W&S), or Church-Related Community Work (CRCW), ministry within the URC. In particular, two references are drawn upon here:

"At every step of the journey, both Church and candidate are engaged in testing a Call and at every stage it may become apparent that a different path is the next step. At every point both Church and candidate are seeking to work out what is right. There will be judgments to be made; about suitability or progress about learning, character and personality, about availability and readiness." (URC, *Oversight and Care of Candidates for Ministry*, 2014, p1).¹

These statements are, themselves, underpinned by an understanding embedded in the Reformed ethos, namely that an individual's personal sense of call is only the inner dimension of a complete picture. By taking the step of candidating for a ministry within the URC, each candidate opens themselves to the equally important external dimension of having that inner sense of call tested by the Church. All discernment is undertaken in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit. No call is complete without both the inner and external dimensions. A candidate, once accepted as a student, ought prayerfully and consistently to be open to God's further directing. And each student must expect that the Church, particularly through the College to which they have been recommended for EM1 training, will continue to participate in the discerning of the external dimension of their calling.

1.2 "URC Marks of Ministry of Word and Sacrament"

This is a detailed document, over which the church has exercised considerable care and attention. While it is accepted, of course, that no minister or student is expected to exhibit exceptional gifting in every area, nevertheless, the relevant committees of the United Reformed Church have discerned this framework of gifts and graces to be that which forms the basis of training and assessment.

1.3 Living a Disciplined Life

At ordination or commissioning, a minister makes promises to lead a holy life. In 2010, General Assembly (Appendices 3a and 3b, General Assembly *Book of Reports 2010*, pp215-218) agreed guidelines that help to give substance to those promises. There are other aspects of this discipline, such as: the giving of service in the quality and the time with which a minister engages

¹ Available to download from the Education and Learning pages of the URC website

with their work; attendance at synod meetings and responding to the call upon each minister's time and abilities by the wider church.

To be a minister means entering the disciplined life, and that discipline begins in EM1 training. Such discipline is not to be followed or ignored at the choice of minister or student, but to be lived out in daily life. Within the College, that discipline is seen, for example, in the requirements the College lays upon all students for attendance, achieving the necessary academic level, and it is looked for in attitudes of respect for others and openness and willingness within the whole training process.

2. CONTINUING DISCERNMENT WITHIN COLLEGE

The programme of academic study, formational training and placement experience created by the College for each student, normally on an individually-tailored basis, is there to support a student's journey of development with the benchmarks and core competencies for ministry in mind.

During EM1, students will have a personal tutor and, at times, placement supervisors. The roles of tutor and supervisor are to encourage, support and, as appropriate, to challenge a student's words, actions, application, behaviours and attitudes.

Awareness of a student's relationships and interactions within the life of the College community form an important part of the College's understanding of the individual's developing readiness for ministry.

Academic work is assessed through written work and other submissions for credit, or for audit, as agreed for the student's own programme of study. On an ongoing basis, a tutor and a supervisor will both be offering feedback. There is an annual review process where all progress, and a student's own response to it, is brought together for a report, which the student will agree and sign (or note their disagreement upon).

2.2 Principles behind the operation of the policy

Whenever there is concern about a student's suitability or readiness for ministry, it will be tested against the criteria given in the *URC Marks for Ministry of Word & Sacraments*.²

The College seeks to work consensually with students as far as possible and will work hard to achieve mutual recognition and ownership of ways forward.

The College will separate out processes of pastoral support and of decision-making or discipline, so that the same people are not involved in both - and will seek to ensure that other involved parties, such as Synods, will do the same. The College will ensure that a student is offered the pastoral support of a named individual, if this policy is enacted. The College will also offer teaching staff and tutors pastoral support as this policy is enacted.

The College will make written, dated records of all formal meetings that take place, for the sake of transparency, and so that students at all times may agree or register disagreement with any such record.

3. SPECIAL MONITORING

3.1. Initiating Special Monitoring

A concern about a student may be raised in a number of ways, but it would most likely be brought by a student's tutor to an tutorial staff meeting. A sense that there is a significant concern might be tested in discussion among colleagues, judged against the criteria above and on evidence brought.

The tutorial staff will, together with the student's particular tutor, decide what the nature of the concern is and, if they think it is substantial and significant, the student's tutor will convey this to the student verbally and in writing. The tutor will initiate a discussion with the student about a possible programme of help, support and particular steps that can be taken towards alleviating the concerns. The targets set will be realistic and timed. The student will be asked to agree the

⁷ Replaced by description found in attached appendix adopted by Mission Council, May 2019.

content and timing of the Special Monitoring programme. Where no agreement can be reached with the student about such a programme, the tutorial staff meeting may either insist upon such a programme, or determine that the failure to mutually agree such a programme raises the level of the concern such that it is appropriate to initiate a Stage One panel.

3.2 Possible Outcomes of Special Monitoring

3.2.1 By the agreed review date, if the student works with the tutor and makes good and willing progress during Special Monitoring, if the tutor is satisfied with that progress, s/he will recommend to the staff meeting that such monitoring ceases. A record of the Special Monitoring and a short report of their progress will be placed on the student's file and a copy given to the student, who may register any disagreement about its content. EM1 will continue on a normal basis.

It is possible that the student may be asked to work on a Special Monitoring programme on more than one occasion during EM1 training.

3.2.2 If significant progress is not made within the agreed timetable, or if the student does not work to the timetable and goals with an appropriate attitude, then the next stage of the process will be instigated.

3.3 Exceptional Situations

It is possible that serious concerns may emerge and that Special Monitoring is not the appropriate process with which to respond. In such a situation, the academic staff meeting may make the decision to move directly to Amber Light Stage 1. The student's tutor and the Principal (or another tutor if the Principal is the student's personal tutor) will meet with the student, explain the concerns and the reasons they are considered exceptional, and the Amber Light Stage 1 Panel will be convened. This verbal indication will be included in the letter to the student, which sets out the Stage 1 process.

This step might also be taken if the student is so near the end of their training that a reasonable amount of time may not be available for Special Monitoring to be the appropriate process.

4. AMBER LIGHT STAGE 1 PANEL.

4.1 Instigation of Stage 1

Stage 1 will be instigated if:

- i. the student does not, in a reasonable timescale, make sufficient progress in Special Monitoring;
- ii. the student does not respond appropriately to the Special Monitoring programme; or
- iii. the concerns are so serious, or the timing in a student's training recommendation so tight, that the tutorial staff meeting agree that the Stage 1 Panel should be convened with immediate effect. This may be particularly the case if a student is on their Living Ministry Programme (LMP) or in their final year of training.

4.2 Initial Process

The tutor will meet with the student and inform him/her that the 'Amber-Light' procedure has been activated. After explaining how the procedure works, the tutor will explain the concern orally and give the student a written account of the concern. The student will be invited to agree with the account of the concern or to register disagreement. The tutor should also make a written record of the meeting with the student. The student should be invited to agree this record or register their disagreement.

The matter will be shared with the Convenor of the Board of Studies and the Secretary for Education and Learning of the United Reformed Church. The latter will inform the URC Secretary for Ministries, who acts in these matters on behalf of the URC Assessment Board. The appropriate link person from the student's sending Synod will also be informed of the College's concern about the student.

The Convenor of the Westminster College Board of Studies will convene an Amber Light Stage 1 Panel.

4.3 Attendance at the Stage 1 Panel

The student will be invited to bring a friend to support them, who may support the student and clarify points that the student is making, but may not act as an advocate for the student. (Henceforth, when the student's presence at any Panel is mentioned, such a friend's presence and role is implied).

The Panel will consist of

- **a member of the College teaching staff who has not been centrally involved in the situation;**
- **a representative from the College Board of Studies who has not been involved in the situation;**
- **a member of the Board of Studies to take down a record of the meeting.**
- **a representative of the student's synod.**

The representative from the Board of Studies will chair the Stage 1 Panel Meeting. Those listed in bold above are the decision making members of the panel.

Also invited to attend will be:

- The student's tutor (or other appropriate member of Senatus), who will outline to the Panel the College's concerns.
- Any placement supervisor of a placement relevant to the concerns under consideration.

4.4 The Stage 1 Panel Process

4.4.1 All relevant papers will be circulated to all who will be attending the meeting at least 48 hours before the meeting takes place.

4.4.2 Normally no more than one hour should be allowed for initial consultation by the Panel without the student present. There would then normally be no more than ninety minutes allocated for the remainder of the Panel meeting, with the student present for approximately one hour.

4.4.3 The student will be invited to join the Panel and the Convenor will ensure that the panel understands the issues involved, the seriousness of the concerns, the process to be followed and the possible outcomes.

4.4.4 The Convenor will also need to stress confidentiality and encourage openness.

4.4.5 The Panel will share in prayer together.

4.4.6 The Convenor will ensure the good order of contributions to the Stage 1 Panel, and further ensure everyone has the appropriate amount of time to make their contributions.

4.4.7 At an appropriate stage, the Convenor will ask the student's tutor, (and, where present) placement supervisor to withdraw from the Panel to give the student the opportunity to raise any relevant issues with the Panel members who will make a decision.

4.4.8 The Convenor will, at all times, consider whether expertise from outside the Panel might be necessary.

4.4.9 The Panel, without the student, will discuss the progress of the student towards receiving a leaving certificate. The tutor, and supervisor will leave the Panel and the decision-making members of the Panel will come to a consensus on the outcome, and agree the wording of the response to the student.

4.4.10 The student and the whole Panel will reconvene and the decision will be given verbally to the student. The decision will be confirmed in writing within three working days.

4.5 Possible Outcomes

4.5.1 The student is adjudged to have made satisfactory responses and may be returned to the responsibility of the College. In this event, there may be a recommendation that the student be assigned a different personal tutor.

4.5.2 There are still adjudged to be significant steps necessary for the student to pick up and work normally again through EM1. These steps will be outlined to the student, and a timetable for review put in place. The student will be invited to respond, and the student's response will be taken into consideration, but it will not be beholden upon the Panel to alter any part of their decision in the light of that response. In this event, the Panel will agree the date for their next meeting to assess progress made.

It is possible for the Stage 1 Panel to meet on a number of occasions if they consider that the student is applying themselves appropriately and making significant progress. It is possible that this decision will involve extending the period of training initially recommended and the Secretary for Education and Learning must be informed as soon as this is perceived as a possible outcome. It is also possible that such a meeting might result in the beginning of the settlement process being delayed to allow for further progress towards readiness for ordination. The Secretary for Ministries must be informed as soon as this is perceived as a possible outcome.

4.5.3 The Panel, at the first or any subsequent meeting, may decide that the College has done all it can in supporting, encouraging and guiding a student through her/his EM1 training but that the student has made insufficient progress against all the benchmark criteria and requirements of the College. In this event, the Stage 1 Panel will inform the student that they will be sent to the Amber Light Stage 2 Panel. The student will be suspended from EM1 training, pending the outcome of the Stage 2 Panel, and the Secretary for Education and Learning informed so that practical and financial arrangements might be put in place.

4.5.4 It is possible that the Panel considers that, with a decision under 4.5.2 or 4.5.3 above, the relationship between the student and the College has broken down irretrievably. In this event, the Stage 1 Panel will inform the student that they will be sent to the Amber Light Stage 2 Panel with a recommendation that the place of training is also reviewed. The student will be suspended from EM1 training pending the outcome of the Stage 2 Panel, and the Secretary for Education and Learning informed so that practical and financial arrangements might be put in place.

4.5.5 If the outcome means the student will be sent to the Stage 2 Panel, the papers for the Stage 1 Panel, together with a copy of the confirmatory letter sent to the student, will be sent to the Convenor of the Assessment Board with a request that the Stage 2 Panel be convened.

5. AMBER LIGHT STAGE 2 PANEL

The Stage 2 Panel is conducted by the Assessment Board which, on behalf of the Ministries Committee and the United Reformed Church, is tasked with the discernment of call and suitability for ministry at this stage in the same way as its members had been given this discerning task at the student's first Assessment Board.

5.1 Initial Process

The Convenor (or Assessment Board member nominated by the Convenor) will receive the paperwork from the Stage 1 Panel and will write to the student explaining the process.

The Convenor will assemble the personnel for the Panel and will ascertain the earliest date for the meeting and an appropriate venue and make the necessary practical arrangements.

5.2 Attendance at the Stage 2 Panel

(See 4.3 above for the student's attendance.)

Only the Assessment Board members of the Panel will make the decision ("a" and "b" below):

- a. **The Convenor of the Assessment Board** (or the Assessment Board member nominated by the Convenor) who will convene and chair the Panel;
- b. **two further members of the Assessment Board**, one of whom will have responsibility for notetaking;

- c. an appropriate member of Senatus;
- d. a member of the Board of Studies (if at all possible, the convenor of the Stage I Panel);
- e. a representative from the student's Synod;
- f. the Secretary for Ministries (or a nominated representative).

5.3 The Stage 2 Panel Process

5.3.1 The student will be invited to join the Panel and the Convenor will ensure that the Panel understands the issues involved, the seriousness of the concerns, the process to be followed and the possible outcomes.

5.3.2 The Convenor will also need to stress confidentiality and encourage openness.

5.3.3 The Panel will share in prayer together.

5.3.4 The Convenor will ensure the good order of contributions to the Stage 2 Panel, and further ensure everyone has the appropriate amount of time to make their contributions.

5.3.5 At an appropriate stage, the Convenor will ask the College's representatives and the synod representative to withdraw from the Panel to give the student the opportunity to raise any relevant issues with the Panel members who will make the decision.

5.3.6 The Convenor will, at all times, consider whether expertise from outside the Panel might be necessary.

5.3.7 The student will then withdraw and the full Panel will have an opportunity for further discussion, without the student.

5.3.8 The tutor, member of Senatus, and synod representative will leave the Panel and the decision-making members of the Panel will come to a consensus on the outcome, and agree the wording of the response to the student.

5.3.9 The decision will be given in writing by email and by post within three working days.

5.4 Possible Outcomes

Throughout 5.4, "the Panel" refers to the Assessment Board members of the Panel.

5.4.1 The Panel may discern a continuing call to ministry, but may conclude that ordained or commissioned service is not the appropriate place for that ministry to be exercised. In this event, EM1 will be terminated forthwith and the student's synod will be asked to work pastorally with the student to discern what lay ministry might be exercised. EM1 training will cease, and the Secretary for Education and Learning will be responsible for managing the withdrawal of funding.

5.4.2 The Panel may have such grave concerns about a student's suitability that they do not feel able to suggest or recommend any further exploration. In this event, EM1 will be terminated forthwith and the student commended to the pastoral care of their synod. The Secretary for Education and Learning will be responsible for managing the withdrawal of funding.

5.4.3 The Panel may continue to discern the student's call and feel that further steps might be taken by the College and the student. In this event, the Panel will agree a programme of steps and a timetable for review, and will set a further date for the Stage 2 Panel to meet. The Stage 2 Panel will not meet with the same student on more than three occasions before a final decision is made.

5.4.4 In exceptional circumstances, the Panel may decide that the evidence points to considerable efforts on the part of the College and the student, but that they feel the relationship between them has broken down to such an extent that consultations should be opened with a different College.

In this event the student will be made aware (a) that this offer to consult does not mean automatic acceptance by another College, which will always use its usual admissions procedure; (b) that if there is a move to another College, the student will enter EM1 training there on Special

Monitoring with a timetable set for a review by the Stage 2 Panel. There will be no opportunity to go through the Stage 1 Panel at the second institution, and no more than two further Stage 2 Panel's should convene with the student concerned.

There will be practical and financial complexities associated with this outcome, and there is a high risk to the student. The Panel will not, therefore, take this decision lightly.

6. PASTORAL CARE

The College will liaise with the student's synod and ensure that independent pastoral care is in place for the student. The college chaplain remains a source of independent pastoral support for any student throughout the process.

7. APPEALS

7.1 Special Monitoring

If the student wishes to challenge anything in respect of Special Monitoring, the College's own Student Appeal Policy and Procedure should be invoked.

7.2. Stage 1 Panel

The student may appeal the process and decision of the Stage 1 Panel; any such appeal will be conducted through Westminster College's own Student Appeals Policy and must be completed before starting Stage 2.

7.3 Stage 2 Panel

The student may appeal the final decision of the Stage 2 Panel in terms of process only. Such appeal should be made in writing to the Secretary for Ministries within 28 days of the date of the letter confirming the decision of the Stage 2 Panel. Any appeal will be conducted in accordance with the Ministries Committee Appeal Procedure.