



Diocese of Hereford Policy Document

Formation and Discernment at the End of Curacy

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Approval and review

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1. Purpose and scope

1.1 This policy governs end-of-curacy assessment and episcopal discernment for all curates (stipendiary and self-supporting) serving within the Diocese of Hereford.

1.2 The purpose is to ensure that end-of-curacy outcomes are:

- **formation-led**, rooted in prayer, theological reflection, and the Formation Qualities
- **transparent and fair**, drawing on clear processes and documented evidence across time
- **robust for public ministry**, explicit about trustworthiness, safeguarding, boundaries, and fitness to practise

1.3 In this diocese, **sign-off** is the Bishop's permission-giving authorisation for the next stage of licensed public ministry. Where sign-off is not given, this indicates the Bishop cannot presently affirm readiness and fitness for that next stage of licensed ministry.

2. Frameworks for discernment

2.1 Formation Framework (2022)

Assessment and discernment are grounded in the Church of England's Formation Framework (2022): the seven Formation Qualities expressed across four Domains (Christ, Church, World, Self).

2.2 Fitness to practise expectations for public ministry

Alongside formation, the Church holds expectations for safe, trustworthy, and sustainable public ministry, building on the *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy (2015)* and relevant safeguarding guidance. In this policy, "fitness to practise" refers to the curate's demonstrated capacity for public ministry characterised by integrity of character, appropriate competence, safeguarding

practice and compliance, healthy boundaries, accountability, and maintenance of public trust.

2.3 Trustworthiness and public confidence

Trustworthiness carries particular weight where safeguarding, boundaries, conduct, or public confidence are engaged. Where Trustworthiness is not demonstrably present, sign-off may not be possible regardless of strengths in other areas.

3. Evidence and the core rhythms of formation

3.1 End-of-curacy discernment draws on evidence gathered across the whole curacy, primarily through ordinary ministry and the core practices described in the Curacy Handbook.

3.2 Evidence is expected to be visible within these rhythms:

- **Supervision logs:** themes, learning, and agreed actions from supervision with the Training Incumbent
- **Reflective Practice Groups (RPGs):** sustained engagement in confidential, structured peer reflection
- **Portfolio:** curated evidence showing integration and development over time
- **Curate Development Plan (CDP):** formation priorities, opportunities, feedback, and review outcomes carried forward

3.3 Evidence is read **cumulatively**, attending to pattern, integration, sustainability, and sound judgement in public ministry.

4. Review stages and decision points

4.1 First and Second Review Panels

Full-time curates attend First and Second Review Panels at approximately 6 and 18 months; timings are adjusted proportionately for part-time and SSM curacies. Panels consider formation and fitness to practise, identifying clear development actions for the next phase.

Panels normally comprise:

- Training Incumbent
- IMD Officer
- External Assessor

4.2 Targeted Development Plan (TDP) as early intervention

Where significant concerns are identified through supervision, panel review, or other evidence, a TDP is normally put in place promptly, with clear aims, support, timescales, and review points. Concerns are named early so that the Final Review does not introduce unexpected outcomes.

4.3 Final Review Panel and recommendation

The Final Review Panel (normally around 30 months full-time equivalent) reviews the portfolio and relevant reports, including any TDP and any Independent Reviewer or External Mentor input, and makes a written recommendation to the Bishop.

4.4 Episcopal meeting and decision

The Bishop meets with the curate to reflect on vocation, formation, and the panel recommendation. The Bishop then confirms the decision in writing to the curate, Training Incumbent, and IMD Officer, setting out reasons and next steps.

5. End-of-curacy outcomes

Panels and Bishop's Office communications must use the outcome language consistently and accurately.

1	Sign-off	Affirmation of readiness and fitness to practise for the next stage of licensed public ministry.
2	Conditional sign-off	Ready for licensing subject to proportionate, time-bound development actions, normally held within CMD structures with defined review points. This outcome does not call into question basic fitness to practise.
3	Further formation required	Not yet ready for the next stage of licensed ministry. A plausible and supported pathway to readiness exists via a structured further period of formation (typically 6–12 months, proportionately adjusted), with a defined plan and review.
4	No recommendation for licensed ministry (at this time)	Readiness or fitness to practise for the next stage of licensed public ministry cannot be affirmed at this time. This outcome is qualitatively different from Outcome 3 and initiates further vocational discernment, which may include vocational redirection. Written next steps must include clarity about interim ministry status and what

forms of ministry are, or are not, appropriate pending further discernment.

6. Fairness, transparency, and staged safeguards

6.1 TDP expectation before Outcomes 3 or 4

Movement towards Outcome 3 or Outcome 4 is normally preceded by a TDP, so that concerns are explicit, evidence-informed, and accompanied by support and review points. Accelerated action may be required where immediate safeguarding, conduct, or serious-risk concerns arise.

6.2 Independent Reviewer and/or External Mentor

Where progression is moving towards Outcome 3 or Outcome 4, or where there is a significant breakdown in the training relationship, the IMD Officer will normally appoint an Independent Reviewer and/or External Mentor.

Their role is to:

- strengthen transparency and clarity about concerns, evidence, and expectations
- ensure the curate's voice is heard within a fair process
- provide pastoral containment to support a constructive and proportionate pathway forward

The Independent Reviewer acts as a **friend of the process** and is distinct from legal or HR representation. Their involvement and outputs are recorded on the curate's diocesan file.

7. Next steps and continuity into CMD

7.1 After Outcome 1

A transition conversation and handover take place through ordinary CMD arrangements, focusing on sustainable patterns and ongoing formation priorities.

7.2 After Outcome 2

CMD planning includes defined development actions, oversight arrangements, and review points, supporting continuity without re-litigating curacy.

7.3 After Outcome 3

A written further-formation plan is agreed and recorded, normally including:

- a defined timescale (typically 6–12 months, proportionately adjusted)

- supervision expectations and additional support
- evidence required for reconsideration
- the date and format of the review point and decision process

7.4 **After Outcome 4**

A written next-steps process is agreed, normally including:

- further vocational discernment conversations (as appropriate, involving the Bishop's Adviser/DDO and the IMD Officer)
- pastoral care and wellbeing support
- clarity about interim ministry status and what forms of ministry are, or are not, appropriate pending further discernment
- any relevant HR or common tenure guidance and diocesan processes, where applicable

8. Records, confidentiality, and accountability

8.1 Panel recommendations, Bishop's decisions, TDPs, and any Independent Reviewer or External Mentor reports are retained on the curate's diocesan file.

8.2 Documentation references the Formation Framework and fitness to practise expectations and is written with appropriate confidentiality and proportionality, particularly where safeguarding, health, or third-party information is involved.

9. Appeals and grievance routes

9.1 Curates may raise concerns about process or outcome through the relevant diocesan grievance and common tenure routes.

9.2 An Independent Reviewer is normally offered before escalation where this is appropriate, to support a fair and restorative process while maintaining safeguarding and accountability.

10. Training, implementation, and review

10.1 Induction and periodic training for Training Incumbents, curates, panel members, and relevant officers will include the Formation Framework, fitness to practise expectations, and effective use of Targeted Development Plans.

10.2 The IMD Officer oversees implementation and consistency.

10.3 This policy is reviewed annually, with a summary report to Bishop's Staff, and updated in line with national developments.

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