

# A guide to good practice in Reader Ministry for Readers and Oversight Ministers



THE DIOCESE OF  
**SHEFFIELD**



**Diocese of Sheffield Readers Association**

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## **Useful contacts**

### **Warden of Readers Team**

The responsibility for encouraging licensed Readers in their ministry, arranging annual reviews and relicensing and managing complaints when they arise is held collectively by the Warden of Readers team. For the purposes of the national church (and Central Readers Council) the Director of Mission and Ministry is the named warden, but at a diocesan level the four members of the Wardens team work together. Any one of them may be contacted by a Reader with questions and concerns.

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### **Diocesan Safeguarding Officer**

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### **Area Deans**

See: <https://sheffdio.org/area-deans>

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## General principles

1. A Reader's calling and ministry is a gift volunteered in response to the calling of God and in the service of God and the church. It is not to be treated lightly and should be nurtured and encouraged to flourish.
2. Readers are expected, as part of their responsibility for their calling and discipleship actively to engage in ongoing ministerial development (OMD), so that they can feed and nurture their own lives of faith and those to whom they preach and minister. This is a requirement for continuing to hold the Bishop's licence or a Permission to Officiate (PTO).
3. OMD training is provided centrally through the Diocese. It includes training at Church House and events on Zoom. It also includes the Bishop's annual lecture in the Cathedral and other events open to clergy, Readers and other lay ministers. Readers may also undertake training outside of the Diocese. Where an expense is incurred grants are available through the Adams Myland fund, Pamela Richardson fund and Diocesan OMD grants. Details are available on the website.
4. Readers are also required to have up-to-date DBS clearance and must have completed appropriate safeguarding training, as specified and required by the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer within the previous three years. This is a requirement for continuing to hold the Bishop's licence or a PTO.
5. Readers are strongly advised to have a Spiritual Accompanier to assist them in their life of faith and to see him or her on a regular basis. A list of approved accompaniers is held by the Diocese. For further information please contact the Bishop's Adviser in Spirituality, Julian Raffay ([spirituality.adviser@sheffield.anglican.org](mailto:spirituality.adviser@sheffield.anglican.org))
6. Readers and their Oversight Ministers<sup>1</sup> should endeavour to work together as a team in a collegiate fashion, alongside Focal Ministers and other lay leaders, to further the ministry of their church(es). The frequency of their meetings will depend on the time commitment that the Reader is able to offer. Good practice would suggest that regular supervisions between a Reader and Oversight Minister take place every 4-8 weeks.
7. A **Reader's licence or a PTO** is held at the pleasure of the Bishop. It does not belong to the Reader as of right:
  - i. A PTO is limited to a specific length of time (between one and three years) and on expiry the Reader must apply for a further PTO, with the consent of his/her Oversight Minister and PCC if s/he wishes to continue to preach or officiate.
  - ii. A five-year licence is granted on the Reader's initial admission as a Reader and is subject to peer reviews which should take place on a three-yearly basis. The five-year licence is renewable at the summer Readers' AGM after evidence that the peer review has taken place and all safeguarding requirements have been met.
8. **Three-year peer reviews** are organised by the Warden of Readers team.
  - i. The Reader who is to be reviewed is asked to use a form for reflection and reporting of his or her role in the Church. This is discussed with another

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this guide "Oversight Minister" includes Oversight Ministers and priests-in-charge who have not yet been licensed as Oversight Ministers.

Reader and an agreed statement of strengths, areas for development and personal goals is sent to the the PA to the Bishop of Doncaster at the end of the review.

- ii. The Reader who is to be reviewed must show evidence of a commitment to Ongoing Ministerial Development (OMD), that they have a current DBS check and that their safeguarding training is up to date and satisfies the requirements of the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer [sheffdio.org/safeguarding](http://sheffdio.org/safeguarding).
- iii. If the review is satisfactory then, at the expiry of the five year term, the licence will be renewed for a further five years. If the review is not carried out, or is not satisfactory, then the licence will lapse until the Warden's Team are satisfied that the Reader has been reviewed, and any matters of concern have been satisfactorily addressed.

9. All Readers should have a **Ministry Agreement** with their Oversight Minister (If there is no Oversight Minister in the Mission Area, this should be done with the Church Wardens and/or the Area Dean). This should be in place on the Reader's first licensing and should be reviewed regularly with the Oversight Minister (ideally annually) and in particular before the Reader's diocesan three-year peer review. The Ministry Agreement should set out the time commitment that the Reader offers to the Church, the duties that s/he is expected to undertake, the support that the church will offer him or her, particularly in respect of continuing education or ministerial development, and the periods of holiday that the Reader will have, including sabbatical time.

In an interregnum it may be appropriate to review the Reader's Ministry Agreement with the Church Wardens and the Area Dean, so that the Reader is not over-burdened but cover is provided.

10. When a new Oversight Minister comes to a parish the Reader's licence should be reviewed, together with this Ministry Agreement, after a period of about six months. If it seems appropriate for the licence to that parish to continue, this should be confirmed to a member of the Warden's team.. If the Oversight Minister and Reader do not agree about whether the Reader's licence should continue in that parish the Warden's team should be informed, the Reader should return his/her licence to the bishop, and there should be a discussion with the Area Dean and the Reader (and, if necessary the appropriate Archdeacon) about how and where that Reader may be redeployed if s/he wishes.
11. If difficulties arise over any aspect of a Reader's behaviour or capability the Oversight Minister should attempt to resolve these as quickly as possible in an amicable and supportive way. It is strongly recommended that this is done by means of conversation, rather than letter or email. If either the Reader or Oversight Minister (or both) feel that it would be helpful to have a third-party present to facilitate a discussion, a member of the Warden's team may be asked by either of them (or both) to assist in this.
12. There are a number of circumstances in which a Reader's conduct or capability may need to be called into question and an Oversight Minister feels that action must be taken. In all cases the actions taken and the procedure must be transparently fair. If difficulties arise because of a Reader's physical or mental illness or capacity this needs to be taken into account with sensitivity.
13. Oversight Ministers should not stop or restrict a Reader from exercising his/her ministry as a sanction or punishment as a result of behaviour or a disagreement. An

Oversight Minister does not have the power to suspend a Reader's licence.

14. If difficulties arise for a Reader over any aspect of their Oversight Minister's behaviour towards them the Reader should attempt to resolve these as quickly as possible in an amicable way. It is strongly recommended that this is done by means of conversation, rather than letter or email. The Reader may, (before talking to the Oversight Minister), ask a member of the Warden's team for advice and support. If either the Reader or Oversight Minister (or both) feel that it would be helpful to have a third-party present to facilitate a discussion, a member of the Warden's team, or other experienced Reader, may be asked by either of them (or both) to assist in this.

## Expectations of the conduct of Readers

1. Readers should be clear about their roles as church workers and the boundaries which they need to observe. They are likely to be seen as role models by those with whom they are in contact at all times, including when they regard themselves as off duty.
2. Readers must have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures and must also make sure that they attend regular training which is relevant and appropriate for their ministry and should keep a record of such training. It is the responsibility of the Reader to ensure that all safeguarding training is kept up to date.
3. Readers are governed by [Canons E4, E5 and E6](#), which are set out in Bishops' Regulations. These set out what a Reader may and may not do in the Church and should be read in conjunction with these guidelines.
4. Readers are also subject to the *Parish Safeguarding Policy* [sheffdio.org/policy](http://sheffdio.org/policy). This sets out helpful guidance for behaviour of church workers in all contexts.
5. Readers holding a licence or PTO must tell the Bishop if there is any matter which may affect their good standing as public ministers in the Church of England: for example, if they are arrested or convicted in respect of a criminal offence, or are subject to DBS barring. Failure to do this may result in disciplinary proceedings.

## Dealing with complaints and concerns about a Reader

1. This section sets out the appropriate action to be taken in matters of concern, or where a complaint has been made that does not warrant disciplinary procedures. This is likely to be initiated by:
  - i. A complaint about a Reader's behaviour from a member of the congregation or public; or
  - ii. A concern on the part of the Oversight Minister because of something that s/he has observed, or been told about.
2. A copy of the diocesan complaints procedure is obtainable by request from the chaplain to the Bishop of Sheffield or the Executive PA to the diocesan secretary.
3. The Oversight Minister should consider whether this is a matter that requires an immediate disciplinary procedure. If it does s/he should contact the Director of Mission and Ministry. If not, s/he should respond courteously if there is a complainant, and assure him/her that s/he will investigate the matter. The Oversight Minister should be aware that illness (physical or mental) may be the cause of the difficulty, in which case a different approach may be needed.
4. The Oversight Minister should inform the Reader about the complaint/concern and ask him/her to respond as quickly as possible.
5. If the Oversight Minister feels that a member of the Warden's team should be involved s/he should inform her/him as soon as possible.
6. The section below sets out, by way of examples, recommended ways of dealing with various issues that may arise.
7. In each case the discussion between the Oversight Minister and Reader should be recorded in writing in a note that they both agree and sign. Each should keep a copy. It is recommended that the issue should be kept under review between

them. A copy of the note should be sent to the Warden's team.

8. If the Reader's behaviour (including performance of his or her agreed duties) and/or capability continues to give concern, or give rise to complaint, the Oversight Minister should consider whether disciplinary procedures will need to be invoked. This should be discussed first with the Director of Mission and Ministry.
9. The Oversight Minister should give the Reader an informal warning that disciplinary procedures may be invoked if the behaviour continues. This should be given verbally, but confirmed in writing. The Oversight Minister should keep a confidential record of the confirmation, and inform the Warden's team and that s/he has done so.
10. If the cause of concern continues after an informal warning the Oversight Minister should request the Director of Mission and Ministry to start disciplinary proceedings.

## Examples

Examples of ways in which a complaint/concern about a Reader may be handled.

### Example 1:

Nature of complaint/ concern	A complaint/concern about a discourtesy or other behaviour by the Reader which falls short of disciplinary conduct
How the Oversight Minister should approach the issue	The Oversight Minister should give the Reader a chance to explain the incident from his/her point of view
How the issue should be dealt with by the Oversight Minister	<p>The issue should be discussed supportively.</p> <p>An apology, swiftly and politely expressed, if necessary in person, with the Oversight Minister present as a witnessing third party, is often the most effective way of dealing with this. An apology is not an admission of 'guilt'. NB Apologies should not be expressed along the lines of 'I'm sorry <i>if</i> you were offended...' which implies that the blame lies with the offended person.</p>
How the Reader should respond	The Reader should be aware that even if s/he feels that s/he was not discourteous, or was justified in acting as s/he did, it is generally better to apologise and put the incident 'to bed'.



## Example 2:

Nature of complaint/ concern	A complaint/concern about the way/style of the Reader's conduct of a service or preaching. This may also include concerns about the Reader's capability.
How the Oversight Minister should approach the issue	The Oversight Minister needs to consider whether this is a matter of taste and preference in worshipping style, or whether there is a concern about the capability or manner of the Reader.
How the issue should be dealt with by the Oversight Minister	<p>The issue should be discussed supportively. If there are issues over capability, including theology, then these should be addressed with practice, supervision and (where appropriate) more training.</p> <p>It may be appropriate for a Reader to stop some aspects of his/her ministry (such as preaching) while these are addressed. But Oversight Ministers should bear in mind A6 above and assist the Reader (if s/he wishes) to improve these skills with a view to exercising them further. Part 3 of the Capability Procedure: Code Of Practice Made Under Section 8 Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure 2009 may be helpful as a way of proceeding.</p> <p>The Warden's team should be consulted and informed.</p> <p>If necessary a member of the Warden's team may be called on to mediate, or arrange a mediated conversation.</p>
How the Reader should respond	The Reader should be aware of the need for continuing ministerial development and be prepared to accept critical appraisal of his/her ministry.

### Example 3

Nature of complaint/ concern	A complaint/concern about the content of a Reader's preaching or teaching
How the Oversight Minister should approach the issue.	The Oversight Minister needs to consider whether this is a matter of taste and preference in worshipping style, or whether there is a concern about the competence or theology of the Reader.
How the issue should be dealt with by the Oversight Minister.	<p>The issue should be discussed supportively. There may be theological issues on which the Reader and Oversight Minister hold differing views, both of which are within the accepted spectrum of the teaching of the Church of England. Reader and Oversight Minister should work to find a way in which differences can be explored without antagonism and the one undermining the other.</p> <p>Matters of theology should be explored in an open and undefended dialogue during regular supervision periods.</p> <p>The Warden's team should be consulted and informed. If necessary the Warden's team may be called on to mediate, or arrange a mediated conversation.</p>
How the Reader should respond	The Reader should take account of the spectrum of opinion on a topic and be careful in public discourse to make clear what is his/her personal opinion as distinct from the formal teaching or doctrine of the Church. The Reader should be aware that there are differences of opinion in the Church and should not preach or teach in a way that undermines/opposes the Oversight Minister in such a way that causes division in the congregation.

### Example 4

Nature of complaint/ concern	A complaint/concern about the Reader's lifestyle or behaviour outside church
How the Oversight Minister should approach the issue	<p>The Oversight Minister should be clear that some of the canons that apply to clergy do not apply to Readers who are lay people, though licensed ministers.</p> <p>The question should be asked as to whether the conduct of the Reader brings the Church or the Christian faith into disrepute or is in clear contravention of the teachings of Scripture (bearing in mind the diversity of interpretations that are within the acceptable frame of Anglican theology).</p>

How the issue should be dealt with by the Oversight Minister	<p>The issue should be discussed supportively.</p> <p>The Reader may need to be reminded that his/her conduct outside the Church can still give rise to comment, as the distinction between lay and clergy roles is often not well understood.</p> <p>If the Reader has personal problems which are giving concern (such as a drink or drug problem) the Oversight Minister should try to arrange support, both through the diocese and the health service.</p> <p>It may be appropriate for a Reader to withdraw from ministry for a period to allow for rest or recovery. This should be kept under review.</p> <p>It is important that confidentiality is observed as far as possible. It may not be appropriate or desirable for the wider congregation to be informed of the issue.</p> <p>If the issue involves grave scandal or conduct that falls well below that expected of a Reader then the Director of Mission and Ministry must be informed so that they can decide whether or not disciplinary proceedings need to be commenced.</p> <p>If the matter involves a safeguarding concern then the Parish Safeguarding Officer must be informed immediately.</p>
How the Reader should respond	<p>The Reader should be aware of the public nature of his/her role and the demands it exacts, and behave accordingly.</p>

## Dealing with complaints about an Oversight Minister

This section sets out how a Reader may attempt to deal with a difficulty in a relationship with his/her Oversight Minister or equivalent minister.

Often, a personal disagreement may be resolved by a gentle conversation where each person tries to understand the other's point of view. If this is not possible the Reader should seek advice about how to resolve the problem, preferably from someone outside the parish, rather than asking the person to take sides. Members of the Warden's Team are always available for advice and support.

The Warden's team can help the Reader and Oversight Minister have a mediated conversation to think through and try to resolve any difficulties that have arisen. This can sometimes take the form of working through the Ministerial Agreement.

Sometimes the Oversight Minister's behaviour may amount to bullying or harassment. This should be discussed with the Warden's team and, if appropriate, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, who may refer the matter further, and will take steps to protect the Reader. Readers and Oversight Ministers should be aware of the Dignity at Work Policy of the diocese [sheffdio.org/dignity-at-work](http://sheffdio.org/dignity-at-work):

Readers who cannot resolve their issues with their Oversight Minister by informal

means should be aware of the [Grievance Procedure for Licensed Ministers](#) which they may choose to invoke.

It should be stressed that most potential conflicts or disagreements can be averted through the practice of regular supervisions. If these are not regularly happening then the Reader should take the initiative to put them in place.

## **Guidelines about the completion of the Ministry Agreement**

1. Readers and their Oversight Ministers should have a common understanding of the nature of the work that the Reader will undertake in the parish, or in the wider church, how it is to be supported and reviewed, and how it relates to the mission of the parish as a whole.
2. Before a review meeting with the Reader and Oversight Minister the Reader should use the schedule at Appendix 1 of the Agreement to list her/his regular church/parish-based activities.
3. It is hoped that by working through this form you will be able to come to a mutually agreed understanding or "contract" about the ministry to be undertaken. Care should be taken to ensure that the Reader is not overburdened, but at the same time there is scope for growth and development of skills and gifts. Time for rest and refreshment (including sabbatical periods) should be ensured.
4. Please note the last part of this form which asks you both to consider whether the Reader has skills/gifts that might be used in other churches in the Deanery (or on a wider basis). Please copy this part of the form to the Area Dean.
5. When you have completed this form the Reader and the Oversight Minister should keep a copy, and a further copy should be returned to the Warden's team. **Ideally this should be reviewed annually and in particular in the period before the Reader's three-year review.**