
Southern Synod Local Church Leaders Policy

1. Introduction and background

1.1 In 2008 in its “Challenge to the Church” (Assembly Resolution 23 and accompanying report) the General Assembly expressed its “belief that each congregation and mission group has a need of its own local leader to work in partnership with the elders’ meeting to challenge, enable and equip the saints and be a focus of Christian presence in the local community” but left it to Synods to “make arrangements for the recruitment, training, calling and support of local church leaders”.

1.2 The Assembly saw the need for the recognition of an individual who would have a pastoral and teaching role, would be the first point of contact in the event of pastoral need, would provide continuity of worship and nurture, and would be the focus of the Christian presence in the wider community”. (Assembly Reports 2008, p.226, para.7.1) Prior to Resolution 23, the Southern Synod had a number of people in church posts that would now be considered Local Church Leader (LCL) posts.

1.3 A number of early appointments of LCLs in the Southern Synod were made informally and no formal provision was made as to job description, terms of volunteer agreements, training or review. The Synod Ministries Committee wishes to regularize the Synod’s approach to these issues and to achieve consistency among the United/Synod Areas of the Southern Synod.

1.4 This Policy was first written in 2013, amended in January 2018 and again in June 2018.

1.5 These provisions apply in respect of all LCLs commissioned on or after June 2018. In addition, certain provisions shall (where stated) apply to all LCLs, whenever appointed.

2. Models of Local Church Leadership and Ordination

2.1 One model. From June 2018 there is to be one defined model of local church leadership within Southern Synod offering pastoral oversight, preaching, worship and mission support.

2.2 LCLs and Eldership. All LCLs (whenever appointed) must be elders in the United Reformed Church and the Guidelines on Conduct and Behaviour for Elders (General Assembly Reports 2010, Appendix 3c) accordingly applies to all LCLs. If not already ordained as an elder prior to appointment as a LCL, a newly appointed LCL shall be ordained as such as soon as possible and normally during the commissioning service relating to his or her appointment to a specific post.¹

2.3 Ministers of Word and Sacraments as LCLs - From 1 January 2013 no new appointments of ministers of Word and Sacraments as LCLs shall be made. Retired ministers may (if appropriate) be called to serve local churches (without payment) either as ministers or elders but not LCLs.

2.4 Oversight/Supervision. All LCLs must be subject to the supervision of a minister of Word and sacraments who will be appointed as a pastoral advisor. When making any future appointment of any LCL it is the responsibility of the Synod/United Area to ensure that adequate provision is made to ensure that such supervision is carried out.

¹ The approved order of service for the commissioning of LCLs will need to be amended accordingly if an appointee needs to be ordained as an elder.
LCL: 2018-07 LCL Policy v.8

3. The role of the Synod

3.1 A LCL appointment is a Synod appointment. It is vital that the local church meeting, Synod Candidates and Students Committee, Synod Area and its Pastoral Committee and the TDO all play their part in the approval of the candidate at different points in their journey.

3.2 However, the final approval for appointment is given by the Synod Ministries Committee on behalf of Southern Synod and ratified at the Synod Area meeting where possible, and where not possible, through its Officers.

4. Discerning the call of a LCL to a local church

4.1 The process set out in Appendix 1 shall be followed in relation to every proposed appointment of a LCL.

4.2 Each LCL position is unique and the role is not transferrable outside the local church to which they have been appointed. A candidate must apply through the local church meeting and Synod Candidates and Students Committee and Synod Area for each LCL position. The Lord delights in each person's unique gift and calling to all forms of ministry. It is for the candidate, the TDO and the local church, with support from Synod Candidates and Students Committee and Synod/United Area to ensure each LCL is equipped for their calling.

4.3 For some LCLs, it will be right to deploy the candidate back within their sending church. In other cases, it will be right to deploy LCLs in churches other than the one that shaped them. In both cases it shall be for the Synod/United Area, in consultation with the Moderator and the Synod Ministries Committee, to deploy the LCL where there is the greatest need for this ministry.

4.4 Following provisional approval by the Moderator of a candidate as a potential LCL (Step 2 in the Table), the candidate shall submit to the Candidates and Students Committee in a satisfactory form a profile setting out details of the candidate's:

- Journey of faith;
- Character/Spiritual Maturity;
- Prior local church experience, including positions of responsibility held, with brief summary of dates and nature of duties, and experience of the wider councils of the church (e.g. attendance at Synod meetings, General Assembly, membership of national or Synod committees).
- Previous theological studies (if any) (e.g. theology degree, TLS Foundation Course, accredited lay preacher training in the United Reformed Church or another denomination).
- Previous practical training (e.g. elders' training courses – give detail of subject-matter covered).
- Life experience/training gained in workplace
- Other information the candidate considers relevant to assessment of his or her training needs.
- Candidate's personal assessment of training he or she needs for the proposed role.

4.5 A further training needs assessment will be carried out in respect of every LCL whenever such appointment is formally reviewed with a view to extending the term of the post and/or the period of service of the post-holder.

5. Training requirements

5.1 Process of assessment/specification of training

The TDO through the Candidates and Students Committee will

(a) assess the training needs of the candidate by taking into account:

- the proposed specific role of the candidate, having regard to the draft Job Description and Volunteer Agreement (if already in existence);
- the nature of the training appropriate to such a role;
- the criteria referred to in para. 5.2 below;
- the candidate's previous experience, theological studies and practical training;
- personal attributes.

- (b) in the light of such assessment specify what training is to be done by the candidate and when. The specification of training shall be included in the candidate's volunteer agreement upon appointment as LCL.

5.2 Criteria

The assessment of training needs and specification of training will seek to ensure that the following criteria are satisfied in relation to every candidate, namely that the candidate

- a) has or will be able to develop an adequate understanding of the ethos and traditions of the United Reformed Church;
- b) has carried out, or will prior to appointment or during the term of the appointment be able to carry out, the theological studies (if any) which are in the opinion of the TDO appropriate to the candidate's specific role as LCL including the content, use and interpretation of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and Christian doctrine;
- c) has undertaken or is willing during the period of his or her appointment to undertake eldership (and other practical) training appropriate to the candidate's specific role as LCL;
- d) has adequate self-understanding;
- e) receives any further training appropriate to the candidate's specific post;
- f) receives the same training in safeguarding children and adults at risk as a Minister of Word and sacraments serving in Southern Synod;
- g) receives the same training in safer sacred space boundary training as a Minister of Word and sacraments serving in Southern Synod;
- h) recognizes the importance of ongoing education and learning.

5.3 The TDO shall have discretion to allow minor departures from such provisions (e.g. by allowing longer for completion of training). However, it is envisaged that all new LCLs will complete the CPAS course "Growing Leaders" which will form part of the URC's Stepwise programme.

5.4 The pastoral advisor who supports the LCL may wish to draw up an Action Plan to support his or her learning development.

5.5 Training costs

5.5.1 Travelling costs incurred by a LCL in attending training carried out in accordance with this Policy shall be reimbursed in the same manner as these would be reimbursed to ministers attending approved training courses. (i.e. claim using appropriate form).

5.5.2 Where the LCL arranges (through or with the approval of the TDO) specialised training appropriate to the specific post, the pastorate may be asked to contribute to the cost of such training.

6. Guidance for Volunteer Agreements and Job description

6.1 The job description must be written in consultation with the Elders and normally with the nominated LCL. They need to be realistic and detailed so they can be clearly reviewed. These are then incorporated into the Volunteer agreement.

6.2 Before the local church seeks a LCL it is recommended that it looks at what the role of the LCL would be in their specific area. The church must ensure that the candidate fits the role *required by the church*, not try to make a candidate do what the church would like but doesn't suit the candidate. A LCL is not a person who can fill a gap; rather it is a vocational calling as in all ministry.

6.3 Volunteer Agreement recommendations. The Volunteer Agreement is an agreement between the church, the Synod and the LCL on the basis of the role of LCL in the local situation.

- a) Lengths of posts are 3 years with the possibility of renewal every 3 years following LMMR review and in accordance with the LCL Volunteer Agreement.
- b) Each LCL will be reviewed under the Southern Synod's Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) process with the local church. Part of the LMMR review will look at how the church finds the LCL role and achievements during the post.
- c) The post should be commissioned by Southern Synod as the LCL will be working within the Synod as a representative of Southern Synod and the Synod Area. Churches are encouraged to ask The Synod Area Leader or a member of the pastoral committee to attend the commissioning.
- d) Each LCL must be subject to a regular DBS check. The appointment of LCL to a local church is subject to a satisfactory DBS Enhanced Disclosure. If a LCL is in post longer than 5 years this will need to be repeated.
- e) Appointment: this must be in line with the Synod Process for discerning the call of a LCL to a local church'.
- f) Specification of training: this must be attached/included, together with updated version of his or her profile, containing a schedule of training carried out during the term of such LCL's appointment.
- g) Supervision: Each LCL will be accountable to the ordained Minister with oversight of the congregation served by the LCL, who will act as his or her pastoral advisor. It is the responsibility of the Synod/United Area to ensure the Volunteer Agreement adequately reflect the expectations of the Synod/United Area, supervising minister and LCL as to the frequency and nature of the supervision.
- h) Support: Each LCL will have an ordained Minister with appropriate experience as a pastoral advisor. It is the responsibility of each Synod Area to ensure that its SAPC appoints someone to each LCL in that Synod Area to reflect regularly on their ministry. It is suggested that this occurs 4 times a year.
- i) Reimbursement: The local church is responsible for the payment of suitable expenses such as petrol, stationery and telephone.
- j) Signed Volunteer agreements will be held by the
 - Synod Office in the LCL's file
 - LCL
 - local pastorate

6.4 LCL's Job description

6.4.1 There is no one prescribed job description which will fit all the circumstances of a LCL. The job description should be carefully identified by the Eldership of the church in prior to the appointment according to the perceived requirement of the church in question, taking into account the mission needs and opportunities of that church in its particular situation.

6.4.2 The paper in support of Resolution 23 of 2008, commending the appointment of Local Church Leaders, proposed, at 7.1:

“Therefore we propose that there should be provision of appropriate local church leadership in each congregation or group which is the focus of Christian presence This leadership would be rooted in the shared responsibility on ministers and elders, especially recognising the renewed commitment and enthusiasm for affirming and developing the role of elder made by General Assembly in 2007. Within this we feel the need for the recognition of an individual who would have a pastoral and teaching role, would be the first point of contact in the event of pastoral need, would provide continuity of worship and nurture, and would be the focus of the Christian presence in the wider community”

6.4.3 The Southern Synod paper on Local Church Leadership of 2003 stated that

“... local churches and District Councils, informed by the Assembly’s decision, increasingly believe it appropriate to designate a person within a local church for the ministry of oversight, in partnership with the minister/s of the Word and Sacraments and as a team member alongside the other elders. Although these local leaders would have varying roles and profiles according to local requirements, in general they would be intended to provide a focus for the congregation, being elected by the local church, approved by the District Council and identifiable within the local community.”

6.4.4 That paper concludes with the paragraph:

“In all this the primary motive is to equip the whole church for dynamic and faithful mission. It should be grounded in prayer and concerned with nurture and growth. The sort of local leadership envisaged is nothing to do with power. Rather, it is everything to do with empowering the local church for sharing in that mission to which God calls all God’s people.”

6.4.5 In the light of the above, and in view of the actual experience of some church leaders within Southern Synod, items for inclusion in the job description will probably include some of the following:

1. To provide visible leadership in the church by worshipping at the church regularly.
2. To lead worship on a regular basis (*specify the intended frequency, e.g. the number of services per month*)
3. To give leadership to the church community in seeking to plan and develop the mission strategy of the church.
4. To assist the Elders in planning for the nurture of church members.
5. To teach, or to help provide teaching for, those seeking baptism, confirmation or membership.
6. In association with the Elders, to be responsible for pastoral care of members, and to be prepared to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice.
7. To chair Elders’ and Church Meetings
8. To give guidance to the Elders and Church Meetings on denominational matters.
9. To represent the church at meetings of Synod Together and the Synod Area.
10. To give leadership to the church in ecumenical matters, including representing the church on the local Churches Together.
11. To make a regular contribution to the church magazine and/or website.

6.5 The job description should clearly identify the relationship between the LCL and the minister/s of Word and sacraments with the oversight role in respect of the LCL’s pastorate, as appropriate.

7. Appointment

- 7.1 It is important that LCLs are seen as an integral part of Southern Synod’s deployment strategy. It is imperative that, at an early stage i.e. in discerning the call, the Synod Area through its Pastoral Committee talks with the Candidates and Students Committee about there the candidate might serve.
- 7.2 Following completion of training, the appointment is made, where appropriate, by the Synod Ministries Committee on behalf of Southern Synod in consultation with the Synod Area Pastoral Committee.
- 7.3 A suitable date for commissioning is agreed by the Moderator, LCL, local church and Synod Area Leader.

8. The review process

- 8.1 All review dates are now held by the appropriate SAPC.
- 8.2 There is a rich variety of roles that LCL provides which is why the LCL should be reviewed within the local context.
- 8.3 The local church with the SAPC should ensure:
The LCL is included in the LMMR process.

That within that review process the minister with the oversight role in respect of the LCL's pastorate (and who has a supervisory role in relation to the LCL) is included.

That there is input from the local Eldership.

- That there is an analysis of the role to assess what the LCL has achieved, consistency with the aims/goals of the church (as set out in the pastorate profile or other relevant documentation), and areas for improvement.
- The LCL has undertaken the training referred to in the specification of training and any other appropriate identified during the course of his or her appointment. (See paras. 4.5 and 5.1(b)).
- That the LCL has clear support to address any further needs for development and training, as identified during the LMMR process.
- That if difficulties arise then the LCL can ask for the SAPC to review the post and position.
- That a report of the review is sent to Synod Office and held by the LCL, local church and SAPC for their records.

9. Applicability of certain provisions

For the avoidance of doubt, from 2013 all LCLs (whenever appointed) will

- be reviewed under the LMMR process;
- be required to receive any training in safeguarding children and adults at risk required of ministers of the Word and sacraments in accordance with paragraph (f) of the Schedule (in addition, if applicable, to any other training they may be required to carry out); and
- be required to attend two study events a year in accordance with paragraph (g) of the Schedule (in addition, if applicable, to any other training they may be required to carry out).

10. Complaints Procedure

All Local Church Leaders and Elders are called to comply with the Synod Complaints procedure.

Appendix 1

Process for discerning the call of a Local Church Leader (LCL) to a local church

1. Church Meeting approves of the candidate being put forward as a LCL by Church Meeting resolution.
2. The candidate meets with the Moderator to discern a sense of call. At this point it shall be explored whether the candidate will serve in their own church or is open to serve in a church other than their own.
3. The Moderator informs the Candidates and Students Committee of the application. The secretary of the Candidates and Students Committee makes contact with the candidate (usually through a telephone call) and sends the candidate the application form.
4. Upon receipt of the completed application form, the Candidates and Students Committee:
 - a) takes up references;
 - b) normally arranges for a placement in a church different from their own if appropriate.
5. The Candidates and Students Committee liaises with the Synod Area through its Pastoral Committee for
 - a) an assessed service (normally 2 people) and a written report;
 - b) a Synod/United Area interview (normally 2 people) and a written report. This normally takes place immediately after the assessed service.
6. The Candidates and Students Committee conducts the Synod interview using a panel of 5 from its committee. The candidate is able to bring a 'supporter' who will not be part of the formal interview but may be invited to speak at the end of the interview.
7. If the candidate is successful, the Candidates and Students committee shall:
 - a) inform the Synod Area that the candidate will commence training (to be included in its report to the Area Meeting)
 - b) discuss training recommendations with the TDO. The TDO is a member of the Candidates and Students Committee.
8. The TDO meets with the candidate to discuss training. Training commences and will normally include Stepwise (Growing Christian Leaders course) which may take a year to complete.
9. Upon completion of training the TDO shall:
 - a) meet with the elders of the church identified for their ministry to explore areas to form the Job Description and Volunteer Agreement;
 - b) recommends to the Synod Area Pastoral Committee that training is complete and an appointment should be made.
10. The Volunteer Agreement is prepared by the Moderator with input from the candidate and local church and agreed by the Synod Area Pastoral Committee on behalf of the Synod Area.
11. The appointment is made, where appropriate, by the Synod Ministries Committee on behalf of Southern Synod.
12. A suitable date for commissioning is agreed by the Moderator, LCL, local church and Synod Area Leader.