

# Vocational Pathways

Perspectives from Curacy

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## Executive Summary

This summary highlights key findings from a qualitative study undertaken with nearly 70 lay and ordained leaders from four Dioceses. The full report contains considerable nuance and important detail on the experiences of 23 Curates (in the latter stages of their post, representing all IME 1 pathways), their Training Incumbents (TIs), Diocesan IME 2 Officers and Church Wardens. It reflects their perspectives on how IME 1 pathways prepare individuals for curacy, their experiences of IME Phase 2 and TI training.

### 1. How do existing IME 1 pathways prepare Ordinands for Curacy?

All pathways are reported to have strengths and limitations. Each brings about learning and transformation but they are not equivalent in theological depth, ministerial formation or pastoral experience acquired.

- **Residential colleges** are reported to: provide in-depth theological education within a formational community of peers; establish devotional rhythms; and create opportunity to form ministerial identity. A key challenge is that leadership training was described as mixed, frustrating for those with prior experience and focussed on historic rather than current patterns of ministry. Some Curates reportedly took longer to become proficient in parish roles - particularly if their ministerial experience was based solely on placements (which vary widely across institutions).
- The **part-time course pathway** makes training accessible to a wide demographic. It is perceived as improving in quality and providing a positive, but inevitably less in-depth, theological education. Its integrated nature means Curates are typically well equipped to begin parish ministry but can be less geographically deployable. The key reported challenge is that demanding workload levels can be overwhelming on top of employment or family life.
- The **mixed mode pathway** was viewed positively. Content is described as theologically stretching and engaged with contemporary issues. Leadership training is strong and Curates 'hit the ground running' with considerable parish experience. Challenges are around the weekly rhythm of travel to training hubs, managing expectations (since parish ministry is limited to three days a week) and the integration of this pathway with current patterns of curacy.

### 2. Experiences of IME Phase 2 training

- **Communication** is a core issue. Emergency support around TI-Curate relationships is usually good but regular contact from senior staff (particularly for Curates during TI absences) can be lacking. Likewise some IME 2 Officers expressed frustration about inadequate communication or consultation with senior clergy. Finally, communication between IME 1 providers and IME 2 trainers was often limited. This lack of integration created problems around provision for the ongoing training needs of individual Curates.
- **Assessment procedures** were often experienced as laborious, complex and demanding although ongoing attempts to simplify processes were commended. Some view assessment frameworks as a helpful checklist for supervision but others find them restrictive and detrimental to genuine learning. As with other aspects of IME there is wide variation in assessment across Dioceses which creates frustration among Curates.
- **IME 2 training provision** shows considerable variation and is experienced as mixed in quality. Curates were most positive about: interactive training directly relevant to ministry; sessions delivered by outstanding practitioners; and opportunities for peer learning. Criticisms were: repetition of material covered in IME 1 for some; lack of differentiation with training aimed at an 'average' Curate rather than recognising diversity; uninspiring delivery or material; and logistical issues around evening and weekend

training. Some Dioceses had a model of compulsory and elective sessions which was more popular. IME 2 officers were aware of the mixed quality of some training and were working hard, sometimes in isolation, to improve standards within limited budgets and the vast diversity of Curate needs.

- Three sets of relationships are vital to ministerial development in IME 2.

*TI-Curate relationships* require: positive ‘chemistry’; TI enthusiasm to develop another minister; regular interaction and the keeping of agreed training contracts. Opportunity for Curate responsibility is vital and while TI absence in early curacy is problematic, leaving them in charge at a later stage (e.g. during a sabbatical) can be beneficial.

Within *congregations* Church Wardens often function as unofficial coaches for Curates. Some witness a Curate’s ministry more than their TI does and are interested in formally assisting with clergy training. Clarifying the nature of a Curate’s role with a congregation is vital to establishing healthy expectations and relationships.

*Peer* contact is important to all respondents but is particularly so for Curates. Small peer groups and peer relationships from IME 1 are crucial to both support and learning.

- *Part-time Curates* face and pose specific training issues around expectation and capacity. Undertaking meaningful amounts of ministry alongside required assessment is demanding and particular pressure is caused by the expectation of priesting at the end of their first year. Both TIs and Diocesan Officers recognise that providing appropriate training for part-time Curates under current models is challenging.

### 3. Provision for the Training of Training Incumbents

- TI training is diverse, with every diocese devising their own programme. These are most commonly ‘front loaded’ training days which focus on supervision skills or managing IME 2 assessment procedures.
- TIs typically describe this as mixed in quality but improving overall. They appreciate training focussed on achieving meaningful learning (rather than just managing assessment) and the peer contact which training days facilitates. Where it takes place they also appreciate small TI peer groups or experienced TI support for those new to the role.
- Frustrations include: repetition and a lack of differentiation; failure to recognise prior training expertise or view TI training as part of CMD; and the need for training tailored to specific contexts. Managing a part-time SSM Curate in a large team or rural multi-parish benefice is significantly different from training a stipendiary Curate in an urban, single church context but specialised training is rarely available.
- Diocesan Officers recognised the importance of TI training and some had structures for ongoing support of the TI-Curate relationship. However many TIs reported limited Diocesan contact and Officers described the challenge of doing so or of developing training within current budgetary demands. Some expressed concern at how appropriate TIs were to be sourced and trained if Curate numbers increase to meet current targets.

### 4. Some Conclusions

Overall findings were that there is need for:

- *Better communication* between those involved in training and *better resourcing* for IME 2.
- Greater *integration of training provision* across Dioceses and TEs, including a clearer perception of ministerial training as an ongoing, holistic process throughout and beyond IME.
- Within that, greater *differentiation at an individual level* to create meaningful training and avoid common frustrations around ‘one size fits all’ in an extremely diverse sector.

# Vocational Pathways: Perspectives from Curacy

## Introduction

This report is the result of research conducted by the Archbishops' Council as part of ongoing investigation of ministerial education. The purpose of this 2015/16 project was to explore in more detail some aspects of research undertaken in 2014; specifically the finding that all training pathways can be used with confidence, the limitations of quantitative analysis regarding investigation of the more recent mixed-mode pathway and questions raised about IME Phase 2 training.

Within that wider research context this study used qualitative research to investigate how IME Phase 2 is experienced, how the various IME Phase 1 pathways prepare Curates for their current role and what provision is made for the training of Training Incumbents.

## Methodology

Undertaking a representative, large scale study was beyond the remit of this project. There are therefore limitations to the findings, however it was possible to identify significant patterns across the four Dioceses selected as case studies. Two were rural and two urban, situated in both Northern and Southern Provinces. They were selected based on their having Curates who had participated in all three forms of IME Phase 1 pathway. From each Diocese a group of five to eight curates, in the latter stages of their training, were invited to participate in focus groups. Each group contained a mixture of stipendiary and self-supporting ministers (SSMs), female and male curates of a variety of ages, and representatives of all three IME Phase 1 pathways. In order to provide a fuller perspective their Training Incumbents (TIs) and Church Wardens were also invited to participate in focus groups or interviews. In addition Diocesan Officers with responsibility for IME Phase 2 were interviewed about the policies of the Diocese as well as their own experiences and observations.

Having undergone a methodological consultation with representatives from diocesan offices and theological education institutions (TEIs) and approval by the Archbishop's Council ethics committee, data from 67 participants (both lay and ordained) was gathered over a five month period. It was audio-recorded, transcribed and coded using NVivo software. Care has been taken to anonymise all participants.

## Findings

The findings of this project have been structured into three sections:

- Firstly, how the various IME Phase 1 pathways were observed to influence readiness for curacy. This involved Curates reflecting with hindsight on their training experiences but also observations of wider patterns from TIs and Diocesan Officers.
- Secondly, the reported experiences of IME Phase 2 as a training process, including Diocesan provision, assessment procedures and key factors in the development of Curates as ministers.
- Finally, the training of TIs, including examples of how the participating Dioceses undertake this process and how Training Incumbents experience it.

Each section also presents suggestions made by participants with regards to future development.

## Section 1: How do IME Phase 1 Pathways Prepare Individuals for Curacy?

Of the nearly 70 leaders interviewed during this research 23 were Curates. Twelve had attended residential colleges, seven had participated in local courses and four represent some of the earliest participants in mixed-mode training. Their TIs, Diocesan Officers and Church Wardens also contributed perspectives on patterns they had observed. This section makes preliminary comments and explores views on the three IME Phase 1 pathways before presenting some conclusions.

### 1.1 Preliminary Comments

There were some initial patterns in perceptions and experiences of IME Phase 1 pathways:

Firstly, Church Wardens were typically not only unaware of the Phase 1 pathway their Curate had undertaken but were largely unfamiliar with clergy training in general. In some cases relationships with SSMs or OLMs meant they had opinions on courses, but overall the process of ordination training was somewhat mysterious to the majority of them. All of the groups expressed a desire for greater transparency - to understand the processes more clearly, and felt that it would be beneficial for lay leaders to be aware of the training their Curates had and were undertaking in order to better support them.

Secondly, since the mixed-mode training pathway is still a relatively recent development there are limited numbers of latter stage Curates who have undertaken it. Many of the TIs had no experience of mixed-mode Curates and some of the Diocesan Officers had only encountered a few. Therefore, these findings are preliminary with regards to that pathway.

Thirdly, with regards to deployability, several individuals considered that attendance at a residential college made candidates more geographically deployable. The experience of one move and expectation of a second made transition beyond their sending Diocese more likely. Conversely, local courses had the advantage of being able to tailor training to a Diocesan context since geographical deployability was a less significant consideration for most undertaking them. All of the mixed-mode Curates within this sample had remained within their sending Diocese.

There were also a number of comments about the challenges for Curates' families. Regardless of the pathway, preparing the whole family for the pressures of curacy was often a missing piece within IME provision. Some TIs described having to offer significant support to their Curate's spouse and although some residential colleges made provision for the partners of Ordinands this was varied. A number of self-supporting Curates talked about the struggles their families had experienced without any significant support.

Finally, neither Diocesan Officers nor TIs had definitive views on the effectiveness of the various training pathways. Based on their own experiences some felt that in an ideal world residential training was the best option. However, they recognised that the variety of pathways had allowed those who might otherwise have been excluded from ordination to do so. The majority view was that suitability and effectiveness were very much based on individual circumstances. Several expressed the opinion that a strong candidate was likely to thrive whatever pathway they undertook. One TI commented:

*I don't think one [pathway] is necessarily going to produce a perfect Curate over the others. I think it is dependent on the individuals really and what they bring to it. Motivated, enthusiastic, committed individuals will make the best of whatever material that is put in front of them.*

### 1.2 Perspectives on the Residential Training Pathway

A majority of the Curates and TIs participating had undertaken residential training and a considerable number of TEs from across the country were represented in the sample. The most notable patterns which emerged from the data were:

- Preparedness for curacy – theological confidence versus ministerial experience
- Leadership training
- Formation and self-redefinition as ministers
- Relationships and networks

### 1.2.1 - Preparedness: Theological Confidence versus Ministerial Experience

One common observation on the effects of doing two or three years' residential training was that individuals typically entered their curacy with greater theological confidence and depth of learning but sometimes took longer to find their feet and 'get going' within the parish. One TI considered that:

*Residential courses, depending on the college and the experience they give you, can become a bit separated from real life. It can make coming back to real life in a parish a bit of a shock.*

While many of the Curates articulated that they had been enthusiastic to start parish ministry, TIs reported both the need to hold them back and, in some cases, to push them into areas where they were less comfortable. Church Wardens also commented on a reluctance among some (particularly younger) Curates to engage with demographic groups where they had less experience. They felt that the somewhat protected environment of college had not always equipped Curates to relate to a diversity of people.

The overall sense was that those from residential colleges were more formed in terms of theology than ministry and that placements were a key part of preparation for curacy. It became clear that the number and length of placements Ordinands undertake is highly variable across TEIs. Some had experienced considerable variety while others had done relatively few and consequently came to curacy with little practical ministerial experience. Those with previous ministry or related professional experience suffered least from this since they were able to draw on existing skills but some, who had come through college with few placements, found the jump to curacy a sharp learning curve.

### 1.2.2 - Leadership Training

The tension between standardisation and personalisation of training across both IME phases was a repeated pattern but a frequently raised concern was a perceived weakness in leadership training. One TI with a background in business commented:

*The thing I think is missing is the whole thing of leadership and what it is to be a leader. That seems to be really varied across the theological colleges. I left college with nothing on leadership and what it is to lead and some of the tools you might need for that at all. I hoped that would change with the Durham curriculum but I didn't notice my Curate coming out with shedloads of stuff. He said one of the reasons he wanted to come here was that he obviously noticed that I had a bit of experience in leadership. That's the piece that he thought I could add for him.*

Some Curates reported doing modules on Christian leadership within their residential course but typically felt that most of their leadership skills had come from previous professional experience. Others expressed frustration that their existing leadership experience appeared to count for little in college but rather they were expected to undertake very basic training with those who had none. A number of TIs and Diocesan Officers similarly expressed concern over leadership training and the need for stronger management skills among Curates. Some Dioceses had specifically addressed those issues in IME Phase 2 but a number of individuals felt that their considerable management experience in previous careers was still ignored. One Curate described a disconnect between the leadership training he had received and the lived reality of his situation.

*As I reflect on the training prior to curacy, certainly from my college, we were very much trained to be leaders in one church. That was the model. So for me, I'm officially the Curate of two, the reality is now two and a half, or three. For me that was the gap - how you make that transition from being trained for a one-church model. I chose the curacy I went to and there were various factors in that decision, but that is the gap - training for one church, the reality is more than one.*

A Diocesan Officer also specifically commented on this issue, recognising that there was a need for leadership training that addressed the current reality of Anglican priesthood rather than an historic model. S/he also observed that despite considerable talk of 'collaborative leadership' many priests struggled to work effectively with lay leaders and believed that this should be addressed more effectively in training both Ordinands and Curates as leaders.

Church Wardens also commented on the need for Curates to inspire confidence in congregations and manage volunteers well. Several considered that those coming from residential colleges were more inclined to lecture than preach and that good interpersonal skills and an ability to communicate appropriately from the outset were vitally important and something college courses might improve on. One Church Warden was emphatic about some Curates he had seen.

*They need guidance in how to look at someone to talk to them; how to hold their head up. They don't seem to get that sort of training. It's patently obvious to me that they are not given training in personal skills, the skills of leadership. They may not be a leader type person but they still need to be able to inspire confidence. I can think of at least two people that we've had who would have benefitted enormously in having the psychological advice as to how you look, how you meet, how you deal with one person, three people, a meeting, a congregation; how you hold yourself; how you inspire confidence.*

### 1.2.3 - Formation and Self-Redefinition as Anglican Ministers

A commonly held view about residential training was that it was a time of formation; often a redefining of an individual's identity. Some saw it as 'recovery time' from their previous circumstances prior to entering ministry. Others were enthusiastic about the opportunity to study at a higher academic level and had chosen their college accordingly. A number reported that with hindsight it had been a time of being broken down (in both positive and negative ways) in order to be re-formed.

In particular it was noted that understanding one's vocation to the priesthood was aided by the 'time out' a residential course provides. Leaving an old life, taking a period of study in community and then moving to a new location as a deacon appeared to help with a redefining of self as a minister and similarly for their families to reorient themselves as a clergy family. However, undertaking this process of dislocation with similar people was appreciated and being around other families undertaking the same journey appeared to be particularly helpful.

A number commented that the rhythm of community life had helped them to lay devotional foundations, particularly in the area of daily prayer. Many described their college course as a time of filling up, or retreat; an oasis in which they could develop and explore their theological and personal perceptions prior to the anticipated demands of ministry.

*I think as soon as you hit the ground you have to hit it running and it's really good to have that retreat time when you can fill up before you go.*

*Having that time to concentrate on more study and prayer is better, personally, than just being thrown into the deep end straight away.*

*I agree. The study and prayer is very important at that stage in training. The prime purpose of the training is doing those things which actually now, I don't have time to do. I couldn't be in the parish and do a Master's degree, it just isn't practical because of the busy nature of the parish.*

It was noticeable that these comments were articulated by Curates whose TIs and Church Wardens saw as having initially lacked confidence. One Diocesan Officer commented:

*Some of the very young Curates, I think it's been better for them to be at college really. I would say that being in parish ministry is not a sheltered place to be. I think the parish will soon deal with all of that if they have had a sheltered life. I think there is something secure about the college life that perhaps younger people need. There is a security and a regularity.*

However, in terms of length needed to prepare, one younger Curate described his third year at college as feeling superfluous.

*What I found was that, because I was doing three years, the first two years everybody did exactly the same thing and then the third year was, 'Well what do you do now in the third year?' There was a good group, it wasn't just one or two of us and it felt like a kind of add-on really. You'd done all the bits you needed to do in the first two years. It means I could do a Masters so in a way it was very helpful, but there are still questions about why you do two or three years depending on how old you are and whatever your background is.*

Finally, one Curate discussed the 'doctrinal party line' of his college (which he had found difficult) and a few TIs expressed the opinion that some residential colleges were 'churchmanship ghettos' which did not expose Ordinands to sufficient breadth of the Anglican tradition. Several Curates reported DDOs deliberately steering them away from institutions for what they perceived to be churchmanship or theological issues. However, Curates more frequently articulated that they had come to appreciate varieties of churchmanship through their residential community. Some had deliberately chosen colleges that varied from their previous tradition in order to prepare themselves for deployment and had found that a challenging but positive experience.

#### 1.2.4 - Relationships and Networks

A strongly recurring pattern was that relationships built up during residential training were highly significant for individuals during their curacy. In some cases colleges had encouraged students to intentionally maintain them. Having continuing networks of peers with whom they had close relationships had helped a number through difficult periods when they had felt isolated or been in conflict with their TI.

Likewise, the encouragement of college staff was identified as a significant factor. For example, one Curate felt that their college had given helpful direction on how to choose a curacy placement and actively given them permission to decline an offer they might otherwise have unhappily accepted. Another reported that they had reluctantly accepted an offer presented during vacation and perhaps, if it had been in term time with college support, they might have made an alternative (and better) choice. Some reported that their colleges had invited former students back to discuss starting curacy with them and had found that a helpful experience. Particularly for those whose relationships with DDOs or sending Diocese were less accessible, the support of their TEI was among the most significant in their decision making about future ministry.

Those who had undertaken to be weekly borders at residential colleges reported a mixture of experiences. For some it had worked well but others felt that they had missed out on the sense of community and full formation experience. All those who had taken this route had done so in order not to disrupt family life but there were mixed views as to whether they would make the same decision a second time. Some were clear it had worked for them, others wished they had been full time.



There were, of course, frustrations among those Curates who had undertaken residential training and a number talked about the challenges of community living or the difficulties faced by those who did not fit the majority demographic of an institution. Some colleges had engaged their whole family more fully than others and two reported that their spouses taking modules had been of great benefit.

Almost all of those interviewed expressed a clear sense of loyalty and affection for their time in college. Some vehemently defended their institution from what they perceived as criticism from the wider Church. Although a number of TIs and Diocesan Officers had queries or concerns about the colleges their Curates had attended (particularly in terms of communication and passing on of important pastoral or developmental information) almost all of the Curates asserted that they would undertake the same training pathway at the same institution again. Just one said he would, with hindsight, have preferred a Mixed-mode pathway.

### 1.3 Perspectives on the Part-time Course Pathway

With regards to those undertaking the local course pathway all those in the sample were self-supporting but were a mixture of SSMs and OLMs. Some were training for incumbency while others were pursuing an assistant role. The variation in their training routes was considerable. Three had begun as self-supporting and part-time while engaged in other employment but had gone on to become full-time stipendiary Curates. Another had remained non-stipendiary and part-time, still involved in their former profession. Three were retired, self-supporting full-time Curates. A number of the TIs and Diocesan Officers had taken the course pathway themselves or worked with other curates that had done so. Church Wardens also had wider experience of SSMs and OLMs within their congregations. Thus the range of experience of courses represented is considerably wider than the seven Curate participants.

Overall, findings showed variation of experience. A number were very positive and had thrived but others had found their IME Phase 1 process extremely difficult. The general consensus was that those doing courses had felt equipped to begin their curacy but that there were some inevitable weaknesses as well as advantages with a part-time training pathway. Overall the most commented upon areas were:

- Pastoral and theological preparedness
- Workload management
- Peer relationships
- Ministerial formation.

#### 1.3.1 - Preparedness: Pastoral Experience versus Theological Confidence

It was evident that part-time courses often prepare people well for local parish life. The integration of study and parish ministry means that by the time they become Curates those choosing this pathway have considerable ministerial experience. Although many Dioceses place SSMs in a different context for their curacy, those who remain in their initial parish are typically known and trusted by their congregations. One TI commented that in such situations:

*They have been training on the job for three years and when they are ordained, they hit the ground running, so there isn't really a problem because they know the TI. They've worked with them for three years. They are there because they've chosen and feel called to be there. They are in a much better position than people who have just floated in from a college somewhere.*

Another considered that courses provided a helpful model:

*As opposed to residential courses where there's theology, theology, theology and then real life and you are trying to apply it. The course is theology, real life, theology, real life and I think you get*

*more used to applying the theology that you are learning to everyday life in a better way, in a more instant way.*

On the other hand one Diocesan Officer had noticed issues with theological reflection. S/he speculated that those undertaking courses might be more inclined to activism than reflection and thus needed more help to do that.

*Certainly with the course at the moment, there seems to be a problem around theological reflection. They are given a particular model but they seem to really struggle to take it beyond a thick description of experience and really apply it in practice. So in that sense, I think there's a limitation to how they are equipped to approach ministry.*

Several Church Wardens remarked on seeing SSMs grow in confidence and clearly courses broaden the demographic range of those able to access ordination. A number commented that without courses they could never have been able to serve in the way they felt called to. One Church Warden explained:

*'Joe' has come on hugely. He started totally lacking in confidence. The reason for him doing the course is that he has two little children and he couldn't afford to do full-time training. He's the sort of boy (he's a boy to me), I don't think he went on in school past 16. I don't think he had a lot of exams. Without this type of training I don't think he would ever have been able to be a Priest.*

This diversity does mean that the academic ability of Ordinands can vary greatly and a number of TIs and Diocesan Officers commented that Curates from this pathway tended to have narrower biblical knowledge and sometimes less spiritual confidence. Obviously this varied from individual to individual but in general it was considered inevitable that Curates would have less theological depth since part-time Ordinands simply had less time for study and reflection than those undertaking full-time pathways. One Officer commented, *'My observation is that it's nothing like as rigorous. It cannot be, because they just can't put the hours in!'*

By contrast a retired SSM commented that he had been frustrated by the 'purely intellectual' content of his part time course. He had wanted greater practical 'how to' in its content. A number of TIs and Diocesan Officers told historic stories of course modules lacking rigour or Curates starting with considerable gaps in their knowledge. However there was a sense that the quality of courses had improved and Curates were, on the whole, positive about the learning they had done. A number of individuals also commented that the diversity of candidates and the breadth of churchmanship represented was a real strength and one of the most positive aspects of the pathway.

### 1.3.2 - Managing the Workload

All those interviewed who had taken this pathway had done so for personal reasons, most frequently family commitments and financial constraints. Although most were positive about the actual content of the course they also articulated the challenge that completing it had presented. Many talked about the level of demand they observed courses placing on candidates. Some had travelled considerable distances to access the closest local course on top of full-time work and other commitments.

*I was the mother of three children allegedly training part-time. I did more on my part-time course than my son did on a bio-chemistry degree! I trained part-time with X Course. Very good, contextual experience from day one but it nearly killed some of us in terms of self-supported working, paid jobs during the day and our family commitments.*

Some had reduced their working hours in order to accommodate their studies. One said she had only coped by taking early retirement and the majority talked about the struggle to balance family life with the demands of the course. Another reported not having taken a family holiday for three years and a female curate stated:

*There was no understanding of the amount of peaks of workload that was placed upon you. Most people ended up, in the second year, reducing their working hours to be able to do the course, or using their holidays to complete assignments. That is just grossly unfair. It cost me literally a month's salary a year in taking unpaid leave, just to be able to cope with the demands of it. Again, there was no flexibility in residential weekends whatsoever. You had to be there unless somebody was dying. That is no way to re-imagine ministry and have different people in ministry. There is still the expectation that you have a wife at home to do all that and the course, as good as it was, was run by men who trained residentially and who do not have a clue about managing all those pressures at once!*

Some had come to resent the workload, talked about the inflexibility of the programme and on occasion a lack of pastoral care as they endeavoured to juggle all the aspects of their life. With hindsight some would not repeat the pathway or wished there had been a feasible alternative. By contrast others had found staff on another course to be sympathetic, encouraging and flexible. Those with fewest commitments expressed the greatest satisfaction in the pathway. One retired OLM was hugely enthusiastic:

*I loved my training. I started doing courses before my formal training just out of interest and I enjoyed them very much. So when it came to start my training I could complete it in two years. It involved the privilege of going to X College which I didn't expect. That was brilliant. There were several residentials a year and they were superb! They really helped with formation. I'd say that a major factor was the person who put that course together and who ran it. They were always open to give guidance and help.*

A number articulated that the transition to curacy had been a relief in terms of workload, one describing it as 'a holiday' in comparison. Likewise significant numbers of TIs and Diocesan Officers raised concerns about the workload for those undertaking courses. However, some TIs had a different perspective; that juggling the demands of the course was more like lived parish ministry than residential training and therefore a more realistic preparation for curacy.

*It's much more like parish life. When you are trying to write a sermon but someone's phoning you up and saying, 'Can you come and see me at the hospital? I've had a fall'. So you think, 'Do I write the sermon, or do I visit?' You have to make judgement calls and I think you are much more prepared for that from the word go if you've done something like the X course.*

### 1.3.3 - Peer Relationships

A recurring positive pattern from those who had undertaken courses was that the relationships formed among peers within course cohorts were strong and enduring, providing encouragement during curacy.

*The good thing you already have are relationships with other people in the Diocese, so the friendship I have with X and the other people we trained with who are rooted in the Diocese - that is a key advantage.*

One Curate reported that some of his course cohort had formed an informal cell group to pray together which was a place of genuine disclosure and support. Indeed these networks were sufficiently close that incoming Curates from other pathways sometimes reported feeling excluded.

*I noticed that during the cohort (20 of us were Curates together), it was the ones that had been in the X training course together who had got those bonds between one another. I actually felt like an outsider coming into that!*

As with residential training, a cohort of peers who had undertaken the challenges of the pathway together was clearly important and had been of clear benefit when transitioning into curacy.

### 1.3.4 - Formation

Those interviewed had mixed feelings about the formational effects of courses. Some Diocesan Officers and TIs saw this as a weakness of the pathway and felt that it was too part-time for there to be significant transformation. Others speculated that the pressure of the workload was perhaps the formational part of the process. However, typically Curates were more positive about its effects:

*When I went to X, the Principal said at the beginning that 'It's about information and formation and by the end of it you will be different.' I thought that was a really silly thing to say and that I wouldn't be different. S/he was right and I was wrong. It's as much the formation as the information that you are getting. I think one of the strengths of the course is you have a whole range of different people who are collected there, but it wasn't just about the lectures, it was everything - the residential weekends, the alternative worship, your prayer groups, doing different spiritualities. It was a wide range of learning and experiences and I felt more prepared than I did at the beginning and definitely changed. S/he was right, I was wrong.*

For those remaining within the same church there were both benefits and challenges in the transition from IME Phase 1 to Phase 2 and a sense of vocation. Knowing the congregation and not having to relocate made the transition more fluid and some had taken it in their stride. However some SSMs and OLMs reported difficulties around vocational identity and managing the attitudes of the congregation.

*One day you are doing your job but then you are ordained and you still go back to your job on the Monday. That's very strange and particularly when you go back to serve your own church. One of the women looked me up and down in my new shiny Vicar's outfit and said, 'When does the strip-o-gram start?' Because they'd known me as just an ordinary person in the pew.*

*I think X has had an element of that challenge as the Curate because he's lived in the village for 7, 8, 9 years or something like that. He's back and one day he's standing up in a dog collar and everyone's going, 'Look at you!'*

One highly experienced TI observed that those on residential pathways undertake the process of ministerial identity formation during their time away and, in his words, 'grieved' their old life. He had noted it taking longer for Curates who did not take that break. Rather he considered that the formation process continued for some time after ordination for SSMs and should be taken into consideration and factored into training contracts. This was supported by a TI who described the extended period it took him to make the vocational transition.

*I came away feeling 'I don't know very much about the Bible, I hope nobody asks me too difficult questions on my first few days'. You think, 'This is crazy. Here I am in a different role and I don't know any more than I did last week and all of a sudden this change has happened'.*

It was clear that there were mixed views on part-time courses and that there was considerable variety within the pathway. However the sense that Curates had practical experience of ministry was frequently articulated. Many were strongly positive about their learning and it was evident that the pathway had made ministry possible for a group of candidates who would otherwise have been excluded.

## 1.4 [Perspectives on Mixed-mode Pathways](#)

Clearly, with fewer participants who had experienced this pathway there were less data gathered. One Curate had undertaken a previous form of mixed-mode course and their experience was unique. The findings again fall into four categories:

- Initial impressions on a new pathway
- Preparedness, theological and ministerial confidence
- Time management
- Leadership training.

#### 1.4.1 - Initial Impressions

Due to the relatively recent development of mixed-mode training a number of TIs and Diocesan Officers felt it was too early to make any significant comments on the effects of this pathway on curacy. However, those with Curates who had undertaken it were typically positive about those individuals and their training. Although some Diocesan Officers identified individuals who had presented complications as Curates they were reluctant to identify this as linked to the pathway. In two cases it appeared instead to be related to expectations around Pioneer Ministry. Some of the comments on earlier forms of mixed-mode were that there were issues around course structure; in particular the expectation that Ordinands would leave their sending churches for significant blocks of time was seen as disruptive to ongoing ministry. However, the more recently developed models were seen as better structured.

#### 1.4.2 - Preparedness: Theological and Ministerial Confidence

Overall, Diocesan Officers, TIs and Curates themselves were positive about the teaching content and how it had prepared Curates. They typically considered it to focus on practical engagement with contemporary issues as well as being theologically stretching. One Curate commented:

*The evening class type of approach that these guys were on, that wasn't for me. I didn't feel it would give me enough depth and enough solid academic training. It was really getting into the Bible study and that side of it that was important to me. I knew that was a weakness of that course because I'd looked into it beforehand. I felt I got much more rigour, but maybe not as much as I could have had at a college?*

A number commented that inevitably time limitations meant that there was perhaps less depth than in a residential course, one TI explaining:

*They seem to be engaging with quite a lot of contemporary issues. I think it's quite stimulating; they seem quite engaged with it. It's just a bit lighter. We had the luxury of more time and could go into more depth. If you held the two courses up side by side, you just cannot fit as much in. I don't think there's anything wrong with it. I'm not aware that they've missed a huge chunk out or anything like that. I think it's just slightly - and I don't mean this in a derogatory sense - but if I said it was 'lite' because they just haven't got the time and space to go quite as deep.*

By contrast another TI commented that his Curate appeared to have packed into one day the teaching he had received in a week at college. He thought that perhaps what was missing was the extended processing time college had afforded him. One Curate did express a measure of sadness that she had missed out on certain aspects of residential training:

*I yearned a little bit for that being in community and doing that daily rhythm. I think if I'd been single that would have been what I would have wanted. It would have fed me.*

It was also noticeable that the Curates from this pathway did not articulate the same sense of solidarity with their peers as those from courses and residential colleges. They did not talk about having a relationally important cohort, instead their key relationships appeared to have remained within their sending church. They all explained that they had pursued this pathway for a mixture of theological and pragmatic reasons; typically to minimise disruption to their family.

*There's no way that God would have made our family do that [go to a residential college]. Four kids, three teenage boys. It was challenging commuting into X. It had its pressures: weekends and a week's residential. It was challenging for us as a family but it was right for us as a family... we were then plugged into church. It was just one less change for us to do.*

Mixed with ongoing practice in the parish, the pathway was described by a number of clergy as being more integrated and thus Curates typically 'hit the ground running.' However, two of the Curates with considerable previous ministry experience raised a frustration. Both had been under the impression that the integrated nature of the course meant they would serve a shorter curacy. In neither case had that happened.

*I think one of the things with the mixed-mode course was the expectation within the way that course was run. That at the end of it you wouldn't need a full three year curacy. But the Diocese aren't tuned into that, so you are just given the one-size-fits-all training in all the areas that they expect you to work in. You just bide your time, you just tick the boxes that you know you could have ticked a lot sooner than you have done.*

By contrast, another had become a Curate in a tradition distinctly different to her own and felt the need for a full length curacy. She also explained that she had been surprised by the breadth of churchmanship.

*You got a broad experience of different worship styles and churchmanship. I loved that and I loved being in that mix and having people say, 'What was all that incense? I don't understand that.' Or 'What was all that singing in tongues?' I loved being in that environment and that mix.*

The general consensus was that Curates who had undertaken this pathway appeared to have a good mix of theological depth and ministerial experience at the start of IME Phase 2.

#### 1.4.3 - Time Management

What was frequently recognised was that travelling to teaching centres each week was an exhausting process for those who were coming from considerable distance.

*Somebody at my church is training at the X mixed-mode course and he is having that experience of being completely exhausted because he is travelling for miles to go to the course for one day every week and then coming back and spending time in the parish and then having to do essays. Trying to juggle all that is very difficult.*

Those who made this choice of pathway did articulate the challenge of the travel but were pragmatic about using the time and felt that exposure to another location was an enriching factor.

*Even although it was a real drag travelling back and forwards (although you did get study time on the train) getting into the culture of a different city and what goes on in the church there and everything, was really helpful and I benefitted hugely from doing that.*

Some of the TIs involved commented that the mixed pattern of the week created complications for Ordinands. Despite being in the parish, only being available for ministry three days a week narrowed ministerial experience and meant Ordinands physically could not participate in the whole spectrum of opportunities. Some had clearly found this frustrating and it was noted that the mixed-mode workload was considerable. However, none expressed regret at their choice. None-the-less juggling the two things was demanding and travel requirements limit accessibility to those who are (or move to) within commutable distance of the training hubs.

#### 1.4.4 - Leadership Training

One particularly striking feature of the mixed-mode pathway was that Curates and their TIs noted a good level of leadership training. Curates felt they had had access to outstanding practitioners in this area and were being encouraged and shaped by a mixture of teaching on biblical leadership and effective management skills. One Curate from a residential pathway commented on a mixed-mode colleague.

*All my leadership training is from my previous employer and I have to try to relate God into that. I'm working with someone who is currently at X mixed-mode course and I am jealous of his training because he goes on leadership modules, he's doing so much more Levitical study. His theology, his doctrine - he's doing stuff that I am still having to go and look in books to do now. I'm just left thinking, 'Oh my goodness, I've got to train our church leaders on church leadership and I've got no materials'. So I go and ask him for his stuff from X.*

There appeared to be a perception that certain people particularly thrived in this pathway. 'Go-getters' was how one Diocesan Officer described them. A middle-aged Curate did describe feeling somewhat unusual participating in the pathway but overall she was positive about her experience.

*I am really thankful for it. What I've described makes it sound like it was really easy; it wasn't. There was a lot of being back in that glossy 20-something young guys and very clear about where they are going. And for a mum who's not done any study for twenty-something years it is quite challenging. There was some learning in that, but actually it was the right place for me.*

It seemed then that the mixture of theological depth, practical experience and leadership skills was a particular strength of the pathway. The lifestyle required to complete the training was demanding and there were frustrations about integration into standard IME 2 training but those involved (and those observing them) were positive about the training they had taken and their preparedness for curacy.

### 1.5 Conclusions

Clearly there was a wealth of experience and perspective represented among the leaders interviewed. These vary considerably even within pathways; with significant differences between institutions of the same type. Overall, there appeared to be both benefits and limitations to all three IME Phase 1 pathways.

- Residential training appears typically to provide theological depth and a strong relational support network. Those who have done it are usually loyal to their institution and are considered more geographically deployable. The length of study and community lifestyle provide a period of intentional preparation with space for significant theological and vocational formation. Its challenges appear to be rooted in the variation across different TEIs. In some cases a lack of ministerial experience based on limited placements causes some Curates to struggle. Similarly a focus on an historic one priest-one church model does not match the experience of many Curates. In some cases there also appear to be challenges around aspects of leadership training.
- Courses by contrast appear to integrate practice and learning since Ordinands do both. They create strong peer groups who are committed to their locality and congregations. They also provide opportunity for a wider demographic to train for priesthood. However, time constraints mean that theological study is inevitably less developed and the workload is extremely demanding. Concerns were repeatedly raised about the wellbeing of those endeavouring to juggle this type of training with full-time work and family demands; a pattern which for many continues into IME Phase 2.
- Mixed-mode training, while still in its early stages, received largely positive comments. Its focus on contextual relevance and leadership development alongside considerable theological input

appeared a particular strength. Those having undertaken it appeared well prepared for curacy in terms of theology and ministerial experience. Some of the challenges appeared to be around the demands of travel, the structure of juggling studies with parish ministry, and integration between this pathway and the expected length of curacy.

All of these pathways are demanding and require considerable sacrifice on the part of those undertaking them. Equally all of them bring about learning and transformation in different ways and for different reasons. They are apparently not all equal in terms of theological depth, ministerial formation, or pastoral experience acquired. The Curates they produce will inevitably come with needs for different sorts of ongoing learning depending on their background, previous experience and personality as well as the strengths and limitations of their IME Phase 1 pathway. This makes the challenge of appropriate IME 2 training even more acute.

## Section 2: Experiences of IME Phase 2

A considerable amount of time within interviews and focus groups was devoted to exploring Curate experiences of IME Phase 2. A number of themes were recurrent, they fall broadly into five categories:

1. Issues of communication



2. Assessment policies and procedures
3. Diocesan training provision
4. The significance of relationship for Curate development
5. Specific challenges around training for part-time Curates.

## 2.1 [IME Phase 2 and Communication](#)

A strong theme in the data gathered was the need for better communication around IME. Concerns existed on a number of levels:

1. Between Diocese and clergy involved in training
2. Between senior staff and Diocesan Officers
3. Between IME 1 and IME 2 providers.

### 2.1.1 - [Communication between Diocese, Curates and TIs](#)

It should be stated at the outset that in all four Dioceses Curates and TIs reported that administrative communication between themselves and IME Phase 2 officers was typically very good. The Officers effectively communicated expectations and organised training and assessment efficiently. Many of the participants commented that if there were problems with these processes, or a serious problem between Curate and TI they knew who to approach. For the most part those had been dealt with well and in some Dioceses there were intentional systems to facilitate Curate –TI relationships.

Where communication within the IME 2 system seemed to be a problem for some, was with non-urgent, on-going relational support. A number of TIs commented that during a three year curacy, beyond their Curate’s formal assessments, no-one from the Diocese had checked in with how they, as a TI, were finding the process. Likewise some Curates reported that they had received little communication or supervision from the Diocese when taking responsibility during their TI’s sabbatical or sick leave. One Curate reported that the Diocese had supported her effectively over a safeguarding issue but only after the Police had become involved. Another, in a benefice with an extremely large number of churches, described seeking support with little success.

*So I was left with X churches and no Training Incumbent - he had a sabbatical as well as being off ill. I felt not supported very well at all by the Diocese. Occasionally I would make contact with them, but not once did the Bishop phone up and say, 'How's it going?' I felt like I was drowning for most of the time to be honest. I've had frank conversations with the Area Dean and with the Bishop, although less usefully. It seems that the Church of England is a place where you need to go and get the help if you want it, it doesn't come to meet you, that's been my experience.*

The general consensus seemed to be that one had to pursue Diocesan support, and that although clergy knew where to go in a difficult situation, on-going, regular contact could be scarce. In one Diocese the Officer had intentionally put regular meetings with groups of TIs into place but others commented that, much as they would like to, this was beyond their capacity.

### 2.1.2 - [Communication between Senior Clergy and Diocesan Officers](#)

Communication within Diocesan structures varied enormously. In two of the four, Officers voiced concerns. One described the ‘constantly changing goal posts’ for training and felt caught between senior staff and clergy on the ground. S/he described attempting to absorb the tension to protect TIs and Curates but felt

overwhelmed. Decisions to move the timings of assessment, taken without consultation, had created a great deal of distress. The Officer was doing their best to be supportive but was very frustrated that decisions had been taken, apparently without awareness of the consequences and pressure created.

A second Officer talked about being taken out of the communication loop. Changes in staffing meant decisions were now imposed without consultation with the training team. This was experienced as undermining and devaluing of their expertise, causing considerable frustration.

In a third Diocese the Officer explained how they tried to manage and absorb the constant change of policy and targets. In their case an experienced team and better communication with senior staff made the task more manageable. By contrast in the fourth case the Officer described themselves as having regular contact and good support from their local Bishop and holding senior staff to account on their policies.

*In some ways I have to be the monitor/evaluator because the policies are there to help the senior staff keep everything fair and just for everybody. But if an Archdeacon appoints a Curate to a new job before they've done their full three years of curacy then that's the time I have to stand up and say, 'Hang on, you can't do that.' So I exercise quite an interesting role. I do have to get in there sometimes and say, 'You do realise what you've just done? This is setting a precedent and I'm not sure this is a good idea'. They know very well they shouldn't have done it. But they will always come up with a good reason. It's their policy, it's not mine!*

Communication, sense of their expertise being valued, and consultation between senior staff and Diocesan Officers clearly made a significant difference to their morale and the way they felt enabled to do their job.

### 2.1.3 - Communication between Providers of IME Phases 1 and 2

There appeared, for a number of TIs and Diocesan Officers, to be issues of communication between themselves and IME Phase 1 providers. One described their frustration that information about individual Curates was not passed on.

*On one occasion the Training Incumbent didn't even get information about the fact that the Curate was dyslexic! Now, I happened to discover that in a sideways route, but the college concerned didn't pass that information on to the Training Incumbent, didn't pass it to me. The Training Incumbent then couldn't figure out why this Curate was having so many difficulties reading aloud. It's not rocket science, is it?*

Another frustration was that ongoing training needs for individuals were rarely reported in their final college or course report.

*Occasionally there will be a comment, but I'd say probably no more than five out of 25 will I get that information. It will be less than 5 each year. It would be helpful to have a steer. What normally happens is that some of the colleges write a report that says, 'This was what was identified before they started training in their Bishop's Advisory Panel and this is what they've done to meet those requirements'. It's almost that they've given the impression that the Ordinand is now going to be fully formed and really there isn't anything else to do. That's the impression they give because they've not given anything in that section that says 'further training needs'. Doesn't that blank box say they don't need any more training? Of course Ordinands see that and they sign it!*

Reporting did appear to vary across institutions with some named as having significantly improved their processes. Indeed, some of the TIs who functioned as trainers on local courses explained that they wrote detailed reports on individual Ordinands. It would appear however, that this feedback does not always reach TIs or those responsible for IME Phase 2. The general sense was that they would appreciate knowing

how specifically to help Curates address their ongoing training needs, particularly in areas of character and leadership development.

Several Diocesan Officers expressed frustration at having to chase Curates over IME 2 training. Some appeared to be passive or reluctant to engage and appeared unwilling to prioritise their ongoing development.

*This term we found particularly that some of the new Curates have been very dependent. Instead of thinking for themselves, they've just not. They haven't booked on the courses they should have booked on. They haven't read the paperwork, they haven't done what we've asked them to do in e-mails and things. So, we've had to chase them.*

*One of my frustrations is when people won't take responsibility for their own learning. Because we try to treat people as adults and they then come back and pretty much say sometimes, 'Well, you haven't spoon-fed us'. And I find that very frustrating.*

One described the current system as creating a culture that separates the two IME phases unhelpfully. They considered that it leaves Curates irritated by ongoing study and resentful of IME 2 input and assessment as a distraction from the 'real' work of parish ministry. A number of Curates did express that irritation; that surely their theoretical learning was done by the end of IME 1? Or that they were tired of reflecting on their personal development and what they were now interested in was practical 'how to' knowledge.

The lack of integration between the two phases came across most frequently in the comments of Curates who, in all four Dioceses, reported that IME 2 input repeated things they had studied in IME 1. Diocesan Officers by contrast sometimes felt they were trying to resource a huge variety of Curates without really knowing what experience and training they were bringing or what their developmental needs were. The considerable variation of content across IME 1 providers, combined with the wide variation across IME 2 provision makes it inevitable that some Curates will experience repetition while others may be left with gaps in their training.

Overall, in the light of the diversity of both IME phases it seems that good communication on each individual Curate is vitally important to make their ongoing training as helpful as possible.

## [2.2 Assessment Policies and Procedures for Curates](#)

Much of the discussion with all three types of clergy interviewed, revolved around the challenges of assessment for IME 2. These are categorised:

1. Ongoing development
2. Challenges
3. Benefits
4. Variation
5. Feedback.

### [2.2.1 – Ongoing Development](#)

It was evident that assessment policies for curacy are in a place of ongoing development. All of the Diocesan Officers talked about simplifying processes. Two had inherited systems they described as 'extremely challenging' and 'very heavy' for all involved which they had significantly modified to make them more manageable. Clergy in those Dioceses expressed strong approval of that simplification and recognised that IME 2 assessment was still in a fluid state. Across all four Dioceses most clergy were positive about the comprehensive training handbooks which Officers had put in place and about administrative support they received.

*I think the IME training manual is very useful when you've got 'This is what they are expected to know and this is what they are expected to do by the end of each year'. That's a very good framework for supervision.*

The setting up of training agreements and supervision for that process was also widely commended. It appeared well-managed, with Diocesan Officers usually attending initial meetings to establish those frameworks. Clearly considerable work had been put into developing and outworking those policies. One Curate commented on how helpful boundaries had been established from the outset.

*In our handbooks at the very beginning we were given information about setting up your targets for the year, general habits, your curacy agreement and re-evaluating that every year, so that was the baseline level of understanding with your incumbent. So, Friday is your day off, he won't hassle you or expect anything of you on that day; just simple things that can alleviate a lot of problems. I think, at the beginning, given the handbook and a lot of the material there, and following a lot of that through step by step, and being very clear, laid a good foundation.*

Training Incumbents were also generally positive about that initial process and recognised why assessment was important in principle. However, there were mixed feelings about the developments in assessment processes.

*Each time I've gone round the assessment cycle, it's got a bit more prescribed. I understand why it's gone down that route, because in the past when folk have been left to their own devices it sometimes has not been very positive or helpful. I just wonder if the emphasis has gone too far the other way? Some of the spontaneity and flexibility that makes the training relationship fun is being squeezed out.*

Typically clergy thought there was still scope for further development to make the system an entirely helpful learning experience, particularly for those who struggled with paperwork. One Curate commented:

*Sometimes I just feel, couldn't someone just take me for a day? Someone who is wise, who is further along, and just listen, ask some probing questions? I reckon they'd be able to find out the areas where they could say, 'Just go and spend a week doing that, or try to think about doing that'. In other words, the areas that needed more work, a wise person just tracking your progress could do it in a relational way.*

### 2.2.2 – Challenges for Curates and TIs

Despite these developments the overall tone was still one of concern that assessment was laborious and demanding. Repeated frustrations over the amount of paperwork required and time it took were raised. Those who had used a portfolio model, providing evidence for up to 46 objectives, described it varyingly as an exercise in 'hoop jumping', 'box ticking', a 'bolt on' to genuine learning, 'inflexible' and a 'burden'. Criteria were described as 'vague', 'woolly', 'blurred' and 'oblique'. In some cases there were tensions around understanding whether criteria had actually been met and some Curates expressed real anxiety about that. Two TIs discussed their experience.

*TI A. I'm running two Curates at the moment and it's all down to interpretation. One interpreted one of the competencies one way and the other interpreted it another way. They both got it ticked off at the end of the day, so I think it is down to interpretations. It is woolly enough for you to make of it what you want.*

*TI B. I don't think 'woolly' is acceptable. Yes, you can adapt it, but what if you and you and your Curate interpreted it in one way, and the assessor interprets it in a totally different way?*

TI A. *I've had that as well, where it's been sent back and they've said, 'You haven't completed it'. On the other hand they said we had completed another, where we thought we hadn't.*

Other concerns were that the assessment process removed capacity for creativity or spontaneity and whether they were even measuring the right things? One TI explained that his prior management career had enabled him to interpret objectives in a creative way. He had developed a 'quick and dirty but meaningful' way of dealing with assessment in order to 'avoid getting an ulcer'.

*You have to be confident to find ways of fulfilling the criteria meaningfully without killing Curates or killing the joy of doing it. Mine just filled their folder with stuff which we then coded against the grid. A lot of people are floundering because it looks like a massive task that you can never do.*

Processes were noted as a particular challenge for those who were dyslexic or temperamentally less structured, but even those who were highly organised found that creating enough time to do the required paperwork was challenging. One Curate explained:

*We've carved out some space for me to do these things, but last night I went to bed at one o'clock having planned a funeral for Friday, the two services for Sunday and the minutes of the Deanery Synod. No different from anybody else, but went to bed thinking, 'Have I done the wrong thing?' I had not done the IME things that I had set out to do.*

However, one TI noted that his Curate, a former social worker, considered the paperwork light by comparison. Those from teaching backgrounds also seemed less frustrated, again possibly because they were used to managing large amounts of documentation. Even so, the amount of administration required was a constantly repeated concern.

### 2.2.3 - Benefits

By contrast there were those who had found guidelines and a framework helpful. Some Curates described it as a useful checklist to ensure they had 'covered the basics' or gained the range of experience they needed.

*The good stuff is the framework in the booklet and how my incumbent and I have met regularly, we've worked our way through the topics, covered all the ground. There was a clear framework which gave us some lines to work to and then there was flexibility, to do a placement or not.*

Others liked the systematic structure and recognised that it had pushed them to look for ministerial opportunities they might otherwise not have thought to undertake.

*The IME 2 advisor looks at your learning and so if there's gaps that didn't happen in year 1 and 2 on the prescriptive programme of what was expected, they might suggest you go to another church for example, to experience that. An example would be confirmation. My church didn't have any confirmations, so I participated with a colleague in another area to run a confirmation course. It was one way of filling that gap.*

Some of the more experienced TIs were also pragmatic about assessment processes recognising that they addressed historic issues of inconsistency in clergy training. One said he had found it to be a useful framework for supervision with his Curate and a second that a systematic approach had made achieving targets manageable.

*I think it's pretty good. I don't think it made any difference in terms of what I would have done with a Curate, but it did mean we were more objective about ensuring that all those experiences were in there. I think it's given us enough space to do what we would have wanted to do anyway, but it has also given an objective framework to make sure that there is nothing obvious that we have missed.*

#### 2.2.4 - Variation in Assessment

Although all four Dioceses had processes for managing assessment criteria, not all used a portfolio model. Some had Curates write essays. These too could be a source of frustration. Some reported having written essays on the same subjects during their IME Phase 1. Two others explained:

*Curate A. I'm doing the Masters, and you still have to do these poxy little essays for no apparent reason as well.*

*Curate B. Well, they are very vague what they look for. Some of the comments I've had have been very odd. The last one I had said it was a bit short, and I thought, 'Well, I've just done the word count that you've asked for, if it's a bit short it's because you've not asked for more words'. One of them I had to re-do because they said I hadn't done what they were after and I said the reason is that what you're asking for is very vague. We asked for clarification and it wasn't particularly clear in their clarification what they were actually looking for.*

Alternatively another Diocese, based on feedback about long essays, had created a policy of requiring multiple, very short, 'streams of consciousness' reflection from Curates. They were appreciative of this model explaining that less time spent on written assessment allowed them to spend longer learning in the parish or in discussion with their TIs which they felt was more beneficial. None of the sample Dioceses made formal academic study mandatory for their Curates, although in some places it was a possibility. One Curate explained, 'When I came one of the things I expressed as a desire was to do more study and post graduate work, and that hasn't been possible in this Diocese.' Alternatively another explained that they had not accepted a post in a certain Diocese because an MA was compulsory during IME 2.

Indeed, one of the recurring issues for all the Curate groups was that they were confused by the variation of IME 2 assessment across Dioceses. Particularly those from residential pathways were keenly aware that their peers were undergoing significantly different training and assessment.

*Every Diocese has such a different IME process. I trained alongside people and their only assessment throughout their curacy is that they write a reflective essay once a year, they have a meeting with their Bishop and they attend whichever sessions they want to, according to their own interests. I have other friends who have to submit 4,000 word essays every term which are then assessed and then have to go towards some kind of qualification. And they have to do it, it's not an option. There's us here jumping through hoops, ticking boxes, whatever! Why, what's that about?*

*It seems to vary hugely between Dioceses. So, in other Dioceses you have to go and do a Masters or PhD or whatever the next phase of your education is. Or 'Here you are, fill out a couple of forms and that's your portfolio'. Or you have to produce tons and tons of evidence. What they are all expecting is very different. It seems a bit unfair, but it also seems that if you were to become an Incumbent in a different Diocese, what you've experienced is going to be very different to somebody in that Diocese who's been a Curate.*

One group of Curates speculated that it might be prudent to pick a curacy based on the IME 2 assessment policies of that Diocese. Another described their frustration that in some Curates appeared to be signed off very quickly, once they'd ticked everything on the assessment list, while in others a full three or even four years was expected before they were released for incumbency. Overall, a central frustration was the huge variation in what IME 2 assessment looked like which appeared unfair and inconsistent.

#### 2.2.5- Feedback

One final observation on assessment was a tension raised by several of the Curate groups. That was the issue of feedback about IME 2 provision. All of the Diocesan Officers commented that the feedback loop

was a challenge, either because it was at the bottom of a long list of tasks or because they struggled to get feedback out of busy clergy. In one Diocese it seemed that the feedback loop was working; the Diocesan Officer having altered policy based on it. One of their Curates commented:

*What was really nice was that they were always interested in feedback and they did seem to take that on board and things did seem to change depending on what it was.*

However, overall Curates said they found it difficult to give honest feedback. One group explained why:

*Curate A. There is a degree of sadness in sitting here saying this, but it would be nice to be able to feed back to the people who are doing the course now. I don't feel there is. There are little forms that we fill in at the end, but it would be really nice to sit down and discuss it and feel that you had some input into making a difference.*

*Curate B. These are our trainers though.*

*Curate C. It's hard to criticise the system. Because they don't like criticism - is my opinion, and if we want a job...*

*Curate B. and we are dependent on them.*

*Curate D. When you start looking for a job... this is sort of the unwritten thing isn't it? Although we are training, everybody who is part of our training will in some way have an influence on where we end up.*

In a second Diocese Curates held similar views about giving feedback to their Diocesan Officer but added:

*It is too much of a closed circle. I think X's strengths are in helping us through the process and the backroom stuff. I think if other people were actually delivering the training that might enable us to be a bit more honest to say, 'That was really good; that wasn't really good'. I've self-censored a lot, partly because I've been aware that they have not had the easiest of times and I've deliberately not been as frank as I could have been about some of the feedback. If something has been good, I've said it, but I don't think anybody has been honest.*

There was a similar sentiment about giving feedback in IME Phase 1 but it was much stronger about IME 2. Some of it was based around concern to not hurt the feelings of individuals who had shown them support. But because Diocesan officers were such influential people in signing them off, and in them getting incumbent posts, Curates were reluctant to be candid about the training they were receiving.

### 2.3 Diocesan IME 2 Training Provision

In terms of formal training provided for Curates by the four Dioceses there was considerable variation. Similarly, responses from Curates were diverse. Some were undertaking postgraduate study, but none of the Dioceses involved made that compulsory. Further investigation of how compulsory academic study is experienced by Curates would helpfully supplement these findings.<sup>1</sup> With regards to their views on their Diocese's current provision there were:

1. Positive reflections
2. Challenges

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<sup>1</sup> For a 2014 overview, see Hanson, D. (2014), *Pattern and cost of Dioceses' Curacy Training (IME Phase 2)*, Ministry Division, Archbishops' Council.

[http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/RME/pattern\\_and\\_cost\\_of\\_curacy\\_training.pdf](http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/RME/pattern_and_cost_of_curacy_training.pdf) and [http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/RME/Curacy\\_training\\_patterns\\_and\\_cost\\_per\\_diocese.xls](http://www.ministrydevelopment.org.uk/UserFiles/File/RME/Curacy_training_patterns_and_cost_per_diocese.xls).

### 3. Suggestions for future development.

#### 2.3.1 – Positive Reflections

##### *'How to' training from practitioners*

In all four Dioceses Curates commented that some of the residential and training days they had attended had been helpful. They were most enthusiastic about hard skills days that were both directly relevant to their ministry *and* interactive. Practical 'how to' training was most appreciated and that delivered by current clergy was identified as of greatest help. Curates particularly appreciated engaging with those in parish ministry.

*We did a session on baptism and X came in and talked, not for a long time, but talked about their actual experience of doing baptism as a fairly recently ordained person and that half hour was worth about three or four hours of the rest of the year! Have a training programme where you are drawing on the experience within the Diocese. Maybe the Diocese feels that they can't ask people because it's taking them away from the parish? But I think they should be.*

##### *Peer learning and small groups*

The main consistently reported advantage to training days and residential appeared to be time with peers to share experience and learn from each other. One Curate explained:

*They have been really good team building times, sharing with colleagues, the best things about a lot of our training have been the lunches, (not the quality of the food - we usually have to bring our own) but the conversation that you had, like 'This is happening for me'; that's been most beneficial.*

Likewise a TI reported:

*My Curate's comments have more centred on her meeting with her peers and conversations she's had, and energising from the interaction rather than specific comment on the content.*

Most Dioceses had regular small groups of Curates led by tutors and these were frequently described as the most helpful aspect of Diocesan provision. Some of those groups used case studies to stimulate discussion and reflection.

*We're in the same tutor group, the three of us, and it's been, for me, where most of the learning has happened. Listening to other people and doing the case studies. The case study approach just makes a lot of sense.*

Others commented that the facilitator or tutor was central to the success of the group, and that someone from outside the formal Diocesan assessment structures was most helpful; whether a practising minister or experienced lay leader. Where Diocesan Officers led those groups there seemed more reticence for individuals to share openly. Although they did not explicitly explain why it seems likely that, like the concerns with feedback, their dependence on the Officer to write them a positive report inhibited their willingness to be completely candid in that setting.

##### *Choice of training*

In one Diocese the training structure gave an element of choice to Curates. There were some mandatory events each year but individuals were then asked to select a certain number of training days that they and their TI felt were most pertinent to their ongoing development. This model was unusual and popular among the Curates who appeared to have a greater 'buy in' when given options.

##### *Individual preference*

In other Dioceses Curates could identify individual days, or retreats that had been particularly good or helpful. Sometimes they were in agreement, but often different individuals had found different events



most constructive, usually based on prior experience or personal preference of delivery style. Two TIs commented:

*Sometimes My Curate comes back and it's absolutely brilliant and sometimes they come back and say 'It's been a waste of time'. It depends on the input, and probably how it impacted them as an individual. Just because it didn't impact them, it doesn't mean it is not seized on by others.*

*I asked (another) Curate how the last training day was that she went on. She said, 'Brilliant, really helpful'. When I asked my Curate he said, 'Waste of time'. So it depends on the person and the context. For some people it's brilliant because it's just what they needed. For my Curate, 'We did that at college so it was a waste of time'. They are trying to bring everybody up to a certain level and that's difficult for the Diocese I think. That's what they are always struggling with.*

Several noted that temperamental differences, or personal circumstances made Curate's training needs diverse and that they had encouraged their Curates to attend with a positive attitude, considering what they might be able to contribute as well as what they might take away.

*I think you just have to be grown-up and say, 'Some days are going to be a bit of a dawdle and others are going to be fantastic', and you just have to take the rough with the smooth. But be committed to it all because what you take with you to the day will help the other Curates. If you've got great experience in that area you can share that with them.*

### 2.3.2 – Challenges

#### *Mixed Quality of Training*

A number of criticisms of IME 2 training provision were raised across the Dioceses. In all four cases the quality of training events was described as variable, with some excellent sessions but others less so. One Curate voiced a commonly held view.

*There was a real mixed bag. Some of them were really interesting and some of them were really boring. You couldn't really tell before you turned up whether it was going to be useful or not.*

Some Curates were strongly critical, describing formal training as a frustration. Comments included training being 'too basic' and sometimes lacking theological or biblical content. Requests for more prayer, diversity of worship and focus on evangelism were also made. Other concerns were that often training lacked creativity, or had become formulaic in its delivery and was therefore less stimulating; not taking learning styles into account. One SSM described having undertaken a detailed assessment of his experience, skill level and learning style at the start of his curacy but was then frustrated by uniform delivery for all Curates regardless of that initial assessment. Some of the Diocesan Officers were sympathetic towards these complaints and also recognised that quality could be mixed. One acknowledged some sessions could be 'thin' but explained,

*Curates are sometimes very critical of the standard of the training. And I kind of want to say, 'You know what, our resources are really limited. The budget's this big'. Who did you think I was going to get to talk about so and so? The Archbishop of Canterbury?' Some of the criticism is certainly worth listening to, but it's hard to overcome the difficulties of not having the resources to be able to do things more effectively.*

#### *Lack of variation*

Another key issue, widely repeated, was that training was 'one size fits all'. That regardless of one's previous employment or ministerial experience, IME 1 pathway or parish situation, training was broadly targeted at some sort of 'average' Curate, which many felt they did not fit. A TI explained:

*The Church of England is a wonderful thing but it can seem a million miles away from our experience in our setting. So sometimes it can seem almost a foreign world that you are talking about. I think sometimes it doesn't seem entirely relevant to my Curate.*

A retired SSM commented:

*I think the IME training days were good network days to see colleagues, but the content of the programme... quite often I used to think, 'Gosh, I've been round this mulberry bush once too often in other Dioceses and in other parts of my life experience'. I was then thinking, 'Is this a good use of my time? Is it a good investment of resources by the Diocese?' In actual fact, what they could have done is utilise the resources of the Curates themselves who have vast experience in different aspects of life and be more participatory in those training days.*

Almost all clergy recognised the challenge facing Diocesan Officers in delivering training relevant to such diverse groups of Curates.

*There hasn't been an opportunity for a differentiated approach to IME 4 - 7 for us. Within our group, some of us have done full-time degree courses as training, some people have done certificate courses, some people who have done a one year conversion from reader ministry. We've come with a whole range of things.*

A number spoke about the need for more bespoke training, that resentment at giving up parish time to attend training would be decreased by knowing the training would be relevant to the situation they currently were, or would be, working within.

#### *Overlap with IME Phase 1*

Curates frequently commented on overlap with IME 1 provision, and frustration at having to attend compulsory days that repeated training they had already undertaken.

*Curate A: It seems to be one of the challenges that we've all come from very different training experiences and courses and colleges. And there seems to be an emphasis on making sure that we're all on the same level and that we've all done the same thing and therefore, we have to repeat a lot of the same stuff again. I kind of think, the point of IME is to continue your training, but to me it doesn't seem like it's continuing, it just feels like it's going over the same stuff.*

*Curate B: I agree with that. I think a lot of IME stuff you've already done in modules at college.*

Those who had attended courses were more likely to report appreciating the IME 2 training and were less likely to cite repetition as an issue. It seems that perhaps current IME 2 provision follows on more helpfully from the course pathway than either mixed-mode or residential training, although practical 'how to' training was appreciated by those from other pathways.

#### *Uncertainty over function*

It also appeared that there was a level of frustration in some cases at not understanding why certain things were being asked of them. Some were pragmatic, viewing it as time with peers, or a break from the busyness of the parish, but others were very negative. One group explained that the annual residential all Curates were expected to go on felt random in its content. The Diocesan Officer explained the rationale behind the pattern but the Curates did not seem aware of this and found the process challenging.

*It didn't feel like there was a cycle. It just felt like topics were being picked – 'We need to have a Curate weekend and we need to pick a topic'. It didn't feel like there was a clear flow through the three years and it didn't feel like there was a rotating programme. It seemed to be more dependent upon who was able to deliver those weekends.*

Diocesan Officers explained in detail the rationale behind training programmes and their constant adaptation to make sessions as helpful and relevant as possible. Some reported frequently explaining policies and rationale to clergy but felt that individuals did not always hear what they were saying, or at least did not absorb the information. Typically they were sympathetic, given the workload and pressure Curates were under, but none-the-less found the response challenging. One explained '*Curates are more polite in year one. They become more critical as the time rolls by.*'

#### *Logistical demands*

Another frequent difficulty was around the logistics of training events. In large Dioceses Curates reported having to travel considerable distances. They recognised the logistical constraints but felt there needed to be significant 'value added' if they were going to invest that time and energy away from a busy parish. Others were frustrated by training taking place on evenings and weekends. Some recognised that this was to accommodate working SSMs, but losing Saturdays with family, or attending training at the end of a long day were identified as problems. SSMs by contrast reported that they appreciated training being available to them, although they too were tired in evening training sessions after a full day's work.

Overall, Curates reported that what they wanted was good quality training which they could see the direct relevance of in terms of developing their ministry. Greater understanding of the rationale behind training programmes and a more bespoke model that avoided direct replication were identified as desirable. It would appear that although Diocesan Officers have put considerable thought into training events it does not always translate into Curates leaving with a sense of purpose and development.

#### 2.3.3 – Suggestions for Development

Curates and TIs had a number of constructive suggestions about IME 2 training:

- Several noted budgetary restrictions and felt more needed to be invested in IME 2 provision to raise the quality of training, increase staffing and therefore support.
- There were many requests for training to be practical, relevant, inspiring and creative in content and delivery. Ideally accommodating a variety of learning styles.
- It was felt that this might be most effectively delivered by local practitioners who were recognised as excellent in some field, but who had current experience rather than 'historic war stories'. Several experienced TIs articulated their willingness to help with this although Diocesan Officers also noted that there was a difference between experienced clergy and those who were effective trainers. Drawing on prior experience of Curates themselves to deliver training in specific areas was also suggested. For example, those from teaching backgrounds have a wealth to offer schools work training etc.
- One Curate had been encouraged by his TI to find external training to supplement IME 2 provision. He and others suggested that encouraging Curates to access other forms of appropriate training might be a helpful way of tailoring development to individual needs. This need not be academic qualification, but rather conferences, training provided by other traditions or parachurch organisations and charities. Some commented that courses their TIs were attending as part of CMD would have been of interest to them, particularly as they came towards the end of their curacy.
- Related to this, both TIs and Curates advocated a more bespoke or 'pick and mix' model to Diocesan provision. They recognised the need for core components but wondered whether allowing Curates to then undertake elective modules or select a specific number of training days

might be more empowering and motivating, allowing Curates to grow in their areas of need without replication of training.

- Finally, there were requests for more creative ways of assessing Curates' development. For it to be less paperwork focussed and more relationally oriented; taking into consideration their future ministry pathway and tailored around what requirements needed to fulfil that role.

## 2.4 The Significance of Relationships for Curate Development

Although there were mixed feelings among Curates about Diocesan IME 2 provision the majority were positive about their ministry and the learning they had undertaken as Curates. Many described their progress and growing competence. Indeed TIs, Church Wardens and Diocesan Officers all described great satisfaction and encouragement in watching Curates grow as priests. It was evident that relationships were at the core of that development and one of the greatest joys (as well as challenges). When asked for the most positive things about their curacy, groups overwhelmingly responded with comments about relationships, both within the church and wider parish.

*It's just the best job in the world. Meeting people and seeing them grow in faith. I love nurture groups and seeing people grow and take steps forward and coming to faith, it's just massively exciting. Preaching and seeing how people respond to that - just a massive privilege really, that God would allow you to speak for him. Walking alongside people in the toughest times of life and the most joyful times in life. There are just so many privileges in this job.*

Three areas of relationship were described as most significant for Curate development. They were:

1. Relationship with their TI
2. Relationship with their congregations
3. Relationships with their peers.

### 2.4.1 - Relationship with Training Incumbent

#### *Importance of TI/ Curate 'chemistry'*

The general consensus across all those interviewed was that a good relationship between a Curate and TI was vital to Curate development. TIs reported having declined taking on Curates with whom they felt they had poor 'chemistry' and many Curates had been advised that the relationship was vital; more so than the type of church they might be placed in. Only three of the 23 Curates described significant difficulties in their relationship with their TIs; two because their TI had left, or been away from the parish for extended periods and they had experienced little support or training. A number of the experienced TIs reported previous occasions of having stepped in to 'rescue' a curacy that was failing. In most cases that had been successful – but not always. In one Diocese TIs discussed their observations of the level of relationship breakdown.

*TI A: I've had it reflected back to me that although a very small number get to the point of complete breakdown of relationship and the person moves from where they have their training, the number where there are real significant pastoral difficulties is really quite high at any one time. I've had Curates come back from their support groups saying, no names but actually two thirds could be having some sort of difficulty in their curacy. Now, a wild variation of degree. The number that break down and it's a complete transfer of where the person is training, I think it's only one or two in the year in the Diocese.*

*TI B: I would say it's more than that.*

One of the Dioceses deliberately tried to pre-empt relational difficulties by providing a third party to meet regularly with each pair and in others Officers reported informal mechanisms to address issues. However it was also apparent that both TIs and Curates were sometimes reluctant to admit to relational difficulties and access support to resolve those issues. It appears that relational difficulties have to get quite bad before help is sought.

#### *TI enthusiasm and motivation*

The vast majority of 20 TIs interviewed were highly positive about their role, viewing it as a privilege. Many talked about the blessing of a colleague to partner with or were appreciative of fresh ideas and links to current theological thinking that Curates brought. Others considered that it was good for their own ministerial development to have Curates observing and critiquing their practice. They typically also believed that it was beneficial for the parish and a service to the wider church; investing in ministers of the future.

A number expressed concerns about the selection of clergy for the role of TI and speculated over that process. Their concerns were primarily for the wellbeing of Curates. Several had strong feelings about colleagues who they perceived had not released Curates appropriately yet were repeatedly given a training role.

*One of the things that worries me, in all honesty, is the diversity of experience of Curates with Training Incumbents. With our TI meetings it became very apparent that some of us were doing it one way and others were expecting to create clones of themselves. That bothered me a great deal.*

Some had experienced significant challenges in current and previous training relationships, few articulated a reluctance to be a TI again. Those with reservations explained it as the result of the volume of administration and time away from parish ministry which they felt they could ill afford. One considered that twenty percent of her time went into training a first year Curate while another reported colleagues whose reluctance to take on a training role was due to the volume of extra work they felt unable to manage. However, it was clear that for the majority they felt that the benefits outweighed the costs.

Some were honest enough to observe that Curates might tweak their insecurities, and others talked about the challenges of trying to communicate with different Curates and best help them to grow. A number were more candid than their Curates in expressing some of the relational challenges they had experienced. Curates were typically appreciative of the support their TI had provided, and now, at the end of their curacy most saw the relationship as a positive one which they had learnt much from.

Most TIs agreed that communication was the key to success, and an ability to respect and release Curates. In many cases they talked about the relationship being one of mutual support and encouragement and that having a Curate, while increasing their workload somewhat, had enabled them to diversify and develop ministry as well as take time away from the parish.

#### *Rhythm of relationship*

All four Dioceses had well developed structures to facilitate initial TI-Curate working contracts. These were usually facilitated by the Diocesan Officer. Some TIs had fiercely protected time to meet and review with their Curates – something those Curates reported as encouraging and helpful. Recognising the regular time sacrifice the TI was making for their development was a significant factor in making the Curate feel valued and positive about their growth. Some curates described their meetings with TIs as more erratic, they were typically accepting of that, recognising the busyness of the TI, but those who reported feeling most supported were those where a regular rhythm of input and discussion had been established.

Meeting daily for prayer and Bible study was described by many TIs as a key part in the building of that relationship. Fewer Curates commented on that specifically, but regularity of contact even on an informal level was seen as positive. Those who described the greatest struggle were those who rarely saw their TI. This might be for logistical reasons, such as living at opposite ends of a large benefice, or rarely worshipping

together since so many churches needed serving. One talked about feeling abandoned by her TI who had decided to move on in the early part of her curacy.

*My Training Incumbent, in the October after my priesting announced he was looking for jobs and I felt so betrayed. I think that stinks. I was absolutely abandoned. I don't think Training Incumbents should be given a Curate unless they are willing to commit to being there two and a half years minimum.*

Regular contact and sticking to training contracts appeared highly significant in building trust and communication between Curates and TIs.

Although Curates whose TI had been absent in the early stages of their training described feeling abandoned, a number reported that one of the most significant factors in developing confidence as ministers was being left in charge during their TI's sabbatical at a later stage in their curacy. Indeed, several TIs reflected that a competent Curate had enabled them to confidently leave the parish in 'safe hands'. For those who had experienced this in the latter stages of their curacy it was a strongly positive experience, with Church Wardens also noting this as a key point in their development. The step up in responsibility was identified as a good preparatory step for becoming an Incumbent. One Warden described his Curate's experience:

*He was dropped in it slightly, because the Vicar went on a three month sabbatical. So that was it, the Church Wardens were in charge with him doing all the work. He did it brilliantly. Nobody else would have known that he wasn't the Vicar really. We'd all had our meetings together as to how we were going to proceed when the Vicar was off. I think also because he'd already been with us two years, this is his third year, everybody already knew him. I don't think they would have allowed the Vicar to go off if he'd only been there three weeks. The Diocese had faith in him to carry it off. The congregation were fine. They quite enjoyed it actually!*

#### *Role models*

Curates frequently talked about their TIs as role models. Some commented that they would do certain things differently from their TI in the future, or that they had disagreed with decisions. However these were usually viewed as learning points and part of discovering their own leadership style. A regular comment from Curates was that while their time off had been guarded they had not always seen their TI model resting well themselves. Indeed, some TIs confessed that this was indeed the case. What was seen as positive across the board however, was Curates having the chance to watch a number of different leaders rather than solely observing their TI. Those in larger churches, or with multiple clergy commented that seeing how individuals ministered differently had been an encouragement in developing their own unique ministry. Placements or cross-church partnerships had also facilitated this for some. However it had happened, working with a variety of leaders and finding different individuals as examples of good practice was considered advantageous for Curates.

#### *Opportunity*

A key concern, particularly raised by Church Wardens, was the need for Curates to be given opportunity to have authority, and to make mistakes. Indeed, there was some tension around the desire from Curates to take initiative and a reluctance from their TIs to allow them to do so. A number described experiences where the TI had been strongly emphatic they *they* were the vicar and that a certain task was not suitable for a Curate. Others described frustration that although they were being trained as a leader they were not actually in a full leadership role yet. At the end of their curacy a significant number were clearly ready to pick up greater responsibility. However as well as this frustration some recognised the freedom their current role gave them as being a temporary advantage.

*I think what's helped me in this area is the freedom to go for it. A Training Incumbent who's not controlling and holding back, and is actually willing to release you to use your gifts in that area*

*(evangelism) and who is available to reflect back on that stuff. Actually I think, being in a role when you've got the time to focus on it is key as well. If I was leading a church I wouldn't have been free, as easily, to find the time for some of the things. I relish the time that I've got to be able to do that. When I'm an Incumbent there will be less opportunity to use the time in that kind of way.*

Many of the Curates described new initiatives they had been encouraged to undertake by their TIs and many of those TIs and Church Wardens talked very positively about those. There were concerns about sustainability and the continuity of such projects once they left. Some talked about stepping into the shoes of previous Curates and being unable to sustain their projects. One described a painful situation where he had felt forced to close down a ministry that revolved entirely around the previous Curate's relationships. Clearly there is need for carefully managing the tension between Curates who have vision and need opportunity to take responsibility and grow as leaders, and the sustainability of their initiatives for the wider wellbeing of the parish.

However, the overall sense was that opportunity to try, risk, and fail was central to healthy development and the most effective TIs were those willing to allow their Curates to experiment to some degree. One TI explained.

*It's not imposing ... even when you think something might not work. It's still allowing her to try because if it does work I'll be very pleased. It was an experience that came through from her training and she really enjoyed it. It was X town centre ministry, shop ministry, and she said, 'I really want to do that here'. I was thinking 'Nah' but actually once we had reflected on why it didn't work, the reflection was even better because she'd seen it work and then seen it not work. So that was recognising difference in context really.*

## 2.4.2 – Relationship with Congregations

### *General Comments*

The overwhelming response from Curates and Church Wardens about the relationships between congregations and their ministers in training was positive. Although some Church Wardens could identify previous Curates who had been difficult to work with, or had lacked confidence they believed it was good for their church to have one. Curates expressed deep commitment and concern for those they ministered to, and Church Wardens typically expressed appreciation and affection for their Curates. Many made comments such as:

*She is absolutely wonderful with people. I don't know what we're going to do when she goes. She is an ordinary person and you can approach her and talk to her. We've become friends. She's hilarious at times, but she has been so motivational.*

*He spends a lot of time walking around, talking to people, talking to the younger members of the church, both on Sundays and during the week. He cultivates a relationship with them all the time, which he couldn't do if he had the burden of running the church on his shoulders.*

*This one, he's been enthusiastic all the way. He's not a problem to work with. It's been a pleasure to watch him grow and blossom.*

### *Church Wardens as Coaches*

Many Church Wardens reported coaching nervous Curates through practical procedures for the first time or explaining practicalities of administrative tasks to them. In some cases they described feeling protective towards Curates; wanting to encourage them and help them to manage their workload.

*When we were planning the services through to Easter (because our new Priest in charge will have arrived by then) we were planning the preaching slots up till Easter to book people. We said in our*

*meeting with the Curate, 'You don't have to do all this stuff, we can do it'. 'You don't have to take all these preaching slots. Communion, yes, we'd rather you'd do communion because we can't do communion officially but you can. You concentrate on that and the rest we can sort out'. So that they didn't think they had to be there for Morning Prayer and the family service and everything else.*

Some saw themselves as a buffer with responsibility to protect the Curate from excessive criticism or to offer support and encouragement.

*They mustn't be jumped on. This is where Church Wardens are important because they are the link with the congregation. I find that when I go into church on Sunday I will have a queue of people (we all get it, don't we?), 'Why has this happened?', 'What's happened to so and so?' Sometimes you end up having to explain things. 'I don't think he (the Curate) really meant that'.*

Alternatively some were also willing to challenge or correct Curates when they felt it necessary and described Curates with strong personal agendas learning to moderate their views or behaviour. Others reflected that the emotional intelligence of Curates made a significant difference to their working relationships. However the general consensus was that having a Curate was a benefit for the church and that they felt that it was at least partly their responsibility to play a part in their informal development.

Several commented on individuals who they felt were temperamentally unsuited to being a minister. Although they recognised that confidence grew some Church Wardens speculated about those who came from college with what they perceived as a serious lack of people skills. For the most part though, the general tone was one of affection and support, with Church Wardens genuinely concerned to see Curates develop and thrive and Curates feeling well supported and cared for by their congregations. One explained.

*I think there are some times when I'm not there and my Incumbent gets it all in the neck. I get all the good bits and my Incumbent gets a lot of the rubbish!*

#### *Expectations and Information*

A recurring theme amongst Church Wardens was that some of the issues that had come up were because congregations, and in particular the wider parish, did not understand that a Curate was in training. Some of them saw this as potentially dangerous to Curate wellbeing.

*Often in churches there's so much work that can be done that you can end up trying to cover and plug all the gaps and fill all the holes. Sometimes having a Curate is great. That is another person that can preach, or that's another person that can organise our Children's Church or that is another person that can organise that away weekend. Although they can be used for those things where appropriate, if it is done just to fill gaps, to do jobs that someone else hasn't got round to doing then it becomes a tightrope as to whether they get through that placement or not, depending on how they cope with that.*

Several felt that congregations often didn't understand the complexity of a priest's role and misunderstood the need for training. Therefore they felt that it was vitally important that the role of a Curate was clearly communicated in order to prevent misunderstandings or unreasonable expectations.

*I think it is really important that the wider church congregation have an understanding of what that Curate's role is, because if they are just seen as another dog collar, they could quite easily be misunderstood in terms of what they are doing. Large parts of the role are going on training, for example, or shadowing or doing things for the first time, or doing less of each thing because they are having to put a lot more effort and preparation than someone who is much more experienced. If that is made clear, I think curacy in general is a really positive thing for churches and it has been in this case for us.*



This was easier in churches which regularly had Curates and essentially functioned as ‘training congregations’. In those cases the congregation saw repeated numbers of Curates come and go which made expectations more realistic.

Overall Church Wardens felt a greater need for communication with congregations about the role of a Curate. They also requested more information for lay leaders about curacy training and some suggested that there might be scope for suitably trained Readers or Church Wardens to make a contribution to that. In some cases they reported that they saw more of the Curate’s leadership in worship than the TI did and might be better placed to give constructive feedback.

#### *Boundaries and friendship*

Curates themselves spoke about the challenges of forming healthy boundaries with parishioners. Different individuals had resolved this in different ways but particular challenges were faced by SSMs and OLMs as their role within congregations where they already had established relationships changed. One TI described that he had been told not to become friends with parishioners. Curates had different views. One distinguished between being friendly and being friends, a second explained how they had deliberately kept the congregation at a very professional arm’s length distance while another talked about his accountable relationships and deep friendships within the congregation. Particular issues were articulated by unmarried Curates. The need for friendships and supportive networks for those without a spouse were an ongoing challenge.

#### *Ending curacy*

One final theme mentioned was the process of transition. Some of the frustrations of not having long term or strategic oversight have already been mentioned, but some Church Wardens recognised that coming to the end of a curacy was hard for both the Curate and congregation. One commented.

*As it gets more towards the end of his time, more and more conversations have the sentence ‘...when X moves on’. I think that has the potential to be quite dismissive. He doesn’t have to move on for quite some time, so I think that will get more and more so in that period where the attitude is ‘Well, he can go any minute, find a job and move on’, but actually he might be around for another six, seven, eight, nine months, so how do you work that practically? When you come to decision making, how much weight is he allowed to give and put on things while he is still here? It’s a tricky transition period for him and for us as a congregation.*

Some Curates described the slightly odd experience of taking up a role while the previous Curate was still in post. None of them described it as particularly difficult but the overlap in timings was described as logistically complicated.

Clearly there are issues for both congregations and Curates around transition – both at the start and end of curacies. These can be handled well, but sometimes are not and need thought and attention to make changes positive.

#### *2.4.3 – Relationships with Peers*

As previously mentioned, peer relationships were extremely significant to Curate development. Ongoing relationships with those from IME 1 pathways were described by some as vital to their wellbeing. Many reported meeting with peers as the most beneficial part of IME 2 training and that small discussion groups were highly valued when well led. Some had formed informal prayer groups but overall, learning collaboratively in discussion with others in the same position was clearly highly significant.

Similarly, TIs and Diocesan Officers reported the value of peer group communication and support. Mutual learning, theological reflection, prayer and emotional support are clearly a significant factor in clergy wellbeing. A number of Curates expressed anxiety that the role of priest was a lonely one, and one of the greatest advantages of becoming a TI appeared to be having a colleague. There is therefore a need for the

recognition of peer relationships as central not only to Curate development but the ongoing CMD of all clergy.

## 2.5 [Part-Time Curates and IME Phase 2](#)

One of the most frequently raised sets of concerns was around the training and experiences of part-time curates. Participants often used the terms 'SSM' and 'part-time' interchangeably. However, the concerns they raised were more to do with Curates being part-time than self-supporting. Commonly raised issues related to:

1. The dynamics, both positive and negative, that part-time and SSM curacies can create
2. Capacity and timescales for part-time training of Curates
3. The logistics of IME 2 training for part-time Curates.

### 2.5.1 - The Dynamics of Training Part-Time and Self-Supporting Curates

Clearly every Curate is different, as is each parish situation, however significant numbers of TIs made comments or raised concerns around the dynamics of having a part-time Curate. One described it as 'massively different' from training a full-time Curate and several who had both full and part-time Curates simultaneously noted a clear difference in process.

The advantages of self-supporting Curates were described as their bringing life experience to the role, having a long term perspective on the congregation and knowledge of the local community. Their intention to 'stick around' clearly addressed some of the issues around initiating and sustaining ministries. Indeed commitment, enthusiasm and integration into the locality were regularly raised as positive dynamics. However, it was also noted that if the curacy was difficult, or relationship with the TI strained then the fact of their remaining within the parish was complicated. Likewise age could make a difference. One TI described an experience where she had inherited two retired self-supporting Curates on taking up an incumbency. As a younger priest, who was not local, she had found the established, older Curates to be strongly resistant to being trained and this had created extremely difficult dynamics. Another TI explained his exasperation that a retired self-supporting Curate under his direction simply refused to take days off or slow down in any way. In this case the Curate's enthusiasm and availability was proving something of a problem.

By contrast to this 'over-availability' a frequent concern was the under-availability of part-time, self-supporting Curates still in other employment. Some TIs reported resentment from these Curates who felt excluded from meetings, events or decision making processes because they were simply unavailable. Some were clearly comparing themselves with full-time Curates and were struggling with the fact that they were not getting comparable experience of ministry. One TI described tension he had experienced.

*I started with a [full-time] stipendiary and [part-time] non-stipendiary at the same time. The non-stipendiary was known to the parish, but actually felt put out by the stipendiary because they weren't in on everything. It was difficult. It just looked like this should be straightforward but for various reasons it wasn't. The relationship between them wasn't easy either because I think the non-stipendiary thought they were being supplanted.*

Another TI in a large church explained:

*X is ordained as a locally deployed self-supporting person who is only working two days a week plus Sunday. When he comes onto my team he doesn't come on as the Vicar's right-hand man. He is in the senior team of several people, but he is well down the pecking order.*

He described his self-supporting part-time Curate as a 'windfall' – a bonus to the ministry of the parish - but not someone that could be utilized in the same way as a full-time Curate might be. Another TI described:

*I've got an OLM in her third year of training now who works full-time teaching in primary school. She has just hung on by her finger nails to get through the training. Very little of it has been enjoyable. The contact that I've had with her during this three years has been really minimal. She has tried to come to one thing during the week; that's what we agreed and that it would be Sundays and one thing during the week. But she goes home every night after school and studies, every night. Sometimes we've said, 'That's what you need to do during the week, forget about Tuesday night'. Most weeks I see her for an hour to reflect on things, plan, talk about a piece of work and just listen to her experience of the course. She has literally hung on by her finger nails.*

Some of the self-supporting participants reported a sense of isolation from their peers. One went so far as to take the researcher aside and quietly explain:

*I just wanted to say there's a difference between being stipendiary and SSM. When I came to the end of the training I just realised how differently we are viewed by the Church of England and that was quite confidence knocking. SSMs are viewed as second class. We did have an SSM conference this year and other people felt that very much – it's the amateurs versus the professionals. And that's hard – I found it hard anyway.*

### 2.5.2 Capacity and Timescales for Training Self-Supporting, Part-Time Curates

Related to the simple fact of availability for ministry, across all the Dioceses, Officers and TIs raised concerns about the need to sign part-time Deacons off at the end of one year. TIs explained that often Curates simply had not had enough experience to be legitimately priested. Some described considerable anxiety about doing so because they felt a pressure of expectation which conflicted with how ready they felt their Curate was. In some cases that pressure came from the Curates themselves who anticipated being priested at the end of one year regardless of how much ministry they had undertaken, and were distressed at having to wait any longer. In others there appeared to be little recognition from the Diocese that the process of training part-time and full-time Curates was so different and might legitimately take longer. One group discussed it for some time.

*TI A: The expectation of an OLM/NSM part-time to finish the first year and to be priested doesn't make sense. For those who have got the time to do it, it makes sense. My SSM was basically full-time and in three years she will have finished, but I know there are others that there is no way they can complete what is needed and required, and also be good for them, in a set period of 12 months - or eight months effectively. It doesn't make sense. We say they've got a five year training period, but still expect them to meet that first year block.*

*TI B: There needs to be more flexibility to make the process a. fair and b. help the person to develop rather than forcing them through something.*

*TI C: Some OLMs are more or less full-time, so it's a Sunday and not even a day a week, a couple of evenings a week. How can you possibly fulfil the criteria? It's just impossible! I think that needs building in so that it's actually abnormal to be priested after a year, rather than the norm. That could be the exception. If it's sold as that...*

*TI B: Or the flexibility to say 'This is the minimum criteria' and if you've not covered that yet...*

*TI A: And let's assume at the beginning that it's going to take two years.*

*TI B: If it takes less than that, lovely. Then we would start ministering to an individual. We have almost lost the development of the person for long-term ministry. It is about their walk of service and faith as well. At the moment it's one size fits all, but now the ministry is so diverse that one size fits all is no longer appropriate.*

### 2.5.3 Diocesan Provision for Part-Time IME Phase 2 Training

One final theme which recurred in the data was around the challenge of completing IME 2 assessment and Diocesan training for self-supporting Curates. Officers had clearly tried to accommodate them as far as possible with considerable amounts of training programmes being scheduled at weekends and in evenings. This (as previously mentioned) was a frustration to stipendiary Curates.

Officers and Curates themselves reported a mixture of attitudes towards that IME 2 provision. Some of the Curates were very positive, enjoyed the input and the chance to learn from stipendiary peers. They tended to have a more positive attitude towards the quality of the training. Similarly, some Dioceses had intentionally placed Curates in peer study groups based on their pathway which were also reported to be helpful.

However, there were still workload issues. As with IME 1 pathways, part-time Curates reported that accomplishing assessment criteria, writing essays or producing a portfolio were hugely demanding on top of a job, family life and ministry. One Officer explained that since 85% of a Curate's time was to be spent in the parish and 15% on IME 2 related study and assessment it was almost impossible for part-time Curates to complete the necessary workload. Not only had they not gained enough experience but nor was there time to properly reflect on or assess that with their TI. They observed that some self-supporting, part-time Curates seemed to particularly resent ongoing training.

*I think they think, 'I've done three years study, I should now be free to do the ministry I want to do. Why should I have to do more training, more assessments?'*

Another Officer commented:

*I definitely think there's an attitude amongst some self-supporting [part-time] people who think that actually, because it's very difficult to fit Phase 2 training in that it's a bit of an option. But it's not. I wonder if we should be wising up to this and saying, 'Look you've got to do this IME Phase 2, we'll help you by making it longer or doing whatever is necessary'? But there's a much higher sense of kind of resentment about how they're going to make the time to go on training.*

Those who had taken an initial self-supporting route and were subsequently part-time Curates training for incumbency were identified as being particularly vulnerable. One Diocesan Officer commented:

*They are really having difficulty and I've urged the DDOs not to let them do that, because to train to be an incumbent is a full-time job and you can't do it in three years unless you are full-time. If you are doing a full-time job outside and trying to train to be an Incumbent, it's just impossible. Every year we've had one or two of these and almost all the time they want to get into a paid, stipended curacy, but there aren't any so they have to struggle on. It's a killer. We say to them, you are part-time, of course you can have four years! We'll extend curacy for another year, give you another two years if you need it. Take your time, don't rush. But actually what they really want to do is their Incumbency. So they want to get their curacy in three years, but if they are only offering ten hours a week, eight hours a week, how can they do it in the parish? They are just not getting the exposure. So, never mind all the courses and assessment, that's even harder!*

One Officer stated frankly. *'I'm not sure that the IME Phase 2 we've got actually fits self-supporting [part-time] people.'* In an ideal world they suggested that there was need for a separate IME 2 pathway to best

develop and support part-time and Assistant Curates. However, this was beyond budgetary constraints. One Curate summarised:

*As the Church, we need to address the way in which we approach stipendiary [full-time] and non-stipendiary [part-time] a little bit more intelligently. Recognising that we can't be all the same in the way that we approach it because there isn't the time to do that. What we tend to do is put the same expectations on a non-stipendiary [part-time] that we do on stipendiary [full-time]. We get all this good practice around avoiding burn-out and how many hours you should give to this, that and the other. If you are stipendiary [full-time] you can manage all that, and you can manage the day. If you're non-stipendiary [part-time], it's a joke. You spend all the time preparing for the service on top of doing your day job. To go around pretending that it's the same is ludicrous actually. As a Church we need to say, 'it's a different kind of ministry'.*

An experienced TI explained that he had developed a different system for supporting his two Curates based on their future ministry. His retired SSM would never become a ministry team leader in the same way his full-time stipendiary Curate would and so he encouraged their development differently. Assessment was more of a challenge, since both needed to provide evidence of certain skills, but he, like a significant number of others, was vocal in the need for differentiated training and assessment.

## 2.6 Some Conclusions on IME Phase 2 Provision

The evidence from these four Dioceses suggests that IME 2 provision is being provided by diligent, pastorally motivated clergy who frequently feel under resourced. The structure and quality of training provided is reported as variable and diverse assessment procedures can be laborious. Training Incumbents are crucial to the current model of training and thus the selection, matching and support of the TI-Curate relationship is vitally important. There are particular issues around training for part-time and assistant focussed Curates and a need for differentiation more widely within IME 2 provision. It is clear that while much good work has been done in the ongoing development of IME Phase 2 there is still a way to go to make curacy training a universally positive process and there is considerable need to integrate the two IME phases.

Key factors voiced by participants for consideration within Dioceses and IME providers are:

- Communication at every level and the building of supportive relationships across the IME sector.
- Integration of both IME phases and CMD in order to provide ongoing, high quality, comprehensive training for clergy.
- Differentiation within that training to best facilitate the development of each minister based on their experience, skills and potential future ministry.

## Section 3: Provision for the Training of Training Incumbents

A third area of focus of this research was the provision of training for TIs. Data from Diocesan Officers and 20 Training Incumbents across four Dioceses illustrate some of the diversity in current training models as well as some common patterns.

This section presents:

1. A brief overview of the training models of four Dioceses as case studies
2. How Training Incumbents report experiencing their training

### 3. Suggestions for further development.

#### 3.1 [Some Existing Models of TI Training](#)

Across the four case studies there was considerable structural variation. Training might be organised at regional, Diocesan or Archdeaconry levels. In some Dioceses IME Phase 2 officers were also responsible for ongoing ministerial development and the training of TIs. In others the roles were separated or delegated. Some were working in teams or networks while others were working almost entirely alone.

What all four cases had in common was that their TI training had seen development in recent years and that TIs reported that things had or were improving. In addition they all contained two central components: training on managing the curate assessment procedure and supervision skills. Beyond that the models were diverse. As one Diocesan Officer commented, *'There isn't any cohesion across the whole Church of England about any of this at all. It's very disparate.'*

##### Case Study: Diocese 1

48 hour supervision skills course (in conjunction with other local Dioceses) for first time TIs or those who have not had a Curate for four years. Or a 24 hour supervision skills 'refresher' for clergy who have attended the extended course within the past four years.

A subsequent one day session for all TIs on logistical practicalities of assessment.

##### *Plus:*

Twice yearly, optional, half-day conferences for TIs. One addressing key issues, the other a discussion with their Bishop in Archdeaconry groups.

On-going quarterly meetings with a third party to accompany the TI/Curate relationship.

##### Case Study: Diocese 2

An initial training day prior to receiving a Curate.

Followed by a 24 hour residential shortly after they arrive.

##### *Plus:*

Bi-monthly group meetings between all TIs and the IME Officer in the diaconal year, decreasing to twice a year in the second and third years.

#### Case Study: Diocese 3

An induction day for all TIs new to the role or the Diocese.

Two single training days spaced apart, undertaken prior to/ in the early stages of each curacy for all TIs.

*Plus:*

A subsequent additional training day done on a regional basis. Compulsory for first time TIs but optional for existing ones.

Subsequently TI peer groups of 3-4 clergy are set up.

#### Case Study: Diocese 4

36 hour winter conference for all involved in various forms of supervision including TIs (who ideally attend prior to receiving a Curate the coming year).

Followed by a Spring 72 hour conference for all TIs.

Clearly these models demonstrate a mixture of front loaded and ongoing training. Some distinguish between new and experienced trainers or facilitate ongoing conversation partners to a greater degree than others. All the Diocesan Officers interviewed recognised the importance of TI training and were committed to continual development of the processes but expressed the challenge of doing so within the limits of time and resource available to them. One expressly articulated a desire to improve TI training but explained that an already unsustainable workload simply made it impossible. It was also commented that with the target of increasing new clergy numbers by 50% a year it was unclear how finding and training the requisite number of TIs would be feasible.

### 3.2 Training Incumbent Experiences of Training

As previously described, the vast majority of the participating TIs were enthusiastic about their role and despite the demands and challenges stated that they would be willing to train another Curate. In terms of the training provided by their Dioceses views were mixed. Individuals in one Diocese were enthusiastic explaining that their training had been really helpful and was improving in line with feedback. Another group described theirs as providing 'intelligent support' while a third group were more cautious with mixed views on sessions and some criticism of the quality of delivery. The fourth group had not yet experienced their Diocese's newly implemented model but were strongly critical of the one it had superseded. Overall the general trend was that TI training had previously been non-existent or weak but was gradually improving although there was still scope for development.

Four central themes recurred in their discussion:

1. The significance of peer learning
2. The dominance of assessment criteria management
3. The need for differentiated training
  - a. For ongoing ministerial development and
  - b. In managing differing types of curate.

### 3.2.1 - Peer Learning

The most consistently positive comment was that Training Incumbent training allowed peer learning and support. TIs primarily appreciated the opportunity to discuss, process and share best practice with one another. However there were mixed views about how far individuals felt able to share the difficulties they faced in corporate settings. One described a session that had been dominated by a colleague who was struggling. Another commented:

*You always need to have places that you can talk to colleagues and talk on a peer level about your experience. Again, because of the system it's difficult to be raising those sorts of issues in a group meeting because you don't want to be seen to be having problems.*

The sense that they might be seen as failing or not given another Curate discouraged honest discussion in a public setting for some. Those in Dioceses which facilitated peer support groups or provided access to more experienced TIs (allowing more private discussion) were strongly positive about the benefit they had derived from those relationships. Those without such relationships expressed a desire to have them.

*That's a great idea that you might be partnered with someone elsewhere, maybe close-ish, who is a more experienced Training Incumbent than you are!*

*I would really have appreciated, as a first time Training Incumbent, a sort-of buddy who had more experience of being a Training Incumbent. If somebody had said, 'Just go and meet X two or three times and talk about the ups and downs, her experiences, her wisdom', I would really have appreciated that.*

TIs were also typically positive about the third party involvement model. Some had also been that third party for others and had found it a good experience. Although this was not a specific coaching role for the TI, that outside support seemed to facilitate increased self-reflection among those who wanted to grow as trainers.

### 3.2.2 - Managing Assessment Criteria

In terms of common criticisms, TIs frequently expressed the view that significant portions of their training were devoted to 'managing the system' of assessment criteria rather than improving as trainers. Many considered that the curate assessment criteria were laborious and unclear, and that subsequently their training was a pragmatic response to coping with that.

*Training feels as though it's more driven by the assessment and all the stuff we initially needed to do to make sure we got it 'right'.*

Although most recognised the need for consistency in IME 2 training and saw the benefits in the criteria in principle, there was an overall sense that their training appeared aimed at assisting them to help their Curate 'tick all the boxes' rather than exploration of how meaningful formation and genuine learning takes place. For example:

*I would say that in this Diocese there is a fairly good level of intelligent support to try to support to help us interpret (the assessment criteria) and help us navigate the waters as best we could.*

*I would agree. The guidance that I've given is that it's no good moaning about it. It has got to be done, get on with doing it and we will do what we have to do to tick those boxes.*

In some cases that was changing.

*I went on a couple of days training on it which was more about 'Here's the grid and here are the criteria that you are training towards'. The last one I went on, which was much, much better, was*



*about the 'how to', rather than the 'what'. It was about how to have proper meaningful supervisions. That, I think, is much more helpful.*

*Yes, certainly in the first year it was all about the assessment criteria. In the second year it got better because we were less focussed on that portfolio and more focussed on training a Curate to become a future minister on their own, in different circumstances.*

Although they recognised the need for managing the assessment TIs were more enthusiastic about training that focussed on achieving meaningful learning in the curate.

### 3.2.3 - Non-Differentiation of Training

Another recurring critique was that TI training was 'one size fits all' both in the development of TIs as trainers but also in recognising the diversity of challenges faced in supervising different types of Curate.

#### *Personal development of individual trainers*

Although Dioceses tend to differentiate between experience levels for those who have been in the Diocese for some time, several reported having to undertake training aimed at new TIs when moving Diocese.

*I think to be honest it felt like a hoop jumping exercise because I've had three Curates and I was delivering training with the training team in another Diocese before I was here in this post.*

Others were frustrated at having to repeat training with subsequent curates.

*There were people there who were doing the training for the second or third time and not really getting anything new out of it. They had had multiple Curates or had done the training the previous year and who were still expected to do the training this year, despite the fact that it was basically the same.*

*There were some factual bits that we needed to know and that was fair enough. I think it's more when it gets into listening skills for the umpteenth time that I think, 'I could lead this workshop myself'. It feels a bit like, 'We've got somebody for X days, what do we do with them?'*

Others were pragmatic about the repetition.

*I think the Supervision Skills course is pretty good. I've been on it loads of times because every time you get a new Curate you do it again and again and again. So, I just turn up. It's a bit frustrating but there's always something new on it. Once you're there it's fine, you meet people. There's always something new to learn.*

One TI reported that in a smaller Diocese his training had been more individually tailored and a number of experienced TIs reported requesting to be excused from repeating training (a request usually dealt with sympathetically). Another individual reported an occasion where the Diocesan training team were faced with a group of highly experienced TIs who threatened to revolt if expected to do the basics again. They had modified their programme on the spot and facilitated a genuinely helpful peer learning session.

However others were more critical:

*The irony of the Supervision Skills session was that they said, "You have to account for your Curate's learning style, you have to communicate in the right sort of way, you have to find out what their experience is". For us, it was three days sat in the same room, with no pictures, somebody talking at you and all these things they were saying, they were completely not modelling. There was no real understanding of where people had come from. You might have had somebody in there who had been a high level manager of 2,000 for example, and none of that was taken into account.*

Indeed, some of those who were very experienced or had considerable prior skills as managers, teachers or trainers felt that those were not recognised and were under-utilised by the Diocese.

Others expressed a desire for TI training to be a more intentional part of continuing ministerial development with greater support or reflection on their personal growth as a trainer.

*I've just had my review, which went well, but I wasn't asked in my review, 'How is the training of your Curate going?' It would be an easy question to put into the review of Training Incumbents.*

*I've not found a vast amount of support from the Diocese. I know I've been on various courses but nobody, that I can recall, has actually phoned and said 'How's it going?' I don't want the Diocese phoning all the time, but I can't recall in three and a half years anybody actually saying to me, 'How am I in this? Is it working well for you?'*

It appeared that TIs' personal development in that role was not on most Diocesan agendas or within the capacity of training officers to focus on. Although some of these skills were included in initial TI training most Dioceses were not intentionally following up on that progression.

One TI commented:

*I think that's the difference between reactive approaches and pro-active approaches. This Diocese is quite good at reactive. If it goes wrong and you need help, yes, you know who you can call and in my experience you would get a good response. But as Training Incumbents we are being asked to be very pro-active in our supervision. That then is not reflected in our training. What if you had processes and a sense of training that was pro-actively nurturing you, having conversations along the way? We are talking about an experienced Training Incumbent who rings you up and says, 'How's it going? How are you learning? How are you changing as a Training Incumbent? How are your skills and gifts being honed?' That part of it doesn't seem to be happening.*

#### *Need for circumstance targeted training*

A second area in which non-differentiated training was a frustration centred on the variation in types of Curates or circumstances they were learning within. Across all four Dioceses it was commented upon that TI training did not take into account the differences between supervising full-time and part-time, assistant or team leader focussed Curates. Several had experienced considerable difficulty in their role as a trainer of self-supporting, part-time Curates. As previously detailed this was most commonly due to expectations from the Curate around what it was feasible for them to achieve given the limited time and capacity they actually had. This was particularly acute in terms of them completing their diaconal period. Only one individual among the 20 said that she had attended SSM [part-time] specific training. Another described:

*We know somebody who had a really difficult time with an SSM [part-time] Curate. She didn't have enough time with her in order to meet any of the criteria which were expected at the end of the first year. She didn't really have anywhere to go with that either. I think she would really have appreciated specialised supervision within the process.*

Similarly, size of church or number of parishes within a benefice meant that the experience of being a Curate, and subsequently TI, were varied. One incumbent from a larger church with a number of Curates including part-time SSMs commented:

*A lot of the training days are predicated on the assumption that your team is just a Curate and the Vicar and maybe a part-time administrator. Therefore, the relationship that you have is going to be very close and that's just not true for us. That sometimes reflects the background and experience of the trainers. Just for us, it's not a good fit.*

With other church structures there were different complications. As mentioned previously several Church Wardens commented that they saw more of Curates leading worship or preaching and were probably better placed to comment on those skills than the TI was. Some Curates confirmed this, one had rarely seen his TI due to the number of churches in the benefice and their geographical separation. Clearly a TI in that environment may need specialised training in managing a Curate whose actual ministry they see relatively little of.

### 3.3 Possibilities for Future Development of TI Training

It is clear that in these Dioceses TI training is developing in a positive direction and there are examples of good practice. One in particular is reflecting on how to create new models of training for the future. In terms of the ongoing development of wider TI training participants made the following suggestions.

#### 3.3.1 - Within Training Sessions

- Intentionally modelling creative methods of teaching and learning within the training delivery.
- Clear, practical guidance on how to integrate genuine learning with the assessment criteria systems, and how to encourage curates to engage positively with that process. Including exploring how that has been successfully undertaken by existing TIs.
- Progression in skills training for those who have previously undertaken the basics including a recognition of experience and skills from previous careers and Dioceses.
- Ensuring focussed time for peer discussion and greater use of the skills and experience of TIs in delivering training. Peer learning from those actively functioning as TIs appears particularly useful and exploring ways to incorporate the input of those with appropriate abilities might add value to the training.
- Specialist options within TI training that recognise and provide advice on the variety of Curate circumstances e.g. part-time SSMs, multi-church/parish settings, chaplains, large churches etc.

#### 3.3.2 Wider Structural and Support Systems

- TIs described receiving Ordinand placements as helpful in developing supervision skills. Potential Incumbents might therefore be put forward as a supervisor of short term placements prior to making the lengthy commitment to supervise a Curate.
- Regular proactive Diocesan contact and support, especially for first time TIs or those with challenging situations.
- The establishment of intentional peer support either on an individual mentoring/ buddying level, or local peer groups of TIs.
- Personalised training and review plans for TIs as part of their CMD. This might take into consideration their development as trainers and provide a regular coach or conversation partner for them in this role.

However it should be noted that Training Incumbents already carry an extra workload burden. They felt that ongoing development should not create further unnecessary demands but rather work alongside, supporting and equipping them as ministers and trainers. Clearly all of these suggestions are contingent upon resources. Time, skills and personnel at Diocesan level are necessary to develop both strategy for TI

training and individual clergy as good trainers. They currently appear to be stretched to, and in some cases beyond capacity. Given that the overwhelming findings of this research are that within the current system of ministerial training the Curate/ Training Incumbent relationship is crucial, that those TIs are well trained, equipped and supported is vital to the future of ministerial development and thus the Church as a whole.

## Overall Conclusions on Curacy and IME Phase 2 Training Provision

Clearly there is a significant amount of nuance and detail in this study. The experiences of Curates, TIs and Diocesan Officers are hugely varied. However there are some overall themes that emerge from their voices with regards to how IME 1 pathways prepare Curates and how IME 2 provision and TI training are experienced. At the centre of effective ministerial training is a clear requirement for positive relationship. Both lay and ordained leaders identified it as vital to clergy development. Not only were good supervision and mentoring important, but peer support and learning were described as significant for clergy at every stage of their career. Clear communication, reasonable expectation and proactivity in maintaining healthy, respectful relationships at all levels was described as vital to the well-being and ongoing development of individual ministers.

It is clear that the three IME Phase 1 pathways all have strengths and challenges in terms of theological, pastoral and vocational development of Curates. There are advantages to each but also areas where those who have undertaken them typically need further training and support. Particular concerns were raised around the current model of training for part-time clergy and the need for greater realism about the demands that places on individuals in both phases of IME. However it is also clear that within each of the three pathways there is variation from institution to institution. This variation within IME 1 means that individuals come to their curacy with a wide range of previous experience, learning and ongoing training needs. However mechanisms for communicating these are not always effective and thus there appears to be limited integration of effective training for individual clergy.

Similar to the variation in IME 1, Dioceses all have their own model for IME 2 provision including differing budgets and resource allocation. Many of the programmes are being developed and improved but continually changing expectations and policies make this a challenging task. Likewise, content of training and assessment vary considerably as can the actual length of curacy. This means that Curates across the Church of England have widely differing experiences. It would appear that despite the best efforts of Diocesan Officers, working with limited resources and a wide range of Curates, the quality of IME 2 training can be mixed and is stronger in some Dioceses than others. Likewise TI training is varied and, although improving overall, can be mixed in quality with little emphasis on the ongoing development of individual ministers as trainers within their CMD.

In summary, although there is much that is positive in current IME provision the greatest challenges appear to be:

- The need for better communication between those involved in training and assessment at all levels.
- The need for greater integration of training provision across Dioceses and institutions, including a stronger understanding of ministerial training as an ongoing, holistic process throughout, and beyond, IME.
- Within that a need for greater differentiation at an individual level, to create meaningful training and avoid the common frustrations around 'one size fits all' provision in an extremely diverse sector.