



## Committee for Ministry of and among Deaf and Disabled People

### **The Selection and Training of Deaf\* Candidates for Ordination**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1. God's people who are called to ordained ministry come from a diversity of backgrounds, bringing richness to the Body of Christ. Selection for ministry seeks to take account of differing ages, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, worshipping experience and life skills.
- 1.2. The 2012 Annual Report of the Archbishops' Council states:  
*The ordained and lay ministers of the Church of England are key to winning and sustaining disciples for Christ. It is important for the flourishing of the Church and its people that its ministers are well trained and supported, diverse and reflect the society in which they minister.* (para 30)
- 1.3. The Church of England has been ministering among Deaf people for well over 100 years and recognises they may have vocations to lay and ordained ministries that will need to be encouraged and tested. This document is designed to provide guidelines to help all those involved in the discernment process.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1. Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users constitute a distinct cultural-linguistic group within Britain. BSL is the language of everyday communication in Deaf families and social clubs, but it is also the language of poetry and worship, able to express the complexity of ideas and beliefs and the subtlety of emotions and feelings.
- 2.2. In more recent times, Deaf people have been taking more of an active role in the structures of the Church of England, through representation on General Synod Deaf people have been exploring liturgy and worship in BSL that is authentic to their community. The ordination and subsequent ministry of several Deaf priests has been instrumental in this development and has also provided role models to encourage other Deaf people to consider their calling.

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\* This document employs the convention of using an upper case D when referring to Deaf people. This indicates reference to Deaf, BSL users. For the purposes of this policy, Deaf people are defined as those whose identify themselves as members of the Deaf community and who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first, or preferred language.

2.3. The Church of England needs to respond well to Deaf people who wish to test their vocation at every step and this is outlined below.

### **3. The selection process**

#### **3.1. Initial discernment**

3.1.1. One of the priorities of the Committee for Ministry of and among Deaf and Disabled People is that there should be provision in each diocese for Deaf people who use BSL. However, at present, several dioceses have no such provision. In dioceses where there is a Chaplain with Deaf people, his or her language skills may be variable and so there may not be someone who can readily talk with a Deaf person about a call to ministry. Vocations in dioceses where there is no active provision may be rare since there is no one to foster and encourage such vocations. Nevertheless, they may arise, just as in parishes, people may rise to leadership and discover a vocation during a vacancy.

3.1.2. In order that such vocations should not be overlooked, even where there is an active provision, the National Adviser for Deaf Ministry should be consulted as early as possible in the process to ensure that there is someone who is able to meet with the Deaf person and discuss their calling in BSL as well as guide them through the process.

3.1.3. Interviews in the diocese should take into account the candidate's preferred communication needs and suitably trained, registered BSL/English Interpreters should be used if needed. Before any interviews take place, the interviewers should be aware of the role of the interpreter and how using an interpreter impacts on the dynamics of the interview (appendix I how to use a BSL/English interpreter)

3.1.4. The use of an interpreter or interpreters is deemed a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010 and should be funded by the candidate's diocese.

#### **3.2. Bishops' Advisory Panel**

*3.2.1. Particular care is needed in assessing candidates from a minority ethnic background to ensure that ethnic and cultural aspects are taken into proper consideration. Bishops' Advisers should be aware of the danger of having expectations of candidates which are inappropriate to their ethnic or cultural background.  
Particular care is also required in assessing candidates with disabilities to ensure that their situation is taken into account in a realistic way. (Criteria for Selection for the Ordained Ministry in the Church of England p. iv)*

3.2.2. If the candidate is considered suitable to attend a Bishops' Advisory Panel, care needs to be taken that he or she is not disadvantaged either by reason that their deafness may be viewed as a disability or by reason of their cultural difference. In some cases, it may be preferable for candidates to be selected through the Candidates Panel process where they would have three one-off interviews with members

of the Candidates Panel instead of attending a residential panel. This possibility should be discussed with the candidate.

3.2.3. The Ministry Division may also request that the candidate is interviewed by one of the Chaplains who is experienced and skilled and may be Deaf themselves. The reason for this is because several activities used in a residential BAP may disadvantage a Deaf candidate. For example, taking part in the group discussion is always difficult when an interpreter is used since the interpreter may be a few seconds behind the discussion, making it hard for a Deaf person to contribute. The written personal inventory and pastoral exercise may prove difficult for some Deaf candidates whose first language is BSL and not English. These tasks should still be carried out, but the candidate may need more time, support from someone to check their written English or may prefer to do these tasks in BSL, which could then be translated into written English.

3.2.4. Whether the candidate attends a residential BAP, or sees advisers individually, suitably trained, registered BSL/English interpreters should be used and all involved should understand how to use an interpreter and how that impacts on the dynamics of the interview process.

3.2.5. Interpreters for the BAP or the Candidates Panel will be funded by the Ministry Division

#### **4. Training for Ordination**

4.1. Whether the candidate is trained on a full-time or part-time course, the theological training institution (TEI) needs to take account of the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate against disabled people. This is also a stated requirement of Durham University, the validating partner of the TEIs.

4.2. The TEI needs to make a full assessment, in consultation with the Deaf candidate, of his or her needs for support, to enable them to access the training. This may include the use of BSL/English interpreters, notetakers, specialist equipment and adaptations to living accommodation. Other reasonable adjustments may be made such as extensions to assignment deadlines in order that written English may be checked.

4.3. It is expected that the Deaf candidate will make application for any available funding such as the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and further discussions should take place between the TEI and the Ministry Division regarding the funding of educational support.

4.4. The TEI, in consultation with the National Adviser for Deaf Ministry will ensure that staff will receive Deaf awareness training in order to mitigate disadvantage to the Deaf candidate.