Guidance on appointing clergy to offices without a stipend

Summary

Most clergy do not minister with a stipend; many do so with the bishop’s permission to officiate. This guidance is primarily about clergy who are appointed to an office, but do not receive a stipend. It highlights some of the pastoral, legal, and tax implications with a view to recommending good practice and encouraging greater consistency and flexibility in diocesan arrangements.

The guidance follows consultation with clergy, the National Network of Self-Supporting Ministry Officers and Advisers, diocesan secretaries, deans of women’s ministry, and archdeacons.

This guidance needs to be read in conjunction with Self-Supporting Ordained Ministry: Best Practice Guidance, as agreed by the Ministry Council of the Church of England and the National Network of Self-Supporting Ministry Officers and Advisers, which is attached as Annex 1.

April 2023
Introduction

1. The Review of Clergy Remuneration has resulted in calls for greater flexibility, clarity and consistency in how appointments are made in order to enable new forms of mission and ministry and support a mixed ecology. Part of this is likely to lead to an increase in the number of offices that are held without a stipend.

Purpose

2. This guidance highlights some of the pastoral, legal, and tax implications of holding office without a stipend to recommend good practice with a view to encouraging greater flexibility and consistency in diocesan arrangements and avoiding some of the pitfalls.

Scope

3. This guidance is provided to assist dioceses when appointing clergy to offices without a stipend including offices held on a ‘house for duty’ basis. It aims to distinguish between statements about the legal and tax position, with which dioceses will need to comply, and suggestions about good practice, which are recommendations.
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Guidance statement

4. Many clergy office holders are stipendiary, but not all; some roles are specifically designed to be performed on a self-supporting basis. This guidance provides examples of when this might be appropriate, and highlights some of the pastoral, legal, and tax implications, with a view to recommending good practice and encouraging greater consistency and flexibility in diocesan arrangements.

Responsibilities

5. RACSC will keep this guidance under regular review. Dioceses are encouraged to bear this guidance in mind when appointing clergy to offices without a stipend.

1. What kinds of ministry are self-supporting ordained ministers able to offer?

1.1 The roles undertaken by ministers without a stipend take a variety of forms. They include
- those carried out with permission to officiate (PTO)
- licensed or beneficed parochial offices held without a stipend being paid
- roles undertaken by clergy with a general licence to officiate within the diocese.

1.2 Many self-supporting ministers exercise their ministry with the Bishop's permission to officiate. For further details, see the House of Bishops policy on PTO. Clergy exercising ministry with a PTO have often retired from holding office, but not always. Some have permission to officiate in more than one diocese. A priest with PTO requires permission from the relevant incumbent or priest in charge to carry out ministry in a particular benefice. Many self-supporting ministers are able to carry out their role (including where it is not primarily focussed on parochial ministry) with a PTO. Clergy with PTO are not necessarily eligible for such benefits as grants towards study.

1.3 In other cases, a licenced (or even a beneficed role) may be more appropriate, for example:
- Where the role is parochial but needs a detailed description; or
• When the minister is regarded as an integral part of the ministry team and their ministry is centred round a particular benefice or group of benefices; or
• Where the role is considered to be sufficiently significant to require a general licence.

1.4 Holding an office or a general licence will have the effect of
  o requiring the minister to participate in MDR and CMD\(^1\)
  o making the minister a member of the PCC\(^2\).

1.5 Self-supporting office holders do not fall into a single category. Some roles are described as self-supporting ordained ministers (SSOMS)\(^3\), whilst others are described as “house for duty”, although these categories are not rigorously defined.)

1.6 It is important not to confuse self-supporting ministry with designations used as part of the national discernment process. These distinguish between ministry exercised at incumbent level (including priests in charge and team vicars) and ministry at the level generally exercised by an assistant curate (although some holding the office of assistant curate are actually exercising ministry at incumbent level, for example associate priests). No formal designation is given on this point as part of the discernment process. Candidates are asked to indicate their intentions as part of local discernment processes, but these can change over time. While it may be more usual for Self-Supporting ordained ministers to be exercising ministry at assistant curate level rather than at incumbent level, this is not always the case.

1.7 Self-supporting ordained ministers (SSOMs) are
• Usually licensed as an ‘assistant curate’\(^4\) and are supporting the ministry of an incumbent or priest in charge;
• Are generally in - or retired from - other paid work;
• Less likely to be provided with a house;
• Likely to be in a role that has been negotiated with the bishop rather than advertised;
• Often not full time because they also have an employed role, which can sometimes limit their availability during the working day;

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\(^1\) Unless provided for the purposes of a contract of employment, when the terms of service regulations are disapplied, as the employment contract stipulates the terms and conditions.
\(^2\) Where they hold parochial office. Church Representation Rules rule M15(1)(a))
\(^3\) Sometimes referred to as SSOMs self-supporting ministers.
\(^4\) Sometimes the bishop may direct that the office of an assistant curate may be described by another title (for example associate priest). See s.99 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. This is likely, however, to be when their role is at incumbent level of responsibility, and is more likely to be relevant for “House for Duty” clergy.
• Able to exercise incumbent level ministry provided they have been sponsored as such during discernment, or they have been to a candidates’ panel which has agreed to change their sponsorship category.

1.8 SSOMs often have a secular employed role and feel that their vocation is not exclusively church-based and includes being a priest and providing a Christian presence in a secular workplace.

1.9 This guidance needs to be read in conjunction with Self-Supporting Ordained Ministry: Best Practice Guidance as agreed by the Ministry Council of the Church of England and the National Network of Self-Supporting Ministry Officers and Advisers November 2022. See Annex 1.

1.10 “House for Duty” ministers, as distinct from SSOMs, have a house provided for the better performance of duties and are more likely to

  o be at incumbent or priest in charge level of responsibility
  o be in a post that was advertised
  o have duties that are reasonably substantial (at least one third of a full-time post) as otherwise the provision of the house could be seen as a taxable benefit.

2. What needs to be considered when deciding that an office should not come with a stipend?

2.1 Offices can be held be held with or without a stipend. The legal and canonical requirements of a role are no different simply because a stipend is, or is not, provided. A so-called house for duty post is simply an office which does not come with a stipend but for which a house is provided for the better performance of the office holder’s duties.

2.2 Whether or not to pay a stipend is ultimately a question for the Bishop to decide, but it is important to have a proper justification about why a stipend is not provided for a particular office when most posts are stipendiary.

2.3 The main reason for not offering a stipend with an office will be either that the role is not sufficiently substantial because of small population or congregation size, or because someone has offered to carry out the duties of the office without a stipend as they already have sufficient financial means of their own.

2.4 Parishes and clergy are likely to make comparisons with other offices held in the diocese. If the implications of a decision not to pay a stipend are not thought through, it can result in perceptions of unfairness. Ways of helping SSMs to feel their ministry is valued in the diocese include ensuring good communication and inclusion in diocesan events, initiatives and programmes. (See the recommendations in section 7 below.)
2.5 Where someone holds a parochial office, or has been issued with a general licence, he or she will be subject to the Canons and the Ecclesiastical Offices (terms of service) Regulations 2009, whether or not they receive a stipend. Role descriptions are not legally required for clergy office holders, but they help to indicate the main priorities of someone’s ministry and enable others to understand what the minister sees as the particular focus of his or her ministry and how they are intending to carry it out.

2.6 Having a public statement of expectations (sometimes called a working agreement) that sets down what is expected of the office holder in their particular role should be seen as essential. This will help to avoid misunderstandings and mismatches of expectations. It should be agreed by the Bishop and the office holder and be periodically reviewed. If the role is parochial, the key elements of the working agreement should also be shared with the PCC or PCCs so that they understand what is being expected of the office holder.

2.7 Defining and agreeing expectations is particularly important where an office is held on a part time basis as it is necessary to ensure that the role is doable on a part time basis and that parishioners understand what the office holder is able to do in the time available, and what the office holder is not able to do.

2.8 If someone holds an office - whether with or without a stipend – the Bishop is required to provide CMD and MDR and the minister is required to participate. MDR should match the needs and wherever possible, the availability of Self-supporting ministers and offer appropriate development support including opportunity to reflect on all aspects of their ministry and setting of specific development objectives.

2.9 It is particularly important to ensure that SSMs who are in paid employment while doing a training curacy receive sufficient training in a way that fits in with their other commitments.

3. What needs to be considered when appointing someone to an office without a stipend?

3.1 Some clergy offer themselves for non-stipendiary ministry and this remains their expectation, as they already have sufficient financial resources of their own, and they may feel able to offer a ministry without receiving a stipend. In other cases, this will be either because they are already retired and are receiving a pension, or because they already own a house where they can live when they retire. In other cases, the focus of someone’s ministry is primarily in secular or diocesan employment or chaplaincy and they are attached to a parish on a voluntary and part time basis.

3.2 It should not be assumed that clergy will spend all their ministry before retirement holding full time stipendiary office. However, it is important to
consider carefully why one office holder is not receiving a stipend, when someone engaged in a very similar ministry is receiving a stipend. Without this, there may be perceptions of unfairness. This is particularly important, as there may be some clergy who exercise ministry full time without a stipend, but who do not have adequate provision for current living costs or a future pension.

3.3 Consideration also needs to be given to the implications for the priest’s retirement of holding a non-stipendiary office. This is particularly important if they are ministering full time and thus not able to earn or make national insurance contributions and provide for their retirement, and they do not already own a house where they can retire. It is vital to point out to these clergy that without stipendiary service, they will not be eligible for help with retirement housing provided under the CHARM scheme. While clergy need to take some responsibility for their own financial wellbeing, it is still important to ensure that they are not taken advantage of or exploited, and that they are aware of the longer-term financial implications of engaging in ministry without a stipend.

3.4 It is also important to ensure that there has not been any discrimination (whether direct or indirect). Care needs to be taken to avoid making assumptions that lead to people from groups that are under-represented in full time stipendiary appointments – including women, UKME clergy, and clergy with disabilities – holding a disproportionate number of offices that come without a stipend.

3.5 Do not assume that a stipend need not be paid simply because

- someone’s spouse or civil partner is a high earner; or
- someone sponsored for incumbent ministry has not so far been able to obtain a stipendiary role and is willing to minister without a stipend; or
- someone is being provided with a house (so-called house for duty). A house is provided for the better performance of duties (which is why it is not a taxable benefit). Whilst being provided with a house for the better performance of duties is financially advantageous to the office holder, as he or she is not incurring housing costs, it is not a substitute for a stipend; or
- someone has carried out other roles on a self-supporting basis in the past; or
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- someone was selected for ministry as an assistant minister or ordained local minister. This is sometimes incorrectly confused with self-supporting ministry.\(^5\)

4. Is it possible to make additional payments to support a self-supporting minister?

4.1 It is not possible to decide that an office is self-supporting or house for duty and then make payments to the minister by calling the payment an honorarium instead of a stipend or by using such terms as housing allowance, payments in lieu of expenses, or compensation for not receiving benefits other than stipend (such as, for example, a provided house, having council tax paid on their behalf, or HLC). Such payments are stipend and will be taxable and will need to be declared to HMRC. If any of these additional payments meet the threshold, it will also be necessary to invite the minister receiving any payments to enrol in a pension scheme.

4.2 DBFs have discretion to allocate a proportion of the fee due to the DBF for the payment of occasional offices to ministers who are not paid a stipend, but who carry out occasional offices. This discretion is exercised differently in different dioceses. Any ministers receiving a proportion of diocesan fees need to declare these fees as income to HMRC.

4.3 The working expenses of self-supporting ministers should be claimed and fully reimbursed as for stipendiary ministers.

5. What are the implications of appointing someone with a disability to an office without a stipend?

It will be necessary to take particular care to support clergy with disabilities who are engaged in self-supporting ministry, as they will not be eligible for the Government’s access to work scheme which does not apply to unpaid volunteers. This may mean they are given additional help with having their expenses reimbursed or that they should be appointed to stipendiary roles. Where reasonable adjustments are required to the parsonage house, these should be carried out whether the office is stipendiary or not.

6. Impact on pension while self-supporting

Self-supporting roles do not qualify as pensionable appointments under the Clergy pension scheme (Church of England Funded Pension Scheme), so no pension is attached to these roles.\(^6\) The minister may wish to look at setting up

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\(^{5}\) The issue of whether someone will be stipendiary or not is not considered as part of the national discernment process and no formal designation is given on this point – candidates are asked to indicate their intentions as part of local discernment processes, but these can change over time.

\(^{6}\) However, in some cases it may be possible for a self-supporting minister to remain eligible for CHARM if he or she (i) has at least 15 years stipendiary service or remains in the clergy pension scheme while taking an employed role in the diocese.
their own pension and pay their own pension contributions into this. The minister will also not be covered by life cover while self-supporting, so may wish to explore setting up a separate, individual life policy. If the minister later becomes stipendiary and joins the Clergy Pension Scheme, they can make Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVCs) to help fill any gaps and increase their savings for later life.

7. Recommendations for good practice

i. Many clergy who carry out their ministry without a stipend will do so by holding parochial office, but parochial office should not be assumed to be the only option.

ii. Bishop’s Officers/Advisors for SSM should be regularly involved at senior staff meetings and in the discernment processes for lay and ordained ministry.

iii. SSMs should be included on diocesan websites including vocations pages to assist in the understanding that they are not simply ‘gap fillers’ who are there to support incumbents and priests and charge or provide ministry without the cost of a stipend.

iv. SSMs often have considerable relevant experience and skills gained in secular fields which are not always made as much use of in ministry as they could be. In particular, it is important not to ignore the possibility that many self-supporting ministers may be suitable for leadership roles.

v. Dioceses should ensure that training in collaborative ministry is provided to enable the Church to make better use of the talents of its self-supporting ministers lay and ordained.

vi. Sabbaticals, study leave provision and study grants should be equally available to SSM and stipendiary clergy, but not necessarily to clergy on PTO.

vii. Chapter meetings and learning events need to be held at times that suit the commitments of SSMs. This does not necessarily mean that all meetings should be held in the evening, but it does mean that SSMs should be involved and consulted about the timing of these events.
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Annex 1

Self-Supporting Ordained Ministry

Best Practice Guidance

as agreed by the Ministry Council of the Church of England and the National Network of Self-Supporting Ministry Officers and Advisers

November 2022

Self-Supporting Ordained Ministers (SSoMs) are licensed clergy not in receipt of a stipend, and retired clergy with PTO who have previously been SSOM. Some House for Duty clergy, chaplains, those working outside parochial ministry and others not in receipt of a full stipend also consider themselves to be SSOM.

2023 marks 60 years since the first SSOMs were ordained in the Church of England. SSOMs make an important contribution to the life of the Church of England and gain significant fulfilment from their ministry. However, concerns remain about the extent to which SSOMs are recognised and offered opportunities for development so that the mission and ministry of the Church thrives. Ordained ministers need to have confidence that their ministry is valued regardless of whether they receive a stipend. As the Church of England together seeks to deliver the outcomes of its Vision and Strategy, it is clear that a ‘mixed ecology’ of ministry will be a key element.

*Under each heading, we indicate an outcome which we would hope to see by the end of 2023, and at the end of each section, a way in which progress could be measured. The National Network proposes to conduct a baseline study across all dioceses in order to set benchmarks and targets and to measure progress in subsequent years.*

1: RECOGNITION

**Outcome:** Dioceses include SSOMs more effectively in communication and consultation

Many dioceses celebrate the contribution SSOMs make to the life of the Church. The Church has expressed a clear priority embracing a broad range of ministry as part of its Vision and Strategy. This includes lay and ordained ministry, paid and unpaid. Self-supporting ordained ministry offers a critical contribution to this objective. Consequently, the Church will want to recognise in meaningful ways the valuable ministerial resource represented by SSOMs for example by featuring SSOM in vocations web pages and outlining key SSOM contributions in communications.

Many dioceses have statements stressing that all clergy are equal – which in itself is helpful. However, in practice this view can result in a lack of creative thought on how best to support and develop ministry by failing to recognise where SSOM needs and perspectives may differ from the ‘default’, normative position of stipendiary clergy.

It is recommended that:

- The National Church Institutions (NCIs) and Dioceses review how they recognise the contributions of SSOMs nationally and locally and seek to understand the differing contexts in which they operate, including less visible, non-parochial positions such as Ministers in Secular Employment;
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- Bishops consider how they might regularly involve Bishop’s Officers/Advisors for SSOM in senior staff meetings;
- Creative thought is given to making key diocesan meetings more accessible and flexible for SSOMs who are often employed in other jobs;
- Each diocese keeps an up-to-date, accessible and searchable database of SSOMs;
- Regularly updated information for and about SSOMs is posted on diocesan websites, including vocation pages.

Measure: A significantly increased proportion of SSOMs report that their ministry is recognised in diocesan communications, and they are routinely involved in the same conversations as similarly deployed stipendiary clergy.

2: DISCERNMENT AND VOCATIONS

Outcome: More focus is given to SSOM as a valued and recognised expression of ministry

The following is recommended:

- Acknowledgement of many SSOM’s being employed outside the church. In particular Dioceses are encouraged to value and support MSEs.
- The continued expansion of specific initiatives to attract potential SSOMs. While we acknowledge that this is becoming less prevalent, a continuing and sometimes explicit assumption that SSOMs are second class clergy persists in some places, which discourages SSOM vocations, and is entirely inappropriate in the 21st century Church.
- Bishops and DDOs are urged to discourage any such assumptions, and to develop policies that reinforce contrary perceptions, demonstrating that SSOMs are valued equally with stipendiary colleagues.
- Diocesan and national communications should exemplify the ways in which SSOMs already make an important contribution to Church leadership, ensuring that all understand that SSOMs are not ‘gap fillers’ whose role is simply to assist incumbents or provide affordable ministry for stringent times.
- DDO’s should discuss with the majority of candidates discerning a call to ordained ministry whether they have considered serving in an SSOM capacity. Ideally this would be a holistic vocational conversation discerning whether God could be calling the person to continue in an existing calling alongside training for and serving in ordained ministry. The exception to this is where, in the discretion of diocesan staff, to do so would leave candidates (and especially candidates from historically underrepresented groups) feeling pressured into making a choice which is not their preference.
- That assumptions about age and focus of ministry should be challenged so that greater numbers of younger people consider a call to ordained ministry on an SSOM basis whilst being facilitated to remain in other jobs or careers. Dioceses should freely offer information on both stipendiary and SSOM routes and not indicate that one pathway is assumed because of age, gender or background.
- Dioceses sponsor more SSOM candidates for incumbent-level ministry.
- That every diocese should include SSOMs in its vocations and discernment processes e.g. as vocations advisers or ADDOs (and not just for those considering self-supporting roles).

Measure: A significantly increased proportion of SSOMs in each Diocese report that SSOM vocations are featured clearly and positively in vocations materials and processes.
3: CLARITY ABOUT ROLES

Outcome: All expressions of ministry are required to have clarity and purpose.

There are good examples across dioceses of detailed and sensitive deployment conversations, collaborative working, and appropriately enabling Working Agreements. Examples of less good practice also exist, resulting in lack of clarity about expectations, discomfort and sometimes distress.

The definition of SSOM is not as clear-cut as may be thought, since some clergy are partly supported financially by the Church, while not being in receipt of a full stipend.

The following is recommended:

- Regular and meaningful conversations between SSOMs and colleagues leading to the universal use of realistic, properly reviewed Working Agreements (a template is available at SSOMnetwork.org.uk);
- Working Agreements should start with the focus of ministry deemed most significant by the SSOM, rather than parochial ministry being the default, and sometimes the only, context considered.
- All active clergy not in receipt of a full stipend (unpaid, part-stipended, House for Duty, employed by the diocese, retired SSOM on PTO or in some forms of chaplaincy) are invited to be on diocesan SSOM lists if they find this useful.

Measure: All SSOMs on the diocesan list agree that they belong there, no one who would like to be on it is excluded, and a significantly increased proportion of (and ultimately all) SSOMs in each Diocese have relevant and regularly reviewed Working Agreements.

4: MINISTERIAL DEVELOPMENT REVIEW (MDR)

Outcome: SSOMs are offered relevant MDR processes.

MDR practice varies enormously across dioceses, with some well-adapted processes, and others appearing to have little relevance to SSOMs, particularly those whose focus of ministry is not mainly parochial.

It is recommended that dioceses review MDR processes to ensure they match the needs of SSOMs and offer appropriate development support as a result. MDR conversations relevant to the focus of ministry and context of SSOMs, with specific development objectives outlined, are encouraged.

Measure: All dioceses have an MDR process which enables all SSOMs to reflect fully their ministry, and that the process includes mechanisms to ensure that recommendations and any areas of concern are followed up.

5: DEPLOYMENT

Outcome: Ministerial deployment takes full account of the potential contribution of SSOMs.
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In recent years some SSOMs have been invited to take on incumbent positions and other leadership and advisory roles (for instance, Area/Rural Dean). Research suggests that a greater proportion of SSOMs are open to discussion about redeployment than is often assumed to be the case. Not all SSOMs are given opportunities for development or redeployment after completing their curacy, and many are not made aware of or encouraged to progress to leadership roles within the Church at diocesan and national levels. SSOMs may well have considerable relevant experience and skills gained in secular fields, a resource of which the Church could avail itself to a greater extent than is currently the case.

The following is recommended:

- More flexible models of deployment are considered, taking into account both local needs and the experience and skills of SSOMs.
- That all SSOMs have the opportunity to discuss their deployment with a member of diocesan staff at regular intervals, perhaps as part of the MDR process;
- Work is undertaken at all levels of the Church including the Archbishops’ Council and the Archbishops’ Advisers for Appointments to establish how they could encourage SSOMs into all roles within the Church, including episcopal, to avoid the impression that any level of leadership is restricted to stipendiary clergy, or those who have been stipended at some point.

Measure: A significantly increased proportion of SSOMs have been involved in a conversation about deployment within the last 5 years.

6: CONTINUING MINISTERIAL DEVELOPMENT

Outcome: SSOMs are provided with appropriate support in terms of CMD.

Although dioceses can demonstrate creativity and flexibility in training programmes, IME 1 and 2 are not always well-tailored to SSOMs.

The following is recommended:

- All levels of training regularly refer to the theology and practice of SSOM as well as other forms of ministry.
- Training for all new Training Incumbents includes a refresher course in forms of ministry, including SSOM and the reasonable outcomes anticipated of teamwork within a mixed ecology.
- The introduction of evidence-based training on collaborative ministry in which stipendiary clergy and SSOMs are encouraged to explore potential issues together.
- Creative discussion in dioceses and deaneries to make it easier for SSOMs to attend chapter meetings and learning events at times which suit their commitments – that may or may not mean evening meetings, but it will require consulting with SSOMs.
- Study leave and sabbaticals, with appropriate grants, are equally available to SSOM and stipendiary clergy.

Measure: An increased proportion of SSOMs in each Diocese feel they have been offered relevant CMD.

7: WELLBEING
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Outcome: SSOMs are provided with appropriate support in terms of wellbeing in ministry and into retirement

The following is recommended:

- The development, nationally and locally, of new ways of supporting all clergy, including SSOMs, at key transitional points, such as completing their curacy, taking on a post with more responsibility, or coming up to retirement.
- Particular attention is given to the challenges faced by SSOMs during and after vacancies, especially where workload increases and they subsequently feel side-lined.
- Attention is given to retirement planning and pastoral care for SSOMs moving to retirement/PTO status. This transition for SSOMs can often go unnoticed and unsupported. Liturgical committees are invited to develop appropriate liturgy to make this transition.
- Support for the wellbeing of SSOMs should be offered as part of the overall care of all clergy in the diocese.

Measure: An increased proportion of SSOMs in each Diocese feel their wellbeing is supported by the Diocese.

Revd Helen Fraser
Head of Vocations in the National Ministry Development Team

Steering Group, National Network of SSOM Officers and Advisers:

Revd Nick Hallam, Carlisle Diocese
Revd Lyndon Bannon, Chester Diocese
Revd Canon Dr Jill Tucker, Coventry Diocese
Prebendary John Lees, National SSOM Officer and Exeter Diocese
Revd Hugh Lee, Oxford Diocese
Revd Tony Redman, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocese
Revd Karen Cribb, Sheffield Diocese

http://SSOMnetwork.org.uk/

The National Network of SSOM Officers and Advisers, formed in 2020, has over 60 members representing almost all English dioceses and several other provinces.

We are grateful to God for the significant contribution of the Revd Dr Jenny Gage who sadly passed away during the development of this work.
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Approval and review

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Revision history

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