

General Assembly 2024: Supplementary Report Speech

Two years ago, the Assembly Trustees reported that The Church of Scotland is going through transformational change at all levels, and it needs to ensure that its ministers are properly equipped to provide effective ministry to both the Church and to the wider communities in which they serve. We require ministers who will be both leaders themselves and inspire leadership in those they are working with.

Together they will develop and nurture disciples and deliver the mission of the church. We require ministers who are collaborative, reflective, and formative and will reach out to the communities in which they serve and of which they are an integral part.

Ministers who see beyond the bricks and mortar and will inspire those around them to become involved in the mission of God. They will be pastors, worship leaders, educators, and pioneers. They will develop meaningful, relevant forms of worship and outreach, making the best use of the resources and technology available to them.

'Not before time...'

'Exactly what's needed...'

'This will make ministry more accessible and appealing'.

Though of course not universally so, this is what we heard again and again over the last year as we shared with presbytery representatives and other stakeholders, the principles that underpin this supplementary report.

And what is IT?

Nothing less than a reshaping of how we prepare people for the family of ministries in our church.

A year ago, we met some in their early years of ministry and asked, 'Now that you're in ministry, how well do you feel prepared for what you're facing?' Essentially, the answer was 'insufficiently.' They felt ill-equipped to meet the demands of modern ministry.

This concurred with the findings of the 2018 Blake Stevenson report 'Review of Training and Support for Ministers'. It highlighted the largely positive response of ministers to their

academic training, with most feeling it had been of high quality. BUT that there had been a lack of 'tie-in' to the reality of ministry.

How then, can we better shape what we offer our people so that their better equipped and prepared for what they'll need to minister in 21st Century secular Scotland?

Our training must be adaptable, flexible, creative, and reflective. We must train for different forms of ministry – pioneering and pastoral, and for the transforming of the communities we already have as well as for the creating of new missional communities.

Our conviction is this:

For greater flexibility in the preparation and training of our ministers and others in our families of ministry, such preparation and training needs to be done in context, on-the-job, in the way that apprentices and others are readied for their future roles in other spheres. Much of their learning is by seeing, trying, and doing. And much of it is done on the ground, learning from the fullness of these experiences.

We believe this to be the model that Jesus used in the training of his disciples, which is why we're keen to suggest this model to you as a General Assembly.

This is not the lowering of the rigour of our training – it is about the content, application, and accessibility. What we are proposing would build on the recently launched Integrated Training Programme, creating a culture of learning for our family of ministries for the whole of their ministries – a vision for life-long learning.

On an institutional level, it allows our congregations and presbyteries to actively participate in the training of those who will enter ministry.

Our Academic Providers kept saying to us - Tell us what it is you want and need?
Our proposals/deliverances before you are our responses to this question.

- A more flexible and adaptable approach that will allow us to prepare Ministry Development Staff, Readers, Deacons and Ministers of Word and Sacrament to levels appropriate to the various roles.
- Apprentices and Candidates that are called, supported and developed through

training, with the Church and academic provision developing them spiritually, prayerfully, theologically, biblically and practically to be the people they are called to be.

Whilst many will still choose the degree path, the apprenticeship route will appeal to and work for some. This will help broaden those for whom ministry in our church would be an option, which in turn will help us with our current ministry numbers crisis, and that crisis being across our family of ministries. 80% of our Ministers are over the age of 50.

Ministers and Deacons will be educated to at least diploma level, many continuing to degree and some to PhD level. All will be expected to continue their learning as they develop their ministries.

What's being proposed, then, is initial ministry education followed by a required continuing ministry education – IME and CME – with all of that taking place in a way that balances lecture hall and living locally in a village, town, or city.

We believe and pray for a way that will allow us to open doors wider to the right kinds of ministry to many who presently find themselves concluding, 'it's not for me' or 'I feel called, but I can't respond to that call because of where I'm at in life right now'.

Perhaps more:

- 'full of potential' younger people
- why not older people who come with educational attainment and a wealth of experience?
- and more people like the disciples, Peter and John, of whom it was said were 'uneducated and ordinary' and yet who had what mattered most; a burning love for Jesus and a passion to share that in bold ways that saw the early Church burst into life.

These virtues they had because they had been Jesus' apprentices. They learned by watching him. Then he sent them out filled with the Holy Spirit, so they were fully equipped to continue the ministry he had begun and so impact the world around them.

Our church needs such people, and our proposals give us the flexibility to help engage them, train them, and release them.

Moderator, I present the report and move the deliverances.

