

## EXTENSION TO THE FIVE-YEAR PERIOD ON TRIAL

### On Trial for five years?

There are very few time constraints that apply to training as a Local Preacher. The principal one is that no one should be “on trial” for longer than five years. The relevant Standing Order, 564B (1) states:

***Before persons on trial are finally admitted as local preachers they shall have not less than one nor ... more than five years on trial.***

The reason for this is to ensure that all persons on trial are progressing with the approved training course at the same time as undertaking their formation under the oversight of the local preachers' meeting. However, there are times when circumstances intervene to prevent completion of training within five years, and the following standing order (564B (3)) makes provision for this:

***Applications to extend the period on trial beyond five years must be to the district Policy Committee. Such applications should be granted only in very exceptional circumstances. The Superintendent and the person on trial have the right to be present and to speak to the case.***

### When is it appropriate to apply for an extension?

Note the words “very exceptional circumstances”. The commitment to training as a local preacher is a demanding one for the person who senses the call, and for those who support them in the circuit. It is normal for people to sometimes struggle to meet their learning targets but for most people, five years provides adequate time to allow them to overcome difficulties that arise and complete the training within the time allowed.

Exceptional circumstances do however arise, sometimes caused by medical or family crises, sudden and drastic changes in employment or life circumstances or other unforeseen causes<sup>1</sup>. Extensions are provided to address these unforeseen, exceptional circumstances.

Oversight of the training process is the responsibility of the Local Preachers' Meeting and all possible support should be provided to support and encourage students to navigate the demands of the course. Sometimes a lapse in progress is indicative of a struggle, and a conversation between the student and their mentor or tutor early may prevent an obstacle turning into a crisis.

If however it becomes clear that exceptional circumstances are significantly affecting progress with study, an extension application may be appropriate. Ideally, this option should be considered early, well before the five years is due to expire. A conversation with the District Local Preachers' Secretary may help in deciding when and how to apply.

### How to Apply for an Extension

1. Applications for an extension should be made on behalf of the Local Preachers' Meeting and are normally compiled by either the Local Preachers' Secretary or the Circuit Superintendent.
2. They should be sent to the District Local Preachers' Secretary<sup>2</sup>, who will ensure they are discussed at the District Policy Committee (or equivalent), and should keep the circuit informed

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<sup>1</sup> The global pandemic caused by COVID-19 caused severe disruption to many lives. However, it also provided increased opportunities for study for others. COVID-19 is not in itself an inherent reason for extension, but may have given rise to changes in life circumstances that do constitute a valid reason for extension. An extension of up to two years in such a case may be appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> If there is no District Local Preachers' Secretary in post, we recommend communicating with the District Chair or their PA, who should be able to advise who to contact.

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of progress. They will also ensure that the Superintendent and person on trial are invited to be present at the meeting to speak, should they wish to.

3. Applications should include the reason for the application, but also describe what plans the person has to complete their training and what support will be provided by the circuit to enable this.
4. In presenting the case for an extension, the privacy of the person on trial should always be respected. This should be taken into account when describing or discussing their circumstances. The application should provide sufficient information to support the case without compromising confidentiality. The words used should be agreed with the person concerned.
5. As indicated above, early application is helpful – it is much easier for the District to agree an extension if the situation is already known, past progress has been demonstrated, and a clear plan and intention is in place for the person to get back on track with their training.

### Alternatives to Extension

Sometimes, unfortunately, a one-year extension is simply not sufficient to allow a person on trial to complete their training. However disappointing, this need not necessarily be the end of the road. Sometimes, stepping back from preaching for a while can bring clarity of vision and enable a fresh start. It is worth noting that not completing training does not prevent a person from seeking a Note to Preach again at some point in the future.

The phrase On Trial indicates that this is a joint process of discernment by the person themselves and the community of the Local Preachers' Meeting. It may be that through the experience, God's may be saying "not yet". Or it may be an invitation to consider a different calling (maybe as a Worship Leader), or to pursue a different course of study.

It may be appropriate for someone to take a break from study, step back from being On Trial, and then restart the journey later. This allows the clock to be reset on the On Trial period.

For those who step back from being on trial but who wish to continue with theological study at their own pace, Worship: Leading & Preaching offers an "Independent Learner" option. More details are available from the Local Preachers' office.

### Help and Advice

Many sources of help are available:

Your **District Local Preachers' Secretary** will be able to advise you regarding the application process, and the best ways of presenting an application. Their contact details will be in your District Directory.

The **Learning Network** in every region has a Learning & Development Officer who specialises in training of local preachers and worship leaders. You can find out who your regional contact is on the Methodist website at [www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning-and-development/learning-network-regions/](http://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning-and-development/learning-network-regions/).

The **Local Preachers' Office** in the Connexional Ministries Team can be contacted at [localpreachers@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:localpreachers@methodistchurch.org.uk) for general advice, but note that they play no role in deciding individual applications.

*Bob Bartindale, Officer for Worship & Local Preachers, August 2021.*

## EXTENSION APPLICATION FORM

<b>Personal Details</b>		
<b>Name:</b>		<b>PIN:</b>
<b>Circuit:</b>		<b>Circuit Number:</b>
<b>Date On Note:</b>	<b>Date On Trial:</b>	<b>Date of Application:</b>

<b>Progress with Worship: Leading &amp; Preaching</b>		
	<b>Date Completed</b>	<b>If portfolio is not complete, list projects completed to date:</b>
<b>Portfolio A</b>		
<b>Portfolio B</b>		

### **Reasons for Extension Request**

*Provide any information relevant to the application, noting that to comply with GDPR regulations, the student must agree to its inclusion. Continue on additional sheets or provide appropriate supporting documentation.*

### **Action Plan**

*Explain what steps the student is taking to complete their study and what support the circuit Local Preachers' Meeting are planning to provide. Include a realistic programme for completion of study that has been agreed by the student and their Tutor. Mention any other measures (e.g. stepping back from other roles in church) that will help achievement of the plan. Continue on additional sheets as required.*

## EXTENSION APPLICATION FORM

<b>Decision of the District Policy Committee or equivalent</b>	
<b>Decision:</b>	
<b>Conditions:</b>	

<b>Date of decision:</b>	<b>Date of next review:</b>	
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**Points to consider in making and reviewing applications:**

1. *How much of the course has already been completed? What time lapse was there between coming on trial and completing the first section of the course?*
2. *What timescale is proposed by the circuit and the person on trial to complete the course? Is this realistic and what evidence is there that the person is making a serious attempt to complete in the proposed timescale?*
3. *Is the student receiving sufficient and appropriate support from their Tutor and Mentor to meet the requirements of the course?*
4. *How many appointments per quarter is the person on trial expected to fulfil? Are the circuit and local church being fair in their expectations, given the significant time and effort required to train as a local preacher?*
5. *What other responsibilities in the life of the circuit and local church does the person carry? The role of the district might be to suggest that the person on trial be released of other responsibilities before an extension is granted.*
6. *During the period on trial so far, was there a particular period when studies had to cease for a particular reason? If so, for how long? Is this a reasonable amount of time to be added for the extension of training?*
7. *Extensions should be reviewed each year to ensure that progress is being made by the person on trial.*
8. *When extensions are granted, the Circuit Local Preachers' Secretary should advise the Local Preachers' Office by means of the LP Return Form to enable training records to be kept up to date.*
9. *It is not appropriate to grant extensions where the person concerned has made no real attempt to tackle the course; there is not a realistic timetable to complete the course or the circuit and/or local church is not willing to consider the demands they are making upon the person.*