

REGISTRATION OF MINISTRIES COMMITTEE MAY 2025

Proposed Deliverance**The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Note that Licentiates seeking to return to ministry should do so via the Admissions and Readmissions process and not the Registration of Ministries route.
3. Instruct the Committee to consider the designation of the existing categories within the Registration of Ministries Act and to report back to the General Assembly of 2026.

Report**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Committee's main function is to consider applications from Church of Scotland Ministers, who wish to have the status of a Category O registration, which entitles them to be considered as an applicant for a vacant charge. Category O stands for Office-Holder; the other categories are listed in the Act, which can be found at this link: <https://bit.ly/3QMLnzV>. In addition, where ministers are returning from suspension, and wish to transition out of category S (for those who have been suspended) the Committee is required to consider applications from ministers in this category who wish to exercise ministry again. The Registration of Ministries Committee's task is to assess an individual's readiness for parish ministry, and then to specify what steps need to be taken to address any gaps in knowledge, understanding and experience which come to light. Further information on the workings of the Committee can be found at the Committee's page on the Church of Scotland website, here: <http://bit.ly/3J3jSzg>

1.2 Over and above this, the Committee also works with Presbyteries to review the names of those for whom the Presbytery has pastoral responsibility and this exercise takes place each year.

1.3 At last year's General Assembly (2024), there was significant engagement with the Committee's Report, not least on the proposal to restrict the validity of Category O registration to two years following demission. As part of that debate, the Convener assured the General Assembly of a commitment to listen and engage, and he has followed up on that commitment by being in contact with some Commissioners in relation to their comments at last year's General Assembly.

2. PRINCIPLES AT THE HEART OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

2.1 The Act has at its heart not just a concern for accountability and good order, but also a passion for pastoral care and vocational direction. The Committee seeks in its engagement with those applying for Category O registration (or an extension of an existing Category O registration) to explore whether those who seek to enter, or return to, parish ministry are equipped with the spiritual and vocational gifts to enable them to serve the congregations which call them: also, to assess the individual's readiness for parish ministry, and to indicate how individuals might address any gaps in knowledge, understanding, and experience which come to light. That passion for pastoral care also extends to a heart for those pastoral charges engaging with applicants for their vacancy, who have gone through the Registration of Ministries process. The Committee aspires to assure such charges, and their Nominating Committees, that those presenting are appropriately equipped for the challenges of ministry in this season in the Church's life.

3. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

3.1 At the 2024 General Assembly, the question was asked why inducted ministers are not facing similar questions about their involvement in the wider Church, at national or regional level; about their spiritual life; about awareness of issues to do with Church Law and civil law. It should be noted there was a discussion about the possibility of compulsory Continuing Ministerial Development as part of the Report of the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (FAPLT) to the 2024 General Assembly. Work is also being done by FAPLT on Capability and Competence, building on the Formation Framework presented to the General Assembly of 2019, and that will eventually impact on the work of the Registration of Ministries Committee. The Committee would wish to commend the process of Ministerial Development Conversations to all. It is hoped that Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions will encourage individual ministers to take up these possibilities, as well as the opportunities for pastoral supervision and spiritual direction outlined on the Ascend pages of the Church of Scotland website at this link: <https://bit.ly/3UPyb0f>

4. ASSISTANT MINISTERS, PROBATIONERS, AND FAMILIARISATION CANDIDATES

4.1 The Committee reported to last year's General Assembly the position that those Assistant Ministers, Probationers, and Familiarisation Candidates, who have taken on assistant minister contracts and have been ordained by their Presbytery should be registered as Category E. Subject to their graduate candidate status being affirmed by the Presbytery, or certificate of eligibility still being valid, they will move to be automatically registered as Category O status on induction to a parish. The provisions of section 22A (5) of Act X 2004 on Selection and Training for Full-Time Ministry will still apply, where a Presbytery has renewed such graduate candidate status, on three occasions (i.e. for up to three years) and it would then fall to the individual minister to make application to the Registration of Ministries Committee. For familiarisation candidates, the three-year validity of a certificate of eligibility applies similarly, and thereafter they should make application to the Registration of Ministries Committee for Category O registration following the expiry of their certificate of eligibility.

5. LICENTIATES

5.1 In the past, when candidates for ministry finished their academic studies, and before they began their placement as Probationer Ministers, they were licensed to preach the Gospel. There are still a small number of people in this category, known as licentiates. Following conversation with the People and Training Team of FAPLT, the Committee asks the General Assembly to affirm that the route of licentiates to return into ministry should not be via Registration of Ministries but should be via the Admissions and Readmissions process.

6. MINISTERS AND COMMUNION ROLLS

6.1 It has become clear in the work of the Committee that there is some confusion about whether the duly inducted minister of a charge is automatically a member of that charge. For the avoidance of doubt, the Minister's name should feature on the Communion Roll as an individual member. When a minister demits a charge, and then moves to become part of a worshipping congregation elsewhere, they should obtain a certificate of transference and be added to the Communion Roll of that congregation.

7. STATISTICS

7.1 At the time of writing (February 2025), since 1 June 2024, the Committee has engaged with seven applicants seeking Category O registration and granted five of the seven applications. Three were people seeking to move from Category E to Category O; three were ministers not in parishes seeking to extend their Category O registration for a further period; and one was a minister seeking to return from suspension.

8. CATEGORIES AND EXCEPTIONS

8.1 The Committee has received representations about the names of the different categories. In particular, the use of the word "Inactive" – Category I – has particular pastoral sensitivities, and has caused a degree of upset in some quarters.

8.2 Category E, for Employed, covers not only those in the employment of the Church, including staff in the Church Offices, but also a whole range of others, including those in the different posts of chaplaincy, and others in roles where the Church's engagement is not as clear cut, but where they are able to exercise all aspects of ministry, save being inducted to a charge.

8.3 Category R is to be understood as R for Retained. It is worth noting, that, at time of writing, there are 617 in Category R.

8.4 There are ministers inducted to parishes, on restricted certificates of eligibility, either in terms of the Admissions and Readmissions Act (Act 13,2022), or The International Presbytery Act (Act 2, 2016). While the terms of these certificates are defined, the Committee will work with the International Presbytery and FAPLT to explore how best to ensure that such ministers are appropriately equipped to minister in the Church of Scotland, where such ministers are not subject to the discipline of the Church but, nonetheless, are serving in parishes or charges.

8.5 The Committee will consider these matters and report to the General Assembly of 2026.

9. SOME WORDS OF THANKS

9.1 The collaborative nature of the Committee's engagement is a vital part of its work. The Committee would like to express its thanks to Presbytery Clerks, and Presbytery Administrators – this last group of people an unsung and often unheralded group of people – who have supported the Committee in its work, both in offering insights on individual applications, and in the work which goes in the annual review of the names of those for which each Presbytery has pastoral responsibility.

In the name of the Committee

ROBERT HAMILTON, *Convener*
HILARY MCDUGALL, *Vice-Convener*
ANGUS R. MATHIESON, *Registrar*

Addendum

Robbie Hamilton assumed the Convenership of the Registration of Ministries Committee following the General Assembly of 2023, when he was minister at Airdrie: New Wellwynd. He brought to the role the experience and wisdom as a former Depute Presbytery Clerk in the then Presbytery of Hamilton, as well as a pastoral heart for those presenting before the Committee. That pastoral concern was allied to a deep respect for good order and accountability, and these characteristics were typical of Robbie's leadership of the Committee. The work of the Committee covers issues of real sensitivity and Robbie has without fail, both skilfully and sympathetically addressed those. He steps down to concentrate on his duties as Presbytery Clerk; the Committee is grateful to him for his counsel and commitment, and wishes him well in his role as Presbytery Clerk with all the complexities involved in that role.

HILARY MCDUGALL, *Vice-Convener*
ANGUS R. MATHIESON, *Registrar*