

Ministerial Development Review Consultation Amicus Response

Amicus welcomes the proposals as set out in the proposals by the Clergy Terms of Service Implementation Group regarding Ministerial Development Reviews (MDRs). From consulting with our members, we would like to draw attention to some of the areas that our members highlighted to us.

In Amicus, as expressed with out meeting with the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council on 7 September 2006, we are not sure that this is the first priority, since appointment procedures would seem necessary to come first, since a poor match for a candidate to a post could result in a minister not succeeding in their office, and thus the MDR would do little to rectify the situation. However we do understand that appointments are also being considered, and trust that these two issues will be reviewed in the light of one another.

Amicus believes that the process of the MDR is a good one, since it provides clergy with the opportunity to dialogue over issues, to reflect on the past and to focus on the future, and identify the necessary support required over the forthcoming period. However there are some areas that do cause our members concern, and should be given further consideration.

Nationally Agreed Scheme

Firstly, Amicus supports the concept of a nationally agreed standard for MDRs across all dioceses. Our members know that this would assist those that move between dioceses, assist creating consistency across diocese and for those new to the diocese enable better continuity. This approach will also save many dioceses from re-inventing the work of creating a new scheme as well as building confidence in the process, which is important. Since, a nationally agreed discipline, and perhaps more significantly, capability procedure will be in place, it is clearly noted that cases could be transferred from the MDR to commence these procedures. It is therefore important and fairer that clergy enter these procedures from the same position.

We certainly would not want diocese to be able to opt out of the nationally agreed principles/scheme, however a national scheme would not prevent a diocese exceeding this standard. The refining of the scheme can then be drawn from examples of best practice, as it should be subject to formal reviews periodically by all its stakeholder parties.

Fundamental principles of openness and transparency in the procedure is essential in order to build confidence in the scheme among those that are being reviewed.

Amicus believes that a "job description" would enhance the process as this sets a basis for the preparation for the review and the review itself. It is right that the "job description" is altered, as appropriate, with the development of the role and the changing nature of the parish and its needs. Each "job description has to be worked out in the context of the local situation, with the involvement of the bishop and with his agreement, and also the PCC, as appropriate. In situations where there is team ministry, then the "job description" needs to be devised in the light of the overall team and its strategy within diocesan objectives. Within the "job description" it is important that lines of accountability and responsibility are clearly identified.

Amicus can see no reason why such a scheme should not be rolled out to all ministers, including those with the freehold.

Amicus would suggest that the MDR is piloted, perhaps in one or two diocese, to ensure that it meets the aspirations of the McClean recommendations, and refined, if necessary, before being rolled out to all the dioceses.

Within the two sample schemes provided the words “Ministerial Development Review is founded on the assumption ...” are used. Amicus believes that the word “assumption” should be replaced by “belief” (first page, second paragraph of both sample documents).

Continuity of Reviewer

Amicus members believe that continuity from one MDR to the next is important due to the relational nature of appraisals. In secular employment, it is common for the reviewer to be a line manager or a senior colleague who has regular contact with the employee, thus not only understanding their role and how it works in a particular setting, but also the employee and their attributes and support needs. If, with the MDR, the reviewer is either changing or interchanging between bishop and reviewer, then this loses the opportunity for relationship and understanding to be built over time. The bishop could then focus his meetings on the outcomes of a series of appraisals instead of undertaking the MDR itself, although we believe that the bishop should receive all ministers MDRs annually, as there may be areas that he would want to take up with individuals or things that he needs to respond to. In addition, the bishop, in our view, should undertake MDRs of senior colleagues within their diocese. Whilst turnover of reviewers will occur naturally, this should be discouraged. Also individuals may, in certain circumstances, request a change in reviewer.

Careful consideration should be given to the matching of the reviewer and reviewee to avoid unnecessary personality or other conflicts. Our members have expressed the concern that if the reviewer was of a different theological persuasion than the minister, then this could cause the MDR process to be less open and therefore less productive, or for the minister to feel under threat. Careful training and monitoring should help remove these concerns and maintain fairness.

If a minister is going through a process of change, personally, within their parish or for any other reason, it may be appropriate for the MDR to be carried out more frequently than once a year.

Amicus does not support the proposal to focus on different areas of ministry in different years since the meetings are only annual and some issues may require a more concentrated allotment of time, for two years running, for example, and a rolling agenda of issues, say spread over a three year period, would not be in the best interests of addressing the issues of today.

We believe that each clergy should be able to see the references that have been provided to the reviewer for the MDR, in advance of the MDR, in case there are issues that would be appropriate for them to respond to.

Training

Every step should be taken to ensure that MDRs are as objective as possible. All parties should not only be aware of the process but allowed sufficient time to prepare for this. Those undertaking the MDR for the first time, together with all ministers should be given clear guidance about the procedure, and especially how to prepare for the MDR.

All reviewers should be provided with appropriate training to carry out a review, and this training should be reviewed and updated as appropriate.

Preliminary work of the reviewer to orientate themselves to the parish and the individual should be seen as an important part of their role, so they can understand the context of the reviewee's comments. Consistency of the reviewer would again assist in this. The ability to be flexible according to the context is essential, since individuals involved in parochial ministry, chaplaincy, team ministry, teaching will all have differing demands placed upon them. Likewise, an individual's personal and domestic circumstances will require different understanding and sensitivities to be applied, as would mitigating circumstances that the minister finds himself in.

Amicus believes that there is a potential conflict of interest in the archdeacon being involved in MDRs due to the function they carry out in regards to issues of discipline or capability. If, as a result of an MDR, such a case is identified, then the archdeacon could well be involved in this process as well, which would not be appropriate. We would certainly say that if the archdeacon had been involved with the minister through some capability or disciplinary case, then they should under no circumstances become the individual's reviewer after this.

If an individual is not comfortable with the reviewer assigned to them, then they should be able to request an alternative, and this should be granted.

In gathering references, the reviewer must be mindful that some clergy will have greater challenges to face than other colleagues, for example, in securing a change in attitude within the parish and/or dealing with a problem regarding buildings. Often a bringing together of two parishes in a pastoral reorganisation can create very difficult situations for ministers to deal with. These issues and events must be fully taken into account with regards to any MDR that is carried out and the reviewer must be able to adapt to the circumstances and be sensitive to the situation the individual is in.

Capacity Issues

The MDR is a time consuming process to carry out comprehensively. Amicus believes that if it is not carried out to a comprehensive standard, then there is little point engaging with the process in the first place.

Careful consideration needs to be given as to where enough reviewers will come from, the training that they will need, and a realistic assessment on their time that will need to be utilised in carrying out a review. Again a pilot scheme should identify the true resource requirements of this which in some diocese will be above that of the current provision dedicated to this function.

Capability Procedure

Amicus is firmly of the opinion that matters of either capability or discipline should be raised at the time that they occur, and these not wait until there is an MDR. However, we also recognise that some issues may come to light during an MDR that need to be dealt with under these procedures. If this is the case, then these issues should initiate a separate (series) of meetings under the procedures, since the MDR should be viewed as having no role in dealing with capability or discipline, i.e. it is not the informal stage of the procedure.

Objectives

Outcomes and objectives from the review must be clearly defined so that both parties have a clear understanding of them and the support agreed to reach these objectives. There needs to be a clear understanding, in reaching these objectives by the parties as to the gifts and abilities of the minister, the parish context and the resources available, whether financial, facilities or personnel. Objectives must not be too numerous nor ambitious resulting in the reviewee unable to achieve them.

If agreed objectives are not being met by the diocese, then there needs to be a process in place where the minister can get the church to fulfil its commitments. Likewise, if the minister is unable to fulfil the agreed objective, or circumstances change deeming them no longer to have priority or relevance, then they should be able to contact the reviewer to discuss this, and, if appropriate, request an interim MDR.

In addition to the list of areas for discussion and record of the MDR as laid out in section 16 of the consultation, we believe that specific training and developmental needs should be recorded too.

Ability to deliver outcomes

One of Amicus' greatest concerns is the ability to deliver the agreed objectives. The reviewer needs to have the power and authority to make decisions and agree objectives, so their role is not weakened, and the MDR is effective and has purpose. This must also include the resources available to meet these objectives.

If there is a demand on training, then the review must be able to identify the right proportion of the CME budget to support the reviewee in this. We are concerned that the CME will be under-resourced to meet need, so prior budget reviews need to take account of the new MDR system. The reviewee may also require support in undergoing training. Capacity needs to be built here.

Inability to deliver in this area would certainly create cynicism in the process. A proper diocesan strategy to accompany the MDR process is therefore necessary so confidence can be built into the scheme.

We do, however recognise that there will be times when they will need to seek further guidance.