



An Introduction to Recognised Local Ministry



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1. Equipping local leaders

Across Baptists Together there are well over 1000 accredited Baptist ministers. After ministerial formation and theological education, usually at one of our Baptist colleges, they serve as church ministers, chaplains, children's youth and families workers, pioneers, evangelists, or in regional, national or college roles.

But we also find across Baptists Together hundreds of women and men – local leaders – who serve churches and communities in deeply committed and sacrificial ways, yet who have never been to a Baptist college or gained formal recognition.

Some of these local leaders are indistinguishable at first glance from accredited ministers. They are appointed and paid to lead a Baptist congregation – it's just that they have never been formally trained or gained accreditation.

Some of these local leaders are what we used to call 'lay' pastors. They are faithful people who offer pastoral care, preaching, and oversight to their own church, usually in addition to their daily work or profession, or in retirement. Probably they are not paid and their churches might not be large or affluent enough to afford a minister on a stipend.

Some of these local leaders are just starting in their leadership journey. They might be interns, for example. Often but not necessarily young adults, they are immersed in activities in the church and community, all the while gaining confidence and experience. They want to acquire more skills and understanding whilst deepening their discipleship, all to better serve in their locality.

Some of these local leaders are embedded in the mission of the church out in the community, volunteering as chaplains in local hospitals, acting as evangelists to town centres, running youth and children's clubs, or managing projects that combine their love for Jesus with their heart to help others.

Some of these local leaders are acting as pioneers – taking Jesus to places or people groups where there is no structured Christian presence, observing carefully what God might be doing there in order to build upon it.

Some of these local leaders are planting new Baptist churches – whether in an unchurched or de-churched neighbourhood, or among a particular ethnic group.

What all these have in common is a strong sense of Jesus' calling to ministry and mission in their particular locality. Yet, for whatever reason, training for accredited Baptist ministry isn't likely to happen. They may just not feel called to it. They may have no interest in being commended to the *whole* of Baptists Together, because it is where they are *now* that consumes them. They may simply be unable to enter accredited training because of their circumstances. Or, they may have a strong sense that a bi-vocational approach is best and that they want a measure of training so they may minister alongside their normal working life.

Do any of the above examples describe you? If so, we would love to support you, equip you and recognise you for your ministry, mission, leadership and service – just where you are. And to this end, we have [Recognised Local Ministry](#).

2. What is a Recognised Local Minister?

With our Recognised Local Minister programme, we aim to equip, support and recognise those who are committed to ministry in their locality, yet who feel that national accreditation is not for them.

Nowadays, we define ministry not so much by a person's role or skillset, but more by their calling and character. What we are looking for are people who exhibit the Marks of Ministry – those who are:

- **Mature** as disciples of Christ
- **Accountable** to others
- **Relational** in approach to leadership
- **Kingdom-focused**
- **Servant-hearted** and sacrificial

(The [Marks of Ministry](#) document has a fuller definition.)

A Recognised Local Minister, or RLM, is unlikely to have been through the full rigour of training for accredited Baptist ministry. Yet they have nevertheless received *some* training. Importantly, they too demonstrate the Marks of Ministry.

So, a Recognised Local Minister is someone who:

- serves their local church or community by practising ministry or engaging in mission;
- can articulate a sense of calling to that local setting;

- has received an introduction to theology and the practice of ministry;
- has undergone a measure of testing and formation of their character and calling.
- connects with the wider Baptist movement, mostly through their regional association.

Please note that each word in the term Recognised Local Minister is carefully chosen.

They are a **‘minister’** because they are entrusted by a Baptist church with the spiritual oversight of that church or the mission that emerges from it. This broad definition encircles at least those who are church pastors, pioneers, chaplains, evangelists or children’s, youth and families’ workers.

They are **‘local’** because it is their fitness to serve their particular ministry setting that is recognised. Their training aims to enable them to serve that setting. Their recognition relates ‘to this role, in this place, at this time.’

They are **‘recognised’** because, a) they have completed a programme of training that is common across Baptists Together and, b) their call, character and competence has been tested and affirmed by their regional association.

The recognition given to an RLM is awarded regionally but against a nationally agreed standard. Because it is for local ministry, recognition is not portable from place to place. An RLM who moves church or ministry setting asks their association to re-affirm their recognition for their new setting. This is hopefully a formality, but the association might ask the RLM to undertake a further aspect of training, or receive some coaching for their new position, for example.



3. Training to be a Recognised Local Minister

Training to be a Recognised Local Minister is overseen by our regional associations, often working in conjunction with a Baptist college. Your regional minister can tell you what the arrangement is in your association.

Training usually takes place over a two-year period, beginning and ending with an interview at your regional Ministerial Recognition Committee. Training consists of four elements:

1. Studying a curriculum of foundational theological learning.

Arrangements vary between training providers, but study usually involves teaching on either a Saturday or in an evening, eight to twelve times a year, plus a number of assessed pieces of work. Teaching may be in person, or online, or a combination of the two. Learning and assessment are set at Level 3, or 'A' level standard. Please see below for more on the topics covered.

2. Receiving mentoring from an experienced minister.

Your regional minister arranges a mentor for you. You meet with your mentor at least every two months to talk through aspects of your developing ministry.

3. Engaging with a spiritual formation group.

Your association arranges for you to meet regularly with other RLM trainees – possibly online – to look at elements of your spirituality and discipleship. The aim is to explore the person God is forming you to be. Groups meet at least eight times a year.

4. Practising ministry in a local church, chaplaincy, or mission project.

Your study, your mentoring and your spiritual formation group all draw on your active ministry experience to help shape you as an RLM.

The curriculum is flexible and is shaped by the types of ministry you are involved in as an RLM trainee. With the agreement of your training provider, it may be possible to include specialist training from elsewhere in, for example, digital mission or pioneer entrepreneurship. However, all RLM trainees must cover the following elements:

Bible. What makes up the Bible and how do you piece it together? What ways are there of interpreting the Bible and how can you best help others to find life within it?

Mission. How do you share in God's mission today? How do you communicate the gospel in ways that are relevant and contemporary within our particular culture and setting?

Pastoral leadership. How can you understand, support and include people effectively and appropriately? Is there a distinctly Baptist form of leadership and how do you practise it?

Christian belief. What big themes can you trace in Christianity's beliefs about God, the world and people? How does this Christian theology shape your ethics today?

Reflective practice. What models are there that help you reflect theologically on your experience and practice, and how can you enable others to do the same?

Spirituality and formation. What different forms of Christian spirituality have developed over the ages and how may they be used to sustain you in your ministry?

Baptist foundations. What is the history of the Baptist movement and what principles are important? In what ways does this resonate with you and contemporary society?

Ministry practice. How can you develop the best approach to your own ministry, whether you are leading worship and preaching, working with children and young people, acting as a chaplain, pioneering in new space, and so on?

Programme costs differ, but you should expect to pay between £1000 and £1500. Your association will be able to tell you more.



4. Applying for Recognised Local Ministry

Application forms for those wishing to become an RLM are available via your Regional Minister. So the first and most important thing to do is to have a conversation with your regional minister about your sense of calling to apply.

Everyone who trains as an RLM must have a clearly defined ministry or missional role connected to a church in membership with a regional association and the Baptist Union. Most applicants are already working in such a role when they apply. But it might be that you have a strong sense of call yet your own church cannot or will not support your vision for mission and ministry. In this instance, please speak to your regional minister, as they may know of a nearby opportunity for you where you can serve and train at the same time.

You will be asked to seek a formal commendation from your church at a church meeting. You should normally have been in membership of the church for two years or more. However, if you are a staff member or an intern, one year is sufficient. The church meeting will be asked to comment on how you exhibit the Marks of Calling – a version of the Marks of Ministry suitable for those about to start training. You can find more about these in the [Marks of Ministry](#) document already mentioned.

Once you have a commendation from your church, you will be invited to attend your association's Ministerial Recognition Committee. They will interview you and, all being well, accept you onto the RLM programme. (They will interview you again at the conclusion of your training period.)

Your association will arrange for you to complete a criminal record self-disclosure; an DBS enhanced disclosure application; and level 2 and 3 safeguarding training if you have not already done so. If you have spent more than twelve months overseas in the last ten years you will also, where practicable, have to get a police check from the country or countries where you lived. You will be told more about this once you have submitted your application.

5. Ongoing Recognised Local Ministry

Once a person has gained RLM status, there are four ongoing expectations.

1. We expect an RLM to engage with their regional association – keeping in contact with their regional minister; attending regional events and conferences where appropriate, and connecting with other local Baptist ministers where possible. This is all part of what Baptists refer to as a covenant relationship. The RLM and the association agree to 'walk with and watch over one another.'
2. We expect an RLM to keep their safeguarding training and DBS enhanced disclosure up to date.
3. We expect from an RLM a certain standard of conduct. This is spelt out in the [RLM Rules](#).

4. We expect an RLM to practise a measure of Continuing Ministerial Development, or CMD. There are five CMD habits – learning, attentiveness, accountability, connection and review, and ministers reflect on these annually in a ‘CMD audit’. The extent to which an RLM can practise CMD may be limited, of course, as many are part-time or minister as volunteers. Associations help RLMs to consider what is appropriate CMD in their context. Much more on CMD may be found in the [CMD handbook](#).



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