



Recognised Local Minister Rules

Adopted by the Ministerial Recognition Committee
on 17 June 2025

Correspondence relating to these RLM Rules should be addressed to the
Ministries Team Leader.

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1 PREAMBLE

These Rules for Recognised Local Ministers (RLM) aim to follow the broad principles of the Rules for Accredited Ministers. For an RLM, the expected theological education and the extent of ministerial formation is notably lower than for an Accredited Minister. Nevertheless, RLMs would still normally be expected to meet the requirements of a level 3 theological programme validated by a Baptist College; complete a two-year formation programme led by their Regional Association and College working in partnership; and submit their calling to testing by their Association Ministerial Recognition Committee (Association MRC). This training and testing aims to equip them to serve in their particular and local ministry setting. This could be in a church pastorate, a pioneering work, or a chaplaincy role. It might also be as a children's, youth or families' worker.

Each RLM is awarded recognition for their local setting only. This is distinct from Accredited Ministers who are commended by the Baptist Union to all its churches and settings. The difference reflects the lower theological and formation requirements for RLM status. For a fuller explanation of why an RLM is 'recognised', 'local' and a 'minister', please see Appendix 1.

Though the recognition for RLMs is awarded regionally, it is set against a national standard. As recognised ministers, RLMs still represent Baptists Together in their communities. Baptist thinking understands relationships in terms of a mutual covenant. RLMs express that covenant primarily in their relationship with their Association. But because they receive recognition according to a national standard and in common with other RLMs across Baptist Together, they also share in the covenant relationship between fellow ministers and with the Union. So, like Accredited Ministers, RLMs commit to pursue a way of being that reflects the national standard expressed in the Marks of Ministry and are held accountable to this. In return they are awarded recognition by their Association, and can count on the prayerful support of their Association and, by extension, the Union.

2 PURPOSE OF THE RULES

These rules for Recognised Local Ministers explain the basis on which RLMs are awarded recognition and when that recognition would be removed. They explain the standards of behaviour expected of RLMs and the process for addressing any failures to meet these standards.

3 DEFINITIONS

In these RLM Rules the expressions noted below have the meanings assigned to them unless the context otherwise requires:

Accredited Minister means an individual called accredited by the Baptist Union of Great Britain in accordance with the Ministerial Recognition Rules Relating to the Register of Nationally Accredited Ministers

Association means an Association of churches ("Regional Association" "Regional Team") in membership with the Union

Association Ministerial Recognition Committee (Association MRC) means the Ministerial Recognition Committee of each Regional Association or Association partnership

Baptist Church means a church or group of churches in membership with the Union and/or an Association

Baptist Union of Great Britain means the charitable incorporated organisation registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales under charity number 1181392 (“the Union”, “the Baptist Union”, “BUGB”)

College means a Baptist College in membership with the Union

Council means The Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Declaration of Principle means the Declaration of Principle contained in the Constitution of the Union

Moderator means the Moderator of the national MRC.

National Ministerial Recognition Committee (National MRC) means the Ministerial Recognition Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

National Safeguarding Team means the specialist team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Recognised Local Minister means an individual called by God to Christian ministry in their local setting and recognised by an Association MRC against a national standard for that specific ministry and governed by these RLM Rules

Regional Minister means a Minister who is part of a Regional Team appointed by an Association.

RLM Rules means the Ministerial Recognition Rules for Recognised Local Ministers set out in this document

Trustees means the Trustees of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

4 AWARD OF RECOGNISED LOCAL MINISTER STATUS

- 4.1** The Ministerial Recognition Committee of each Regional Association (Association MRC) determines which persons may be awarded RLM status. An Association MRC may refer to the Ministries Team leader and, ultimately, to the Ministerial Recognition Committee of BUGB (‘national MRC’) any decision about which they are uncertain. Matters of discipline will be dealt with by the Ministries Team Leader as outlined in Appendix 3. Matters to do with safeguarding will be dealt with by the National Safeguarding Team in conjunction with the Ministries Team Leader as outlined in Appendix 4.
- 4.2** RLM status may be awarded to those who complete the recognition process as set out in Section 4 of *A Guide to Recognised Local Ministry*, or who can satisfy their Association MRC, working with a Baptist College, that they have an equivalent level of theological education and ministerial formation.
- 4.3** An RLM will normally in the view of the Association MRC be a person:

- appointed by a Baptist Church to exercise spiritual oversight of that church or a significant ministry area within it, such as children's, youth or families' ministry; or
- entrusted by a Baptist Church or Association to act as a pioneer or evangelist within a defined local community; or
- supported by a Baptist Church in their role as a chaplain to a local institution or community.

Please see Appendix 1 for a further explanation of Recognised Local Ministry.

4.4 Recognition is awarded against an RLM's particular ministry role. If an RLM leaves their church or other ministry role, their recognition ends. If they are moving to a new position or role, they can apply to their Association MRC for a continuation of their RLM status. The Association MRC will determine whether their recognition can be retained in their new role. If the role is within a different Association, the RLM must apply to the receiving Association's MRC for recognition in this new role. The receiving Association should in turn seek a commendation from the RLM's original Association. For RLMs in good standing who move to a new but similar role, this re-examination by an Association MRC provides a chance to understand and celebrate a new appointment. It also allows the Association MRC to check the RLM is fit for the new role and, if necessary, request that the RLM seeks further training, mentoring or coaching before confirming their ongoing recognition. This might happen, for example, when an RLM who is recognised in their role as a local chaplain is appointed as a pastor of a church.

4.5 All those awarded RLM status must:

- accept the Declaration of Principle;
- submit to the Ministries Team a self-disclosure of any criminal record, and meet any requirements for overseas police checks as determined by the Ministries Team;
- have an enhanced disclosure issued by the Disclosure and Barring Service, or its appointed agent, stating that the RLM is not unsuitable for work with children, young people or adults at risk;
- undertake to renew their enhanced disclosure on taking up each new appointment and at such regular intervals as the national MRC shall determine;
- complete appropriate and regular training in safeguarding, as set by national MRC;
- complete any other mandatory training set by the national MRC from time to time;
- commit to Continuing Ministerial Development appropriate to their role.
- be a baptised member of a Baptist Church; or a baptised member of an Urban Expression team.

4.6 An RLM will normally be at least 20 years of age at the date recognition is awarded.

4.7 If an Association has a query about the eligibility of a candidate's role or whether they meet the criteria, they should consult the Ministries Team Leader.

4.8 Association MRCs will report all additions of RLM status to the Ministries Team who will log the changes on the BUGB database and inform the national MRC.

5 REMOVAL OF RECOGNISED LOCAL MINISTER STATUS

5.1 An Association MRC will remove an RLM's recognition if any of the following circumstances are found to exist:

- The RLM leaves or retires from the post for which recognition was initially awarded without having gained recognition from an Association MRC for any new role.
- The RLM no longer accepts the Declaration of Principle or is found in clear breach of it.
- The RLM fails or refuses to renew a Disclosure and Barring Service Enhanced Disclosure as required by the national MRC.
- The RLM fails or refuses to undertake safeguarding training or other mandatory training required by the national MRC.
- The RLM, in the opinion of the Association MRC, has failed to demonstrate adequate covenantal relationship with the Association.

Before an RLM loses their recognition for any of the reasons set out in Section 5.1, the Association MRC shall normally give the RLM an opportunity to make representations in writing to the Association MRC. Upon written notice being given, the RLM shall have fourteen days in which to provide such written representations or decline to do so. Failure to respond within the fourteen-day period will be taken to mean that the RLM has accepted the removal of their recognition.

5.2 An Association will also remove an RLM's recognition for the following reasons:

- The RLM asks to resign their RLM status.
- The RLM has been found to lack sufficient capability for the Association MRC to continue to recognise their local ministry as provided for in Appendix 2.
- The RLM has been found to have engaged in conduct incompatible with being a Recognised Local Minister, or in gross misconduct, by a subcommittee of the national MRC as provided for in Appendix 3.
- Following a safeguarding risk assessment undertaken by the National Safeguarding Team, the RLM is found not to be suitable for working with either children and young people or adults at risk, or both, as provided for in Appendix 4.

If an RLM loses their recognition under any of the processes set out in Appendices 2, 3 and 4, the RLM shall have a right to make such representations as described in the relevant appendix.

- 5.3** If an Association has a query about the possible removal of an RLM's recognition, they should consult the Ministries Team Leader.
- 5.4** Association MRCs will report all removals of RLM status to the Ministries Team who will log the changes on the BUGB database and inform the national MRC. Ministries Team will also note the reason for the RLM's loss of recognition and whether they were in good standing at the time.
- 5.5** An Association MRC will also remove any RLM trainee from the training and formation programme for RLMs for any of the above reasons.

6 REGAINING RECOGNISED LOCAL MINISTER STATUS

- 6.1** All who previously lost or gave up their recognition and who wish to regain RLM status must have arranged, or already be in, one of the roles that makes them eligible under Section 4.3. They must also meet the criteria of Section 4.5.
- 6.2** An Association MRC shall determine applications from those wishing to regain their recognition in the following circumstances:
- When a previous RLM who lost or gave up their recognition was in good standing at the time.
 - When a previous RLM lost or gave up their recognition because of capability issues as outlined in Appendix 2.
- 6.3** A sub-committee of the Association MRC, with either the Ministries Team Leader or the national MRC Moderator present, shall determine applications from those wishing to regain their recognition in the following circumstances:
- When a previous RLM lost or gave up their recognition because of or during an investigation that led to a finding of either conduct incompatible with being an RLM, or gross misconduct, as explained in Appendix 3.
 - When a previous RLM lost or gave up their recognition because they were found to be unsuitable to work with children, young people and/or adults-at-risk, as explained in Appendix 4. In this instance the National Safeguarding Team will provide the sub-committee with a report and recommendation. On occasion in order to produce this recommendation an independent safeguarding panel may be convened, or an independent risk assessment may be commissioned at the applicant's expense. An expert with relevant safeguarding experience must be part of the sub-committee in these circumstances.

The applicant has the right to be accompanied by a minister or other person during their interview with the sub-committee. This includes, where appropriate, a trade union representative, but excludes legal representation.

The sub-committee will have access to all relevant information held within the applicant's file, so that they are aware of the concerns and circumstances which led to the RLM's earlier loss of recognition. If there are subsequent concerns which are known about by the Ministries Team or Association which would be relevant to the decision, these also will be made available.

The sub-committee must be satisfied that all the requirements of any earlier disciplinary process have been met, and that there are no ongoing causes for concern.

- 6.4** If an applicant for regaining recognition is turned down by an Association MRC or its sub-committee, that committee will determine the time required before the individual can re-apply. This will typically be at least three years.

7 EXCEPTIONAL CASES

An Association MRC may in any exceptional case vary, extend, or give exemption from the operation of the RLM Rules, but only in consultation with the Ministries Team Leader, and provided always that in exercising their discretion the Association MRC abides by the Union's safeguarding policies.

8 ALTERATION OF THE RULES

No amendment or alteration of the RLM Rules shall take effect unless approved by a resolution of the national MRC passed by the vote of at least two thirds of the members present and voting.

Whenever the Ministerial Recognition Rules for Accredited Ministers are changed, the Ministries Team Leader shall consider whether those changes should be carried across into the RLM Rules. If so, the Ministries Team Leader will propose the necessary revisions to the RLM Rules to the national MRC.

APPENDIX 1

DEFINITION OF RECOGNISED LOCAL MINISTRY

There is a degree of precision in the title of Recognised Local Minister that helps to explain what an RLM is. Each word is carefully chosen and all three are understood only with reference to the others:

A Recognised Local Minister is a **'minister'** because they are entrusted by a Baptist church with the spiritual oversight of a church or supported in mission that is local to the church. This broad definition could encircle those who are church pastors, pioneers, chaplains, evangelists or children's, youth and families' workers. It is parallel to the current understanding of Accredited Ministers, who are each termed 'minister' despite exercising a wide variety of ministry roles.

A Recognised Local Minister is **'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 is not automatically portable from ministry to ministry, but relates to 'this role, at this time, in this place'.

A Recognised Local Minister is **'recognised'** because, a) they have completed a curriculum of formational training that is common across Baptists Together and, b) because their call, character and competence has been tested and affirmed by their regional MRC. The recognition is therefore awarded regionally but against a nationally agreed standard.

APPENDIX 2

CAPABILITY PROCEDURES

The Union recommends to its churches an appraisal and capability procedure that enables the removal of a minister, whether Accredited Minister or RLM, in a church pastorate or other appointed church role, on the grounds of incapability or incapacity. This procedure enables a fair process to be enacted that protects ministers from unjust removal, but also enables churches to dismiss those who prove unable to meet the reasonable requirements of that church for capable ministry and have not been able to remedy such shortcomings or failings after reasonable levels of support over an appropriate time span.

The removal of an RLM from their appointed role as church pastor or other worker on the grounds of incapability would automatically mean the end of their recognition, as outlined in Section 5 of the RLM Rules.

An RLM who loses their recognition in this way may apply to regain their recognition under the process described in Section 6 of the RLM Rules. This renewed recognition would not normally be considered by an Association MRC unless they had again been exercising an eligible form of ministry and had proved themselves capable over a three-year period.

APPENDIX 3

DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES FOR RECOGNISED LOCAL MINISTERS

1. Purposes and Scope

- 1.1 As with Accredited Ministers, Recognised Local Ministers are encouraged to live out their call from God in consistent patterns of conduct and appropriate professionalism. These procedures concern those who fall short of these high standards. This Appendix relates to the recognition of Recognised Local Ministers in particular.
- 1.2 The aim is to ensure consistent and fair treatment for all. To this end, though Association MRCs manage the awarding and removal of recognition, matters of discipline are handled by the national MRC, facilitated by the Ministries Team Leader.
- 1.3 This procedure is not to be used in relation to capability issues, where Appendix 2 would apply. It is also separate from the risk assessment process set out in Appendix 4 which relate to an RLM's suitability to work with children, young people and/or adults at risk. For the sake of clarity, the conclusion of a disciplinary process under this Appendix 3 does not preclude the Baptist Union from undertaking a risk assessment under Appendix 4 to assess an RLM's suitability to work with children, young people and/or adults at risk where the circumstances of the disciplinary investigation demand it.
- 1.4 The procedures apply to the RLM's recognised status only. There are separate procedures that are recommended to be applied to the RLM's appointment by their church or other appointing body.
- 1.5 The procedures cannot cover every eventuality and the national MRC working through the Ministries Team reserves the right to alter the process where appropriate depending on the circumstances of any particular case.

2. Principles

- 2.1 The disciplinary process is initiated when:
 - A formal written and signed complaint is received, or
 - A Regional Team Leader or College staff member raises serious concerns regarding conduct that would be at least serious fault with the Ministries Team Leader, or
 - A serious concern is raised with the Ministries Team Leader by the National Safeguarding Team, a statutory authority or another professional person with relevant information, for example a counsellor.
- 2.2 Formal complaints will normally only be considered from an individual directly affected by the actions of the RLM. Gossip, rumour, hearsay, and unevicenced anonymous accusations should be dismissed.
- 2.3 No disciplinary action will be taken against an RLM until the case has been fully investigated. However, if an RLM makes a self-disclosure to a Regional Minister or the Ministries Team Leader the issue of discipline may be considered without the need for a full investigation as outlined in Section 3.11.

- 2.4 The RLM will be advised of the nature of the complaint against him or her and will be given the opportunity to state their case before any disciplinary decision is made.
- 2.5 The RLM will have the right to be accompanied by a minister or another person during an investigation interview or a disciplinary hearing. This includes, where appropriate, a trade union representative, but excludes legal representation. While an RLM may seek legal advice at their own expense during the investigation and disciplinary process, including the appeals stage, as the accrediting body for the RLM, the Ministries Team will normally only communicate with the RLM rather than their legal advisor.
- 2.6 No RLM will be removed for a first breach of discipline except in cases of conduct incompatible with being an RLM or gross misconduct, when the penalty will be removal of RLM status.
- 2.7 An RLM will have the right to appeal against any disciplinary action imposed.
- 2.8 The complainant has no right of appeal against the decision of the national MRC or its representatives.
- 2.9 The procedure may be implemented at any stage if the alleged misconduct warrants such action.
- 2.10 At all stages, it is important to ensure that information is only given to those who need to know, and that those involved realise the need for confidentiality. Breach of confidentiality could undermine both the processes and the RLM involved.

3. Processes and Investigations

- 3.1 The purpose of an investigation is for the Baptist Union to establish a fair and balanced view of the facts relating to any disciplinary allegations against an RLM, before deciding whether to proceed with a hearing. The amount of investigation required will depend on the nature of the allegations and will vary from case to case. It may involve interviewing and taking statements from the RLM and any witnesses and collating relevant documentation.
- 3.2 An investigation into complaints of serious fault, conduct incompatible with being an RLM, or gross misconduct will usually be led by an investigator reporting to the Ministries Team Leader.
- 3.3 The person appointed to investigate will consider with the Ministries Team Leader whether the RLM concerned should have their recognition suspended at the outset and during the course of the investigation. The requirement to suspend will be taken by the Ministries Team Leader who will instruct the RLM's Association to suspend the RLM's recognition, and inform the Moderator.
- 3.4 Suspension should not be a "kneejerk" reaction to allegations. Consideration should be given as to whether the RLM can retain their recognised status during the course of any investigation, taking into account any consequent risks.
- 3.5 Suspension from recognition will not automatically lead to a suspension from the role to which the RLM is appointed. Suspension from role would be a decision for the Church

Trustees, usually guided by the appropriate Regional Minister, or the governing body of the organisation the RLM works within.

- 3.6 The investigator will write a report of their investigations and findings (“the Report”) and send it to the Ministries Team Leader.
- 3.7 If the person investigating concludes that a prima facie case has been made which suggests that a serious fault, conduct incompatible with being an RLM, or gross misconduct may have taken place, the Ministries Team Leader will normally determine whether the RLM is given the opportunity to consider accepting the investigator’s preliminary finding. The Ministries Team Leader can at their discretion refer the case to a disciplinary hearing before a sub-committee of the national MRC rather than giving the RLM the opportunity to consider accepting the preliminary finding.
- 3.8 If a serious fault may have taken place, the Ministries Team Leader will allow the RLM 14 days to consider accepting a serious fault or choose to attend a disciplinary hearing before a sub-committee of the Ministerial Recognition Committee. The RLM will be informed of any appropriate requirements which may be imposed such as supervision or training, as well as the length of time that the final warning will be active.
- 3.9 If either conduct incompatible with being an RLM or gross misconduct may have taken place, the Ministries Team Leader will allow the Minister 14 days to consider accepting the preliminary finding and resign their RLM status, or choose to attend a disciplinary hearing before a sub-committee of the national MRC.
- 3.10 Where the RLM does not accept the findings of the Report or fails to follow through on any actions in 3.8 or 3.9 above, they will be invited to a disciplinary hearing before a sub-committee of the national MRC. The sub-committee will consider whether serious fault, conduct incompatible with being an RLM, or gross misconduct has taken place and if so, the appropriate sanction.
- 3.11 In cases where an RLM makes a self-disclosure to a Regional Minister or the Ministries Team Leader, the issue of discipline may be considered without the need for a full investigation. Instead, the matter may be dealt with under 3.7 but with their Regional Minister present. The notes of this meeting will remain on the confidential section of their file. If the RLM does not accept the outcome of that meeting an investigation will take place and normal process will be followed from 3.7. If the Ministries Team Leader deems it necessary, an investigation will be carried out prior to any disciplinary action. If the self-disclosure related to safeguarding concerns, the Ministries Team Leader will consult with the Safeguarding Team Leader as to whether any stage of the safeguarding investigation process, including statutory reporting, is necessary.
- 3.12 If at a later date a formal complaint against an RLM who had been disciplined under 3.11 (without an investigation) is received relating to the same incident, no new disciplinary action will be taken unless there is significant new evidence which would have resulted in more serious disciplinary action being taken. The process to determine if the complaint should be considered will be that the Ministries Team Leader will draw up a report for the Moderator and two other members of the national MRC who will determine if an investigation should be undertaken.
- 3.13 If an RLM chooses to resign partway through an investigation then the Ministries Team Leader in consultation with the Moderator will have the discretion to record a decision about future recognition, which may include presentation of the information at that point to the national

MRC or consideration by a sub-committee. On an application for regaining recognition, this information would be made available to the reinstatement committee.

4. Types of Disciplinary Issue

The conduct expected of RLMs and RLM trainees is described in broad terms in Section 1 of these RLM Rules. RLMs commit to pursue a way of being that reflects the national standard expressed in the Marks of Ministry and are held accountable to this. This applies both when they are serving in their capacity as an RLM and when they are away from their work. It applies to their behaviour in both physical and digital or virtual spaces, and in both private and public forums.

4.1 Minor Faults

Minor faults will be dealt with by a conversation with either the appropriate Regional Minister or, exceptionally, the Ministries Team Leader after an investigation appropriate for the nature of the allegations. If the Ministries Team Leader conducts the investigation, the conversation may be noted on the RLM's file. The aim is to help the RLM become aware of a potential failing and assist them to address their behaviour. If the RLM is appointed to a local church role, these notes may also be kept by the church, normally in the keeping of the church secretary.

Examples of minor faults might include:

- Persistent failure to keep appointments
- Inappropriate response in a conflict situation or loss of temper on more than one occasion
- Use of improper language in public duties

This list is not exhaustive.

There is no right of appeal over a decision to note a minor fault on file as it is not regarded as a disciplinary sanction.

If the fault remains unacknowledged by the RLM and there are further incidents the RLM may be investigated to consider whether the conduct amounts to a serious fault, conduct incompatible with being an RLM, or gross misconduct.

4.2 Serious Faults

While dealing with minor faults is primarily intended to help an RLM be aware of difficulties that might, in due course, lead to more serious consequences, handling serious faults is intended to also indicate censure of behaviour that is inappropriate. Normally, for these serious faults, removal of the RLM's recognised status is not appropriate, and support is to be sought in post to address the behaviours identified.

Examples of serious faults might include:

- Conducting ministry while intoxicated, even if not incapable.
- Disclosure of confidential information, except where required to do so under law.

- Use of inappropriate language of a sexual nature with adults.
- Persistent loss of temper.
- The intentional use of discriminatory language.

This list is not exhaustive. Depending on the graveness of the fault, any of the above examples might also amount to conduct incompatible with being an RLM or gross misconduct.

Where a serious fault is deemed to have occurred, a letter will be given to the RLM. This will give details of the complaint, the improvement required, any required supervision and training, and the RLM's right to appeal. It will also state the time period during which the RLM's behaviour will be monitored and regularly reviewed. This is typically two years but may be longer. The letter will explain that, if during this period there is a failure to change behaviour or to keep to the requirements of the letter, the RLM will be invited to a hearing before a subcommittee of the Ministerial Recognition Committee. The subcommittee will consider whether, in weighing the evidence on the balance of probabilities, the RLM should have their recognition removed for either conduct incompatible with being an RLM or for gross misconduct.

A copy of the letter will be kept by the Union but it will be disregarded for disciplinary purposes after the monitoring period is over, subject to satisfactory conduct. If the RLM holds office in a local church, a copy of the letter or an outline of its content will also be kept by the church, normally in the keeping of the Church Secretary.

4.3 **Conduct incompatible with being a Recognised Local Minister**

Conduct incompatible with being an RLM is that which may not necessarily be deemed contrary to the standards of wider society, but which is contrary to the expectations for those recognised by their Association and the Union.

Where a subcommittee of the national MRC concludes that an RLM's conduct is incompatible with being an RLM, the RLM will lose their right to recognised status. The relevant Association will be instructed to remove the RLM's recognition and the national MRC informed. The RLM will be provided with written reasons, the date on which recognition will be terminated and be informed of their right to appeal.

The names of those who lose or resign their recognition for conduct incompatible with being an RLM will not normally be made public. Similarly, the names of those RLMs who resign their recognised status following a preliminary finding of conduct incompatible with being an RLM, or who resign during an investigation into what could be conduct incompatible with being an RLM, will normally not be made public.

The national MRC will arbitrate and determine whether the alleged behaviour amounts to conduct incompatible with being an RLM. The following are examples of behaviour or practice that would normally be regarded as conduct incompatible with being an RLM:

- Bringing the cause of the Gospel or the Baptist Union into serious disrepute.
- Deliberate accessing of legal pornography.

- Sexual conduct which is contrary to the agreed beliefs of the Baptist Union, provided it does not also meet the examples of gross misconduct in section 4.4. below. Sexual conduct which is contrary to the agreed beliefs of the Baptist Union specifically includes sexual intercourse and other genital sexual activity outside of marriage (as defined exclusively as between a man and a woman).
- Further examples are given in paragraphs 4.5.1 (note on divorce, separation and remarriage) and 4.5.2 (note on homosexual genital practice) below.

4.4 **Gross Misconduct**

Gross misconduct is conduct that is likely to prejudice seriously the Baptist Union's work and reputation or damage irreparably the trust and confidence placed in the RLM as one holding a position of trust in society. It denotes behaviour that is not acceptable for those entrusted with the care of others, whether within or beyond the Church.

Where a subcommittee of the national MRC concludes that gross misconduct has taken place the RLM will lose their right to recognised status. The relevant Association will be instructed to remove the RLM's recognition and the national MRC informed. The RLM will be provided with written reasons, the date on which recognition will be terminated and be informed of their right to appeal.

The Baptist Union will usually add to a published list the name of a person who loses or resigns their recognised status for gross misconduct, subject to a data impact risk assessment. No RLM's name will be published unless they have either accepted a finding of gross misconduct or a subcommittee of the national MRC has found gross misconduct following an investigation.

The Baptist Union will normally add to a published list the name of a person who loses their recognised status for gross misconduct. The decision to publish a name will only be taken after a suitable assessment of the risks of doing so to all parties affected. No RLM's name will be published unless they have either accepted a finding of gross misconduct following a preliminary finding as outlined in paragraph 3.9 above, or a subcommittee of the Ministerial Recognition Committee has found gross misconduct following an investigation. If an RLM resigns during an investigation and the Ministries Team Leader considers that gross misconduct is a possible outcome, the investigation will still be completed and the case referred to a disciplinary hearing before a sub-committee of the Ministerial Recognition Committee.

The national MRC will arbitrate and determine whether conduct is gross misconduct. The following are examples of behaviour and practice that would normally be regarded as gross misconduct:

- Conviction or the issuing of a police caution, at any time, in respect of a criminal offence which may affect the reputation of the Baptist Union or its relationships with churches, stakeholders or the general public and/or is considered to be unsuitable for those in a position of trust.
- Sexual misconduct, i.e. actions which are of a sexual nature or are sexually motivated, that are unwanted or non-consensual, or where there is an abuse of the RLM's power or position.

- Violent, abusive or bullying behaviour towards others.
- Domestic abuse, including physical, emotional and mental abuse, financial abuse, coercion and control.
- Fraud, financial impropriety and theft.
- Assisting, encouraging or coercing someone with whom they have pastoral contact to include them as a beneficiary of their will.
- Deliberate grooming of young people or adults at risk with a view to improper conduct.
- Abusive behaviours or actions that breach the safeguarding policies and procedures of the Union or the church/employer and which do not necessitate a separate risk assessment under Appendix 4.
- Harassment (including sexual harassment) or victimisation of, or unlawful discrimination against church staff, ministerial colleagues, church members or attendees, or anyone else who comes into contact with the RLM in their professional capacity.
- Serious breach of confidence.
- Making a disclosure of false or misleading information to others, in bad faith.
- Practice that brings the Baptist Union into serious disrepute.

The list of examples is not exhaustive.

4.5 Notes

- 4.5.1 Divorce, separation and remarriage should not automatically lead to loss of recognised status but should be reported to the Regional Minister who shall inform the Ministries Team Leader. RLMs should take note of the fact that the national MRC considers a marriage to remain in force until a decree absolute has been granted, and it is not appropriate to begin a new relationship prior to that. Likewise, an RLM should not start a relationship with someone who is still married and has not completed their divorce. Both these contexts would normally be considered as conduct that is incompatible with being an RLM. A new relationship can be defined as when an RLM becomes emotionally attached to another individual, in what is becoming an exclusive relationship, which has the potential to move on to marriage or a similar long-term relationship; or which appears to others to be such a relationship.
- 4.5.2 Homosexual orientation (whether male or female) is not of itself a reason for exclusion from recognised status, but homosexual genital practice is to be regarded as conduct that is incompatible with being an RLM. As for all sexual behaviour, if this practice is also coercive or abusive, it might additionally be deemed gross misconduct.
- 4.5.3 Ministers should note that their online behaviour such as, for example, their social media interaction, is also subject to these RLM Rules. Words and actions online that are improper, inappropriate, discriminatory, abusive and so on will be dealt with as outlined in the rest of this Appendix, or if relevant under Appendix 4.

5. Appeals

- 5.1 Any RLM who wishes to appeal against a disciplinary decision following a disciplinary panel hearing should ensure the Ministries Team Leader has received a request in writing and within 10 days of the outcome of the panel hearing. They then have a further 11 days (21 days from the outcome of the hearing) to submit an application for appeal that outlines the basis for their appeal and the appropriate documentary evidence to support it. Appeal hearings will only be allowed if there was a procedural issue that may have led to a different outcome or where there is further evidence that was not presented to the panel that may also have led to a different outcome.
 - 5.2 The Ministries Team Leader will consider the application for an appeal. If they are content that there is a basis for the appeal they will contact the Moderator of the national MRC and ask them to arrange an appeal hearing with a different sub-committee of the national MRC.
 - 5.3 If the Ministries Team Leader finds no basis for the appeal they will present a report to that effect and the application for an appeal to three members of the national MRC who have not been involved in the case. They will determine if a new panel should be called or whether they uphold the view that there are not sufficient grounds for an appeal. If they agree to the appeal they will contact the Moderator and ask them to arrange an appeal hearing with a different sub-committee of the national MRC.
 - 5.4 If the appeal relates to the actions of the Ministries Team Leader the appeal will be referred to the General Secretary who will follow the process of 5.2 and 5.3.
 - 5.5 The sub-committee reserves the right to take appropriate legal advice and request legal representation. The appeal decision will be final.
 - 5.6 This document refers only to the process for determining recognised status. Parallel disciplinary and grievance processes would determine appointment or employment by a church, an Association, a College; or the Baptist Union of Great Britain.
6. If an RLM has lost or resigned their recognised status for conduct incompatible with an RLM or for gross misconduct, they may not normally regain recognition within five years of their loss of recognition. The process of regaining recognition begins at a meeting with the Ministries Team Leader to acknowledge fault and to agree a process which may lead to regaining recognition.

Where the reason for removal is that an RLM has had an affair and they have continued the relationship and subsequently married the individual, the process for regaining recognition will not normally begin until a period of five years has passed. They will meet with a sub-committee of the national MRC, who will determine if a process for re-instatement is possible, and if so, agree the process required. The final decision will still rest with a sub-committee of the national MRC as outlined in Section 8 of the RLM Rules.

APPENDIX 4

POLICY FOR UNDERTAKING RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR RECOGNISED LOCAL MINISTERS

1. Purpose

There are situations where it is necessary for a safeguarding risk assessment to be undertaken to determine the suitability of an individual either to gain or retain RLM status. This would include, but is not limited to:

- Receipt of a blemished enhanced disclosure
- Receipt of a blemished self-disclosure
- Information from a reference
- Information from the police or social services or other statutory body
- Information obtained during a complaint process

A risk assessment will not always be required, for example where an RLM's conduct is found to be so unsuitable on safeguarding grounds e.g. by a criminal conviction, that to continue to recommend the RLM for working with children, young people and adults at risk would be unconscionable.

2. Process

As for issues of conduct requiring discipline, though Association MRCs manage the awarding and removal of RLM status, safeguarding risk assessments for RLMs are managed at a national level by the National Safeguarding Team (NST), working in partnership with the Ministries Team Leader.

The Ministries Team Leader will consult with the NST and will if necessary ask them to undertake a risk assessment following the process laid down for assessing blemished enhanced disclosures. (Blemished enhanced disclosures are always reviewed.) They will produce a risk assessment report outlining the impact of the safeguarding concern on the suitability of the individual to engage in ministry and if they are considered suitable, any requirements for managing and monitoring which need to be put in place.

This process is distinct from the capability procedures and disciplinary procedures for RLMs set out in Appendix 2 and 3 respectively. A RLM's recognised status may be removed on the basis of the procedures set out in this Appendix alone. For the sake of clarity, the conclusion of a risk assessment under this Appendix 4 does not preclude the Baptist Union from commencing a disciplinary process under Appendix 3 where the circumstances demand it.

The RLM will have the right to be accompanied by a minister or another person during an assessment interview. This includes, where appropriate, a trade union representative, but excludes legal representation. While an RLM may seek legal advice at their own expense during the investigation and disciplinary process, including the appeals stage, the Ministries Team will normally only communicate with the RLM rather than their legal advisor.

The RLM will have the right to provide relevant additional information to the NST following an interview including providing the names and contact details for individuals with information relevant to the assessment, if such individuals exist. This information should normally be provided within 14 days of the interview. It will then be for the NST to determine whether the information provided is relevant and whether any individuals identified should be interviewed.

If a blemished enhanced disclosure has been considered, the RLM Rules require that the conclusion of the report is that they are 'not unsuitable to work with children, young people and adults at risk', in order for them to gain or retain RLM status.

Following receipt of the report the Ministries Team Leader will take one of the following courses of action:

- If the individual is an RLM and the risk assessment concludes that they are no longer suitable for ministry, the RLM will lose their right to recognised status. The relevant Association will be instructed to remove the RLM's recognition and the national MRC informed.
- If the individual is applying to become or is already an RLM trainee and the risk assessment concludes that they are considered unsuitable for ministry, the Association will be informed that the application or training cannot progress.
- If the recommendation is that actions need to be taken to manage and monitor the individual to enable them to engage in ministry, they will be given the opportunity to accept the outcome. If they fail to accept or abide by the recommendations, the Ministries Team Leader will consider this against the disciplinary process set out in Appendix 3. They will also consider suspending recognition or training pending the outcome of the process.
- If there is a need to manage and monitor the individual, appropriate steps will be taken to make sure that there is local knowledge and accountability and that this can be sustained over time.
- If the individual is not considered unsuitable to work with children, young people and/or adults at risk but conduct issues are identified within the report the Ministries Team Leader will determine whether further investigation should be undertaken under Appendix 3.
- If there are no concerns about the individual's conduct and suitability they will be informed of this conclusion.

3. Appealing the risk assessment

The appeals process will normally follow the Blemished Disclosure Appeal Process. The actions above will be subject to the outcome of any appeal. Those who are already in ministry and therefore at risk of losing their RLM status have seven days from receipt of the Safeguarding Risk Assessment Report to ask the Ministries Team Leader to arrange for an appeal to take place. Normally this would involve two members of the National Safeguarding

Group (which represents all of the Regional Association Safeguarding Leads) to review the risk assessment. If the outcome of their review disagrees with the conclusions of the original assessment, the National Safeguarding Team will re-consider their original conclusion. If there continues to be a divergence of opinion the matter will be referred to a sub-committee of the national MRC for decision over the question of recognition and any conditions being put in place. If the reviewers are in agreement with the findings of the original assessment, the RLM will lose their right to recognition and the relevant Association will be instructed to remove their recognition. There will be no further right of appeal or representation to the national MRC.

Alternatively, the RLM can ask for the appointment of an independent safeguarding specialist to review the risk assessment, at their own expense. Once a fee estimate has been obtained from a specialist and passed to the RLM, the RLM then has a further seven days in which to decide whether to proceed with the independent assessment, with payment to be made in advance of the assessment being undertaken. If the reviewer disagrees with the conclusions of the original assessment, the National Safeguarding Team will re-consider their original conclusion. If the reviewer is in agreement with the findings of the original assessment, the RLM will lose their right to recognition and the relevant Association will be instructed to remove their recognition. There will be no further right of appeal or representation to the national MRC. If there continues to be a divergence of opinion the matter will be referred to a sub-committee of the national MRC for decision over the question of recognition and any conditions being put in place.

For clarity only one of these appeal routes can be used.

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