Working Agreement for an ordained self-supporting minister (OSSM)

Guidance notes & essential reading before drafting a working agreement

This document serves as a basic template for a working agreement (WA) for clergy serving as ordained self-supporting ministers (OSSMs) in the Diocese of Bath and Wells as we live and tell the story of Jesus and engage in shared local ministry using our different gifts.

1. All OSSMs are expected to have a Working Agreement (WA). Matters covered in the Statement of Particulars won’t need duplicating in the agreement. When the WA is being developed, consideration should be given to its subsequent review. For a new post-holder, it is usually wise to undertake an initial review within six months and thereafter regularly and at least annually from the agreement’s start date.
2. The benefits of a structured conversation often lie in checking assumptions together so there are clear, realistic, and agreed expectations to work within. An agreement will reflect the actual time offered by the OSSM to the benefice, recognising other spheres beyond the parish/benefice where the OSSM exercises ministry and has responsibilities.
3. The conversation prior to drawing up the WA will benefit from a detailed and candid discussion exploring the following suggested areas. These are not exhaustive:

* their mutual and separate expectations
* the transferable skills and experience of the OSSM to ministry and mission (including those gained in current or prior employment)
* the skills and experience of the incumbent and other team members
* the expectations and needs of the OSSM’s family
* the hopes, plans and needs of the worshipping community
* the time that the OSSM has to offer and how that may vary during a typical year. For example, for those engaged in farming, child-care or education different rhythms of ministry availability may emerge to someone who is semi-retired, freelancing or a minister in secular employment [MSE]
* maintaining confidentiality and demonstrating mutual public support and respect whilst encouraging the exploration of difference and courteous challenge in private

1. An openness with each other, as peers and partners in ministry, about their relative strengths and weaknesses is likely to help the desire to be used for God’s purposes together. This discussion may usefully identify any areas of theological and liturgical difference or preferred working style.
2. Most OSSMs have limited availability for parish/benefice work therefore the WA should focus on particular aspects of contextual mission and ministry. The other part of their life.brings a richness and potential source of insight and gifts to local ministry. Shared local ministry brings an opportunity to develop creative conversations and opportunities for those OSSMs who sense a local, contextual focus may be their principal calling and role.
3. The post holder and incumbent each keep a copy of the agreed document. It is often useful for churchwardens also to have a copy. During a vacancy it will be helpful for the Area Dean to receive a copy. There may need to be a renegotiation of responsibilities for a vacancy depending on the OSSM’s availability and the benefice’s needs.
4. Prior to times of transition and vacancy a discussion between incumbent and the OSSM will help clarify mutual understandings and expectations to facilitate a helpful working relationship while recognising the primacy of wardens as the Bishop’s officers in vacancy.

The Bishops’ Adviser for Ordained Self-Supporting Ministry in each archdeaconry is available to assist or help with any queries. You can find their contact details on the Self-supporting ministry advisers’ page on the diocesan website: [bathandwells.org.uk/selfsupporting-ministry-advisers/](https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/clergy/selfsupporting-ministry-advisers/)