

Ordained Assistant Ministry Scheme

Training for Ordained Assistant Ministry for those in later years

The Diocese of Oxford, in partnership with Ripon College Cuddesdon, has created a new pathway enabling mature Christians with substantial life and faith experience to train for ordained assistant ministry in two years, while undertaking the shared discernment process alongside their first year of this training. This enables those wishing to offer themselves for ordained ministry later in life to spend more of the time they have to offer in ministry, following a reduced but appropriately robust period of discernment and training.

Our aim is to form a confident community of learners who love God and are:

- devoted to becoming more Christlike
- formed for a ministry steeped in contemplation, courage and compassion
- confident in their vocation, equipped for the nurturing of God's people, and enabling of others in everyday faith and ministry in response to the call and mission of God.

The scheme aims to build on existing relationships and ministry experience, with the expectation that 'sending churches' support their candidates on placement throughout training and receives them back as ordained ministers. In this way, it builds the ministry team of the local church as well as releasing highly skilled, experienced and enabling practitioners to ordained ministry among the whole people of God.

The pathway is designed in such a way that what you study in each course is integrated with practice in the local church, encouraging you to reflect on what you are learning and to grow in character, understanding of ministry and ministerial aptitude.

Prerequisites

As an accelerated training pathway, it is important that those who enter OAMS have the requisite experience and understanding to ensure they leave training properly equipped for ministry. Candidates must therefore:

- a) have read the whole Bible (e.g., through a Bible in one year scheme) within the last five years;
- b) understand the basic structure of the Apostles' and Nicene creeds, that they describe the one God as three persons, as Creator and Saviour;
- c) have demonstrable leadership experience in the local church (e.g., they have led a group or a team);
- d) readily, appropriately, and comfortably talk about their faith with those of Christian faith, and those of other faiths and worldviews;
- e) have developed sustaining habits of daily prayer and Bible reading;

- f) be prepared to move parish for the exercise of ministry (although the general expectation is that they will stay where they are);
- g) are aged 60 (or, exceptionally, 55) or over;
- h) demonstrate wisdom and maturity.

This may seem a tall order. If it does and you are interested in exploring this training pathway towards ordained ministry, talk to your minister and a few other people who know you well. You may find they see all these things in you and more!

Overview of training

OAMS candidates complete their first year of formation with our diocesan training team, learning alongside candidates for Licensed Lay Ministry (LLM) and a growing number of interested learners seeking to grow in their faith and discipleship. You would undertake this first year while also continuing to discern your vocation in conversation with your director of ordinands. The design of the course is that, in sync with what you learn in modules each term, you are also putting things into practice in your home placement and reflecting on these with your supervisor.

At the end of Year 1, if you have been recommended for training following a Stage 2 National Discernment Panel, you would then progress to Ripon College Cuddesdon for the second year of training.

Ordination as Deacon would typically follow successful completion of Year 2 (though this is ultimately the Bishop's decision). After ordination you would then complete a final Doctrine module, which must be completed during the first year of curacy and certainly prior to any priesting.

Year 1 - Diocese of Oxford

Discipleship & Licensed Ministry Learning Hub

Core Modules

During the first year of OAMS you will complete three full modules in these foundational aspects of faith and ministry:

- Mission and Evangelism (Autumn Term)
- Opening Up the Bible (Spring Term)
- Everyday Discipleship (Summer Term)

Each core module runs for 10 weeks in the relevant term and comprises up to eight units of online learning materials, which you work through each week (in your own time, at your own pace) before exploring this learning further in group tutorials (also online).

The remaining units of each course are delivered through either one or two onsite Study Days, usually gathering all together in Oxford.

- Module Study Days occur 9am-4pm on Saturdays.
- There is usually a choice of meeting times each week for online Tutorial Groups – typically Wednesday afternoon, Wednesday evening or Thursday evening. We ask you to be as flexible as possible when expressing preferences.
- You should expect to allow approximately four hours each week to complete the online preparatory learning materials.

Long thin module: ‘Being Anglican’

In Year 1, you will also complete one further module, spread ‘thinly’ across the whole year and delivered through three stand-alone study days, one Saturday each term:

- Day 1 (autumn term) – Roots and Reformations. A focused look at the birth and development of what we now know as the Church of England and the Anglican Church.
- Day 2 (spring term) – Ministry. What does it mean to be a deacon and/or a priest?
- Day 3 (summer term) – Anglicanism Today. A day to consider the wider Anglican Communion and current issues in the life of the Church.

Bible Summer School Intensive

The annual Summer School Intensive is an opportunity to take a deeper dive into focused areas of biblical studies and you can expect to immerse yourself for a week in selected parts of both Old and New Testaments.

Typically, Summer School runs Monday-Friday (daytime) during early July, usually in Oxford. This is an integral and therefore compulsory part of the programme for OAMS candidates, and you will be expected to be available for this. It is open to other learners, lay or ordained, so you can invite others to come along if they already have a basic grounding in the Bible.

Also...

❖ Induction Day (mid-September)

A day to kick off the year and immerse yourself in the programme, together with LLM candidates and ordinands in discernment for other training pathways.

❖ Formation groups

You will join a Formation Group for the year, to reflect together with other potential ordinands on life, learning and emerging vocation. Formation Groups meet twice each term – once online and once during the ‘long-thin’ study days. (You will also, of

course, still meet regularly with your Director of Ordinands, especially during Year1, as you continue to explore your discernment journey.)

❖ **Context-based Placement**

OAMS candidates are considered to be 'on placement' at their sending church during the first year of training. This will involve engagement in practical ministry experience and supervision with a designated training minister.

❖ **Spiritual Director**

If you do not already meet regularly with a Spiritual Director/Spiritual Guide you will be expected to do so.

❖ **Assignments**

OAMS candidates are typically required to complete two 2500-word formal assignments for each core module (so two each term in year 1). Completion of 'formative assignments' is also a requirement of the programme, but these are carefully designed to help you along the way to completing the formal assignments. You can expect a range of assignment types, including essays, creating 'resources for others' and a project investigation.

❖ **Moodle**

In order to engage with your programme you will be enrolled on Moodle, the virtual learning platform on which our Learning Hub is based. Just ask if you want earlier access to discover some of wider resources available on the Hub, and to explore the Induction module prior to the formal September start.

❖ **Safeguarding**

We are committed to keeping all our students safe. Any safeguarding concerns will be taken seriously by staff, with support and direction from our Diocesan Safeguarding Team.

❖ **Inclusion and accessibility**

We are committed to fostering a culture of learning in which students feel safe, respected and valued by one another and by staff. We seek to nurture this through highlighting the theological model of dialogue and listening, facilitating a space in which all both belong and learn. Concerns relating to bias or discrimination will be addressed with the aim of achieving reconciliation, change and appropriate learning.

We are striving to ensure our courses are as accessible as possible to those who are disabled, neurodivergent and have learning difficulties. Please speak to us to ensure we are able to address your requirements in the most appropriate way.

Common Awards (Durham University) - Foundation Award

Typically, OAMS candidates will be enrolled initially for a Common Awards *Foundation Award* during Year 1 of the programme. This is a 60-credit (3 module) award validated by Durham University at HE Level 4. It equates to half of a Certificate of Higher Education (Cert HE), which (at 120 credits) is equivalent to the first year of a full university degree programme.

Candidates who, following a Stage 2 Panel, are admitted to the second year of the OAMS programme at Ripon College Cuddesdon will be, at that time, transferred to the full (120 credit) CertHE to complete the higher award there.

Candidates who do not continue to ordination training following a Stage 2 Panel, but who have successfully completed sufficient modules at the required level, will be able to exit with a completed Foundation Award.

Year 2 at Ripon College Cuddesdon

OAMS candidates who successfully complete Year1 with the Oxford Diocese Learning Hub, and who are recommended following a Stage 2 Panel, will be admitted to the second year of the programme, which is delivered through Ripon College Cuddesdon.

Assessed modules will cover a range of theological and ministerial issues. In particular:

- Brief introduction to Christian Doctrine (10 credits)
- Introduction to Christian Ethics (10 credits)
- Introduction to Pastoral Care (10 credits)
- Introduction to Preaching (10 credits)
- Ministry & Worship (Leading worship, sacraments, pastoral offices & leadership) (20 credits)

You will also engage in a 30hr Placement which exposes you to mission and ministry in a 'context of difference', and some non-assessed work in Contemporary Anglicanism and further Theological Reflection.

Teaching during year two is delivered mostly onsite at Cuddesdon. This will typically involve:

- 10 teaching evenings (Tuesdays) each term, beginning with dinner from 5.30-6pm ending at 9.15). Up to two modules may be available as asynchronous online learning.
- 6 residential weekends (Friday evening to Sunday lunch)
- 1 Easter residential week (typically just before or just after Easter)

FAQs

❖ **I've been out of education for a long time, will I cope with the study?**

This is true of many people who engage with courses of this nature and most discover that they find their feet again soon enough! At the same time, we are experienced in supporting adult learners returning to study after a break of sometimes many years. You will be given support from course tutors and core team to ease you back in and, if further support is required, we will help to source that for you.

❖ **What will it cost?**

Core OAMS training costs are picked up by either the diocese or national church, and you don't even have to buy lots of books, unless you wish to (you will be given access to a vast library of online resources, and required reading will be provided for you for all modules.) PCCs may be able to provide a modest grant to help towards books or travel expenses for candidates in training.

❖ **When will I know my timetable for the first year?**

Dates for the whole year are usually confirmed soon after Easter of the previous year. Just ask for details if you need to know training requirements for certain times of the year or, for example, the weekends on which induction and study days will fall.

❖ **I've already trained as an LLM - is OAMS for me...?**

Possibly... though it's more likely that a more bespoke programme building on the formal theological and ministerial training you will have already done is more appropriate for you. It is likely such a pathway would be reduced in length anyway and you would be able to train at a higher level with less repetition of similar material. Check with your Director of Ordinands.

❖ **I've done a fair bit of theology and ministry training before – is OAMS for me?**

A more bespoke pathway at another TEI would almost certainly be more appropriate to build on your prior learning. There will be opportunities there to work at a higher level rather than repeat more of the same. Again – check with your Director of Ordinands.

Testimonials

- From **ordained pathway candidates** in last year or so.

❖ *Thank you so much for your support... without your help and support I would have not made it. God bless you.*

Year 1 candidate.

❖ *you helped me grow in love, faith and learning to find my presence with others.*

Previous ordinand.

- From **training incumbents**

❖ *Thanks to you all for everything you have poured out into N's training.*

Training incumbent.

❖ *You guys have done a great job with 'B' – they have grown immensely through your work.*

Training incumbent.

- **Student comments (relating to 23/24 modules in particular)**

❖ *The learning materials provided to work through each week were well-balanced. I particularly enjoyed the reading, which was well-chosen and thought-provoking and added a great deal to the tutorials.*

Year 1 candidate.

❖ *The study days were good. It's stimulating to be with others on the same pathway.*

❖ *I have enjoyed every week of this course and revisit themes discussed often. The discussion, reading and materials have added to my knowledge and understanding of discipleship and have caused me to reflect on my own discipleship and what I can address and pray about.*

- ❖ *It has made me feel confident that I am able to do the work that is required. It has built up my confidence in many ways and I find it easier now to converse with others about my faith and to lead others in prayer.*
- ❖ *I really liked the course content. I thought the mix of watching, listening and reading was just right. Asking questions of me as I went along was great as it confirmed my understanding of what I had just learnt. The weekly group session was a great opportunity for me to share my views and opinions on what I had learnt during the module and to listen to other learners' views and opinions on what they had learnt.*
- ❖ *The group quiet/study day was great. I have never done anything like that before and very much enjoyed the experience. During the weekly meetings I had the opportunity to deliver the worship. It was a bit daunting to write it and decide what to include but the group leader gave me some great advice and the confidence to deliver it. The feedback from the group was good and I was very happy I had done it.*
- ❖ *This course has given me a deep understanding of the New Testament and Old testament. Helped me to look at the bible from different perspectives.*
- ❖ *This course has significant impact on my faith and my ability to share my beliefs with others. It has deepened my understanding of my own belief, and it has also developed a stronger sense of purpose and mission in my life it has given me more confidence to share the word of God and given me knowledge how to grow new congregations and bring them closer to God.*

Bishop Steven

Bishop Steven said: "We know there are Christians in our churches who have a wealth of experience and a deeply-rooted faith who feel called to ministry. It is our hope this pathway will encourage those people to offer their gifts to God and embark on a new journey of faith with him. I'm hopeful offering another route to ordained ministry will enable more people who feel called to share their love of God with others to step forward."