

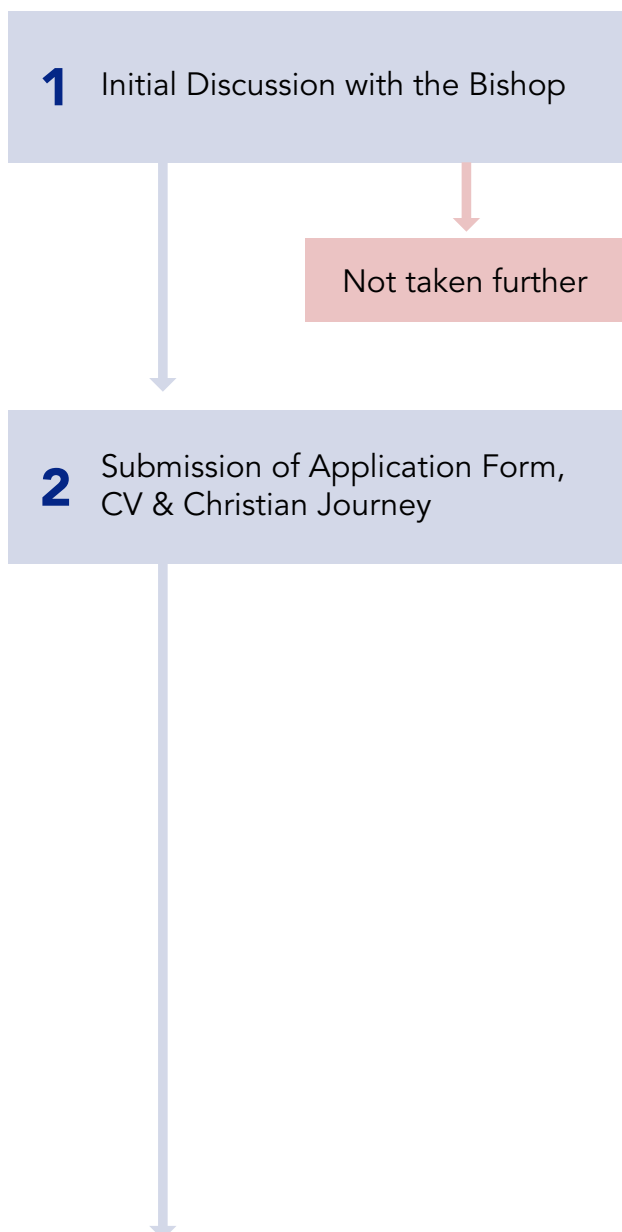


The Free Church of England

Exploring Ministry

To offer public ministry in the Free Church of England (FCE) means that you must be called, equipped and trained. The call is from God and however secure you may be in the fact that God's call is real to you, others must discern that they perceive it too. Being equipped for ministry will mean some theological training and most probably securing a recognised qualification appropriate to your experience and ability. Training is learning the craft of ministry.

Hopefully, this step-by-step introduction will help you begin the process and to discover, together with others, what God may have planned for you.



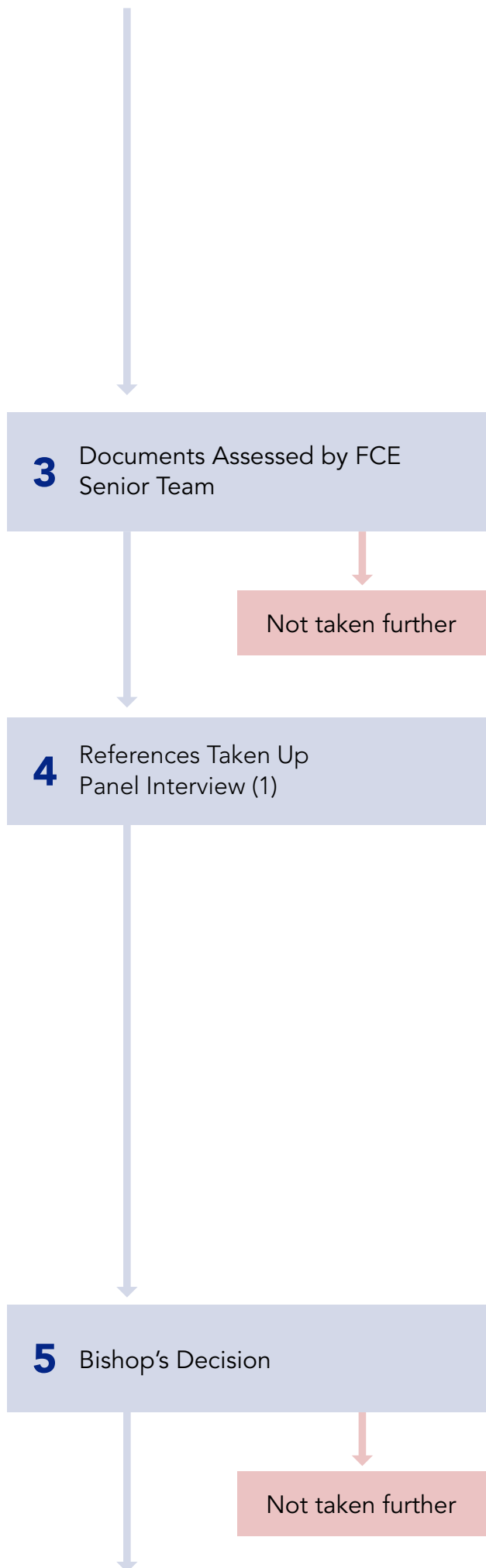
As an Episcopal Church, the ministry of the Bishop is key to the proper order of the Church. If you are to have a ministry in the FCE it will be the Bishop who ordains you and it will be the Bishop who will license you to any ministry in the Church. The initial conversation with the Bishop is informal, but will cover your story, your Christian commitment and your sense of call. If all goes well then the process continues and if there any issues that arise they will be addressed before you move to the next stage.

Application Form

The form is sent to you by the Bishop and you must fill it in fully, honestly and accurately. It should be accompanied by the 'Outline of your Christian journey' and your 'CV'. These forms will be kept by the Bishop and the General Secretary and will only be used as a record of your exploration of and training in ministry.

Outline of Your Christian Journey

This is more than just telling your story: it is about God and you. What is your background? Are you cradle Christian, baptised and fully engaged with the Church for the whole of your life or are you a convert – perhaps from a different faith or none – and how did that happen? In this written piece, please explore how you worship, how you pray and how you sustain your faith. What do you do to pursue the daily discipline of reading the Bible and praying? What is your involvement with the local Church? How important are the Sacraments to you? Are there any key people who have influenced your faith? What have you read in the past six months and how has that informed or challenged you? Do others say that they think you are called to public ministry? For those who are married, or are engaged to be married, there should also be some indication of the level of support you will receive from your wife or fiancée for both your training and in your ministry. These are just suggestions – it is your story and we look forward to reading it.



CV

Your Curriculum Vitae is the formal record of your life. Here you should tell us your contact details (including address, telephone and email); your date of birth; your national insurance number; if you have a full and clean driving licence; if you are married and if you have any children. You then give details of your academic history: GCSEs (or equivalent); A Levels; Degrees, stating the places you studied, the subjects and the award and class of award. You would next list any professional qualifications or memberships. Your employment history is next, with the most recent first and working backwards. You finish by listing and hobbies or interests. This should give a good outline of what you have done and where your life is to date.

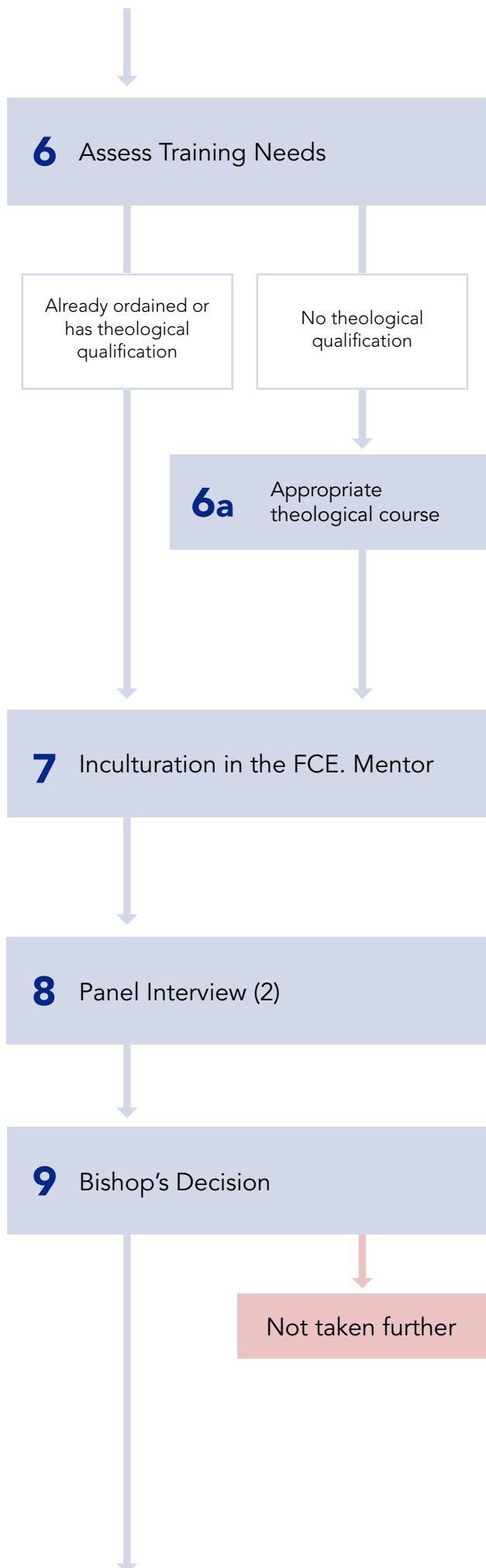
The Bishop is always enthusiastic to get the view of his senior colleagues on any potential candidates. Your documents will be shared with senior colleagues and their advice sought. This is the final part of the informal exploration of your call to ministry and those involved will report back to the Bishop with advice about how (or if) the process carries on.

References Taken Up

If the advice is positive, references will be sought in preparation for an interview. As part of the application form you will have been asked to supply the details of three referees. These must be people who know you well and can make detailed comments about you, your personality and at least two should be able to make informed comments on your Christian life. Ordinarily, at least one referee should be your minister: if he is not listed, he will be contacted as a matter of course (unless you share with us specific and detailed reasons why this is something you would rather we did not do).

Panel Interview (1)

The Bishop asks for the opinion of others, both clergy and lay people, as he prepares to make a decision about your future ministry. This panel will explore every aspect of your life, faith and call and will discuss your application with you and then between themselves. The interview will ideally be face to face, but may happen virtually if circumstances require. The panel will make a recommendation to the Bishop, indicating whether the panel supports your ordination or not. If the answer is positive, and the Bishop agrees, then you will be recognised as an FCE ordinand.



Assessment of Training Needs

The FCE has agreed a training partnership with the London School of Theology. Some candidates have no formal education in theology and others already hold post-graduate degrees. The Bishop, in consultation with his Examining Chaplain and others, will recommend what courses should be taken and over what period.

Theological Training

The London School of Theology has a variety of courses at Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Post-Graduate levels, all of which can be taken either in-person or on-line. Candidates without an existing theological qualification will normally be directed to one of these courses. You will be advised and supported through this part of your preparation.

Alongside any theological training you may already have had or will be receiving, you will need to become familiar with the history, purpose and distinctiveness of the FCE. This may be through some guided reading, or more formal lessons, or through placements. You will need to be assured that the FCE is somewhere you can live honestly and the FCE needs to know that you will fit in.

This interview takes place towards the end of your training and is intended to assess how you have progressed and matured, both in terms of academic knowledge and of fidelity to ministry in the FCE. Possible future training posts may also be discussed.

It is the Bishop who decides whether or not you will be ordained and where your training post will be. He will communicate that to you and then must report his intention to General Council before the actual ordination.



10 Ordination to the Diaconate
Assigned to Training Post and Mentor



11 Panel Interview (3)



12 Bishop's Decision



13 Ordination to the Presbyterate

Ordination to the Diaconate

Admission to each of the three Orders of ministry (deacon, presbyter, bishop) is by laying on of hands of a bishop, following an authorised rite. The Diaconate is the first of these orders of ministry, all of which originate in the New Testament. You will be guided through the service in preparation for the day. Your family, friends and those who have shared your Christian journey with will be enthusiastic about sharing this day with you.

Training post

The FCE offers a number of approaches to ministry. It can be stipendiary (paid) or non-stipendiary (self-supporting); accommodation may be provided, or it may be that you have your own home. Exactly what your training post will look like will be discussed during the later stages of your preparation. As a Deacon you are a clergyman but are restricted in some respects (presiding at the Eucharist or giving a blessing, for instance). During this period, you will be supported, and the Bishop will receive regular reports on your progress. Ordinarily, you will serve as a Deacon for a year, but the Bishop will determine, in discussion with you, the term of this stage of your ministry (some opt to be Permanent Deacons).

The purpose of this interview is to assess whether you are ready to proceed to ordination as a Presbyter. In many ways, this Panel Interview is like the previous one, except that it will have taken references from those to whom you have ministered. It will also explore what you believe to be both your strengths and weaknesses in your ministry and whether you have any specific further training needs. The panel will make a further recommendation to the Bishop who will make his decision and, if appropriate, report his intention to ordain you to the Presbyterate to the General Council.

This is the culmination and fulfilment of your call to ministry, the result of a great deal of prayer, questioning, training and hard work. The challenge then is to become the minister God has called you to be. This will probably initially mean continuing in your training post before eventually transferring to another post where you will have greater responsibility.

