

IM5+ England: Interim Ministry England – The First Five Years

Executive Summary

Interim ministry is considered an effective and beneficial way of bringing about transformation in the Church of England, according to the first survey since Interim ministry appointments were enabled by legislation in the Church of England five years ago.

43 people completed the survey from 17 dioceses: 89% were Interim Ministers and 16% those who appoint, manage or work with IMs. They represented an estimated 82-137 IM appointments over 5 years from 2015-2020.

All respondents (100%) said that Interim Ministry has been effective and beneficial. The majority (97.3%) said the IM appointments had not been ineffective and disappointing. Analysis of the responses indicated IM had the following 14 benefits:

1. Bringing stability, support and reassurance: e.g. *offering stability, security, reducing anxiety.*
2. Dealing with difficult situations and enabling healing and forgiveness: e.g. *untangling difficult situations, healing wounded history.*
3. Offering clarity, vision and new direction: e.g. *a fresh way for people to look at where they are as a church, a change of outlook.*
4. Promoting spiritual renewal and growth: e.g. *Through teaching and spiritual refocussing.*
5. Creates momentum and a mandate for change: e.g. *Enabled churches to 'hit the reset button'.*
6. Promoting mission and community engagement: e.g. *Mission Action Plan, more outward focussed.*
7. Enabling pastoral reorganisation: e.g. *A new team; integrated with deanery, enabling a church 'graft'.*
8. Strengthening Leadership: e.g. *take more responsibility; gave new confidence; 'can do' attitude*
9. Improving stewardship and sustainability: e.g. *able to finance a full time appointment.*
10. Addressed building issues: e.g. *restarted a stalled project.*
11. Reconnecting with the diocese and senior staff: e.g. *feel noticed/valued; grown in trust of Diocese.*
12. Enabling a long term appointment: e.g. *successful appointment; attractive proposition.*
13. Benefitted the diocese in strategic planning: e.g. *think through the future of the parish and implement changes, while keeping the show on the road.*
14. Benefitted the IM as a leader: e.g. *Helped with transition; Challenged; Gave new opportunity.*

Participants said it would make most difference to this work to:

1. Recognise, support and raise awareness of a unique vocation.
2. Provide training and information resources.
3. Enable networking and mutual support.
4. Refine the national model of IM.
5. Offer support, understanding and commitment from senior staff.
6. Clarify appointments, timescales and objectives.
7. Provide opportunities for curates, S/NSMs and retired/near retirement clergy.

Those involved with IM described it as '*a joy*' and '*a privilege*', '*exciting and rewarding*', which enabled them to learn and use their skills well. One person said IM had changed '*my inner core sense of ordained priestly ministry.*'

IM was considered to be '*an essential part of the Church of England's toolkit*' which '*enables*' lay leaders and '*empowers the church*'. One person asked to what extent Interim Minister was '*increasingly needed for any meaningful ministry in the CofE today?*'

IM needed to get *'the recognition and support it deserves'* as a distinct vocation, to be flagged up in training and curacy, and offered as an option for SSM, LLM and retired clergy.

IMs stressed the need for training – one pointed out *'I've not had any!'* - for information resources, networking, *'fellowship & support,'* and *'a more comprehensive national training and deployment system.'*

It is clear that not all IMs were appointed with an understanding of the ministry. One commented: *'Wow... It would have helped to have known about and had experience of the concept of Interim Ministry before I started. I just thought it was a label, didn't know it was 'a thing'.'*

This highlighted the importance of better awareness, *'clearer understanding'* and *'greater clarity'* about IM appointments among diocese and senior staff. There needed to be *'more widespread understanding'* within parishes, deaneries and dioceses. Work needed to be done to share learning between dioceses and establish a *'clearly defined and nationally agreed set of principles'* and to have sharper distinctions between *'intentional interim posts and locums.'*

Support and supervision by senior staff was important, as was good handover and follow up. Where IMs were effective it was *'largely because of the Archdeacon, Area and Diocesan Bishops are committed to IM.'* One noted: *'The support of the 'instructing party' as it were, is crucial.'* But it was clear that support was not uniform. One IM said: *'I feel abandoned and ignored';* another said: *'I have only once in four years been asked how things are going by anyone from on high!'*

The majority (97.3%) said the IM appointments had not generally been ineffective and disappointing. Where there were concerns, these were about the impact of Covid 19, handover at the end of appointments, about timescales for change, and theological concerns about IM and the nature of priestly ministry.

The survey, *IM5+ England – The First Five Years* - was conducted between July and early November. It was the first survey of IM since IM appointments were enabled by legislation in the Church of England in 2015. It provided an opportunity to gather feedback from IMs and those who appoint and work with IMs on the benefits and challenges of Interim Ministry

43 people completed the survey, of which 36 (89%) were Interim Ministers, while 7 (16%) were those who appoint, manage (or work with) Interim Ministers. They represented an estimated baseline of 82-137 IM appointments over 5 years from 2015-2020.

Respondents had experienced IM in 17 Dioceses, 13 from the province of Canterbury (Norwich, Lichfield, Lincoln, London, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Gloucester, Leicester, Chelmsford, Winchester, Chichester, Exeter, Oxford and Hereford) and 4 from the Province of York (Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Durham). Norwich had the most respondents (7), followed by Liverpool (6), Leeds (5), Chichester (3), London, Lichfield, Leicester, Chelmsford, Winchester and Oxford (2) and the rest had 1 apiece.

IM5+ England: Interim Ministry England – The First Five Years

Full Report

Purpose

This was the first survey of IM since IM appointments were enabled by legislation in the Church of England in 2015.

It provided an opportunity to gather feedback on the benefits and challenges of Interim Ministry from IMs and those who appoint (and work with) them.

Method

The survey was created by Helen Gheorghiu Gould, who is an interim minister and IM and Vacancy Development Advisor in the Diocese of Chelmsford. Chelmsford has received capacity building funding from the Church Commissioners' Strategic Development Fund to support an initial period of networking and training in Interim Ministry.

A 6 question survey was shared via Survey Monkey among approximately 130 subscribers to Chelmsford's Interim Ministry Bulletin in 2020, and distributed through the Church of England's *Friday Mailing* network.

The survey questions were as follows:

1. Have you been involved in IM as:
 - An Interim Minister
 - Someone who appoints/manages IMs
2. If you have served as an IM, or been responsible for appointing IMs, how many IM appointments have you been involved in since 2015.
3. Have the IM appointments you have been involved in generally been effective and beneficial?
4. Have the IM appointments you have been involved in generally been ineffective and disappointing?
5. What would most make a difference to your experience of Interim Ministry in England?
6. Please state in which diocese you have been involved in Interim Ministry? (Optional)
7. Any other comments.

Summary data

44 responses were received, of which 43 completed the survey.

36 (89%) were Interim Ministers; 7 (16%) were those who appoint, manage (or work with) Interim Ministers. Some may have been both IMs and those who work with IMs.

31 (78%) had been involved in 1-2 appointments

5 (13%) with 3-5 appointments

2 (5%) involved in 6-10 appointments

2 (5%) involved in more than 10 appointments

This represents an estimated baseline of 82-137 IM appointments over 5 years from 2015-2020.

Of those who responded to Question 3 (93% of those who responses to the survey), 100% found the IM appointments they had been involved in generally effective and beneficial.

Of those who responded to Question 4 (84% of those who responses to the survey), 97.3% said the IM appointments they had been involved had not been generally ineffective and disappointing. About 3% (1-2) people had found them generally ineffective and disappointing. 40 people (90%) had suggestions to make about what would make most difference to their experience of IM, and this is discussed below.

Respondents had experienced IM in 17 Dioceses, 13 from the province of Canterbury (Norwich, Lichfield, Lincoln, London, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, Gloucester, Leicester, Chelmsford, Winchester, Chichester, Exeter, Oxford and Hereford) and 4 from the Province of York (Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Durham).

Norwich had the most respondents (7), followed by Liverpool (6), Leeds (5), Chichester (3), London, Lichfield, Leicester, Chelmsford, Winchester and Oxford (2) and the rest had 1.

Findings

How has IM been effective and beneficial?

Responses indicated that Interim Ministry has been effective and beneficial in the following ways:

- I. Bringing stability, support and reassurance
 - *Parish has had a priest where otherwise would not.*
 - *Support for the benefice during a difficult time (Covid 19.)*
 - *Stability in a changing environment.*
 - *Daily oversight.*
 - *Point of contact*
 - *Has provided security to the PCC and people of the church during a time of relative uncertainty.*
 - *Very helpful during a vacancy.*
 - *It has been incredibly important to the seven parishes of this benefice to have someone 'in post' during this period.*
 - *The church and parish is being pastorally cared for.*
 - *Giving/promoting stability.*
 - *Helps hugely in the continuance of the life of parish.*
 - *Consistent ministry.*
 - *Congregation...feel supported and valued during a time of uncertainty.*
 - *Pre-existing ministries ... continue with a minimum of disruption.*
 - *Lessened anxiety.*
 - *Continuance of ... worshipping life.*
2. Dealing with difficult situations and enabling healing and forgiveness
 - *Helped address ... need for respect and forgiveness.*
 - *Untangle difficult situations.*
 - *Stabilising a very turbulent situation.*
 - *Healing wounded history.*
 - *Grasping difficult nettles and dealing with them in a way others have feared to tread.*
 - *Giving stability to a parish community after the parish priest has left (or died in two cases)*
 - *Time ... to emotionally disconnect from former clergy.*
 - *Letting go of old wounds.*

3. Offering clarity, vision and new direction
 - *Helped address problems of vision.*
 - *A fresh way for people to look at where they are as a church.*
 - *Facilitation in discerning the way forward.*
 - *Clear sense of issues to be prioritised.*
 - *Creates clarity of expectation.*
 - *Visions discerned.*
 - *The church was able to renew itself.*
 - *It allowed the parishes to accept that ... (situation)... was unrealistic.*
 - *Clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the community going forward.*
 - *Giving new direction to the parish.*
 - *Gain clarity for a new direction.*
 - *Change of outlook.*

4. Promoting spiritual renewal and growth
 - *Providing spiritual refocussing*
 - *Teaching ministry*

5. Creates momentum and a mandate for change
 - *Enabled churches to 'hit the reset button'.*
 - *Sense of urgency that releases creativity and opportunity.*
 - *A mandate for change.*
 - *A mandate for change and challenge.*
 - *Assessing the life of a dying congregation (and bringing new life to it).*
 - *Creates momentum in ministry.*
 - *This kind of ministry enables one to make change quickly and effectively.*
 - *Able to 'tell it how it is', move quickly, deal with issues firmly and make lasting change in short order.*
 - *Helps turns failing churches into potentially thriving ones.*
 - *Helped focus most members of the congregation and made enabling change easier.*
 - *Generating the energy needed for change from within the parish.*
 - *Clear the ground for new chapter.*
 - *Creative option to bring around necessary change.*
 - *Provided focus and energy.*
 - *Helped change culture.*
 - *Allowing me to set a fast pace for change in a parish that badly needed it.*
 - *Leading change - congregation had been prepared to expect change when I arrived.*
 - *Sustained and grown a failing church.*
 - *Growing numbers.*
 - *Increased numbers in church.*
 - *Increased church attendance*

6. Promoting mission and community engagement.
 - *Relationships developed with families and schools have developed.*
 - *The church was able to... agree a Mission Action Plan... and start to realise that MAP.*
 - *Starting new missional things.*
 - *Helped identify ... opportunities to promote mission.*
 - *Focus congregation on partnership working for effective mission.*

- Churches now more outward focussed.
- Relationships have grown between church and community.
- Mission opportunities.

7. Enabling pastoral reorganisation

- Helped identify pastoral reorganization opportunities to promote mission.
- Integrate parish plans with a broader direction of travel for the deanery.
- Led to a decision to distance the Team Ministry into its constituent benefice groupings.
- Setting up a new team of churches.
- Chose to become a single parish rather than 3 incorporating all 3 names.
- Two churches now working more closely.
- Transitioning a graft from another stronger church into the church
- See(n) two parishes through the process of pastoral reorganisation into a single parish.

8. Strengthening Leadership

- Good and effective leadership in multi parish benefice.
- The church was able to ... take more and more responsibility.
- Strong lay leadership in place.
- Giving new confidence to the laity.
- Encouraging the whole congregation ... (in) ... owning and making decisions about the present and future ministry.
- Leadership and working group were empowered and not priest dependent.
- People became stewards of ministry and did not leave it to priest.
- Congregation has grown in confidence, and outreach.
- Growing lay leadership.
- A slow but steady increase in lay involvement and ministry.
- Vocations identifying.
- 'can do' attitude ... development of lay confidence, capacity and creativity.

9. Improving stewardship and sustainability

- ...were able to finance and make a full time stipendiary appointment

10. Addressed building issues

- A stalled building reordering has been completed.

11. Reconnecting with the diocese and senior staff

- Enabling parishes/benefices to feel noticed and valued by the diocese.
- Congregation has grown in trust of Diocese.
- Renewed confidence in hierarchy.
- Reconnecting to community and diocesan systems

12. Enabling a long term appointment

- Able to ... make a full time stipendiary appointment
- Hope it will become a permanent post within the 6 years
- Resulted in a successful appointment of a long-term stipendiary to the parish
- Excellent appointment following IM...fulfilled the guidelines
- Enable these remote parishes become an attractive proposition for a permanent incumbent.
- Very positive (experience) preparing parish for new priest after long vacancy.

13. Benefitted the diocese in strategic planning:

- *Gives the diocese time to think and pray about whether ministry in the current form is viable at that parish.*
- *Allowed time for legal/structural changes to be implemented before a new appointment, etc*
- *Have allowed time for us to think through the future of the parish while still keeping the show on the road.*

14. Benefitted the IM as a leader:

- *Very positive (experience) preparing parish for new priest after long vacancy.*
- *Gives freedom to the minister to minister.*
- *It helped me in a process of transition.*
- *Challenged me as a leader.*
- *(as an NSM) It has given me the opportunity to have my own parish on a part-time basis while still working and the experience which was needed to go into full-time ministry.*

How has IM been ineffective and disappointing?

There were only 11 comments on this.

Covid 19 has had a huge impact on IM appointments and imposed additional pressures on time-limited posts. One respondent noted that it was: *'Challenging for both the clergy person and the congregation to have so much in limbo with no certainty about the future.'* The departure of the UK from the European Union is causing additional stress for those affected.

Other issues raised were about handover and transition at the end of the IM appointment. One IM expressed concern at the *'Speed at which the next appointment was made'* and that *'I felt under pressure to step down early'*.

Some raised concern at the timescales of IM which one saying: *'Three years ... is very little time to move people. ... often has felt like we have to move faster than some of the congregation would like...change doesn't really become sustainable until there is time to journey with and bring the majority of the people with you.'* In later parts of the survey, however, another respondent suggested timescales beyond 3-6 months were *'too long'* as *'It starts to feel like I am the parish priest, drawn into roles that the interim shouldn't be drawn into.'*

Another expressed: *'theological concerns with the model,'* explaining: *'I have concerns that we might be importing a business model that isn't theologically thought through - and that discourages what priestly ministry has been for centuries.'* Other concerns were raised about an: *'overly cautious Diocesan response to the major reorganisation needed'* which made *'reorganisation ... much more laborious than it needed to be.'*

What would most make a difference to your experience of IM?

1. Recognise, support and raise awareness of a unique vocation

- *To have it better recognised as a skilled transition ministry, not a stop gap, to actively promote IMs and develop their mutual flourishing.*
- *Support and recognition that it's a distinct ministry.*
- *If it had the recognition and support it deserves.*

- A continued sense of them NOT being ordinary - a post that is needed, for a specific reason - should they become 'ordinary' then you lose the benefits that are currently associated with them.
- IM mentioned from a much earlier stage in the training process as a possible vocation;
- Wow... It would have helped to have known about and had experience of the concept of Interim Ministry before I started. I just thought it was a label, didn't know it was 'a thing'.
- An awareness of these posts and having them flagged up more during curacy for those who feel called to them
- I don't know to what extent IM is referred to in either pre- or post-ordination training; I would like to see it have more visibility and more intentional recruitment of people with the skills and gifts to be IMs.

2. Provide training and information resources

- Conferences
- Creative resources to sustain the 5 key themes of intentional ministry, drawn from good practice. Case studies of effective interim ministry.
- Hearing lessons learned from others in 3 year posts, at the beginning of mine, would have been helpful...
- Some training! I've not had any!
- Training. Bridge Builders courses were great, but maybe there could be some specific courses for IMs.
- More intentional training and support locally to those in similar roles

3. Enable networking and mutual support

- An online network would be a huge help.
- I have found the IM Network in England to be very helpful.
- Making the most of networks of practitioners.
- Regular contact/meetings with other IMs to share insights and experiences.
- Fellowship & support with fellow Interim Ministers.

4. Refine the national model of IM

- A clearly defined and nationally agreed set of principles which define IM as strategic and differentiates it from a more traditional understanding of IM.
- To have a more comprehensive national training and deployment system for interims.
- Effective sharing of learning by dioceses about development of IM.

5. Ensure support, understanding and commitment from senior staff

- Follow up. I feel abandoned and ignored now that a further interim appointment has been made ... I feel they should be maintaining better contact with me.
- In Eds and Ips have a diocesan bishop and an archdeacon who actually understand the difference between stop gap and interim.
- To somehow have more sense of security.
- If there was a mixed economy where more clergy owned their own houses rather than our current reliance on tied accommodation, then there might be a greater pool of candidates for IM.
- More widespread understanding from within the parish, deanery, diocese of the benefits of short term, high energy, ministry that helps congregations 'see' worship, mission and ministry in a new way.
- Flexible and understanding support from diocese.

- *More support from archdeacons.*
- *Better support for IMs within the diocese.*
- *It worked really well for me. I was well supported by either bishops, area dean... The support of the 'instructing party' as it were, is crucial.*
- *Better support from the Diocese - I have only once in 4 years been asked how things are going by anyone from on high!*
- *My experience has been very positive, largely because of the Archdeacon, Area and Diocesan Bishops are committed to IM.*
- *Knowing what is happening next for the parish in which I am IM.*
- *That diocese organises resources out of larger healthy parishes to support interims in their work.*
- *Good handover: senior staff really listening well and communicating well with parishes.*

6. Clarify appointments, timescales and objectives

- *More specific time scale and goals.*
- *... hugely helpful if the C of E could draw a sharper distinction in job adverts and general discussion between intentional interim posts and locums. Often the term 'interim' is used for both which risks misunderstanding.*
- *It would be valuable to distinguish between what is say a three year holding operation and what is a more focussed and intentional process of discernment.*
- *Better clarity in purpose and monitoring by line management.*
- *Greater clarity around process for IM i.e. expectations of how the interim ministry is going to be both supported and assessed.*
- *Clearer understanding from senior staff and the parish what IM is and is not.*
- *Greater clarity around process for IM i.e. expectations of how the interim ministry is going to be both supported and assessed.*

7. Offer opportunities for curates, S/NSMs and retired/near retirement clergy

- *...having them flagged up more during curacy for those who feel called to them.*
- *Encourage those priests in NSM rolls to take on IM positions.*
- *IM as a pre-retirement or retirement ministry ... it could be a rich and rewarding pre and retirement ministry for some if we could scope it as such.*

Other Comments

Enjoyment and Privilege

- *I experienced IM as a joy.*
- *A privilege being asked to take on the position and I would do it again.*
- *Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to serve in this capacity.*
- *...loving every moment of it so far!*
- *It is an exciting and rewarding ministry to be involved in.*
- *It has been beneficial.*
- *I greatly valued the opportunity to do this work and would do so again.*

Using skills and experience

- *As a retired parish priest, I've thoroughly enjoyed being back "in role".*
- *After 20 years of parish ministry ... I was glad to find a way of drawing upon the wisdom and experience I had acquired and which offered interest, challenge and variety.*

- *This is fantastic role for someone like me who enjoys change, encouraging lay leadership, and refining systems ... it feels good to put a church back on its feet in a short time, raising heads and helping people feel that the future looks better.*
- *I have been a steady hand on the tiller and I can move on and do it all again somewhere else.*
- *Interim ministry makes me feel like I can 'do some good' in many places over and over again, building relationships quickly and edifying the church membership to be much more corpus Christi in their mission, discipleship and pastoral ministry;*
- *I have been able to use experience to be calm and to grow the parishes here.*

Implications for ministry in the Church of England

- *To what extent are the skills of an Interim Minister increasingly needed for any meaningful ministry in the CofE today?*
- *IM changed my inner core sense of ordained priestly ministry.....*
- *Interim ministry helps the church look at clergy roles differently too, as supportive, enabling and resourcing, rather than the person who does everything for them. It empowers the church.*
- *I learned a great deal from my experience and I am glad the C of E are taking this seriously.*
- *I feel passionately that IM is an essential part of the C of E's toolkit. I would like to see it more widely known about and understood - in particular, the circumstances in which it is appropriate to be used, and where it is NOT appropriate.*
- *I think IM is very useful tool and should be used more.*
- *IM is still a young discipline and that we are learning all the time.*
- *We seek to have FTE posts for interims with housing—one per Archdeaconry—licensing them to our cathedral and deploying them regionally.*

Reservations

- *Effective doesn't necessarily mean that the church continues... sometimes it closes.*
- *I fear that the progress ... made through IM in my recently ended appointment may be undermined by the impact of Covid. I trust that "nothing is lost" with God.*
- *I have achieved much ... However, there is still an entrenched level of opposition to some of the changes, and hearts and minds have not been fully won over.*
- *This has been personally quite costly, but I hope and trust that it will be of long-term benefit.*