



**GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPING FORMATION PROGRAMMES FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS  
CONSULTATION FOR TRAINERS: 23-24 FEBRUARY 2023**

At the Retreat Association gathering of SD trainers in February, there was enormous affirmation for the document presented and its contents. Many expressed their appreciation for the principles that underlie its approach, the overall framework that is followed and the usefulness of the contents. At the same time, those present were asked to offer comments and suggestions as to how it might be further improved ahead of final release, and this is an attempt to draw together what was said.

Such an attempt is always dangerous! This is no more than a personal attempt to bring order to all that was discussed, and it is open to scrutiny and change. There were inevitably overlapping views expressed, and I have tried to bring those comments together. There were also contradictory views expressed, and those are simply acknowledged. I may also have missed or misunderstood what was said at times, and so corrections may be needed. I have divided the comments and suggestions into two categories but, again, this reflects my own views and is open to challenge. However, despite the limitations I hope this provides a helpful summary and enables those with the difficult task of writing and editing to find appropriate ways forward.

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**Comments and suggestions that should be acted upon if at all possible**

|           | <b>Comment and suggestion</b>  | <b>Reflection</b>  |
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| Page 1    | A key summary of the document would be helpful at the beginning.   | This ought to be possible, but it would be worth thinking through what such a summary seeks to achieve. It might be better not to rehearse the actual content, but to offer answers to three simple questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is this guidance for?</li> <li>• What does the guidance seek to do?</li> <li>• How might this guidance be used?</li> </ul> It could usefully pick up the comments and suggestions noted below. |
| Page 1    | The comment was made that this is to be a living document, offering best practice from a national perspective, and designed to support and encourage what takes place in very different settings.  | This comment might usefully be included in the suggested 'key summary' above.  |
| Page 1    | The image of soil and flowers could be used in any introduction to the document.   | This suggestion could usefully be included in the suggested 'key summary' above.   |
| Page 1    | It would be helpful to identify key words in the document and how they fit into the course.  | This suggestion is partially fulfilled within the current introduction, and could be developed further without extending the introduction too much.  |
| Page 4    | The question was asked: What are the distinctive aspects of the gift of SD, as opposed to those qualities needed of any listener? Are those listed appropriate, and does there need to be mention of the importance of self-awareness?   | The four bullet points might be reviewed, and reference to self-awareness added. It is not immediately evident what further changes might be needed.   |
| Pages 5-6 | Without wanting to ignore what is being said about congruence, it was suggested that there are ways in which forming SDs is not the same as the process of SD itself – in particular, those engaged in formation are involved in the task of appraisal and of making judgements.<br>It was argued that the diagrams in Fig 2 and 3 are not quite right as the relationships are more complex. Note might be taken, for example, of the 'absent other' – those who are the potential future directees of the participants and the responsibility supervisors might have for them. | This appears to be an important corrective to what the current guidance document says and consideration should be given to how these insights can be included, even if some rewriting is necessary.  |

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| Page 7                   | It is importance to stress flexibility in constructing a course, as all courses are different and no document can say everything.   | This is implicit in the document's discussion about evolving a formation programme. Flexibility could easily be emphasized, together with the advice not to feel that everything in the guidance needs to be slavishly followed!  |
| Page 7                   | A careful review of any formation course is needed in order to learn from experience.   | This point could usefully added as point 6 at the bottom of this page.  |
| Page 8                   | The question is asked: 'What model of SD will be used?' It would be helpful to understand what is meant by this question.   | Clarity should be offered as to what is meant by 'models of SD'.  |
| Page 11-12<br>Appendix 6 | Issues were raised about the framework out of which a course is constructed and whether this is clear enough. This is about establishing: expected learning outcomes, identified core competencies, and related forms of assessment. It is what allows quality controls to be put in place. | Much of this is covered in the 'Expected outcomes' section, and it has to be acknowledged that the document is trying to speak to a rich variety of different situations, not all of which will identify very clearly with such a framework. However, it is worth considering whether it might be valuable to reshape this section to help those running courses think through more systematically what they hope to achieve and how this will happen.<br>A specific suggestion was to add a column to Appendix 6 indicating core competencies and this could also be considered. |
| Page 11-12               | It was asked whether there should be expected outcomes for the trainers as well as the participants.  | Though what is said might of necessity be fairly brief, it would be useful to express the hope that any formation course is a learning experience for all those involved' All have wisdom and discernment to offer and so also to receive.  |
| Page 17                  | The section on team formation is helpful, but it would be useful to included reference to the team needing to: pray and share together, show a willingness to be vulnerable to one another, and to identify where a visiting expert might be useful within the formation programme.         | It should be possible to include these aspects into the paragraph as currently written.   |
| Page 17                  | The importance of inclusion and diversity and addressing this within the document.  | This potentially has many dimensions and probably does need to be addressed directly in some way. It might be that the issue could be raised and mentioned in the section on the formation of the team, recognizing that if those who are responsible for formation are aware of such issues (and attempt to model that awareness in the way they are   |

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|  |  | brought together) then that can be communicated through the delivery of the course.  |
|  | The presentation of the document might be improved so as to ensure that it looks as attractive as possible and is easy to use. | This should be possible. It could usefully include careful proof-reading, and give attention to section headings and numberings. It would be the last matter to receive attention. |

**Comments and suggestions that are important but can only be responded to in a limited way**

|  | <b>Comment and suggestion</b>   | <b>Reflection</b>   |
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|  | The length of the document was noted and different views were expressed.                                | <p>This is a difficult issue to address, particularly when a number of very helpful proposals were put forward that will inevitably increase the length of the document.</p> <p>There were no suggestions as to what might be left out in order to make it shorter!</p>   |
|  | The provision of examples of course outlines representing good practice, perhaps as a further appendix. | <p>There were clearly those who would welcome this, and a general willingness to be generous in learning from each other by sharing good practice and knowledge, including resources and books. But there were also those who pointed out the need for each to respond to God's calling in their particular context, and not narrow down options. Courses have to be always evolving each year.</p> <p>It might be more appropriate to signpost the possibility of seeking advice and guidance from others within the network, rather than attempt to offer actual materials.</p> |
|  | The importance of DBS checks and safeguarding issues.   | No one at the gathering doubted the need to pay attention to this issue. However, as well as being a complex matter to address, it was recognized that church denominations have their own rules and procedures that are not always aligned.  |

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|             |  | It should be possible for the document to signpost this issue without trying to offer any further guidance.  |
|             | The lack of structural and financial support in the area of SD and how to deal with this is an important issue. SDs may have their own questions about how many hours they should offer, what payment is appropriate, and where bursaries may be sought. | <p>This is a difficult area to address – precisely because of the lack of support offered. Inevitably it is one of the matters that anyone on a formation course is likely to ask about, and so the team need to be prepared to answer this from within their own context.</p> <p>It should be possible for the document to signpost this issue without trying to offer any specific guidance.</p> |
| Pages 11-12 | Further guidance is needed on what happens to people after the course, including those who drop out. What support, guidance, ongoing evaluation and learning will take place?  | <p>Though important, any detail is probably beyond the scope of this document – particularly when expected outcomes and assessment patterns may vary considerably.</p> <p>Minor changes could be made to this section to ensure such issues are thought of in advance.</p>   |
|             | It was commented that there is a lack of reference to the contemplative dimension that might well form an important aspect of the journey of SD.   | <p>This is true. It has to do with the content of any course, and as the guidance does not seek to offer a detailed syllabus it is not too surprising that it isn't mentioned.</p> <p>This is probably beyond the scope of the document but could well be picked up in the sharing of resources and experience.</p>  |

*Graham Sparkes  
March 2023*