

EXTENDED STUDY LEAVE: GUIDELINES AND POLICY

This document sets out the St Albans diocesan policy regarding Extended Study Leave (ESL) and explains the diocese's recommended principles for making good use of such time.

1. Purpose

The main purpose of ESL is to do as the phrase indicates: to offer a three-month break from the pressures of daily ministry to focus on personal study and growth. Such growth should be considered in the broadest sense, including gaining new knowledge and experience, sharpening existing skills, and renewing prayer and spirituality.

2. Eligibility

ESL is available to all stipendiary and self-supporting clergy, although it may not suit self-supporting clergy in secular employment. ESL is also provided to clergy serving dual roles who hold officer positions and parish posts and work six days a week.

Clergy are entitled to ESL every 10 years provided that:

- They have been ordained for more than 10 years;
- They have been in their present post for at least 3 years; and
- They are not within 5 years of retirement.

Prior service in a comparable ministry in another diocese will normally be recognised.

ESL is most beneficial for those actively engaged in healthy ministry; it is not suited for those recuperating or recovering from any crisis. In such cases, the Diocese will provide alternative support and resources.

3. Procedure

The process starts with an email from the Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry informing the clergy person that they are eligible for ESL and inviting them to take up the opportunity. A specific timeframe is given for completing ESL. Typically, this will be 18 months from the date of the email to provide adequate time for planning and preparation.

The member of clergy then needs to take the following steps (approximately in this order):

- **Inform the Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry (DDMM)** that they wish to take up the opportunity. The DDMM is happy to meet to help plan the theme, content, and structure of the ESL, if requested.
- **Obtain the approval from the PCC** that they may take ESL. While this should simply be a formality, in difficult circumstances, the DDMM may be invited to attend a PCC meeting.
- **Consult with the Rural/Area Dean** at an early stage of planning and seek their approval.
- **Arrange parish cover** during the absence, particularly regarding supervision of any curate in training. Whilst this will involve consultation with the Rural/Area Dean, it is ultimately the responsibility of the person taking ESL to ensure that adequate cover is organised.

- **Detailed planning** of the ESL, including scheduling, itinerary, and preparing a budget using the proforma spreadsheet available [here](#).
- **Final approval.** This involves completing the online [ESL Proposal Form](#). Upon receipt, the DDMM will consult with the Bishop, Archdeacon and Rural/Area Dean, and once the proposal has been approved the clergy person will be notified by email. If they have indicated they are living in clergy housing and will be away from their home for 60 consecutive days or more, the Diocesan Property Team will be notified by the DDMM.
- **Applications towards grant-making bodies** to help cover the costs of the ESL.
- Once the ESL is complete, the clergy person will be expected to **report back to the DDMM and the Bishop** (see below).

4. Finance

Clergy must complete the ESL Budget Proforma and include it with their application.

ESL can be costly, especially when extensive travel is involved, so careful financial planning is essential. Applicants should anticipate their ESL to cost around £2,000, which is considered sufficient to cover two to three months' stay at an English theological college.

There is no objection to clergy spending more than this amount if extra funds can be obtained from sources such as Ecclesiastical Insurance Group bursaries, trust fund grants, or their own resources. However, if the projected ESL costs are considerably higher than normal, the Bishop may seek assurance that the applicant will not face financial hardship.

The Diocese will generally provide a grant towards ESL up to the amounts specified below or half of the budgeted cost, whichever is less:

- Full-time stipendiary clergy £1,200
- Part-time clergy, pro rata e.g. £600 for 0.5 post
- House for Duty / Self Supporting Ministers £300

This grant is usually released three months before the start of the ESL. The remaining cost (excluding any other grants) should typically be divided equally between the individual and the PCC. However, the PCC would not usually be asked to contribute more than £500.

5. Getting the most from Extended Study Leave

Since part of the goal of ESL is to experience a different rhythm of life, it is important to treat the three months as a single block. Exceptionally, an ESL plan allowing two shorter instalments may be approved, provided they are not separated by more than a few months. Plans involving three or more instalments are unlikely to be approved.

It is much easier to avoid parish entanglements when part or all of the time is spent physically away from the parish, but this is not always possible or desirable. Commitments to family must take a high priority, and there is no objection in principle to ESL being based largely at home, although careful thought must be given as to how the "absence" from the parish is maintained.

Leaving and re-entering regular ministry should be approached with care. This is particularly important regarding "clearing the desk" before ESL and the risk of accumulating a "backlog" of demands when returning. It's wise to allow a few clear days at

either end of the ESL to allocate time and space for this transition. Additionally, it is prudent to consider in advance how it may feel to relinquish all usual ministerial duties, especially given that a clergy person's identity can be closely linked to their role.

6. Elements of Extended Study Leave

ESL varies considerably, and each clergy member's time away will be unique. Although the term "sabbatical" is no longer used, the church should remember its origins in rest and renewal. Therefore, it is important not to fill three months with an endless series of activities, no matter how worthwhile they may seem. Nonetheless, ESL forms part of Continuing Ministerial Development, and it is expected that the time away will help clergy to grow and develop both personally and professionally. As a result, ESL is expected to include three key elements.

1. *Rest and Refreshment*

ESL is not an opportunity for an extended holiday, although taking a break is important! Nonetheless, the biblical pattern of the Sabbath includes rest as a vital part of its nature. It is, therefore, fitting and necessary that the three months include some time for physical rest and refreshment. This may involve dedicating time to – or perhaps trying for the first time – a relaxing hobby or activity such as painting, gardening, cooking, sailing, or playing a musical instrument. It is especially wise to start with a few days to "recover" from the demands of ministry and to adjust to a different pace.

While annual leave should remain separate from ESL, in some cases – particularly when travelling abroad – it can be sensible to combine ESL with a holiday. When ESL includes a holiday component, it should be discussed with the DDMM early in the planning phase. The ESL grant usually does not cover specific holiday expenses.

2. *Broadening or Deepening*

This is the "project" element of the ESL. It involves personal, professional, and ministerial development and will generally occupy most of the three months. While it may not necessarily require formal study, it will involve some learning. This might take one of two forms – or occasionally both.

The project may involve some "broadening" of the clergy person's experiences and horizons. This would be especially true when the ESL involves learning something entirely new to that individual. An example would be visiting a church in a different context, culture or country.

Alternatively, the project might concentrate more on "deepening." This would apply when the clergy member already has an interest in a particular subject and wishes to dedicate time and effort to explore it further. One example is studying a theological topic in greater depth than is possible in daily ministry. Another could be improving a specific ministerial skill or expertise.

Whatever project is selected, it should aim to broaden horizons or deepen understanding rather than merely revisit familiar ground. While most clergy have a general idea of their goals, the DDMM can assist in clarifying the specific nature of the ESL project.

It should be emphasised that ESL should not be used solely for completing dissertations for higher degrees. While some time may be allocated to "writing up", the

purpose of ESL is broader than this. No more than half of the time should usually be spent on this.

3. Getting Back in Touch with God

Clergy should dedicate time during the ESL to nurture their own relationship with God. For some, this may involve going on a "Retreat", but there are other ways to do this, including Christian festivals, pilgrimages, or spending time living in community.

This is often a good way to spend the three months away, as it provides time to "process" the experiences of the ESL in a Godly and reflective manner before re-entering everyday life.

While the DDMM can assist with this aspect of the time away, clergy are also encouraged to discuss this element with their spiritual director.

7. Extended Study Leave Report

There are two perspectives on ESL reports. One view is that ESL involves time away from work, and clergy shouldn't be burdened with producing lengthy written documents. The other perspective is that, since the Diocese and PCC are contributing financially, it is fair to expect some kind of "outcome".

In practice, the only requirement is that clergy bring back something from their time away. Ideally, this should be something of interest and benefit to others in ministry, but this is not always possible. Examples include a short, written report, a presentation that could be shared at a Deanery Synod, or the fruits of a creative project such as art or poetry. The key point is that whatever is brought back shows what has been gained from the time away.

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