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## Ministerial Development Conversation Pilot Feedback

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## Executive Summary

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The purpose of the pilot project was to trial the Ministerial Development Conversation (MDC ) which included the MDC positioning and preparation paperwork, the facilitator training and the MDC itself with a small number of facilitators and participants.

This pilot project allowed for comprehensive feedback from each participant and facilitator and as a result the pilot responses have further shaped the MDC.

**The feedback from the pilot project has been consistently and overwhelmingly positive from both participants and facilitators.**

While many made suggestions on aspects that they would tweak, change or include **everyone** we spoke to told us that they had benefitted from their MDC experience and some of them were effusive about the MDC discussion and the difference it has already made.

In presenting the feedback from the MDC and capturing authentically people's views we have included as many quotes as possible and have structured it under the following headings:

- **Overall: How was the MDC?**
- **What worked and Recommendations for Improvement?**
  - Pre-MDC Discussion
  - Preparation
  - The MDC Discussion
  - The Onward Journey
  - Frequency
- **The Facilitators.**
- **Taking the MDC forward.**
- **Proposed Next Steps.**

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## Overall: How was the MDC?

Responses are from MDC participants and facilitators.

Extremely affirming.	I feel very buoyed up by it.
I was worried I wouldn't have anything to say but once I got started I didn't shut up!	A really positive experience - I felt a real connection
Interesting – not quite what I expected.	Valuable experience – came up with some pragmatic ideas which I have already implemented.
The time flew by – I couldn't believe it.	It was of <i>real</i> benefit to me.
It has made me think about where I need to go with my development.	It allowed me the opportunity to reflect and explore what I will do next.
It was powerful experience – more than I ever imagined or hoped for.	It gave me to opportunity to talk through and actually say out loud some of the stuff that I have been thinking about. I have now put some of it in place already.
It was very fulfilling and I feel more in control.	Extremely helpful on a personal level
It was a worthwhile discussion and I left with a plan of what I am going to take forward.	I found it empowering and uplifting.
I started by doing something small and that made a difference. It then motivated me to do something bigger - the larger thing was much easier to do.	I really enjoyed it.
Made me realise we should be looking at my gifts and talents and not just focusing on what I don't do well.	I wouldn't change a thing – everything was helpful and I have already followed through on ideas.
It was a chance to think about me – not what the congregation / colleagues/ 121 needs, but what I need.	I found it really useful and I am glad that this is happening.

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## What worked and Recommendations for Improvement

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### Pre –MDC Discussion: Overall Feedback.

For the vast majority the “process” worked very well. Participants told us that the initial contact was in most cases via an introductory email to set up an initial phone conversation. Many described how useful this initial conversation was in terms of building rapport, reiterating the purpose of the MDC discussion and covering areas such as confidentiality and preparation for the discussion.

*“The conversation before the meeting made me feel positive going in”*

*“The first conversation went really well. I felt a connection and this meant I was set up for a positive experience”*

### Preparation: Overall Feedback

The vast majority of those that we spoke to commented extremely favourably on the MDC booklet and the preparation guidelines in particular.

*“The pre-work was very flexible. I read it through a few times to make sure I thought about it”*

*“The preparation wasn’t daunting. I found it really, really helpful”*

*“The booklet was excellent. I did the preparation and worked through it all. I found that useful in terms of my own reflective practice”*

*“I liked the layout of the pre-work and the statements were good as they prompted me”*

*“The preparation was an important part of it for me”*

*“I looked through it and picked out some bits that I thought about in advance”*

### Additional Comments:

- Some participants said that they were surprised that there was no requirement to send their preparation to the facilitator in advance or to provide evidence of it during the discussion. Whilst most understood and appreciated that the preparation was for their benefit, many commented that this was *“quite different from the norm in the Church of Scotland!”*
- A small number of people did send their preparation to their facilitator in advance of the MDC discussion as was their wish to *“provide some background”* or *“put me in context.”*
- A small number of individuals did not do any preparation before the MDC discussion took place, but stated that they had benefitted from the discussion as they felt the facilitator had used the guidelines and in some cases the statements to prompt insightful questions as and when appropriate.

### The Discussion: Overall Feedback

Everyone that we spoke to described a good quality conversation, one that focussed completely on the individual and the support they might require to move forward. Each and every person said that they had benefited from the conversation.

*“It gave me space to talk and things just dawned on me as I was talking....”*

*“The whole conversation just flowed. My facilitator summarised at regular points and I found that very useful.”*

*“The discussion was well structured, it all made absolute sense.”*

*"I think it worked so well because I talked about me and we didn't have to stick to a pre-set agenda"  
"I didn't feel under pressure time wise and it was a lengthy discussion. I talked about everything that  
I wanted to and much more"*

*"It was very comfortable and I was able to relax quickly into the discussion. That surprised me!"*

#### **Additional Comments:**

- Whilst it is widely agreed that conducting the MDC face-to-face is the preferred format, those who experimented with holding the conversation via the telephone, Skype or Face Time all said that these mediums were suitable alternatives to the face-to-face option.

*"Once I got used to the technology we just settled into the conversation."*

*"I was surprised how easy it was and how quickly I got used to it."*

Many felt that this was a particularly significant finding of the pilot project and one that should be actively promoted – geography is not barrier to participating in MDC.

- One participant suggested the inclusion of guidelines on how to use Skype and FaceTime in the MDC booklet.
- Others asked if the MDC booklet could be made available for completion and storage online.
- Some participants and facilitators described the MDC as a *"significant"* and at times *"intense"* discussion lasting anything between two and three hours. They spoke of taking breaks during the discussion and in particular some emphasised that people should carefully think about what time of day suits them best to have the discussion and to manage their workload carefully before and after the MDC.

*"I underestimated how exhausted I would be afterwards."*

*"I mean this in a good way, but I needed recovery time."*

- A wide variety of venues were used to conduct MDC discussions. However, some commented that they found it a little challenging to source a suitable, neutral venue. It was suggested that a *"directory"* be established whereby if someone has within their Kirk/Parish a suitable room or knows of a good venue the address and contact details can be published so that other participants/facilitators can make use of them.

#### **The Output: Overall Feedback**

The majority of those that we spoke to told us that the MDC had inspired them to take action. Many said that as a result they had already taken steps to move towards their desired outcome. The majority were able to articulate what they would do as a result of their MDC – it was an action orientated discussion.

For many the *"Onward Journey"* section helped them to plan their next steps. However, there were some that really struggled with not having to complete any paperwork following their MDC and not having to send it to their facilitator or anyone else (for example Ministries Council). They felt that this meant that they were not being *"held accountable"*, that the MDC would therefore *"lack credibility"* or, as one person put it, the MDC process will be seen to *"have no teeth"*.

*“By not filling in any forms and sending them anywhere, I’m not being forced to do what we talked about. I worry that the whole thing just ends up as a discussion.”*

These were not views held by many, but it is helpful to understand these thoughts as it reminds us that the MDC is culturally different to how things have been before. It will take time for some to really understand that it is only when we give our thoughts substance and form and then take action that we may hope to achieve the desired outcomes – that the onus is on the individual to create the change they seek and that the emphasis is not on completing and submitting paperwork.

We believe therefore that it is worth continually highlighting that the MDC seeks to ***inspire action*** and that there is a fundamental difference between ***forcing*** and ***inspiring*** action.

**Additional Comments:**

- The “Onward Journey” section. Facilitators and participants made recommendations on how this section might be improved and we will discuss these with you when next we meet.
- Participants spoke about how frequently they would like an MDC. Some said that that they would initially benefit from a discussion on an annual basis with a view to at some point extending the timeframe to a three-yearly cycle. We would reiterate that the frequency of MDC should very much depend on individual circumstances and would encourage individual’s to book in for a full MDC or a review as and when required. Those that we spoke to favoured this flexible approach and we believe that it is worth continually reminding Ministers that the onus is on them to determine the frequency and to make sure that they book in for their next MDC – especially if they want the conversation to take place with a preferred facilitator who may have limited availability. As one participant commented

*“It would be a good idea to have a review in the diary.”*

- Many felt strongly that Ministers within their first five years should undertake an MDC on an annual annual basis.

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## The Facilitator

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The role of the facilitator is fundamental to the MDC process. Their objective is to help the Minister to define their own path and encourage them to take responsibility for their own decisions and actions.

The feedback about the pilot MDC facilitators was overwhelmingly positive:

I trusted my facilitator which was the most important thing for me. I could then open up.	My facilitator was warm, friendly and asked lots of good questions.
My MDC facilitator was perfect.	I felt <i>really</i> listened to.
My facilitator was excellent.	I found them very supportive.
My facilitator made me feel really comfortable.	My facilitator helped me to feel empowered.
My facilitator encouraged me to think realistically.	My facilitator reassured me and gave me the space to explore.
My facilitator was absolutely brilliant!	A really positive experience – I felt a real connection.
I felt my facilitator was really interested in ME!	My facilitator was very, very good and kept bringing me back to the purpose – but gently
We had a great conversation.	My facilitator was well trained.

### Additional Comments:

- The feedback from the consultation stage was that people wanted to choose their facilitator. For the purpose of the pilot project each participant was allocated a facilitator and it was only on a small number of occasions that, at the participant's/facilitator's request, the facilitator was changed. The vast majority of participants indicated that having a facilitator allocated to them was perfectly acceptable. Some commented that had they been given a choice they might not necessarily have chosen the facilitator allocated to them but that on reflection they were very glad that their MDC had been with that particular individual.

Everyone we spoke to said that they could tell following the initial conversation that they had made a good connection with their facilitator and this was the basis on which they decided that they were happy to proceed.

- As far as the future is concerned Ministers coming to their MDC will be offered the option of either:
  - I. Having a facilitator allocated to them or
  - II. Choosing one.



- Some participants expressed the view that Ministers in their first five years should not facilitate MDC discussions. Whilst length of Ministerial experience should not be a factor, some people did see it as a barrier - they told us that length of service would be a determining factor when selecting a facilitator. Accordingly we would suggest that further consideration is given with regards to training Ministers in their first five years as facilitators.

### The Facilitators' Perspective:

We asked the facilitators who attended the group feedback session to describe their MDC experience in three words....

MDC in 3!		
Promising	Worthwhile	Challenging
Fun	Intimate	A privilege
Exciting	Humbling	Energising
Valuable	Inspiring	Personal
Enjoyable	Enlivening	Transformational
Empowering	Fulfilling	Permission giving
Precious work		

All the facilitators told us how much they enjoyed the role and many commented on how they felt they had developed their skills and described how much they had benefitted from facilitating the discussions.

### Additional Comments:

- The facilitators consistently told us that the two-day Facilitator Training had equipped them fully with the skills, knowledge and confidence to conduct the MDCs. They described how they found the “learning through doing” format **very** beneficial.

*“We had done a lot of practice sessions in the training and I found that really useful when it came to the MDC discussion itself.”*

- One facilitator suggested including a full MDC (i.e. running the full 2-3 hours in duration) as part of the training.
- The biggest “talking point” with the facilitators was the area of “next steps” and how to conclude the discussion at the point where the individual has become inspired and feels empowered to take action. Many told us of the different approaches that they applied to encourage the individual to take the next step. As one facilitator aptly stated

*“I think that people only commit to action if they feel a certain level of motivation. And they only feel motivation when they feel inspired – so that is what I set out to achieve.”*

Some facilitators said that they left it completely up to the individual as to whether they looked at or completed the “Onward Journey” section. Others described how they took a break towards the end of the discussion and suggested to the participant that they might want to jot down some notes and/or complete the final section of the MDC guidelines. This, they explained, served several purposes – it allowed everyone time to pause for reflection, it provided the participant space to think about the possible next steps and it gave the facilitator the opportunity to consider the conversation and whether there was anything else

that had arisen in the course of the discussion that they thought appropriate to pick up on after the break.

- The facilitators that we spoke to told us the support they felt that they needed to remain skilled, confident and motivated in the role. They discussed a number of challenges that they might/could /had faced and the type of ongoing support that would be beneficial. The general consensus is that MDC facilitators would benefit from an annual Continuing Professional Development day which many suggested should be mandatory for those that wish to remain in the facilitation role. The CPD day would include a training session designed to maintain/ enhance the facilitators' skills plus a group supervision session.
- Interestingly the facilitators expressed and continually reiterated the value of their regularly coming together (for example in the form of a CPD day on an annual basis) as providing them with the opportunity to establish a network of, and in many cases friendships with, individuals undertaking a similar role.
- We asked the facilitators to provide their thoughts on how frequently they should/could conduct MDCs. Whilst everyone agreed that it was down to individual circumstances, many held the view that there should be some guidelines so that people considering the role would have an idea of what the expectations were in terms of the number of discussions that they should ideally facilitate. Individuals could then make a better informed decision as to whether they should commit to the role. The facilitators that we spoke to felt that the guidelines figure should be between four and six MDCs a year (this number includes Annual Reviews). They also liked the idea of being able to input their availability onto a system that would allow participants to book in for their MDC discussion.

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## Taking the MDC forward.

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We asked people to tell us their thoughts on how we might best communicate the value of the MDC and encourage others to participate. The feedback was unanimous in confirming the importance of this:

*“They need to hear it from us, the people that have participated.”*

*“We need to tell the story.”*

*“Those who have been involved in the pilot should stand up at Presbytery and share their experience.”*

*“I would speak at our Ministry Committee in our presbytery to encourage others.”*

*“People need to hear it from us.”*

*“Could we have a champion of this approach in each area?”*

*“We could have MDC champions – people like us that can speak to anyone that might be interested.”*

*“People need to hear about our experience.”*

*“I have already recommended it.”*

Those that we spoke to said that the only way to bring the value of the MDC successfully to a wider audience is to let people hear from those that have experienced it. People expressed the strong view that a large scale launch would tend to put people off and that simple persuasive stories from those that have participated will be far more effective - the more “mouth to mouth” marketing the better!

People also pointed out that it is important to continually highlight the “what’s in it for me” and that this type of communication should take place on a regular basis.

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## Additional Comments

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### Sustainability

*“This is too good a conversation for it all to fade away.”*

Some people continue to question the sustainability of the MDC process stating that there is a history in The Church of initiatives being adopted, but not sustained or being seen as “*spreading improvement.*”

Whilst sustainability has been a priority from the outset, it is understandable that people should express concern if they have experienced the improvement evaporation effect or a lack of sustainability in the past. It is important therefore to find ways to continually reiterate the reason for and the passion behind the MDC.

### Travel Expenses

Many raised travel expenses and how to claim them as an area that required further clarification. It may be worth including guidance on this within the “Frequently Asked Questions” section in the MDC booklet.

### The Conference Programme and Probationary Programme:

A number of people suggested bringing MDC into the conference programme. Some suggested:

- I. Adding an MDC session into the conference programme, providing an overview of MDC and allowing time for discussion.

*“I’d like to hear and discuss how others are interpreting ‘the boxes’ - could we offer this as a conference opportunity?”*

- II. Proactively offering Ministers the opportunity to have an MDC before or after, for example, a conference:

*“Could it be offered alongside other conferences / gatherings so those in remote areas could have a face to face meeting?”*

- III. Introducing MDC at the probationary stage, at a probationary conference.

One individual even suggested that

*“MDC should be introduced as soon as someone is accepted as a candidate for ministry.”*

### **Pastoral Supervision:**

As has already been highlighted pilot participants were very complimentary about their facilitators and how they conducted their MDC. In summary the overriding feedback was that the facilitator provided an opportunity for the Minister to explore the best way forward for them in a trusted environment with their individual needs at the centre of the conversation.

A number of people suggested / asked if there were aspects of the facilitator training that could be incorporated into the Pastoral Supervision training.

It is our understanding that what they were referring to is the “coaching based methodology” that sits at the heart of the facilitator training. Therefore would it be of benefit to seek to develop a coaching mind-set, combined with coaching skills and a simple coaching model, into the Pastoral Supervision training?