

External Examiner Report
Congregational Federation – York St. John University
By Rev Dr Carlton J. Turner, The Queen’s Foundation, Birmingham.
25th August 2023

Review of Modules:

For the August exam boards the following modules of the Foundation Degree in Practical Theology by the Congregational Federation were examined.

- Independent Learning Project: Living Congregationally
- Module C - VCF4004M: Practical Theology in Contemporary Contexts
- Module F – VCF4002M: Exploring Christian Service
- Module G2 – VCF4006M: Christian Ethics
- Module G4 – VCF4001M: Conflict, Resolution and Reconciliation
- Module H – VCF5017M: The Bible: Law and Letters
- Module K – VCF5002M: Action Research as a Way of Doing Theology
- Module L – VCF5001M: Christian Leadership and Service
- Module N1 – VCF5005M: The Word and Words: An Introduction to Biblical Languages
- Module N4 – VCF5008M: Living Congregationally
- Module W – VCF5012M: Negotiated Study
- Module X – VCF5015M: Ethical Case Studies

Overview and Assessment Process:

I received relevant University, Programme, and Module documentation as a Teams folder with sub-folders and relevant files. In these documents I have received access to handbooks, student submissions, Tutor moderation forms showing discussions between first and second markers, and reports of overall module marks. Samples and documents were consistent across modules and where there was only one assignment, overall reports and tutor moderation forms were not included, which is understandable.

Further information, explanation and guidance were shared by email and CF were more than happy to assist with any queries. Sufficient samples of coursework were made available. I was given enough information and guidance to gain a sense of the programme, the standard of modules, and the consistency of marking.

Assessment, Marking and Moderation:

The courses above are generally focused and well designed, and grounded in the principles of Practical Theology. They seem very well administered, and I, personally, found them engaging. All modules seen were clearly introduced and handbooks laid out clearly for the students what the expectations are in terms of assessments and marking. There is consistency across modules that further ground the overall aims and objectives of the Foundation Degree.

- **Range of Assessments:** Assessments are generally wide ranging and, where necessary, appropriate for the nature of the module. It was good to see that assessments included essays, case-studies, individual presentations, project reports, self-reflections, and others. For some modules, I have no access to the actual presentation videos (and presumably shouldn't, for reasons of confidentiality), but the comments for students and for external are helpfully crisp and thorough.
- **Quality of Students' Work:** Modules are pitched at Levels 4 and 5, and, perhaps as expected, marks varied across modules and components. Feedback broadly fit the Levels of the Module and were generally clear and instructive.
- **Feedback:** Tutor feedback is generally clear and instructive. Feedback depth and style vary across modules, but generally, the practice is to both identify weaknesses and to affirm strengths. Tutors, both first and second markers, give feedback that help student improvement and learning.
- **Moderation:** First and Second markers disagreed in a number of places. The recorded conversations about discrepancies are well evidenced and there is clear rationale for mark adjustments.

Concluding Assessment:

Overall, the Congregational Fellowship offers high quality courses that are engaging and creative. There is a deep sense of professionalism in the administration of the modules. There is also a deep sense of the programme's connectedness with real life contexts, and the need to engage theological learning in a holistic way. There are two further comments I wish to conclude with an further commend.

- **Diversity, Inclusivity, and Attention to Power:** Engaging with and celebrating diversity in the churches is something that is highlighted within a good number of modules and in different ways. Mostly, bibliographies tend to include non-Western and Non-White voices. In modules where students do more independent work, the intercultural and diverse contexts of the churches, and the need to employ and engage with multiple tools and approaches is something that is strong within handbooks and modular structures. I commend and encourage this attention to the issues of diversity, inclusivity and power.
- **Practical Theology Framework:** It is evident that courses are built upon a Practical Theology framework, and designed upon the idea that the learning relates to all of life and must find impact in 'on the ground' ministry. I also note that the course is designed to involve not just students, but practitioners and real-life contexts, as far as possible. I commend the degree to which you build your teaching and learning around the fundamentals of Practical Theology.

Well done and keep up the good work.

Rev Dr Carlton J Turner, August 2023