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# Professional Practice Assessment: Principles, Practices and Processes

## Introduction

Developing ministry practices with our students is central to CYM’s work. Line Managers and Practice Tutors are integral to our students’ development and success – thank you for your involvement and commitment!

This document outlines the principles, practices and processes of assessing students’ professional practice, particularly the formal assessment of portfolios. It should be read as complementary to your student’s Practice Handbook (see [MyCYM](http://www.mycym.info)) and to the Induction Session held for Practice Tutors, Line Managers and students.

## Principles

All assessment, whether formal written feedback on students’ portfolios, or informal feedback offered via observation and dialogue should be developmental; indeed, feedback, might be better described as *feedforward.* ‘Feedback’ derives from the Latin *‘ad sedere’,* to sit with, or alongside. This connotes a sense of dialogue, wondering, thinking, and reflecting with others. It is in this spirit that we ask Practice Tutors and Line Managers to engage with the tasks of feedback and assessment. Depending on the student’s programme of study, there are likely to be two portfolio assessment points in each year, or level, of study – one ‘formative’ (usually in the spring of each year of study) and one ‘summative’ (usually in the summer of each year of study). Formative feedback is offered to enable students to further develop their portfolio of evidence in preparation for a summative submission at a given stage. Whilst these staged points are fixed, we also encourage students to see summative feedback at each level, or point, as developmentally formative for the ongoing development of their work and portfolio as they develop it across the course of their programme of study. It is this portfolio of practice developed across either three years of undergraduate study, or two years of postgraduate study that becomes the key document which evidences professional/ministry competence and development. In this sense, the network of Practice Tutors, Line Managers and CYM staff surrounding each student acts as professional gatekeeper. This is an important task, irrespective of the pathway students select, but holds particular weight for those working with students on Youth and Community pathways which hold formal accredited professional status.

At CYM, we are interested in each student’s holistic development. By this we mean students’ personal, spiritual, ministerial, professional, academic, theological and community development. Whilst portfolio assessment may concentrate on the assessment of particular tasks, it is anticipated that students’ holistic growth will be reflected in the work they produce. Central to this task is promoting students’ capacity to reflect holistically upon their practice. This, we believe, is integral to developing reflective and reflexive practical theologians. Thus, we strongly encourage students to draw upon, apply and evidence theological reflection methods in developing their portfolios.

With all this in mind, feedforward and assessment should clearly enable students to identify strengths, weaknesses, progress and areas which they should focus upon.

### Professional Practice Agencies (PPAs)

At M-level, students are required to complete at least 400 hours of practice (across their first two years of study) in their main Practice Agency. At least half of these hours should be engaged in face-to-face practice. Time in students’ main PPA is concerned with *deepening* their practice. Students are also required to complete at least 80 hours of practice in an Alternative Agency. This is designed to enable students to *broaden* their practice.

### CYM Competences[[1]](#footnote-2)

Across their programme of study, students evidence their competence in relation to:

1. Values, principles and practice
2. Leadership and management
3. Communities and contexts
4. Learning and informal education
5. Building purposeful relationships
6. Professional and ministerial formation

Whist different assessment points and portfolio tasks are designed to enable students to focus upon and demonstrate different competencies and sub-competencies (outlined in Practice Handbooks), there is a sense in which practice and assessment allow for more ‘holistic’ evidencing of work. Therefore, should a student ‘naturally evidence’ a competence, or sub-competence outside the core remit of a given assessment task, space is afforded within assessment proformas for naturally occurring evidence to be ‘claimed’. Thus, each student has ample opportunity to evidence competencies, (and their development thereof) throughout their practice.

### Students have been advised to view their portfolios as:

* A space to ‘evidence’, give account for and voice to their practice.
* A place to develop reflection in drawing together practice, theology and theory.
* A space for others to speak into their practice, allowing them to learn and develop further.
* A space to consider how different strands of practice and development become ‘an integrated tapestry’.
* A space to be challenged, to challenge themselves and to celebrate what God is doing through them
* A space to set targets
* A space to develop and reflect strategically
* A space to get creative

## Portfolio tasks

Portfolio tasks are designed to enable students to demonstrate their competence and ability to reflect meaningfully upon their practice by drawing on different theological and theoretical lenses.

Examples of portfolio tasks may include:

* Directed tasks
* SWOT analyses
* Reflective accounts/blogs/vlogs/critical incidents
* Gathering evidence
* Timesheets
* Observations of practice
* Self/PT/LM assessments

## Assessment Practices

The validation of CYM’s BA and MA programmes with Newman University means that students’ practice portfolios are no longer graded with a ‘percentage mark’. Instead, portfolios assessed summatively at each stage of students’ CYM learning journeys are considered ‘gateway assessments’ to specified modules. This means that students must be considered to pass their practice portfolios at each summative assessment point as a pre-requisite to passing nominated modules, for which a percentage mark is allocated to (an) additional piece/s of work.

We recognise the risk that students may be tempted therefore to reduce their efforts in formulating their portfolios. However, we have re-emphasised the significance of the portfolio as a place to demonstrate practice and develop reflection in advancing practice learning. Portfolios are also the principal means of evidence by which Practice Tutors and CYM staff will be able to offer future comment on students as practitioners. In conjunction with Practice Tutors, CYM staff will therefore make a judgement on the *quality* of students’ practice. Principally, this judgement will be drawn from assessment of students’ summative portfolios. Graduating students will be assessed as having passed/passed with merit/passed with distinction in respect of their practice at the end of their programme of study. These achievements will be recognised via a CYM certificate, supplementary to their degree award.

Practice Tutors are therefore requested to offer full and rich qualitative feedback on their students’ portfolios at each submission point. The use of phrases like ‘Your portfolio demonstrates that your practice and reflections are deemed to be at pass/pass with merit/pass with distinction level’ are encouraged.

## Assessment Processes

Students are encouraged to meet with their Practice Tutors on a regular basis. At postgraduate level this should usually be five times across each of the two years of the PgDip. Students are responsible for driving the process of arranging meetings. Students should use these meetings to discuss their practice and the development of their portfolios. Students should send any pieces of portfolio work they wish to discuss to their Practice Tutor at least 48 hours in advance of meeting in order to give time to develop considered feedback.

At each of the staged submission points (both formative and summative), students should upload their portfolio as a *single PDF* to MyCYM in advance of the deadline. Practice Tutors should then assess their student’s work and complete the Portfolio Assessment Sheet, uploading their feedback to the nominated link no later than three weeks after the student’s submission date. The Portfolio Assessment Sheet should be saved as: Student Surname, Student Initial, Submission Month, Submission Year before uploading. You should advise CYM’s Practice Co-ordinator (Graham Bright) by email when you have completed this. A moderation process (‘parity’) to ensure fairness of assessment across the cohort will follow. This will involve either:

1. CYM staff moderating work,
2. Practice Tutors being asked to comment on and cross-assess the feedback and assessment (pass/merit/distinction) offered by colleagues
3. A group of CYM staff and Practice Tutors meeting (online) to moderate students’ portfolios.

(Numbers 2 and 3 will attract an additional payment for Practice Tutors involved in moderation processes).

Thereafter, formal feedback is released to students.

We hope this document is useful to Practice Tutors (and Line Managers). But should you need any clarification, no matter how small, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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1. These competencies are further mapped in Practice Handbooks to the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Youth Work, for those students studying on these pathways at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)