

METHODIST CIRCUIT-BASED LEARNING PATHWAY

What is the Circuit-based Learning Pathway?

The Circuit-based Learning Pathway (CBLP) is a recently-developed programme currently in pilot phase. Student ministers can be provisionally allocated to this pathway, explore their suitability further during the first term of their programme, and begin CBLP fully towards the end of their first year on either the full-time or part-time pathway at Queen's. The CBLP involves a different combination of Circuit-based and Foundation-based (formal) learning than on the other two pathways. It involves being based in a selected Circuit, accumulating experience and insights alongside ordained ministers, whilst blending that learning with the more formal learning acquired alongside your cohort at Queen's.

The Circuit-based Learning Pathway may be particularly suitable for student ministers who have less practical experience in ministry, or indeed in circuit life generally, than some others and would benefit from seeing ministry in a wider and deeper context than they have experienced before. It is also suitable for those who have some practical experience already but would benefit from sustained ministry experience in a contrasting context.

In years two and three, CBLP students will continue to study on a part-time course (either through QCC weekends and online learning, or on the weekday course) and will be engaged in Circuit-based learning for the rest of their time. Students on this pathway will continue to live in their own homes and undertake Circuit-based learning in a nearby Circuit. This is a full-time pathway, so ministerial students allocated to this pathway will have financial support and obligation as appropriate for them as full-time students (Track 1).

The expectation is that an average of two days per week, plus an agreed number of Sundays, would be available for Circuit-based activities and reflection, with engagement in the part-time course plus personal study taking another 3 days in the week. In terms of hours, the balance might be 20 hours per week for Circuit-based activities and reflection, and 25 hours for Queen's-based learning and formation. The programme extends over the full year, with agreed holidays of five weeks per year, plus time allocated for a 4-week intensive placement in a specific context.

The Circuit base will not be a Circuit in which you have been a lay employee, because the change of role involved in moving towards ordained ministry is best explored where you are less well known and have had no professional role. Nor will it usually be in your home Circuit, unless it can be shown that there is a discrete and distinctly different context available. Even were this available, a student would not be likely to be placed in their home Circuit if: i) they have recently been a Circuit steward or taken another Circuit leadership role; ii) they have been an accredited Local Preacher for more than 3 years; iii) they have established relationships as colleagues or close friends with the ordained staff. In any Circuit, the base for the pathway would not usually be confined to one church, but would relate to a broader section of the Circuit.

The Circuit-based Learning Pathway is currently open to student presbyters only. This is because, at least in the initial years as this programme develops, given the spread of deacons across the connexion, it is likely to be easier to find Circuits with the facility to offer this partnership for student presbyters, while we continue the research as to the most helpful support and model for this pathway.

Is this for me? Criteria for assessing students for whom the Circuit-based Learning Pathway might be suitable

This is not a pathway to be 'chosen' for geographical or financial reasons, but for reasons of learning and formation. Criteria for Circuits highlight that this pathway is about the learning needs of the student minister, not about the need for 'an extra pair of hands' in the Circuit. Students who would benefit from the pathway will be assessed according to specific criteria.

The Circuit-based Learning Pathway might be suitable for you if:

- You are a confident, independent learner, self-motivated, so that you can benefit from studies on either the weekday or the QCC pathway, while undertaking Circuit-based formational ministry as well. *(The evidence we would look for, to confirm your allocation, is that you begin the course confidently and engage in activities in your link church.)*
- You have undertaken some theological learning before beginning ministerial training (usually beyond Local Preacher training) and you show that you have been able to build on that learning and take it further in the first months of the course. *(We would usually look for accepted candidates who already have some theological background to resource their theological reflection and who also show that they are positive about further learning and know how to make the most of it, whatever level they are working at.)*
- You can demonstrate a capacity for theological reflection on experience, in which you hold together reflection on life and faith, church and world, God's activity and human response. You would show that you are capable of benefiting from and integrating the different forms of learning available in Circuit reflection and activities, and in college-based community and learning. *(This capacity has been tested in candidating and would be explored further with tutors during the first term of the course.)*
- You are mature in self-awareness, and constructive and caring in community. *(Evidence would come from the candidating process, and then from engagement in classes and other formational and community activities at Queen's. This may also be demonstrated through how you deal with the frustrations of church life and discipline, as much as its joys.)*
- You are resilient in character. *(Evidence would be looked for to show that you have coped with a number of demands, either in your time at Queen's, or before, and can manage time, boundaries and relationships appropriately).*

It is important to realise that even if you, as a student minister, show suitability for this pathway, it may not be possible to find a suitable Circuit. There are no guarantees about the outcome.

Criteria for Circuits willing to be involved in the partnership working of the Circuit-based Learning Pathway:

A Circuit would be suitable as a base for the Circuit-based Learning Pathway if:

- The Circuit wants to be involved and sees helping the student minister's learning as a gift to the student, not as an 'extra pair of hands for the circuit'. In doing that, the Circuit is willing to work in partnership with The Queen's Foundation.
- It is possible for the student minister to be placed in a Circuit not an individual Church, to ensure that they gain a broader experience of the life of a Circuit than is possible if focusing on one church.
- The Circuit is committed to good practice in supervision and can demonstrate a good track record or show how they plan to develop this. The supervisor will be willing to undertake training and reflection in supervision practice as appropriate for CBLP. The Circuit recognises that supervision involves a significant time commitment, and believes it will be possible to offer continuity in supervision for two years.
- The Circuit should be able to show engagement in the following:
 - developing disciples;
 - participating in a learning culture, so that it is possible to support the student in their learning, including helping the student to work through their mistakes and to bear the consequences;
 - working with a plurality of approaches to mission and ministry;
 - upholding Methodist practice and discipline, including sound governance, with regard to trusteeship, safeguarding, awareness of good practice and awareness of where improvement or change is needed.
- The Circuit should offer the potential to learn from the whole people of God, both lay and ordained.
- Ministers in the Circuit should be modelling theological reflection as part of their everyday practice and sharing that as they meet and work together.
- The Circuit should be able to offer on average two days a week, plus an agreed number of Sundays, or approximately 20 hours of placement time per week, to include activities and appropriate space for reflection. It is expected that the time in Circuit-based learning will cover the year, with appropriate time for holidays and for one four-week placement in a different context (to be arranged through Queen's).
- The Circuit should be able to offer a suitable work base as Student Ministers will be travelling from their homes. Circuits should be willing to cover travel expenses within the Circuit, and any other expense directly related to the role.

March 2018