

Assessment Definitions at Level 4 and above



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Introduction

A number of sources provide useful guidance, which, taken together, can inform and support users to gain a clear understanding of what should be expected of learners at Level 4.

Clearly, much of the guidance is intended for those who design the content of courses, or in our case, units, but since assessment cannot be seen as a bolt-on extra but is integral to the design and wording of units, it is appropriate to examine the detail.

Ofqual guidance given for the development of qualifications at Level 4 and above concentrates on the concept of a whole qualification made up of a number of units, but the following extracted statement is key to assessment at these levels:

'Assessment should encourage candidates to apply and reflect on their studies, both within and across units and produce evidence to demonstrate ability across a range of units.'¹

A number of HE institutions have developed elaborated versions of these definitions, which have provided background for the development of this document. At the same time there is a note of caution, as expressed very succinctly in this extract:

'..... academic level is not an absolute concept and cannot be defined in absolute terms: it is impossible, for example, to compare in any absolute terms the academic demands of a mathematical programme with those of a fine art programme; they are both demanding, but different.

At the same time, any attempt to ascribe an absolute value for a particular topic within a discipline area may be inappropriate, since 'difficulty' has a tendency to relax with time or to be eased by the use of new, alternative approaches.

There is also general acceptance that a topic taken from one subject area at a particular designated level may not warrant the same designated level when transferred to a programme in some other subject area.

It is to be concluded that the academic level is dependent upon how the topic is applied and to what, how it relates to and is integrated with surrounding material, and the level of the learning outcomes which result.²

In short, assessment is a matter of judgement, not just computation. Notwithstanding these notes of caution, a common understanding must be established, supported by verification and standardisation activities within the cycle of continuous improvement. Without this, sound and defensible judgments regarding comparability of standards between different disciplines and differing institutions could not be reached.

¹ Criteria for Qualifications at Level 4 and Above – Ofqual/11/4878 – July 2011

² Guidance on Academic Levels - Academic Handbook 2009/10 – University of Wales Institute, Cardiff

Achievement at Level 4

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) gives a helpful summary of work at this level, where the achievement equates to the first year of Higher Education (HE) and if the relevant course does not simply form the first year of a degree course, the candidate could be awarded a Certificate of Higher Education:

'Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- Knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study
- An ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- Evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work
- Communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments

Of central importance are the Ofqual QCF level descriptors, which must form the basis for the design of assessment definitions relating to the various assessment methods appropriate at Level 4.3

Level	Summary	Knowledge and Understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and Accountability
Level 4	Achievement at level 4 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. It includes taking responsibility for overall courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within fairly broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use practical, theoretical or technical understanding to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas. Be aware of the nature and approximate scope of the area of study or work Have an informed awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.	Address problems that are complex and non-routine while normally fairly well defined. Identify, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills. Initiate and use appropriate investigation to inform actions. Review the effectiveness and appropriateness of methods, actions and results	Take responsibility for courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad but generally well-defined parameters

³ QCF Regulatory Arrangements 2008

Assessment Methods and Definitions at Level 4

The following assessment methods are appropriate for this level - although exceptionally others may be included - and furthermore, two or more methods could be used in combination as indicated in the list below:

Assessment methods:

- Case Study, where the outcome to be assessed might be either written or oral
- Written Question and Answer / Written Description
- Essay
- Written Test/Exam
- Oral Question and Answer
- Report, which may be presented in written format or as an oral presentation
- Group Discussion, which may be followed by a written assignment such as an essay
- Reflective log
- Practice file or portfolio

For practical assessment:

- Practical Demonstration/Experiment
- Performance / Exhibition
- Production of Artefact

It is evident that many of the considerations and criteria contained above could be applied across most assessment methods; however, more detailed discussion of what is most relevant for any individual method or combination of methods might give further clarity, and perhaps more importantly, help to ensure parity across methods and equally, across assessors.

Case Studies

Case studies involve consideration of a particular relevant situation or example, selected by the tutor or by learners, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations.

They may be used as a collective/group activity and discussed in a group of learners or by an individual learner.

They may also be used as a written activity through study materials either presented in advance or given unseen, and completed either in own time or under test conditions. The situation will influence the design of the task and the expected outcomes. See also comments under 'Group discussion' about the issues of a group assessment. The length of the text will depend on the topic, the task and the situation in which it is assessed, but might reasonably be approximately 1200 words.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of written outcome
- Tutor observation of class or one-to-one discussion
- Self-assessment through reflective writing after discussion (alongside other assessment)

Evidence could include:

- Learner's written answer with tutor marking
- Tutor record of observation
- Learner's notes
- Summary of class discussion by tutor, or by learner with reflective comment
- Tutorial notes
- Audio/video record with witness statement

Case studies should:

- Assume and /or test knowledge of underlying concepts and principles of a topic being presented
- Allow for the application of knowledge in a range of well-defined areas
- Require the ability to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems and evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches

Written question and answer / written description

Written questions and answer or written descriptions involve consideration of a particular subject, situation or example, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations and to present them in written format.

They could be a longer, formal exercise or may be in the form of short, quiz-like questions to test immediate responses, in which case requirements as set out below should take account of the shorter format. This method may be combined with discussion in one-to-one tutorial.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of written outcome
- One-to-one tutorial discussion

Evidence could include:

- Learner's written answer with tutor marking (preceded by a clear statement of the task/question)
- Learner's notes
- Tutorial notes

Written question and answer and written description tasks should allow for:

- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of well-defined areas
- the inclusion of varied and specific contexts, which may not be familiar
- where appropriate, the incorporation, presentation and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant, if basic, theoretical concepts
- the conclusion of sound judgements

The process may be time-limited. Judgements made about achievement of the task should take account of accuracy in grammar and spelling where errors should be few, and appropriate written style / register / awareness of the intended audience. Allowance may be made, however, under provision for special consideration, for learners where English is not their first language.

Essay

The general parameters for an essay task are the same as those set out for Written Question and Answer or Written Description above, except that shorter, quiz-like questions are not appropriate.

Learners' scripts and tutor marking are likely to be the only method of assessment and type of evidence for this assessment method.

Furthermore, in a written assignment expected to be of about 1500 – 2000 words in length, but may be more, the topic set should allow and require the following:

- a structure which makes argument and discussion clear and coherent
- information from an appropriate range of sources
- evaluation of information presented and its use to develop investigative strategies
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions
- reflection on the topic, information and solutions presented, as appropriate
- a clear and agreed system of referencing

Written test / exam

The general parameters for an essay task are the same as those set out for Written Question and Answer or Written Description.

Learners' scripts and tutor marking are likely to be the only method of assessment and type of evidence for this assessment method.

The exact parameters for setting and judging tests/exams will depend on a range of factors, such as the subject area, length of time per question etc. Task setters are advised to select from the range statements given under

Written Question and Answer / Description and Essay above those that are appropriate for the style and length of the tasks to be set for examination.

Whilst making allowance for time restraints and the restriction this may place on the wider development of ideas, topics should require the same level of application as other written tasks, in:

- knowledge and understanding
- Structure and coherence
- Development of lines of argument
- Presentation of and evaluation of evidence, taking account of the level of detail appropriate for test conditions
- Presentation and justification of solutions/outcomes
- A limited degree of reflection

Task setters and markers should also bear in mind the following, in relation specifically to exam conditions:

There is sufficient accuracy in grammar, spelling and style/register to enable clear communication, making allowance as above for special cases

Emphasis is put on demonstration, application and interpretation of principles rather than on a test of recall only.

Oral question and Answer/Viva

Oral question and answer or viva examinations involve consideration of a particular subject, situation or example, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations and to present them orally, usually within an individual tutorial situation. The process may be time-limited and formal.

The learning may be assessed through:

- One-to-one tutorial discussion
- Follow-up written reflection

Evidence could include:

- Questions posed with tutor notes of discussion
- Learner's preparation notes
- Tutor statement of achievement
- Audio / video record with witness statement

Planning of the tasks should take account of:

- Whether questions are presented
- unseen, with limited preparation and no access to written information during the task
- as questions for discussion after a significant period of personal preparation, but with no access to written information during the task
- as questions for discussion after a significant period of personal preparation, with access to written information during the task
- Whether the process is time-limited and formal, or in an informal tutorial situation
- The degree to which follow-up questions are acceptable as 'prompts' or to carry discussion further
- Awareness of the issue of fairness between learners if the situation is informal and there is no restriction on the use of prompt questions

Planning should allow for some or all of the following, depending on the nature and circumstance of the task:

- Questions should be key in assessing understanding, stimulating thinking and allowing the transfer and application of knowledge, not just in testing recall
- Questions may be structured to cover a wide range of knowledge and contexts, and may introduce unfamiliar and unpredictable problems
- Questions should be planned to allow the demonstration of sound knowledge of the topic(s), underlying concepts and principles and their interpretation
- Questions should allow for the development of a structured and coherent response, and some discussion of contrasting or complementary lines of argument
- Questions should allow solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems to be determined

Report

A report may be in a written format or presented orally, or both, for example through a presentation to a tutor or examiner(s) or to a group of peers, which is then submitted as a written follow-up.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of a written report.
- Tutor observation of a presentation.
- Peer feedback (but not exclusively).
- Follow-up written reflection.

Evidence could include:

- Written report, either stand-alone, or as combined evidence with presentation notes etc.
- Presentation e.g. PowerPoint, with notes.
- Tutor statement of achievement.
- Audio / video record with witness statement.
- Peer feedback sheets.

Tasks should allow and require the following:

- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of complex areas.
- information from an appropriate range of sources, clearly referenced.
- where appropriate, the incorporation, presentation and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data.
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant, if basic, theoretical concepts.
- evaluation of information presented and its use to develop investigative strategies.
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions, a limited number of which may be innovative.
- a structure which makes argument and discussion clear and coherent.
- the conclusion of sound judgements.
- reflection on the topic, information and solutions presented, as appropriate.

Written reports should demonstrate sufficient accuracy in grammar, spelling and style/register to enable clear communication. Presentations should demonstrate:

- Clear, logical, focused delivery.
- Good communication and presentation skills, allowing an effective delivery which takes account of the audience.
- Use of appropriate audio-visual aids.

Group discussion

This is a discussion within the peer or tutor group, which may be led by the tutor or by learners. Learners may have contributed to the preparation for the discussion, or it may be on an unprepared topic.

It may be followed by a written task, for example, a report of the discussion, a reflection and development of a learner's own views, or further research on the topic.

The criteria for assessing the discussion must take account of:

- Group dynamics and personalities within the group, which could disadvantage some learners
- The willingness of learners to contribute fully to the discussion

It is recommended that discussion is used in combination with other assessment methods in order to ensure fairness of assessment.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor observation
- Tutor marking of follow-up written work

Evidence may include:

- Tutor statement of achievement
- Marked follow-up work
- Audio / visual record with witness statement

Topics discussed should allow and require the following, as appropriate:

- consideration of a range of complex topics in a variety of familiar and unpredictable contexts
- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of complex areas
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant, if basic, theoretical concepts
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions, a limited number of which may be innovative
- evaluation of information or arguments presented
- the conclusion of sound judgements

Reflective log

A reflective log offers the opportunity for detailed reflection on experience, practice or theoretical learning, and may be recorded regularly, where reflection comments on each session which has taken place, or occasionally, where reflection comments on one specific experience.

There may be specific headings under which comment is made, which can usefully guide analysis and demonstrate understanding of theory or application of theories or processes being studied, or it may be an open format.

It is unlikely to be the only method used for any individual unit, but may be a theme continued throughout the unit. The style may be open and personal, allowing for some freedom in structure and quantity produced, although minimum requirements could be set. The log may be part of a bigger process, where the log itself is discussed and evaluated in a tutorial context.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor comments and 'marking' although precise criteria for achievement may not be appropriate.
- Self-evaluation, particularly over time as knowledge and skills increase and allow for a reflection on earlier learning.
- Tutorial where the log is discussed.

Evidence may include:

- The reflective log.
- Self-evaluation at a later date.
- Tutor comments.
- Tutorial notes.

The set-up of the reflective log should allow and require a range chosen from the following, depending on subject and context:

- analysis of theory presented in other sessions.
- reflection on experience of e.g. experimentation, learning session, visit etc.
- reflection on application of theory.
- reporting of how processes worked in practice, e.g. in a counselling, interview or training context, and analysis of perceived success or failure.
- analysis of own performance against planning and intention.
- the forming of judgments, solutions or conclusions, though sound reasoning.
- evaluation of judgements, solutions or conclusions.
- planning for future activity and/or improvement, taking account of previous success or failure or additional learning.
- reflection on others' opinions or conclusions.

Practical demonstration / Experiment, Production of Artefact, Performance / Exhibition

These assessment methods can to some extent be grouped together, since they may represent a continuous process in a learning cycle: for example, demonstration of processes or experiment could lead to the production of an artefact, which may in turn lead to an exhibition, particularly within the creative arts.

Practical work will mostly be presented alongside preparation, for example, portfolios of ideas and planning, analysis of tasks, etc., and evaluation of what has been achieved, though reflection, for example, on the extent to which the outcome achieves the intention, and/or how further learning or practice might improve or extend ideas or achievement. At all times the assessment criteria in the unit are key to the selection of the range criteria by which the activity will be judged.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor observation of a process in demonstration, experiment or performance
- Marking of preparation notes and planning
- Self-evaluation showing follow-up analysis and reflection
- Tutor comments on self-evaluation

Evidence may include:

- Preparation notes, which may include justifications and analysis of decisions made
- Audio/visual recording with witness statement
- Artefacts produced
- Self-evaluation
- Programme notes etc. for performance: although these may relate to other specific criteria within a unit rather than the performance itself

The tasks set should allow for and require the demonstration of a range of the following, as appropriate:

- Articulation and synthesis of knowledge and understanding gained through preparation for the task, for example developments in current or emerging media and technologies
- Application and consolidation of specific learning acquired in preparation for the task, for example creative processes, or practical techniques
- Sourcing and researching of relevant material
- Evaluation of sources
- The ability to generate ideas and concepts independently and/or collaboratively
- The development of ideas through to outcomes
- The ability to take account of the work of other practitioners in the discipline, where appropriate
- The selection, testing and appropriate use of materials, processes and environments
- The ability to communicate ideas
- The ability to benefit from the critical judgements of others
- The presentation of ideas to audiences, taking account of the context

Furthermore, for performance:

- Technical proficiency
- Balance of intention with outcome, for example where programme or preparation notes indicate specific intentions
- Originality and independence of thought, balanced with:
- Interpretation of historical context, for example, conveying of accepted norms of style and the interpretation of performance directions.

Achievement at Level 5

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) gives a helpful summary of work at this level, where the achievement equates to the second year of Higher Education (HE) and the candidate on appropriate courses may be awarded a Foundation Degree:

'Foundation Degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- Knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed
- An ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context
- Knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- An understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- Use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis
- Effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and to deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively
- Undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within their organisations.⁴

Of central importance are the Ofqual QCF level descriptors, which must form the basis for the design of assessment definitions relating to the various assessment methods appropriate at Level 5.5

Level	Summary	Knowledge and Understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and Accountability
Level 5	Achievement at level 5 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address broadly-defined, complex problems. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Use practical, theoretical or technological understanding to find ways forward in broadly defined, complex contexts Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information, concepts and ideas Be aware of the nature and scope of the area of study or work Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them	Address broadly-defined, complex problems Determine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills Use relevant research or development to inform actions Evaluate actions, methods and results.	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad parameters

⁴ The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2008

⁵ QCF Regulatory Arrangements 2008

Assessment methods and definitions at Level 5

The following assessment methods are appropriate for this level - although exceptionally others may be included - and furthermore, two or more methods could be used in combination as indicated in the list below:

Assessment methods:

- Case Study, where the outcome to be assessed might be either written or oral
- Written Question and Answer / Written Description
- Essay
- Written Test/Exam
- Oral Question and Answer
- Report, which may be presented in written format or as an oral presentation
- Group Discussion, which may be followed by a written assignment such as an essay
- Reflective log
- Practice file or portfolio

For practical assessment:

- Practical Demonstration/Experiment
- Performance / Exhibition
- Production of Artefact

It is evident that many of the considerations and criteria contained above could be applied across most assessment methods; however, more detailed discussion of what is most relevant for any individual method or combination of methods might give further clarity, and perhaps more importantly, help to ensure parity across methods and equally, across assessors.

Case Studies

Case studies involve consideration of a particular, relevant situation or example, selected by the tutor or by learners, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations. They may be used as a collective/group activity and discussed in a group of learners or by an individual learner.

They may also be used as a written activity through study materials either presented in advance or given unseen, and completed either in own time or under test conditions. The situation will influence the design of the task and the expected outcomes. See also comments under 'Group discussion' about the issues of a group assessment.

The length of the text will depend on the topic, the task and the situation in which it is assessed, but might reasonably be approximately 1500 words.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of written outcome
- Tutor observation of class or one-to-one discussion
- Self-assessment through reflective writing after discussion (alongside other assessment)

Evidence could include:

- Learner's written answer with tutor marking
- Tutor record of observation
- Learner's notes
- Summary of class discussion by tutor, or by learner with reflective comment
- Tutorial notes
- Audio/video record with witness statement

Case studies should:

- Assume detailed knowledge of underlying concepts and principles of a topic being presented
- Allow for the application of knowledge in a range of areas, which may be simple but unpredictable or complex but predictable
- Require the ability to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems and evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches

Written question and answer / written description

Written questions and answer or written descriptions involve consideration of a particular subject, situation or example, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations and to present them in written format.

This could be a longer, formal exercise or may be in the form of short, quiz-like questions to test immediate responses, in which case requirements as set out below should take account of the shorter format. This method may be combined with discussion in one-to-one tutorial.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of written outcome
- One-to-one tutorial discussion

Evidence could include:

- Learner's written answer with tutor marking (preceded by a clear statement of the task/question)
- Learner's notes
- Tutorial notes

Written question and answer and written description tasks should allow for:

- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of areas, some of which may be complex
- the inclusion of varied and specific contexts, which may not be familiar
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant theoretical concepts
- where appropriate, the incorporation, presentation and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data
- the ability to select appropriate techniques of evaluation and use these to judge the significance of data collected
- the conclusion of sound judgements

The process may be time-limited. Judgements made about achievement of the task should take account of accuracy in grammar and spelling, good sentence and paragraph construction and appropriate written style / register / awareness of the intended audience.

Allowance may be made, however, under provision for special consideration, for learners where English is not their first language.

Essay

The general parameters for an essay task are the same as those set out for Written Question and Answer or Written Description above, except that shorter, quiz-like questions are not appropriate.

Learners' scripts and tutor marking are likely to be the only method of assessment and type of evidence for this assessment method. Furthermore, in a written assignment expected to be of about 2000 words in length, but may be more, the topic set should allow and require the following:

- a structure which makes argument and discussion clear and coherent
- information from an appropriate range of sources
- evaluation of information presented and its use to develop investigative strategies
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions, some of which may be innovative
- reflection on the topic, information and solutions presented, as appropriate
- good use of references to professional literature and a developing ability to use academic literature
- a developing appreciation of the quality of the literature
- clear understanding and use of a clear and agreed system of referencing

Written test / exam

The general parameters for an essay task are the same as those set out for Written Question and Answer or Written Description above.

Learners' scripts and tutor marking are likely to be the only method of assessment and type of evidence for this assessment method. The exact parameters for setting and judging tests/exams will depend on a range of factors, such as the subject area, length of time per question etc. Task setters are advised to select from the range statements given under Written Question and Answer / Description and Essay above those that are appropriate for the style and length of the tasks to be set for examination.

Topics should require the same level of application as other written tasks, in:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Structure and coherence
- Development of lines of argument
- Presentation of and evaluation of evidence, taking account of the level of detail appropriate for test conditions
- Presentation and justification of solutions/outcomes
- A degree of reflection

Task setters and markers should also bear in mind the following, in relation specifically to exam conditions:

- There is sufficient accuracy in grammar, spelling and style/register to enable clear communication
- Emphasis is put on application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge rather than on a test of recall only.

Oral question and Answer/Viva

Oral question and answer or viva examinations involve consideration of a particular subject, situation or example, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations and to present them orally, usually within an individual tutorial situation. The process may be time-limited and formal. The learning may be assessed through:

- One-to-one tutorial discussion
- Follow-up written reflection

Evidence could include:

- Questions posed with tutor notes of discussion
- Learner's preparation notes
- Tutor statement of achievement
- Audio / video record with witness statement

Planning of the tasks should take account of:

- Whether questions are presented
- unseen, with limited preparation and no access to written information during the task
- as questions for discussion after a significant period of personal preparation, but with no access to written information during the task
- as questions for discussion after a significant period of personal preparation, with access to written information during the task
- Whether the process is time-limited and formal, or in an informal tutorial situation
- The degree to which follow-up questions are acceptable as 'prompts' or to carry discussion further
- Awareness of the issue of fairness between learners if the situation is informal and there is no restriction on the use of prompt questions

Planning should allow for some or all of the following, depending on the nature and circumstance of the task:

- Questions should be key in assessing understanding, stimulating thinking and allowing the transfer and application of knowledge, not just in testing recall
- Questions may be structured to cover a wide range of knowledge and contexts, and may introduce unfamiliar and unpredictable problems
- Questions should be planned to allow the demonstration of detailed knowledge of the topic(s), underlying concepts and principles and their interpretation
- Questions should allow for the development of a structured and coherent response, and discussion of contrasting or complementary lines of argument
- Questions should allow solutions to some unpredictable problems to be determined

Report

A report may be in a written format or presented orally, or both, for example through a presentation to a tutor or examiner(s) or to a group of peers, which is then submitted as a written follow-up.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of a written report
- Tutor observation of a presentation
- Peer feedback (but not exclusively)
- Follow-up written reflection

Evidence could include:

- Written report, either stand-alone, or as combined evidence with presentation notes etc.
- Presentation e.g. PowerPoint, with notes
- Tutor statement of achievement
- Audio / video record with witness statement
- Peer feedback sheets

Tasks should allow and require the following:

- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of areas, some of which may be predictable but complex or unpredictable but simple
- information from an appropriate range of sources, clearly referenced
- the ability to collect and categorise ideas and information in an appropriate format
- the ability to reformat ideas/information towards a given purpose where appropriate
- where appropriate, the incorporation, presentation and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data, and comparing alternative methods for obtaining data
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant theoretical concepts
- evaluation of information presented and its use through the application of a wide range of standard techniques
- the ability to undertake systematic analysis and offer informed criticism
- the development of investigative strategies
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions, a limited number of which may be innovative
- a structure which makes argument and discussion clear and coherent
- the conclusion of sound judgements
- analytical reflection on the topic, information and solutions presented, as appropriate

Written reports should demonstrate accuracy in grammar, spelling and style/register and enable clear and convincing communication. Presentations should demonstrate:

- Clear, logical, focused delivery
- Good communication and presentation skills, allowing an effective delivery which takes account of the audience
- Use of appropriate audio-visual aids
- The ability to interact effectively within a group, exchanging information and modifying response where appropriate

Group discussion

This is a discussion within the peer or tutor group, which may be led by the tutor or by learners. Learners may have contributed to the preparation for the discussion, or it may be on an unprepared topic. It may be followed by a written task, for example, a report of the discussion, a reflection and development of a learner's own views, or further research on the topic.

The criteria for assessing the discussion must take account of:

- Group dynamics and personalities within the group, which could disadvantage some learners
- The willingness of learners to contribute fully to the discussion

It is recommended that discussion is used in combination with other assessment methods in order to ensure fairness of assessment. The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor observation
- Tutor marking of follow-up written work

Evidence may include:

- Tutor statement of achievement
- Marked follow-up work
- Audio / visual record with witness statement

Topics discussed should allow and require the following, as appropriate:

- consideration of a range of topics, some of which may be complex, in a variety of familiar and unpredictable contexts
- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of complex areas
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant theoretical concepts
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions, a number of which may be innovative
- evaluation of information or arguments presented
- the conclusion of sound judgements
- the ability to interact effectively within a group, exchanging information and modifying response where appropriate

Reflective log

A reflective log offers the opportunity for detailed reflection on experience, practice or theoretical learning, and may be recorded regularly, where reflection comments on each session which has taken place, or occasionally, where reflection comments on one specific experience.

There may be specific headings under which comment is made, which can usefully guide analysis and demonstrate understanding of theory or application of theories or processes being studied, or it may be an open format. It is unlikely to be the only method used for any individual unit, but may be a theme continued throughout the unit.

The style may be open and personal, allowing for some freedom in structure and quantity produced, although minimum requirements could be set. The log may be part of a bigger process, where the log itself is discussed and evaluated in a tutorial context.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor comments and 'marking' although precise criteria for achievement may not be appropriate
- Self-evaluation, particularly over time as knowledge and skills increase and allow for a reflection on earlier learning
- Tutorial where the log is discussed

Evidence may include:

- The reflective log
- Self-evaluation at a later date
- Tutor comments
- Tutorial notes

The set-up of the reflective log should allow and require a range chosen from the following, depending on subject and context:

- analysis of theory presented in other sessions
- reflection on experience of e.g. experimentation, learning session, visit etc.
- reflection on application of theory
- reporting of how processes worked in practice, e.g. in a counselling, interview or training context, and analysis of perceived success or failure
- analysis of own performance against planning and intention
- the forming of judgments, solutions or conclusions, though sound reasoning
- evaluation of judgements, solutions or conclusions
- planning for future activity and/or improvement, taking account of previous success or failure or additional learning
- analysis of and reflection on others' opinions or conclusions

Practical demonstration/Experiment, Production of Artefact, Performance / Exhibition

These assessment methods can to some extent be grouped together, since they may represent a continuous process in a learning cycle: for example, demonstration of processes or experiment could lead to the production of an artefact, which may in turn lead to an exhibition, particularly within the creative arts.

Practical work will mostly be presented alongside preparation, for example, portfolios of ideas and planning, analysis of tasks, etc., and evaluation of what has been achieved, though reflection, for example, on the extent to which the outcome achieves the intention, and/or how further learning or practice might improve or extend ideas or achievement. At all times the assessment criteria in the unit are key to the selection of the range criteria by which the activity will be judged.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor observation of a process in demonstration, experiment or performance
- Marking of preparation notes and planning
- Self-evaluation showing follow-up analysis and reflection
- Tutor comments on self-evaluation

Evidence may include:

- Preparation notes, which may include justifications and analysis of decisions made
- Audio/visual recording with witness statement
- Artefacts produced
- Self-evaluation
- Programme notes etc. for performance: although these may relate to other specific criteria within a unit rather than the performance itself

The tasks set should allow for and require the demonstration of a range of the following, as appropriate:

- Articulation and synthesis of knowledge and understanding gained through preparation for the task, for example developments in current or emerging media and technologies
- Application and consolidation of specific learning acquired in preparation for the task, for example creative processes, or practical techniques
- Systematic sourcing and wide-ranging researching of relevant material
- Well-informed evaluation of sources, and evaluation of the relationship between elements
- Evidence of conceptual risk-taking/using own judgement to inform further cycles of enquiry
- The ability to generate ideas and concepts independently and/or collaboratively, and to challenge received opinion where appropriate
- The development of ideas through to outcomes
- Understanding of the work of other practitioners in the discipline, where appropriate
- The selection, testing and competent use of materials, processes and environments
- The ability to communicate ideas using appropriate communication media and with awareness of audience and context
- The ability to analyse and benefit from the critical judgements of others
- The ability to analyse and reflect on own learning and performance, in a self-directed and iterative process, as evidenced through written evaluation

Furthermore, for performance:

- Excellent technical proficiency
- Balance of intention with outcome, for example where programme or preparation notes indicate specific intentions
- Originality and independence of thought, balanced with:
- Accurate interpretation of historical context, for example, conveying of accepted norms of style and the interpretation of performance directions.

Achievement at Level 6

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) gives a helpful summary of work at this level, where the achievement equates to the third or final year of Higher Education (HE) or Bachelor's Degree with Honours: 'Bachelor's degrees with honours are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

A systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline

An ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline

Conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- To devise and sustain arguments, and/or solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline
- To describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- An appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- The ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- Apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects
- Critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution – or identify a range of solutions – to a problem
- Communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.⁶

Of central importance are the Ofqual QCF level descriptors, which must form the basis for the design of assessment definitions relating to the various assessment methods appropriate at Level 6.⁷

Further discussion within the document emphasises transferable skills and a level of personal responsibility for undertaking work.⁸

⁶ The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2008

⁷ QCF Regulatory Arrangements 2008

⁸ The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2008

Assessment methods and definitions at Level 6

The following assessment methods are appropriate for this level - although exceptionally others may be included - and furthermore, two or more methods could be used in combination as indicated in the list below.

Assessment methods:

- Case Study, where the outcome to be assessed might be either written or oral
- Written Question and Answer / Written Description
- Essay
- Written Test/Exam
- Oral Question and Answer
- Report, which may be presented in written format or as an oral presentation
- Group Discussion, which may be followed by a written assignment such as an essay
- Reflective log
- Practice file or portfolio

For practical assessment:

- Practical Demonstration/Experiment
- Performance / Exhibition
- Production of Artefact

It is evident that many of the considerations and criteria contained above could be applied across most assessment methods; however, more detailed discussion of what is most relevant for any individual method or combination of methods might give further clarity, and perhaps more importantly, help to ensure parity across methods and equally, across assessors.

Case Studies

Case studies involve consideration of a particular, relevant situation or example, selected by the tutor or by learners, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations. They may be used as a collective/group activity and discussed in a group of learners or by an individual learner.

They may also be used as a written activity through study materials either presented in advance or given unseen, and completed either in own time or under test conditions. The situation will influence the design of the task and the expected outcomes. See also comments under 'Group discussion' about the issues of a group assessment. The length of the text will depend on the topic, the task and the situation in which it is assessed, but might reasonably be approximately 2000 words.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of written outcome
- Tutor observation of class or one-to-one discussion
- Self-assessment through reflective writing after discussion (alongside other assessment)

Evidence could include:

- Learner's written answer with tutor marking
- Tutor record of observation
- Learner's notes
- Summary of class discussion by tutor, or by learner with reflective comment
- Tutorial notes
- Audio/video record with witness statement

Case studies should:

- Assume comprehensive and detailed knowledge of underlying concepts and principles of a topic being presented
- Allow for the application of knowledge in a range of areas, some of which may be complex and unpredictable
- Require the ability to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems that may be at the forefront of the academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, and evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches

Written question and answer / written description

Written questions and answer or written descriptions involve consideration of a particular subject, situation or example, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations and to present them in written format.

They could be a longer, formal exercise or may be in the form of short, quiz-like questions to test immediate responses, in which case requirements as set out below should take account of the shorter format. This method may be combined with discussion in one-to-one tutorial.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of written outcome
- One-to-one tutorial discussion

Evidence could include:

- Learner's written answer with tutor marking (preceded by a clear statement of the task/question)
- Learner's notes
- Tutorial notes

Written question and answer and written description tasks should allow for:

- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of complex areas
- the inclusion of varied and specific contexts, which may not be familiar
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant theoretical concepts
- where appropriate, the incorporation, presentation and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data, including, where appropriate, new and/or abstract data
- the ability to critically review evidence supporting conclusions/recommendations including its reliability, validity and significance, and to investigate contradictory information
- the conclusion of sound judgements

The process may be time-limited. Judgements made about achievement of the task should take account of accuracy in grammar and spelling, and expect clear, fluent writing in an appropriate written style / register / awareness of the intended audience. Allowance may be made, however, under provision for special consideration, for learners where English is not their first language.

Essay

The general parameters for an essay task are the same as those set out for Written Question and Answer or Written Description, except that shorter, quiz-like questions are not appropriate.

Learners' scripts and tutor marking are likely to be the only method of assessment and type of evidence for this assessment method. Furthermore, in a written assignment expected to be of about 2000 - 3000 words in length, but may be more, the topic set should allow and require the following:

- a structure which makes argument and discussion clear, coherent and sustained
- information from an appropriate and extensive range of sources
- critical evaluation of information presented and its use to develop innovative investigative strategies
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and a range of innovative solutions
- reflection on the topic, information and solutions presented, as appropriate
- comprehensive use of a wide range of literature including academic and professional journals
- appreciation of the quality of the literature
- accurate use of a clear and agreed system of referencing

Written test / exam

The general parameters for an essay task are the same as those set out for Written Question and Answer or Written Description above. Learners' scripts and tutor marking are likely to be the only method of assessment and type of evidence for this assessment method.

The exact parameters for setting and judging tests/exams will depend on a range of factors, such as the subject area, length of time per question etc. Task setters are advised to select from the range statements given under Written Question and Answer / Description and Essay above those that are appropriate for the style and length of the tasks to be set for examination. Topics should require the same level of application as other written tasks, in:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Structure and coherence
- Development of lines of argument
- Presentation of and evaluation of evidence, taking account of the level of detail appropriate for test conditions
- Presentation and justification of solutions/outcomes
- Reflection

Task setters and markers should also bear in mind the following, in relation specifically to exam conditions:

- There is sufficient accuracy in grammar, spelling and style/register to enable clear communication
- Emphasis is put on application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge rather than on a test of recall only.

Oral question and Answer/Viva

Oral question and answer or viva examinations involve consideration of a particular subject, situation or example, which enables learners to apply knowledge to specific situations and to present them orally, usually within an individual tutorial situation. The process may be time-limited and formal.

The learning may be assessed through:

- One-to-one tutorial discussion
- Follow-up written reflection

Evidence could include:

- Questions posed with tutor notes of discussion
- Learner's preparation notes
- Tutor statement of achievement
- Audio / video record with witness statement

Planning of the tasks should take account of:

- Whether questions are presented
- unseen, with limited preparation and no access to written information during the task
- as questions for discussion after a significant period of personal preparation, but with no access to written information during the task
- as questions for discussion after a significant period of personal preparation, with access to written information during the task
- Whether the process is time-limited and formal, or in an informal tutorial situation
- The degree to which follow-up questions are acceptable as 'prompts' or to carry discussion further
- Awareness of the issue of fairness between learners if the situation is informal and there is no restriction on the use of prompt questions

Planning should allow for some or all of the following, depending on the nature and circumstance of the task:

- Questions should be key in assessing understanding, stimulating thinking and allowing the transfer and application of knowledge, not just in testing recall
- Questions may be structured to cover a wide range of knowledge and contexts, including complex issues in unfamiliar or unpredictable contexts
- Questions should be planned to allow the demonstration of comprehensive knowledge of the topic(s), underlying concepts and principles and their interpretation
- Questions should allow for the development of a structured and coherent response, and discussion of contrasting or complementary lines of argument
- Questions should allow solutions to a variety of complex and unpredictable problems to be determined

Report

A report may be in a written format or presented orally, or both, for example through a presentation to a tutor or examiner(s) or to a group of peers, which is then submitted as a written follow-up.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor marking of a written report
- Tutor observation of a presentation
- Peer feedback (but not exclusively)
- Follow-up written reflection

Evidence could include:

- Written report, either stand-alone, or as combined evidence with presentation notes etc.
- Presentation e.g. PowerPoint, with notes
- Tutor statement of achievement
- Audio / video record with witness statement
- Peer feedback sheets

Tasks should allow and require the following:

- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of areas, some of which may be complex and unpredictable
- information from an extensive range and appropriate range of sources, clearly referenced
- the ability to collect and categorise ideas and information in an appropriate format, using standard and innovative techniques
- the ability to reformat ideas/information towards a given purpose where appropriate, and design novel solutions
- where appropriate, the incorporation, presentation and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data, and comparing alternative methods for obtaining data
- the inclusion and analysis of relevant theoretical concepts
- evaluation of information presented and its use through the application of a wide range of standard and innovative techniques
- the ability to undertake systematic analysis and offer informed, independent criticism
- the application of investigative strategies
- the development, where appropriate, of sustained, contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions, which may be innovative
- a structure which makes argument and discussion clear and coherent
- the conclusion of sound judgements, demonstrating where appropriate confidence in own criteria of judgement
- analytical reflection on the topic, information and solutions presented, as appropriate

Written reports should demonstrate a high degree of accuracy in grammar, spelling and style/register, and enable effective communication. Presentations should demonstrate:

- Clear, logical, focused delivery
- Excellent communication and presentation skills, allowing an effective delivery which takes account of the audience,
- Use of appropriate audio-visual aids
- The ability to interact effectively within a group, exchanging information and modifying response where appropriate and demonstrating the ability to negotiate and manage conflict if necessary

Group discussion

This is a discussion within the peer or tutor group, which may be led by the tutor or by learners. Learners may have contributed to the preparation for the discussion, or it may be on an unprepared topic. It may be followed by a written task, for example, a report of the discussion, a reflection and development of a learner's own views, or further research on the topic.

The criteria for assessing the discussion must take account of:

- Group dynamics and personalities within the group, which could disadvantage some learners
- The willingness of learners to contribute fully to the discussion

It is recommended that discussion is used in combination with other assessment methods in order to ensure fairness of assessment. The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor observation
- Tutor marking of follow-up written work

Evidence may include:

- Tutor statement of achievement
- Marked follow-up work
- Audio / visual record with witness statement

Topics discussed should allow and require the following, as appropriate:

- consideration of a range of topics, which may be complex, in a variety of familiar and unpredictable contexts
- the application, interpretation and transfer of knowledge in a range of complex areas
- the inclusion and critical analysis of relevant theoretical concepts
- the development, where appropriate, of contrasting and complementary lines of argument, and of solutions, including those which are innovative
- evaluation of information or arguments presented
- the conclusion of sound judgements
- the ability to interact effectively within a group, exchanging information and modifying response where appropriate

Reflective log

A reflective log offers the opportunity for detailed reflection on experience, practice or theoretical learning, and may be recorded regularly, where reflection comments on each session which has taken place, or occasional, where reflection comments on one specific experience.

There may be specific headings under which comment is made, which can usefully guide analysis and demonstrate understanding of theory or application of theories or processes being studied, or it may be an open format. It is unlikely to be the only method used for any individual unit, but may be a theme continued throughout the unit.

The style may be open and personal, allowing for some freedom in structure and quantity produced, although minimum requirements could be set. The log may be part of a bigger process, where the log itself is discussed and evaluated in a tutorial context.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor comments and 'marking' although precise criteria for achievement may not be appropriate
- Self-evaluation, particularly over time as knowledge and skills increase and allow for a reflection on earlier learning
- Tutorial where the log is discussed

Evidence may include:

- The reflective log
- Self-evaluation at a later date
- Tutor comments
- Tutorial notes

The set-up of the reflective log should allow and require a range chosen from the following, depending on subject and context:

- detailed analysis of theory presented in other sessions
- reflection on experience of e.g. experimentation, learning session, visit etc.
- reflection on application of theory
- reporting of how processes worked in practice, e.g. in a counselling, interview or training context, and analysis of perceived success or failure
- critical analysis of own performance against planning and intention
- the forming of judgments, solutions or conclusions, though sound reasoning
- critical evaluation of judgements, solutions or conclusions
- planning for future activity and/or improvement, taking account of previous success or failure or additional learning
- analysis of and reflection on others' opinions or conclusions

Practical demonstration / Experiment, Production of Artefact, Performance / Exhibition

These assessment methods can to some extent be grouped together, since they may represent a continuous process in a learning cycle: for example, demonstration of processes or experiment could lead to the production of an artefact, which may in turn lead to an exhibition, particularly within the creative arts.

Practical work will mostly be presented alongside preparation, for example, portfolios of ideas and planning, analysis of tasks, etc., and evaluation of what has been achieved, though reflection, for example, on the extent to which the outcome achieves the intention, and/or how further learning or practice might improve or extend ideas or achievement. At all times the assessment criteria in the unit are key to the selection of the range criteria by which the activity will be judged.

The learning may be assessed through:

- Tutor observation of a process in demonstration, experiment or performance
- Marking of preparation notes and planning
- Self-evaluation showing follow-up analysis and reflection
- Tutor comments on self-evaluation

Evidence may include:

- Preparation notes, which may include justifications and analysis of decisions made
- Audio/visual recording with witness statement
- Artefacts produced
- Self-evaluation
- Programme notes etc. for performance: although these may relate to other specific criteria within a unit rather than the performance itself

The tasks set should allow for and require the demonstration of a range of the following, as appropriate:

- Articulation and synthesis of knowledge and understanding gained through preparation for the task, for example developments in current or emerging media and technologies;
- Application and consolidation of specific learning acquired in preparation for the task, for example creative processes, or practical techniques, where ideas and techniques are unified
- Systematic sourcing and extensive researching of relevant material
- Well-informed evaluation of sources, and accurate interpretation and critical evaluation of the relationships between elements
- Evidence of conceptual risk-taking/using own judgement to inform further cycles of enquiry; unfamiliar conceptual territories may be explored
- The ability to generate ideas and concepts independently and/or collaboratively, and to challenge received opinion where appropriate
- The development of ideas through to outcomes
- Understanding of and the ability to apply critical analysis to the work of other practitioners in the discipline, where appropriate
- The selection, testing and competent and confident use of materials, processes and environments with discernment and judgement
- The ability to communicate ideas, demonstrating a persuasive personal style and the ability to take account of diverse audiences
- The ability to analyse and benefit from the critical judgements of others
- The ability to analyse and reflect on own learning and performance, taking full responsibility for own learning, through iterative cycles of well-articulated and purposeful analysis, as evidenced through written evaluation

Furthermore, for performance:

- Outstanding technical proficiency
- Balance of intention with outcome, for example where programme or preparation notes indicate specific intentions
- Originality and independence of thought, balanced with:
- Interpretation of historical context, for example, conveying of accepted norms of style and the interpretation of performance directions

Sources quoted or used for the development of this document:

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