

Principles of Assessment

All assessment in OCN approved courses will follow the five principles below:

Authenticity: All assessment activity which provides evidence of achievement for the award of credit by the OCN must have processes in place to ensure that the achievement is authentic, i.e. the learner's own work. Internal and external verification should be capable of scrutinising the circumstances in which evidence is produced. Centres must provide clear guidelines on plagiarism.

Validity: Assessment should measure what it claims to measure and there must be a close fit between the assessment activity and the learning outcome(s). For example, if the learning outcome is to 'bake a cake', an essay is an invalid assessment method. Verifiers must ensure that validity is maintained in assessment practice.

Reliability and Consistency: The assessment result should be replicable and consistent either under different circumstances, with a different assessor or over time. Policies and practices in verification and standardisation should all be devised to ensure reliability and consistency. Providers are expected to retain samples of assessed work to monitor standards over time.

Fitness for Purpose: Assessment must be fit for the learner, the learning and the level. The assessment strategy and methods must be clearly appropriate for the target group(s) of learners in the context in which the learning takes place. Assessment must fit the learning outcomes and be appropriate for the form of assessment (e.g. an initial assessment should build confidence and not deter a learner from appropriate progression). It must also be appropriate to credit value (e.g. a 5000 word essay is not appropriate for a 1 credit unit. Assessment methods should not raise barriers to demonstration of achievement.

Inclusiveness: Assessment should be based on learners' needs. It must be equitable and designed to allow all learners to demonstrate their achievements regardless of individual, social or economic circumstances. OCN accreditation promotes inclusiveness in learning and equality of opportunity. All assessment practice within an OCN course should take active account of equal opportunities issues. Assessment methods should not exclude individuals from demonstrating the learning outcomes and should be free from bias.

Assessment Strategy

The assessment strategy for a course will specify

- The principles, purposes, characteristics, arrangements and choices of assessment methods.
- The person specification(s) and expertise of assessors and internal verifiers.
- The arrangements for recording and tracking assessment evidence.
- The timing of assessment tasks.

The assessment strategy must operate within the principles of assessment and comply with any activities specified for the unit by N/OCN.

The assessment strategy must be appropriate to the aims of the course; the needs of the target group; the level of the course (e.g. at entry level assessment is often non paper based and supported).

The assessment strategy should empower learners by:

- Using open and transparent methods.
- Including feedback on the process and results of assessment.
- Allowing all learners opportunities to demonstrate learning.
- Being relevant and integrated into the learning process.
- Offering the right to appeal against assessment decisions.

The assessment strategy must be devised to take account of the difficulty of different assessment methods in terms of time, learner ownership and involvement and the level of the award across the curriculum areas. While different methods may be used, there should always be a comparability in the level of difficulty at the same level. For example, Level One Cake Making and Level One Community Leadership will be assessed by different methods but there must be comparability in terms of demand.

Any assessment strategy should include a variety of assessment methods, adapted as necessary to the needs of the target group and the curriculum. As part of the process of determining and planning which assessment methods are appropriate to be used an example assessment planning form is included within this section.

Forms of Assessment

The skills, knowledge and understanding to be assessed in any OCN approved course are defined by the specifications of the Qualifications and Credit Framework in units of assessment. Units contain explicit learning outcomes, which define what the learner will know, understand or do, and assessment criteria, which define the achievement of the learners at one of the four nationally agreed levels: Entry Level, Level One, Level Two and Level Three.

This is **critterion referenced** assessment, which is both **formative** and **summative**. Criterion referenced assessment allows for openness and equity for all learners.

For a learner to achieve the award of credit in a unit, the learning outcomes must be observed, achieved and assessed using the stated assessment criteria.

The type of assessment chosen will relate to the target group, the curriculum and the timing within the assessment process.

Initial/Diagnostic assessment usually takes place at the start of a learning programme.

Purpose: This is used to identify current learning style and strengths in order to determine potential needs and areas for development of individuals and/or the group.

Formative assessment is ongoing, developmental and continuous throughout the learning programme.

Purpose: This is used during a learning programme to give feedback and support to the learner on progress towards outcomes and to inform the tutor of action to take. It empowers learners to take action in their own learning and assessment. It should be a supportive and encouraging process even if the learner is not completely successful in meeting all of the criteria. It can contribute to the final overall achievement of learning outcomes in a unit, but is not always required to do so.

Summative assessment may take place during or towards the end of a learning programme and counts towards final assessment.

Purpose: This is used to measure the extent of planned learning that has taken place at the end of a learning experience. It is the act of making a judgement on whether the learner has achieved all or some of the learning outcomes within a unit.

Formal assessment is structured and usually takes place in clearly stated conditions, e.g. a set time to make a presentation or a practical task or test undertaken by the whole group. This is usually summative in nature.

Informal assessment is ongoing, integrated and flexible. It is varied in nature and can be recorded by the tutor and the learner. It can include self-assessment, peer group assessment or conversational feedback from the tutor. It can be either formative or summative (or both). If it contributes to the summative assessment process it must be recorded.

External assessment is used for some NOCN Qualifications, and details are provided in the appropriate Qualification Guide.

Assessment Activities

Any assessment strategy should include a variety of assessment activities or methods, formal and informal, adapted as necessary to the needs of the target group and the level of study.

Refer to the NOCN assessment definitions document

The OCN approves the assessment activities/methods for each unit through the approval process (using Unit Plus), and internal and external verifiers will scrutinise their implementation.

Role and Responsibility for Assessment

Judgements must be made on the achievement or non-achievement of the learning outcomes to the standards described by the assessment criteria as specified in the unit(s). This rules out assessment based on percentage marks, the use of grades or schemes based on a given percentage 'passing' an assessment task, unit or course. The learning outcomes of a unit must be achieved to the prescribed standard. The assessment strategy should identify who will be responsible for making and recording judgements.

Tutors: The tutor is responsible for planning and managing the assessment strategy and ensuring that it complies with Unit Plus. The tutor is responsible for:

- Sharing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria with learners.
- Using the criteria explicitly and equitably.
- Recording assessment.
- Giving on-going and positive feedback.
- Ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities for their achievement to be assessed.
- Giving guidance to the learner when there are choices regarding assessment.

Learners: Self-assessment involves the learner in identifying his/her own learning in relation to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. It encourages the development of learners' own judgement and evaluation skills, allows reflection on learning and involves learners in the whole learning process.

Peers: Peer assessment involves other learners on the course in formal or informal situations either as a group or individuals giving feedback and support in assessment of their learning. Assessment by other learners in the group can encourage evaluative skills and increase group cohesion.

Peer and self-assessment should always be augmented by tutor assessment and evidence and should not normally constitute a major part of the assessment methods leading to the award of credit.

Others within the learning environment: The tutor will also liaise with others who may be involved in the assessment process. This may include support workers, care assistants and others who contribute to the assessment process. It is essential that these additional sources also have full access to the unit specifications and assessment strategy. They will work in liaison with the learner and tutor.

Others external to the learning environment: This may involve supervisors, workplace mentors, witnesses and others who contribute to the assessment. It is essential that these additional sources also have full access to the unit specifications and assessment strategy. The tutor is normally responsible for communication and liaison with these outside sources.

Assessment Evidence

Credit can only be awarded for a unit when there is evidence that all the learning outcomes have been achieved to the standard described by the assessment criteria as specified in the unit. This assessment evidence is made available to the verifier. The evidence must be linked to information on assessment methods: for example, if the method is 'tutor observation', the evidence will be a tutor observation checklist.

Evidence should comply with the principles of assessment and must always be:

- *Sufficient*, i.e. there must be enough evidence to enable the assessor and moderator to make a reliable and consistent judgement on achievement.
- *Current*, i.e. up to date with the demands of the particular curriculum and demonstrate that the learner is competent at the time.
- *Valid*, i.e. directly related to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- *Authentic*, i.e. the result of the learner's own performance. All centres must give guidance to learners on plagiarism.

Evidence of learning will be generated by the student throughout the learning process, and may include a large variety of products. Paper-based products may include notes, reports, learning journals, gapped handouts, essays, examinations etc. Non paper-based evidence may include role plays, videos, tapes, artefacts, performance, oral questions and answers, disks etc. Evidence of these activities must always be recorded.

Evidence of achievement comprises the appropriate selection of evidence of learning which has been assessed against a specific outcome or outcomes using the stated criteria. There must be a transparent process of recording this evidence which clearly records the assessment judgement made.

OCNs promote the recognition of diversity in learning and evidence can be tailored to the needs of individuals or groups of learners. Evidence should always be flexible, varied and appropriate.

A collection of assessed materials to demonstrate a learner's achievement is generally termed a *portfolio*. It may take different forms but must always be a collection of the learner's proof of achievement which the tutor has assessed as matching specific units at a stated level. Learners can be encouraged to see assessment as important to their own sense of achievement.

Assessment Records

Assessment records form a vital component of evidence for the following purposes:

- Evaluating learner progress (for the learner and the tutor).
- Presentation to internal verifiers as evidence of achievement of the learning which has taken place.

Evidence of achievement must be mapped against specific, recognised units within the NOCN Credit Framework with a stated level and a credit value. Learners cannot be awarded credit for partial achievement of a unit.

It is the tutor's responsibility to record assessed achievement and to track this against the learning outcomes. Learners must be advised fully of the unit specification(s). They must also be advised of any assessment regulations, including the opportunities to resubmit if applicable and of the appeals procedure.

The evidence can be recorded in a number of ways but must be

- Tracked against the individual learner and the achievement of the relevant unit specifications.
- In a clearly structured format.
- Available for the internal verifier.