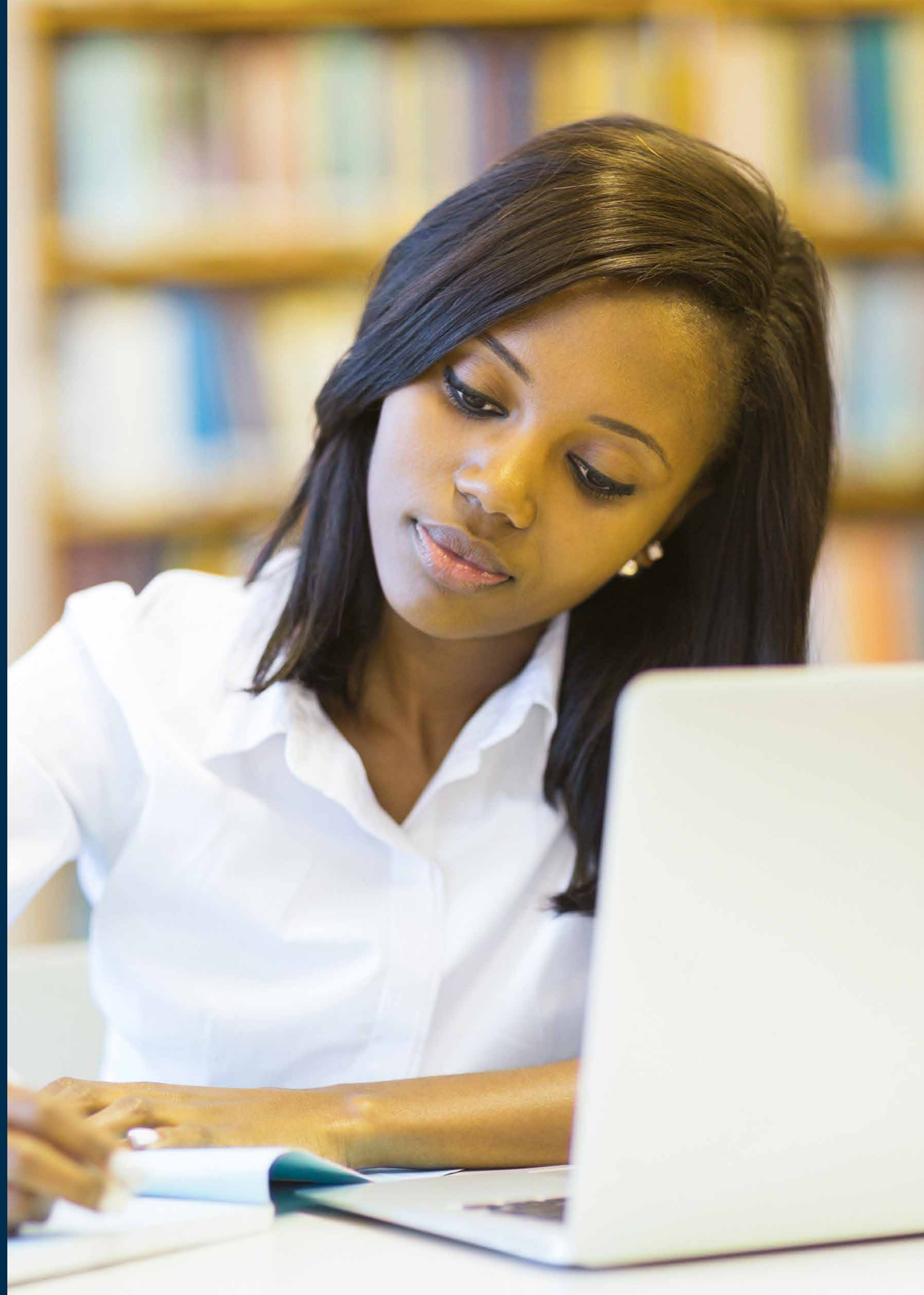
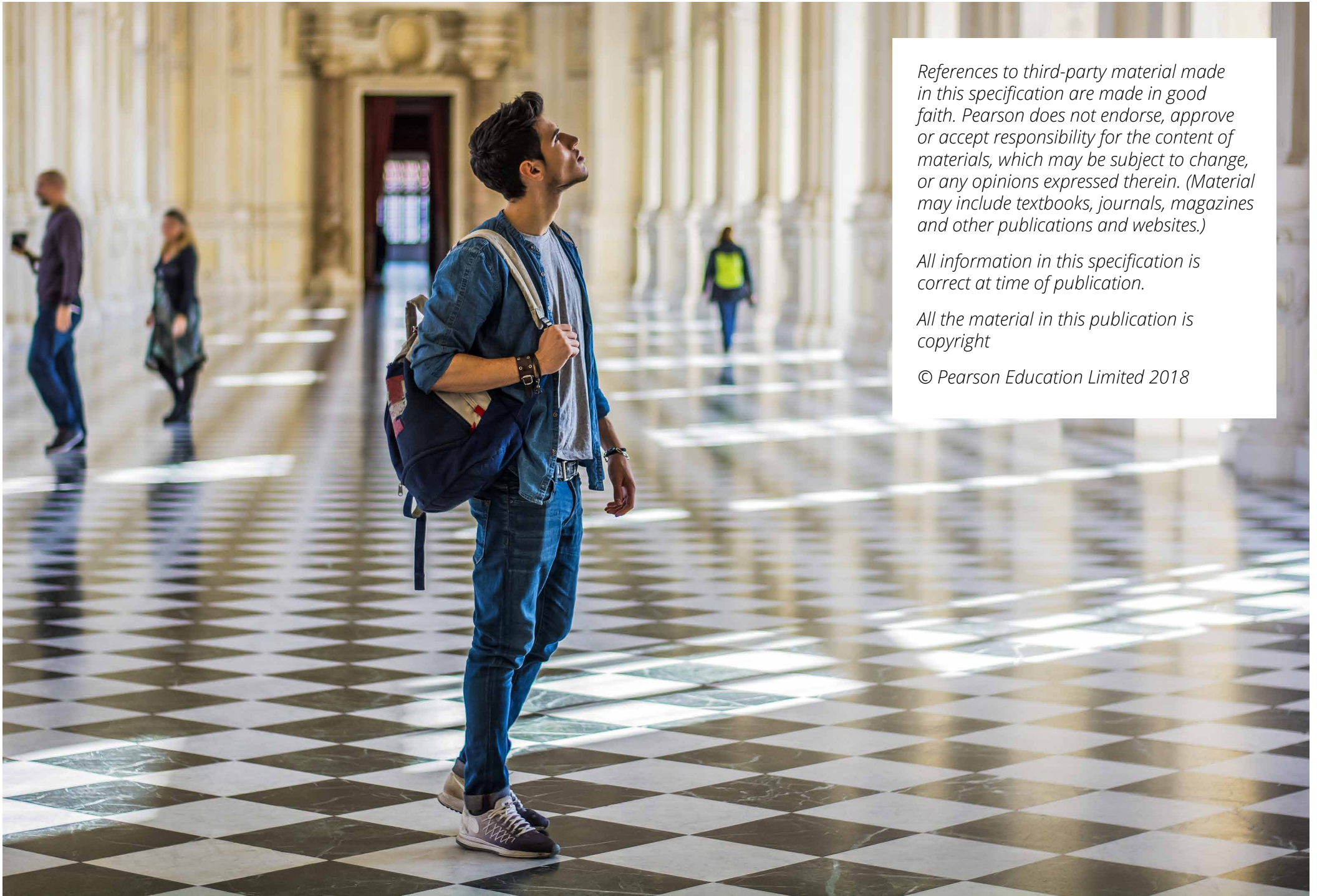


**BTEC Higher Nationals - (RQF)
Assessment & Feedback
Guidance for Centres/Tutors**





References to third-party material made in this specification are made in good faith. Pearson does not endorse, approve or accept responsibility for the content of materials, which may be subject to change, or any opinions expressed therein. (Material may include textbooks, journals, magazines and other publications and websites.)

All information in this specification is correct at time of publication.

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Pearson Education Limited 2018

About Pearson

Pearson is the world's leading learning company, with 35,000 employees in more than 70 countries working to help people of all ages to make measurable progress in their lives through learning. We put the student at the centre of everything we do, because wherever learning flourishes, so do people. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at [qualifications.pearson.com](https://www.pearson.com/qualifications).

Introduction

BTEC is one of the world's most recognised applied learning brands, engaging students in practical, interpersonal and thinking skills, for more than thirty years.

BTECs are vocational qualifications for students taking their first steps into employment, or for those already in employment and seeking career development opportunities. BTECs provide progression into the workplace either directly or via study at university and are also designed to meet employers' needs. Therefore, Pearson BTEC Higher National (HN) qualifications are widely recognised by industry and higher education as the principal vocational qualification at Levels 4 and 5.

When developing the new Pearson BTEC HN qualifications we collaborated with a wide range of students, employers, higher education providers, colleges and subject experts to ensure that the new qualifications meet their needs and expectations. We also work closely with the relevant Professional Bodies, to ensure alignment with recognised professional standards.

There is now a greater emphasis on employer engagement and work readiness. The new RQF BTEC HN qualifications are designed to reflect this increasing need for high quality professional and technical education pathways at Levels 4 and 5, thereby providing students with a clear line of sight to employment and to progression to a degree at Level 6.

Developing and delivering good assessment and feedback are a key part of defining a robust and rewarding learning and teaching strategy to support students. Through this guide we aim to provide tutors and centres with clear information and advice on designing assessment, writing assignments and providing students with constructive and rewarding feedback.

What is assessment?

Assessment is the process of measuring students' learning. Through the process of assessment, we aim to evaluate whether a student has achieved the learning that is intended and the level of that achievement.

Assessment should be considered a part of the students' learning process. Students should feel that they are participants in the assessment process, rather than feel that assessment is something that is *done to them* after their learning has been completed. Throughout the entire process of assessment, including post-assessment feedback, the aim is to support students to recognise their achievement and how to continue to improve and progress in the future.

As with all aspects of teaching and learning, assessment should help students to develop their knowledge and skills. Whether the assessment is via a project, writing an essay, sitting an examination or any other type of assignment, assessment should be considered as part of an overall teaching & learning strategy. Good assessment will enhance the student experience and their learning journey.

Forms of assessment

Assessment can be undertaken through a wide variety of activities or assignments. Assessment can be undertaken by peers or tutors, in order to achieve different types of learning experience.

Formative Assessment

Not all assessment results in a final grade. Formative assessment is intended to provide students with a sense of their progress and support them to improve and develop their work toward summative (final) assessment.

The feedback associated with formative assessment is often the most challenging and critical element. Tutors must seek to provide students with a clear understanding of their progress and how to continue to improve, but must avoid *coaching* the student.

Summative Assessment

As the name indicates, summative assessment is the summation of the student's achievement and evaluation of their learning. Typically, summative assessment results in the awarding of a grade that indicates the student's level of achievement.

For students, the summative assessment is often viewed as the most important form of assessment, as it provides them with a definitive indication of their performance. However, tutors must assist students to recognise that summative assessment remains a part of the student's learning journey and that the feedback, that should accompany summative assessment, is crucial; to give the student a context in which to view their results and to understand how to continue to improve.

Assessment & Grading

Grading vs Marking

The terms 'grading' and 'marking' are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same.

Marking is a form of scoring, using a numbered system, to record the level of student achievement. Typically, higher numbers represent a higher level of achievement. Marking is most appropriate to the assessment of individual tasks or assignments; not necessarily for whole modules, units or qualifications. It is often the case that, for overall whole units or qualifications, marking results are converted to grades.

Grading is the use of bands of achievement to recognise the level to which students have evidenced their learning. Typically, grading will use a non-numerical system of award; such as, Pass, Merit, Distinction.

The HNs use grading at all levels of assessment and award. For the assessment of individual learning outcomes, entire units and the overall qualification, students will be awarded either Pass, Merit or Distinction grade. **There is no use of marking in the HNs.** The student should only be awarded Pass, Merit or Distinction.

In the RQF HNs, learning outcomes and assessment criteria are defined within the Programme Specification. Therefore, the levels of achievement necessary for Pass, Merit or Distinction are clearly set-out for students and assessors. This allows for greater consistency of assessment; from individual learning outcomes up to overall qualifications.





Assessment in BTEC Higher National Qualifications

Pearson BTEC qualifications, including the HNs, employ a **mastery model** of assessment. Originally proposed by Benjamin Bloom (best known for the development of Bloom's Taxonomy), the mastery model of learning is based on the principle that students must achieve a level of 'mastery' of prerequisite knowledge or skill, in order to progress to higher levels.

In practice, the mastery model of assessment means that a student must achieve all of the required learning at a level and below to be awarded the grade. Thus, for a student to achieve a Pass, they must achieve all of the requirements that define the Pass. To achieve a Merit, students must achieve all of the requirements that define Pass and Merit. For Distinction, the student must achieve all Pass, Merit and Distinction requirements.

Learning Outcomes & Assessment Criteria

Learning Outcomes

Students need to be clear about what they are aiming to achieve, through a unit or activity. Having a clear understanding of what is necessary, will support them to undertake their work with greater focus and to achieve better results through assessment.

Learning outcomes define the skills and knowledge that a student should be able to evidence on completion of a programme of learning. For each unit in the HNs there are 3-5 learning outcomes defined. The aim of these learning outcomes is to provide a clear indication of what that the student should be able to do upon completion of that unit. Each learning outcome aims to consider a specific knowledge and/or skills domain that will be achieved through the unit.

Assessment Criteria

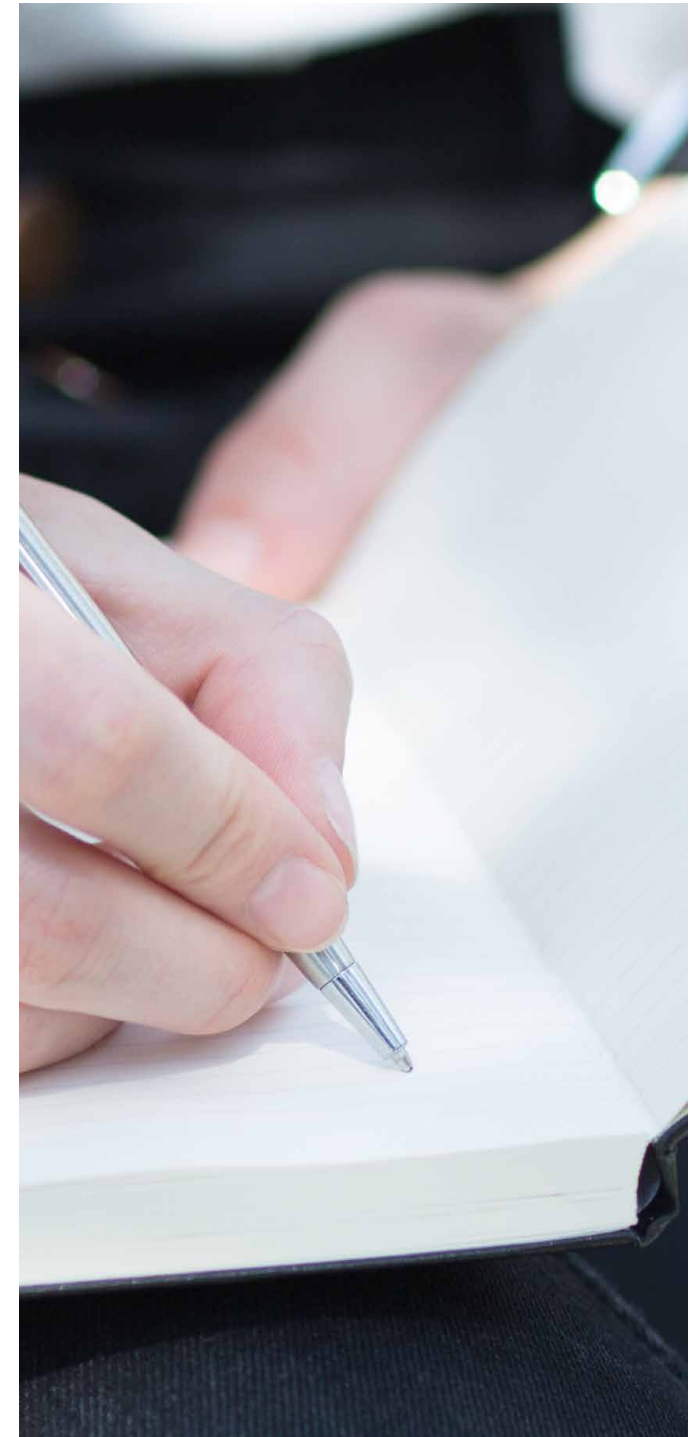
While learning outcomes define what a student should be able to do, they do not indicate a level of achievement. Effectively, learning outcomes are binary; you can do something or you cannot do something. To evaluate the level of achievement associated with a learning outcome we use *assessment criteria*.

For each learning outcome defined for a unit in the HNs, there are assessment criteria that define what is required for a student to achieve Pass, Merit or Distinction.

These criteria have been designed to provide students and assessors with a clear description of the learning that must be evidenced for a student to achieve at the specified level.

Assessment criteria are designed around a 'scaffolding' principle. This means that criteria at the higher levels build upon those below. In this way, a student who achieves a Merit criterion will have also achieved the Pass criteria because the Merit criteria are building upon the Pass criteria. Similarly, a student showing evidence of the Distinction criteria will have achieved the Pass and Merit, because of the 'scaffolding.'

This 'scaffolding' is also important in terms of assessment evidence. For a student to evidence higher levels of achievement should not require them to undertake a different activity or produce a different body of work. The 'scaffolding' of assessment criteria should provide students with the opportunity to evidence higher levels of achievement (meeting the higher level criteria) through the same work executed with greater depth or detail; as required by the criteria.



A Varied Skills Profile

The HNs have been designed to support students to develop high-level technical skills, along with transferable skills that will support them in future employment. The range of skills that are considered cover the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. These are referred to as CAP Skills.

Cognitive skills are knowledge-based. These are the skills that require students to provide evidence of their understanding of their subject of study. In evidencing cognitive skills, students will typically be engaged in activities that call upon them to analyse, evaluate, apply, or synthesise.

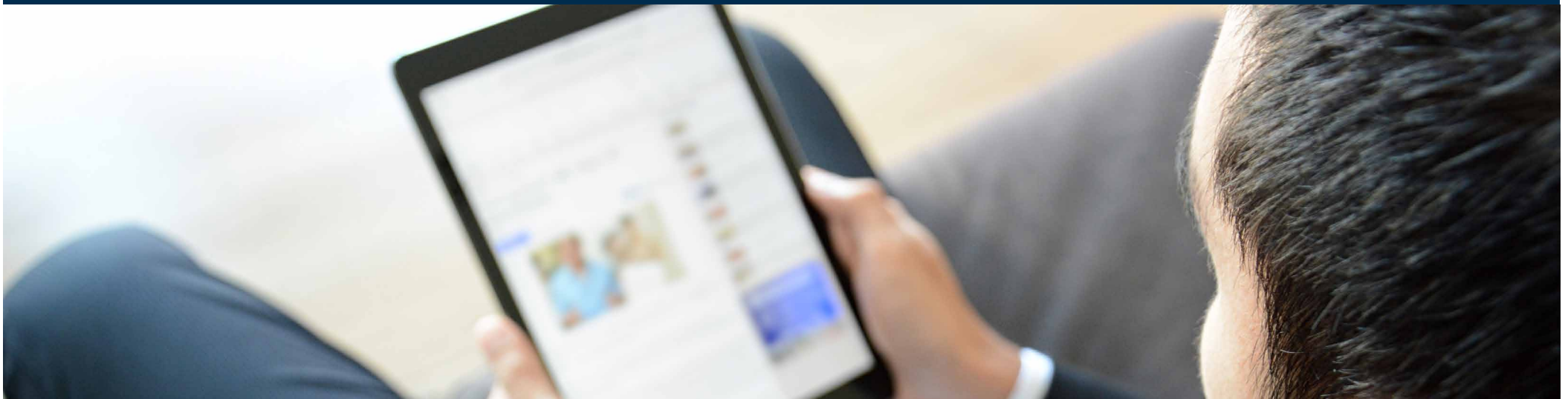
Affective skills describe the behaviours that a person exhibits in relation to a subject or activity. These skills call

upon the student to consider what something means to them and to others, and promotes growth in attitudes and behaviours. For students on the HNs, affective skills will often involve considering the professional practice aspects of the subject; promoting attitudes and behaviours that are present within the workplace.

At their most basic, *psychomotor skills* relate to the ability to physically manipulate tools. While this may apply to some aspects of the HNs, there is a broader definition that informs the qualifications. In order for students to show their awareness and mastery of complex topics, they will be asked to produce bodies of evidence and communicate these in appropriate ways. The necessary skill to communicate high-

level knowledge of specialist subjects, requires the student to undertake a series of different activities that may fall into the psychomotor domain. For example, in producing a report, a student will need to exhibit skill in the production of a specific type of written material. In giving an audio-visual presentation, students will be engaged in the use of specialist software (tools) and carry-out a specific type of performative activity ('to present').

As you read through a Programme Specification, Example Assessment Brief or sample Scheme of Works, for a HN qualification, look for the various ways in which the CAP Skills are made evident and assessed through learning outcomes and assessment criteria.





Holistic Assessment

The RQF HNs aim to support students to become independent, self-aware, practitioners in their chosen field. Whether; upon graduating from an HN, a student wishes to enter employment or 'top-up' to a university degree, their HN qualification will provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to progress. Both employment and university degree studies require that a student is able to manage complex interrelated areas of knowledge - they must think about the 'whole' rather than just the parts of their subject. By the same token, the HNs are designed to promote an holistic approach to learning, teaching and assessment.

Holistic assessment is when the assessor evaluates student achievement as a whole; rather than breaking things down into separate components. For the HNs, this means that we do not set and assess work only to consider Pass, then assess other work for Merit, etc. Rather, we design assessment activities that will allow us to assess a student's achievement at Pass, Merit or Distinction. This can be done in relation to individual learning outcomes or multiple learning outcomes assessed together.

Holistic assessment encourages students to consider their learning and achievement as a set of relationships. If assessing a single learning outcome, students may see that through a single activity/body of work they may evidence their achievement at different levels. If the assessment is of multiple learning outcomes, students are encouraged to consider the way that their learning and their work may bring together theories, concepts, skills across different areas of their subject.

It is crucial to recognise that assessment in the HNs is undertaken in relation to the learning outcomes, rather than in relation to assessment criteria. This drives assessment toward a holistic approach. In the assessment, we are considering a student's achievement of the *learning outcome* at the *level defined by assessment criteria*.

Forms of Holistic Assessment

Single Unit Assessment is when all of the learning outcomes of a unit are assessed together through a single assignment. The assignment may be made up of different pieces of work, but they are submitted and assessed together; as a single body of evidence. This type of holistic assessment encourages students to develop an awareness of how different areas of their learning may relate and support each other.

In reviewing the assessment criteria of some HN qualifications, you will see instances of Distinction criteria that span across multiple learning outcomes. In these cases, Pearson has identified that when working at the Distinction level, students will be able to provide evidence of the relationship between the learning associated with these outcomes.

Single Unit (Staged) Assessment allows for learning outcomes, in a single unit, to be assessed through two or more assignments. In this case, each assignment will be designed to provide students with an opportunity to show their achievement of one or more of the learning outcomes.

When considering this form of assessment, centres should consider the timing of assessments and the potential impact that this may have on student achievement. For example, if an assessment is staged in 3 parts; equally spaced across a 12-week programme, the first assessment would take place about 4 weeks into the unit. If a student, at this point, achieves a Pass (in the assessment of a single learning outcome) they will not be able to achieve anything above a Pass for the overall unit. This may mean the student will not be 'driven' to attempt more challenging work for the other assessments.

While the above example paints a challenging picture, there are instances where staged assessment can be highly effective. When designing a staged assessment, centres should keep in mind that the individual assessments must be closely allied to the scheme of works and curriculum delivery. For a student to be successful (ideally at the highest level) in an early staged assessment (e.g. early in the unit), it is vital that they have had all of the learning and teaching opportunities that will fully empower them to undertake the assessment.

Integrated Assessment is the undertaking of assessment across multiple units. This is the most holistic form of assessment, in that it allows the opportunity for students to engage in work that encourages a high-degree of relational thinking; as students undertake assignments that bring together bodies of knowledge and skill across a wider range of experiences.

While this form of assessment can provide great benefits for students, it does have additional challenges. For tutors, it is necessary to ensure that the work that students do will provide clear evidence of their achievement of all the learning outcomes at the full range of levels (as defined by the assessment criteria). In addition, tutors must ensure that the link between assignments and units does not adversely affect the students' ability to achieve. In integrated assessments, tutors must ensure that students' work toward one unit does not limit their ability to achieve in other units of the integrated assessment. Ensuring that integrated assessment is effective for the students, and manageable for the tutors, requires careful planning and design of the assignments and the assessment strategy.

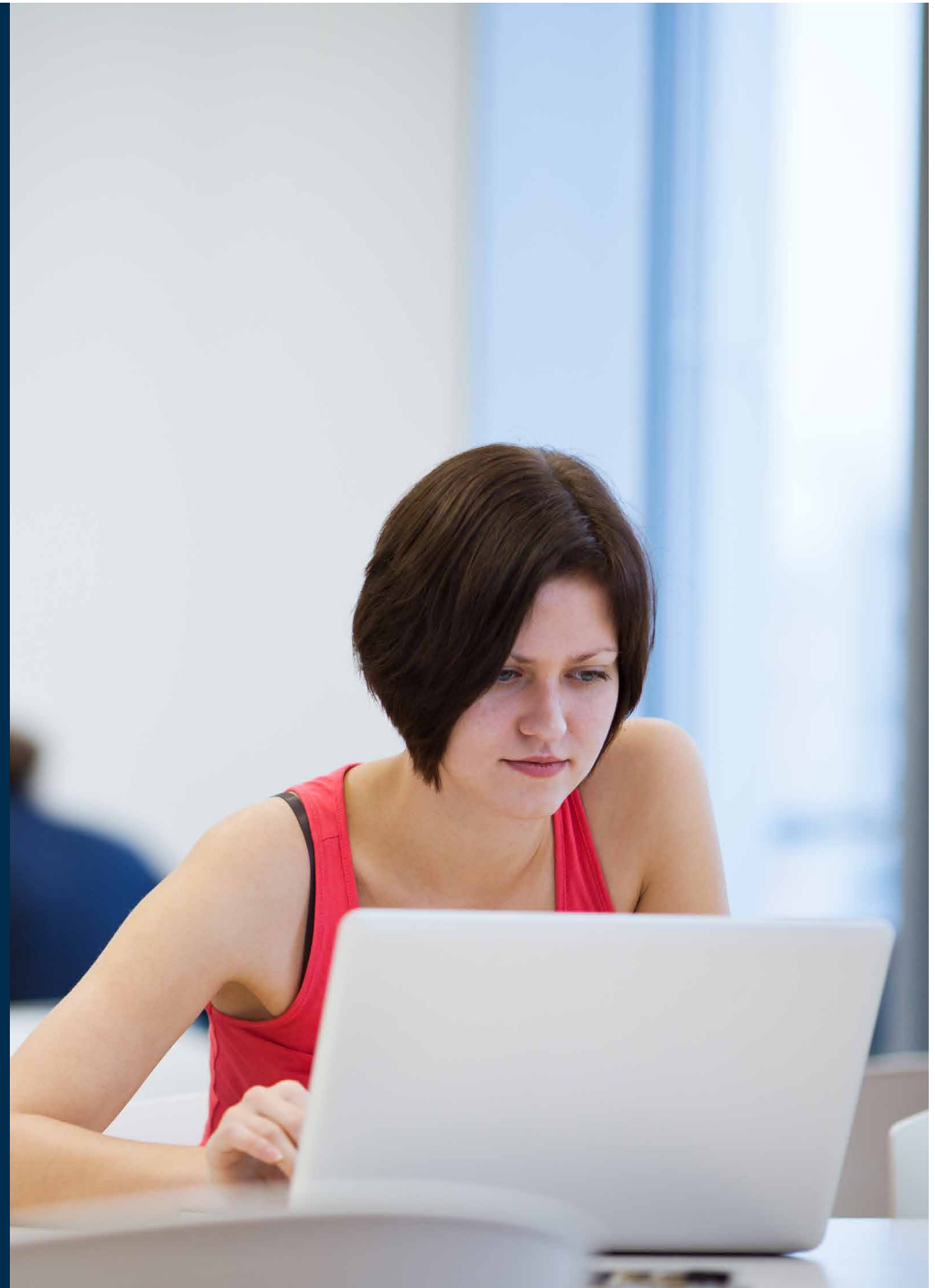
Assignment and Assessment

As with grading and marking, the terms assignment and assessment are sometimes used interchangeably, but this is not the case. Assessment is the process of measuring the level of a student's achievement of required learning. An assignment is the articulation of the work that a student will be required to undertake, in order to provide evidence that can be evaluated in the assessment. Effectively, the assignment enables assessment to take place.

When we discuss the design of an assessment, we are considering the way in which the student's learning will be measured. Typically, we may ask:

- how many assessments will be undertaken for a unit (or units)?
- which learning outcomes will be assessed in each instance of the assessment?
- what type of evidence will be required to undertake the assessment?

When planning assessment, there will be some consideration of the type(s) of assignment that might be appropriate. However, it is usually a good idea to develop an assessment plan prior to writing assignments.



Assessment Planning

Assessment is most effective when it is planned and designed in relation to both the overall programme and the unit(s). Assessment planning should be undertaken as part of team or departmental activity. While individual tutors may be responsible for designing assignment briefs, it is important that individuals share their assignments and discuss the timing of assessments across the programme. **Similarly, it is good practice, at the start of the programme, to provide students with a clear indication of the schedule of assessments; as this will help students to plan their time effectively and to be aware of the varying demands upon their time.**

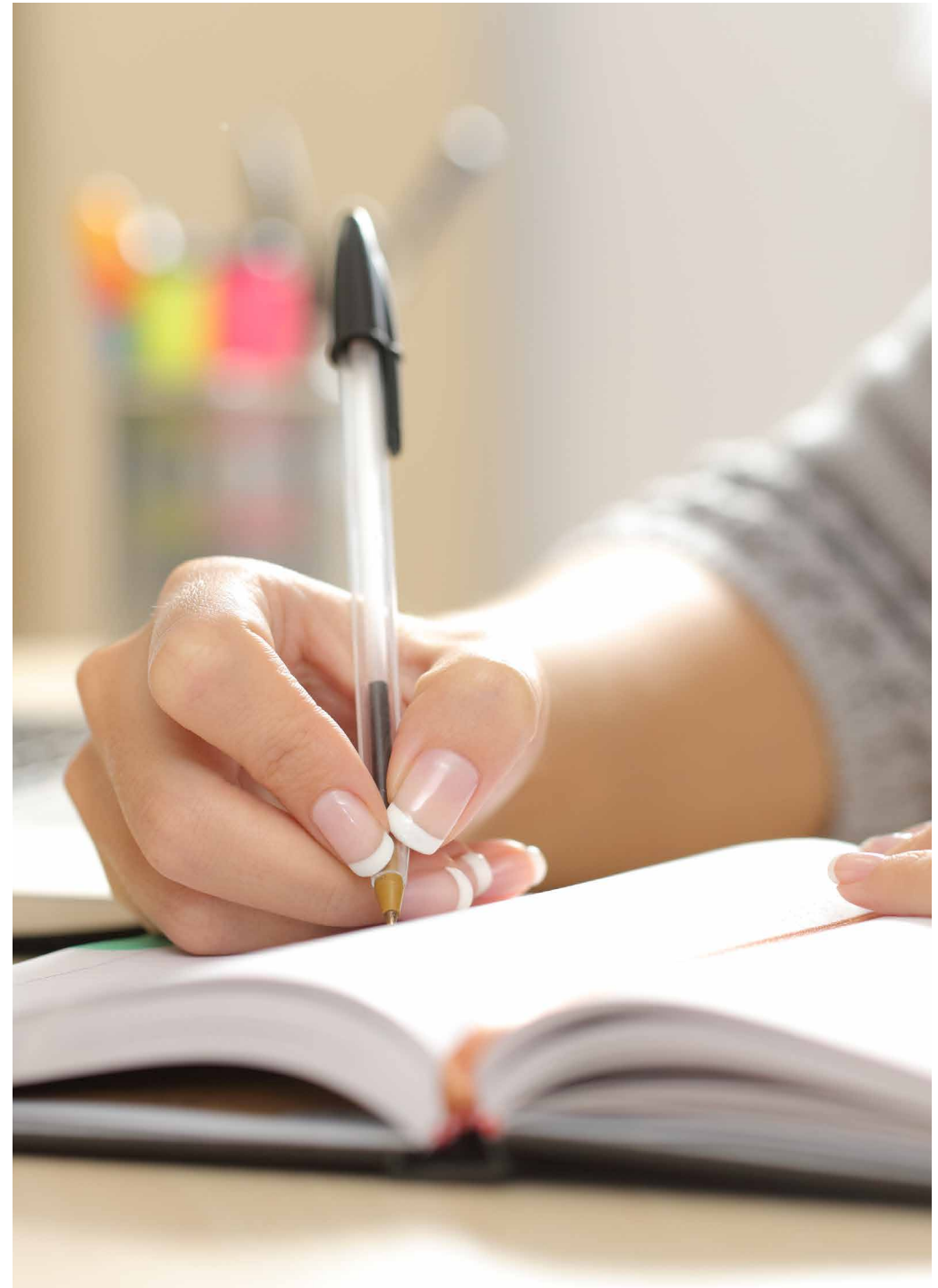
Assessment in the HNs is internal to the centre. Pearson does not impose any external assessment on HN centres. It is the centre's responsibility to design and administer assessments.

To ensure the quality and suitability of assessment design, Pearson requires that centres engage and record a process of *Internal Verification of Assignment Briefs*. This is a system that involves members of the centre staff in reviewing and confirming that the assignment and assessment strategy meets the requirements of Pearson's Quality Assurance policies and provides the correct information and guidance for students.

Internal Verification of Assignment Briefs *must* be completed before the assignment is issued to students.

Following the assessment, there is a further stage (Internal Verification of Assessment Decisions) that requires centres to sample the assessment results and feedback to ensure quality of feedback and parity of assessment decisions. Internal Verification of Assessment Decisions must be completed prior to results being issued to students.

Pearson's External Examiners, who make regular visits to a centre, will review Internal Verification documentation to confirm the centre's implementation of the policy and practices.



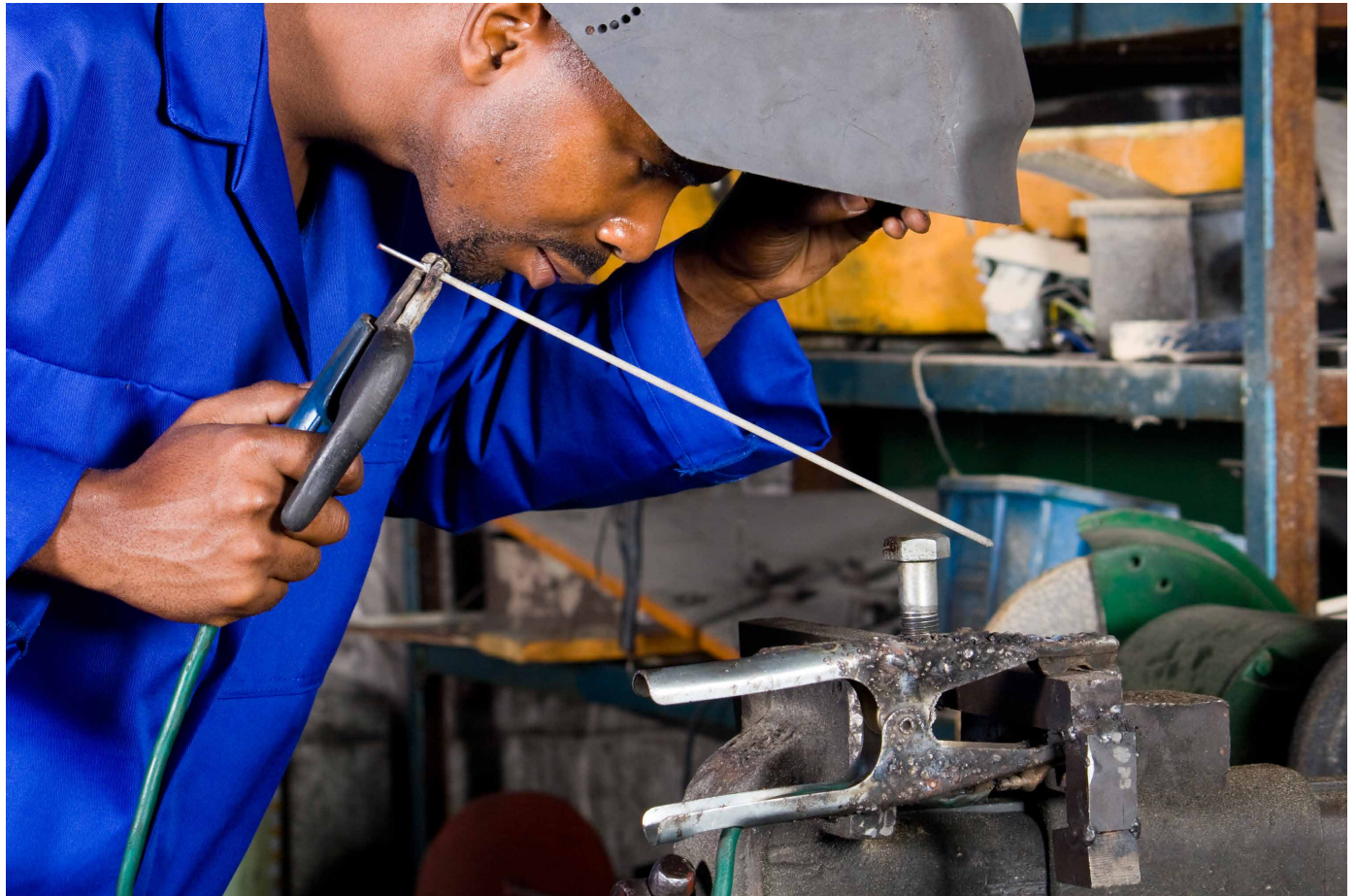
Programme Assessment Planning

Across the various units that make up an HN, students should engage in a variety of different methods of assessment and types of assignment. In planning your assessment strategy for a programme, you will want to avoid using the same type of assessment or the same type of assignment too often. Being exposed to different types of assessment will better support students in their future employment or progression to university degree studies.

Variety and relevance

To ensure a range of assessment methods, programme teams should meet to consider the different methods and the types of assignment that will be used. While controlled assessments (e.g. open or closed book examinations) may be an effective method of evaluating a student's learning for some types of unit, it should not be overly-emphasised. Keeping in mind the vocational nature of the HN qualifications, the choice of assessment type should provide students with experiences that are vocationally relevant to the subject area.

For example, in many employment contexts the writing of reports may be an important feature, so students will need to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to undertake this type of work. So, an assignment that calls upon students to undertake research,



analysis and then write a report will be highly relevant and valuable.

In subjects that require an understanding of the design process or creative practice, project-based assignments that require students to produce work that evidences their creative process will be vital. However, there may also be forms of evidence that are equally appropriate to allow students to reveal both process and outcome; presentations, observation, blogs, etc. are all suitable forms of assessment evidence.

It is also important to recognise the relationship between assessment and the overall model of delivery for a programme. Again, the programme team should consider the overall view of when students will be required to submit work for assessment. Students must have sufficient time available to allow them to complete work, to the best of their ability. Assessment submissions that are too close together may create situations that are obstacles to the students' ability to achieve at the highest level.

Unit Assessment Planning

What to consider

In developing an assessment strategy for a specific unit (or combination of units in an integrated assessment), staff teams must consider a number of factors.

It is important to consider the type of assessment used in previous units and those that will follow. Just as in programme assessment planning, tutors will need to share their plans and, if necessary, discuss how to adjust things to ensure that students are engaging in a varied 'menu' of assessment methods.

In starting to develop an assessment, tutors must review the unit descriptor; making sure that they are clear about the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Whether the planned assessment will cover all learning outcomes or only a sub-set of the learning outcomes, it is crucial that the assessment is designed to be an effective means of evaluating student's achievement of the learning outcomes.

Working with Essential Content

In addition, it is necessary to review the Essential Content of the unit. You cannot assess a student on a curriculum that has not been taught. If tutors are developing a staged assessment, then they must ensure that the delivery strategy for the Essential Content (associated with the learning outcomes to be assessed) has been fully taught prior to the assessment, and that

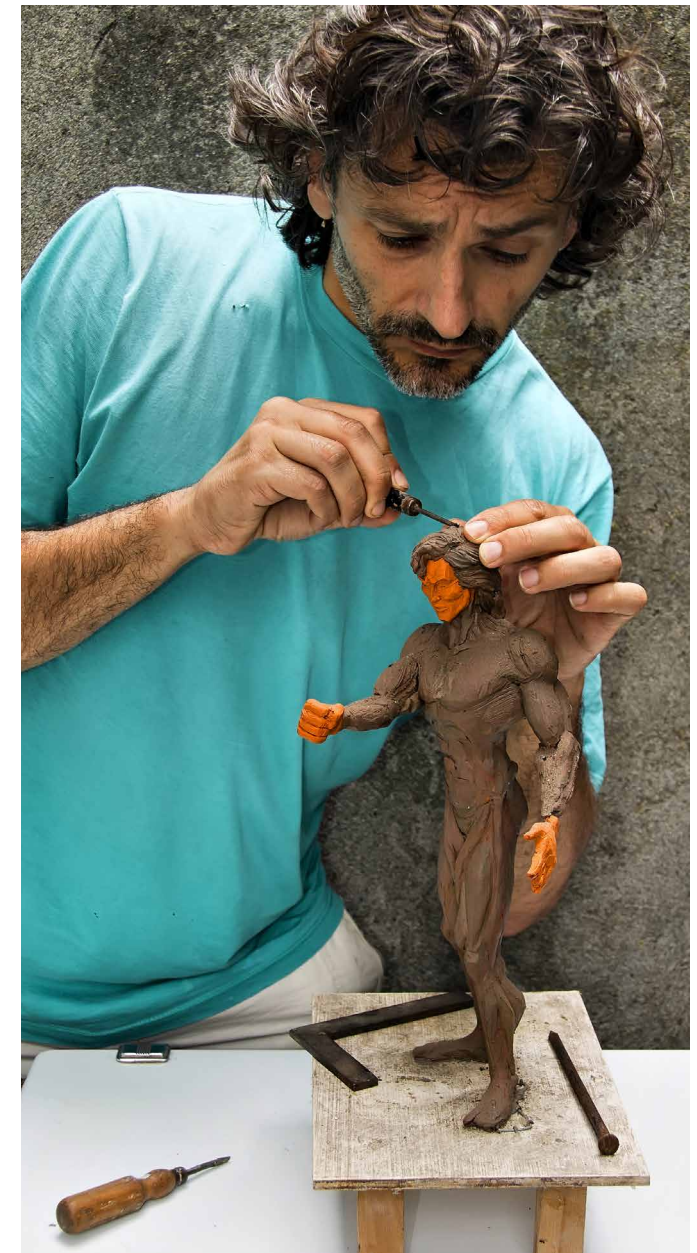
students have had sufficient time (following the delivery) to complete the work required.

If tutors are developing an integrated assessment, across multiple units, it is necessary to make sure that there is a clear strategy that will allow assessment of the individual learning outcomes from each unit. It is not appropriate for students to be assessed for one learning outcome, but be given a grade for multiple learning outcomes occurring in different units. In an integrated assessment, the assignment must provide students with the opportunity to evidence all of the necessary learning outcomes. It is not possible to combine learning outcomes or to assume that because a student has achieved an outcome for one unit they have also achieved an outcome in another unit. The assessment plan must make clear how the evidence that students are asked to produce will allow tutors to assess the learning outcomes at the appropriate level.

Remember, the Essential Content for a unit is the range of topics that Pearson has determined that students must have engaged in order to be prepared to achieve the learning outcome(s). While centres may add to this content, they must not remove content from their curriculum. Keep in mind that there is no expectation that assessment will cover all of the essential content.

Make time to plan

Successful assessment for students, and manageable assessment for tutors, will be much more achievable with planning that is



undertaken well in advance of the start of teaching. Centres should ensure that time is allocated to allow staff to plan assessment at unit and programme levels.



Assessment Evidence

The work that a student is asked to prepare and submit for assessment is intrinsically linked to the assessment plan, the learning outcomes and the vocational character of the qualification.

The specification of assessment evidence plays a key role in supporting the student to understand how skills and knowledge may be presented to others. For a vocational qualification, this is particularly important as the assessment evidence can also seek to model the type of work that a student may be engaged, when in employment.

When considering the assessment evidence that a student will be required to submit, we must ensure that it is:

Valid - the work that the student will produce must provide evidence that is clearly related to the learning outcome(s).

Sufficient - the evidence must provide enough material that the student can show their achievement at Pass, Merit or Distinction.

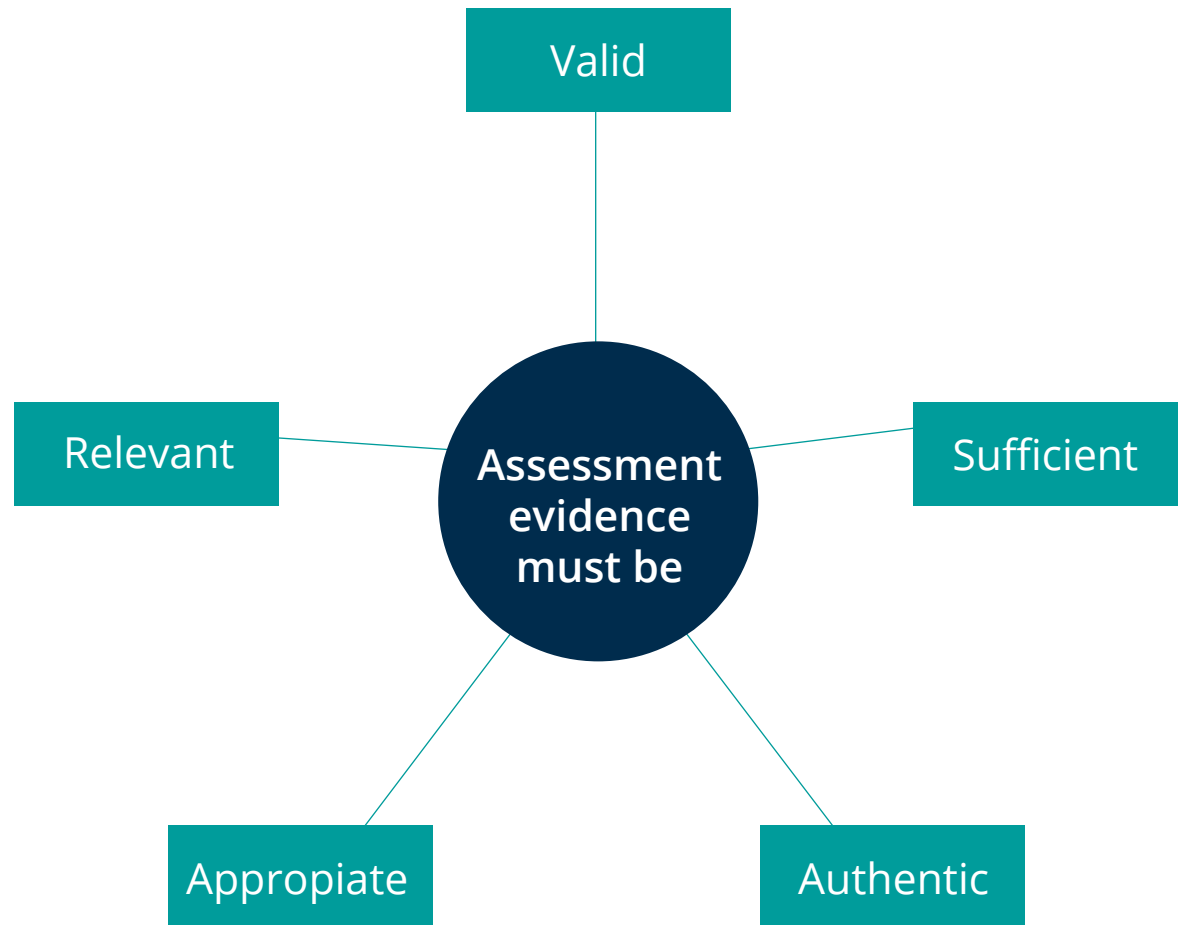
Authentic - the work the student submits should be their own, and it must be described in the assignment brief in such a way that students understand that they cannot simply present work that has been compiled or collected.

Appropriate - the work that the student is required to produce must be clearly related to the content of the unit and at the appropriate level. An assignment brief must not ask the student to produce work that is too simple or too complex for the level of study.

Relevant - the student must produce work that is related to the vocational nature of the programme. This requires that the assignment brief provides the student with a clear vocational context, in which they will work to produce their evidence.

Types of assessment evidence have a relation to the type of skills that may be assessed. When developing a plan for the assessment and the evidence, care should be taken to ensure that type of evidence will provide suitable means to assess the knowledge or skill that is embodied in the learning outcome.

When deciding the type of assessment evidence that will be required, tutors should also take into consideration the size of the unit and the amount of time that a student may reasonably be expected to dedicate to completing the work. It is unfair to ask a student to undertake work that requires more time than would normally be expected for a student to have available. The specifics of this consideration will vary; based on the nature of the evidence to be produced, the size of the unit and the level of the unit. Such issues will also inform the programme assessment planning phase, as it will have a direct impact on the relationship and timing of assessments.



Writing Effective Assignment Briefs

The relationship between the assignment and assessment is one that must be considered very carefully. As the assignment enables the assessment, it needs to be developed with a clear understanding of how it will provide students with a body of work (evidence) that will allow them to show their achievement of the learning outcome(s) at the highest level that they may be able to attain.

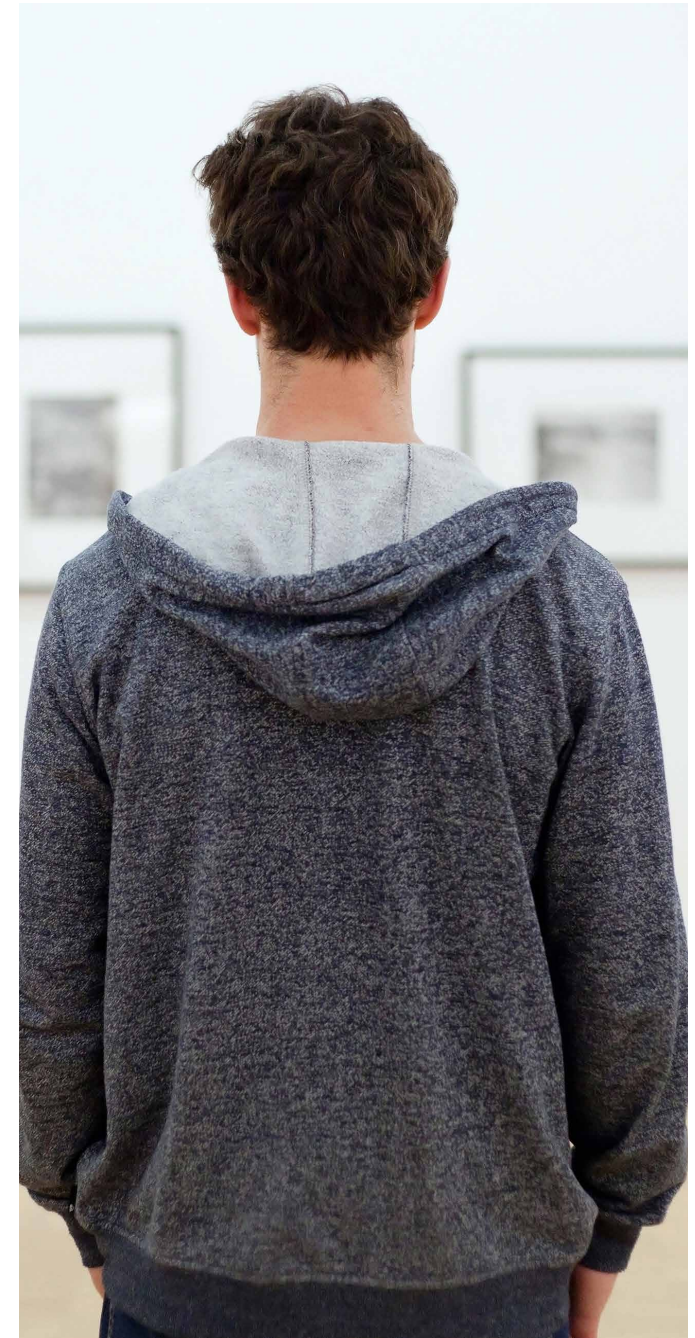
A good assignment will:

- make clear what evidence the student must submit and the format, word count, length of the individual elements;
- present a vocational scenario that provides a professional context in which the student will produce work;
- use language that is clear and precise, both in defining the vocational scenario and in describing the evidence required;
- make clear the range of levels of achievement (Pass, Merit, Distinction) through the use of the same or similar command verbs found in the assessment criteria;
- clearly indicate the learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are covered by the assignment;
- allow a student to achieve a learning outcome (or multiple learning outcomes) at any of the levels defined by the assessment criteria.

When writing an assignment, tutors must not:

- change the wording of learning outcomes or assessment criteria (these are defined in the specification and approved through Pearson's validation processes, they cannot be modified by the tutor/centre);
- add any additional assessment criteria;
- use 'multiple-choice' or 'fill-in the missing word' activities (these are not suitable to Level 4 or Level 5 qualifications);
- use numerical marking or percentage weighting (remember, HNs are *graded*, not marked);
- penalise students for exceeding word counts or limits (word counts or limits can be given as recommendations, but cannot be used to determine assessment);
- associate the assignment with a single assessment criterion.

It is important to remember that **assessment is undertaken at the learning outcome level**, using the assessment criteria to determine the level of achievement that the student has evidenced. To support this, assignments must not be written as tasks that only allow a student to achieve a single assessment criterion. Rather, the assignment should define an action or activity for the student to undertake, that will allow them to achieve the learning outcome(s) at Pass, Merit or Distinction. For example:




LO: Produce a set of drawings


P1: Develop drawings using industry standard tools and techniques

M1: Communicate the ability to use line, shade and form in drawings.

D1: Visually analyse a subject through the production of drawings.

You are asked to produce a set of drawings, using industry standard tools and techniques, that communicates the use of line, shade and form to visually analyse a given subject. 

You will:

1. Produce a set of drawings, using industry standard tools and techniques. (P) 
2. Present drawings that show a command of line work, shade and form (M)
3. Show your visual analysis of a subject. (D)

From the above, you can see that the first example integrates different levels within the description of the work that the students will undertake. Through this, the student will work toward achievement of all of the assessment criteria through an integrated action. While they may not achieve the higher order ('critical'), they will be aiming toward this level. As discussed previously, this 'holistic' approach encourages students to explore the range of their learning and to recognise the relationship between aspects of their study.

By contrast, the second example presents the student with three distinct tasks, each targeting a different criterion. There are

a number of issues with this approach. It is repetitive (task 1 and 2 are actually repeating the same basic work). Task 3 is ambiguous and does not clearly relate to the other tasks. Finally, this approach may encourage the student to be 'strategic' in approaching the assignment and not seeking to explore the higher-level aspects of their learning.

It is considered good practice, in writing assignments for an HN qualification, to have no more than one assignment per learning outcome. Where possible, integrated assignments (covering multiple learning outcomes) are strongly encouraged.



The Vocational Context of an HN Assignment

As vocational qualifications, intended to prepare students for future employment (as well as university progression), HNs aim to provide students with a programme of learning and teaching that reflects contemporary issues that are present in the workplace. While seeking to provide students with the knowledge and ability to address employer needs for staff with higher technical skills, the qualifications also provide students with the application of transferable skills that will promote professional behaviours and practices.

The assignment brief is one of the primary means by which students may recognise the relationship between their coursework and the employment sector. By designing assignment briefs that situate the student in relation to 'real-world' issues and challenges, they are encouraged to undertake the assignment with a view toward their future in the industry.



Designing scenarios

A good scenario:

- is clearly linked to the vocational context of the subject;
- puts the student into an identified role, that is appropriate to their current level of study;
- communicates 'real-world' issues and challenges faced in the workplace;
- encourages the student to act professionally;
- calls upon the student to engage with the full range of cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills;
- is presented using language that is appropriate to the level and relevant to the vocational context.

"You are employed as an assistant marketing manager in the regional office of a large advertising and marketing consultancy. The consultancy has been appointed to develop a marketing strategy for a multinational pharmaceutical firm. Your manager has tasked you with..."

"You have recently gained employment as an Electrical Engineering Technician, in a small engineering firm. Your employer is working on a large-scale power generation project for local manufacturing company. The Lead Engineer on the project has asked that you..."

"You have decided to embark on a career as a freelance graphic designer. You have been approached by a client who wishes to develop a new website for their clothing brand. They request that you..."

In these examples we can see how, within a few lines, it is possible to create a vocational context for an assignment.

In each case, we are aiming to give the student a sense of the professional environment in which they might find themselves in the near future. Setting the right level for the student is important, because it will ensure that they develop an understanding of the types of work that they might engage in during and after their studies. It would not make sense for the first example to have suggested "You are employed as a Senior Account Manager", or for the second to present the student as "... an Electrical Engineer". These roles are much more advanced than a Level 4 or Level 5 student might be expected to work. Using an inappropriate role will either suggest that the student is working at a level that is not 'real' or undervalue the type of work that such 'senior' roles would normally undertake.

Setting the vocational context for an assignment brief can make the entire assignment more relevant to the student. And when students feel that assignments are 'real' it can inspire them to do their best work.

Context

The vocational context of the assignment should be consistent throughout the assignment brief (as far as possible). There is little to be gained by setting the context at the start of the brief and then describing what is required to be done in terms that are clearly institutionally based. For example, if our context is established with:

You are employed as an Assistant Trend Analyst for a small fashion design firm. The Design Director has announced that they need to start planning for next year's Autumn collection. You have been asked to prepare a trend report on Autumn colours and styles.

The description of the work that the student must do for the report would be less effective if it were described as:

Your report must be presented as an A4 PDF document, of no more than 2000 words. This should be divided into sections that show:

- *Research - you should collect images and text that shows the research that you have done (500 words).*
- *Analysis - this should be 500-750 words, clearly showing how you have evaluated your research.*
- *Proposition - you are to present a series of 'mood board' pages that use images and swatches to communicate your ideas for colours and styles. You should include text and annotations that explain the colour ranges and style features.*
- *Justification - based on your research and analysis, you should explain why you have proposed the colours and styles.*

While the above may give very clear instructions, it provides very little incentive for the student to challenge themselves toward higher levels of achievement. The language used is very basic, and clearly does not retain a sense of professional activity.

When describing the work that is required, it is important to reflect the full range of achievement that the student may attempt. Reviewing the unit descriptor, learning outcomes and assessment criteria will give clues as to how we might phrase the description to be more challenging and help the student to recognise the higher levels of achievement.

Another version of the above, might be:

You will present your report to the Design Team both verbally and in a written report. The Design Director requests that you include:

- *A critical analysis of your research, showing the range of sources that have been reviewed; including trend databases and fashion news;*
- *A series of 'mood boards' that communicate the colours and styles that you have identified as being the basis for next year's Autumn collection. You will need to provide a justification for your proposals, based on clear trend data and evaluations of your research and analysis.*

Your verbal presentation will be part of a larger meeting, so you will have approximately 10 minutes to communicate your findings and proposal, followed by about 5 minutes for questions from the team.

Your written report will be left with the Design Director, and should be clear and succinct (not exceeding 2000 words).

As we can see, much of the same information is presented, but we retain the professional context by continuing to refer to the scenario that we defined in the opening paragraph. In addition, the inclusion of phrases like "critically analyse" may be using a similar language that is found in Merit or Distinction assessment criteria.

It is not necessary, when describing the types of work that will be required for the assignment, to give highly detailed formatting, length or style instruction on the of the submission. This information can be indicated elsewhere in the assignment brief.

For further examples of how a vocational context may be developed for an assignment, you may download the Example Assessment Briefs associated with the different HNs qualifications. These are available from the Pearson Qualifications website (qualifications.pearson.com) or from HN Global (highernationals.com).



Feedback

In order to fully support their learning, students must be able to recognise what has been achieved, what needs to be achieved and how to continue to progress. Critical to this is the process of feedback. It is through feedback from tutors, peers and themselves that students may develop and enhance their reflective practice in support of their own learning.

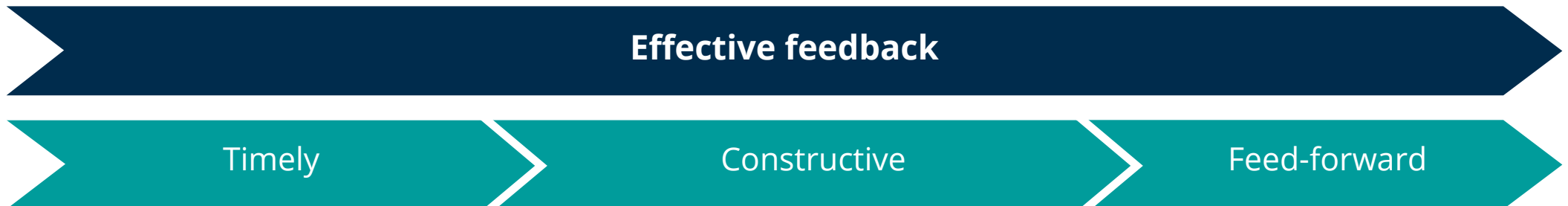
Broadly speaking, feedback is ***“any information, process or activity which affords or accelerates student learning based on comments relating to either formative assessment or summative assessment activities.”***¹

The Role of Feedback

Students need and want feedback. However, feedback is often an area where students suggest that improvement is required from tutors and institutions. For feedback to be effective it must be:

- **Timely** - feedback should be provided as soon as possible after a student has completed an activity. The longer it takes for the student to receive feedback, the less supportive and constructive the feedback will be. Your centre will have a policy on how soon a student may expect formal feedback (typically related to summative assessment), but it is equally important to consider the timeliness of formative feedback.

- **Constructive** - while it is important for students to recognise where they may have taken a wrong direction or missed something, and how this is communicated plays an important part in how students can make use of the feedback. Saying “you did this wrong” focuses on the negative and only identifies that something was not as expected. While saying “this area needs improvement...” allows the student to recognise that their work was lacking in some aspect, but presents it as something that can be addressed.
- **Feed-forward** - just as students need to recognise that they may have areas which need improvement, they will benefit from advice on how to make those improvements for the future. While the results of a summative assessment are final, comments which are ‘feed-forward’ assist the student in thinking about how to improve their work for the future.



¹ Irons, A. (2008) Enhancing learning through formative assessment and feedback. Routledge, Abingdon, UK.

Formative feedback

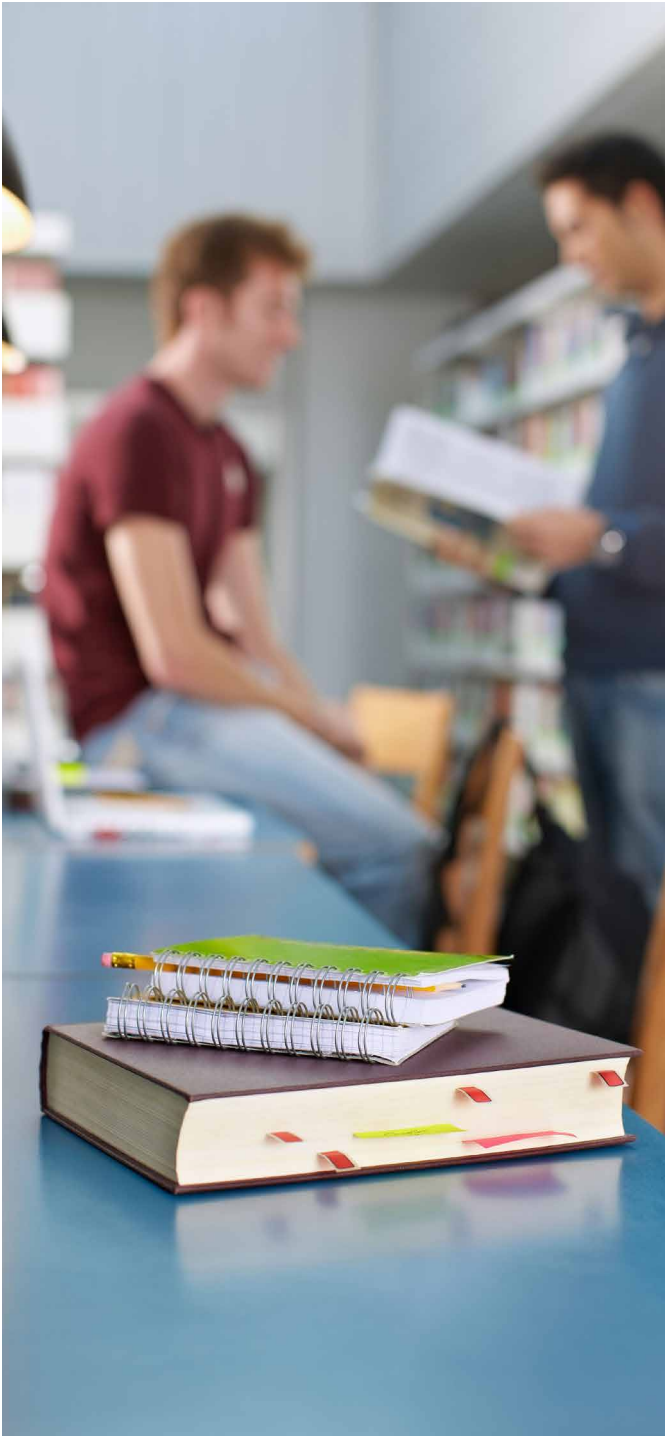
While assessment and feedback always constitute a part of the student's learning, the purpose of assessment will vary depending on when it is undertaken and the aim of the assessment activity.

Formative feedback is given to students during the learning journey. This is to say that it relates to formative assessment that may be undertaken, at any point, prior to the summative assessment. Just as formative assessment is undertaken to support students to understand their progress, the associated formative feedback must be aimed at helping the student to recognise their current position and how to move forward.

Formative assessment should always result in qualitative feedback. When giving formative feedback it is important to avoid giving students advice that directly informs the work that they may do for summative assessment. This is referred to as 'coaching' and is inappropriate. Feedback should provide students with general advice on how to progress in their studies, but should not tell them what to do. For example, a tutor might say "...your analysis of the research is not clear, you will need to look at the research more critically..." rather than "...what you should be writing is..." In the former, the tutor is supporting the student understand their current progress and how to improve. While the latter is 'coaching' the student.

Formative feedback can be both formal and informal. We might schedule specific points where students present work for formative assessment. Such instances can be valuable opportunities for group discussion and peer assessment. In such cases, it is expected that students will receive written formative feedback. In other instances, the formative feedback may be during tutorials or classroom activities. It is important to recognise that formative assessment can, in some cases, be continuous; depending on the learning and teaching strategy that has been adopted for a unit or programme.





Summative Feedback

Feed-forward

Summative feedback follows summative assessment and results in a grade. Whether the assessment is for a single learning outcome, multiple learning outcomes or an 'integrated assessment' that combines multiple units, the feedback that follows will be different from the formative assessment.

Summative assessment feedback needs to support students to understand why they have achieved the grade awarded. To this end, it should be written to allow the student to recognise how their work has succeeded in meeting the learning outcome(s) at the level of the assessment criteria. This does not mean that the student must be told "you have achieved a merit, because..." Rather, the feedback might make reference to the language of the criteria; such as, "...your work on the report indicates a critical approach to the analysis of research..." The same approach should help the student to understand why they have not achieved something. So, we might find "...while your analysis is clear, it does not show a critical approach..."

As well as pointing out areas of achievement and areas where there may be a lack of higher achievement, summative feedback must also help the student to consider how to improve in the future. Again, this should be constructive and feed-forward. Using a similar example from above, we might write "...while your analysis is clear, it does not show a critical approach. In the future, you will need to review your research more closely, identifying areas where different sources may help you to develop new interpretations of the issues..."

It is also important that summative feedback corresponds with the grade that has been awarded. Students will find it confusing if the tone or character of feedback is at odds with the grade. For example, if a student has achieved a Pass grade, it would be inappropriate for the feedback to say "Overall, this is an excellent project..." Terms like 'excellent' suggest a higher than Pass level of achievement. Similarly, feedback that is overly critical and does not recognise higher levels of achievement, may be equally confusing to a student who has achieved Merit or Distinction. Using the exemplar feedback forms available from <http://qualifications.pearson.com> will help to ensure that the overall grade is clearly indicated, but feedback must correspond to the mark; ensuring that the language of the feedback communicates the appropriate level of achievement.



It's About the Work, not the Person

Students put a great deal of effort into their work. In some cases, particularly in the creative subjects, this work may be highly personal; reflecting aspects of their personal experience and personality. For every subject, students' work will be very important to them; as it represents their attempt to show their achievement and the associated grade. This creates an inevitable tension around assessment.

In this context, it is vital to make clear to the students that assessment feedback is about the work. In addition, tutors must ensure that feedback avoids the use of language that may seem personal. For example, consider how a student might interpret the following comments:

Example 1:

"You have shown a distinct lack of engagement with the subject and this is reflected in your failure to include clear references to some of the key texts associated with the subject. In the future, this lack of engagement will mean that you will continue to achieve poor grades."

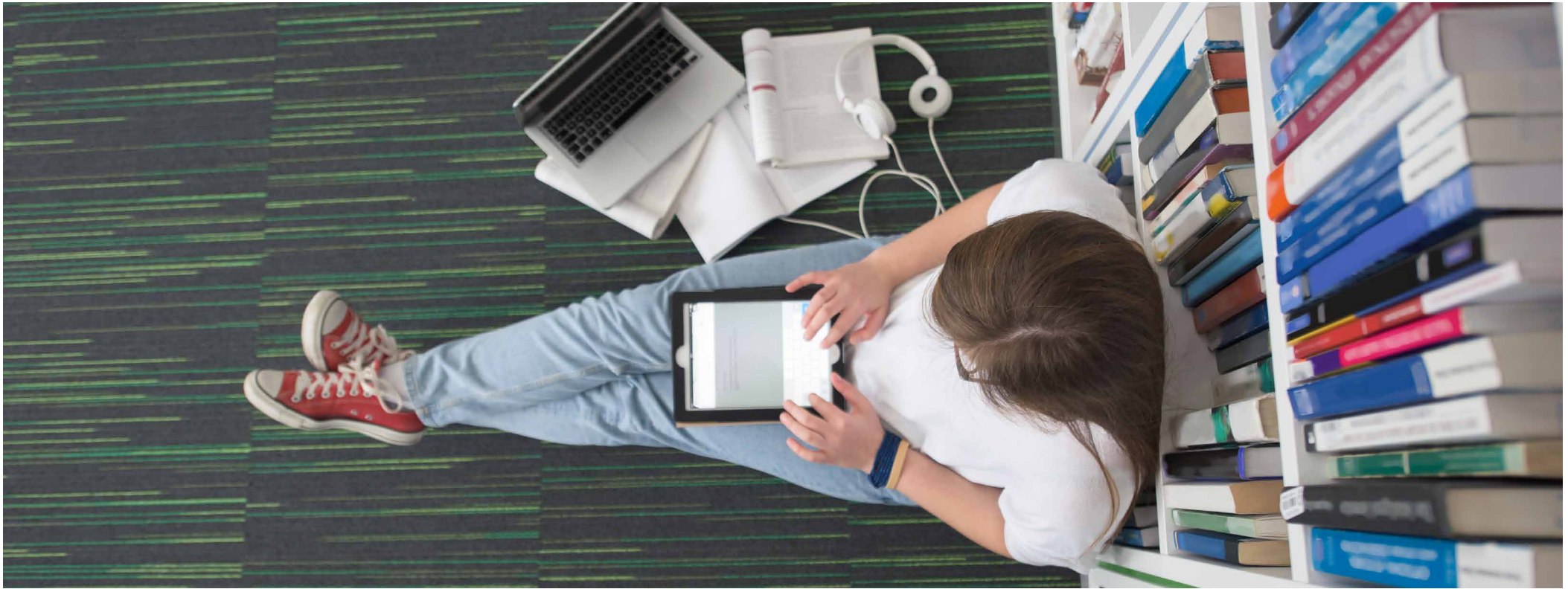
Example 2:

"There is an apparent lack of engagement with the subject and this is reflected in the fact that we find very few references to some of the key texts associated with the subject. For the future, you are encouraged to explore the subject more fully through the assigned readings."

Both of these examples are pointing out the same issues, but the language used creates a radically different tone. Example 1 uses language that is personally directed at the student. It is both negative and non-constructive. The use of language situates the feedback as being about the student, rather than about the work that has been assessed. Tutors should be very careful when using words like 'failure'; as, unless the student has failed the assessment, this can be confusing.

Example 2 uses language which relates to the work that has been assessed. It does not focus on the student. The comments about the future, while using 'you', are presented as positive and constructive rather than the negative tone of the Example 1.





Reassessment

Not every student will achieve all learning outcomes on their first attempt at summative assessment. Therefore, in instances where a student has failed to achieve a pass grade for the unit, on the first attempt, they may be given the opportunity for reassessment. ***An opportunity for reassessment will only be available if a student has failed to achieve a Pass.*** In such instances, the student should be provided with clear feedback and guidance as to why they have failed, so that they are able to identify what additional work they need to undertake for reassessment.

Reassessment should only be offered following the completion of the unit. If the approach has been a 'single unit staged' assessment, and the student has failed to achieve a pass grade in one of the early assessments, they should be given the grade

and feedback, but reassessment should not be scheduled until the student has completed the other assessments. The reason for this is that undertaking reassessment work, while seeking to complete the remaining assignments, may put the student at risk of underachieving in the remaining assessments.

When offering a student an opportunity for reassessment, the expectation is that the student would, normally, be continuing to work on the same assignment(s) and assessment evidence. However, where the reassessment is for a controlled assessment or examination, the student will need to be undertaking a new assignment/examination.

The time allowed for reassessment is a centre-based decision, but it must be applied consistently for all students.

Offering the Opportunity for Reassessment

Whether to offer a student the opportunity for reassessment is not a decision that is taken by an individual tutor. As with all decisions related to assessment, they should be discussed, and recorded, as part of the activity of an Assessment Board. Where the timing of the Assessment Board may not correspond with the point of assessment, centres may adopt different approaches.

Interim Assessment Boards may be scheduled to allow for formal discussion and decision.

The Assessment Board may delegate responsibility to a panel of staff, who are empowered to decide on reassessment opportunities. It is good practice to ensure that, at least one member of the Assessment Board is external to the assessment team (e.g. Head of College, Quality Nominee, etc.). This panel may meet, as necessary, to ensure that students are provided with timely information about reassessment opportunities. Decisions of a delegated panel must be recorded and presented at the next full Assessment Board; where they will be formally accepted into the Board minutes.

Reassessment Grading

A student's grade, through reassessment, will be **capped at Pass**. A student may not improve a grade through reassessment (other than moving from fail to pass).

In reassessment feedback, the student should be provided with an indicative grade that represents the level of achievement (what the grade would have been) before the grade is capped, but make clear that **the official grade is Pass**.

This is a change from the 2010 (QCF) HNs, and has been implemented to bring the RQF HNs in line with general higher education practice.

Reassessment and Mitigating Circumstances

Centres are required to have a Mitigating Circumstances policy, and this should be administered in relation to reassessment.

It is expected that a centre will have a procedure that allows a student to submit evidence of mitigating circumstances and that a formal panel will review the student evidence; in order to decide whether the mitigating circumstances are accepted. This decision will be relayed to the Assessment Board (or delegated panel) to consider the mitigating circumstances in relation to reassessment. There may be instances where the mitigating circumstances are such that a student could not have been successful in the first assessment. In such cases, depending on the centre's policy, the decision to offer reassessment may 'lift the cap' and a student would be graded 'in full' for the reassessment.

Again, any such decisions must be discussed and recorded so that they can be formally accepted at the next Assessment Board.

Internal Verification of Assessment Decisions

The aim of the assessment and feedback process should always be to support the student to continue to improve. It is important to review feedback to ensure that it is clear, constructive and provides 'feed-forward.'

At the start of the assessment process, Pearson requires that there is an Internal Verification of the Assignment Brief. Similarly, before assessment feedback is returned to students, it is required that there is an Internal Verification of Assessment Decisions.

Internal Verification of Assessment Decisions does not require that every student grade and feedback is reviewed. Rather, the centre will sample the assessment decisions and feedback. The size of the sample will depend on the number of students, the experience of the tutor, experience of the Internal Verifier and requests from the External Examiner.

When internally verifying assessment decisions, the Verifier will be:

- seeking to ensure that the assessment process has been fair
- confirming there is a parity of grading across the sample
- ensuring that feedback is clear, refers to the work and provides the student with guidance for the future (feed-forward).



Assessment Planning Checklist

- Has assessment been planned at unit level and programme level?
- Is there a broad range of types of assessment activity in the programme?
- At programme level, have you ensured that the overall assessment strategy is achievable for the students?
- Is there enough time for students to complete work for assessment?
- Is there a reasonable amount of time between assessment submissions to allow students to complete all of the work?
- Is the unit assessment clearly related to the content covered in the taught programme (Essential Content)?

Assignment Writing Checklist

- Is there a clear vocational context/scenario?
- Does the assignment place the student in an appropriate professional role?
- Are the submission requirements (the work to be done) clear and succinct?
- Is the amount of work required for submission appropriate to the size of the unit? The level of unit?
- Can the work required for submission be reasonably completed in the time available to students?
- Is the assignment presented at learning outcome level and described using similar language (command verbs) found in the assessment criteria?
- Is the assessment evidence clearly articulated, such that students will understand what is required?
- Is the evidence required for assessment going to provide students with the opportunity to show that it is valid, sufficient, authentic, appropriate and relevant?
- Has the centre undertaken Internal Verification of the Assessment Brief, prior to issuing to students?
- Has the writer of the assignment brief responded to the recommendations of the Internal Verifier?

Assessment Feedback Checklist

- Does the feedback clearly identify where the student shows good achievement and areas for improvement?
- In summative feedback, is the character/tone of the feedback in keeping with the level of achievement?
- In formative feedback, do the comments avoid coaching?
- Does the feedback use similar language found in assessment criteria, to help the student understand why/how they have achieved their grade(s)?
- Is the feedback about the work and not the student?
- Have assessment results and feedback been sampled as part of the Internal Verification of Assessment Decisions, prior to distribution to students?

Photo credits

Page	Photo Credit	Page	Photo Credit
Cover	michaeljung. 123rf.com	15	wavebreakmedia. Shutterstock
2	Stefano Cavoretto. Shutterstock	17	Ditty_about_summer. Shutterstock
5	forestpath. Shutterstock	18	nesharm. 123rf.com
6	KPG_Payless. Shutterstock	19	pan_kung. Shutterstock
7	PKpix. Shutterstock	22	clearimages. Shutterstock
8	kritchanut. 123rf.com	24	rawpixel. 123rf.com
9	arekmalang. 123rf.com	25	diego_cervo. 123rf.com
11	lightpoet. Shutterstock	26	stockbroker. 123rf.com
12	antonioguillem. 123rf.com	27	rawpixel. 123rf.com
13	michaeljung. Shutterstock	28	dotshock. Shutterstock
13	marcovarro. Shutterstock	30	PrinceOfLove. Shutterstock