

Research and Analysis

Annexes - Grading Vocational & Technical Assessments

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Annex 1 Extract from QCF *Regulatory Arrangements*, Annex E

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 2	Achievement at level 2 reflects the ability to select and use relevant knowledge, ideas, skills and procedures to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. It includes taking responsibility for completing tasks and procedures and exercising autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.	<p>Use understanding of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems</p> <p>Interpret relevant information and ideas</p> <p>Be aware of the types of information that are relevant to the area of study or work</p>	<p>Complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems</p> <p>Select and use relevant skills and procedures</p> <p>Identify, gather and use relevant information to inform actions</p> <p>Identify how effective actions have been</p>	<p>Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures</p> <p>Exercise autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance</p>
Level 3	Achievement at level 3 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, have a measure of complexity. It includes taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within limited parameters. It also reflects awareness of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	<p>Use factual, procedural and theoretical understanding to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine</p> <p>Interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas</p> <p>Be aware of the nature of the area of study or work</p> <p>Have awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work</p>	<p>Address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine</p> <p>Identify, select and use appropriate skills, methods and procedures</p> <p>Use appropriate investigation to inform actions</p> <p>Review how effective methods and actions have been</p>	<p>Take responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures, including, where relevant, responsibility for supervising or guiding others</p> <p>Exercise autonomy and judgement within limited parameters</p>

Annex 2 Extract from Guidelines for Writing Credit-Based Units, Section 2

LEVEL 1: Learning outcomes

The learner will:

1. Understand the benefits to the organisation of good customer service
2. Understand the possible consequences of poor customer service
3. Understand the value of first impressions
4. Understand positive verbal and non-verbal interaction with customers
5. Understand that respect for the individual is at the heart of good customer service
6. Understand **own role in dealing** with complaints from customers

Assessment criteria

The learner can:

- 1.1 **Outline reasons why** good customer service is important for an organisation
- 2.1 **Give examples of how** poor customer service can impact upon customers, the organisation and staff
- 3.1 **Outline why** it is important to make a good impression

LEVEL 2: Learning outcomes

The learner will:

1. Understand the benefits to the organisation of good customer service
2. Understand the possible consequences of poor customer service
3. Understand the value of first impressions
4. Understand positive verbal and non-verbal interaction with customers
5. Understand that respect for the individual is at the heart of good customer service
6. Understand **how to deal** with complaints from customers

Assessment criteria

The learner can:

- 1.1 **Describe how** good customer service promotes customers' confidence in the organisation
- 1.2 **Explain why** good customer service is important for an organisation
- 2.1 **Describe how** poor customer service can impact upon organisational efficiency and staff morale
- 2.2 **Explain the effects of** poor customer service on an organisation's reputation
- 3.1 **Explain why** it is important to make a good first impression

Assessment criteria

The learner can:

- 3.2 **Give examples of how** to create a positive first impression when communicating: a) face to face; b) on the telephone; c) in writing (including by email)
- 4.1 **Identify appropriate and inappropriate ways** of communicating verbally with customers in commonly met situations.
- 4.2 **Give examples of** types of non-verbal communication

- 5.1 **Outline why** it is important to maintain customer confidentiality

- 5.2 **Indicate ways in which** s/he can respect individual customer needs from a diversity of cultures and backgrounds
- 6.1 **List the types of** complaints that are commonly made by customers
- 6.2 **Identify appropriate** people that need to be informed in response to a complaint made by a customer
- 6.3 **Give examples of** positive ways of dealing with complaints made by customers

Assessment criteria

The learner can:

- 3.2 **Describe ways of** creating a positive first impression when communicating: a) face to face; b) on the telephone; c) in writing (including by email)
- 4.1 **Describe appropriate and inappropriate ways** of communicating verbally with customers in commonly met situations
- 4.2 **Describe what is meant** by non-verbal communication
- 4.3 **Illustrate ways** in which non-verbal communication can be used positively to support face-to-face communication
- 5.1 **Explain why** it is important to maintain customer confidentiality and the factors that need to be taken into account
- 5.2 **Describe ways** of respecting individual customer needs from a diversity of cultures and backgrounds
- 6.1 **Explain best practice in** dealing with complaints from customers
- 6.2 **Explain how** to deal with a specific complaint situation

- 6.3 **Explain what** needs to be included in a report on an incident of complaint from a customer
- 6.4 **Describe** the procedure for taking action on the report

Annex 3 Extract from *Levels Requirements and Guidance*, Section 3

Level	Knowledge descriptor (the holder...)	Skills descriptor (the holder can...)
L2	<p>Has knowledge and understanding of facts, procedures and ideas in an area of study or field of work to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems.</p> <p>Can interpret relevant information and ideas.</p> <p>Is aware of a range of information that is relevant to the area of study or work.</p>	<p>Select and use relevant cognitive and practical skills to complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems.</p> <p>Identify, gather and use relevant information to inform actions.</p> <p>Identify how effective actions have been.</p>
L3	<p>Has factual, procedural and theoretical knowledge and understanding of a subject or field of work to complete tasks and address problems that while well-defined, may be complex and non-routine.</p> <p>Can interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas.</p> <p>Is aware of the nature of the area of study or work.</p> <p>Is aware of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work.</p>	<p>Identify, select and use appropriate cognitive and practical skills, methods and procedures to address problems that while well-defined, may be complex and non-routine.</p> <p>Use appropriate investigation to inform actions.</p> <p>Review how effective methods and actions have been.</p>

Annex 4 Grading Structure of Available* Qualifications, 28/11/2017

Grading Structure	AEA	EPA	ESOL	Entry	FSMQ	FSQ	A level	AS	G(9-1)	G(A*G)	Higher	Key Sk.	NVQ	Occnl	Ot. Gen.	Pr. Le.	Project	QCF	VCE	VRQ	Total
1/2/3				9										2				1		1	13
24-45														1							1
9/8/7/6/5/4/3/2/1									132					3							135
9-9/9-8/8-8/8-7/7-6/6-6/6-5/5-5/4-4/4-3/3-3/2-2/2-1/1-1									6												6
A*/A/B														9	3	3	4				10
A*/A/B/C														9	2	4	7			2	24
A*/A/B/C*/C/D/E/F/G									41												41
A*/A/B/C/D										6								9		19	34
A*/A/B/C/D/E					4		336	1		2				7	1	6	8		4		369
A*/A/B/C/D/E/F/G							3	1		303				23							330
A*A*/A*/AA/AB/BB/BC*/C*/C*/C*/CC/CD/DD/DE/EE/EF/FF/FG/GG										1											1
A*A*/A*/AA/AB/BB/BC/CC/CD/DD/DE/EE							17														17
A*A*/A*/AA/AB/BB/BC/CC/CD/DD/DE/EE/EF/FF/FG/GG							2			31											33
A*/AA/AB/BB/BC/CC/CD/DD/DE/EE							1														1
A/B/C/D/E			8		6		1	322	1		5		1	1	22			3		6	376
AA/AB/BB/BC/CC/CD/DD/DE/EE								17													17
D1, D2, D3, M1, M2, M3, P1, P2, P3															35						35
Dist/A*/A/B/C															1						1
Grade 1: P/M/D, Grade 2: P/M/D, Grade 3: P/M/D																				1	1
Grade 1-7															82						82
Grade 4: P/M/D, Grade 5: P/M/D																				1	1
Grade 6: P/M/D, Grade 7: P/M/D, Grade 8: P/M/D																		1			1
Merit/Distinction	1																				1
Missing / Unknown			86	115		180			1	62	15	273	343	209				10228	1	2382	13895
Other				2											5					16	23
P/M/D/D*														1	119			250		261	631
Pass/Distinction		4									1			1	5			3		10	24
Pass/Merit			6												2			46		5	59
Pass/Merit/Distinction			54	3						48		1	11	75			609		465		1266
PP/PM/MM/MD/DD																				36	36
PP/PM/MM/MD/DD/DD*/D*D*															50			77		57	184
PPP/PPM/PMM/MMM/MMD/MDD/DDD																				1	1
PPP/PPM/PMM/MMM/MMD/MDD/DDD/DDD*/DD*D*/D*D*D*															8			45		26	79
Total	1	4	154	129	10	180	360	341	139	377	124	15	275	357	658	6	13	11291	1	3293	17728

* Available qualifications are available for learners to begin studying. This excludes qualifications that are no longer available for learners to begin studying, but that are still being studied (ie that have not yet awarded their final certificates).

Key to Annex 4:

Advanced Extension Award	AEA
End-Point Assessment	EPA
English For Speakers of Other Languages	ESOL
Entry Level	Entry
Free Standing Mathematics Qualification	FSMQ
Functional Skills	FSQ
GCE A Level	A level
GCE AS Level	AS
GCSE (9 to 1)	G(9-1)
GCSE (A* to G)	G(A*-G)
Higher Level	Higher
Key Skills	Key Sk.
National Vocational Qualification	NVQ
Occupational Qualification	Occnl
Other General Qualification	Ot. Gen.
Principal Learning	Pr. Le.
Project	Project
QCF	QCF
Vocational Certificate Of Education	VCE
Vocationally-Related Qualification	VRQ

The columns shaded in pink contain GQs, and qualifications in the remaining columns were treated as VTQs.

Annex 5 Insights into grading approaches

The following sections address each of the qualifications, below, in turn; explaining their structure, assessment approach, and their approach to grading.

Pass/Merit – 46 QCF

500/5317/6 RSPH Level 4 Award in Food Safety Management for Manufacturing

Pass/Merit/Distinction – 54 ESOL

601/1931/7 NOCN Level 1 Certificate in ESOL International (B2)

Pass/Merit/Distinction – 48 Higher Level

603/2341/3 Pearson BTEC Level 4 Higher National Certificate in Policing

Pass/Merit/Distinction – 609 QCF

500/8255/3 Pearson BTEC Level 5 HND Diploma in Electrical Engineering

501/2073/6 TCL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Speech and Drama
(Grade 8)

501/2030/X UWLQ Level 2 Certificate in Graded Examination in Oral
Communication (Grade 4)

500/8477/X ABC Level 4 Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media

601/6170/X ATHE Level 3 Diploma In Business

Pass/Merit/Distinction – 465 VRQ

600/8603/8 Cskills Awards Level 2 Diploma in Site Carpentry (Construction)

601/8423/1 CIBTAC Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy

601/7324/5 IMI Level 3 Diploma in Light Vehicle Maintenance (VRQ)

Pass/Merit/Distinction/Distinction* – 250 QCF

601/2624/3 NCFE Level 2 Diploma in Skills for Business

600/6609/X RSL Level 3 Diploma for Music Practitioners

Pass/Merit/Distinction/Distinction* – 261 VRQ

601/6993/X VTCT Level 3 Extended Diploma in Barbering

601/7145/5 AQA Level 3 Certificate in Applied Business

PP/PM/MM/MD/DD/DD*/D*D* – 77 QCF

600/4229/1 OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Diploma in Business (QCF)

PP/PM/MM/MD/DD/DD*/D*D* – 57 VRQ

601/7101/7 OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Diploma in IT

PPP/PPM/PMM/MMM/MMD/MDD/DDD/DDD*/DD*D*/D*D*D* – 45 QCF

601/3493/8 Pearson BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Dental Technology

RSPH Level 4 Award in Food Safety Management for Manufacturing¹

Overview

- Designed to address National Occupational Standards in food safety for manufacturing, and to incorporate the legal requirement for all food businesses to operate a food safety management system.
- One of a set of Awards offered at Levels 2, 3, and 4.
- Relatively small qualification (40 GLH).

Assessment

- 100% external examination:
 - Paper 1 – 5 questions (90 mins);
 - Paper 2 – 1 case study (60 mins).

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the paper level (P/D).
- Distinction paper-level threshold = 80% of marks (for each paper, respectively):
 - “In order to be awarded a Distinction, candidates must be able to recall and apply relevant knowledge and facts from the entire specification with few significant omissions and demonstrate a high level of understanding of the principles and concepts used in food safety management. The majority of answers to examination questions will be correct and relevant.”
- Pass paper-level threshold = 50% of marks (for each paper, respectively):
 - “In order to be awarded a Pass, candidates must be able to recall and apply relevant knowledge and facts from some parts of the specification and demonstrate a satisfactory level of understanding of the principles and concepts used in food safety management such that the candidate will be able to satisfactorily work in the food manufacturing or related industries. The majority of answers to examination questions will contain some information of relevance.”
- For the qualification:
 - Distinction = Distinction on both papers;
 - Pass = Pass on both papers.

¹ Accessed from: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/f587aef9-ee75-42a1-a935229cfd67c98b.pdf> (Version: October 2017)

Cross-level analysis

- As this Award was offered at both L4 and L3, it was possible to compare the command verbs used in their AC. These are tabulated below:

	L3 (3 LOs)	L4 (5 LOs)
State	3	1
Identify	1	
Describe	3	1
Outline		2
Communicate		1
Explain	1	4
Review		1
Discuss		2
Determine		1
Analyse		2

- Inspection of this table suggests that progression in command verb challenge has been used, to some extent, to differentiate between qualification levels.

NOCN Level 1 Certificate in ESOL International (B2)²

Overview

- “ESOL International qualifications are designed for learners who are not native speakers of English and who wish to achieve a high quality, internationally recognised qualification in English that is available and recognised world-wide”
- Comprises 4 mandatory units: Listening; Reading; Speaking; Writing.
- Level 1 Certificate (B2) is part of a suite of Certificates, available at six levels, referenced to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). It is the fourth of these six levels (described as ‘Independent User’).

Assessment

- Each unit is 100% externally examined.
- The speaking exams are conducted one-to-one, at the centre, by an external interlocutor (NOCN-appointed and NOCN-trained).
- All exams are task-based and linked to everyday situations.
- Each exam has a detailed mark scheme.

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level (P/M/D).
- Each exam mark is converted into a unit grade, on the basis of unit grade boundaries (which are not fixed).
- “To gain an overall grade for the qualification, if all four units are undertaken, the marks are calculated by weighting the Speaking % at 0.2, Listening % at 0.2, Reading % at 0.3 and Writing % at 0.3.”
- The cross-unit-mark-total is transformed into a qualification grade as follows:

Distinction	80% and above
Merit	65-79%
Pass	51-64%
Refer	50% or less

- The qualification is linked to the CEFR standards – illustrated below for B2 – via sets of ‘skills’ standards, which were written to support item and mark scheme writing.

² Accessed from: https://www.ocnni.org.uk/media/2586/qs_esol_international_all_levels.pdf (Version 3.0 – December 2017. Note that analysis based on version 2.6 – August 2017)

B2 | Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

- The L1 (Independent User) skills standard for reading states:

Independent User Level

At this level, the learner should be using a large degree of independence to read texts written in different styles and for different purposes. Topics used will vary between familiar and abstract topics and will be complex in nature. They should be able to identify the main ideas in texts and understand feelings, opinions and warnings in both formal and informal texts. Some of the texts will be lengthy and will contain complex instructions or explanations. The learners will be able to understand articles and reports on current affairs which demonstrate the writer's point of view or opinions.

The learner will understand a broad range of vocabulary, but may still struggle with some less frequently used idiomatic expressions. Texts may include images, graphical and tabular data to demonstrate the purpose. Learners will be able to understand the register of texts including those conveying emotion.

Pearson BTEC Level 4 Higher National Certificate in Policing³

Overview

- “BTECs are work-related qualifications for students taking their first steps into employment, or for those already in employment and seeking career development opportunities.”
- “The purpose of the BTEC Higher Nationals in Policing is to develop students as professional, self-reflecting individuals able to meet the demands of employers in the policing sector and adapt to a constantly changing world.”
- The L4 Certificate is part of an L4/L5 suite:
 - HNC, L4, 120 credits (eg 1 year f/t);
 - HND, L5, 240 credits (eg 2 year f/t);
 - The HNC = 1st eight L4 (mandatory) units of the HND.

Assessment

- “BTEC Higher Nationals in Policing are assessed using internally assessed centre-devised internal assignments (which are set and marked by centres.)”

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level (P/M/D).
- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied; both for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied), and for the award of higher grades (eg all Merit criteria satisfied for Merit).
 - “The assessment criteria for a unit are hierarchical and holistic. For example, if an M criterion requires the student to show ‘analysis’ and the related P criterion requires the student to ‘explain’, then to satisfy the M criterion a student will need to cover both ‘explain’ and ‘analyse’.”
- The example, below, presents LOs and AC from the Level 4 HNC/HND mandatory Unit 1.

³ Accessed from: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/BTEC-Higher-Nationals/policing/specification/btec-higher-nationals-Policing.pdf> (Version: Issue 1. Note that analysis based on version with a slightly different cover, but the same content).

Unit 1 (L4):

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria

Pass	Merit	Distinction
L01 Explain how information sources and data are used in small-scale police service research projects		L01 & L02
P1 Explain how information sources and data are used in small-scale police service research projects, the potential limitations of the data and problems that may arise	M1 Appraise information sources used by the police services and the extent to which research data aids decision-making	D1 Critically evaluate the rationale behind a small-scale research project for the police services and methods used to collect data
L02 Analyse the use of research strategies in small-scale projects for the police services		
P2 Analyse different research strategies employed in small-scale research police projects and how ethical research practice is maintained	M2 Evaluate different research strategies and use this evaluation to justify the potential use of a particular research strategy for a small-scale research project that will maintain ethical research practice in a police service context	
L03 Conduct a small-scale research project for the police services and communicate the research methodologies and findings		L03
P3 Design a small-scale research project, explaining why the chosen research methods will enable the achievement of research objectives P4 Conduct research based on the project design and present findings in an appropriate format and manner for the intended audience	M3 Coherently and logically communicate an analysis of the research findings to the intended audience, demonstrating how the research outcomes met research objectives	D2 Communicate a critical evaluation of the research findings and make valid, justified recommendations for further research

- Notice the use of a progression in command verb challenge across the unit grade descriptors:

	Pass	Merit	Distinction
L01	explain	appraise	critically evaluate
L02	analyse	evaluate/justify	critically evaluate
L03	design/explain, conduct/present	communicate an analysis	communicate an evaluation

- Notice also how there is some grouping of criteria, eg there is only one Distinction criterion for LOs 1 and 2.

- Unit grades are converted into points (eg Pass = 60 points), and these points are added, across units to a total qualification point score.
- Qualification point boundaries are then used to determine the candidate's overall grade:

Grade	Point boundaries
Pass	420-599
Merit	600-839
Distinction	840 +

- Candidates are permitted to fail a unit (but only one unit) and still pass the qualification. For instance, the HNC can be achieved, at Pass, with only 7 of the 8 units (each at Pass, ie 7 x 60 = 420).
- For the 8-unit HNC, the qualification grade boundaries are set such that, if a candidate were to achieve 4 units at one grade (eg Pass) and 4 units at the next grade (Merit), then they would be awarded the higher grade (Merit).

Various outcomes are modelled below, for illustration:

Level 4 Higher National Certificate

	STUDENT 1					STUDENT 2		STUDENT 3		STUDENT 4		STUDENT 5	
	Credits	Level	Grade	Grade point	Unit points	Grade	Unit points	Grade	Unit points	Grade	Unit points	Grade	Unit points
Core 1	15	4	P	4	60	P	60	P	60	D	120	D	120
Core 2	15	4	P	4	60	P	60	P	60	D	120	M	90
Core 3	15	4	P	4	60	P	60	P	60	D	120	M	90
Core 4	15	4	P	4	60	P	60	M	90	M	90	M	90
Core 5	15	4	M	6	90	P	60	M	90	M	90	M	90
Core 6	15	4	M	6	90	P	60	M	90	M	90	M	90
Core 7	15	4	M	6	90	M	90	D	120	D	120	D	120
Core 8	15	4	M	6	90	M	90	D	120	D	120	D	120
TOTAL					600		540		690		870		810
GRADE					M		P		M		D		M

Cross-level analysis

- The grading table presented below displays Level 5 LOs/AC, from Unit 9. These can be compared with the Level 4 LOs/AC, from Unit 4, presented above.
- Once again, the criteria in this unit use command verbs in the unit grade descriptors to differentiate levels of proficiency across grades. Notice, however, that the command verbs used across grades at Level 4 (eg analyse, evaluate/justify, critically evaluate) are essentially the same as those used across grades at Level 5 (eg explain, evaluate, critically evaluate); at least, in this example. In other words, there is no clear-cut attempt here to differentiate *between levels* in terms of a progression in command verb challenge.

Unit 9 (L5):

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria

Pass	Merit	Distinction
LO1 Analyse the relationship between police structure and culture		LO1 & 2
<p>P1 Analyse the structure of the police service and the roles and functions of members of the service</p> <p>P2 Analyse the factors that influence the culture of the police service and individual behaviour in the workplace</p>	<p>M1 Critically analyse how the leader of a team can affect the work ethics, direction and behaviour of that team, giving examples to support the analysis</p>	
LO2 Compare different approaches to management and leadership		
<p>P3 Compare the effectiveness of different leadership styles in the police service</p> <p>P4 Explain the roles and responsibilities of those charged with ensuring that the police service operates fairly and without bias</p>	<p>M2 Evaluate the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner and its effects on the police service</p>	
LO3 Assess how leadership styles and application of motivational theories affect the police service workplace		LO3 & LO4
P5 Assess the impact that different leadership styles can have on motivation in the police service in periods of change	M3 Analyse and contrast the application of different motivational theories within the police service workplace	D2 Critically analyse the roles of teams and teamwork in the police service and how leadership and use of technology can enhance or detract from the effectiveness of its teams
LO4 Assess the factors that can promote or inhibit effective teamwork in the police service and associated teams		
<p>P6 Explain the nature of teams and team behaviour within the police service and associated teams</p> <p>P7 Assess factors that may promote or inhibit the development of effective teamwork in the police service and associated teams</p>	<p>M4 Analyse the impact of barriers to team functioning within the police service</p>	

Pearson BTEC Level 5 HND Diploma in Electrical Engineering⁴

NOTE: Although this qualification was technically available to candidates – according to the Ofqual register – it was essentially a legacy specification, coming to the end of its life (Review Date of 31/12/2017). It has now been replaced by a new version⁵.

The approach to grading in the new version is similar to the HNC/HND in Policing, described above. The approach from the version discussed below is interesting by way of contrast.

Overview

- “The Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals in Electrical and Electronic Engineering have been developed to focus on: the education and training of electrical/electronic engineers/technicians who are employed at a professional level in a variety of types of technical work [...]”
- The L5 Diploma is part of an L4/L5 suite:
 - HNC, L4, 120 credits (eg 1 year f/t);
 - HND, L5, 240 credits (eg 2 year f/t).
 - The HND includes both L4 and L5 units.

Assessment

- The qualification is 100% internally assessed:
 - “Assessment instruments are constructed within centres.”

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level (P/M/D).
- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied for a Pass).
- However, for Merit and Distinction unit grades, all of the work that a candidate has produced for the unit is judged against generic (ie not unit-specific) grading criteria.
 - “The generic merit and distinction grade descriptors need to be viewed as a qualitative extension of the assessment criteria for pass within each individual unit.”
 - “Each of the generic merit and distinction grade descriptors should be amplified by use of indicative characteristics which exemplify the merit and distinction grade descriptors. [...] The indicative characteristics

⁴ Accessed from: https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/BTEC-Higher-Nationals/Electrical-and-Electronic-Engineering/2010/Specification/9781446942468_BTEC_HNs_L45_EEE.pdf (Version: Issue 12. Note that analysis based on version with a slightly different cover, but the same content).

⁵ Specification available from: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/btec-higher-nationals/general-engineering-2017.html#tab-1>

should reflect the nature of a unit and the context of the sector programme. The indicative characteristics [...] are not exhaustive. Consequently, centres should select appropriate characteristics from the list or construct others that are appropriate for their sector programme and level.”

- The generic criteria for Merit, which apply across all units, are presented below:

Merit grade

Merit grade descriptors	Exemplar indicative characteristics Centres can identify and use other relevant characteristics. This is NOT a tick list.
In order to achieve a merit the learner must:	The learner’s evidence shows, for example:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify and apply strategies to find appropriate solutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective judgements have been made • complex problems with more than one variable have been explored • an effective approach to study and research has been applied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • select/design and apply appropriate methods/techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevant theories and techniques have been applied • a range of methods and techniques have been applied • a range of sources of information has been used • the selection of methods and techniques/sources has been justified • the design of methods/techniques has been justified • complex information/data has been synthesised and processed • appropriate learning methods/techniques have been applied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • present and communicate appropriate findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the appropriate structure and approach has been used • coherent, logical development of principles/concepts for the intended audience • a range of methods of presentation have been used and technical language has been accurately used • communication has taken place in familiar and unfamiliar contexts • the communication is appropriate for familiar and unfamiliar audiences and appropriate media have been used.

- The indicative characteristics are not intended to be interpreted as a tick list, and are not presumed to be exhaustive.

- Points are awarded for each unit grade according to the following conversion:

Unit credit points for specified unit grades at Level 5 only

Unit points per credit		
Pass	Merit	Distinction
0	1	2

- Qualification grades are awarded by applying the following thresholds:

BTEC Level 5 HND overall qualification grades

Points range	Grade	
0-74	Pass	P
75-149	Merit	M
150	Distinction	D

- Candidates for the L5 HND are awarded a qualification grade based on points from their N best-graded, L5, units (where N is obtained by ordering L5 units by grade achieved, highest first, then counting those units until at least 75 credits has been reached). This is best explained by illustration:

Example 3

Achievement of an HND Diploma with a distinction grade

		Level	Credit	Grade	Grade points	Points per unit (weighting x credit points)
Unit 1	Mandatory core unit	4	15	P	X	
Unit 2	Mandatory core unit	4	15	M	X	
Unit 3	Mandatory core unit	4	15	D	X	
Unit 4	Mandatory core unit	4	15	D	X	
Unit 5	Mandatory core unit	4	15	M	X	
Unit 6	Mandatory core unit	5	15	D	2	30
Unit 7	Mandatory core unit	5	15	D	2	30
Unit 8	Mandatory core unit	5	20	D	2	30
Unit 20	Specialist unit	5	15	D	2	30
Unit 21	Specialist unit	5	15	D	2	30
Unit 23	Specialist unit	5	15	P	0	
Unit 25	Specialist unit	4	15	P	X	
Unit 26	Specialist unit	5	15	M	1	(15)
Unit 29	Specialist unit	4	15	M	X	
Unit 33	Specialist unit	4	15	M	X	
Unit 35	Specialist unit	5	15	M	1	(15)
Unit 36	Specialist unit	4	15	P	X	
	Qualification grade totals	Min 125 at level 5	245			150

The learner can be considered for a distinction: only count the points from level 5 units for the best 75 credits from a valid combination of 240 credits () these units are not counted in the overall score X not counted as below the level of the qualification.

The learner has sufficient points for a distinction grade.

- Since most units have 15 credits, this means that the qualification grade is likely to be based on performance in only 5 units, from around 16 units taken. Thus, a Distinction grade requires at least (but no more than) 5 Level 5 Distinction grades (from units worth at least 15 credits). In theory, the remaining L4 and L5 units could all be achieved at no higher than a Pass.

Cross-level analysis

- Although this is a Level 5 qualification, the passing criteria, illustrated below for Unit 66, are not particularly demanding in the sense of Bloom's Taxonomy; at least, when judged against other (L3 and L4) qualifications in the present study.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria for pass
On successful completion of this unit a learner will:	The learner can:
L01 Be able to apply complex notation in the analysis of single phase circuits	1.1 solve problems involving LCR circuits 1.2 evaluate the effects on circuit performance of changes in values of impedances
L02 Be able to apply circuit theory to the solution of circuit problems	2.1 solve problems using circuit theorems to calculate currents and voltage in circuits 2.2 analyse circuits including the value of circuit loads which produce maximum power
L03 Understand the operation of electronic amplifier circuits used in electro-mechanical systems	3.1 analyse the operation of single- and two-stage amplifiers 3.2 evaluate the performance of single- and two-stage amplifiers 3.3 design and evaluate a single-stage transistor amplifier 3.4 compare measured results with theoretical calculations
L04 Be able to design and test digital electronic circuits used in electro-mechanical systems	4.1 evaluate digital electronic device families 4.2 design combinational and sequential digital electronic circuits 4.3 test digital circuits by construction or by computer simulation.

- Nor do the generic Merit descriptors (presented earlier) appear to 'raise the game' significantly in terms of a progression in command verb challenge.
- However, the generic descriptors for Merit vs Distinction do seem to be differentiated clearly in terms of command verbs, as illustrated below (presented alongside the AC for Unit 66):

- Pass (Unit 66) – ‘solve’, ‘evaluate’, ‘analyse’, ‘design’, ‘compare’, ‘test’;
- Merit (generic) – ‘identify’/‘apply’, ‘select’/‘design’/‘apply’, ‘present’/‘communicate’;
- Distinction (generic) – ‘critically reflect’/‘evaluate’/‘justify’, ‘managing’/‘organising’, ‘convergent’/‘lateral’/‘creative thinking’.

TCL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Speech and Drama (Grade 8)⁶

Overview

- “Trinity’s graded acting and speaking exams provide a structured yet flexible framework for progress, which encourages learners of all levels and abilities to demonstrate their skills in performing and speaking through engaging with as wide a variety of performance activities and texts as possible.”
- The Grade 8 examination is part of a suite of nine examinations (Initial, then Grades 1 to 8).

Assessment

- Assessment is via a single face-to-face practical examination, typically with a single examiner (Grade 8 = 25 minutes, cf 23 for G7, 20 for G6).
- The examination involves: performance (80 marks); discussion (20 marks).
- Expectations are specified (by Examination Grade band, eg 6-8) concerning the language, context, duration and complexity of performances required.
- “The examiner writes a report on the extent to which the candidate has met the learning outcomes of the qualification and awards marks in line with the published assessment criteria and attainment descriptors.”

Grading

- The published information on grading approach was limited, so details were fleshed-out in conversation with an AO representative.
- Marks are awarded to performances in both components, according to a detailed marking scheme. The two marks are then totalled and converted to a grade using the following thresholds:

Marks received	Attainment levels
85 or more	Distinction
75-84	Merit
65-74	Pass
64 and below	Below Pass

- The specification presents both LOs and AC for this qualification, written in the conventional QCF format:

⁶ [Link no longer available at time of writing.] (Analysis based on version: Online edition, August 2017)

INTERMEDIATE (GRADES 4-5, RQF LEVEL 2)	
Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
The learner will:	The learner can:
1. Employ appropriate physical and vocal resources to engage an audience through an imaginative and sustained performance	1.1 Demonstrate a personal and imaginative interpretation in which there is reasonably consistent application of developing technical skills 1.2 Perform in an audible and clear manner with appropriate articulation (eg volume, pitch, pace, rhythm, style, dynamics), leading to a secure, accurate and sustained performance, which also conveys a sense of spontaneity
2. Respond sensitively to the quality, form and content of the material being presented	2.1 Support intentions in performance by demonstrating a sound understanding of material 2.2 Show clear evidence of sensitivity to and considerable control of the material, which is grounded in effective preparation
3. Adopt and sustain a role using space creatively and effectively to enhance meaning	3.1 Communicate shades of meaning and contrasts, for example, of characterisation and mood 3.2 Combine the use of voice, body and space effectively to enhance meaning and interpretation and to engage an audience
ADVANCED (GRADES 6-8, RQF LEVEL 3)	
Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
The learner will:	The learner can:
1. Employ appropriate integrated physical and vocal resources to engage an audience in a performance that shows a sense of ownership	1.1 Perform with confidence, clarity and a sense of ownership of the material 1.2 Consciously integrate knowledge, understanding and skills in a secure and sustained performance
2. Respond with authority and mature understanding to the quality, form and content of the material being presented	2.1 Demonstrate mature understanding of the material 2.2 Demonstrate authority and control through relevant and thorough preparation
3. Adopt and sustain a role using space creatively and effectively to convey complexity of meaning	3.1 Combine skilful and appropriate use of voice, body and space with imaginative response and flair, to engage an audience wholeheartedly 3.2 Demonstrate a discriminating and sensitive personal interpretation of the material, which conveys complexity and range of meaning (eg in mood, atmosphere, characterisation, feeling)

- However, it is important to note that the 'Advanced' LOs/AC are common across all of the acting and speaking qualifications covered by the specification (except 'plays in production'), as well as being common across the three Examination Grade bands (Grade 6 to Grade 8). This indicates that they do not have a direct role to play in grading examination performances.
- Instead, marks for each of the components are allocated according to marking schemes, and a separate mark is awarded for each strand within each scheme.
- Attainment descriptors are published which illustrate the standard associated with each grade (see below). However, once again, the descriptors are common across the three Examination Grade bands (Grade 6 to Grade 8), which indicates that they do not have a direct role to play in grading examination performances.

Annexes - Grading Vocational & Technical Assessments

INTERMEDIATE (GRADES 4-5, RQF LEVEL 2)	ADVANCED (GRADES 6-8, RQF LEVEL 3)
<p>DISTINCTION (85 OR MORE MARKS) Work that demonstrates a secure, accurate and sustained response to the chosen material. A sense of spontaneity and personal involvement will be achieved through the employment of a wide range of performance skills that engage an audience effectively.</p>	<p>DISTINCTION (85 OR MORE MARKS) Work that achieves richness and a sense of total performance through a synthesis of advanced performance skills at a level of sustained excellence. Sophistication of interpretation will be demonstrated through a sense of originality and a wholly independent response to the material performed.</p>
<p>MERIT (75-84 MARKS) Work that demonstrates a considerable level of control of the material and a relatively wide range of performance skills. There will be appropriate establishment of mood and character and a level of sensitivity to the needs of an audience.</p>	<p>MERIT (75-84 MARKS) Work that demonstrates understanding through a mature and imaginative commitment to the material. This will result in a performance of some complexity, using a wide range of advanced performance skills effectively.</p>
<p>PASS (65-74 MARKS) Work that demonstrates a reasonable control of the chosen material and a range of appropriate performance skills. There will be some attempt to engage an audience and convey a sense of personal involvement in the ideas communicated.</p>	<p>PASS (65-74 MARKS) Work that demonstrates some evidence of mature understanding presented with an element of identification with the material. Performance skills are integrated and used with some assurance.</p>
<p>BELOW PASS (64 AND BELOW MARKS) Work that may show lack of preparation and control of performance skills (even though some may be evident). At best, the performance may be sporadic in its attempt to communicate effectively.</p>	<p>BELOW PASS (64 AND BELOW MARKS) Work in which some skills may be evident but they are insufficiently integrated or contain significant lapses in technical achievement. There may be inadequate preparation and inappropriate response to the material.</p>

UWLQ Level 2 Certificate in Graded Examination in Oral Communication (Grade 4)⁷

Overview

- “A course of study based on this syllabus is intended to provide: a balanced combination of performing skills and the supporting literacy; opportunities for learning and assessment that are both creatively challenging and technologically relevant; opportunities for mastery learning that are structured and directly related to the repertoire published for each grade; the basis for study and practice that will be relevant to career skills and concepts.”
- The Grade 4 examination is part of a suite of eleven examinations (Steps 1-3, then Grades 1-8).

Assessment

- The examination, which last 20 minutes, has three components: Performance (60 marks); Sight Reading (10 marks); Discussion and Folder of Work (30 marks).
- It is conducted face-to-face with an external examiner.
- “The standard expected of a candidate at any particular grade is defined by the repertoire of tasks prescribed for that grade.” Compare, for instance, the second task (a 3-minute talk) within the Performance component, for Grade 4 and Grade 5, respectively:
 - Grade 4 – The candidate will give a talk on a hobby or sport. Visual aids may be used.
 - Grade 5 – The candidate will give a talk, introducing the main speaker on a formal occasion.
- Candidates have considerable freedom of choice over the content through which they demonstrate their oral communication proficiency. They are guided in their choice of materials by Grade Descriptions which are provided for each Examination Grade band. The description for the Grade 4/5 band reads:
 - “The material selected for these grades will be substantial enough to convey some development, both in terms of authors’ intentions and candidates’ interpretation and performance. Content will be sufficiently complex to provide some contrast and range (e.g. in terms of theme, character, situation and mood), and will provide opportunities for candidates to begin to explore more universal themes. There will be stylistic variety of language and literary form and some subtleties of

⁷ Accessed from: <http://lcme.uwl.ac.uk/media/1391/communication-grades-syllabus-2017.pdf>
(Version: Copyright 2017)

vocabulary and syntax will provide opportunities for a variety of approaches and interpretative choices.”

Grading

- Each of the three components is marked holistically, with reference to guidance on the approximate weighting that ought to be allocated to each element of four Assessment Domains. These weightings are specified separately for each component, as illustrated below for Sight Reading:

Sight Reading (Component 2)

The examiner will consider the performance of the sight reading, and will award a mark taking the following into consideration:

Assessment Domains	Approximate Weightings (%)		
	Grades 1–3	Grades 4–5	Grades 6–8
Technical Accomplishment: the ability to perform the given extract(s) with regard to the aspects listed for Component 1, above.	25	22.5	20
Interpretation: the ability to make sensitive performance choices in relation to the given extract(s).	20	22.5	25
Knowledge & Understanding: knowledge of voice production technique, understanding of the meaning of the texts and the stylistic context of the repertoire.	35	35	35
Communication: the ability to communicate the meaning and mood of the extract to the examiner.	20	20	20

- Notional marking/grading standards, known as Attainment Band descriptions, are also specified for each component, illustrated below for Sight Reading:

Component 2: Sight Reading

	Grades 1–3	Grades 4–5	Grades 6–8
Below Pass	Inaccurate reading with lack of understanding of text.	Inaccurate reading and insufficient understanding of text and mood.	Inaccurate and/or stilted reading with little or no attempt at characterisation, and lack of interpretive skills.
Pass	Accurate reading with some phrasing and understanding of text.	Accurate reading, with some phrasing and understanding of text and mood.	Satisfactory rendition, with some use of expression demonstrating understanding.
Merit	Accurate reading, well phrased and with some communication of meaning.	Accurate reading, well phrased and with some characterisation and communication of text and mood.	Mostly fluent and convincing reading, including characterisation and demonstrating good comprehension.
Distinction	Accurate reading, well interpreted and communicated.	Accurate reading, well interpreted with good characterisation and communication of text and mood.	Sound and convincing reading demonstrating characterisation and comprehension of text.

- These descriptions provide a rough, best fit, characterisation of standards. However, they are not used directly to grade, and are therefore purely for illustrative purposes.

- Marks from each of the three components are added to determine a mark total for each candidate, out of 100 marks.
- This mark total is converted to a grade, on the basis of fixed thresholds:
 - Pass – 65;
 - Merit – 75;
 - Distinction – 85.
- Generic ‘descriptions of achievement’ are provided in the Syllabus, which are intended to characterise the essential differences between performances at each grade. The same descriptors apply across all Examination Grades. These descriptions are purely for illustrative purposes, and play no role in the grading process. They are reproduced below.

Distinction (85–100%)

A candidate who achieves a Pass with Distinction will have offered a highly accurate and fluent response in all or most of the components. They will have demonstrated the ability to perform accurately from memory, with audibility and secure vocal technique, and will have shown evidence of excellent interpretative skills. They will have demonstrated a thorough familiarity with the vocabulary in the pieces, and will have demonstrated wide-ranging contextual knowledge in relation to the repertoire performed. They will have initiated conversation in the discussion, and been able to comment perceptively on their own performance and interpretation. They will have shown the ability to offer character development, and to vary such aspects as modulation, pitch, pace and power as applicable to the different pieces performed. They will have communicated, through performance, a sense of real engagement with, and an understanding of, and at Grades 6–8, a sense of individual personality in relation to, the repertoire.

Merit (75–84%)

A candidate who achieves a Pass with Merit will have offered an accurate and fluent response in all or most of the components. They will have demonstrated the ability to perform accurately from memory, with audibility and secure vocal technique, and will have shown evidence of good interpretative skills. They will have demonstrated a largely assured understanding of the vocabulary in the pieces, and will have demonstrated secure contextual knowledge in relation to the repertoire performed. They will have been able to offer opinion as well as fact in the discussion, and will have responded positively and easily to questions from the examiner. They will have communicated, through performance, some sense of engagement with, some understanding of, and at Grades 6–8, an emerging sense of individual personality in relation to, the repertoire.

Pass (65–74%)

A candidate who achieves a Pass will have offered a mostly accurate and fluent response in all or most of the components. They will have demonstrated the ability to perform from memory with reasonable accuracy, with an acceptable level of audibility and reasonable vocal technique, and will have shown some evidence of interpretative skills. They will have demonstrated an acceptable understanding of the vocabulary in the pieces, and will have demonstrated some contextual knowledge in relation to the repertoire performed. They will have produced correct factual answers to most or all of the questions. They will have communicated, through performance, a basic understanding of the repertoire and ability to engage the listener.

Below pass (less than 65%)

A candidate who achieves a mark in this band will have demonstrated some inaccuracy and lack of fluency in all or most of the components. They will not have demonstrated an acceptable standard of vocal technique or audibility; there will have been lapses in memory, and they will have shown little evidence of interpretative skills. Their understanding of the vocabulary of the texts and their contextual knowledge in relation to the repertoire performed will have been judged inadequate. They will have offered mostly incorrect or incoherent answers to questions asked by the examiner. They will have failed to communicate, through performance, any significant degree of understanding of the repertoire, or an ability to engage the listener.

ABC Level 4 Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media⁸

Overview

- “The ABC Level 4 Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media is primarily designed for those of you who know which sectors you would like to specialise in and are wanting to progress into higher education.”
- “The Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media start at Level 3, however, learners may demonstrate achievement at a higher level and be able to claim for a second qualification - the Level 4 where their work has been developed accordingly.”
- The L4 Diploma is based on the same core as the L3 Diploma; with three of the L3 units being, in effect, ‘re-worked’ as L4 units (highlighted below):

Unit	Level	Credit Value	GLH	Page No.
Mandatory Units				
Information and research in art, design and media [M/601/4196]	3	10	75	6
Recording and responding in art, design and media [A/601/4198]	3	10	75	9
Experimentation with materials and processes in art, design and media [K/601/4200]	3	12	80	13
Personal preparation and progression in art, design and media [T601/4202]	3	12	70	16
Information and interpretation in art, design and media [H/601/4213]	4	12	60	19
Combined experimental studies in art, design and media [K/601/4214]	4	12	60	22
Media development in art, design and media [M/601/4215]	4	12	60	25
Personal confirmatory study in art, design and media [D/601/4209]	4	40	240	28

Assessment

- All units: “will be internally assessed, internally and externally moderated via a learner’s portfolio and other related evidence, against the unit outcomes and assessment criteria.”
- “Evidence is not prescribed” other than for the Personal Confirmatory Study (PCS) which also requires a written “statement of intent” (500-700 words).

Grading

- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied for a Pass). All units need to be passed.

⁸ Accessed from: https://www.abcawards.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Qualifications/1123-TOP-3_Qualification%20Guide.pdf (Version: Issue 4. March 17)

- Grading occurs at the unit level (P/M/D), but only one unit is graded – the final L4 PCS unit – and the grade on this unit determines the overall qualification grade.
- Note that exactly the same criteria are used to grade this PCS unit, for both L3 and L4 candidates:

Confirmatory Stage Grading criteria for Unit D/601/4209 Personal confirmatory study in art, design and media	
Merit Grade To achieve a Merit grade the evidence will have to show that, in addition to meeting the pass criteria, the learner can	Distinction Grade To achieve a Distinction grade the evidence will have to show that, in addition to meeting the pass and merit criteria, the learner can
M1. Demonstrate commitment and initiative in the management of wide ranging research, recording clear and informed perceptions	D1. Demonstrate commitment and initiative in the management of wide ranging and in depth research, imaginatively recording clear, informed and reflective perceptions
M2. Use research material to creatively support the development of a range of predominately personal ideas relevant to the stated aims and objectives	D2. Use research material to creatively support the development of an extensive range of distinctly personal ideas relevant to the stated aims and objectives
M3. Manage the development, organisation and execution of the personal confirmatory study consistently, efficiently and creatively	D3. Manage the development, organisation and execution of the personal confirmatory study with exceptional consistency, efficiency and creativity
M4. Demonstrate well developed levels of skill and control with materials and processes	D4. Demonstrate exceptionally developed levels of skill and control with materials and processes
M5. Demonstrate consistency and effectiveness in the use of analysis to evaluate and support the final confirmatory study	D5. Demonstrate consistency and effectiveness in the use of analysis to perceptively evaluate and creatively support the final confirmatory study
All criteria must be met to achieve this grade.	All criteria must be met to achieve this grade.

- Note that the Merit and Distinction grades are not differentiated using a progression in command verb challenge. Instead, differences are marked more in terms of performance quality, eg ‘Demonstrate well developed’ vs. ‘Demonstrate exceptionally developed’.
- Note that these 5 criteria for Merit and Distinction do not map straightforwardly onto the AC for this unit, which have different foci.

Cross-level analysis

- This qualification comprises units at both L3 and L4. As noted above, three of the units are, in effect, available at both L3 and L4. For these three unit-pairs, the LOs are common across levels. Consequently, the AC are all that distinguish proficiency at L3 from proficiency at L4. This is illustrated below with respect to the unit titled 'Information and interpretation in art, design and media':

L3 unit specification

Learning Outcomes (1 to1) <i>The learner will</i>	Assessment Criteria (1.1 to 1.4) <i>The learner can</i>
1. Interpret and evaluate the work of others to support their own creative development	1.1 Undertake research into the work of others 1.2 Identify the characteristics of the work of others and evaluate its relevance to their own development 1.3 Demonstrate an awareness of different approaches to creative activity within the work of others 1.4 Demonstrate the ability to communicate knowledge through visual and textual language

L4 unit specification

Learning Outcomes (1 to 1) <i>The learner will</i>	Assessment Criteria (1.1 to 1.5) <i>The learner can</i>
1. Interpret and evaluate the work of others to support own creative development	1.1 Undertake broad, in depth, research into the work of others 1.2 Analyse the characteristics of the work of others and evaluate its relevance to support their own creative development 1.3 Through interpretation and evaluation demonstrate an informed awareness of creative activity in the work of others 1.4 Demonstrate the ability to articulate critical understanding and knowledge through visual and textual language 1.5 Use practical and theoretical understanding of the work of others to inform and develop own practice

- Comparing these sets of AC for the same unit, at L3 vs. L4, it is clear that they are not radically different. To some extent, the distinction between levels is articulated via a progression in command verb challenge (eg 'identify' vs. 'analyse' for AC1.2) although not exclusively (eg 'research' vs. 'broad, in depth, research' for AC1.1).

ATHE Level 3 Diploma In Business⁹

Overview

- “The primary purpose of this RQF qualification is to support your progression to higher education, specifically to a BA degree course relating to business.”
- It comprises 4 mandatory L3 units:

Unit Title	Level	Credit	GLH
Mandatory Units			
How Businesses Operate	3	15	90
Marketing Principles and Techniques	3	15	90
Academic and Research Skills for Business	3	15	90
Communication Skills for Business	3	15	90

Assessment

- “For all of these ATHE qualifications assessment is completed through the submission of internally assessed student work.”
- “ATHE will provide a sample assignment for each unit which can be used as the assessment for the unit. These assignments have extension activities, which enable the learners to provide additional evidence to show that the criteria for the higher grades have been met.”

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level (P/M/D).
- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied; both for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied), and for the award of higher grades (eg all Merit criteria satisfied for Merit).
- The specification explicitly recognises differentiation via a progression in command verb challenge:
 - “In making their judgements assessors will continue to check whether the command verbs stated in the AC have been delivered.”
 - “Command verbs reflect the level of the qualification eg at level 4 you would see words such as analyse and evaluate.”
- Note that these two quotations link command verbs both to grades and to levels (respectively). Inspection of various unit LOs/AC reveals that they are particularly closely linked to grading, for instance:

⁹ Accessed from: https://atheuk-my.sharepoint.com/personal/server_athe_co_uk/_layouts/15/download.aspx?docid=0d9ee070150554ecaa7535c5c24bcf4b5&authkey=AaChoy5uL9VC427owE_MxtY (Version: 16032016 Version 3.0)

3. Be able to apply key principles of accounting and present and interpret data	3.1 Present and interpret key accounting information using profit and loss accounts	3 M1 Analyse business performance using basic ratios	3 D1 Analyse business performance using ratios and accounting information including budgets, profit and loss accounts, cash flow predictions and ratios
4. Understand the principles of managing and leading teams in organisations	4.1 Describe the stages of team development 4.2 Carry out an analysis to determine own and others' roles within a team. 4.3 Assess three motivation theories 4.4 Describe different types of leadership style	4 M1 Explain why it might be appropriate to use different leadership and motivational styles in different situations	4 D1 Evaluate how motivational theories are used in businesses to motivate employees 4 D2 Evaluate the impact of different leadership styles on employees.
5. Know the role of the Human Resources department	5.1 Describe the different functions carried out by the HR department in a business 5.2 Outline key features of employment legislation	5 M1 Explain the benefits of employment legislation to employees and businesses	5 D1 Analyse the impact of employment legislation on businesses in a named country
6. Understand the importance of customer service to organisational success	6.1 Explain the impact of customer service on business success 6.2 Explain the benefits of customer profiling to a business.	6 M1 Analyse the impact of customer service on business success	6 D1 Analyse how customer profiling is used to help deliver targeted customer service

- Across the mandatory units:
 - 'evaluate' is only ever used as a Distinction descriptor;
 - 'analyse' is mainly used as a Distinction descriptor, although sometimes also for Merit; whereas the
 - Pass descriptors tend to involve verbs like 'state', 'describe', 'explain'.
- The strong link between command verbs and grading is reflected in the provision of additional 'extension activities' relating to the higher grades, ensuring that the higher grade tasks present additional demands to learners, eg a heavier emphasis upon application of understanding to solve a problem.

- Qualification grades are awarded on the basis of points, as follows:

	Points available per unit grade	Points required for qualification grade
Pass	45	180-224
Merit	60	225-284
Distinction	75	285-300

- The Pass thresholds are set at a level corresponding to 4 Passes; and all four units must be passed to pass the qualification overall.
- The qualification Merit and Distinction thresholds are set just above the 'balanced performance' tipping point (eg 2 Pass, 2 Merit would be classified as Pass; whereas 1 Pass, 3 Merit would be classified as Merit).

Cross-level analysis

- There appears to be heavy reliance upon a progression in command verb challenge to differentiate between grading standards for P, M, and D. Relationships between qualification levels were investigated further by considering the ATHE Level 4/5/6 Diplomas in Business and Administrative Management, all three of which award only the passing grade.
- All three specifications explicitly linked command verbs to levelness, albeit linking Levels 4-6 to essentially the same command verbs. In their respective definitions of 'Assessment Criteria' they stated:
 - "at level 4 you would see words such as analyse, explain and evaluate" (L4 specification);
 - "at level 5 you would see words such as analyse and evaluate" (L5 specification);
 - "at level 6 you would see words such as analyse and evaluate" (L6 specification).
- When the first unit from each of these three specifications was examined, a progression in command verb challenge across levels was somewhat evident, particularly at L6:

L4 specification:

Learning outcomes The learner will:	Assessment criteria The learner can:
1 Understand the role of administrative management	1.1 Outline the role of administrative management 1.2 Explain how the role of the administrative manager relates to the functions of management 1.3 Evaluate the role of the administrative manager in the context of the administrative management function
2 Understand administrative systems	2.1 Describe the main features of administrative systems employed in different types of organisations 2.2 Explain how organisations manage information flows 2.3 Evaluate the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting administration
3 Understand the role of communication in organisations	3.1 Evaluate the different models of communication in organisations 3.2 Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation's communication system

L5 specification:

Learning outcomes The learner will:	Assessment criteria The learner can:
1 Understand the role of operations management within organisations	1.1 Explain the role and characteristics of operations management within organisations 1.2 Analyse how operations management supports organisational success
2 Understand the role of operations management and the importance of meeting operational performance targets	2.1 Identify the links between strategy and operational performance targets 2.2 Explain why there may be conflict between different performance targets 2.3 Assess the role of strategic operations management
3 Understand how and why organisations use performance evaluation	3.1 Assess a range of techniques used by organisations to evaluate performance 3.2 Analyse the role of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in operations management
4 Understand the impact of a range of quality improvement techniques on competitive advantage	4.1 Explain the concept of the value chain as a means to identify competitive advantage 4.2 Explain how quality improvement techniques are applied in managing operations

L6 specification:

Learning outcomes The learner will:	Assessment criteria The learner can:
1. Understand the concept of strategic management	1.1 Explain the concept of strategy 1.2 Identify the elements of the strategic management process 1.3 Critically analyse the role of values, vision and mission statements in the strategic management of organisations 1.4 Evaluate different approaches to strategy formulation 1.5 Demonstrate how the external environment influence strategy formulation
2. Be able to conduct strategic analysis	2.1 Differentiate between organisations' general, competitive and internal environments 2.2 Critically appraise the tools available for the analysis of the general, competitive and internal environments 2.3 Apply appropriate tools to analyse organisational environments

Cskills Awards Level 2 Diploma in Site Carpentry (Construction)¹⁰

Overview

- “The Level 2 Diploma in Site Carpentry qualification has been developed for delivery in a training environment; this means that you do not need to be employed to study this qualification. It has been designed to develop your skills, knowledge and understanding so you can work in Site Carpentry in the construction industry or progress to further training.”
- This qualification comprises 8 mandatory units:
 - 3 Core units – Health, safety and welfare (L1); Understanding information, quantities and communication (L2); Understanding construction technology (L2).
 - 5 Occupational units – Prepare and use carpentry and joinery power tools (L1); Carry out first fixing operations (L2); Carry out second fixing operations (L2); Carry out structural carcassing operations (L2); Carry out maintenance to non-structural carpentry work (L2).
- The qualification sits alongside a variety of ‘competence’ (NVQ) and training qualifications, including:
 - Level 1 Diploma in Carpentry and Joinery;
 - Level 3 Diploma in Site Carpentry;
 - Level 4 NVQ Diploma in Construction Site Supervision.

Assessment

- The qualification involves both:
 - externally examined m/c knowledge tests (all 8 units)
 - designed to be delivered by computer but also available on paper, covering the LOs for each unit to determine whether they have been met;
 - internally assessed practical assignments (the 5 Occupational units)
 - can be combined, across units, for synoptic delivery.

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level:
 - knowledge tests (P/M/D);
 - practical assignments (P only).

¹⁰ Accessed from: <https://www.citb.co.uk/awards/i-am-learner/qualification-search/viewqualification/?q=DIP057> (Details were available directly from website, rather than in a specification.) Information on the rebranded qualification can be accessed from the NOCN website: https://www.nocn.org.uk/what-we-do/qualifications/18415-600-8603-8-nocn_cskills-awards-level-2-diploma-in-site-carpentry-construction/

- Learners must attain at least a Pass in each unit in order to achieve the overall qualification.
- The qualification grade is determined by performance on the knowledge tests:
 - unit grades are converted into unit grade points, for aggregation into an overall qualification grade (P/M/D);
 - each unit is equal in its contribution to the overall grade (ie regardless of level or size).
- LOs and AC are specified for each of the 8 units, for instance, the Core unit CSA L2Core04:

Learning Outcomes <i>The learner will be able to:</i>	Assessment Criteria <i>The learner can:</i>
1 Know how to interpret and produce information relating to construction.	1.1 Describe the types of supporting information available to produce construction information. 1.2 Describe how to check supporting information for conformity. 1.3 Interpret information from construction specifications relevant to the work. 1.4 Interpret basic construction drawings and describe their purpose. 1.5 State a range of drawing equipment and their uses. 1.6 Describe a range of scales used to produce construction drawings.
2 Understand how to estimate quantities of resources.	2.1 Compare the different methods used to estimate quantities of materials required in a construction project. 2.2 Describe the systems in place for deciding which materials should be used and where they can be purchased. 2.3 Compare estimated labour rates for different construction projects. 2.4 Define the differences between quoting, estimated pricing and the tender process. 2.5 Describe the possible implications of inaccurate estimates.
3 Understand how to communicate workplace requirements efficiently.	3.1 State the key personnel involved within the communication cycle. 3.2 Describe the effects that poor communication could have on the overall process. 3.3 Describe how the use of appropriate communication techniques would improve teamwork. 3.4 Describe why it is important to apply the principles of equality and diversity when communicating with others. 3.5 Describe the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of communication.

- LOs for the Occupational units include both 'know how' and 'be able to' requirements, with command verbs for the latter including 'select', 'replace', 'splice', 'repair', and such like.

Cross-level analysis

- Comparing the command verbs used in the L2 unit, presented above, with those in the L1 and L3 units, presented below, it appears that the wording of AC for Carpentry qualifications, at successive levels, are strongly associated with a progression in command verb challenge:
 - 'identify', 'state', 'list' (L1); vs.
 - 'describe', 'interpret', 'state', 'define', 'compare' (L2); vs.
 - 'explain', 'detail', 'compare', 'define', 'evaluate', 'analyse' (L3).

Level 1 unit (CSA L1 Core01):

Learning Outcomes <i>The learner will be able to:</i>		Assessment Criteria <i>The learner can:</i>
1	Know the health and safety regulations, roles and responsibilities.	1.1 Identify key health and safety legislation relevant to and used in a construction environment.
		1.2 State the key employer responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAWA).
		1.3 State the key employee responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act (HASAWA).
		1.4 State the roles and responsibilities of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
		1.5 Identify other sources of relevant health and safety information.
		1.6 State when legislation would require the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to be informed.
		1.7 State why there is a requirement for enforcing stringent guidance in health and safety.
		1.8 State the importance of holding on-site safety inductions and toolbox talks.
		1.9 State how your behaviour and actions could affect others.
2	Know the accident and emergency procedures and how to report them.	2.1 State the major types of emergencies that could occur in the workplace.
		2.2 State the key legislation used for reporting accidents.
		2.3 State the different types of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences in the workplace.
		2.4 State the main types of records used in the event of an accident or emergency.
		2.5 State why it is important to report accidents and near misses.
		2.6 State the difference between major and minor injuries and the meaning of a near miss.
		2.7 List the key accident trends within the United Kingdom construction industry.
		2.8 State the effects that common types of accidents and injuries could have on the employer.
		2.9 List the authorised personnel who could be involved in dealing with accident and emergency situations.
		2.10 List the contents of a basic first aid kit.

Annexes - Grading Vocational & Technical Assessments

		2.11 State the actions to be taken on discovering an accident.
3	Know how to identify hazards on construction sites.	3.1 State the importance of good housekeeping.
		3.2 State the purpose of risk assessments and method statements.
		3.3 List the major types of hazards in the workplace.
		3.4 State the importance and methods of reporting hazards.
		3.5 State why hazards can be created by changing circumstances in the workplace.
		3.6 State the importance of the correct storage of combustibles and chemicals on site.
4	Know about health and hygiene in a construction environment.	4.1 List the requirements for welfare facilities in a construction environment.
		4.2 State the health effects of noise and the appropriate precautions that can be taken.
		4.3 Identify the various substances hazardous to health and the appropriate precautions that need to be taken.
		4.4 State the importance of personal hygiene.
		4.5 List possible consequences of health risks in the workplace.
5	Know how to handle and store materials and equipment safely.	5.1 State the procedures for safe lifting in accordance with guidance and legislation.
		5.2 State the importance of using site safety equipment when handling and storing materials and equipment.
		5.3 Identify the key legislation relating to the safe handling of materials and equipment.
		5.4 State the importance of correct storage of construction materials.
		5.5 State the importance of waste control procedures in the workplace.
6	Know about basic working platforms and access equipment.	6.1 State the safe methods of use and appropriate parts of working platforms and access equipment.
		6.2 State good practice methods in the use of working platforms and access equipment.
		6.3 Identify the dangers of working at height when using basic working platforms and access equipment.
7	Know how to work safely around electricity in a construction environment.	7.1 State the precautions to be taken to avoid risks to themselves and others when working with electricity.
		7.2 State the dangers and effects of those dangers associated with the use of electricity.
		7.3 State the different voltages that could be used in the workplace.
		7.4 State why there is a need for cables to be colour coded.
		7.5 State the requirements for working safely with equipment of differing electrical voltages.
		7.6 State the methods and importance of storing electrical equipment correctly.
8	Know how to use personal protective equipment (PPE) correctly.	8.1 State the importance of and the different types of personal protective equipment (PPE) used in the workplace.
		8.2 State the legislation governing personal protective equipment (PPE).

		8.3	State why it is important to store and maintain personal protective equipment (PPE) correctly.
		8.4	List the possible consequences of not using the correct personal protective equipment (PPE).
9	Know the fire and emergency procedures.	9.1	List the three elements essential to creating a fire.
		9.2	State the ways in which a fire could spread and identify methods of fire prevention.
		9.3	State the actions to be taken on discovering a fire.
		9.4	State the correct fire evacuation procedures.
		9.5	State the different types of fire extinguishers and their correct uses.
10	Know about signs and safety notices.	10.1	List the categories of signs and safety notices used in the workplace.
		10.2	State the key differences between signs and safety notices used in the workplace.

Level 3 unit (CSA L3Core07):

Learning Outcomes <i>The learner will be able to:</i>		Assessment Criteria <i>The learner can:</i>	
1	Know how to produce different types of drawings and information in the construction industry.	1.1	Explain the advantages and disadvantages of electronic drawing methods to traditional drawing methods.
		1.2	Explain the range of details required for floor plans in construction drawings.
		1.3	Detail information required for elevation in construction drawings.
		1.4	Explain the information required for linking specification schedules to drawings.
		1.5	Compare the reasons for different projections used in construction drawings.
		1.6	Explain why hatchings and symbols are used in construction drawings.
2	Know how to estimate quantities and price work for contracts	2.1	Analyse the resource requirements for a construction task.
		2.2	Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing or hiring plant and equipment.
		2.3	Explain the benefits of planning the sequence of materials and labour requirements.
		2.4	Explain suitable methods used for calculating hours required.
		2.5	Explain a range of added costs to consider when estimating work.
		2.6	Define the elements that make up the total estimated price.
		2.7	Explain the different factors that affect profitability.
3	Know how to ensure good working practices.	3.1	Explain the measures undertaken on site to maintain good working relationships.
		3.2	Explain the need for maintaining the trust and confidence of colleagues.
		3.3	Analyse the need for accurate communication throughout the stages of construction.

Learning Outcomes <i>The learner will be able to:</i>	Assessment Criteria <i>The learner can:</i>
1 Know how to interpret and produce information relating to construction.	1.1 Describe the types of supporting information available to produce construction information. 1.2 Describe how to check supporting information for conformity. 1.3 Interpret information from construction specifications relevant to the work. 1.4 Interpret basic construction drawings and describe their purpose. 1.5 State a range of drawing equipment and their uses. 1.6 Describe a range of scales used to produce construction drawings.
2 Understand how to estimate quantities of resources.	2.1 Compare the different methods used to estimate quantities of materials required in a construction project. 2.2 Describe the systems in place for deciding which materials should be used and where they can be purchased. 2.3 Compare estimated labour rates for different construction projects. 2.4 Define the differences between quoting, estimated pricing and the tender process. 2.5 Describe the possible implications of inaccurate estimates.
3 Understand how to communicate workplace requirements efficiently.	3.1 State the key personnel involved within the communication cycle. 3.2 Describe the effects that poor communication could have on the overall process. 3.3 Describe how the use of appropriate communication techniques would improve teamwork. 3.4 Describe why it is important to apply the principles of equality and diversity when communicating with others. 3.5 Describe the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of communication.

CIBTAC Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy¹¹

Overview

- “The CIBTAC Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy is aimed at preparing you to enter the Beauty Therapy sector as a Beauty Therapist. The units within this qualification have been mapped to the National Occupational Standards and relate specifically to the job role of a Beauty Therapist. A learner must already have a level 2 beauty qualification that includes facial therapy.”
- It comprises 5 (core) mandatory L3 units and 1 optional L3 unit.

Assessment

- The qualification is 100% externally examined.
- Each candidate completes:
 - a portfolio covering the LOs/AC for the health and safety unit;
 - a single, terminal, multiple-choice theory test, which has separate elements covering LOs/AC from the remaining units;
 - a single, terminal, synoptic practical assessment, which has separate elements covering LOs/AC from the remaining units (except anatomy and physiology), progressing from one treatment to the next.
- Although there are only two terminal assessments – the Multiple-Choice Theory test and the Practical Assignment – their discrete unit-elements are graded separately:

Unit	Assessment 1		Assessment 2	
	Method	Grades	Method	Grades
Monitor and maintain health and safety in the salon	Assessed by portfolio, only awards P.			
Provide facial electrotherapy treatments	15 MCQs	P/M/D	Observation + Oral Qns.	P/M/D
Provide body electrotherapy treatments	15 MCQs	P/M/D	Observation + Oral Qns.	P/M/D
Provide body massage	15 MCQs	P/M/D	Observation + Oral Qns.	P/M/D
Anatomy and physiology for beauty and spa therapy	20 MCQs	P/M/D		
Optional unit	15 MCQs	P/M/D	Observation + Oral Qns.	P/M/D

- “the practical is a synoptic assessment carried out by a CIBTAC Examiner.”

¹¹ Accessed from:

<http://www.cibtac.com/Portals/3/PDFs/CBD03%20L3%20Dip%20in%20Beauty%20Therapy%20Specification.pdf?ver=2017-12-22-142348-483> (Version: CBD03, V1.4 06/12/2017). Additional information came from the qualification “Syllabus” and “Overview” (cf “Specification”) document, both specified as version: V1.3 04/12/170).

- The Syllabus document presents LOs/AC for each unit, written in a fairly standard format; although the AC are exemplified additionally via bullet-point lists.
- The approach adopted within the massage unit is fairly representative:
 - LO1: Know and understand the requirements for providing body massage treatments (26 AC: 9 describe, 2 state, 1 identify, 1 outline, 5 explain, 1 know) – MCQ
 - LO2: Be able to prepare for a body massage treatments (5 AC: prepare, use, advise, provide, select) – PA
 - LO3: Be able to provide a body massage treatment (7 AC: communicate, follow, position, perform, perform, provide, record) – PA
- The MCT test samples from across the ACs for a unit (LO1 only, the knowledge outcome, in the above example).
- The PA is marked according to a detailed marking scheme. The criteria in the marking scheme do not map directly onto the AC for each unit. For instance, in the massage unit, marks are awarded for evidence of:
 - pressure – 2 marks
 - rhythm – 2 marks
 - effleurage – 2 marks (1*)
 - etc.
- “Where a minimum mark is required, Learners should achieve full marks for all areas marked with a *. Failure to achieve full marks in those areas may result in failure of the exam.”

Grading

- Each of the discrete MCT unit-subtests is graded by applying grade thresholds to the mark total:
 - P – 60%;
 - M – 75%;
 - D – 85%.
- The same grade thresholds are used to grade the PA unit-elements. However, as noted above, certain marks operate as hurdles for passing the unit-elements.
- Additional bullet-point descriptions are provided to illustrate the PA grading standards. However, as the PA is marked according to a detailed marking scheme, these descriptions are essentially for information only. They “give a general description of responses the Examiner expects to see throughout practical examinations.”
- They are illustrated, below, for Distinction and Merit only:

CIBTAC operates the following grading scheme for the final synoptic practical assessment

Grade	Mark range	Description
Distinction	Marks of 85% and above	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplary application of practical treatments • Excellent demonstration of underpinning knowledge during oral questioning • Excellent consultation with detailed explanation of treatment plan adapted to meet the Client's needs • Outstanding Client care
Merit	Marks of 75% - 84%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good application of practical treatment • Good demonstration of underpinning knowledge during oral questioning but some missing information • Good consultation identifying the some of the Client's requirements • Good Client care throughout the treatment

- “The Learner will need to pass all MCQ papers and practical examination to achieve the full CIBTAC Level 3 Diploma in Beauty Therapy”
- “The overall grade for the qualification will be determined by the grades achieved for all units carrying an external assessment. The qualification grade is the lowest unit grade. The unit grade is the lowest of the theory and practical grade (where both forms of assessment take place).”

IMI Level 3 Diploma in Light Vehicle Maintenance (VRQ)¹²

Overview

- “This Level 3 Tech Level qualification provides a progression path from the Level 2 Certificate in Light Vehicle Maintenance (601/7033/5) qualification, which will enable the learner to further develop and expand their knowledge, understanding and skills required to reach a diagnostic technician level.”
- “This qualification is a Tech Level at Level 3 and has been developed primarily for schools and colleges to deliver to learners aged in the 16-19 age group either on a full or part-time basis”
- The qualification comprises 10 units from 4 groups:
 - Group A: 3 Mandatory Units – 2 at L2 & 1 at L3
 - Group B: 1 Core Unit (Synoptic Assessment) – L3
 - Group C: 4 Mandatory Specialist Units – all at L3
 - Group D: 2 Optional Units – from selection of L2 and L3

Assessment

- “Learners will gain their knowledge and skills in a mainly workshop based environment by carrying out tasks, which their assessors will observe. Learners will collect evidence of their skills and knowledge in a ‘portfolio of evidence’. In the mandatory topic areas learners will also be required to pass multiple choice questions, set and marked by IMI, to prove their knowledge and understanding.”
- The Online Tests (OLTs) are compiled randomly from an item bank.

Grading

- Qualification graded on basis of:
 - Group A: 1 OLT [P/M/D] + 3 Task-Portfolios [P only]
 - Group B: 1 OLT [P/M/D] + 1 Practical Task (Synoptic Assessment) Job Report [P/M/D] + 3 Practical Tasks [P only]
 - Group C: 1 OLT [P/M/D] + 4 Task-Portfolios [P only]
 - Group D: 2 Task-Portfolios [P only]
- OLT graded as follows:
 - 60% to 74% = Pass
 - 75% to 84% = Merit
 - 85% and above = Distinction
- Grades from the groups are weighted to achieve the qualification grade, although it is not clear exactly how the aggregation is done:

¹² Accessed from:

<http://awarding.theimi.org.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EHnHOt5ny5k%3d&portalid=0> (Version: Version 1: September 2016)

- Group A = 20% of the overall grade
- Group B = 50% of the overall grade
- Group C = 30% of the overall grade
- As such, the qualification grade derives predominantly from the OLT grades, supplemented by the Synoptic Assessment Report grade. Most, but not all, of the units upon which the grading is based are at L3.

Cross-level analysis

- Two of the units within this qualification are at L2, which provides a basis for comparison across levels.
- Across units – both L2 and L3 – a wide variety of command verbs are used, and there are few obvious differences between command verbs in the L2 and L3 units.
- Across both levels, the most common command verbs include: ‘describe’, ‘explain’, ‘identify’, ‘state’; alongside, for the more practical LOs, ‘select and use’, ‘perform’, ‘ensure’, and so on.
- L2 AC tend to use ‘describe’ most frequently; whereas L3 AC tend to use ‘explain’ most frequently.
- Even in the L3 units, there are only occasional references to higher-level command verbs, such as ‘evaluate’.

NCFE Level 2 Diploma in Skills for Business¹³

Overview

- “This qualification is for learners aged pre-16 and above and is suitable for use within a Study Programme. This qualification is ideal for learners who want to develop an understanding of the essential skills required to work successfully in a business environment, and gives them an understanding of business culture and responsibilities.”
- The qualification is awarded on basis of 6 L2 (8 credit) units, selected from 10 (all optional).

Assessment

- 100% internally assessed, via portfolio of evidence.
- Assessment Guidance (re content and context) and Evidence Requirements (eg candidate report, questioning, observation, witness testimony) specified for each individual AC of each unit.

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level (P/M/D).
- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied; both for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied), and for the award of higher grades (eg all Merit criteria satisfied for Merit).
- The example below (from Unit 4) presents grading descriptors for each AC, for Pass, Merit and Distinction:

¹³ Accessed from: <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/media/442691/l2-diploma-in-skills-for-business-601-2624-3-qual-spec-issue-2.pdf> (Version: Issue 2 November 2017). Additional information from: <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/media/834405/l2-diploma-in-skills-for-business-601-2624-3-qual-spec-issue-3.pdf> (Version: Issue 3 January 2018).

Assessment criteria	Pass	Merit	Distinction
1.1 Identify a problem that exists within a business	The candidate will identify a problem that exists within a business	The candidate will identify a problem that exists within a business, using initiative	The candidate will perceptively identify a problem that exists within a business
1.2 Discuss the business problem with others	The candidate will discuss the business problem with others	The candidate will coherently discuss the business problem with others	No Distinction for this AC
1.3 Identify potential causes of the problem	The candidate will identify potential causes of the problem	The candidate will identify potential causes of the problem, using initiative	The candidate will perceptively identify potential causes of the problem
1.4 Identify potential solutions to the problem	The candidate will identify potential solutions to the problem	The candidate will identify potential solutions to the problem, showing initiative	The candidate will identify potential solutions to the problem, using critical judgement
1.5 Compare a range of solutions	The candidate will compare a range of solutions	The candidate will compare a range of solutions, justifying their opinions	No Distinction for this AC
1.6 Agree upon a solution	The candidate will agree upon a solution	The candidate will agree upon a realistic solution	The candidate will agree upon a convincing solution
2.1 Agree on a plan to achieve the solution	The candidate will agree on a plan to achieve the solution	The candidate will agree on a plan to achieve the solution, justifying their choice	No Distinction for this AC
2.2 Give positive and negative points of the agreed plan	The candidate will give positive and negative points of the agreed plan	The candidate will give positive and negative points of the agreed plan, justifying their opinions	No Distinction for this AC

- Note that each Pass criterion rephrases slightly its AC.
- Most units have both Pass and Merit descriptors for every AC.
- Units differ both in terms of the number of AC presented (as separate rows) and in terms of how many AC do not have Distinction criteria. For instance, Unit 1 has 12 AC and 3 Distinction descriptors; whereas Unit 8 has 9 AC and 4 Distinction descriptors.
- As highlighted above, the command verb that is used to articulate a particular AC is also used in each of its grading descriptors, from Pass to Distinction. In other words, differentiation between grades tends not to be articulated via command verbs that are presumed to embody qualitatively different degrees of challenge.
- Differentiation between grades, at the AC level, is achieved in terms of performance quality, eg
 - merely identified (Pass) vs. identified ‘showing initiative’ (Merit); or
 - merely agreeing a solution (Pass) vs. agreeing a ‘realistic’ solution (Merit) vs. agreeing a ‘convincing’ solution (Distinction).
- However, for certain units, the idea of a command verb progression does come into play, even when the same base command verb is repeated across grading descriptors. For instance, in the example below (Unit 10) we see examples such as the following:
 - merely state (Pass) vs. state ‘justifying their choice’ (Merit) vs. state ‘demonstrating critical judgement’ (Distinction).

Assessment criteria	Pass	Merit	Distinction
1.1 State why it is important for a business to change	The candidate will state why it is important for a business to change	The candidate will state why it is important for a business to change, demonstrating critical understanding	No Distinction for this AC
1.2 State the risks associated with a business changing too quickly	The candidate will state the risks associated with a business changing too quickly	The candidate will state the risks associated with a business changing too quickly, justifying their choices	The candidate will state the risks associated with a business changing too quickly, demonstrating critical judgement
1.3 State the risks associated with a business changing too slowly	The candidate will state the risks associated with a business changing too slowly	The candidate will state the risks associated with a business changing too slowly, justifying their choices	The candidate will state the risks associated with a business changing too slowly, demonstrating critical judgement
2.1 Outline positive effects change can have on people working in a business	The candidate will outline positive effects change can have on people working in a business	The candidate will outline the positive effects change can have on people working in a business, justifying their opinions	No Distinction for this AC
2.2 Outline negative effects change can have on people working in a business	The candidate will outline negative effects change can have on people working in a business	The candidate will outline the negative effects change can have on people working in a business, justifying their opinions	No Distinction for this AC
3.1 Describe methods of dealing with change in a business	The candidate will describe methods of dealing with change in a business	The candidate will describe, in detail , methods of dealing with change in a business	No Distinction for this AC
3.2 Outline how to help others cope with change in a business	The candidate will outline how to help others cope with change in a business	The candidate will clearly outline how to help others cope with change in a business	No Distinction for this AC

- Instead of assigning points to unit grades and deriving qualification grades from total point scores, this qualification simply uses a lookup table to convert unit grade profiles into the qualification grade. For instance:

Unit assessment grade	Final qualification grade
P P P P P P	P
M M M M M M	M
D D D D D D	D*

- The lookup table indicates that:
 - Distinction* is only awarded on the basis of 6 Distinction unit grades;
 - both Merit and Distinction are awarded with only 3 of the 6 units at that grade (and the remainder at the grade below).
- The L2 specification identifies overall qualification grading descriptors, which “should be used as a guide to show what we’d expect to see overall from a candidate at each grade”. However, since grading is only judgemental at the unit level, the descriptors presented below are purely for illustrative purposes:

Not Yet Achieved
The candidate will not have met all the assessment criteria and will not have enough work or evidence of progress available to allow a valid judgement to be made.
Pass
To achieve a Pass grade the candidate will be able to meet all the requirements as set out in the assessment criteria for each unit. The candidate will make some effort to apply knowledge, and will have a basic understanding of key concepts but may not be able to make links between them. The candidate will have a general understanding of processes, resources, techniques and materials but there may be some minor errors or one major error in application. The candidate's evidence will show some degree of planning, organisational and investigatory skills but may be lacking in structure. The candidate will have shown that they can complete the tasks to the minimum standard.
Merit
To achieve a Merit grade the candidate will be able to meet all the requirements as set out in the assessment criteria for each unit to a good standard. The candidate will demonstrate a confident level of ability in their application of knowledge and skills and will have a clear understanding of key concepts, making some links between them and giving reasons for their choices. The candidate will have a clear understanding of processes, resources, techniques and materials with few errors in application. The candidate's evidence will show planning, organisation and investigatory skills in a clear and logical way. The candidate will have been able to complete the tasks in a manner exceeding the minimum standard.

Cross-level analysis

- Note that the NCFE *Level 3* Diploma in Skills for Business has exactly the same structure, with 10 parallel units.
- L3 Unit 10, below, parallels L2 Unit 10, above. Notice how the command verbs in corresponding AC tend to be more sophisticated at L3. For example:
 - L2 1.1 'state' why it is important vs. L3 1.1 'explain' why;
 - L2 1.2/3 'state' the risks vs. L3 1.3 'compare' the risks.

Grading descriptors – Unit 10 Respond to change in a business environment (D/505/9706)

Assessment criteria	Pass	Merit	Distinction
1.1 Explain why it is important for a business to change	The candidate will explain why it is important for a business to change	The candidate will explain in detail why it is important for a business to change	The candidate will give a sophisticated explanation of why it is important for a business to change
1.2 Analyse the positive and negative effects of change on a selected business	The candidate will analyse the positive and negative effects of change on a selected business	The candidate will analyse the positive and negative effects of change on a selected business, demonstrating critical judgement	The candidate will analyse the positive and negative effects of change on a selected business, demonstrating critical judgement and drawing conclusions
1.3 Compare the risks of slow and rapid change within a business	The candidate will compare the risks of slow and rapid change within a business	The candidate will compare the risks of slow and rapid change within a business, demonstrating critical judgement	The candidate will compare the risks of slow and rapid change within a business, demonstrating critical judgement and drawing conclusions
1.4 Compare the benefits of slow and rapid change within a business	The candidate will compare the benefits of slow and rapid change within a business	The candidate will compare the benefits of slow and rapid change within a business, demonstrating critical judgement	The candidate will compare the benefits of slow and rapid change within a business, demonstrating critical judgement and drawing conclusions
2.1 Explain why people respond positively to change in a business	The candidate will explain why people respond positively to change in a business	The candidate will give a convincing explanation as to why people respond positively to change in a business	No Distinction for this AC
2.2 Explain why people respond negatively to change in a business	The candidate will explain why people respond negatively to change in a business	The candidate will give a convincing explanation as to why people respond negatively to change in a business	No Distinction for this AC
3.1 Identify support mechanisms for self and others during change process	The candidate will identify support mechanisms for self and others during change process	The candidate will perceptively identify support mechanisms for self and others during change process	No Distinction for this AC

- Note also how this particular L3 unit (Unit 10) is similar to its corresponding L2 unit (Unit 10) in its unconventional use of a command verb progression to differentiate grades. Indeed, where 'critical judgement' indicates Distinction at L2, it indicates Merit at L3. For the L3 Distinction grading descriptor, critical judgement is supplemented with 'drawing conclusions'. Adopting this approach to differentiating proficiency seems to suggest that Level 2 Distinction is somehow comparable to Level 3 Merit (on this unit, at least).

RSL Level 3 Diploma for Music Practitioners¹⁴

Overview

- This is the non-performance table version of this qualification.
- “This suite of qualifications has been designed to provide vocationally relevant courses in popular music aimed at beginners through to semi-professionals, which allow for both direct progression into the industry and/or progression to a higher level of study.”
- The Diploma is one of a suite of five L3 qualifications (Certificate, Extended Certificate, Subsidiary Diploma, Diploma and Extended Diploma). The qualification is awarded at three levels (L1 to L3).
- Learners take one Core unit and additional Optional units (5, 10 or 15 credits) until a minimum of 120 credits has been completed. Learners specialise within one of four pathways: Performance, Technology, Business, Composition.

Assessment

- The qualification is 100% internally assessed.
- “A wide variety of assessment methodologies are used in the delivery of these programmes. Tutors are encouraged to find the mode of assessment, which best suits the learner in terms of their strengths.”

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level (P/M/D).
- Each unit typically specifies a single LO, with associated AC (eg 4).
- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied for a Pass).
- Each AC tends to be associated with a particular task, and each task performance is graded. The overall grade for the LO corresponds to the ‘average’ of its AC grades (assuming a basic Pass on all AC).
- “If the work submitted for a learning outcome is not all of an equal standard, the assessor team must select the grade corresponding to the majority of the work submitted for that learning outcome (ie the average grade).”
- A table within the specification illustrates this approach, eg
 - (LO with 2 AC) Pass + Merit = Merit overall (higher);
 - (LO with 3 AC) Pass + Merit + Distinction = Merit overall (average);
 - (LO with 3 AC) Pass + Distinction + Distinction = Distinction overall (majority).

¹⁴ Accessed from: <https://www.rslawards.com/vocational/vocational-syllabus/> (Non-Performance Tables zip files. Analysis based on version: September 2017)

- The following illustration of grading criteria relates to Unit 344:

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The learner can:

- 1.1 Explain the marketing strategy for an agreed product including a range of physical and digital promotional devices
- 1.2 Implement a promotional campaign, via appropriate promotional methodology (e.g. The Promotion Mix), for an agreed musical product or service
- 1.3 Produce a Promotion E-Portfolio for the campaign in 1.2 that identifies the marketplace and appropriate audience for the product and includes examples of promotional materials
- 1.4 Evaluate learning from the unit by creating a career focused action plan that highlights how they might apply the promotion techniques learned to their own products in the future

GRADING CRITERIA

Unclassified

A learner not on course to achieve this unit might:

- 1.1 Provide insufficient evidence to explain the marketing strategy for an agreed product, giving an insufficient range of physical and digital promotional devices
- 1.2 Provide insufficient evidence to implement a promotional campaign, via appropriate promotional methodology (e.g. The Promotion Mix), for an agreed musical product or service
- 1.3 Provide insufficient evidence of a Promotion E-Portfolio for the campaign in 1.2, failing to identify the marketplace and appropriate audience for the product and include examples of promotional materials
- 1.4 Provide insufficient evidence of skills to evaluate learning from the unit by creating a career focused action plan that highlights how they might apply the promotion techniques learned to their own products in the future

Pass

To achieve a pass, all learners must:

- 1.1 Explain the marketing strategy for an agreed product including a range of physical and digital promotional devices
- 1.2 Implement a promotional campaign, via appropriate promotional methodology (e.g. The Promotion Mix), for an agreed musical product or service
- 1.3 Produce a Promotion E-Portfolio for the campaign in 1.2 that identifies the marketplace and appropriate audience for the product and includes examples of promotional materials
- 1.4 Evaluate learning from the unit by creating a career focused action plan that highlights how they might apply the promotion techniques learned to their own products in the future

Merit

To achieve a merit, learners should:

- 1.1 Explain with clarity and detail the marketing strategy for an agreed product including a range of physical and digital promotional devices
- 1.2 Implement a clear and detailed promotional campaign, via appropriate promotional methodology (e.g. The Promotion Mix), for an agreed musical product or service
- 1.3 Produce a clear and detailed Promotion E-Portfolio for the campaign in 1.2 that identifies and explains the marketplace and appropriate audience for the product and includes a wide range of examples of promotional materials
- 1.4 Evaluate learning from the unit by creating a clear and detailed career focused action plan that highlights how they might apply the promotion techniques learned to their own products in the future

Distinction

To achieve a distinction, learners should:

- 1.1 Comprehensively explain the marketing strategy for an agreed product including a range of physical and digital promotional devices
- 1.2 Implement a rigorous promotional campaign, via appropriate promotional methodology (e.g. The Promotion Mix), for an agreed musical product or service
- 1.3 Produce a comprehensive Promotion E-Portfolio for the campaign in 1.2 that identifies the marketplace and appropriate audience for the product and includes examples of promotional materials
- 1.4 Evaluate learning from the unit by creating a perceptive and rigorous career focused action plan that comprehensively explains how they might apply the promotion techniques learned to their own products in the future

- As highlighted above, the AC grades are differentiated in terms of increasing performance quality. For example:
 - 'explain' (Pass) vs. 'explain with clarity' (Merit) vs. 'comprehensively explain' (Distinction).

- The specification describes how unit/AC grading criteria are 'banded' to classify candidates' performances in terms of:
 - adequacy (Pass);
 - effectiveness (Merit); or
 - excellence (Distinction).
- Unit grades are converted into qualification points when input into the RSL Registration and Assessment site.
- Points are allocated per 5-credit portion. The table below illustrates how the allocation process works:

Cred.				Unit grade			Scaled points			
	5-credits			D	M	P	D	M	P	
15	3			4	3	2	12	9	6	
15	3			4	3	2	12	9	6	
15	3			4	3	2	12	9	6	
15	3			4	3	2	12	9	6	
10	2			4	3	2	8	6	4	
10	2			4	3	2	8	6	4	
10	2			4	3	2	8	6	4	
10	2			4	3	2	8	6	4	
10	2			4	3	2	8	6	4	
5	1			4	3	2	4	3	2	
5	1			4	3	2	4	3	2	
120							96	72	48	
							%	100	75	50

- The following thresholds are used to calculate the qualification grade, having converted the total point score to a % of maximum point score (ie % of 96 in the above example):

Level 3

94%–100% Distinction*

87%–93% Distinction

63%–86% Merit

50%–62% Pass

Cross-level comparison

- Across the 3 levels of this qualification, there are related, although not perfectly parallel, units. For instance, there are three units that relate specifically to a Digital Audio Workstation. The LOs do not differ greatly across levels:
 - Unit 114, L1, Using a Keyboard with a DAW – Internal

- “Through completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
1. Demonstrate theoretical knowledge and practical skills in using a keyboard to input music in real time into a Digital Audio Workstation”
- Unit 229, L2, Using a DAW and Controller Keyboard – Internal
“Through completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
 1. Describe the key elements in the operation of DAW software including the components within a project
 2. Understand how to configure a keyboard controller with a DAW
 3. Use a keyboard to input music in real time into a DAW”
 - Unit 384, L3, Using a Keyboard with a DAW – Internal
“Through completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:
 1. Understand how to configure a keyboard controller with a DAW
 2. Use a keyboard to input music in real time into a DAW, evaluating the results and their own skill development”
- The AC differ somewhat across levels. There appears to be some differentiation on the basis of a progression of command verbs; although the distinctions are far from clear-cut.

L1 unit:

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The learner can:

- 1.1 Use keyboard skills to input the following in real time into a Digital Audio Workstation:
 - a. A simple 8 bar 4/4 rhythm, using a drum kit or percussion patch, using at least 3 drum sounds e.g. kick drum, snare and hi hats
 - b. A simple 8 bar progression using major and minor chords, to work with the above rhythm track
 - c. A simple 8 bar major or minor scale-based melody line, riff or bass line to complement a and b
 - d. Demonstrate use of effective quantisation in the software to correct timing inaccuracies in a, b & c
- 1.2 Identify the key musical and technical elements involved in creating the music in 1.1
- 1.3 Outline strengths and areas for further improvement

L2 unit:

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The learner can:

- 1.1 **Define** the main features and functions of DAW software, including:
 - a. The edit windows (arrange window, the mixer, audio and MIDI editing pages etc.)
 - b. The main file types used, e.g. audio, midi, patches
 - c. Sound sources
 - d. Software instruments and effects
 - e. Automation
 - f. Routing techniques
- 2.1 **Configure** a keyboard to a DAW using an appropriate interface (e.g. USB etc.) and perform the following:
 - a. Adjust the pitch bend settings/amount
 - b. Map the modulation wheel to a specified parameter
- 3.1 **Apply** keyboard skills to:
 - a. Construct two 8th note-based rhythms/beats, in real time, using a drum or percussion patch in a DAW, one in simple time, one in compound time
 - b. Create a chord progression to fit rhythmically with one of the beats created
 - c. Create a bass line or melody line harmonically appropriate for the progression created
 - d. Play the chord progression and the bass/melody line into a DAW using appropriate patches, in real time
- 3.2 **Edit** the parts created in 2.2 and 2.3 for errors/inaccuracies, to include the following:
 - a. Quantisation at the correct resolution
 - b. Erasure of unwanted notes, as required
- 3.3 Using the controllers configured in 2.1, **apply and record** automation using the pitch bend and/or modulation wheels in real time to one track
- 3.4 **Assess** strengths and areas requiring further development in relation to using DAW software and a controller keyboard

L3 unit:

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The learner can:

- 1.1 **Configure** a keyboard controller to a DAW using an appropriate interface and map the following:
 - a. Volume or Filter envelope (at least one envelope parameter)
 - b. Filter Resonance
 - c. Filter Cut-off
 - d. LFO rate and amount
 - 2.1 **Apply** keyboard skills to accurately construct 8-bar rhythms/beats in a DAW in real time, in the following time signatures and feels:
 - a. 4/4 shuffle
 - b. 4/4 funk or break beat
 - c. 6/8 swing
 - d. 7/8 straight
 - 2.2 **Develop** 8-bar bass lines and rhythmic chord progressions for two of the beats created in 2.1, playing both into a DAW in real time
 - 2.3 **Evaluate** the learning during this process, identifying strengths and areas requiring further development, and assess how this will support learning in other areas
- At all three levels, the grading criteria differentiate in essentially the same way, by distinguishing between adequacy (Pass) vs. effectiveness (Merit) vs. excellence (Distinction).
 - The three sets of Distinction criteria, below, illustrate this similarity:

L1 unit:

Distinction

To achieve a distinction, learners should:

- 1.1 Demonstrate **highly proficient** keyboard skills to input in real time into a DAW: a simple 8 bar 4/4 rhythm, using a drum kit or percussion patch, using at least 3 drum sounds e.g. kick drum, snare and hi hats; a simple 8 bar progression using major and minor chords, to work with the above rhythm track; a simple 8 bar major or minor scale-based melody line, riff or bass line to complement a and b; demonstrate use of highly effective quantisation in the software to correct timing inaccuracies in a, b & c. Any minor errors and inaccuracies that occur will be negligible
- 1.2 **Identify with clarity** and insight the key musical and technical elements involved in creating the music in 1.1. There will be clear evidence of an excellent understanding of the theory and processes involved in creating the music
- 1.3 **Insightfully outline** their strengths and areas for further improvement in using a keyboard with a DAW. There will be clear consideration of strategies for making improvements

L2 unit:

Distinction

To achieve a distinction, learners should:

- 1.1 **Comprehensively** define the main features and functions of DAW software, including: the main edit windows; the main file types used; sound sources; software instruments and effects; automation; routing techniques
- 2.1 Show **accomplished** skills in configuring controller keyboard to a DAW using an appropriate interface, adjust the pitch bend settings/amount and map the modulation wheel to a specified parameter
- 3.1 Show **accomplished** skills in using a controller keyboard to construct two, very strong 8th note-based rhythms/beats in a DAW, in real time, using a drum or percussion patch, one in simple time, one in compound time; create a very strong chord progression to fit very well rhythmically with one of the beats created; create a very strong bass line or melody line harmonically appropriate for the progression created; play the chord progression and the bass/melody line accurately, with no errors, into a DAW using appropriate patches, in real time
- 3.2 Show **accomplished** skills in editing the parts created in 2.2 and 2.3 for errors and/or inaccuracies, including quantisation at the correct resolution and the erasure of unwanted notes, as required
- 3.3 Show **accomplished** skills in editing the parts created in 2.2 and 2.3 to apply and record automation to one track using the pitch bend and/or modulation wheels, in real time
- 3.4 Provide a **comprehensive, insightful** assessment of their own strengths and areas requiring further development in relation to using DAW software and a controller keyboard. There will be clear strategies for further improvement in evidence

L3 unit:

Distinction

To achieve a distinction, learners must

- 1.1 Show **accomplished** skills and a high degree of efficiency in configuring a keyboard controller to a DAW using an appropriate interface and map the following:
 - a. Volume or Filter envelope (at least one envelope parameter)
 - b. Filter Resonance
 - c. Filter Cut-off
 - d. LFO rate and amount
- 2.1 Apply **highly developed and comprehensive** keyboard skills to accurately construct 8-bar rhythms/beats in a DAW in real time, in the following time signatures and feels:
 - a. 4/4 shuffle
 - b. 4/4 funk or break beat
 - c. 6/8 swing
 - d. 7/8 straight
- 2.2 Develop **accomplished** and highly effective 8-bar bass lines and rhythmic chord progressions for two of the beats created in 2.1, playing both into a DAW in real time
- 2.3 Provide a **comprehensive and insightful evaluation** of the learning during this process, identifying strengths and areas requiring further development, and rigorously assess how this will support learning in other areas

VTCT Level 3 Extended Diploma in Barbering¹⁵

Overview

- “The VTCT Level 3 Extended Diploma in Barbering is a tech level qualification aimed at 16-18 learners who are in a full-time Level 3 education programme and wish to pursue a career as an employed and/or self-employed senior barber or senior men’s hairdresser/stylist.”
- “Learners who achieve this qualification are eligible to become a State Registered Barber (SRB) with The Hair Council and/or join the British Barbers’ Association.”
- 6 Mandatory L3 units (inc. Health & Safety unit), plus 4 optional units (from 10).

Assessment

- Mandatory Health & Safety unit (x1) – L3
 - Assessed via terminal Examination + Synoptic assessment [see below]
- Mandatory units (x5) – all L3
 - Assessed via terminal Examination + Synoptic assessment [see below]
 - Also assessed via unit practical assessments – “Externally set, internally marked and subject to external verification.”
 - Unit service portfolio – “Externally set and internally marked. Subject to external quality assurance monitoring.” [Prior to unit practical assessments. These are purely formative; no summative assessment.]
- Optional units (x4) – 9 at L3 (1 at L2)
 - Assessed only via unit portfolio of evidence – “Internally set, internally marked and subject to external verification. Relates only to optional units and includes evidence which demonstrates achievement of all learning outcomes and assessment criteria.”
- Terminal assessments
 - Terminal examinations (x2) – “Externally set and externally marked examinations. Overarching examinations that assess knowledge and understanding from the breadth of mandatory units” (90/70 mins, 70/50 marks; m/c, short-, and long-answer)
 - Terminal synoptic assessment (x1) – “Externally set, internally marked and subject to external verification. Comprises a complete service which assesses the application of knowledge, understanding and skills from across the breadth of mandatory units.”

¹⁵ Accessed from:

<https://qualifications.vtct.org.uk/finder/qualfinder/1Qualification%20Specification/HB3ED2.pdf> (Version 14). Additional information on the Design Rationale for the suite of Technical Qualifications accessed from:

<https://qualifications.vtct.org.uk/finder/docs/common/Technical%20Qualifications%20-%20Design%20rationale.pdf> (Version 10).

- “VTCT will provide marking templates for internal assessments to support consistent marking, and importantly, the consistent capture of sufficient, auditable performance evidence for quality assurance.”
- The terminal synoptic assessment is designed to cover the same ground as the LOs/AC identified for the separate unit assessments, although it focuses on different criteria. It requires the integration of applied knowledge and skills from across the mandatory units, set in a realistic employment environment; focusing on assessing overarching professional skills, rather than discrete technical skills (which are assessed, more discretely, in the unit practical assessments).

Grading

- The graded assessments are graded slightly differently:
 - Practical assessments for Mandatory units (x5) – Pass/Merit/Distinction [50% overall grade weight];
 - Examinations (x2) – Low Pass, High Pass, Low Merit, High Merit, Distinction, Distinction* [30% overall grade weight];
 - Synoptic assessment (x1) – Pass/Merit/Distinction [20% overall grade weight].
- Only graded Mandatory units/assessments contribute to the overall qualification grade.
- For the ungraded portfolio of evidence – for each of the Optional units – all criteria need to be satisfied for the award of the passing grade.
- For each graded practical assessment, all criteria need to be satisfied for the award of the passing grade, as well as for the award of all higher grades: “graded practical assessments at the unit level are assessed by an analytical rubric which assesses applied knowledge and technical skills extensively, using detailed and comprehensive graded assessment criteria.”
- The grading criteria for each unit reflect the following general principles:

All practical mandatory units are graded. Employers have identified mandatory units as those which contain the primary practical skills and higher order cognitive skills required for employment.

- At the **pass grade**, the key theme is **proficient** technical skills and safe performance, which will meet the **minimum industry standards** of practice.
- At the **merit grade**, the emphasis is on **excellent** technical skills and techniques, **organisational skills or communication skills**, where these skills are deemed to be of seminal importance to employers, in a particular context.
- At the **distinction grade**, where a finished product is an output of the practical activity, **mastery of professional techniques**, demonstrated via product evidence, is always an essential component of the criteria, as are **higher order cognitive skills** such as an ability to reflect upon and evaluate one’s own performance and to justify the methods and techniques chosen.

The grading model used is analytical, non-compensatory and hurdle based.

- Note that Distinction is described (in the above descriptor) as requiring “mastery” of professional techniques, as well as higher order cognitive skills.
- There is a strong mastery requirement for this qualification, requiring mastery at the level of component assessments, not simply at the unit level: “To be awarded this qualification learners must achieve a Pass (or higher) grade in: all mandatory units; all selected optional units; the external examinations; the graded synoptic assessment.”
- Note the ‘tick-box’ approach to evidencing each of the grading criteria on this mandatory unit (UHB139M):

Learners must meet all pass criteria to achieve a pass grade.

Pass Criteria	✓
LO4 Be able to prepare for client consultation	
P1 - Ensure the consultation is conducted in a safe and hygienic environment	<input type="radio"/>
P2 - Prepare and utilise client records	<input type="radio"/>
LO5 Be able to provide client consultation	
P3 - Conduct an analysis of hair, skin and scalp	<input type="radio"/>
P4 - Conduct all relevant hair tests	<input type="radio"/>
P5 - Identify factors which may limit or affect the desired outcome	<input type="radio"/>
P6 - Discuss the findings of the hair analysis with the client and make recommendations	<input type="radio"/>
P7 - Provide homecare advice to the client	<input type="radio"/>
P8 - Maintain accurate client records	<input type="radio"/>

Learners must meet all pass Criteria and all merit criteria to achieve a merit grade.

Merit Criteria	✓
M1 - Adapt and tailor interpersonal communication with the client	<input type="radio"/>
M2 - Adapt and modify the proposed treatment plan based on information elicited from the client	<input type="radio"/>
M3 - Relate the questions and information provided during the consultation specifically to the client’s individual needs	<input type="radio"/>

Learners must meet all pass criteria, all merit criteria and all distinction criteria to achieve a distinction grade.

Distinction Criteria	✓
D1 - Evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation	○

- For the graded synoptic assessment, an holistic – and explicitly compensatory – grading judgement is required:
 - “Assessors must observe learner performance and assign a single grade based on an overall judgement of the complete service provided. Judgement must be made against specified [characteristics] that define the Pass, Merit and Distinction grades. Assessors must not attempt to assign a grade to each and every task, instead they must weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of the service provided as a whole and decide on which grade best reflects the learner’s overall performance.”
 - “Grade [characteristics] are presented in a holistic rubric to support an overarching grading decision based on performance across the whole vocational area. Grade characteristics specifically focus on the grading of those components most valued by employers”
- The Design Rationale document (which outlines principles which apply across all of the new Technical Qualifications) explains that the holistic grading criteria for the synoptic assessment are designed to distinguish between differing levels of professional practice:
 - Pass = customer satisfaction;
 - Merit = customer satisfaction + development of the business;
 - Distinction = customer satisfaction + development of the business and personal/career development (becoming a reflective practitioner).
- These holistic, ‘best fit’ criteria are reproduced below:

Use the grading rubric below, to award the learner a grade for the synoptic assessment.

All or most of the characteristics must be achieved to award the given grade
Characteristics of a Pass
<p>The learner carried out a complete barbering service which satisfied the essential requirements of the client and mostly aligned with the consultation. The learner produced a cut and finish, and trimmed/cut facial hair using suitable methods and techniques, including compliance with health and safety and product specifications. The finished look was suitable for the client. The learner communicated with the client to check expectations, maintain positive personal contact and conclude the service to the client's satisfaction. The learner completed the service within the scheduled time, whilst maintaining a clean and tidy work area.</p> <p>The learner demonstrated sufficient knowledge and understanding throughout the assessment.</p> <p>The learner explained some aspects of the service, with reasons for the decisions taken and made suggestions for improvement to personal performance.</p>
Characteristics of a Merit
<p>The learner systematically carried out the agreed services which fully aligned with the consultation and employer expectations. The learner produced a cut and finish of equal quality to achieve a pleasing overall result. The learner used a range of techniques proficiently which were suitably tailored for the client. The learner used communication skills to establish and maintain a positive relationship with the client throughout. The learner maintained customer service, client comfort and confidence. The learner managed time, materials and equipment effectively whilst maintaining a safe working area. The learner discussed methods and products for future hair care, including the services and products available from the business. The learner demonstrated awareness of environmental sustainability with some eco-friendly measures employed.</p> <p>The learner demonstrated a broad and detailed knowledge and understanding throughout the assessment.</p> <p>The learner justified most aspects of the service given relative to the client's needs and wants, with reasons for the decisions and actions taken. The learner identified key strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement.</p>
Characteristics of a Distinction
<p>The learner systematically and seamlessly integrated services, which fully aligned with the consultation and exceeded employer expectations. The learner produced a result that demonstrated equal mastery in cut and finish, which delighted the client. The learner used a range of techniques with a high degree of skill, confidence, flow and fluidity that were suitably tailored for the client. The learner achieved a finish that demonstrated mastery, creativity and innovation. The learner used a communication strategy that was courteous, considerate and attuned to the clients responses, which established a positive relationship with the client throughout. The learner provided a high degree of customer service and actively sought opportunities to make the client feel special. The learner managed time, the work area, equipment and materials for optimal safety, efficiency and effectiveness. The learner used strategies to provide advice and guidance, and promote and sell products and services, discussing the relative advantages and disadvantages of future options; demonstrating a strong commercial focus. The learner demonstrated commitment to environmental sustainability employing eco-friendly measures throughout.</p> <p>The learner demonstrated a broad and comprehensive knowledge and understanding throughout the assessment.</p> <p>The learner reflected upon and justified all aspects of the service, covering the options available, and the reasons for the decisions and actions taken. The learner explained strengths and</p>

- “The score (marks) achieved in the external examinations will be converted into points which contribute to the overall qualification grade. A notional examination grade will be given to learners to indicate their level of performance in each examination.”
 - For example, for the 70 mark exam (Ex1): “Fail = 0 points; Low Pass = 807 points; High Pass = 853 points; Low Merit = 899 points; High Merit = 945 points; Distinction = 991 points; Distinction* = 1037 points”
- Points allocated to the non-exam assessments are as follows:

VTCT product code	Unit title/assessment method	Points per grade		
		Pass	Merit	Distinction
UCO28M	Health and safety in the salon	N/A	N/A	N/A
UHB139M	Hairdressing consultation	420	480	540
UHB132M	Cutting hair using barbering techniques	630	720	810
UHB130M	Creating facial hair shapes	420	480	540
UHB148M	Shaving services	630	720	810
UHB144M	Men's styling services	140	160	180
HB3ED2.SYN	Graded synoptic assessment	896	1024	1152

- The following qualification grade thresholds are applied:
 - Pass – 4480 points;
 - Merit – 4907 points;
 - Distinction – 5334 points;
 - Distinction * – 5547 points.
- A grade-calculating facility is available on the website, which centres can use to aggregate candidates' points from each of the assessments (no additional weighting is applied during the aggregation process).

Cross-level analysis

- The L2 Extended Diploma comprises units that are clearly structurally and professionally simpler than the L3 Extended Diploma. It includes the following mandatory units:

VTCT product code	Unit title	Level	GL	Unit number
Mandatory units				
UHB169M	Advise and consult with clients	2	35	A/615/0802
UHB177M	Create basic outlines and detailing in hair	2	50	M/615/0814
UHB152M	Clipper maintenance	3	20	T/615/0815
UHB179M	Cut facial hair to shape using basic techniques	2	45	F/615/0817
UHB180M	Cut men's hair using basic techniques	2	85	F/615/0820
UHB181M	Dry and style men's hair	2	20	J/615/0821
UHB151M	Hair tonics	3	20	D/615/0825
UCO34M	Health, safety and hygiene	2	30	Y/615/0807
UHB175M	Shampoo, condition and treat the hair and scalp	2	25	D/615/0811

- The grading criteria seem also to be correspondingly simpler. For instance, the clipper maintenance unit specifies:

Learners must meet all Pass Criteria to achieve a pass grade.

Pass Criteria	✓
LO4 Be able to prepare for clipper maintenance	
P1 - Prepare and check the area, products, tools and equipment prior to the service	<input type="radio"/>
LO5 Be able to carry out clipper maintenance	
P2 - Select products, tools and equipment to carry out clipper maintenance	<input type="radio"/>
P3 - Use safe and hygienic working methods throughout the service	<input type="radio"/>
P4 - Use products, tools and equipment to maintain clippers	<input type="radio"/>
P5 - Use a combination of techniques to achieve clipper maintenance	<input type="radio"/>

Learners must meet all Pass Criteria and all Merit Criteria to achieve a merit grade.

Merit Criteria	✓
M1 - Use products, tools and equipment in a logical sequence to perform clipper maintenance	<input type="radio"/>

Learners must meet all Pass Criteria, all Merit Criteria and all Distinction Criteria to achieve a distinction grade.

Distinction Criteria	✓
D1 - Explain the reasons for the safety procedures used when maintaining clippers	<input type="radio"/>

- Note how the Distinction criterion, here, appears to be at a lower command verb level than for the L3 qualification, ie 'explain' (cf 'evaluate').
- The holistic rubric for the synoptic assessment is different for L2, as illustrated below in the Pass descriptor:

Use the grading rubric below to award the learner a grade for the synoptic assessment.

All or most of the characteristics must be achieved to award the given grade
Characteristics of a Pass
<p>The learner set their work area up independently and demonstrated satisfactory personal presentation. The learner demonstrated confident communication and behaviour using suitable consultation techniques to identify client needs and service options. The consultation included a contra-indication check, medical history and client service objectives. The learner explained and agreed the service outcomes with the client. The learner completed a hair analysis. The learner carried out a complete cut, beard trim and finish without support, using a combination of methods and techniques for the client. The learner complied with health and safety guidelines and product instructions. The learner provided basic aftercare which included a product recommendation. Throughout the cut, beard trim and finish the learner maintained a clean, tidy work area and prepared for the next service. All aspects of the service aligned with customer satisfaction. The learner completed the client record card/file following the service.</p> <p>The learner demonstrated basic knowledge and understanding throughout the assessment and outlined the reasons for service choice and decisions made. The learner made suggestions for improvement to personal performance. Assessors may use the Professional Discussion Record provided to capture evidence that has not naturally occurred or been observed during the assessment.</p>

AQA Level 3 Certificate in Applied Business¹⁶

Overview

- “This qualification is aimed at 16–18 learners who are in full-time Level 3 education and who wish to progress to higher education and/or pursue a career in business and/or business-related subjects (eg management, finance, entrepreneurship).”
- It is an Applied General qualification and is generally taught over three terms (190 TQT, 180 GLH).

Assessment

- Three mandatory units:
 - Unit 1 – External examination (90 mins, 60 marks, m/c, short-/long-answer)
 - 4 ‘Assessment Outcomes’.
 - Unit 2 – Practical assignment (internally assessed)
 - 4 ‘Performance Outcomes’.
 - Unit 3 – Practical assignment (externally assessed – AQA-set, controlled administration, AQA-marked – synoptic)
 - 4 ‘Performance Outcomes’.

Grading

- Grading occurs first at the unit level (P/M/D).
- No assessment/grading criteria are specified for Unit 1 (examination).
- For both Unit 2 and Unit 3, 25 separate Performance Criteria are specified:
 - Pass – 10 criteria;
 - Merit – 9 criteria;
 - Distinction – 6 criteria.
- In effect, these are 25-mark units, with a mark awarded for satisfying each criterion.
- However, to be awarded a M (or D) mark, the corresponding P (or P/M) mark must also have been awarded.
- The units are graded on the basis of how many of the 25 grading criteria have been satisfied (‘total criteria’):
 - Pass threshold – 10;
 - Merit threshold – 15;
 - Distinction threshold – 20.
- This permits compensation at the unit grade level, even for the passing grade. For instance, achieving the Unit 3 PO4-P9 performance criterion at Merit (ie P9 and M8) would allow you to fail the PO1-P1 performance criterion entirely.

¹⁶ Accessed from: <http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/resources/business/specifications/AQA-1830-SP-2016.PDF> (Version: Version 4.1 October 2017)

- The following grading criteria are specified for Unit 2 (only PO1/2 presented below):

Performance outcomes	Pass	Merit	Distinction
	To achieve a pass the learner must evidence that they can:	In addition to the pass criteria, to achieve a merit the learner must evidence that they can:	In addition to fulfilling the pass and merit criteria, to achieve a distinction the learner must evidence that they can:
PO1 Understand business organisations	P1 Outline two market opportunities for a business and the benefits of using vision statements and aims.		
	P2 Describe the form of ownership and the interests of four stakeholder groups of a business.	M1 Explain how two factors have determined the form of ownership of the business.	
	P3 Outline the organisation of functional activities of a business.	M2 Explain how two factors have affected the organisation of the business's functional activities.	
PO2 Investigate business advantages	P4 Outline the methods of recruitment used by a business for one managerial and one supervisory position.	M3 Analyse the effectiveness of the business's recruitment.	
	P5 Describe the organisational type of a business.	M4 Explain how the business's organisational type could have helped it to exploit market opportunities, operate efficiently and motivate staff.	D1 Evaluate the suitability of the business's organisational type.
	P6 Outline three ways in which a business could hold a competitive advantage.	M5 Analyse the factors affecting the ability of the business to hold a competitive advantage.	D2 Evaluate the extent to which the business holds a competitive advantage.

- The following grading criteria are specified for Unit 3 (only PO1/4 presented below):

Grading criteria:

Performance outcomes	Pass	Merit	Distinction
	To achieve a pass the learner must evidence that they can:	In addition to the pass criteria, to achieve a merit the learner must evidence that they can:	In addition to fulfilling the pass and merit criteria, to achieve a distinction the learner must evidence that they can:
PO1 Understand enterprising behaviour	P1 Outline examples of enterprising behaviour and market opportunities. (SA Unit 2 PO1)		
	P2 Outline examples of innovation, risk and uncertainty for personal enterprise. (SA Unit 2 PO1)	M1 Explain how innovation, risk and uncertainty can affect the benefits gained from personal enterprise.	
	P3 Outline own personality type and skills relevant to engaging in enterprising behaviour.	M2 Explain how own personality type and skills affect the ways in which you might engage in enterprising behaviour.	D1 Judge the significance of own personality type and skills on the ways in which you will engage in enterprising behaviour.
PO4 Review the risks and uncertainties of personal enterprise	P9 Outline the risks and uncertainties of the personal enterprise. (SA Unit 1 AO1, 2, 4; Unit 2 PO4)	M8 Explain the potential impact of the risks and uncertainties on the personal enterprise.	D5 Judge the key risks and uncertainties facing the personal enterprise.
	P10 Outline contingencies for the risks and uncertainties of the personal enterprise. (SA Unit 2 PO4)	M9 Explain how support networks groups might help to implement the contingencies.	D6 Judge the importance of different support network groups for the effectiveness of the contingencies.
Total criteria for each grade	10	15	20

- Note this qualification's strong use of a progression of command verb challenge to differentiate between proficiency across grades (in relation to essentially the same performance criteria):
 - Pass – 'outline', 'describe', 'collect', 'collate';
 - Merit – 'explain', 'analyse';
 - Distinction – 'judge', 'evaluate', 'justify'.
- Unit marks (U1) and criteria/marks (U2/3) are converted into UMS points and aggregated; ensuring that the units are equally weighted in the overall grade.
- Note that each criterion/mark on an assignment counts as 4 UMS marks, which means that it is possible to achieve 100 UMS on all three units.
- Unit grade UMS boundaries are set at:

- Pass = x raw marks (U1), 10 criteria (U2/3) = 40 UMS;
- Merit = y raw marks (U1), 15 criteria (U2/3) = 60 UMS;
- Distinction = z raw marks (U1), 20 criteria (U2/3) = 80 UMS.
- The overall grade is contingent upon passing all three units. The following thresholds are applied:

Qualification grade	180 GLH (3 units) total: 300 UMS UMS points	360 GLH (6 units) total: 600 UMS UMS points	Grade boundary as percentage of total UMS
Distinction*	270–300	540–600	90
Distinction	240–269	480–539	80
Merit	180–239	360–479	60
Pass	120–179	240–359	40

- Note that the qualification Merit threshold is set at 180 UMS points, which is equivalent to a Merit on all three units. Similarly, the Distinction threshold corresponds to a Distinction on all three units. So these are high thresholds, in terms of unit grade profiles; although they do still permit an element of compensation, eg a P-M-D profile would be awarded Merit overall.

OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Diploma in Business (QCF)¹⁷

Overview

- This is one of the 2012 Cambridge Technicals – which were ‘interim reformed’ Applied General qualifications – for which there is now a revamped 2016 specification, which is aligned with DfE requirements for Applied Generals for 2018 performance tables (eg including external assessment).
- It sits within two suites of related Business qualifications (L2 and L3).
- It is “designed for learners aged 16-19 who want to study business where they can learn and be assessed in ways that are practical and relevant to the business industry. It is designed to give learners the transferable knowledge and skills to progress to higher education, an apprenticeship or to enter into employment.”
- It comprises 5 Mandatory L3 (10-credit) units, plus 7 Optional L3 (10-credit) units (from a total of 17 Optional L3 units).

Assessment

- Assessment is via “centre-devised assignments or tasks” which are also centre-assessed.
- “OCR has provided a model assignment for both Level 2 and Level 3. These are available to download from the OCR website and can be used as they are or tailored to the needs of learners. They can also be used as a benchmark for centres to devise their own assignments or tasks.”
- Centres are encouraged to use a range of assessment methods.
- “Learners should take responsibility for the development of their own portfolios [...] Learners should ensure their work is clearly presented, referenced and ordered to help in the assessment. Where evidence contributes to or fulfils more than one assessment criterion in one or more units, the learner should clearly cross-reference this evidence within their unit portfolio”

Grading

- All units are graded (P/M/D).
- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied; both for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied), and for the award of higher grades (eg all Merit criteria satisfied for Merit).
- For each unit, both LOs and grading criteria are specified. The grading criteria for Pass are the Assessment Criteria.

¹⁷ Accessed from: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/83118-centre-handbook.pdf> (Version: January 2017: This is version 2)

- The following example is from Unit 2:

Learning Outcome (LO)	Pass The assessment criteria are the pass requirements for this unit. The learner will:	Merit To achieve a merit the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to: The learner can:	Distinction To achieve a distinction the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
1 Know how human resources are managed	P1 describe the recruitment documentation used in a selected organisation	M1 analyse the recruitment documentation of a selected organisation	
	P2 describe the main employability and personal and communication skills required when applying for a specific job role		
2 Know the purpose of managing physical and technological resources	P3 describe the main physical and technological resources required in the operation of a selected organisation		
3 Know how to access sources of finance	P4 describe sources of internal and external finance for a selected business	M2 analyse the advantages and disadvantages of a range of different sources of finance for a selected business	D1 evaluate the best source of finance to meet the needs of a selected business
4 Be able to interpret financial statements	P5 interpret the contents of a trading and profit and loss account and balance sheet for a selected company		

- Merit and Distinction criteria are only specified for certain AC. In the above example, candidates only need to achieve a single Distinction criterion (on a single LO) to be awarded a Distinction on the unit overall, assuming that they have satisfied all 5 AC at Pass, and the 2 required Merit criteria.
- The grading criteria clearly reflect a progression in command verb challenge, which is apparent in the examples presented above and below. In both instances, the following distinctions are respected:
 - Pass – ‘describe’, ‘interpret’, ‘explain’;
 - Merit – ‘analyse’;
 - Distinction – ‘evaluate’.

- The following example is from Unit 1:

Learning Outcome (LO)	Pass	Merit	Distinction
The learner will:	The learner can:		
1 Know the range of different businesses and their ownership	P1 describe the type of business, purpose and ownership of two contrasting businesses	M1 analyse the type of business, purpose and ownership of two contrasting businesses.	D1 evaluate the effect of a selected business changing its ownership status
	P2 describe the different stakeholders who influence the purpose of two contrasting businesses		
2 Understand how businesses are organised to achieve their purposes	P3 describe how two businesses are organised		
	P4 explain how their style of organisation helps them to fulfil their purposes.		
3 Know the impact of the economic environment on businesses	P5 describe the influence of two contrasting economic environments on business activities within a selected organisation	M2 analyse the impact of changes in demand and supply on a selected business	D2 evaluate to what extent a selected business is likely to be affected by changes in the economic environment
4 Know how political, legal and social factors impact on business	P6 describe how political, legal and social factors are impacting upon the business activities of the selected organisations and their stakeholders.		

- However, it is also worth noting that this strict differentiation according to command verbs is not apparent in all of the units within this qualification, as the example below – from Unit 6 (LO2) – indicates:

2 Be able to present business information effectively	P2 present complex internal business information using three different methods appropriate to the user's needs	M1 analyse the advantages and disadvantages of three different methods used for communicating internal business information	D1 evaluate three different methods used to communicate complex internal business information and make recommendations for improvement
	P3 produce corporate communications		
	P4 evaluate the external corporate communications of an existing product or service	M2 recommend and justify improvements to the external corporate communications of an existing product or service	D2 produce an improved version of the corporate communications of an existing product or service

- This was an isolated example, though. Most of the units respected a similar command verb progression across grading criteria.
- Although all of the L3 units appear to have the same number of LOs, 4, they differ in terms of grading criteria. For instance:
 - Unit 6 – 7 AC (Pass criteria), 2 Merit criteria, and 2 Distinction criteria.
 - Unit 7 – 4 AC (Pass criteria), 3 Merit criteria, and 1 Distinction criterion.
 - Unit 16 – 6 AC (Pass criteria), 3 Merit criteria, and 2 Distinction criteria.
 - Unit 16 – 7 AC (Pass criteria), 2 Merit criteria, and 1 Distinction criterion.
- Points are awarded for each unit grade according to the following conversion:

Unit level	Points per credit		
	pass	merit	distinction
Level 3	7	8	9

- Qualification grades are awarded by applying the following thresholds:

Points range	Grade
1060 and above	D*D*
1030 – 1059	D*D
1000 – 1029	DD
960 – 999	DM
920 – 959	MM
880 – 919	MP
840 – 879	PP

- The following point scores correspond to straight unit:
 - Passes – 840;
 - Merits – 960;
 - Distinctions – 1080.
- Consequently:
 - all units need to be passed for the qualification Pass grade (PP);
 - 4 of the 12 units (1/3) need to be passed at Merit to achieve the basic Merit grade (MP), or alternatively just 2 Distinctions;
 - 8 of the 12 units (2/3) need to be passed at Merit to achieve the higher Merit grade (MM).

Cross-level analysis

- The L2 units contain different content from the L3 units, so cannot be compared directly.
- As for the L3 qualification, the L2 qualification grading criteria are also framed strongly in terms of a progression in command verb challenge. In fact, they are linked to exactly the same progression (see L2 Unit 1, below):
 - Pass – ‘describe’, ‘interpret’, ‘explain’;
 - Merit – ‘analyse’;
 - Distinction – ‘evaluate’.

Learning Outcome (LO)	Pass The assessment criteria are the pass requirements for this unit. The learner will:	Merit To achieve a merit the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	Distinction To achieve a distinction the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
1 Understand the purpose and ownership of business	P1 identify the purpose of four different business organisations		
	P2 describe the different types of business ownership, linking this to the size and scale of four different organisations	M1 analyse why a sole trader might want to become either a partnership or a private limited company	
	P3 explain how businesses are classified using local and national examples		
2 Understand the business context in which organisations operate	P4 outline the role of government in creating the business climate		
	P5 explain the characteristics of the local business environment	M2 analyse how the characteristics of the local business environment have changed in the last thirty years	D1 evaluate to what extent local business organisations have been affected by government influence and policies

OCR Level 3 Cambridge Technical Diploma in IT¹⁸

Overview

- This is one of the revamped 2016 Cambridge Technicals – now described as a Tech Level qualification – which is aligned with DfE requirements for Tech Levels for 2018 performance tables (eg including external assessment).
- It sits within two multi-qualification suites of L2 and L3 IT qualifications, which share units across qualifications (within levels).
- “This qualification is for learners 16 years old or over who prefer to study IT in a context that allows them to learn and be assessed in ways that are practical and relevant to the IT sector. [...] Learners could progress onto a Level 4 apprenticeship such as Network Engineer or Software Developer or into employment in the IT sector in areas such as technical support, digital technologies, application development or data analysis.”
- It comprises 4 Mandatory L3 units (2x90 GLH and 2x60 GLH), plus 7 Optional L3 units (60 GLH) from a total of 8 or 9 Optional L3 units (depending on pathway).

Assessment

- Assessment is a combination of external exam and internal assessment:
 - Core Mandatory Units (Units 1 & 2) – externally examined (90 mins, 80 marks, m/c, short-/long-answer);
 - Core Mandatory Units (Unit 3) – externally examined (60 mins, 60 marks, short-/long-answer);
 - Specialist Mandatory Unit (x1) – internally assessed assignment;
 - Specialist Optional Units (x7) – internally assessed assignment.
- “Each Learning Outcome (LO) in an externally assessed unit is given a percentage weighting. This reflects the size and demand of the content you need to cover and its contribution to the overall understanding of the unit. You’ll find the weightings for each LO in the externally assessed units.”
- “We provide model assignments for mandatory internally assessed units. These can be: used as they are to assess your learners; modified to suit your local or regional environment; used as a guide to help you design your own assignments.”
- “Evidence can come from a number of sources. The main ones are: outcomes of assignments, tasks or work-based activities (through projects or real work); observation of practice; responses to questions; witness statements. Learners should make sure their work is clearly presented, referenced and ordered to help in the assessment.”

¹⁸ Accessed from: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/258715-centre-handbook-diplomas.pdf> (Version: Version 4)

- “Every unit [...] will require the learner to apply knowledge from one or more of the mandatory units so that their ability to apply this knowledge synoptically can be assessed. That’s why we strongly recommend that learners complete Units 1 and 2 before undertaking assessment in other units and consider carefully where Unit 3 is to be deployed”

Grading

- All units are graded (P/M/D).
- Within each internally assessed unit, all AC need to be satisfied; both for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied), and for the award of higher grades (eg all Merit criteria satisfied for Merit).
- For each internally assessed unit, both LOs and grading criteria are specified. The grading criteria for Pass are the Assessment Criteria.

GRADING CRITERIA

LO	Pass	Merit	Distinction
	The assessment criteria are the Pass requirements for this unit.	To achieve a Merit the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the candidate is able to:	To achieve a Distinction the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the candidate is able to:
1. Understand how applications are designed	P1: Describe the key stages in application development	M1: Compare and contrast different application development models	
2. Be able to investigate potential solutions for application developments	P2*: Gather client requirements for an application solution <i>(*Synoptic assessment from Unit 1 Fundamentals of IT, Unit 2 Global information and Unit 3 Cyber security)</i>	M2: Conduct a feasibility study of different solutions for the client requirements	
3. Be able to generate designs for application solutions	P3: Illustrate the requirements, functioning, and designs of an application solution, using diagrams		D1: Justify design choices identifying the advantages and disadvantages of each
4. Be able to present application solutions to meet client and user requirements	P4: Present a proposed design solution to the identified client	M3: Negotiate adaptations with the identified client to refine the design solution	
	P5: Create a prototype based on the design solution		
	P6: Gather client and/or user feedback on the prototype		D2: Implement improvements based on the analysed client and/or user feedback

- The grading criteria charts share a common structure across the L3 units, with:
 - 4 LOs;
 - 5 or 6 Pass criteria (typically 6);
 - 2 or 3 Merit criteria (typically 3);
 - 2 or 3 Distinction criteria (typically 2).
- Note that for any particular AC, there might be either a Merit criterion, a Distinction criterion, neither, or both.
- From inspection of the grading criteria charts for units 4-12, it was apparent that a wide variety of command verbs are employed for each grade. Most prevalent are:
 - Pass – ‘describe’, ‘create’, ‘develop’, ‘explain’;

- Merit – ‘compare’, ‘explain’;
- Distinction – ‘evaluate’.
- There is a hint of differentiation by command verb challenge. However, this tendency is not clear-cut: some Distinction criteria use lower-level verbs, eg ‘prepare’, ‘use’; while some Pass criteria use higher-level verbs, eg ‘explain’, ‘evaluate’.
- Points are awarded for each unit grade according to the following conversion:

Unit GLH	Points table for units based on GLH			
	pass	merit	distinction	unclassified
30	7	8	9	0
60	14	16	18	0
90	21	24	27	0

- Qualification grades are awarded by applying the following thresholds:

Points range	Grade	
208 and above	Distinction* Distinction*	D*D*
204 – 207	Distinction* Distinction	D*D
200 – 203	Distinction Distinction	DD
192 – 199	Distinction Merit	DM
184 – 191	Merit Merit	MM
176 – 183	Merit Pass	MP
168 – 175	Pass Pass	PP
Below 168	Unclassified	U

- The following point scores correspond to straight unit:
 - Passes – 168;
 - Merits – 192;
 - Distinctions – 216.
- Consequently:
 - all units need to be passed for the Pass grade (PP);
 - 4 of the 11 (60 GLH) units (> 1/3) need to be passed at Merit to achieve the basic Merit grade (MP), or alternatively just 2 Distinctions;
 - 8 of the 11 (60 GLH) units (> 2/3) need to be passed at Merit to achieve the higher Merit grade (MM).
- The specification contains a final appendix (Appendix A) which contains qualification level grade descriptors. These are not used by assessors, for grading learners; however, they are used for developmental purposes, and as part of the information that is available during awarding meetings, to support decisions concerning unit grade boundary thresholds for externally assessed components. The engineering handbook¹⁹ makes this explicit:
 - “They are for use in developing units and assessment criteria, setting assessment materials and in determining grade boundaries (where

¹⁹ Accessed from: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/178279-centre-handbook-diplomas.pdf>

applicable) at awarding meetings. They give a general indication of the levels of attainment likely to be shown by a representative learner performing at these boundaries. The descriptors must be interpreted in relation to the content in the units and the qualification as a whole; they are not designed to define that content. The grade awarded will depend, in practice, on the extent to which the learner has met the learning outcome(s) overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of the assessment may be balanced by better performance in others.”

- They are presented, below, for the passing grade, with the first paragraph from the higher grade descriptors also appended, for comparison:

Appendix A Performance descriptors

Pass

Learners will be able to demonstrate a good level of knowledge of basic IT concepts. Learners will be able to draw on the knowledge that they have acquired through the learning process to identify and recall facts and characteristics associated with these IT concepts, using limited terminology.

Learners will make some basic attempt to apply their knowledge to vocational contexts provided - mostly familiar in nature - and the points they make will often be independent of each other. Points made may be superficial in nature.

There may be an inherent weakness in the ability of learners to move from giving an account of a particular issue to explaining the reason or purpose behind a specific course of action.

The supporting narrative that learners provide in assessments requiring an extended response will be limited in scope and may consist of a number of unrelated points which will be simplistic in nature and may lack relevance in relation to the contexts provided.

Any judgements made will be largely superficial and will lack any supporting commentary. There will be little evidence of building an argument, which will often result in a number of unconnected, basic statements.

Arguments may be obscurely presented and errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling may be noticeable and intrusive.

Merit

Learners will be able to demonstrate a reasonable knowledge of both basic and, to some degree, complex IT concepts, and be familiar with their use. Learners will be able to build on the knowledge base they have acquired through the learning process to demonstrate a reasonable understanding of these IT concepts, using a good level of terminology.

Distinction

Learners will be able to demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of both basic and complex IT concepts and will be familiar with their use. Learners will be able to build on the knowledge base they have acquired through the learning process to demonstrate a clear understanding of these IT concepts, using sophisticated and accurate terminology.

Cross-level analysis

- The L2 units contain different content from the L3 units, so cannot be compared directly.
- At L2, the grading criteria charts also share a common structure across units, although cross-unit-commonality is not quite as pronounced as at L3. At L2 the units have:
 - 3 or 4 LOs (typically 3);
 - 3 to 6 Pass criteria (typically 4);
 - 1 to 3 Merit criteria (typically 2);
 - 1 or 2 Distinction criteria (typically 1).
- As at L3, for any particular AC, there might be either a Merit criterion, a Distinction criterion, neither, or both.
- From inspection of the grading criteria charts for Units 3-11, it was apparent that a wide variety of command verbs are employed for each grade. Most prevalent are:
 - Pass – ‘describe’, ‘create’, ‘carry out’, ‘select’, ‘outline’;
 - Merit – ‘review’, ‘justify’;
 - Distinction – ‘evaluate’, ‘justify’.
- So, once again, there is a hint of differentiation by command verb challenge, although this tendency is not clear-cut.
- Note that essentially the same distinctions between grades are drawn at L2 as at L3, eg ‘describe’, ‘create’ (Pass) vs. ‘evaluate’ (Distinction).

Pearson BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Dental Technology²⁰

Overview

- The qualification is “developed in the dental technology sector to: provide education and training for dental technology employees; give dental technology employees opportunities to achieve a nationally recognised Level 3 vocationally-specific qualification; give full-time learners the opportunity to enter employment in the dental technology sector or to progress to vocational qualifications such as a Foundation Degree in dental technology”
- It is one of two related qualifications – Diploma and Extended Diploma – and “Both qualifications have been developed in line with the current published (2012) General Dental Council (GDC) Learning Outcomes for Dental Technicians and the current Skills for Health National Occupational Standards for Dental Technicians.”
- It comprises 16 Mandatory L3 units, ranging from 5 to 15 credits, totalling 180 credits (the first 5 units comprise the Diploma).

Assessment

- All units are internally assessed.
- “The units include guidance on appropriate assessment methodology. A central feature of vocational assessment is that it allows for assessment to be: current, ie to reflect the most recent developments and issues; local, ie to reflect the employment context of the delivering centre; flexible to reflect learner needs, ie at a time and in a way that matches the learner’s requirements so that they can demonstrate achievement.”
- For each unit, the specification suggests a number of assignment titles; and centres are encouraged to adapt the Pearson-suggested assignments, or to write their own. The specification suggests assessment methods for each assignment title, which vary widely, and which include: practical tasks, written reports, role play, simulation, viva voce, oral questioning, written examination, and so on.

Grading

- All units are graded (P/M/D).
- Within each unit, all AC need to be satisfied; both for the award of the passing grade (ie all Pass criteria satisfied), and for the award of higher grades (eg all Merit criteria satisfied for Merit).

²⁰ Accessed from: https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/BTEC-Nationals/Dental-Technology/2015/specification/9781446937068_BTEC_L3_NAT_DT_SPEC_Iss2.pdf (Version: Issue 2)

- The example below illustrates grading criteria for the first six AC from Unit 1:

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 compare the different types of dental models	M1 discuss the design criteria for each type of dental model	D1 evaluate the effect that poorly constructed dental models have on the outcome of a dental device
P2 explain the selection and use of different types of dental impression materials	M2 describe the classification of dental impression materials	D2 evaluate currently used dental impression materials
P3 compare the different types of custom-made impression trays	M3 discuss the design requirements for custom-made impression trays	D3 evaluate the effect that a poorly constructed tray can have on the outcome of the completed appliance
P4 explain the uses of record blocks in the construction of full and partial removable prosthodontics devices	M4 assess the design requirements of record blocks for edentulous and partially dentate patients	D4 analyse how data registered on a record block is used in the construction of a dental device
P5 classify the different types of dental articulators	M5 discuss how models are articulated to the different types of dental articulator	D5 evaluate the effectiveness of the simulated jaw movement of the different types of articulators
P6 construct dental models to a fit for purpose standard [CT2, RL4, SM3]		

- “It is important to note that the merit and distinction grading criteria require a qualitative improvement in a learner’s evidence and not simply the production of more evidence at the same level.”
- The unit specifications identify both LOs and grading criteria, although the grading criteria are not mapped explicitly to the LOs.

- The number of LOs per unit varies, as does the number of criteria specified for each grade:

	LOs	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Min	3	4	2	2
Max	6	17	13	6

- This can result in quite stark differences between unit specifications. For instance, compare these two 15 credit units:
 - Unit 3 – 5 LOs, 17 Pass criteria, 13 Merit criteria, 5 Distinction criteria
 - Unit 15 – 6 LOs, 8 Pass criteria, 2 Merit criteria, 2 Distinction criteria
- Unit grading is heavily influenced by a progression in command verb challenge:
 - Pass – predominantly ‘explain’ (also ‘describe’, ‘construct’, etc.);
 - Merit – predominantly ‘discuss’ (also ‘justify’, ‘compare’, ‘assess’, etc.);
 - Distinction – predominantly ‘evaluate’ (also ‘analyse’, ‘critically evaluate’, etc.).
- The specification states that: “There are four BTEC grading domains: application of knowledge and understanding; development of practical and technical skills; personal development for occupational roles; application of generic skills.” Its appendix contains a table that describes criteria, for each of these four domains, to distinguish Merit from Distinction; for example:

Grading domain 1	Indicative characteristics – merit	Indicative characteristics – distinction
Application of knowledge and understanding (Learning outcome stem <i>understand or know</i>)	Shows depth of knowledge and development of understanding in familiar and unfamiliar situations (for example explains why, makes judgements based on analysis). Applies and/or selects concepts showing comprehension of often complex theories. Applies knowledge in often familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Applies knowledge to non-routine contexts (e.g. assessor selection). Makes reasoned analytical judgements. Shows relationships between pass criteria.	Synthesises knowledge and understanding across pass/merit criteria. Evaluates complex concepts/ideas/actions and makes reasoned and confident judgements. Uses analysis, research and evaluation to make recommendations and influence proposals. Analyses implications of application of knowledge/understanding. Accesses and evaluates knowledge and understanding to advance complex activities/ contexts. Shows relationships with pass/merit criteria. Responds positively to evaluation.

- These generic criteria are not used directly to grade. Instead, they illustrate the principles from which the unit-specific grading criteria were derived.
- Points are awarded for each unit grade according to the following conversion:²¹

Unit level	Points per credit		
	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Level 2	5	6	7
Level 3	7	8	9
Level 4	9	10	11

- Qualification grades are awarded by applying the following thresholds:

Points range above pass grade	Grade
1300-1339	MPP
1340-1379	MMP
1380-1419	MMM
1420-1459	DMM
1460-1499	DDM
1500-1529	DDD
1530-1559	DDD*
1560-1589	DD*D*
1590 and above	D*D*D*

- The following point scores correspond to straight unit:
 - Passes – 1260;
 - Merits – 1440;
 - Distinctions – 1620.
- Consequently:
 - all units need to be passed for the Pass grade (PPP);
 - 4 of the 16 (10 credit) units (1/4) need to be passed at Merit to achieve the basic Merit grade (MMP), or alternatively just 2 Distinctions;
 - 12 of the 16 (10 credit) units (3/4) need to be passed at Merit to achieve the higher Merit grade (MMM), or just 6 Distinctions.

²¹ In fact, all units from this qualification are at the same level (L3). This is a generic Pearson BTEC conversion table, which suggests that, for qualifications comprising units at different levels, those units are weighted differently in the calculation of the overall qualification grade.



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