

Assessment Strategy & Quality Assurance Policy v1

The Open College

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Figure 1: A close up of a sign Description automatically generated

Assessment Strategy & Quality Assurance Policy

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1 Document Control

Document Version

1.0

Responsibility

Leadership Team

Review Cycle

Yearly

Next Review

This policy is due for review upon publication of updated QQI QA guidelines in 2025/2026

1.1 Record of Revisions

Version	Date	Description	Approved by
1.0	May 2025	Initial Version	

Assessment Strategy & Quality Assurance Policy

Purpose:

This policy serves as a framework for assessment design, implementation, and quality assurance within QQI Level 5 and 6 programmes at The Open College. It establishes a structured approach that ensures all assessments are fair, valid, and reliable while supporting student learning and maintaining academic integrity.

The policy integrates the strategic goals of ensuring The Open College is a learner-centred organisation and in line with QQI's national standards for quality assurance in assessment. It provides clear guidelines for tutors, programme developers, and academic staff to ensure consistency across all courses.

This policy is governed by The Open College's QA Manual (2025) and aligned with the Online Learning Framework (2025), ensuring consistency across the design, delivery, and evaluation of assessment in online and blended environments. This document should be interpreted as a reference for designing assessments that meet both internal quality standards and QQI's regulatory requirements, ensuring that learners are evaluated in a transparent and equitable manner.

By outlining key assessment principles, approved assessment types, and internal quality assurance measures, this policy supports continuous improvement in assessment practices while aligning with evolving educational and industry needs.

Section 1: Assessment Philosophy & Principles

Introduction

Assessment is central to the learning experience at The Open College. It serves multiple functions: evaluating student achievement, guiding learning, providing feedback, and ensuring academic integrity. This policy ensures that assessment practices align with QQI's guidelines, The Open College's student-centred learning strategy, and best practices in further education and training.

All assessment strategies at The Open College are informed by QQI's Assessment and Standards (Revised 2022) and Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers (2013).

These guidelines set the foundation for ensuring that assessments are fair, valid, and reliable, and that they uphold national educational standards.

Core Principles

All assessments within QQI Level 5 and 6 programmes at The Open College adhere to the following principles:

Validity: Assessments must measure what they are intended to measure. They should align directly with the intended learning outcomes of the module, ensuring that students demonstrate the required competencies rather than just recalling information.

Reliability: Assessment results must be consistent and replicable. Clear marking criteria, tutor standardisation, and second marking where necessary ensure that students are graded fairly and consistently.

Fairness: Every student should have an equal opportunity to succeed. Assessments should account for different learning needs and be free from bias.

Transparency: Assessment methods, marking schemes, and expectations should be clearly communicated to students. They should understand what is being assessed, how they will be graded, and what feedback they can expect.

Authenticity: Assessments should reflect real-world tasks relevant to the discipline. This ensures that students develop skills applicable beyond the classroom, preparing them for further study or employment.

Inclusivity and Accessibility: In line with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, assessments should be designed to accommodate diverse learners, including those with disabilities or additional needs. Alternative assessment formats should be made available where applicable.

Learner-Centred Approach

The Open College, as part of the strategic goal of orienting the college in a more learner-centred direction (Strategy 2024-2026) prioritises a learner-centred assessment strategy that supports learning while maintaining academic standards. This means:

- Providing varied assessment methods to cater to different abilities.
- Offering formative assessments that allow learners to track progress before summative evaluations.
- Ensuring feedback is constructive, timely, and meaningful to encourage continuous improvement.
- Using technology to enhance accessibility and engagement, such as digital portfolios, recorded presentations, and interactive orals.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Assessment Integrity

The college maintains a policy on **Academic Integrity** which governs issues around generative AI use in assessment as well as other issues. The Open College acknowledges the growing influence of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in educational settings. While

AI technologies offer opportunities for enhanced learning support, they also present risks to academic integrity and the authenticity of learners' work. Our approach reflects our strategic commitment to academic standards, learner development, and quality assurance, while recognising the specific learning needs of our adult learner population.

We adopt a precautionary and structured approach to the use of AI in assessment, informed by QQI's guidance on academic integrity and aligned with our internal policies.

Institutional Position

- AI-generated content must not substitute for original student work. Any submission that includes significant AI-generated material without critical evaluation or disclosure will be treated as a breach of academic integrity.
- Students may use AI tools for appropriate learning support (e.g., grammar refinement, brainstorming, summarising concepts), but not for completing or drafting core components of assessments.

Detection and Assurance Measures

- All written submissions are subject to review using Turnitin and other academic integrity tools. Tutors are trained to interpret similarity and AI-use indicators in context.
- Assessment briefs are designed to encourage original thought and to reduce the likelihood of uncritical AI usage.
- Tutors are supported in identifying inconsistencies in learners' writing styles and encouraged to engage in follow-up discussions where concerns arise.

Student Guidance and Transparency

- Learners are briefed on appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI during orientation, in assessment briefs, and via dedicated guidance materials.
- The College is developing resources on critical engagement with AI tools to support responsible use, digital literacy, and ethical learning practices.

Section 2: Approved Assessment Types & Their Application:

Overview

The Open College employs a variety of assessment methods to evaluate student learning, ensuring that assessments are valid, reliable, and aligned with learning outcomes. Each assessment type is selected based on its suitability for measuring competency in each subject while maintaining engagement and accessibility for students.

Approved Assessment Types

1. **Scenario-Based Assessments:** These assessments present students with real-world case studies, ethical dilemmas, or industry-specific problems. They require critical thinking and applied knowledge rather than rote memorisation.
2. **Interactive Orals:** Learners verbally explain concepts, defend arguments, or respond to unseen questions in live or recorded formats. This approach ensures learners engage with material deeply and prevents reliance on AI-generated responses.

3. **Reflective Journals & Learning Logs:** These assessments require learners to document their learning journey, analysing how they engaged with content and applied knowledge. AI cannot effectively replicate personal reflections, making this method a strong choice for academic integrity.
4. **Portfolio-Based Assessments:** A collection of student work over time, including essays, reports, presentations, and multimedia projects. Portfolios encourage iterative learning, allowing students to improve their work based on tutor feedback before final submission.
5. **Practical & Performance-Based Assessments:** Students demonstrate skills through simulations, presentations, or hands-on exercises. These assessments are particularly effective for vocational subjects and applied disciplines.
6. **Long-Form Writing (Essays, Research Papers, Reports):** While essays and extended written pieces remain valuable, The Open College emphasises an iterative process. Learners receive feedback on drafts and are encouraged to revise and refine their work, reducing dependency on AI-generated content and improving writing skills. Writing should not merely demonstrate knowledge; it should produce something that demonstrates the application of skills.

The next section will outline the process of designing fair, consistent, and robust assessments that align with QQI standards.

Section 3: Designing Fair, Consistent & Robust Assessments: Assessments

The following guidelines take into account a student-centred assessment design and takes consideration of [QQI's interim guidelines for assessment](#) as well as other leading resources in digital assessment including [Trinity College's 'gateway to assessment' resources](#).

Guidelines for Assessment Design

- **Align with Learning Outcomes:** Every assessment must directly measure the intended learning outcomes of the module. Avoid assessments that test irrelevant skills or knowledge. Assessment design must also align with other aspects of programme validation documentation and be reviewed annually in line with the QA Manual's review cycle.
- **Use Clear and Transparent Marking Criteria:** Students should know exactly how their work will be graded. Detailed marking criteria should be provided in advance and clearly define expectations. All assignments are marked out of 100 with weighting applied afterwards.
- **Balance Workload and Credit Weighting:** Assessment volume must reflect module credits. A 15-credit module should not have excessive writing requirements or unrealistic submission deadlines. Aim for 2-3 assessments for a 15-credit module.

Consider carefully any required length in terms of workload, student ability etc. Aim for the lower end of what is deemed necessary to fulfil a brief.

- **Encourage Iterative Learning:** Where possible, students should receive feedback on drafts and have the opportunity to improve their work before final submission.

- **Ensure Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Design assessments that accommodate different learning needs, offering alternative formats where appropriate. Ensure that briefs align with the college's communication policy including simple English guidelines – readability is an essential consideration for accessible assessment writing.
- **Authentic Assessment/Academic Integrity Measures:** Design assessments that require originality, such as applied problem-solving, personalised reflections, and oral justifications. Don't ask to demonstrate knowledge for the sake of it – it should always be a component of the creation of something authentic.

Section 4: Internal Moderation & Quality Assurance of Assessments:

Assurance of Assessments

All assessments conducted within The Open College are subject to a structured internal moderation process to ensure consistency, fairness, and alignment with QQI standards. This section outlines how assessments are reviewed, verified, and authenticated before final results are approved and released. These processes are integral to our quality assurance system and are designed to uphold the validity and reliability of learner results.

Moderation processes are carried out in alignment with the External Authentication and Sampling Policy, the QA Manual (2025), and QQI's Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines. Oversight of moderation activity rests with the Operations Team, in consultation with Programme Leads and the Academic Board.

Roles and Structures

The following parties are involved in assessment quality assurance:

- **Tutor/Assessor:** Designs and grades the assessment.
- **Internal Verifier (IV):** Reviews the assessment process, marking consistency, and compliance with College and QQI standards.
- **Programme Lead:** Oversees assessment design alignment with programme learning outcomes and supports moderation where required.
- **External Authenticator (EA):** Provides an independent review of assessment results and grading standards.
- **Academic Board:** Validates and ratifies assessment results based on input from the IV and EA.

Internal Verification Process

Before any results are finalised:

- A sample of assessments from each group is internally verified using a standard template.
- The IV reviews consistency in marking, adherence to rubrics, and clarity of tutor feedback.
- Any anomalies, inconsistencies, or grade discrepancies are addressed with the original assessor before EA review.

Internal verification reports are documented and submitted to the QA Officer.

External Authentication

External authentication is conducted in line with QQI requirements:

- EAs are appointed based on subject expertise and independence from the College.
- The EA reviews a sample of verified assessments to ensure fair and accurate grading.
- The EA submits a formal report highlighting any issues, commendations, or recommendations.

Their findings feed into both result ratification and future staff development.

Academic Board

The Academic Board meets after EA reports are submitted. It:

- Reviews IV and EA reports
- Considers learner performance data across modules and programmes
- Confirms final results for submission to QQI
- Notes any recurring issues for QA and programme improvement purposes.

Minutes of the Assessment Board are maintained and used to inform annual QA reviews.

Policy and Framework Integration

Institutional QA and Strategy Documents

- The Open College QA Manual (2025) – defines institutional QA structures, programme review processes, and governance responsibilities.
- Online Learning Framework (2025) – outlines pedagogical and delivery models for online and blended learning, including principles for assessment design and tutor engagement.
- Online Learning Strategy (2025) – sets the strategic direction for digital learning, including infrastructure, staffing, and sustainability.
- Strategic Plan (2024–2026) – reinforces The Open College's commitment to student-centred, inclusive, and high-quality learning experiences.

Core Assessment and Academic Policies

- Appeals Policy for Provisional and Final Results (V7) – governs the formal process for students contesting assessment outcomes.
- EA Script Review (Sampling) Policy (V3) – details internal and external authentication practices, including sampling, moderation, and external review procedures.

QQI National Guidelines

- QQI Assessment and Standards (Revised 2022)
- Statutory QA Guidelines for Blended and Fully Online Programmes (2023)
- Quality Assuring Assessment Guidelines for Providers (2013).

Section 5: Student Support, Feedback & Reassessment: Reassessment

This section outlines the key principles and procedures related to student support in assessment, ensuring alignment with QQI guidelines and best practices in further education.

Communicating Assessment Expectations

Clear and transparent communication is essential for student confidence and success. To support this:

- All assessment briefs will be provided well in advance of deadlines, detailing criteria, expectations, and marking schemes.
- Tutors will be available to answer questions about assessments via scheduled support sessions and online communication channels.
- Examples of high-quality work, where appropriate, will be provided to help students understand expectations.

Providing Effective Feedback

Feedback is a crucial element of student learning and must be structured to support improvement. The Open College ensures:

- **Timely Feedback:** Students receive feedback within a set timeframe after submission.
- **Constructive and Actionable Guidance:** Feedback highlights strengths, areas for improvement, and specific recommendations.

Reassessment Opportunities

Reassessment provides students with a fair chance to demonstrate their learning outcomes if they do not meet the required standard on their first attempt.

- Reassessments must align with QQI guidelines, ensuring students are given a reasonable opportunity to improve their work. At the Open College we allow one resit for each submission.
- Students who fail an assessment will receive detailed feedback and, where applicable, support to prepare for reassessment.
- Alternative assessment formats may be considered where appropriate, ensuring fairness and accessibility.

Appeals Process

Students who wish to contest an assessment result may do so through a formal appeals process. The full details of the appeals procedure, including grounds for appeal and submission timelines, can be found in the [Appeals Policy for Provisional & Final Results](#).

Section 6: Accessibility & Compliance with EAA & UDL Standards: Introduction

The Open College is committed to ensuring that assessments are accessible, inclusive, and designed to support all learners. This aligns with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and the requirements of the [European Accessibility Act \(EAA\)](#), effective from

June 2025. This section outlines how assessments are designed to accommodate diverse learners and meet accessibility standards.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Assessment

UDL ensures that assessments cater to different learning needs by providing multiple ways for learners to engage with, process, and demonstrate their learning. The Open College applies UDL principles by:

- Offering varied assessment formats, such as written, oral, and practical assessments, to allow learners to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways.
- Ensuring clear and structured assessment instructions that are easy to understand and follow.
- Providing flexible submission options, such as digital, recorded, or live presentations, where appropriate.
- Embedding assistive technology options (e.g., text-to-speech, captioned videos) to support diverse learning needs.

Compliance with the European Accessibility Act (EAA, 2025)

The EAA mandates that all digital education resources, including assessments, must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. The Open College ensures compliance by:

- Designing assessments that meet digital accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG 2.1 guidelines for online assessments).
- Ensuring all assessment materials are readable by screen readers and available in alternative formats. The Open College has designed a [fully accessible brief available here](#) (download and open – also available as an appendix to this document). Ensure that fonts, Headings etc. are maintained to ensure full accessibility.
- Providing closed captions for video-based assessments and transcripts for audio-based submissions.
- Training staff on accessibility best practices to ensure assessments are developed with inclusivity in mind.

Alternative Formats for Assessments

In line with the college's reasonable accommodation policy, to accommodate different learning needs, students may request alternative assessment formats. Examples include:

- Oral presentations instead of written assignments for students with writing difficulties.
- Extended time or modified formats for students requiring reasonable accommodations.
- Alternative assessment delivery methods, such as video or audio submissions, where appropriate.

Section 7: Continuous Improvement & Policy Review:

Introduction

The Open College is committed to continuously reviewing and improving its assessment strategy to ensure it remains effective, fair, and aligned with best practices.

Regular Assessment Review Process

1. Annual Review of Assessment Practices

- Assessment methods, grading consistency, and student outcomes are reviewed annually, taking into account the feedback of students, tutors and external authenticators.
- Tutors provide feedback on assessment effectiveness and areas for improvement.
- Student evaluations capture data on assessment to understand the student experience.
- External authentication feedback is considered and alterations made where deemed necessary.

2. Benchmarking Against Best Practices

- Assessment policies are compared against QQI guidelines and other further education providers.
- Industry expectations and professional body standards inform updates to assessment strategies.

Policy Updates & Approval Process

- Changes to assessment policies are reviewed by The Open College's academic board.
- Significant updates are communicated to tutors and learners well in advance of implementation.
- Assessment policies are formally reviewed every three years, with interim updates as required.

Appendix:

1. Accessible Assignment Template



Assignment Brief

[Module Name] [Asses. No. eg. CA1]

How to Use This Brief

This brief explains what your assignment is and how your tutor will mark it.

- **Read carefully** to understand the task and key topics.
- Follow instructions on structure, word count, and formatting.
- Check the marking guide to know what is expected.
- Submit on time following the given guidelines.

If anything is unclear, ask your tutor for help!

Summary:

Category	Details
Type:	[e.g. Case Study]
Weighting:	[e.g. 50%]
Issue Date:	[e.g. Week 2]
Submission Date:	[e.g. Week 12]
Length:	[e.g. 1200 words ($\pm 10\%$)]

Module Learning Outcomes Assessed:

- [List all LO's assessed here **e.g. LO2:** Explain how key psychological areas (focus, confidence, goal setting, anxiety, and arousal) affect performance.]

What is a [e.g. Case Study?]

[These descriptions are available in the assessment technique description file – copy the appropriate one e.g.: A case study is a detailed look at a real or fictional situation. It helps you apply what you've learned to analyse a problem and suggest solutions.

In your assignment, you will examine a specific person, group, or event. You'll describe the situation, identify key issues, and recommend solutions using relevant knowledge and theories. Your response should be well-structured and clearly explain your ideas.]

Task

[Outline the task here e.g: You will choose a case study to analyse how an athlete struggles with **one** of the following:

- **Confidence**
- **Focus**
- **Anxiety**

Your task is to:

1. Describe the athlete's behaviours and explain how these affect their performance.
2. Suggest solutions or strategies to help improve their performance.
3. Support your ideas with sports psychology theories.
4. Choose **either**:

- **Option 1:** A real or fictional case study based on your own experience.

OR

- **Option 2:** The **provided case study** provided on the next page.]

How to Structure your Assessment:

[Be explicit in what you want to see e.g:

- **Introduction:** Briefly introduce the athlete and their sport.

- **Identified Issue:** Explain the psychological challenge (confidence, focus, or anxiety).
- **Impact on Performance:** Describe how the issue affects the athlete's performance.
- **Intervention Strategies:** Outline possible strategies to help the athlete improve.
- **Reflection on Intervention Strategies:** Evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies, considering potential challenges and how they can be adapted.
- **Theoretical Support:** Link strategies to relevant sports psychology theories.
- **Conclusion:** Summarise key points and expected outcomes of the interventions.]

Further Requirements

[Include other helpful information here e.g.:

- Write your case study in first person and past tense. (e.g., "I worked with an athlete who struggled with anxiety before competitions.").
- You can base it on a real or fictional experience (Option 1) or use the provided case study (Option 2).
- Keep the person or team anonymous. Do not include real names or personal details. Instead, use labels like "Person A" or "Team A."
- Add a disclaimer stating that all names and identities in the case study are fictional.
- Follow the required structure above.
- Include relevant theory and references where needed. ([Click here to see this guide for help on referencing](#))

Assessment Marking Guide

[List a summary as well as a detailed description of all criteria used in marking]

Summary:

- 40% - Clear identification of athlete issue and performance consequences
- 30% - Reflection on intervention strategies
- 20% - For supporting theories
- 10% - For presentation.

Marking Criteria with Descriptions

1. Clear Identification of Athlete Issue and Performance Consequences (40%)

- Clearly describe the athlete's issue (Confidence, Focus, or Anxiety) using concepts from the relevant units.
- Identify key behaviours the athlete is exhibiting that indicate their struggle (e.g., loss of focus under pressure, negative self-talk, physical symptoms of anxiety).
- Explain the impact on performance, drawing on taught theories such as:

- Cognitive Anxiety vs. Somatic Anxiety (Unit 5)
- Self-Confidence and its role in performance (Unit 4)
- The effects of distractions on focus (Unit 6)
- Provide logical connections between the psychological issue and the athlete's performance decline.

2. Reflection on Intervention Strategies (30%)

- Propose two or more evidence-based intervention strategies that align with the course content.
- Justify why these strategies are appropriate using theories and concepts from the units:
- Managing Arousal: Breathing techniques, progressive relaxation (Unit 5)
- Confidence Building: Positive self-talk, goal setting (Unit 4)
- Focus Strategies: Pre-performance routines, focus cues (Unit 6)
- Explain how the strategies would be applied in training and competition scenarios.
- Consider potential challenges and how they can be addressed.

3. Supporting Theories (20%)

- Reference relevant sports psychology theories and concepts to support analysis and interventions:
- The Cognitive Triangle: How thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are connected (Unit 4)
- The Inverted-U Theory of Arousal and Performance (Unit 5)
- Internal vs. External Focus (Unit 6)
- Apply theoretical knowledge in a way that is directly relevant to the athlete's case.

4. Presentation (10%)

- Follow the required structure: Introduction, Athlete's Issue, Impact on Performance, Intervention Strategies, Theoretical Support, Conclusion.
- Maintain clarity and professionalism while using first-person and past tense.
- Ensure proper referencing and adherence to word count.

1.1.1

1.1.2 *End of Document*

1.1.3