

Assessment Policy and Procedures

Policy Statements

OHC recognises the value of accurate and timely assessment:

- to learners, to inform their studies and to provide a clear idea of the progress they are making and areas they still need to work on, to promote learner autonomy, and as a measure of attainment on their course of study.
- to teachers, to inform their teaching and enable them better to meet the needs of the learners in their classes.
- to the college, to ensure learners are placed in programmes that best meet their needs and learning objectives, for gatekeeping on courses which require a specified standard of English for entry, and for quality assurance purposes.

To this end, it is OHC policy to offer initial, formative and summative assessment of our learners' language performance. All OHC assessments are designed by senior academic management and criterion referenced to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) with results of formative and summative assessment provided to learners (and for learners under 18 years old, to the learner's parent or guardian) along with clear descriptors derived from the CEFR.

Assessment is standardised and moderated in each centre overseen by the programme manager/director. Assessment is further monitored across the group by the Group Academic Manager. Regular feedback is sought from centre management, teaching staff and learners to inform development of and improvement to assessment instruments and procedures.

The Group Academic Manager keeps informed regarding developments in language testing and assessment and maintains a log of review and development in OHC assessments as part of his annual academic review.

Procedural Statements

Initial placement: learners complete a multiple-choice grammar and vocabulary test and have a face to face interview with either a member of academic staff or a trained member of student services staff using an interview schedule derived from the British Council/Equals Core Curriculum Inventory and the CEFR, that has been subsequently mapped to IELTS. In cases of doubt, an opinion is sought from academic management as to the most appropriate placement. Additionally, learners wishing to join courses preparing for an examination complete a piece of writing and have an interview with an academic manager.

Placement is monitored by the Programme Manager in consultation with class teachers and any issues discussed at regular teachers' meetings.

Formative and progress testing: alongside informal class tests and quizzes and ongoing teacher assessment, learners are formally tested in weeks 4, 8 and 12 of the syllabus cycle. Tests are of productive language use in a communicative context, have a standardised format and are written by senior academic staff and trialled before rollout. To ensure construct validity, test format requires spoken production in the key CEFR productive areas of goal-oriented co-operation, information exchange and discussion. Writing tasks simulate text types/written interactions likely to be relevant to learners at the level to be tested and include prompts to indicate context, purpose and intended audience (and hence register).

Tests are graded using CEFR quality criteria with outcomes communicated to the learner in the course of a tutorial at which the learner's goals and progress are discussed and recorded in the college database to allow for monitoring and analysis. Learners (and in the case of learners under the age of 18, learners' parents or guardians) receive a summary of the tutorial with a grade profile and the relevant CEFR descriptors, ensuring learners have a clear and comprehensible description of how their proficiency has been assessed and are able to see the relationship between course content and assessment outcomes.

Teaching staff receive regular training and professional development in using CEFR criteria to assess learners and test results are moderated in-centre, with teachers routinely discussing grading and double marking or cross marking tests during monthly moderation meetings. In addition, test grading is sampled by the Group Academic Manager and grading compared across the OHC group. The Academic Manager also conducts periodic reviews of testing, along with analyses of student progress and anchor testing to monitor the consistency and reliability of assessment across the group.

Summative assessment: learners are assessed by teachers at the end of their course with the final course certificate giving a brief summary in plain English of the CEFR equivalence of the class level. On request learners or other stakeholders (and in the case of learners under the age of 18, their parents or guardians) can receive a detailed exit profile setting out CEFR competences they have been assessed as having achieved.

Exit proficiency testing for Holmes Pathways students: in addition to CEFR referenced teacher assessment, Holmes Pathways students wishing to begin their VET or HE studies are required to demonstrate competence in specifically academic language skills to an appropriate standard. The Holmes English Proficiency Test (EPT) requires candidates to demonstrate comprehension of an extended reading text of a broadly academic nature, to write a report describing data presented visually and a discursive essay on a topic of contemporary relevance. Test material is selected from published IELTS test material to ensure an appropriate level of challenge and is rated by experienced academic staff using IELTS marking rubrics.

Marking is moderated and standardised by senior academic staff across the OHC group and where possible, grades are compared with the results of external examinations. In addition, ELICOS programme managers and Holmes HE and VET staff liaise frequently to allow for any concerns regarding the language abilities of Holmes Pathway students to be raised.

High School Preparation Progress and Testing

As with OHC ELICOS courses, the HSP course progress testing includes individual tutorials connecting progress to the CEFR criteria; however, testing is scheduled on a typical high school term, with mid-term and end of term tests. Results are moderated, and reports are distributed to the students and appropriate stakeholders including their guardian if the student is under the age of 18.

Progression between levels: An Overview

At each OHC level, students are expected to demonstrate the following objective criteria/characteristics:

Level 1: Beginner – A1

This level is intended for learners who are absolute or false beginners in English; they will have little or no generative command of the language and rely to communicate exclusively on using their first (or another) language, gesture, facial expression and body language perhaps supplemented with a handful of internationally recognised lexical items and perhaps one or two learned phrases deployed more or less appropriately.

Learners will spend long enough in Level 1 to meet a core lexicon of everyday and high-frequency items and to begin to build simple utterances to meet basic communicative needs. They will also develop their confidence and begin to be able to construct novel utterances.

Level 2: A1+ - A2

A1+/A2 Salient Features:

At this level learners can use and understand simple, largely formulaic language in order to meet basic and immediate needs such as getting about, shopping, fulfil basic social functions. They will need considerable support from an interlocutor and will not usually be able to sustain interaction on their own.

Quality Criteria:

Range: has a basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and common, concrete situations. Can use basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple, everyday situations

Accuracy: Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes

Fluency: Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.

Interaction: Can ask and answer questions about personal details and the basics of everyday life (family/job/studies etc) and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep a conversation going of his/her own accord

Coherence: Can link groups of words with simple connectors like and, but and because.

Level 3: A2+ - B1

A2+/B1 Salient Features:

Learners enter this level able to use and understand simple, largely formulaic language in order to meet basic and immediate needs such as getting about, shopping, fulfil basic social functions. They will need considerable support from an interlocutor and will not usually be able to sustain interaction on their own. At this level learners develop their ability to participate actively in conversation, to cope more confidently and flexibly with everyday situations and situations in their sphere of interest. They will also begin to be able to sustain language more confidently, to talk about their feelings and reactions and to describe every day elements of their surroundings and daily routines, to describe past events and their plans for the future.

At the end of this level learners are beginning to be able to maintain interaction and get across what they want to and to keep going comprehensibly despite evident pausing for planning and repair.

They will be able to cope reasonably flexibly with problems in everyday life and in situations they are likely to encounter when travelling in an English-speaking country.

Quality Criteria (A2+):

Range: Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics though he/she will generally have to compromise the message and search for words.

Accuracy: Uses reasonably accurately a limited repertoire of frequently used "routines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations.

Fluency: Can adapt rehearsed, memorised simple phrases to particular situations with sufficient ease to handle short routine exchanges without undue effort, despite very noticeable hesitations and false starts

Interaction: Can initiate, maintain and close simple, restricted face-to-face conversation, asking and answering questions on topics of interest, pastimes and past activities. Can interact with reasonable ease in structured situations given some help, but participation in open discussion is fairly restricted.

Coherence: Can use the most frequently occurring connectors to link simple sentences in order to tell a story or describe something as a simple list of points.

Level 4: B1 – B2

B1/B2 Salient Features:

Learners enter this level able to maintain interaction and get across what they want to in a range of contexts and to cope flexibly with predictable problems in everyday life. They can deal with most situations likely to arise when travelling in an English speaking country and enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics.

At this level learners will continue to develop these abilities, focussing on the range, precision and quantity of information they can process and convey. They will become better able to give detailed and helpful information and instructions, give their opinions on a wide range of common subjects and to exchange detailed information.

Quality Criteria:

Range: Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circum-locutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.

Accuracy: Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used "routines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations.

Fluency: Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.

Interaction: Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.

Coherence: Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points

Level 5: B2 – B2+

B2>B2+ Salient Features:

Learners enter this level at a strong Threshold (B1+) level of performance: they can with some confidence maintain interaction, exchange information and communicate effectively in most routine situations (even outside their field and area of interest) and in non-routine situations in either everyday or familiar situations. They may still struggle to express more complex ideas, particularly when they are on unfamiliar ground, and will sometimes need to compromise the message somewhat to allow for limitations in language. Although there will still be noticeable errors, frequently used and routine language is largely error-free when use is considered and lapses in more fluent or extended speech can usually be corrected.

Learners at this level develop their ability to use language to argue and to persuade, to initiate and direct the course of discourse and to be an equal partner in co-operative language use. They will also develop the ability to express their ideas, thoughts and feelings in greater depth and with more precision. At this level too, learners begin to develop more conscious awareness of their own language, actively monitoring for common errors and breakdowns in communication and correcting and repairing where necessary.

By the end of this level learners can more than hold their own in social discourse. They can actively influence and direct conversation and respond flexibly and appropriately in most situations, even non-routine occurrences outside their normal field of activity and interest. They can produce clear, coherent discourse (though there may still be some loss of flow in longer contributions) and can

argue, persuade and negotiate effectively in English. By the end of this level, learners will also be able to adapt their language use, in terms of register and politeness choices, to the situation and person(s) concerned.

Quality Criteria:

Range: Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions and express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some more complex sentence forms to do so. Does not have to restrict what he/she says due to lack of language in most general situations

Accuracy: Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding and can correct most of his/her mistakes.

Fluency: Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses. Can communicate spontaneously often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression, even in longer, more complex, stretches of speech.

Interaction: Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along when on familiar ground, confirming comprehension, inviting others in etc. Can participate in conversation showing awareness of relevant politeness and register conventions and considering the recipient(s)

Coherence: Can use a variety of linking words efficiently to mark the relationship between ideas clearly.

Level 6: C1 and upwards

C1 and upwards: Salient features

Learners enter this level able to use English with a good degree of flexibility and control. They can socialise comfortably and confidently, can argue, persuade and negotiate effectively in English with little or no support from an interlocutor. They can participate effectively in conversation, managing their own contributions and relating them well to those of other speakers

As they progress through this level, learners develop their language – broadening their range and becoming confident in the use of complex constructions and increasing their access to a broad range of language and the ease and fluidity with which they can deploy language to structure speech and interaction.

By the end of this level, learners can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. They can express themselves fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. They can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes and produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

The most successful learners will achieve mastery of English, they will be able to understand with ease virtually everything heard or read, summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. They will be able to express

themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

C1 Quality Criteria (C2 criteria in italic):

Range: Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.

Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms

Accuracy: Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.

Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).

Fluency: Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder the smooth, natural flow of language.

Can express him/herself spontaneously, at length and with natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.

Interaction: Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his/her remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.

Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making etc.

Coherence: Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.