

## NOCN Guidelines for Writing Units

### Setting the Context

These guidelines have been produced in the light of the introduction of Unit Plus and the new 10-hour credit. They support national consistency in the development of units across the Open College Network. All national and regional units must meet the standards as laid out in this guide. The approach to writing units is the same regardless of level and credit value.

### What is a unit?

A unit gives details of what a learner is expected to know, understand, or be able to do on completion of a period of learning (the learning outcomes) and the criteria that will be used to judge whether these outcomes have been achieved (assessment criteria).

Each unit must include the following five key features (these are known as the unit specifications):

- **title**
- **learning outcomes:** a coherent set of measurable achievements.
- **assessment criteria:** enable a judgement to be made about whether or not, and how well, the students have achieved the learning outcomes.
- **level:** a unit can have one of four levels: Entry, 1, 2, 3.
- **credit value:** the number of credits ascribed to a unit. This identifies the number of credits a learner is awarded upon successful achievement of the unit. One credit is awarded for the learning outcomes which a learner, on average, might reasonably be expected to achieve in a notional 10 hours of learning.

A unit does not contain everything that is taught but the key achievements that the learner is expected to leave with at the end of the learning process. These achievements, the results of the learning, must be demonstrated through assessment.

### What is Unit Plus?

A unit, together with its assessment grid, is called 'Unit Plus'. The learning outcomes and assessment criteria (the unit) are accompanied by the assessment information grid. This grid provides details of the prescribed and optional assessment activities to be used with the unit.

The Unit Plus Template and Assessment Information Grid are included in Appendix 1. Details about types of assessment activities are included in the Business Development Tool Kit, NOCN CQF Assessment Definitions.

Formatting Guidance for the Unit Template is included in Appendix 2.

## **National Standards**

Units must be mapped to National Occupational Standards where possible. Where no National Occupational Standards exist, Levels 1, 2 and 3 units must be mapped to Key Skills Standards. All Level 1, 2 and 3 units should be signposted to Key Skills (under Assessment Grid). Units at Entry Level must be mapped to the national standards for Literacy and/or Numeracy (to be found in the Adult Core Curriculum for each).

Further guidance on national standards is included later in this Guide.

## Guidance for writing units

### Title

The unit title must be relevant, clear and unambiguous and reflect the content of the unit. For example, 'Remixing' as a unit title does not express what the unit is about. A better title would be 'Remixing Music Using Digital Technology'. A unit title must give a clear sense of the achievement in the unit to those external to the learning process.

Titles should not contain numbers, references to level (for example, Basic, Foundation, Intermediate, Advanced), methods of assessment or other extraneous detail.

If it is problematic to identify a title that clearly summarises the achievement in the unit, this may suggest an incoherent group of learning outcomes.

### Level

Each unit will be assigned a level which is determined by referencing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria against a set of level descriptors (see below). These level descriptors comprise three different strands and they are intended to provide broad definitions, rather than to be prescriptive – level depends on a wide range of factors. As a level represents a band within a developmental continuum, it is also difficult to provide definitive boundaries between levels. It may be useful in the unit-writing process to cross-reference/benchmark against existing units at adjacent levels.

The language used in assessment criteria is crucial to expressing level effectively (refer to the separate section on writing assessment criteria).

OCNs use the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) level descriptors/national descriptors in their accreditation processes.

Level	Intellectual Skills and Attributes	Processes	Accountability
Entry	<p>Employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas with dependency on ideas of others</p> <p>Exercise basic skills</p> <p>Receive and pass on information</p>	<p>Operate mainly in closely defined and highly structured contexts</p> <p>Carry out processes that are repetitive and predictable</p> <p>Undertake performance of clearly defined tasks</p> <p>Assume a limited range of roles</p>	<p>Carry out directed activity under close supervision</p> <p>Rely entirely on external monitoring of output and quality</p>

<p><b>1</b></p>	<p>Employ a narrow range of applied knowledge and basic comprehension</p> <p>Demonstrate a narrow range of skills</p> <p>Apply known solutions to familiar problems</p> <p>Present and record information from readily available sources</p>	<p>Show basic competence in a limited range of predictable and structured contexts</p> <p>Utilise a clear choice of routine responses</p> <p>Co-operate with others</p>	<p>Exercise a very limited degree of discretion and judgement about possible actions</p> <p>Carry out responsibility for quality and quantity of output</p> <p>Operate under direct supervision and quality control</p>
<p><b>2</b></p>	<p>Apply knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas</p> <p>Make comparisons</p> <p>Interpret available information</p> <p>Demonstrate a range of skills</p>	<p>Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts, some of which may be non-routine</p> <p>Co-ordinate with others</p>	<p>Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy</p> <p>Achieve outcomes within time constraints</p> <p>Accept increased responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking</p>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p>Apply knowledge and skills in a range of complex activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories</p> <p>Access and evaluate information independently</p> <p>Analyse information and make reasoned judgements</p> <p>Employ a range of responses to well defined but often unfamiliar or unpredictable problems</p>	<p>Operate in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts using a range of technical or learning skills</p> <p>Select from a considerable choice of procedures</p> <p>Give presentations to an audience</p>	<p>Engage in self directed activity with guidance / evaluation</p> <p>Accept responsibility for quality and quantity of output</p> <p>Accept limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of output from others</p>

## Credit Value

All units have an ascribed credit value. One credit represents a notional 10 hours of learning time regardless of the level of the unit. Units would normally be 1, 2 or 3 credits and then in multiples of three. Exceptions will only be made where government/sector skills requirements dictate.

## Unit Code

During unit development the appropriate learndirect code must be inserted. This is then used as the first three digits of the unit code. The full code will be automatically generated by OPUS when the details are entered onto the system.

## Learning Outcomes

The number of learning outcomes needs to be inserted at the top of the unit template.

In identifying outcomes, the following questions should be addressed ***‘What do learners need to know, understand or be able to do, as a result of this learning experience?’*** The answer to these questions should take the form of a series of broad statements that may include the following phrases:

**The learner will:** *(this is a standard rider on all units)*

- Understand
- Recognise
- Know
- Design
- Perform
- Create
- Use (if appropriate for practical application)

Learning outcomes should:

- be short and succinct statements that describe a piece of knowledge or a skill without qualitative or quantitative additions. In other words, the language used for learning outcomes should be relatively neutral;
- describe the results of a learning process rather than the learning process itself;
- be a coherent group of statements that relate to each other and to the title of the units, and avoid repetition and overlap

Learning outcomes may remain the same at adjacent levels, for example, Level 1 and Level 2, thus creating parallel or ‘sibling’ units. If units cover a range of levels, it may be necessary to modify, add or delete outcomes that are not achievable at the lower levels or are assumed/subsumed at the higher levels.

Although learning outcomes express the knowledge, skills and understanding learners are expected to acquire, they do not contain the qualitative detail that expresses the range, the degree of complexity or the degree of autonomy, and which defines the level. This detail is contained within the unit's Assessment Criteria.

Whilst the number of learning outcomes is not prescribed, it is important to remember that all outcomes must be assessed for the learner to achieve the unit and it is not necessary to assess everything the learner knows/understands/does.

***For example:***

✓ “Understand the causes of unemployment.”

***Rather than:***

✗ “Demonstrate an accurate and detailed knowledge of a least three perspectives on the causes of unemployment.”

The latter includes both qualitative (accurate and detailed knowledge) and quantitative (at least three) detail.

## **Assessment Criteria**

Assessment criteria describe precisely what a learner is expected to be able to do in order to prove that s/he has achieved the learning outcome. They should be measurable and indicate the standard expected when the learner is assessed. Appropriate language must be used as it is the criteria that reflect the range, degree of autonomy and degree of complexity associated with the level.

The following table contains verbs that can be used in criteria at the different levels, although the nature of the learning will also determine the language used. For example, ‘Identify the nature and qualities of a black hole’ is hardly Level 1 achievement!

**The learner can:** *(this is a standard rider on all units)*

Entry Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
State Participate in Contribute to List Name Label Give (an example of)	Identify Give (two benefits of...) Indicate Label Name Record Outline Use Define	Define Describe Illustrate Give (a range of...) Select Apply Use (a range of) Follow a plan Give positive and negative points of... Comment on... Compare Perform Assess	Clarify Summarise Critically compare Perform Judge Evaluate Review and revise Analyse Explain Develop (a plan/an idea which..) Draw conclusions Justify

- Where the same unit exists at different levels, the assessment criteria should be clearly differentiated to reflect the increasing complexity involved in progressing from one level to the next.
- The assessment criteria should relate to a specific learning outcome and there should be sufficient assessment criteria to enable evidence of achievement for assessment and moderation.
- There should be at least one assessment criterion related to each learning outcome.
- There should be no new learning described in the assessment criteria that is not already described in the learning outcomes.
- Criteria should be written so that they are applicable and appropriate to a range of assessment methods. This will allow tutors to determine the most appropriate form of assessment if the unit is used within another course.

Assessment criteria must be clear and consistent in their own right and should not rely on comparative judgments.

**Avoid using qualifiers such as:**

- Fully
- Effectively
- Professionally
- Competently
- More detailed
- More complex

Assessment criteria should not refer to methods of assessment or assessment activity.  
In this Level 3 unit, for example:

LEARNING OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
<b>The learner will:</b>	<b>The learner can:</b>
1. Plan a community event.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✘ 1.1 Undertake a project to deliver an event.</li> <li>✘ 1.2 Record the planning and organization of the event in a detailed action plan or annotated diary.</li> <li>✘ 1.3 Record the event on video.</li> </ul>

The above are not assessment criteria because they identify the assessment activity (the project) and the evidence (action plan, annotated diary, video).

They would be better expressed as assessment criteria for several learning outcomes, for example:

LEARNING OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
<b>The learner will:</b>	<b>The learner can:</b>
1. Plan a community event.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 1.1 Plan each stage of the event, describing and justifying required resources and activities, and setting targets for their completion to include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) key personnel</li> <li>(b) technical resources</li> <li>(c) venue/location/accommodation</li> <li>(d) sources of finance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### **Mapping to National Occupational Standards**

Units must be mapped against the appropriate National Occupational Standards. Current National Occupational Standards can be found on website [http://www.ukstandards.co.uk/Find\\_Occupational\\_Standards.aspx](http://www.ukstandards.co.uk/Find_Occupational_Standards.aspx). The mapping should be demonstrated below each learning outcome following formatting guidance included in Appendix 2.

### **Mapping to Key Skills Standards**

Where no National Occupational Standards exist, Level 1, 2 and 3 units must be mapped to Key Skills. The Key Skills Standards can be found on the QCA website <http://www.qca.org.uk/603.html>. The mapping should be demonstrated below each learning outcome following formatting guidance included in Appendix 2.

### **Mapping to the National Standards for Literacy and Numeracy**

Entry, Level 1 and Level 2 units must be mapped to the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula (as appropriate) to show opportunities for learners to develop these skills. Details of the standards can be found on the DfES Read Write Plus website <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/teachingandlearning>. The mapping should be demonstrated below each learning outcome following formatting guidance included in Appendix 2.

### **Signposting Key Skills:**

All Level 1, 2 and 3 units must be signposted to Key Skills. This should be done using the grid at the bottom of the Unit Plus Assessment Information section.

### **An Overview of Unit Design – Checklist:**

When the draft unit has been written, consider the following:

- Is the unit written in the correct format using the Unit Plus template?
- Is the unit title clear and unambiguous?
- Does the unit title make sense and give a clear indication of the learning involved in achieving the unit?
- Do the learning outcomes reflect the unit title and are they a coherent set?
- Are the learning outcomes and assessment criteria directly related to each other in a way that makes the unit coherent?
- Are all of the learning outcomes and all of the assessment criteria consistent with the level attributed to the unit?
- Are the assessment criteria sufficiently detailed to allow a judgement to be made that the level of achievement has been met in a given assessment?
- Is the unit written in a way that makes it accessible to others, for example, tutors and moderators?
- Does the Credit Value reflect the notional learning time required to achieve the unit?
- Has the unit been mapped to Basic Skills (where relevant)?
- Has the unit been signposted to Key Skills (where relevant)?
- Has the unit been mapped to National Occupational Standards (where relevant)?
- Have relevant footnotes been included for mapping details?
- Are the prescribed and optional assessments appropriate?



**UNIT TITLE:** <Title of unit>

**LEVEL:** <Written as word>

**CREDIT VALUE:** <Written as digit>

**NOCN UNIT CODE:**

**ACCREDITED UNIT NO:**

This unit has ? learning outcomes.

<b>LEARNING OUTCOMES</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT CRITERIA</b>
<b>The learner will:</b>	<b>The learner can:</b>
1. Type outcome 1 here (insert NOS ref here in brackets).	1.1 <Type criterion 1 for outcome 1 here> 1.2 <Type criterion 2 for outcome 1 here. The Text should automatically line up>
2. Type outcome 2 here (insert NOS ref here in brackets).	2.1 <Type criterion 1 for outcome 2 here> 2.2 <Type criterion 2 for outcome 2 here> (a) (b)

**Format Guidance:**

Add further criteria by adding paragraphs within the 2<sup>nd</sup> cell – the numbering will operate automatically.

[Add further outcomes by pressing tab when the cursor is in the bottom right-hand cell (which adds another row to the bottom of the table) – the numbering will also operate automatically]

To add bullet points under Assessment Criteria you need a soft carriage return (shift and carriage return together). A hard carriage return will take you back to the numbering again.

**UNIT TITLE:** <Title of unit>

**LEVEL:** <Written as word>

**CREDIT VALUE:** <Written as digit>

**NOCN UNIT CODE:**

**ACCREDITED UNIT NO:**

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

### Guidance:

This grid gives details of the assessment activities to be used with the unit attached.

Please refer to the NOCN Centre Handbook for definitions of each activity and the expectations for assessment practice and evidence for moderation.

**The assessment activities for this unit are indicated in the table below:**

**Key:** **P = Prescribed** – this assessment method *must* be used to assess the unit.

**O = Optional** – this assessment method *could* be used to assess the unit.

<b>Case study</b>		<b>Project</b>	
<b>Written question &amp; answer/test/exam</b>		<b>Role play/simulation</b>	
<b>Essay</b>		<b>Practical demonstration</b>	
<b>Report</b>		<b>Group discussion</b>	
<b>Oral question and answer</b>		<b>Performance/exhibition</b>	
<b>Written description</b>		<b>Production of artefact</b>	
<b>Reflective log / diary</b>		<b>Practice file</b>	

### Signposting Key Skills

This unit offers clear opportunities for learners to provide evidence of achievement in Key Skills achievement in the following skill area/s:

<b>Key Skill</b>		<b>Wider Key Skill</b>	
Communication		Working with others	
Information Technology		Problem solving	
Application of Number		Improving Own Learning and Performance	

## APPENDIX TWO

1. Save as – a Word document – with the unit title and level, for example, Health and Safety in the Workplace Level 1.
2. Margins – should be 2cm all round.
3. Headings
  - Font – Arial, Bold, 14, Dark Blue.
  - The headings are contained in a header – in order to complete the information, click View, Header and Footer. Once the information is complete click on the main body of the text to exit. This information will then be automatically updated on the following page.
  - Level and credit value – Take care to look at the hard copy of the unit carefully, as in some existing units these two fields appear in a different order.
  - NOCN Unit Code – The developer of the unit should indicate the appropriate learndirect code here, to enable the NOCN team to generate the correct code in OPUS.
  - Accredited Unit Number – this is the QCA unit code assigned by QCA.
  - The number of learning outcomes should be stated as a digit.
4. Unit table
  - Font – Arial, 11, Dark Blue.
  - Learning outcomes and assessment criteria – should begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop. Other punctuation should be used as appropriate. Please follow the guidance on the template for adding additional learning outcomes and assessment criteria. ‘Soft carriage return’, which is done by holding the shift key when you use the carriage return key, can be used to line up bullet points under assessment criteria.
  - Numbers in text, should be written as words not digits, for example, three not 3, (with the exception of the credit value).
  - For example, should be written out in full and e.g. should not be used. Commas must be used appropriately to precede and follow if within a sentence.
  - Mapping – all units must be mapped to National Occupational Standards. This should be shown as a code under each learning outcome. The code should be typed within normal brackets and with semicolon between codes. To input the NOS on a new line you need a ‘soft carriage return’. After the first incidence of mapping a footer must be inserted. Footer identifies the reference source for the mapping codes and will relate to NOS, it must include the title of the NOS, the name of the Standard Setting Body and the date of the NOS. The font should be Arial, 10, Dark Blue.
  - Where no NOS exist, Level 1, 2 and 3 units should be mapped to Key Skills Standards. Mapping details for each of the Key Skills, as relevant, should be included under each learning outcome following the formatting details outlined above in mapping for NOS.

- All Entry, Level 1 and Level 2 units must be mapped to the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Core Curricula as appropriate. Mapping details should be included under each learning outcome following the formatting details outlined above in mapping for NOS.
5. Assessment Grid – A 'P' or an 'O' should be inserted into the grid next to the range of assessment methods available for the unit, depending on whether the assessment is prescribed or optional. The font should be Arial, Bold, 12, Dark Blue, Capitals.
  6. Signposting to Key Skills – All Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 units must be signposted to Key Skills. Insert a tick in the box next to the appropriate Key Skill if the unit provides an opportunity for learning to be developed in this area.
  7. Final checks
    - Use spell checker to ensure that there are no obvious spelling mistakes.
    - Ensure all of the bracket marks which look like < > are removed.

