Guide to Calculating Assessment Workloads and Equivalences

Introduction

When assessment is well-balanced and appropriately distributed, students are better able to engage meaningfully with both formative and summative tasks, while staff have the capacity to offer constructive and timely feedback. Achieving fairness in student workload across modules with equivalent credit weighting, and preventing assessment bunching, requires thoughtful co-ordination across the programme team.

This guidance is designed to support programme teams in the planning, delivery and ongoing enhancement of assessments. It encourages staff to consider the overall assessment experience within a programme, ensuring that expectations, timing, and workload are consistent, equitable, and aligned with the principles of the Liverpool Learning Framework (LLF).

Thoughtfully designed assessments create space for students to reflect, receive feedback, and grow in confidence and capability. They provide evidence of learning outcomes achieved, while also helping students develop critical thinking, creativity, and professional skills. A varied and inclusive approach ensures that all students can demonstrate their strengths on fair and equitable terms. Effective assessment also prepares graduates for the future, building the digital fluency, global citizenship and resilience at the heart of the LLF.

The LLF positions assessment not simply as a measure of achievement, but as an active part of the learning process. This approach draws directly from three institutional Hallmarks:

- **Research-Connected Teaching:** Students act as producers of knowledge.
- **Active Learning:** Assessment is participatory and reflective.
- **Authentic Assessment:** Tasks mirror real-world, disciplinary, and professional practice.

These principles ensure that assessment within programmes is coherent, inclusive, and pedagogically grounded, aligning with Design Principle 5: Flexible and Inclusive Assessment for Learning. The underlying approach is grounded in active and experiential learning, recognising that students learn best by doing, applying, and reflecting.

How This Guide Supports Assessment Design

This guide is intended to help you estimate students' 'time on task'. It provides notional assessment workload to support balanced, evidence-based assessment design. While it does not prescribe fixed word lengths or equivalences (since these are highly contextual), it offers a framework for consistency and parity across programmes.

In creating this guide, we have considered feedback received from University of Liverpool staff. Additionally, we have reviewed OFA (2022) and QAA publications (2011; 2018; 2021a; 2021b) and drawn on work accomplished by a range of other universities including Lancaster University (Allan, 2021); Leeds Beckett University (2018); Ulster University (2018); University College, Dublin (2020); and University College, London (2020).

PSRB Requirements

Some programmes are accredited by Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and may have defined assessment structures or volume requirements. Where PSRB stipulations differ from this guidance, those requirements take precedence.

Key Information

Credits related to student workload

A 15-credit module is equivalent to a notional 150 hours of student effort and a 30-credit module to 300 hours. This should include everything the student needs to do from preparing for and attending classes to working on formative and summative assessments (QAA 2021a).

The level of study may influence the time students spend on assessment tasks; for example, certain activities may take less time for Level 6 students than for those at Level 4, even though the overall complexity and depth of the Level 6 assessment are greater.

As per the assessment requirements within Curriculum 2027, that will be embedded within the Code of Practice on Assessment (CoPA), the number of summative assessments should not normally exceed the following:

- Modules worth 15 credits (UG and PGT) and 20 credits (PGT) should have no more than two summative assessment points.
- 30 credit modules (UG and PGT) and 40 credit modules (PGT) should have no more than three summative assessment points.

Proportion of assessment hours

20-30% of a student's time should be spent preparing for assessment, with many in the sector favouring the lower end of that scale.

- **15-credit module:** notional assessment workload is 30-45 hours
- **30-credit module:** notional assessment workload is 60-90 hours

The proportion of student time spent on assessment will vary between disciplines. Subjects with high levels of contact time and practical activity (such as lab-based sciences or clinical programmes) typically allocate a smaller percentage of total study hours to assessment. By contrast, subjects with fewer scheduled sessions and greater emphasis on independent study (such as English or History) generally require a higher proportion of time for assessment-related work. This variation should be considered when determining assessment equivalences.

Weighting of assessments

Many modules will include more than one assessment. When planning assessment load, calculate how much student time should be allocated to each task based on its weighting. The total time across all assessments should reflect the proportionate share of the module's notional hours.

Aligning assessments with Learning Outcomes

Each assessment must test students' achievement of the module's Learning Outcomes (LOs). Where multiple assessments are used, ensure that each LO is assessed appropriately and that the balance of tasks gives students equitable opportunities to demonstrate achievement across all outcomes.

Assessment literacy and designing equitable assessment

Assessment literacy is fundamental to student success. When designing assessments, staff should build in time and guidance to help students develop the skills and understanding needed to complete each task effectively. The total assessment workload should reflect not only production time, but also preparation, practice, and feedback. Programme teams should consider students' readiness for each

assessment type and provide additional support where tasks are unfamiliar, ensuring all students can approach their assessments with confidence and clarity.

Further guidance on indicative assessment equivalences and level expectations is provided in **Appendix A**.

Worked Examples of Assessment Workload and Equivalences

The following examples illustrate how assessment workload and equivalences can be applied in practice. Workload estimates take account of disciplinary norms, expected levels of independent study, and Curriculum 2027's parameters on credit value and assessment points. Programme teams should use these as indicative guides, adapting them to local contexts and pedagogic intent.

Programme teams are encouraged to consider how Generative AI can be incorporated into summative assessments in ways that enhance learning, reflection, and digital fluency. Responsible and transparent use of GenAI supports C2027's commitment to authentic, inclusive, and future-focused assessment, while maintaining academic integrity and parity across programmes.

Example 1: 15-credit UG Module (Management/Business)

Module focus:	Applying management theory to real-world business challenges using digital and AI-enabled tools to support decision-making
Indicative assessment workload:	30–45 hours (20-30%)
Summative assessments:	1. **Individual presentation (40%):** 15-minute client-style presentation addressing a real or simulated business scenario **Indicative workload:** 12–15 hours (research, AI-assisted design, rehearsal and delivery) 2. **Individual report (60%):** 2,500-word analytical report applying theory to a business scenario **Indicative workload:** 23–25 hours (research, AI-informed data synthesis, writing, and revision)
Rationale:	Both assessments measure theory-to-practice application and professional communication
Authenticity:	Reflects consultancy and management practice where AI-supported analysis and visualisation are standard professional tools

Example 2: 30-credit UG Module (STEM)

Module focus:	Experimental design, data analysis, and communication of scientific findings, incorporating responsible use of digital and AI-enabled tools for accuracy and interpretation.
Indicative assessment workload:	75-80 hours (25-27%)
Summative assessments:	1. **Technical project report (60%):** 2,500–3,000-word individual or small-group report presenting an experimental or design-based investigation

	Indicative workload: 45 hours (project planning, data collection, analysis, writing and visual presentation) **Notes of GenAI:** Students may use AI-supported tools for data analysis, simulation or visualisation provided all use is declared and critically evaluated for accuracy and reliability 2. **Applied problem-solving exam (40%):** 2-hour online or in-person assessment focused on data interpretation, calculation and analytical reasoning **Indicative workload:** 30-35 hours (revision, practice problem sets and completion of the exam)
Rationale:	This assessment structure balances extended investigative work with an applied, time-controlled assessment that tests analytical proficiency under realistic constraints. Together, they measure the integration of theory, practical experimentation, and critical reasoning
Authenticity:	Reflects the demands of real-world scientific practice, where projects require independent inquiry, digital competence, and the ability to interpret and communicate complex data accurately

Example 3: 30-credit UG Module (Health/Professional Practice)

Module focus:	Applying theory to practice through professional reflection, evidence-based decision-making, and communication of applied knowledge
Indicative assessment workload:	60–90 hours (20-30%)
Summative assessments:	1. **Case-based analysis (30%):** 1,500-word written task applying theoretical models to a real or simulated professional scenario **Indicative workload:** 20–22 hours (research, analysis, application of theory, and writing) 2. **Practice portfolio (40%):** Curated evidence of skill development and reflection on practice experiences, including integration of feedback from supervisors or peers **Indicative workload:** 30 hours (gathering and annotating evidence, reflective writing, and critical commentary) 3. **Poster presentation (30%):** Visual and oral presentation of a small-scale service improvement or community health initiative **Indicative workload:** 20–25 hours (planning, evidence synthesis, poster design, and delivery)
Rationale:	This assessment structure allows students to demonstrate the integration of theory and practice, critical reflection on their professional development, and the ability to communicate effectively across diverse audiences
Authenticity:	Reflects assessment formats commonly used in professional health education and aligns with PSRB expectations, supporting employability through practice-based analysis, reflection, and professional communication

Further guidance

Further guidance on indicative assessment equivalences and level expectations is provided in **Appendix A**. This appendix outlines typical assessment volumes, notional workload ranges, and level-appropriate expectations for a standard 15-credit module, together with guidance on how these figures can be proportionately scaled for modules of other credit sizes (e.g. 30-credit modules equating to approximately double the notional hours and assessment effort). Programme teams should refer to this when designing or reviewing assessments to ensure consistency, fairness, and alignment with learning outcomes across modules and levels.

Further guidance on estimating the time students should spend on assessment tasks is provided in **Appendix B**, which outlines a five-stage approach to calculating assessment workload. Programme teams are encouraged to use this framework when designing or reviewing assessments to ensure consistency, transparency, and parity across modules.

For further information and support with assessment equivalences, please contact the Centre for Innovation in Education at **cie@liverpool.ac.uk**.

Appendix A - Indicative Assessment Equivalences and Level Expectations

The tables below provide indicative guidance on assessment volumes and the notional hours associated with different assessment types, based on the standard 15-credit module (approximately 30–45 hours of assessment activity). These equivalences are intended to support consistency and transparency in assessment design, not to prescribe fixed requirements.

Where a module includes multiple assessments, these hours should be distributed proportionately according to weighting. The same approach can be scaled for modules of other credit values (e.g. a 30-credit module would normally involve roughly double the total notional workload and assessment effort).

Programme teams are encouraged to exercise academic judgment in setting appropriate tasks that align with learning outcomes, disciplinary norms, and level of study. Where assessments fall outside these ranges, a clear rationale should be provided within the module specification.

Indicative Equivalences (with Ranges)

Assessment Type	Typical Length / Volume	Approx. Student Effort (hrs)
Essay / Report	1,500–3,000 words	30–45 hrs
Reflective Portfolio / Journal	1,500–2,500 words (or equivalent)	25–40 hrs
Exam (seen or unseen)	1.5–2 hours (≈1,200–1,800 words equivalent)	30–45 hrs
Group Presentation	10–20 mins (plus supporting materials)	25–40 hrs
Practical / Project Output	Equivalent to 1,500–3,000 words	30–45 hrs
Poster / Pitch / Creative Output	Equivalent to 1,500–2,500 words	25–35 hrs

Level-Specific Expectations

While total assessment effort for a 15-credit module remains broadly consistent across levels, expectations around complexity, autonomy, and synthesis increase progressively. Increases in level should reflect higher cognitive demand rather than a simple rise in word count.

Level	Indicative Assessment Focus	Notes on Progression
4	Demonstration of understanding, description, basic application	More structured tasks; shorter written components (e.g. 1,500-2,000 words)
5	Application and analysis, integration of sources	Slightly longer or more interpretive assessments (e.g. 2,000–2,500 words)
6	Critical evaluation, independent argument, synthesis	Higher-order thinking and independent research within same notional volume
7	Advanced synthesis, originality, research-based outputs	Greater depth and sophistication; similar or slightly higher workload (e.g. 2,500–3,000 words equivalent)

General Guidance

- Assessment load across a 15-credit module should normally fall within a total range of 1,500–3,000 words (or equivalent).
- Assessment combinations (e.g. exam + coursework) should collectively reflect 30–45 hours of assessment-related activity.

- Non-written outputs should have a clearly articulated equivalence to written word counts.
- Feedback, preparation, and revision are included within the total notional assessment hours.
- Level differentiation should focus on intellectual challenge, complexity, and autonomy, not just volume.

Appendix B - Estimating Student Workload for Assessment Tasks

Assessment in practice takes many forms, some well-established, others innovative or highly discipline-specific, and it is not possible for this guide to capture every variation. To support consistent and transparent workload planning, this appendix outlines a five-stage method for estimating the number of hours students are likely to spend on a particular assessment task.

When applying this approach, programme teams should consider the level of study, the type and weighting of each assessment, and the expected level of student effort and readiness.

Stage 1 – Identify and estimate time on task

Identify each stage or task students must complete to undertake the assessment, and estimate the time required for each, drawing on your knowledge of disciplinary norms and practices.

For instance, here are a few examples of processes, though there are potentially many more, particularly discipline-specific:

- **Planning and preparation:** devising an approach, formulating and refining a research question, identifying resources, experimenting with digital tools.
- **Research and development:** conducting initial research, collecting data, testing, interviewing, constructing or creating outputs.
- **Writing and production:** drafting, annotating, editing, and producing the assessed work.
- **Presentation and review:** presenting work, engaging in peer review, proof-reading, and finalising the submission.

The total student hours on task should reflect the time required across all relevant stages.

Stage 2 – Adjust for complexity and student readiness

Consider reducing or increasing the expected assessment length or scope based on:

- **Student readiness:** Is the format or tool new to them?
- **Level and research demand:** How intensive or conceptually complex is the task for this level of study?
- **Assessment design:** Does it involve multiple outputs or extensive analytical work?
- **Quality expectations:** Does it require highly polished or publication-standard outputs?

Adjust workload estimates to reflect these factors, balancing challenge with fairness and alignment to learning outcomes.

Stage 3 - Check workload balance across the module

Add up the estimated hours for this assessment and any others within the module, taking weightings into account. Compare the total against the notional workload for the module (see Key Information). If the total is significantly over or under, adjust the scope or length of tasks to ensure a fair and proportionate workload.

Stage 4 - Align workload with Learning Outcomes

Check that the estimated hours on task are proportionate to the Learning Outcomes being assessed. If a task requires substantial time but measures only a small part of one outcome, reconsider its scope or weighting.

Stage 5 – Compare workload across the programme

Check with colleagues teaching at the same level to ensure parity in the estimated assessment hours across modules.