FLC Assessment

What is a Placement assessment?
A placement assessment is designed to assess learner understanding and level of competence in the learning area. It assesses skills and knowledge across a range of competence levels in order to determine the level of the learning programme into which a learner should be placed to continue learning. This safeguard tries to ensure that the demands of the learning programme match the learner's level of competence in the learning area.

The IEB has developed placement assessments in an effort to assist the placement of learners into learning programmes appropriately. This assessment intends to assess learner understanding and competence in the learning area across a range of competence levels in order to determine the level at which a learner should be placed so that the demands of the learning programme match their level of competence in the learning area. Hence the assessment includes questions across the range AND samples understanding of key concepts expected at each level. The instrument assesses a learner's *entry readiness* for study and workplace training; it does not assess whether a learner is competent in all the requirements to pass an examination at a particular level i.e. it is not an achievement assessment.

It is worth remembering that assessment is not an exact science. This is not only because of the nature of assessment and the instrument itself – assessment by nature is a sampling exercise of a domain of knowledge - but also the people who write it. So, on a day a person may achieve a higher result than on another day because of factors such as motivation, stress levels on the day, health. The results of the placement assessment should hence be used in conjunction with a range of other information about the learner in order to place the learner appropriately.

Entry to a FLC programme assumes learning at ABET Level 3 to be in place. However a below average or weak ABET Level 3 learner is likely to have a poor foundation and hence may struggle with the Foundational Learning Competence learning programme and find it difficult. The most secure base for entry to a Foundational Learning Competence learning programme would be the achievement of NQF Level 1 in the learning area. Strong ABET Level 3 learners also stand a good chance of success.

Given this, the different decisions on the IEB placement assessment for Foundational Competence are as follows:
- Below ABET 3: this would suggest that the learner is below a level of competence for consideration for entry to any Foundational learning programme.
- Entry to ABET Level 3: this would suggest that the learner needs to do ABET 3 and then possibly also do a NQF 1 course before embarking on a Foundational Learning programme. The learning assumed to be in place for Foundational learning is ABET 3; however this does not mean that a learner will necessarily be able to adjust to the demands of the FLC. If s/he is only an average ABET 3 learner, then it is likely that FLC learning will be a serious challenge.
- Entry to NQF 1: this would suggest that the learner might be better off doing NQF 1 and then entering a Foundational Learning programme. This would again depend on how strong they are at NQF 1.
- Entry to NQF 2: learners at this level are likely to be borderline Foundational Learning candidates. They might pass if they were to attempt the test. However they would probably benefit from doing a Foundational Learning Competence learning programme to consolidate their knowledge and understanding.
- Above NQF 2: learners at this level stand a very good chance of passing the Foundational Learning assessment.

What is the external assessment for Foundational Learning Competence?
Each learning area has an external assessment. The final assessment in each learning area consists of 60 questions in a multiple-choice format. Each external assessment is 2,5 hours in length.

The two subject areas of *Foundational Learning Competence in Communications* and *Foundational Learning Competence in Mathematical Literacy* are assessed separately. Each subject has an external assessment conducted at IEB recognised assessment centres nationally. The IEB will be setting up a database of assessment centres at which learners may write the examination.

The purpose of these assessments is to check whether learners are proficient enough in the foundational skills and knowledge of each learning area in order to engage effectively in formal occupational training.

The assessment model that has been adopted is intended to support occupational skills development, and is therefore based on practical needs which require that the tests:
   • are available regularly and in the long term, electronically, on demand;
   • have a quick turn-around time for delivery of results;
   • are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer.

To meet these requirements the assessments are in a multiple-choice, machine-scored format.

The key feature of such a model is the on-going building of a bank of trialled assessment items that can be used in various permutations.

The questions are based on the curricula of the Foundational Learning Competence in the relevant learning area. They are proficiency assessments, aiming to test the state of readiness to embark on learning rather than assessment of completed learning.

The items have different levels of complexity. The test specifications indicate how many questions at each level of complexity must be included in the test. The following are the ratings of achievement:

80% - 100%	Competent Outstanding (CO)
70% - 79%	Competent Commendable (CC)
50% - 69%	Competent Adequate (CA)
40% - 49%	Not Competent Threshold (NCT)
Less than 40%	Not Yet Competent (NYC)

Why has the multiple-choice format been chosen for the external assessment?
The format allows for the building of a reliable item bank of questions. With an item bank it is possible to conduct assessments on a more frequent basis. The multiple-choice format does not require time-consuming marking sessions and hence enables a quick turn-around time between the conduct of the assessment and the release of results. The methodology appropriately meets the assessment needs of the FLC.

The key motivation for this format is the fact that the format more easily enables the development of an item bank from which tests of comparable difficulty can be produced, on demand.

In addition, examinations can be conducted and resulted in a relatively short space of time because assessments can be computer-marked. In the long term, assessment will be available online and hence results will be available immediately. The use of a methodology that can be computer-marked removes the risk of inaccuracy or prejudice in marking e.g. penalising bad handwriting.

Because of the decreased reliance on human markers, the assessments can be conducted relatively inexpensively. This was the second key consideration in the adoption of this particular assessment methodology.

The items in the IEB item bank have been set by experienced assessors, well-versed in teaching their respective learning areas. Before inclusion in the item bank, all items have been moderated, trialled, modified as necessary and reviewed to ensure they are clear and free of bias.

Is a multiple choice format appropriate for assessment of FLC Communications?

Multiple choice testing is an efficient and effective way to assess a wide range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities. Good question development and proper moderation and trialling, can produce probing questions that reliably assess conceptual understanding, analysis and evaluation in both learning areas i.e. Communications and Mathematical Literacy.

The multiple-choice format allows the assessment of most of the key skills in language, important for both reading and writing e.g. sequencing of ideas, identification of the key messages in a passage or a paragraph, the use of correct vocabulary and grammatical constructions, following the thread of an argument. However the methodology has been criticised because it does not allow for the assessment of extended writing.

Foundational Learning Competence, by definition, targets the minimum requirements for engaging in occupational learning. Any programme developed against the Foundational Communication Curriculum Framework as registered with the QCTO must include listening and speaking activities, and must meet the requirements for internal programme-based assessment of the speaking and listening outcomes.

The FC external assessment, however, focuses on reading with comprehension and processing information in different ways as the minimum requirements for engaging in further learning. Some would argue that the minimum competence for engaging in learning is the ability to read with comprehension.

So the external assessment of FLC Communications targets the reading of a variety of texts (including diagrams, graphical representations), understanding what is being said and then using the information provided in decision-making. The targeted skills then include extracting relevant information from text, making deductions and inferences from the material provided, making decisions based on the information provided, following an argument and arranging ideas to construct a coherent message.

Some occupations require that learners are able to produce extended pieces of writing. Others do not. It is hence probable that in those cases where learners will be required to prove competence in extended writing exercises, the Development Quality Partners (DQPs) will include this requirement in the actual qualification.

The IEB recognises the importance of extended writing and has undertaken the development of a curriculum and assessment process that focusses on writing. It will address skills such as report writing, summarising, evaluating and substantiation of a particular position.

Is there any assessment opportunity to assess writing skills?

The IEB recognises the importance of extended writing and has undertaken the development of an assessment curriculum that focusses on writing. It will address skills such as report writing, summarising, evaluating and substantiation of a particular position. This will be made available as soon as it has been developed and information about the assessment itself will then also be made available.

What is the relationship between the FLC part qualification, assessments in Foundational Learning Competence, the Foundational Learning Competence curricula and learning programmes?

The part qualification Foundational Learning Competence (FLC) outlines the outcomes expected from a learner who has successfully completed the final assessment for the FLC. The FLC assessment is an external assessment that focusses on the competencies outlined in the part qualification. The assessment may be written once a learner has completed a learning programme for FLC in either Communications or Mathematical Literacy i.e. the learner has received tuition in the requirements.

The following are considerations for a learner before embarking on the FLC assessment:
- Learning assumed to be in place: before embarking on a Foundational Learning Competence learning programme a learner should be competent at ABET Level 3. It is unlikely that learners who are not competent at ABET Level 3 will cope with the FLC assessments;
- Placement assessment: learners who are unsure about their competence level are advised to do a Placement Assessment to see whether they are:
  - Below ABET Level 3 and hence require additional instruction to achieve that level of competence;
  - Are at a level to embark upon a FLC learning programme
  - Are at a level to attempt the FLC assessment.

Learners who are not ready to undertake the FLC final assessment, should undertake the relevant FLC Learning Programme/s, either before or during their occupational training. After completing the relevant FLC programme/s, learners will then undertake the final assessment. Given the purpose of the FLC, ideally learners should determine their FLC competence before they embark on an occupational programme. If they are not successful, the learner should preferably complete the FLC programme prior to embarking on occupational training.

The final FLC assessments will be regularly available. Ideally it should be undertaken before a candidate wants to enter occupational training. Successful learners will get a Statement of Results for each learning area, and achieve the *Part Qualification* Foundational Learning Competence when they have passed both subjects.

Where will the FLC external assessment be conducted?

In all cases, the final assessment of the FLC will be conducted at IEB recognised assessment centres. Initially assessment centres will be available in major cities and gradually will be expanded to include out-lying areas. The IEB will place a list of assessment centres on its website (www.ieb.co.za under the Adult/Foundational Learning Competence).

The IEB has approached a number of organisations to establish IEB recognised assessment centres. Initially assessment centres will be available in major cities and gradually will be expanded to include out-lying areas. In time, as the need arises, the IEB will make known the process to become an IEB recognised assessment centres for Foundational Learning Competence. The intention is to include online assessment centres which will increase availability of assessment opportunities.

What are the criteria for an organisation to be recognised as an IEB assessment centre for Foundational Learning Competence? What process must be followed?
There are key criteria that must be fulfilled before the recognition of an assessment centre. These include accessibility, health, safety and security criteria and appropriate resourcing.

To be recognised as an assessment centre for Foundational Learning Competence by the IEB, the following facilities must be in place:
- Easily accessible venue in a safe environment;
- Adequate, safe parking;
- Easy access to public transport;
- The venue is able to house a minimum of 20 learners and a maximum of 90 learners;
- It is clean, has sufficient light and air flow, is free of noise and interference, and is conducive to writing an examination;
- Has adequate space, desks and chairs to accommodate the examinees. Examinees must be a minimum of one meter, on either side and at the back and front of the desk. Venues with sloped seating e.g. auditorium, are not appropriate.
- Staff to assist with the running of the examination and to check ID documents and invigilate as necessary (more than 30 candidate)
- Sufficient security to ensure that the examination can be conducted without interference;
- Staff at the centre have access to a telephone in order to be reached in case of an emergency;
- Appropriate toilet facilities.

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How does the assessment centre model work?

The assessment centre model will function as follows:
- An organisation applies to and is recognised by the IEB as an assessment centre for Foundational Learning Competence. The organisation does not have to be a provider of Foundational Learning Competence in order to apply for recognition as an assessment centre.
- The IEB in consultation with the assessment centre management will determine a set of dates on which FLC external assessment will be available at the centre.
- Providers of FLC will enrol learners for the external assessment through the IEB. The provider will select the assessment centre which is most convenient for their learners. The provider will work through the IEB and will not deal with the assessment centre.
- Once enrolled the IEB will confirm with the provider, the names of learners who are registered for the examination and the assessment centre to which they have been allocated.
- The IEB will inform the assessment centre of the number of learners enrolled for the examination.
- An examination session will require a minimum of 20 examinees. Should there not be 20 learners registered for the examination on the specified date, learners may be asked to write at an alternate venue.
- On the day of the examination, the IEB chief invigilator will go to the assessment centre with the examination papers as well as the answer sheets and registers, listing the learners registered for the examination.
- The assessment centre manager will be required to assist the IEB chief invigilator at the start of the session e.g. checking ID documents, informing examinees about key issues at the centre e.g. fire escapes.
- If there are more than 40 examinees, the assessment centre will need to provide additional invigilators as required i.e. one invigilator per 30 (or part thereof) additional examinees
- The IEB chief invigilator will collect the question papers and answer books after the examination and submit them to the IEB
- The assessment centre management will be responsible only for the running of the examination venue and will not be responsible for any administrative tasks e.g. registration of examinees, distribution of results.
- The IEB will distribute results to learners via the provider through whom they were registered for the examination.

The IEB will have IEB appointed chief invigilators and one chief invigilator will be appointed to a venue for an examination session. If an assessment centre wishes to make use of a number of different rooms, each room is considered as a separate venue and there will need to be an additional IEB chief invigilator for each venue.

The IEB will run training sessions for managers at recognised IEB assessment centres.

In time, the IEB will open the process of recognising IEB assessment centres to include more providers. At that stage a provider that wishes to apply to the IEB to be an IEB recognised assessment centre, will have to complete an application. There will be an initial cost to enable the IEB to check the facilities for suitability.

Are there any exemplar examination papers available?

Yes there are. Visit the IEB website on www.ieb.co.za for more information.