

Recalibration of Vocabulary Assessment Items

The assessment items (questions) written to assess receptive vocabulary knowledge in the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool have been recalibrated. The recalibration is based on data collected from learners who have used the Vocabulary assessment since it became available in November 2010. The recalibration exercise ensures that the information the Assessment Tool uses to select assessment items for learners at different achievement levels and calculate scale scores is based on the best data available.

Key points

Item calibrations tell the Assessment Tool how difficult assessment items are in comparison to each other. The Assessment Tool uses the item calibrations to select appropriate items to administer to a learner and to calculate a learner's scale score at the end of an assessment.

The new calibrations update the original calibrations, which were based on data collected as part of the item trials during development of the Vocabulary Assessment in 2010. The analysis shows little change between the original and updated calibrations.

Existing scale scores have been updated to take account of the new calibrations and can be compared meaningfully with scale scores from Vocabulary Assessments taken from now on.

The "cut points" for each of the performance level descriptors (Emerging, Expanding and Extended) have moved slightly to take account of the new calibrations, but this does not affect the performance level descriptors learners reported for any existing Vocabulary Assessment results.

What is a recalibration?

The Assessment Tool requires information about the relative difficulty of assessment items to make judgements about which items to administer to different learners and calculate their final scale scores. This information is referred to as item calibration. The original item calibration was based on data collected in online trials of the Vocabulary assessment items in 2010. Now, with thousands of "real" Vocabulary Assessments completed new analysis has taken place to ensure that the calibrations are based on a larger amount of learner data. The analysis shows little change between the original and updated calibrations.

What happens to existing learners' scores?

Scores from Vocabulary Assessments learners completed before the new calibrations were introduced (12 June 2011) have been updated so that they can be compared meaningfully with scores from any assessments taken from now on. This means that some learners' scores for Vocabulary Assessments taken before 12 June 2001 may now be slightly higher or lower than originally reported. This does not mean that the learners have done better or worse, rather that the reporting scale has been adjusted.

Does recalibration affect whether learners' scores are described as emerging, expanding or extended?

The cut points for the performance level descriptors (Emerging, Expanding and Extended) have been updated to reflect the new calibrations. Performance level descriptors reported for Vocabulary Assessments taken before 12 June 2001 will still be the same as originally reported. The table below shows the score ranges required for each of the performance descriptors using the new calibrations.

Table 1 New cut points for Vocabulary performance descriptors

Descriptor	Scale score range
Extended	Greater than 610
Expanding	Greater than 467 but less than or equal to 609
Emerging	Less than or equal to 467

Table 2 Original cut points for Vocabulary performance descriptors

Descriptor	Scale score range
Extended	Greater or equal to 616
Expanding	Greater than 508 but less than 616
Emerging	Less than or equal to 508

Table 3 Vocabulary performance descriptors (unchanged)

Vocabulary	
Learners at this step:	
Emerging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have an emerging vocabulary. They will be most comfortable with concrete nouns and frequently used verbs, adjectives and adverbs. These will usually be words used at home and in the community, or words specific to workplaces with which they are familiar. Learners towards the top end of this step will be able to make sense of some lower frequency words, particularly when these are presented with contextual supports.
Expanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have an expanding vocabulary that is likely to include some general academic and specialised words. They understand that words can have more than one meaning and can sometimes recognise when a word has been used figuratively. They are beginning to make sense of some popular idioms, such as "business as usual" and "look up to".
Extended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have an extended vocabulary that allows them to make sense of many general academic and specialised words. They are likely to understand when words and phrases have been used figuratively and can make sense of a range of idioms. Learners towards the top end of this step will have access to many low frequency words.