

Cumulative Assessment:

One concept and its varying interpretations

... led to the UNLcert® Executive Committee devoting their time intensively to this topic during their internal workshop in June 2012 in Dresden.

The possibility to acquire the higher education language certificate UNLcert® at levels Basis, I and II enjoys great popularity as it offers a range of advantages for teachers and learners. This includes the following two aspects in particular:

- The burden of examinations for students is eased in line with improving studying conditions.
- The attractiveness of UNLcert® for students is promoted, because the certificate can be acquired without any extra workload, and for teachers, because there is no additional examination workload.

The individual institutions have used the scope that is at their disposal in the most creative of ways. As a result the UNLcert® Executive Committee has only established a few foundation pillars to assure that the foreign language competences acquired at the accredited institutions meet qualitative standards, and that the comparability between higher education institutions is facilitated.

What does cumulative assessment mean?

- Cumulative assessment means that one, several or all four skills can be assessed before the final course/module examination.

What requirements must be addressed?

- All four skills – reading comprehension, speaking, listening comprehension and writing – must be assessed and each must be passed.
- Section II, paragraph 10 of the UNLcert® Example Examination Regulations, or rather paragraph 5, sections 5.3 to 5.5 determine the minimum requirements regarding the length of the examinations. In order to certify Level II for example, the length of examinations must be at least as follows:

Listening comprehension	- 15 minutes
Reading comprehension	- 60 minutes
Speaking	- 15 minutes
Writing	- 60 minutes
- The final grade is calculated by taking the average of the grades from each part of the assessment. Course grades can, but do not have to be included in determining the final grade.
- Each grade can be used only once for a UNLcert® certificate i.e. the grades that went into the UNLcert® Basis certificate cannot be used again for the UNLcert® I certificate.

How can the results of cumulative assessment be determined?

Cumulative assessment may be achieved by the accumulation of final grades in a number of sections of the training programme/module (variant A) or through the accumulation of assessments carried out in the final section of the training programme/ module (variant B).

Variant A:

Option 1:

A level consists of two/ three/four courses; every course is concluded with an examination in which all four skills are assessed. For each course a final grade is awarded. All courses should be considered equally in the awarding of the certificate.

The certificate is awarded by either adding *the final grades of the individual courses* and dividing this by the respective number of courses, or by adding *the individual grades of the courses for each skill* and dividing this by the respective number of courses.

(Possible problem: how do we deal with learners with prior qualifications who only have to do a part of the courses or the last part of the training programme? A distortion of the actual level of proficiency may arise, because the first and second courses do not correspond to the identified level).

The length of at least 150 minutes for Level II will probably be exceeded if there are examinations in 2 or 3 modules as the following example shows:

- 1. Module: 10 – 10 – 35 – 35 minutes
 - 2. Module: 10 – 10 – 45 – 45 minutes
 - 3. Module:
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- Total: 20 – 20 – 80 – 80 minutes

This example, with examinations in the individual skill-based courses, complies with the required length of at least 150 minutes for Level II:

- Listening comprehension: 15 minutes
- Speaking: 15 minutes
- Reading comprehension: 60 minutes
- Writing: 60 minutes

Option 2:

A level consists of two/ three/ four skill-based courses; each course concludes with an examination in which the respective skill/s is/are assessed.

The certificate is awarded by adding the individual grades of the courses for each skill and dividing this by the respective number of courses.

(Possible problem: A distortion of the actual level of proficiency may arise, because the first and second courses do not correspond with the identified level. How do we deal with learners with prior qualifications who only have to do a part of the courses or the last part of the training programme?)

This example, with examinations in the respective skills-based courses, complies with the required length of at least 150 minutes for Level II:

- Listening comprehension: 15 minutes
- Speaking: 15 minutes
- Reading comprehension: 60 minutes

Writing: 60 minutes

This option is not allowed at Level I.

Variant B:

A level consists of two/three/four courses, but only the last one is required to acquire the certificate. (The grades in the first courses are not taken into consideration).

In the final section of the training programme/module all four skills are tested. The speaking assessment can either take place together with the other three examination sections, or be integrated into the course and in this case spread over the last 4-5 weeks of the training. The student receives a grade for every part of the assessment. The final grade is calculated by taking the average of these grades.

This example complies with the required length of at least 150 minutes for Level II:

Listening comprehension: 15 minutes

Speaking: 15 minutes

Reading comprehension: 60 minutes

Writing: 60 minutes

(Please note: Strictly speaking this is not about the cumulative assessment of grades, but rather an examination without a previous final course examination).

What must be considered when issuing the certificates?

- It must be clearly formulated on the certificate that the level has been achieved through cumulative assessment.
- A sentence must be included explaining how the grade has been calculated.
- All partial grades must be included. Course grades can, but do not have to be included in determining the final grade.

What else is it important to know?

- In the re-accreditation application, you should include the examinations from the *final part* of the training programme, unless skills-based courses are involved.
- On the examination itself, it must be clearly stated that this examination can lead to acquiring a higher education language certificate.

If you have any further questions on cumulative assessment, please contact Barbara Amling (barbara.amling@zentral.uni-rostock.de).