Checklist: Harkes and Shakespeare (2007) FHSC Assessment Audit Summary. (Full paper also available to OU staff – see below.)

The audit recorded assessment features on the thirty one courses running in the faculty in October 2006 (points 1 to 3 below). It analysed the assessment strategy more deeply on nine of these courses (points 4 to 11 below).

Influences on assessment

- The OU move to a programme based approach means that course teams need to consider how their assessment strategy ‘fits’ with faculty policy and with other faculty or programme courses the student may have taken or will take in the future.

- With the increased involvement in professional pre-qualifying programmes all courses, including the open access ones which feed into the programmes, are subject to external scrutiny by professional and statutory bodies. Course teams need to consider how their assessment strategies map onto standards, competencies and proficiencies identified by these external stakeholders.

- The various partnerships which the faculty has developed with employers means they too have an interest in assessment strategies.

Findings

1. The mean number of assignments for 60 point courses is 5.5 with a range of 3 to 7. The mean number for 30 point courses is 3.7 with a range of 3 to 4. In addition some of these courses had iCMAs.

2. Substitution was allowed on one assignment on approximately one third of the courses but not on any of the courses involving assessment of practice.

3. An exam formed part of the assessment strategy on just over half of the courses. The exam followed the format of a three hour paper with three questions on all courses where this information was available. None of the practice-assessed courses had exams. All courses without an exam had an examinable component predominately an end-of-course project or portfolio.

4. The nine courses offered options in over half their assignments. Approximately a third of the assignments consisted of more than one part – for example an exercise on number skills in addition to an essay.

5. The mode length of essay for level 1 and level 2 courses was 1500. However, for level 2 courses all assignments not conforming to the mode fell above 1500 words whereas for level 1 courses the majority fell below. The mode for level 3 courses was 2000 words.

6. The format of the assignments at level 1 and level 2 was largely essays with some use of reflective accounts, a practice portfolio and a report. Level 3 also relied largely
on essays but with some more unusual formats including a learning contract, a memo and a presentation.

7. Just under half of the assignments required the students to use a practice-based incident or aspect.

8. The most common process word in assignment titles was discuss, followed by describe. There were no discernible differences between the processes required by the titles at level 1 and level 2. The word critically was much more likely to occur in level 3 titles and was not used at all at level 1.

9. Learning outcomes could appear in the body of guidance for each assignment, elsewhere in the assessment guide or be numbered in the guide and appear instead in the main course material. On one course the assignment guide referred to professional (NMC) outcomes rather than course specific ones.

10. The most common Dearing thread identified in the courses was knowledge and understanding and the most common key skill was communication – essay. This suggests that the overall preferred assessment mode is to require discourse around knowledge.

11. Professional and Practical skills assessment is largely limited to closed practice courses. It may be possible to extend these to open access courses using observational exercises with video examples. This may make it easier to meld theory and practice courses.