Generic Level Descriptors

Practical Guide for Standard Setters and Evaluators

About this Guide

Under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), each qualification is assigned a QF level to indicate its position in the hierarchy relative to others based on the complexity of learning contained in the qualification. The QF level of a qualification is determined in accordance with the Generic Level Descriptors (GLD).

This Guide is one of the practical tools to help **standard setters and evaluators** use and apply the GLD and to **determine the QF level of a qualification**. The GLD serve as a reference tool for the following purposes:

- For internal quality assurance (IQA), to determine the QF level of a learning programme and / or qualification during internal validation, approval, monitoring and review;

- For external quality assurance (EQA), to determine the QF level of a learning programme and / or qualification;

- For appointed assessment agencies implementing the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanism under the HKQF, to design the assessment task(s) so as to determine whether the knowledge, skills and experience acquired by individuals are at the specified QF level. Usually when conducting RPL, the GLD are used together with the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) formulated by Industry Training Advisory Committees or Cross-Industry Training Advisory Committee of respective industries;

- When awarding and recognising qualification(s) and / or benchmarking the qualification(s) against the HKQF, to determine the QF level of the relevant qualification(s); and

- For entering a qualification into the Qualifications Register (QR), to ensure accuracy of the QF level of the qualification.

To determine the QF levels of the Units of Competency (UoCs) in the SCS, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) will make available guidance notes on moderation of SCS to professional writers.

This Guide is for general reference only and should be read together with the GLD, which can be found on the website of the HKQF at www.hkqf.gov.hk.

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Part 1 GLD in brief

The Generic Level Descriptors (GLD) specify, in four domains, the outcome standards expected of qualifications at each level of the HKQF. These outcome standards are attainable through different forms of learning. Learning may be formal (via a course of study in a learning programme), informal (by experience) and / or non-formal (via structured learning environments without a formal curriculum, e.g. conference attendance) in various modes and may lead to academic, vocational and professional qualifications.

Each descriptor in the GLD starts with an action verb(s). Together with the corresponding contextual information and specified manner, the descriptors provide an indication of the expected level of knowledge and skills assessable and attainable at the relevant QF level.
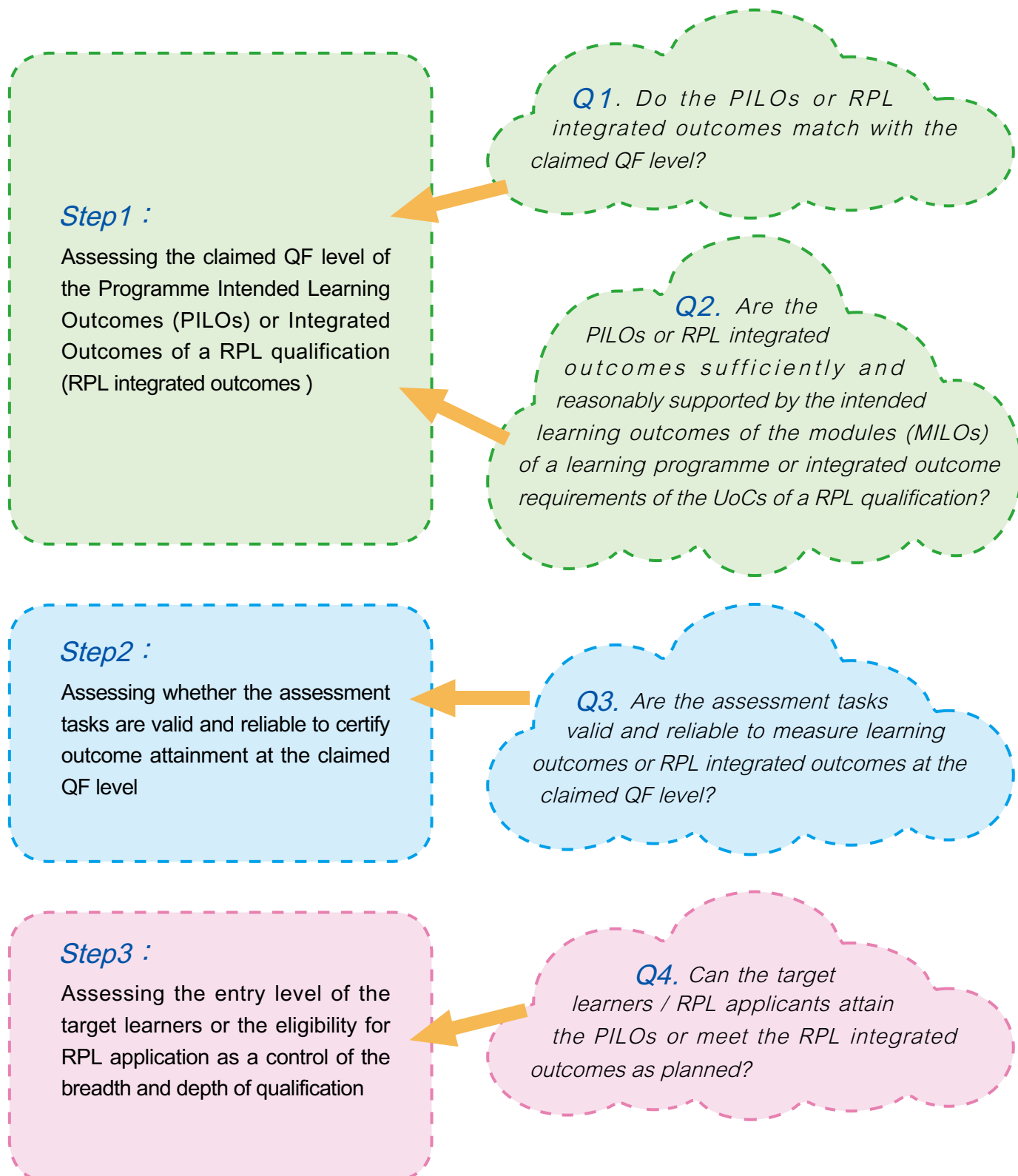
The descriptors progress in a linear manner from the simplest at level 1 to the most advanced at level 7. They are hierarchical, with those at lower levels subsumed under higher levels. Horizontally, the descriptors are inter-related across the four domains at the same QF level. To have a holistic understanding, the descriptors in each domain of the same QF level should be read together. For example, at QF level 1, the learner applies basic knowledge and memory recall (Knowledge and Intellectual Skills domain) to execute routine and repetitive tasks, by applying learnt responses (Processes domain) under close supervision (Autonomy and Accountability domain).

Tips

- The GLD are not an exact science. You must exercise judgement in interpreting and applying the GLD to the discipline, profession or sector in context.

- The descriptors in the GLD at various QF levels are hierarchical, with those at lower levels subsumed under higher levels.

- To have a holistic understanding, the descriptors in each domain of the GLD at the same QF level should be read together.

- In some circumstances, you may need to apply the GLD in conjunction with the ATS, Guidelines for the use of QF Credit, Common Descriptors on Associate Degree and Higher Diploma, SCS, SGC, QG for SCS-based and SGC-based Courses, and other relevant documents.

Part 2 Determination of QF Level

The QF level of a qualification is determined by asking the following questions via a three-step approach:

Q1. *Do the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes match with the claimed QF level?*

Step1 :

Assessing the claimed QF level of the Programme Intended Learning Outcomes (PILOs) or Integrated Outcomes of a RPL qualification (RPL integrated outcomes)

Q2. *Are the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes sufficiently and reasonably supported by the intended learning outcomes of the modules (MILOs) of a learning programme or integrated outcome requirements of the UoCs of a RPL qualification?*

Step2 :

Assessing whether the assessment tasks are valid and reliable to certify outcome attainment at the claimed QF level

Q3. *Are the assessment tasks valid and reliable to measure learning outcomes or RPL integrated outcomes at the claimed QF level?*

Step3 :

Assessing the entry level of the target learners or the eligibility for RPL application as a control of the breadth and depth of qualification

Q4. *Can the target learners / RPL applicants attain the PILOs or meet the RPL integrated outcomes as planned?*

Step 1: Assessing the claimed QF level of the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes

Q1.   Do the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes match with the claimed QF level?

First, please look for the following three essential elements in (a) clearly defined PILO(s) or RPL integrated outcome(s).
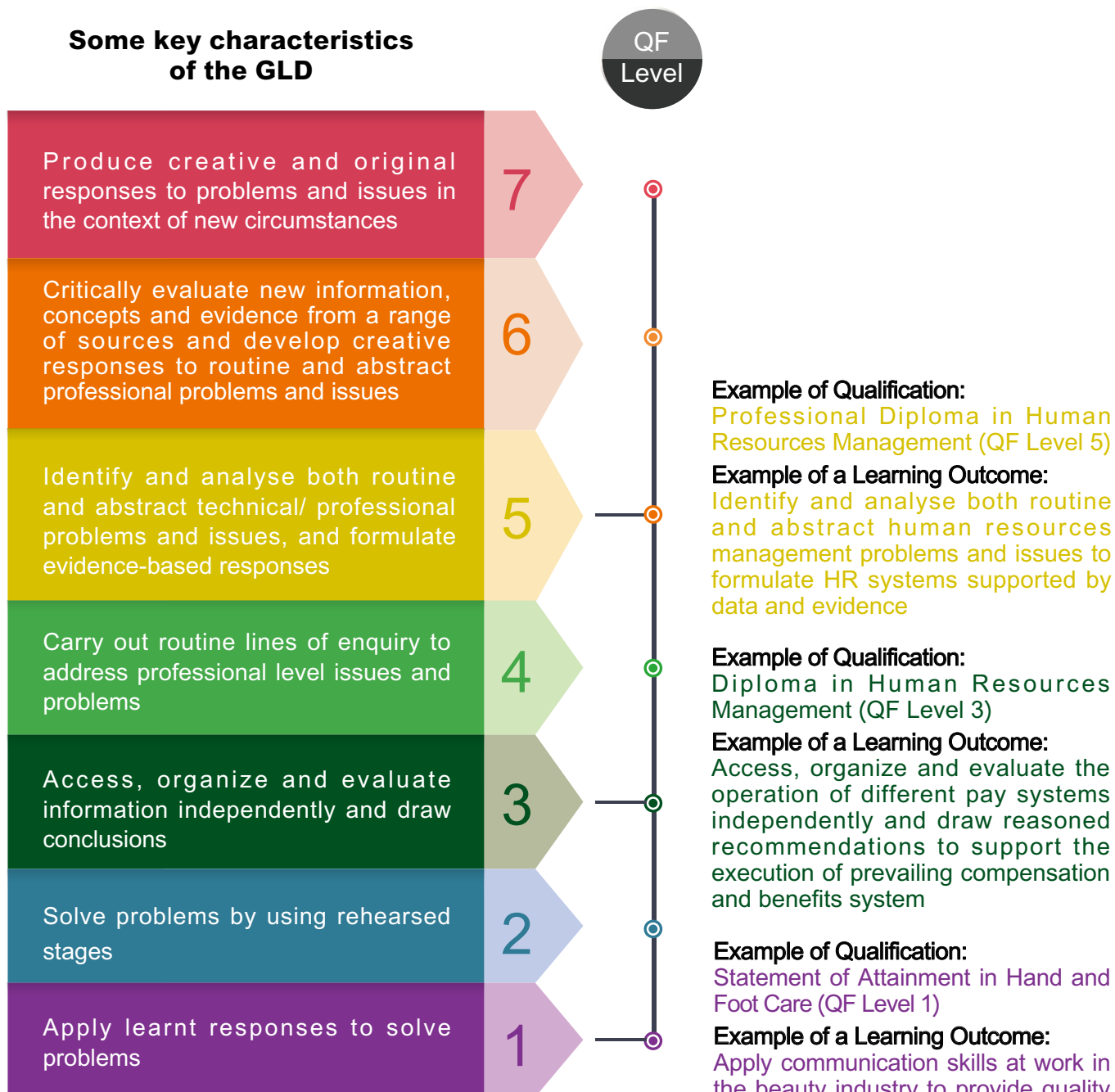
(i) **An action verb** **+** (ii) **Activities, tasks and processes to be undertaken** **+** (iii) **Outcome requirements / standards**

i.   **An action verb** to express what the learners / RPL applicants are expected to know and be able to do, for example

- identify and analyse,
- access, organise and evaluate
- apply learnt responses.

ii.   **Activities, tasks and processes to be undertaken** by the learners / RPL applicants in context, for example

- (identify and analyse) both routine and abstract human resources management problems and issues,
- (access, organise and evaluate) the operation of different pay systems independently
- (apply) communication skills at work in the beauty industry.

iii.   **Outcome requirements / standards** to determine the attainment of the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes at the claimed QF level, for example

- (identify and analyse both routine and abstract human resources management problems and issues) to formulate HR systems supported by relevant data and evidence,
- (access, organise and evaluate the operation of different pay systems independently) and draw reasoned recommendations to support the execution of prevailing compensation and benefits system for the organisation
- (apply communication skills at work in the beauty industry) to provide quality customer services to attract new and regular customers, and referrals so as to improve the company's business turnover.

Second, please look for evidence that the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes are commensurate with the outcome standards at the claimed QF level. The following diagram shows examples of PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes aligning with a discrete QF level:

Some key characteristics of the GLD

QF Level

Produce creative and original responses to problems and issues in the context of new circumstances	**7**
Critically evaluate new information, concepts and evidence from a range of sources and develop creative responses to routine and abstract professional problems and issues	**6**
Identify and analyse both routine and abstract technical/ professional problems and issues, and formulate evidence-based responses	**5**
Carry out routine lines of enquiry to address professional level issues and problems	**4**
Access, organize and evaluate information independently and draw conclusions	**3**
Solve problems by using rehearsed stages	**2**
Apply learnt responses to solve problems	**1**

Example of Qualification:
Professional Diploma in Human Resources Management (QF Level 5)
Example of a Learning Outcome:
Identify and analyse both routine and abstract human resources management problems and issues to formulate HR systems supported by data and evidence

Example of Qualification:
Diploma in Human Resources Management (QF Level 3)
Example of a Learning Outcome:
Access, organize and evaluate the operation of different pay systems independently and draw reasoned recommendations to support the execution of prevailing compensation and benefits system

Example of Qualification:
Statement of Attainment in Hand and Foot Care (QF Level 1)
Example of a Learning Outcome:
Apply communication skills at work in the beauty industry to provide quality customer services to attract new and regular customers, and referrals so as to improve company's business turnover

Tips

- If not all PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes are at the same QF level, please apply the majority rule by taking into account the weighting of individual PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes. For example, if a qualification has five PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes and three are at the claimed QF level 5, the qualification is a QF level 5 qualification by the majority rule.

Q2.   Are the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes **sufficiently** and **reasonably** supported by the MILOs of a learning programme or integrated outcome requirements of the UoCs of a RPL qualification?

MILOs or integrated outcome requirements of the UoCs of a RPL qualification serve as the building blocks for the learners to achieve the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes. The meanings of 'sufficiently' and 'reasonably' are illustrated as follows:

MILO1 or UoC integrated outcome requirement 1

MILO2 or UoC integrated outcome requirement 2

MILO3 or UoC integrated outcome requirement 3

PILO1 or RPL integrated outcome 1

*For each PILO or RPL integrated outcome, are there **sufficient** contributions from the underpinning MILOs / UoC integrated outcome requirements?*

MILO3 or UoC integrated outcome requirement 3

PILO1 or RPL integrated outcome 1

PILO2 or RPL integrated outcome 2

*For each MILO / UoC integrated outcome requirement, is it **reasonable** for it to contribute to multiple PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes?*

💡 **Tips**

When determining the QF level, please ask for evidence that shows the sufficient and reasonable contributions from the MILOs of the modules of a learning programme or integrated outcome requirements of the UoCs of a RPL qualification to each of the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes.

Step 2: Assessing whether the assessment tasks are valid and reliable to certify outcome attainment at the claimed QF level

> Q3.   Are the assessment tasks valid and reliable to measure learning outcomes or RPL integrated outcomes at the claimed QF level?

In order to ascertain whether a person has attained the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes, there should be appropriate assessment tasks that are **valid** and **reliable** to measure what they are set to measure at the claimed QF level consistently. Assessment tasks may include assignments, examinations, projects, practical tests and interviews.

Validity

The assessment measures what it intends to measure.

For example, a mark (or a grade) based on a learner's recall of knowledge is not a valid measure of the learner's knowledge application.

Reliability

The extent to which assessments are consistent.

For example, different assessors using the same assessment task should arrive at the same conclusion about a learner's competency attainment.

For example, if one of the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes for a qualification in software programming is to 'be able to design and develop web-enabled software using Java and evaluate the effectiveness of the deliverable with evidence' at QF level 5, a valid assessment task could be a project requiring learners to design web-enabled software using Java befitting the needs of the target client, with a self-evaluative project report outlining the rationales for the design, the pros and cons of the delivered software and observations for potential enhancement (Processes domain at QF level 5).

If the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes are directly linked to the performance requirements of a particular job function required by an industry or a sector, it would be helpful if the assessment task replicates real world conditions as far as practicable. An example from a RPL qualification of the Property Management industry is on the next page.

**Statement of Attainment in Cleaning Work of the
Property Management Industry (QF Level 1)**

Units of competency (UoCs):

1. Have knowledge on emergency situations
2. Know about fire prevention in a building
3. **Carry out basic cleaning work of a building**
4. Carry out daily property management duties in a safe manner
5. Know about the government departments and public services organisations in relation to property management

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UoC 3 has the following 2 integrated outcome requirements:

UoC Title	Integrated outcome requirements
Carry out basic cleaning work of a building	1. Understand basic concepts of cleaning and environmental protection 2. Carry out basic cleaning duties correctly according to schedule

Valid assessment task(s) would be practical test(s) and/or oral test(s) conducted in a simulated property management working environment to demonstrate mastery of the following competencies at QF level 1: (i) understanding basic concepts of cleaning and environmental protection; (ii) knowing the basic steps of cleaning and clearing and the use of supplementary instruments; (iii) paying attention to clearance of drains and ponding of water at low-lying area; and (iv) carrying out basic cleaning work, removing garbage and clearing stagnant water according to planned schedule. To ensure reliability of the assessment task(s), please look for assessment policy and procedure documents, sample assessment task instruction, sample assessments, marking scheme, rubric and marked assessments as evidence of a valid and reliable assessment task.

Integrated outcome requirements	Evidence of Satisfactory Performance at QF level 1
1. Understand basic concepts of cleaning and environmental protection 2. Carry out basic cleaning duties correctly according to schedule	Demonstrated **recall** of basic concepts of cleaning and environmental protection, with particular attention to clearance of drains and ponding of water at low-lying area Demonstrated the ability to **apply the learnt basic** steps of cleaning and clearing and **use** supplementary **instruments** to carry out basic cleaning work, remove garbage and clear stagnant water **according to instruction and on schedule.**

In the above example, the RPL applicant must be able to demonstrate the meeting of both integrated outcome requirements. In the context of the whole RPL qualification, the applicant must be able to demonstrate meeting all the integrated outcome requirements of all UoCs. Standard setters and evaluators are kindly requested to look for evidence that the assessment tasks are valid and reliable to certify the RPL applicants' attainment of the integrated

Step 3: Assessing the entry level of the target learners or the eligibility for RPL application as a control of the breadth and depth of qualification

Q4.   Can the target learners / RPL applicants attain the PILOs or meet the RPL integrated outcomes as planned?

Operators of learning programmes are expected to take the characteristics and diversity of the target learners into account as they design learning and teaching activities and assessment tasks for learners' attainment of the PILOs at the claimed QF level as planned.

Imagine there are two learning programmes with the same sets of PILOs: *'use different customer service techniques in handling routine clubhouse related requests'*. However, one learning programme has a longer study duration than the other. Why? The learning programme that has a longer study duration aims to train learners without any prior knowledge, skills or experience. Learners of the former programme typically require more practice sessions so that they can gradually pick up various customer service techniques.

The larger the gap between the PILOs and the target learners' related prior knowledge, skills and experience, the more learning and teaching activities the learners are likely to go through in order to master the PILOs at the claimed QF level.

PILOs

Programme Structure and Content

Assessment Tasks

Learning and Teaching Activities

Target learners without any prior knowledge, skills or experience

PILOs

Prior knowledge, skills or experience

Programme Structure and Content

Assessment Tasks

Learning and Teaching Activities

Target learners with some prior knowledge, skills or experience
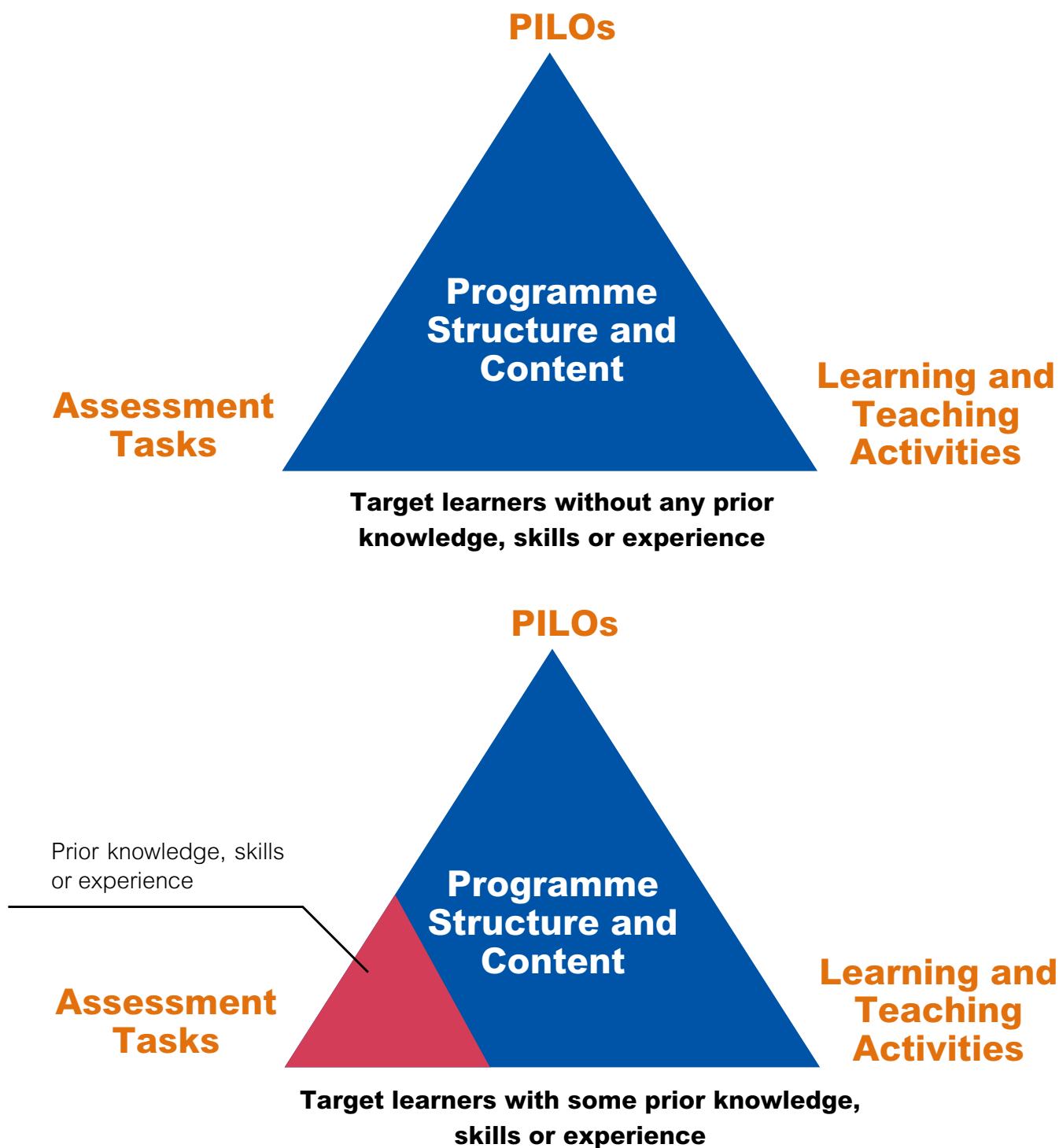
Please look for evidence of an alignment of the PILOs, the learning and teaching activities and assessment tasks to ensure that the target learners have a fair chance to attain the PILOs.

The same is true in the context of RPL qualifications that do not require the completion of a learning programme. Applicants must have met the specified minimum requirements in terms of work experience in order to have a fair chance to attain the RPL integrated outcomes through RPL assessment.

Part 3 Overall Notes

The GLD serve as a benchmark for determining the QF level of a qualification.

When there is uncertainty in level determination, it would be a good practice to adopt a **best fit approach** by comparing the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes with the descriptors of the **GLD at one level above and below.**

The assessment tasks must be valid and reliable to certify the learners' / RPL applicants' attainment of the PILOs or RPL integrated outcomes.