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How you’ll be assessed

Your CIPD programme will be assessed in a number of ways. For many students, traditional exams and time-constrained assessments play a key role, and these are discussed in detail in Guide 6. However, you’ll also need to prepare for assignments.

This guide provides you with hints and tips for tackling assignments. It also provides advice and guidance on the Management Research Report (postgraduate-level students), the work-based project (certificate students), and the business report (Certificate in Business Awareness and Advanced Professional Study (CBAAPS) students).

Recommended books
To help support you through the assessment process, we recommend:

- *Developing and Applying Study Skills: Writing assignments, dissertations and management reports*, Donald Currie.
- *Personal Effectiveness*, Diana Winstanley.

To find out more about these and other books, see Guide 7. To order a book and benefit from your 20% student discount, visit [www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore](http://www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore) or call 0870 800 3366.
About your assignments

Throughout your studies, you’ll need to submit a number of assignments. They’re part of the assessment mechanisms for each module.

If you’re a postgraduate-level student, you’ll be required to pass both the exam and the assignments for each module. As a certificate student, you’ll need to pass all the assessed elements.

Assignments serve a number of purposes. They:

- provide an opportunity for you to receive feedback, so that you can monitor the extent to which your knowledge and understanding is developing
- provide a focus for you to develop your learning in the context of the major topics and themes that are built on throughout your study programme
- allow you to develop your analytical, critical and evaluative faculties by linking the theories and knowledge that you acquire in your studies with the HR policies, procedures, systems and practices that operate within your workplace
- provide you with the opportunity to add value through your activities in the workplace by encouraging you to compare and contrast best practice elsewhere with the systems, procedures and activities of your own organisation
- promote practical skills with written formats (particularly the systematic presentation of written materials in a report structure) and interpersonal skills (particularly informing, persuading, gathering information and negotiating)
- allow you to add depth as well as breadth to your studies in a subject area, building your professional knowledge and practical skills in the process.
Assignment topics and types
Assignment topics are set by your tutor and are wide-ranging while also being thematically constrained – for example, to recruitment/selection, training/development, coaching/appraisal, and so on.

The topics set should have an organisational focus, and the themes should include investigative work (for example, into other organisations or some form of literature search) that takes you beyond your own organisation.

Written assignments should generally specify a maximum number of words. Anything up to 2,500 words is likely to be appropriate for a postgraduate-level assignment, and up to 2,000 words for a certificate-level assignment.

Some assignments – particularly those that are skills-based – may take a different form to the standard written assignment. You could be asked to develop materials used for a presentation, such as slides and notes. Or, as part of skills exercises, you may be asked to include role-play briefs, with an evaluation and discussion of the role-play.

Your tutor will give you further information and advice on how you should present your assignments.

Assignments aren’t necessarily undertaken on a purely individual basis. Group projects and tasks are not uncommon. However if you present an assignment as part of a group effort, your tutor will need to see what you contributed so that marks can be awarded accordingly.
Tackling an assignment
Whatever the topic of your assignment, the following steps should help you to get started. They all apply equally to Management Research Reports, work-based projects or business reports.

Step 1
Once your assignment has been set, you’ll need to clarify your understanding of the question with your tutor. This will allow you to address the issues precisely and help you avoid introducing irrelevant information. Your tutor will also be able to provide guidance on reading material.

Step 2
The next step is to collect all the information and conduct your research.

Where to find the information
There’ll be no shortage of information and data available to you. However it’s very important to go about collecting it methodically and carefully.

• Begin your research with the books on your recommended reading list using the indexes to identify discussion of your chosen topic. Visit www.cipd.co.uk/learnerandtutor to see the recommended reading list for your qualification.
• Visit your centre library and consult the various catalogues, indexes and abstracting services available as a means of identifying books and journal articles relevant to your research. The librarians there are likely to be able to help you find and use these resources. You’ll find things like the British Humanities Index and Anbar Personnel and Training Abstracts useful for researching current topics in journals and newspapers.
• Check the library database on our website to see whether there’s a reading list related to your topic, or do a specific search at www.cipd.co.uk/lis
• Contact our library for advice on literature not held in your centre library. Look through the indexes in specialist journals.
• Visit our website to access over 330 journals and magazines at www.cipd.co.uk/journals
• Make use of CD-ROMs and online services to obtain material on your topic.
• Use the Internet to see what relevant information you can find, but remember to check the authenticity of your sources.

For books that can help you to tackle assignments, see Guide 7 or visit our bookstore at www.cipd.co.uk/bookstore
Tip
When undertaking your research, remember to make detailed notes on the references and locations of your sources. You’ll need them for your bibliography, and you’ll save yourself considerable time by not having to track down specific references later on.

You should list the references in any bibliography alphabetically, starting with the name of the first author, and including the following information:

- author(s), editor(s) or organisation(s) responsible for writing or compiling the book
- year of publication
- title and subtitle (if relevant) in italics
- edition (if not the first)
- place of publication
- publisher
- series and individual volume number where appropriate.

For example:

Using information resources appropriately
It’s important that you use available resources appropriately at all times during your studies. There are a number of offences that could result in your centre or the CIPD taking serious disciplinary proceedings, which in turn could result in marks being deducted or work being declared void. These proceedings include, but aren’t limited to:

- plagiarism, using material not acknowledged as belonging to another writer.
  Visit www.cipd.co.uk/learnerandtutor to view our policy on plagiarism
- copying from another student’s work or another source
- removing pages from library documents
- taking library books/journals without authorisation, either from our library or your own centre.
Step 3
Plan your approach. The ability to communicate your ideas in writing is an important management skill. To be effective, your material needs to be presented in a logical sequence.

- Begin with a succinct introduction stating your main themes.
- In the main body, you’ll need to discuss the themes in greater detail and introduce conflicting arguments, analyse ideas and construct logical arguments, illustrated and supported by appropriate examples of evidence.
- Your conclusion should summarise your findings and the recommendations you made in the main body.

Tips for effective assignments
- When writing the body of your assignment, be clear and remember not to assume too much knowledge on the part of the reader, explain yourself fully and give simple definitions of complicated terms.
- Organise your research material in the order you think best reflects the planned sequence of your report.
- Use illustrations and diagrams where applicable and, if appropriate, use quotations.
- Remember to acknowledge your sources.
Step 4
Writing up your assignment is the next step in the process. Although the layout may vary according to the context, more and more centres specify that assignments should be produced in report form or structured as proposals to senior management. These notes give you some guidance on how such assignment material could be presented:

- **Title page** – you need to state the following: the title; which module it applies to; the tutor you’re presenting to; your name. If appropriate, you can also add a file reference, date, and version number.
- **Executive summary** – if your report is more than about three pages long, a summary should be included so that people can see at a glance what it’s about.
- **Contents page** – this should include page numbers and section/chapter titles. If your report incorporates any appendices, their titles should also be listed.
- **Acknowledgements** – a list of the names, roles and organisations (if relevant) of all those who helped you in compiling your report.
- **Terms of reference** – this section should answer the questions, ‘what were you asked to do?’ and ‘what powers (access to others, budgets and so on) were you given?’ Clarifying the terms of reference not only identifies what the report is about, but also helps to define its boundaries.
- **Introduction** – this section should provide some background to the subject that forms the principal theme of your report. If, for example, the report is designed to solve a perceived ‘problem’, the history of that problem can be reviewed here, culminating in the situation that prompted the report to be written.
- **Method(s) of investigation** – this information is needed to enable readers to judge the authenticity of the ‘evidence’ that comprises the main body of the report. All sources should be mentioned, and if appropriate you should also describe how you put together your questionnaire or survey study. You should discuss the reasons for choosing your research methods, and include copies of any questionnaires or other research instruments in your appendices. If you used any published documents, they should be identified here, although the full list should be included in the bibliography.
- **The main body of the report** – this is likely to comprise many paragraphs or sections, depending on the quantity of information to be presented. It’s useful to break up your assignment under different subheadings, and it can be clear and easy to use lists of bullet points where appropriate in the text, but you must ensure that you provide enough information to explain and justify the points you’re making.
Tip
Use tables, pie charts, graphs and bar charts where possible. Representing data visually can convey a lot of information quickly and clearly.

- **Conclusions** – here you should say what your facts or findings mean. In other words, discuss the main implications arising from the wealth of detail you’ve collected. Your conclusions should not incorporate any new facts.
- **Recommendations** – you should spell out your ideas clearly to enable them to be acted on. In particular, if your proposals involve expenditure, you must supply a cost–benefit evaluation to show what they would cost, and what benefits management would receive by adopting them.
- **References and bibliography** – you should include a list of references (sources that are actually cited in the report itself) and a bibliography (sources that you consulted but which are not directly quoted).
- **Appendices** – these provide the home for all detailed statistical tabulations, graphs, lists and questionnaires. They should be organised into separate appendices. Nothing should be included as an appendix that isn’t referred to in the main body of the report.
**Reports and projects**

In order to complete your qualification, you’ll need to produce a Management Research Report, work-based project or a business report. This will typically span a year of your studies, and provide the opportunity to apply your learning to a practical situation. You’ll be required to:

- investigate and diagnose a ‘live’ HR issue or problem
- collect and analyse relevant data
- derive logical and supporting conclusions
- make recommendations for modification or change in the area you’ve investigated.

This is a piece of work that’s controlled and chosen by you, unlike assignments which may be predetermined. It will allow you to develop and explore an area that you find particularly interesting. It also provides a way for you to integrate elements from different modules.

Your report or project will normally relate to an issue in your own organisation, and ideally will also have been commissioned by, or have the support of, your organisation.

If you’re unemployed or your employer isn’t supportive, you’ll probably need to consider an alternative, broader topic. Identify an area of interest, and then arrange a meeting with your tutor to discuss your ideas. Remember, you’re going to have to work on the chosen topic for quite some time. It’s therefore very important that you choose something you’ll be able to retain your enthusiasm for.
What is the report assessing?
This isn’t just an extended assignment. It should enable you to demonstrate that you’re able to:

- comprehend the principles underpinning the matter under investigation
- take into consideration alternative approaches to investigating and analysing the issue
- consider, by the evaluation of primary and secondary data, alternative solutions to the problem
- demonstrate a critical evaluative approach
- draw relevant conclusions
- consider the feasibility – within the political, economic and social context of the organisation – of the introduction of your recommendations
- present data in a clear and logical manner using charts, diagrams and other forms of data presentation as appropriate
- present the cost–benefits of the recommendations
- prepare an implementation plan.

These factors will all be measured in your report’s assessment.

Certificate students
You must successfully complete your project proposal before you can submit your work-based project.

Choosing your topic
Your chosen topic must be in the HR management or development field. A general management issue will be suitable only if it has personnel/training ramifications. If you’re on a certificate programme, it should reflect the focus of your studies.

Your topic shouldn’t be too large to undertake within the time span. Neither should it be too small or too narrow.

You need to choose a topic that has some relevant literature available. This will help you to refine your area of study, underpin your own investigations and compare your solutions with others. The latest fad or management fashion may not yet have sufficient material for you to draw on, so you’re strongly advised to do an initial literature search before finalising your topic.
Sources of topic ideas
• At work, what are the current problems, what systems need reviewing or what changes need to be prepared for?
• Are you planning or hoping for a role change? If so, what topic would help you deepen your knowledge and understanding and perhaps strengthen your CV?
• What has particularly interested you in your studies that you would like to examine within the context of your organisation?
• Discuss ideas for a topic with colleagues on your course or at work.
• You could ask your manager, but take care with this option. It may not be a topic that really interests you, and the timeframes of the business are unlikely to coincide with those of your assessment.

For further information on the Management Research Report, visit www.cipd.co.uk/professionalstandards (under Applied Personnel and Development Standards).

CIPD Flexible Learning students also have a series of workfiles on Management Research Reports included in their induction pack.

Winning an award
If you gain a Distinction for your Management Research Report, you may be eligible to enter the Management Research Report Prize. This is open to all postgraduate-level CIPD students who produce a research report as part of their assessment or study programme and is presented annually, with the winner receiving a cheque for £500.

To be considered, your research report must be the best at examining a personnel and development problem in an organisation, and should include:

• practical developments for a specific organisation and/or organisations in general
• information that has the potential to change attitudes and/or practices in an organisation
• recommendations for improvement and methods of implementation within organisations.

If you meet the criteria, your course tutor will submit your report on your behalf to our Exams Team. For more information, please contact your course tutor.