

# Essential Digital Skills Guidance

**ofqual**

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# Introduction

This document is part of a suite of documents which sets out our guidance for awarding organisations offering Essential Digital Skills Qualifications.

This guidance comes into effect at 00.01am on Wednesday 24 April 2019 and applies to Essential Digital Skills Qualifications.

This guidance supports both the *General Conditions of Recognition*<sup>1</sup> and the *Essential Digital Skills Conditions and Requirements*<sup>2</sup>.

This document constitutes guidance for the purposes of section 153 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the '2009 Act'), Conditions EDSQ1.1, EDSQ3.1(c), EDSQ7.1 and EDSQ8.2(b).

An awarding organisation has a legal obligation under the 2009 Act to have regard to this guidance in relation to each Essential Digital Skills qualification that it makes available or proposes to make available. Conditions EDSQ1.1, EDSQ3.1(c), EDSQ7.1 and EDSQ8.2(b) impose the same obligation in respect of the guidance below, which is issued under those conditions.

An awarding organisation should use the guidance in this document to help it understand how to comply with the *General Conditions of Recognition*, as they apply to Essential Digital Skills Qualifications, and the Qualification Level Conditions and associated requirements for such qualifications.

An awarding organisation must also have regard to the *Guidance to the General Conditions of Recognition*<sup>3</sup>, which applies to all qualifications. However, in the event of any inconsistency between that guidance and the guidance contained in this document, an awarding organisation must have regard to the guidance in this document.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulating-basic-digital-skills-qualifications>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

# Guidance

## **Guidance on Condition D3 Reviewing approach and EDSQ1.1 Compliance with EDS National Standards**

### **Reviewing approach**

As part of the evidence to inform its own review of an EDS Qualification under Condition D3.1, an awarding organisation should have regard to the outcomes of any review of the EDS National Standards. An awarding organisation should then make any required adjustments to the qualification to ensure that it complies with the revised EDS National Standards as required by Condition EDS1.1.

### **Skills statements**

Condition EDSQ1.1(b) allows us to specify guidance in relation to how an awarding organisation must interpret the EDS National Standards.

An awarding organisation is required to design a qualification so that it covers each of the skills areas set out in the EDS National Standards. However, an awarding organisation is not required to ensure that the qualification covers each of the skills statements in the EDS National Standards. This is to allow for greater flexibility in the design of the qualification so that its coverage depends on its purpose, e.g. whether the qualification is intended to develop the essential digital skills for life or work or study. The reasons why particular skills statements have been covered should be explained in the assessment strategy.

## Guidance on assessment availability

Condition EDSQ7.1 allows us to specify guidance in relation to the assessment of EDS Qualifications. We set out our guidance for the purposes of that condition below.

We have not set any requirements with respect to when an awarding organisation must conduct assessments for an Essential Digital Skills qualification that it makes available.

This means that an awarding organisation may choose its own approach to when assessments are taken. It may, for example, choose to set a number of assessment windows each year, and/or it may offer 'on-demand' assessments which can be taken by a Learner at any time.

Whatever approach an awarding organisation adopts to the availability of assessments, it must ensure that it meets the requirements in the General Conditions of Recognition in relation to the maintenance of standards, comparability and avoiding predictability.<sup>4</sup>

Different approaches to assessment availability will give rise to different risks with respect to these issues and, as outlined in our requirements for the qualification, we will expect an awarding organisation to set out in its assessment strategy how it has sought to identify and deal with such risks.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Conditions D1, G1, G9, H2 (where applicable) and H3.

## Guidance on assessment strategies

EDSQ3.1(c) allows us to specify guidance in relation to assessment strategies for EDS Qualifications. We set out our guidance for the purposes of Condition EDSQ3.1(c) below.

Specific risks to the maintenance of standards apply in relation to on-demand assessments. If an awarding organisation chooses to offer this type of assessment, we will expect the assessment strategy to set out how the AO will identify and deal with risks to assessment design, delivery, monitoring and awarding.

In relation to assessment design, an awarding organisation should consider:

- how many test versions there are,
- how the number of test versions ensures that learners do not sit the same assessment more than once,
- how the number of test versions mitigate risks around centre malpractice (including explicit sharing of tests versions and inappropriate use of test versions as a basis for teaching),
- how test versions are developed to ensure comparability, and
- how the replacement of test versions interacts with the number of test versions available, and the approach to re-sitting where tests are replaced.

In relation to delivery, an awarding organisation should consider:

- how learners are entered for assessments (i.e. individually or as a group),
- how learner evidence is authenticated,
- the lead-in time from an entry being made to the test being taken,
- the modes of assessment available to learners and why those modes are available,
- the arrangements in place for invigilating test sittings including who is permitted to invigilate and/or handle the tests,
- how students access tests that are on screen,
- the security arrangements that are in place while on-screen tests are being taken (e.g. if learners can access other computer programmes and/or the internet while taking the test, how this access is monitored),
- how paper-based tests are delivered to centres,
- how far in advance of test sittings paper-based tests are delivered to centres,
- the controls there are around the storage and destruction of paper-based tests in centres

- what happens to paper-based tests that are not used by centres (e.g. if a learner is absent)
- how test versions are allocated to learners on their first attempt and on re-sit attempts,
- how test versions are allocated to groups of learners within a centre who are sitting the test on the same occasion or different occasions, and
- how long a test version is available for and how to avoid it being sat a large number of times (within individual centres and more generally).

In relation to monitoring, an awarding organisation should consider their approach to:

- inspecting or monitoring centres (up front and on an ongoing basis),
- monitoring or detecting whether any security breaches have occurred (e.g. via social media),
- preventing other learners from sitting a test version where that test version has been breached (e.g. by being shared publically),
- refreshing or replacing test versions,
- monitoring the performance of test versions, and
- monitoring the performance of test items.

In relation to awarding, an awarding organisation should consider:

- when awarding takes place,
- what standard setting method is used,
- what evidence is considered,
- who is involved in the process,
- how comparability is ensured between different test versions, and
- how the outcomes for each test version are monitored.

## Guidance on standard setting

Condition EDSQ8.2(b) allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to standard setting for EDS Qualifications

We set out below our requirements for the purposes of Condition EDSQ8.2(b).

### Approach to standard setting

We expect that the approach taken by an awarding organisation to standard setting for an EDS Qualification that it makes available will –

- (a) follow an appropriate technical methodology,
- (b) include appropriate scrutiny of decisions made,
- (c) promote comparability, including over time, and
- (d) be kept under review.

### Evidence used in standard setting

Condition EDSQ8.3 states that in setting the specified levels of attainment for an EDS Qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must have regard to an appropriate range of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Condition EDSQ8.4 states that such evidence will only be appropriate if it includes evidence of –

- (a) the Level of Demand of the assessments for that qualification,
- (b) the level of attainment demonstrated in those assessments by –
  - (i) an appropriately representative sample of Learners taking that qualification, or
  - (ii) individuals (whether Learners or otherwise) as part of robust technical pre-testing of those assessments,
- (c) following the first time that a qualification designed in line with these Qualification Level Conditions is awarded, the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners who have previously been awarded that qualification.

Examples of the evidence that may be used by an awarding organisation in setting the specified levels of attainment for an EDS Qualification which it makes available may include –

- question papers/tasks and final mark schemes,

- senior Assessor input into decisions, for example comments on how the assessments have worked and recommendations for the setting of specified levels of attainment,
- technical information about how the assessments have functioned, for example mark distributions, mean marks, standard deviations, item-level statistics,
- samples of current Learners' work selected from a range of Centres and assessed/Moderated by Assessors/moderators whose work is known to be reliable,
- details of changes in entry patterns and choices of options,
- archive Learners' work exemplifying specified levels of attainment in previous assessment series for the qualification, together with the relevant question papers/tasks and mark schemes,
- pertinent material or data deemed to be of equivalent standard from similar qualifications or other relevant qualifications,
- information on Learners' performance in previous assessment series, and
- marking guides for assessments where the evidence is of an ephemeral nature.

In determining whether it has sufficient evidence of the level of attainment demonstrated in the assessments for an EDS Qualification by an appropriate percentage of the Learners taking that qualification, an awarding organisation should consider whether the marks on its system reflect –

- all possible routes through the qualification, and
- a representative proportion of Learners' marks for the qualification.



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