Education & Skills Funding Agency

Correspondence

ESFA Update further education: 3 March 2021

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1. Latest information on coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Department for Education has published guidance about COVID-19 in educational settings for staff, parents and carers, pupils and students on GOV.UK.

There is also guidance on the apprenticeship service about COVID-19.

Please check GOV.UK regularly for updates.

2. Information: outcome of consultation on arrangements for exams and assessments in 2021

The Department and Ofqual recently consulted on arrangements for exams and assessments for 2021. The consultation had two pillars, one setting out proposals for GCSE, AS and A levels and one for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications.

On 25 February, the Department and Ofqual published the outcome of both consultations. You can read the analysis of consultation responses for the GCSE, AS and A levels on GOV.UK. For GCSEs, AS and A levels, the Department has published guidance that explains the decisions that have been made and the actions that schools and colleges need to take.

You can read the consultation analysis and decisions for VTQs and other general qualifications on GOV.UK.

For awarding in 2021, we have identified 3 broad groups of VTQs that will have different awarding approaches as described below. Ofqual is currently consulting on the technical framework needed to implement the arrangements for each of these groups and the qualifications in scope for each. Awarding organisations will confirm and communicate the final arrangements shortly.

Exams will no longer be going ahead for VTQs most similar to GCSE, AS and A levels that are used for progression to further or higher education. This will include many performance table qualifications. Students taking these qualifications will receive grades determined by their teachers, with assessment evidence covering what they were taught, and not what they missed.

For VTQs used to enter directly into employment, exams or assessments should continue where they are critical to demonstrate occupational or professional competence and can be delivered in line with public health measures. Exams and assessments can take place in a controlled environment where risk of transmission is low. You should have protective measures in place, in line with Public Health England (PHE) guidance to support exams. Where the assessment cannot take place safely it will need to be delayed.

For smaller qualifications taken for mixed purposes, such as Functional Skills Qualifications and ESOL, exams and assessment should continue in line with public health measures, in person or remotely, but with alternative arrangements available for those who cannot access the assessments.

3. Information: Functional Skills Assessments in apprenticeships

Eligible apprentices can now take their End-Point Assessment before achieving the required Functional Skills Qualifications.

This flexibility will be available until 31 May 2021 and applies to apprentices at all levels who:

- are ready to take and FSQ assessment but are unable to due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions. This means they have exhausted all possibilities to access FSQ assessment via face-to-face and remote delivery
- have confirmed their intent to continue and complete their FSQ within three months of starting their EPA
- meet all other gateway criteria to progress to their EPA except FSQ achievement.

Apprentices must take their FSQ within three months of starting their EPA in order that they complete their programme and receive their completion certificate.

Providers must retain evidence that the apprentice is eligible, as set out in the Apprenticeship Funding Rules. Providers will need to make a declaration to this effect. The Apprenticeship Funding Rules and COVID-19 guidance will be updated to reflect this change.

Apprentices can also access a Teacher Assessed Grade where they have exhausted all possibilities to access FSQ assessment via face-to-face and remote delivery. Ofqual guidance on the awarding of functional skills in 2021 sets this out in more detail.

4. Information: timeline extended for external quality assurance transition

The timeline has been extended for the transition of the external quality assurance (EQA) for end point assessment organisations (EPAOs) from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) to Ofqual.

The Institute announced plans to move to a new simplified system for EQA of apprenticeship end point assessment (EPA) last August.

The changes will see EQA delivered by Ofqual or, for integrated degree apprenticeships, the Office for Students (OfS).

EPAOs who are overseen through the Institute's EQA service now have until 1 July to make formal applications for recognition from Ofqual. They will then have until 16 December to complete the recognition process.

Read more about the extension on the Institute's website.

5. Information: update on mobile network operators offering free data for FE

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a number of mobile network operators are offering free data for financially disadvantaged families who do not have broadband at home and rely on mobile data to access the internet to help children participate in education remotely. Although, from the 8 March, the majority of students will be expected to return to onsite education, this offer may continue to be important for students who, for example, need to self-isolate or shield during this period.

The majority of mobile networks have now extended their data offer to students aged 16-19 and those 19-25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan, including EE, Lycamobile, Sky Mobile, Tesco Mobile, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, Vodaphone and iD Mobile.

This means that FE providers who have registered with the Get Help with Technology Service will be able to request free data for financially disadvantaged 16 to 19 year olds and those aged 19-25 with an Education, Health and Care Plan who:

- do not have fixed broadband at home
- cannot afford additional data for their devices
- are experiencing disruption to face-to-face education

Requests must be made by someone who has been nominated to order devices through the Get Help with Technology Service.

Providers will need to submit student's mobile information through our online service. There is an online guide to help you gather mobile information. Mobile network providers will vary in how quickly requests are actioned.

If you have any questions, please email COVID.TECHNOLOGY@education.gov.uk using the subject line 'Increasing data allowances'.

If increasing mobile data is not a suitable option for some young people, or if a request for additional data is unsuccessful, FE providers can also request 4G wireless routers through the Get Help With Technology Service.

Then providers request support, DfE will seek confirmation about how you have identified the number of disadvantaged students without broadband at home, who are experiencing disruption to their onsite education, through for example, contact with students/parents and/or surveys. In providing evidence of need you should not include any personal information about the students such as their names, addresses or date of birth.

6. Information: April risk-based cash flow template return for colleges

On Wednesday 3 March 2021, we released templates for an April risk-based cash flow financial return from colleges. These will be made available via GOV.UK.

The April risk-based cash flow template return is a risk-based process where we are asking for a return from the colleges that are identified as highest risk, which is part of the ESFA's on-going financial risk-assessment process. Colleges falling within the category listed below must submit a return.

1. From the November 2020 return, any college with less than 25 cash days forecast in any month from 21 March onwards.
2. Any college which is now forecasting less than 25 cash days between 21 March and 22 July.
3. Any college which has been unable to submit their financial statements and two-year finance record.
4. Any college where the external auditors' opinion on the 2019 to 2020 financial statements includes either an emphasis of matter or qualified opinion relating to going concern.

The return comprises the following and colleges must complete and return these documents by 30 April 2021.

1. April cash flow template – this is a slightly updated version of the template used in November 2020.
2. Commentary – as with most ESFA returns we will be asking for some narrative to provide some context for the financial information.

The submission process will be the same as that used for the November 2020 collection, via the document upload portal on GOV.UK.

We are only requiring the accounting officer to sign-off the return, as we acknowledge that it might not be possible to convene a full governing body sign-off meeting ahead of the return deadline.

7. Information: Department of Health and Social Care delivery of face coverings to support contingency stock

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has a strong stock of PPE including the 'Type IIR' face masks. To support the return to onsite education,ensure maximum compliance with the system of controls, including the recommendation to wear face coverings in classrooms for a limited time, DHSC are distributing 'Type IIR' masks to FE providers. This supply is for use only as the settings' contingency stock of face coverings.

FE providers should expect to receive a delivery of between 5,000 and 7,500 units by the end of the week commencing Monday 8 March and be sufficient to cover our contingency stock until the Easter, with larger settings receiving further stock if required. These face coverings are being provided by DHSC at no cost to your setting. For any queries on delivery or missing items, please contact the DHSC PPE helpline (provided by UNIPART) on 0800 8766802, identifying yourself as an education setting. Alternatively, you can email dfeppequeries@unipart.com and your query will be handled by the helpline team. For any questions on DfE face covering policy, please refer to the DfE guidance or call the DfE coronavirus (COVID-19) helpline on 0800 046 8687.

8. Information: traineeship incentive payment claim process – work placement postcode clarification

The claims process for the traineeship incentive was launched in January 2021, we have started to see high volumes of claims being submitted and the majority are being processed and submitted without any issues.

Unfortunately, we are seeing some areas of the process that is causing delays and raising errors for Providers and employers. We have pulled together some of the common errors and have provided further guidance for providers and employers. We will amend the guidance and FAQs within the Traineeship Framework this week.

8.1 Postcode error not matching ILR records

The delivery location postcode of the work placement learning aim recorded on the ILR should be the location of the employer where the learner undertook their work placement.

We capture employer ID on the learning aim (ZWRKX001) for the work placement and on the work placement record. The delivery location postcode of the work placement learning aim (ZWRKX001) is the postcode that we use to verify the claim made by the employer so this postcode should reflect work placement location. We are seeing different postcodes within this field and this is showing up as an error and not allowing the employer to process the claim. There are examples of the providers postcodes within this field, this will result in the employer not be able to complete the claim and may result in the regional cap being applied incorrectly.

You can find this entity on the ILR.

You can also find the guidance for completing.

8.2 Incorrect or incomplete dates with Work Placement Learning Aim Fields

The work placement learning aim must be completed and the ILR records updated before the employer can apply for the incentive. We will not process a claim if there are missing dates or if the end date of the work placement contains a future planned end date. The eligible date for the incentive is for placements that take place between 1 September 2020 up to 31 July 2021.

We would also expect to see the correct completion status against this field, we verify and check for completion status 2 (learning aim is completed).

9. Information: Further Education Capital Transformation Fund - extension of the stage 1 deadline for bid applications to 22 March

Stage 1 of the bidding process for the Further Education Capital Transformation Fund opened on 21 January 2021. Further education colleges and designated institutions in England were invited to apply to the fund by setting out proposals for investment to tackle poor condition across their estates.

In recognition of the work underway to get students back on site in coming weeks, we have extended the deadline for returning stage 1 bid applications by a week to 23:59 on 22 March 2021.

Completed application forms and all supporting documents must be emailed to TransformationFund.FECapital@education.gov.uk, as set out in the guidance for applicants.

10. Information: National Skills Fund – level 3 adult offer

We have added 10 more qualifications to the list of qualifications available in the National Skills Fund level 3 adult offer.

We have also removed 2 qualifications that awarding organisations are withdrawing before the level 3 offer starts on 1 April 2021, affecting delivery across all ESFA-funded offers. Before delivering a qualification in the level 3 offer, providers of education and training must check with the awarding organisation that the qualification is still available for delivery.

In the next month, we will add full funding approval information in this offer to the ESFA list of qualifications approved for funding.

If you have a query about this list, please use the ESFA enquiry form.

11. Information: monitoring post-16 funding

We have analysed R06 ILR data and refreshed the post-16 monitoring reports dashboard. A number of providers have accessed the dashboard regularly and corrected data since its release last year; please continue to review reports as part of your monthly business activity. A new video guide will be published demonstrating how to export data from the dashboard. We will publish further videos in the future based on common feedback and queries.

We have identified that some providers are re-using learner reference numbers from previous years: this field is used for calculations and reporting, and must not be re-used for a different learner. We will contact providers through territorial leads to ensure data is corrected.

We will reduce the amount of correspondence we send you. If we identify errors, we will only send one generic letter instead of multiple letters. We will not contact you immediately if we see that you are correcting errors between months. We will request evidence to support some reports and inform policy development through ESFA Information Exchange. Please ensure that you have an account with access to the document exchange area.

12. Information: webinar for training providers - an overview of the apprenticeship service user journeys

The apprenticeship service is pleased to bring you the next in our series of support webinars. Join us on Wednesday 17 March, 12pm to 1pm. This webinar is aimed at training providers, to enhance their understanding of the apprenticeship service, so they can support employers during their apprenticeship service journey.

The webinar will include information on:

- what the apprenticeship service is
- updates on recent and new developments in the apprenticeship service
- training provider led user journeys

Attendees will have the opportunity to take part in a live question and answer session.

For more information, please see our webinar registration page.

13. Information: how education settings can take part in the Protect Duty consultation

On 26 February the government launched a consultation on a 'Protect Duty' which seeks to improve security and organisational preparedness at a wide range of publicly accessible locations, including education settings. The consultation will run until 2 July 2021.

The consultation will seek views on:

- who would a Duty apply to?
- what would a proposed Duty require stakeholders to do?
- how should compliance work?
- how would Government support those affected by a Duty?

It's important to get a wide range of views from across the education sector to inform the development of the Duty, anyone who is linked to education or has an interest in education can take part in the consultation.

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