



Department  
for Education

# **Contingencies for 2021-2022**

**For Vocational and Technical  
Qualifications (VTQs) and other general  
qualifications**

**September 2021**

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## Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to inform awarding organisations, providers, students and others of the contingency arrangements for the awarding of Vocational and Technical Qualifications and other general qualifications in the academic year 2021-2022.

## Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed before September 2022.

## Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- Awarding organisations
- Providers
- Students
- Parents and carers
- Stakeholder representative organisations

## Main points

This document sets out contingency plans for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) that are necessary to have in place to mitigate the residual risk of exams and assessments not being able to go ahead as planned. These arrangements seek to achieve parity and consistency where relevant with the [arrangements proposed for GCSEs and AS/A Levels](#). The arrangements include that:

- VTQs most similar to GCSEs, AS and A Levels would be awarded using Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs).
- VTQs that require students to demonstrate occupational/professional competence would need to be delayed if necessary rather than awarded using a TAG, in order to ensure that students are able to demonstrate the full set of knowledge and skills required.

The diversity of the VTQ landscape means that a one-size-fits-all approach is not applicable or desirable. As such, responsibility for setting out the requirements for TAGs rests with awarding organisations.

Ofqual will continue to work with awarding organisations to ensure that teachers and institutions are prepared and equipped to offer TAGs in the most effective and efficient way, should they ever be needed.

## Introduction

The government is firmly committed to exams going ahead in the academic year 2021 to 2022. We recognise, however, that students who will be taking exams and assessments have experienced significant disruption to their education and that these students may also need continued support in the face of any further disruption. In July 2021, DfE and Ofqual consulted together on arrangements for the assessment and awarding of VTQs and other general qualifications for 2021 to 2022. The response to this consultation can be found here: [Arrangements for the assessment and awarding of vocational, technical and other general qualifications: 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/arrangements-for-the-assessment-and-awarding-of-vocational-technical-and-other-general-qualifications-2021-to-2022)

This confirmed the policy position that exams and assessments will go ahead in 2021-2022 and outlined the scope of the adaptations that may be necessary to ensure they can go ahead as planned.

Depending on the purpose of the qualification, a range of adaptations for VTQs and Other General qualifications have been made including:

- a reduction in number of internal assessments, whilst ensuring all content is taught
- a reduction of hours of work experience or work placement
- longer and more assessment windows
- social distancing adaptations (for example, professional discussion in place of certain practical activities)
- greater flexibility in invigilation rules (for example, to allow subject teachers to invigilate their own subject).

We believe that these adaptations should be sufficient to ensure that exams and other assessments can take place fairly in 2021-2022, but it is important we keep this under review. We also said we would publish our position on contingencies in the autumn.

## Monitoring the public health situation

The last 18 months have shown that the path of the pandemic is unpredictable. There is a residual risk that exams and assessments are unable to proceed as planned, either because the extent of further disruption means that they would not be fair even with the planned adaptations, or because public health advice is that it would not be safe for students to gather to sit exams.

Whilst we intend for exams and other assessments to take place in 2021 to 2022, it is right that we have contingency plans in place should this not be possible.

As in 2020 and 2021 our priority in circumstances where exams and assessments cannot go ahead would be to ensure that students received grades in as fair a way as possible, to enable them to progress to the next stage of their lives.

## **Contingency arrangements if there has been further disruption but exams and other assessments still go ahead:**

If there is evidence of increased disruption to learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic there may need to be further adaptations for some qualifications.

For some VTQs, for example those which are linear qualifications with exams at the end, it may be necessary for awarding organisations to bring forward the publication of advance information about the focus of the exam content, to enable teachers to focus their remaining teaching time. This decision would be taken alongside any decision to bring forward advance information for GCSEs, AS and A levels. As set out in its response to the consultation on adaptations to GCSEs, AS and A Levels which can be found here: [Proposed changes to the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-the-assessment-of-gcse-as-and-a-levels-in-2022). The Department has decided to retain the flexibility for advance information to be deployed at other points ahead of 28 February 2022 if circumstances require.

For other VTQs, we expect that the already planned adaptations will assist in mitigating against further disruption to learning. These include qualifications which are modular and have exams and other assessments taken throughout the year, Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life qualifications.

## **Contingency arrangements if it is decided that exams and other assessments are no longer viable:**

If there was so much further disruption that exams and assessments were no longer viable, then we would need to move to further contingency arrangements.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach for VTQs. Whilst the contingency measures will apply to all VTQs or other general qualifications there will be different approaches in place for different types of qualifications.

In line with the arrangements we put in place in spring 2021, there should be 3 broad approaches for the different types of qualifications:

### **VTQs and other general qualifications that are most similar to GCSE, AS and A levels:**

If it is decided that it is no longer viable for exams or assessments to go ahead, then for VTQs which are used for progression to further or higher education, or progression to employment, it is our policy intention that results would be awarded using Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs), as they were in 2020 to 2021.

These include VTQs such as many of those approved for inclusion in the 2022 performance tables, other BTECs and Cambridge Nationals and Technicals, and other general qualifications that are not GCSEs, AS and A levels, such as the International Baccalaureate, Pre-U, and Core Maths.

### **VTQs used to demonstrate professional or occupational competence:**

For VTQs that require students to demonstrate occupational or professional competence, including the occupational elements of those qualifications approved for inclusion in the 2022 performance tables, if exams and assessments cannot take place safely even with adaptations, then they will need to be delayed. These may be written or practical exams and assessments. In the unlikely event that students cannot take their occupational assessments at all this academic year, we will work to ensure that students are not disadvantaged and can still progress to the next stage.

## **VTQs used for mixed purposes, including Functional Skills qualifications:**

These are qualifications that are taken for mixed purposes and are unlike GCSEs and A levels in their qualification and assessment structure, such as Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs) and ESOL Skills for life.

Awarding organisations will continue to put in place adaptations relating to the delivery of exams and assessments where necessary. If the decision is made that it is no longer viable for exams and assessments to go ahead, it is our expectation that learners who are not able to safely access assessments in centres, or remotely, would be eligible for a TAG.

## T Levels

The core component is largely knowledge-based with exams typically taken at the end of the first year, whereas the occupational specialism assessments are a practical test of occupational competence taken in the second year.

Core exams and assessments should, wherever possible, go ahead. However, if the decision is made that it is no longer safe for core exams and assessments to be taken by learners in provider settings in the 2021/22 academic year, TAGs would be used.

As occupational specialism assessments test competence, if they cannot take place safely as scheduled they will need to be delayed rather than adapted. In the unlikely event that students cannot take their occupational assessments at all this academic year, we will work to ensure that students are not disadvantaged and can still progress to the next stage.

## Improved Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs)

For many VTQs that are similar to GCSE, AS and A levels, TAGs were used by awarding organisations to determine results for students in 2020 to 2021. The arrangements for TAGs gave students a chance to show what they could do after a year of unprecedented disruption to their education.

Although the approach used in 2020/2021 allowed students to receive grades and progress, it inevitably placed burdens on teachers.

We recognise the hard work from both students and teachers that was put into ensuring TAGs were successful, however, there are lessons we can learn from delivering these. In identifying TAGs as the best option for contingency arrangements in 2022, we have the opportunity to consider how to make improvements.

Ofqual are currently conducting research with students, teachers, and colleges to understand lessons learned from last year and we acknowledge that there may be areas where improvements may be necessary or helpful. The outcomes of that research will be available later in the year.

As well as this research, we and Ofqual have considered how the improvements proposed for GCSEs, AS and A levels, which can be found here: [Contingency Arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels](#), might apply to TAGs for VTQs:

- The diversity of the VTQ landscape means that responsibility for setting out the requirements for TAGs rests with awarding organisations. This is because a one-size-fits-all approach is not applicable or desirable. This means awarding organisations are already able to reflect on their approach and to make improvements to the process for TAGs to manage the burdens placed on schools and colleges as necessary.
- Awarding organisations are already required to provide guidance to centres setting out the evidence used to determine a TAG. This guidance enables awarding organisations to ensure there is a level of consistency in the evidence used so that the results are sufficiently valid and reliable.
- Arrangements awarding organisations put in place should not advantage or disadvantage students taking other VTQs or, where relevant, students taking GCSEs, AS and A levels. This means that awarding organisations must consider whether the proposed improvements to TAGs for GCSEs, AS and A levels would be appropriate or relevant for their own qualifications. It should be noted that the proposed changes to the arrangements for awarding TAGs for GCSE, AS and A levels are the subject of a public consultation, and no decisions in relation to those arrangements will be made until the consultation has closed and the responses have been considered.

Ofqual will continue to work with awarding organisations to ensure that teachers and institutions are prepared and equipped to offer TAGs in the most effective and efficient way, should they ever be needed.

## **Next steps**

### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

Our current assessment is that the equalities impacts are likely to be in-line with those highlighted in our published approach to VTQ awarding for 2020/2021, which can be found here: Consultation on alternative arrangements for the award of VTQs and other general qualifications in 2021 - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))

We will continue to assess the potential equalities impacts of the pandemic throughout the year.

### **Monitoring**

We will continue to work with the sector and Ofqual to monitor the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and ensure there is continued alignment between VTQs and GCSEs, AS and A levels, where relevant, to mitigate any disadvantage or advantage between the cohorts of students.



Department  
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