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Guidance

Guidance for centres: awarding VTQs in 2021 and 2022

Guidance for centres on the awarding of vocational, technical and other general qualifications in the academic year 2021 to 2022.

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Applies to England

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This document is for those working in colleges, schools, training providers and other settings (or 'centres') where assessments for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and general qualifications other than [GCSEs, AS and A levels, AEs and project qualifications](#) (or 'other general qualifications') are scheduled to take place in the academic year 2021 to 2022.

In this guidance we, as regulator, explain how VTQs and other general qualifications will be awarded this academic year. We outline what we expect from awarding organisations and what you and your students should expect to happen over the coming year.

Arrangements for awarding VTQs in the academic year 2021 to 2022

The government's intention is that exams and other formal assessments, including for VTQs and other general qualifications, will go ahead in the academic year 2021 to 2022. We have looked at how our regulations can help make this happen.

We know students taking exams and assessments this year may have already experienced significant disruption to their learning or work over the last year as a result of the pandemic. Your students may also need further support from you this year should the public health situation worsen and cause further disruption. Our regulations can help awarding organisations support you so your students can demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in assessments, and in this way achieve their outcomes and progress to the next stage of their lives.

Qualifications can be adapted

To help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on students and their learning, we are continuing to allow awarding organisations to adapt their exams and other formal assessments for VTQs.

We require awarding organisations to continue to carefully balance mitigating the effects of the pandemic on teaching and learning with the need to ensure that results are fair, consistent and allow students to progress. For example, assessments may need to be adapted to free up time to focus on catch-up and teaching the remaining qualification content.

Ofqual has put in place a number of requirements that awarding organisations must follow when determining if their adaptations remain appropriate in the context of the 2021 to 2022 academic year. For example, we still expect that all content should be taught, as far as is

feasible, so that students are as well-prepared as possible for progression to the next stage of their education, training, or employment.

To align with government policy, this year, we are no longer allowing awarding organisations to award results using alternative evidence such as teacher-assessed grades (TAGs). These were a necessary mitigation when exams and formal assessments could not take place.

We also expect awarding organisations to consider how making some adaptations now could make their VTQs more resilient if there is further disruption so that exams and other formal assessments could continue, as far as possible. We require awarding organisations to ensure, as far as possible, that the adaptations applied do not disadvantage, or advantage, students against their peers taking similar VTQs or, where relevant, GCSEs, AS and A levels.

Ofqual continues to work closely with awarding organisations, as we have done throughout the pandemic, so that awarding organisations provide colleges, training providers and schools with clear information in a timely manner to enable them to implement the adaptations fairly and consistently. In turn, we expect awarding organisations to continue to work collaboratively together and with centres, professional organisations and sector bodies in ensuring their approaches to awarding make sure that students completing these qualifications this year have the knowledge and skills employers expect.

There is a range of different qualification structures and assessment methods used in VTQs. As last year, we expect awarding organisations offering similar qualifications to continue to work with each other to ensure consistency is maintained where possible and appropriate. Awarding organisations will have different approaches, because of the variety of assessment methods, structures, and purposes of VTQs. Awarding organisations are best placed to understand the kinds of adaptation that work best for their qualifications and meet the needs of the students that take them so where there are differences, this is for a good reason.

The Conditions, requirements and guidance setting out our regulatory requirements for awarding organisations offering VTQs and other general qualifications affected by the coronavirus pandemic this year are set out in the [Vocational and Technical Qualifications](#) Contingency Regulatory Framework (the VCRF).

As in any other year it is important to us that:

- results secure public confidence so teachers and employers can be confident this year's results will reflect what students know, understand, and can do, and students can progress to the next stage of their lives

- students receiving VTQ and other general qualification results this year are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged compared to students studying for GCSEs, AS and A levels

What this means for you

1. Your awarding organisation should have provided you with the information you need to support you in implementing their adaptations. They should also provide you with details of the arrangements that will need to be made for any students who need reasonable adjustments.
2. This year, awarding organisations are likely to ask you for more information about which learners are planning to take assessments, when they plan to take them and when they are likely to award certificates. You might find it helpful to start capturing this information as early as possible.
3. If you ordinarily choose to deliver modular qualifications with assessments at the end of the course, you should consider whether that is appropriate this year. You might decide to run assessments throughout the year instead.
4. If you want to change the timing or delivery of assessments, then contact your awarding organisation to make sure this is done in the right way.

Arrangements for continuing students

Students who completed some of their exams or formal assessments in either the 2019 to 2020 or the 2020 to 2021 academic years, and who will complete the remainder of their qualification this academic year or in the future, are able to carry forward any results they have achieved so far. This applies whether the result was awarded using an adapted assessment or through use of alternative sources of evidence, such as TAGs.

In the same way, students starting new programmes of study this year will be able to carry the results of their adapted assessments forward. Arrangements for 2022 to 2023 have not been confirmed yet.

What this means for you

To make sure these arrangements are as manageable as possible for centres, many awarding organisations may use their normal quality assurance policies and procedures, however arrangements may be adapted to reflect current public health advice. On-site visits, for example, may be adapted to remote or virtual visits. Your awarding organisation will tell you what to expect.

Performance table qualifications

Awarding organisations must take account of the Department for Education's technical guidance when developing their approach to adaptation for VTQs approved for inclusion in performance tables. Where it is possible to do so, we expect awarding organisations to use similar approaches to adaptation for other qualifications at the same level leading to similar progression opportunities.

Assessments can be reduced, as is possible for VTQs that are not included in performance tables, but we expect that all of the qualification content should be taught where this is possible and the number of guided learning hours for each qualification should remain the same.

What this means for you

1. If you ordinarily choose to deliver performance table qualifications with assessments at the end of the course, you should consider whether that is appropriate this year. You might decide to run assessments throughout the year instead.
2. You should consider the Department for Education's [decision not to limit the number of resits that are permitted for qualifications listed in performance tables](#). This means you can choose to assess earlier, without putting your students at a disadvantage.
3. If you want to change the timing or delivery of assessments, then contact your awarding organisation to make sure this is done in the right way.

T Levels

The arrangements for the Technical Qualifications of T Levels are in line with other VTQs. This means that the core and occupational specialism components exams and assessments should go ahead in 2021 to 2022. In the case of further significant disruption, [the Department for Education may permit adaptations to content and or delivery of assessments where appropriate](#).

Functional Skills qualifications

As with other VTQs, we expect all Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs) assessments to go ahead in 2021 to 2022 and the full subject content to be taught across all levels.

Our expectation is that awarding organisations will continue to put in place adaptations relating to the delivery of FSQ assessments where necessary. Awarding organisations have put in place a range of

approaches to give students as much opportunity as possible to take assessments. Some examples include:

- changes to invigilation arrangements, including remote invigilation and remote assessment of the speaking, listening and communicating component
- additional flexibility for exam dates and windows for assessments
- additional guidance about the distribution and collection of papers, for example collation of scripts after students have left exam rooms, quarantining papers before and after use, and extended timescales to return scripts after exams
- adaptations to guidance for individuals involved in examination delivery, for example invigilators, readers and or scribes

What this means for you

You should contact your awarding organisation to find out more about the arrangements they have put in place. The table below shows the range of assessment options for FSQs offered by each awarding organisation.

| Awarding organisation | Remote invigilation | On-screen or computer based | Paper based | Awarding organisation provided test centre |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| AQA | No | No | Yes | No |
| C&G | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| FAQ | Yes | Yes | No | On request to the awarding organisation |
| Highfield | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| NCFE | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| NOCN | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| OCR (offer ICT only) | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| Open Awards | Yes | Yes | Yes | On request to the awarding organisation |
| Pearson | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |

Apprenticeship end-point assessments

The [flexibilities for the assessment of apprenticeships](#) are being overseen by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and are not covered by the VCRF.

Monitoring the public health situation and contingency planning

It is possible that further disruption may occur over the course of 2021 to 2022. Even if some public health restrictions were to be needed over the next academic year, it should still be possible for students to take exams and formal assessments safely. If there is further disruption, we would ask awarding organisations to consider whether further adaptations to their qualifications are necessary and possible.

We need to have contingency plans in place for the event that students cannot sit exams and formal assessments.

If the government decides that exams and formal assessments cannot take place in the summer then as in 2021, it is possible that VTQs and other general qualifications may be awarded through TAGs. GCSEs and A levels may also be awarded through TAGs. The evidence for TAGs is likely to come from the assessments your students have already taken during the year or other work. Many VTQs are modular and designed so that assessments can take place throughout the year. This means it is unlikely that there will be any additional assessments to inform the TAG.

You can find more information about contingency arrangements in the Department for Education's [contingency guidance for vocational and technical qualifications](#).

What this means for you

1. If you ordinarily choose to deliver modular qualifications with assessment at the end of a course, you may wish to consider whether that is appropriate this year. You might decide to run assessments throughout the year instead.
2. If you want to change the timing or delivery of assessments, then contact your awarding organisation to make sure this is done in the right way.

Results

Approaches to awarding may differ between awarding organisations. This will depend on how the qualification is assessed and was assessed in summer 2021 and or summer 2020. Some qualification will have standards aligned to those of similar subjects in GCSEs and A Levels. Some VTQs saw an increase in outcomes and higher grades during the pandemic, but that was not the case for others. Awarding organisations will take all these factors into account, to ensure learners get fair results.

Most results will continue to be issued to normal timescales. Roll-on roll-off qualifications, and those not tied to an academic year, will continue to be awarded throughout the year.

Where VTQ results are used to support progression to further or higher education, results should be awarded on or before the following dates:

- 18 August 2022 for level 3 qualifications
- 25 August 2022 for level 2 qualifications

This is in line with A level and GCSE results days and ensures that students wishing to progress onto further or higher education are not disadvantaged compared to students taking A levels or GCSEs.

What this means for you

1. Your awarding organisations will confirm their results days.
2. The results of roll-on roll-off qualifications will continue be awarded in line with current timescales.
3. You should receive results data in good time to allow you to prepare for the distribution of results on the correct days.
4. Please ensure that you have the right people and resources available at your centre who can respond to queries from students, queries from the awarding organisation, and help prepare for the distribution of results.

Appeals

Awarding organisation appeals processes will be the same as any other year. Awarding organisations are still required to consider appeals for students whose results were based on alternative evidence such as TAGs. For more information, please contact your awarding organisation.

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