

GUIDANCE FOR CENTRES

# The awarding of vocational and technical qualifications, and other general qualifications, in summer 2020

Updated 22 May 2020

**ofqual**

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Note: this is an updated version of the document first published on 14 April 2020. Substantive changes are indicated by an update box, with the date of the update shown below it.

22 May 2020

## About this document

This document is for those working in colleges, training providers and other settings (“centres”) where assessments for vocational and technical (VTQs) qualifications were scheduled to be taken in summer 2020.

In this guidance we explain our plans for the awarding of VTQs and general qualifications other than GCSEs, AS and A levels this summer<sup>1</sup>. We outline what we expect from awarding organisations and what centres should expect to happen over the coming weeks and months.

Since publishing the first version of this document, on 14 April 2020, we have concluded our consultation on our approach to the awarding of VTQs and general qualifications other than GCSEs, AS and A levels. A summary of our responses and our decisions have been published separately. This document is designed to sit alongside a more wide-ranging set of Advice for Stakeholders. It has been updated to reflect the outcomes of the consultation.

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## The awarding of VTQs is different this summer

Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions have led to the cancellation of exams and prevented many assessments from being taken as planned.

We have designed an approach that is fair to learners and ensures, as far as possible, that they receive results to enable them to progress to the next stage of their lives without further disruption. Awarding organisations will be drawing on a range of evidence to ensure that results will be as reliable and consistent as possible, so that they are worthy of public confidence and valued by education providers and employers as much as any other year. It is important that learners completing VTQs are not disadvantaged compared to their peers completing GCSEs and A levels. It is also important that learners receiving results this year are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged compared to learners in previous or subsequent years.

The implementation of these temporary arrangements is challenging, especially when we are all living and working within the necessary public health restrictions. These arrangements will require time, effort, understanding and different ways of

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<sup>1</sup> Details on arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020>

doing things – by learners, centres, and by awarding organisations. We have carefully balanced these impacts with the need to generate fair and reliable results that allow learners to progress.

You will know that the VTQ landscape is complex. Unlike GCSE and A levels, there is no single approach to awarding that would work for all types of VTQs because of the very different qualification structures and assessment methods used. We should expect that the way in which results are arrived at will vary, and that arrangements for different types of qualifications will differ, depending on their primary purpose. And we may see variance in the mitigations used by different awarding organisations offering similar qualifications (and even, in a few exceptional cases, variances for different learners on the same qualification). We recognise that this could lead to complicated arrangements for centres; each awarding organisation will need to make judgements about what evidence they need in order to award results fairly and safely. In this document we set out our expectations, which are designed to promote a consistent approach between awarding organisations.

Our expectation is that, through these arrangements, the majority of learners who planned to take exams and assessments this summer for progression to either further or higher education or to employment, will receive a result or be able to take an adapted assessment. But we recognise that, for various reasons, it will not be possible for all learners who were registered to take an assessment this summer to receive a result, and they might have to wait for the next available assessment opportunity.

Some qualifications – in particular, those which are not used for progression – fall outside the scope of the extraordinary regulatory framework that we are putting in place (though this does not necessarily mean that awards will not be made). Awarding organisations will provide further information about the arrangements for these qualifications.

## What this means for you

- calculated results are the starting point for qualifications that are used for progression to further or higher education. The approach is similar to that being used for GCSEs, AS and A levels. Most learners taking most qualifications in this category will receive a calculated result
- for some qualifications, calculated results are not appropriate. In general, assessments will be required for qualifications that are used to signal occupational competence, are about having the skills required for the job, or that could have professional or health and safety implications. We have asked awarding organisations to consider how assessments for these types of qualifications can be adapted. They will need to consider what adaptations are suitable and practicable under the current public health restrictions
- despite this, a delay to the assessment of some qualifications is unfortunately inevitable; for example, where there is no way of calculating a result or adapting an assessment in a way that does not undermine its reliability. In some circumstances we know that it may not be appropriate to issue results at all, as to do so would undermine confidence in the qualifications.

It is our intention that where calculated results are to be issued and/or adapted assessments taken, all reasonable measures should be taken to ensure those

assessments and results are safe, valid and reliable, with standards maintained as far as possible.

We have now made available information about how results will be arrived at for the majority of learners (referred to as the “principal mitigation” – that is, calculate, adapt or delay) for each qualification we regulate. An interactive tool is available [here](#), which allows centres and learners to easily search for qualifications and find this information.

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## Which learners these arrangements apply to

These arrangements apply to learners who were due to take assessments towards unit or qualification results between 20 March (when classroom-based delivery was suspended) and 31 July 2020. This includes those learners who may be only part way through their programme of study (for example in year 12) and will continue with learning towards their qualification after this date – for example, if they had planned to take an assessment on one or more units of a modular course half-way through a 2-year programme of study.

The vast majority of these learners will have been registered with their awarding organisation before 20 March. However, we recognise that this is not always the case, and in particular that for some “on-demand” qualifications, learners are only registered with the awarding organisation when they are ready to take the assessment. Where learners had not already registered, awarding organisations will work with you to confirm that all (and only those) learners who genuinely would have been registered to take assessments this summer are included, and that they are legitimate candidates. We will be monitoring how awarding organisations deal with these late and delayed registrations.

## What this means for you

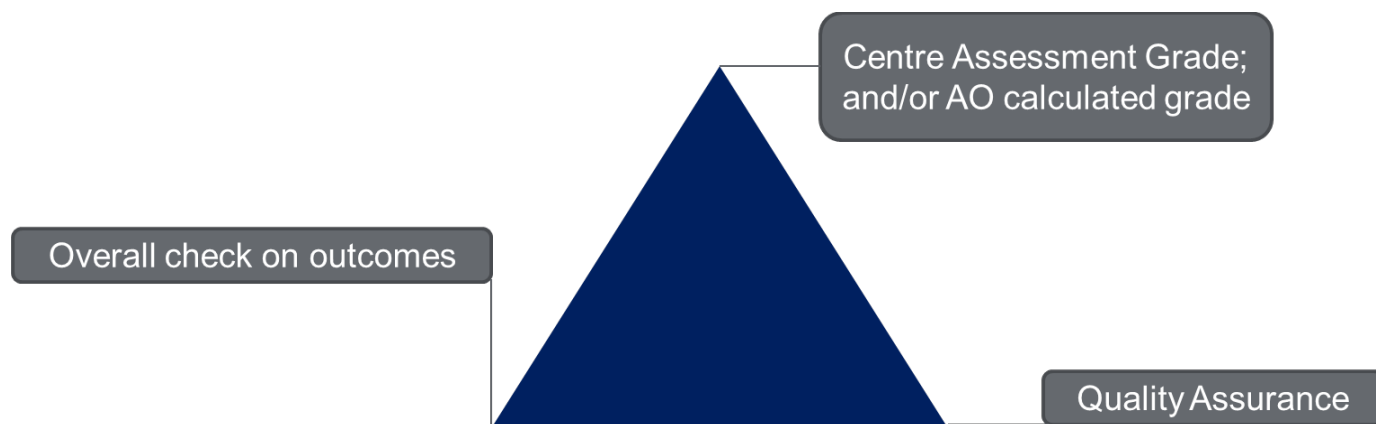
You should expect awarding organisations to ask you to confirm which learners have been or would have been entered for assessments due to be taken between 20 March and 31 July 2020. You may be asked to evidence that these are legitimate learners for these qualifications.

## How we expect results to be calculated

Qualifications where the principal mitigation is the issue of calculated results vary widely in their size, assessment structures, grading structures and delivery models. Learners taking these qualifications may have completed different amounts of formal assessment before 20 March. This means that awarding organisations are having to implement different approaches to calculating results that are appropriate within different contexts. We are working with awarding organisations to ensure that, despite these variations, there is as much consistency in their approach as possible. We expect in most cases similar qualifications and/or qualifications with similar contexts should have similar ways of calculating results for learners, but awarding organisations may need to introduce some variations to secure necessary evidence of learner ability and you should be prepared for that.

One of the ways we are helping awarding organisations take a consistent approach to generating calculated results, is by being clear about the 3 essential elements that must be in place:

1. a Centre Assessment Grade (generated by the centre) and/or a calculated grade (determined by the awarding organisation) based on results they already hold for the learner
2. quality assurance of the overall calculated result
3. a check of overall qualification level outcomes and results profile, to confirm it is in line with expectations



Calculated results will draw on a range of different types of evidence, and this may vary depending upon the qualification. Awarding organisations will consider what evidence is available to them and develop the most appropriate approach for each qualification. Awarding organisations may ask you to provide one or more of the following:

- a Centre Assessment Grade (CAG) – this is derived from evidence held within the centre and is the judgement about the grade that each learner is most likely to have achieved had they been able to complete their assessments in summer 2020. A CAG could be at unit level or for the qualification overall, depending upon the structure of the qualification and the proportion of units already completed
- a rank order of learners, for them to use as part of the quality assurance
- internal assessment grades for completed work that has not yet been externally moderated or verified

To generate calculated results, and as part of their quality assurance, awarding organisations may also draw on evidence they already hold, including:

- banked marks or grades for completed unit assessments – including external assessments as well as internal assessments where the marks/grades have already been through the normal moderation or verification process

- data about how their qualifications function, for example, whether performance on one component is predictive of performance on another component
- data and information about each centre, for example their historical performance qualification outcomes, risk profiles, centre visit information and records of any investigations
- prior attainment data, where this is appropriate

The quality assurance process and the overall check on outcomes are both important parts of the process, because they ensure that the results awarded will be fair and sufficiently reliable. So, we have asked awarding organisations to ensure that they use at least one source of trusted evidence along with a sufficiently robust basis for quality assurance.

In cases where there is little or no banked unit data, or where CAGs are not possible and/or there is little opportunity or evidence to support the generation of CAGs, or to support the quality assurance process, an awarding organisation may determine that this is below the minimum evidential threshold. In these cases, we expect it will not be possible to calculate a result and that learners affected will be offered an adapted assessment wherever possible, or will have to wait until assessments can be rescheduled.

We recognise that the process of using CAGs as the basis of calculated results relies heavily on teachers' and tutors' judgements. The Department for Education has [confirmed](#) that it will not hold schools/colleges to account on the basis of exams and assessment data from summer 2020, and that the data should not be used by others, such as Ofsted, local authorities, academy trusts, and so on to hold schools/colleges or teachers to account. DfE will not be publishing, or sharing, institution-level school/college accountability measures, such as Progress 8 and Level 3 Value Added, using the summer 2020 data.

## What this means for you

We are requiring awarding organisations to provide effective guidance to centres about the information they require from you to calculate results.

Awarding organisations may ask you to provide CAGs (at qualification or unit level). They may also ask you to provide other information, such as a rank order for learners – and where they do so, we expect them to provide clear information about their requirements. There might be different requirements for different qualifications, so be prepared for these variations.

The CAGs submitted to exam boards must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the most likely grade a student would have achieved if they had sat their assessments this summer. Judgements must be objective and fair. They should be a holistic professional judgement, balancing the different sources of evidence, using knowledge of the assessment aims and criteria and reviewed by qualification teachers/tutors and relevant heads of department. You will need to consider each student's performance over the course of study and make a realistic judgement of the grade each student would have been most likely to get if they had

completed the relevant unit(s) or qualification as requested by the awarding organisation. In some cases, this may be a U (ungraded) or fail.

In coming to your holistic judgement, you may want to draw on a range of information sources. In many cases you will have a good understanding of an individual's performance and how they compare to other learners on the same course this year, and on previous courses and in previous years. We realise you may not know precisely how each learner might have performed on assessments and examinations that they did not encounter. However, you may have a good understanding of how your learners with similar achievements have performed in the past on the same or similar assessments. You should use this knowledge, combined with other evidence, including previous formal and informal assessments, mock examinations and homework, in coming to your judgements.

You should assume that it is no easier or harder for a learner to achieve a particular grade this year, compared to previous years.

You should not provide a CAG where there is no evidence upon which to base one.

Where disabled learners have an agreed reasonable adjustment (for example a reader or scribe), or other learners have an agreed access arrangement, the judgement should take account of likely achievement with the reasonable adjustment/access arrangement in place.

You should draw on existing records and available evidence (as far as possible in the context of current public health advice). It is important that the judgements are objective, and they should only take account of evidence about learner performance – their knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to the subject. Other factors should not affect this judgement, including characteristics protected under equalities legislation such as a student's sex, race, religion/belief, disability status, gender reassignment or sexual orientation.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, judgements should not be affected by a student's behaviour (both good and poor), character, appearance or social background, or the performance of their siblings.

We have published further [guidance](#) for centres on the importance of ensuring objectivity in grading and ranking decisions.

We expect AOs to be identifying, monitoring and minimising disadvantage to learners, and they might ask you for additional information to support this.

### **Window for collection of evidence from centres**

You should expect awarding organisations to ask you to provide CAGs and other information about learners in a window of up to 3 weeks, starting 1 June. This may include a quality check confirmation from the head of centre or relevant department on the Centre Assessment Grades you will be providing. In exceptional circumstances where awarding organisations need to extend this window, they will be in touch with you. The window will allow them time for awarding organisations to

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<sup>2</sup> Protected characteristics also include age, marital/civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity status. More information can be found on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website [here](#).



quality assure the data, check the overall profile of outcomes and, if necessary, raise any queries with centres before results are issued. If you feel your awarding organisation's deadline is unachievable, you should speak to them urgently.

### **Work generated after 20 March**

Given the disruption to education caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19), we do not expect awarding organisations to require centres to use evidence generated after centres closed on 20 March for the purposes of determining a CAG for a VTQ, and no learner should be disadvantaged if they are unable to complete any work set after that date. This is in line with our expectations for determining a CAG for GCSEs and A levels.

However, we recognise that there may be some exceptions where awarding organisations need additional information, generated after 20 March, to secure sufficient evidence to provide a result. There may also be circumstances where teaching, learning or internal assessment has been able to continue, and resulting work could provide good evidence for CAGs and allow a more valid award. Awarding organisations may want to use this, particularly where it does not make sense for any such work to be wasted. However, they are only likely to do so where any such work can be authenticated and considered in a consistent manner that improves rather than compromises wider validity, comparability and fairness of judgements.

Where additional work has been completed after 20 March, centres should exercise caution where that evidence suggests a change in performance. In many cases this is likely to reflect the circumstances and context in which the work is done.

The development of knowledge, skills and behaviours leading to qualifications remain important for progression, irrespective of whether they are assessed. We expect that you will want to continue supporting learners preparing for qualifications (particularly where assessments will be adapted or delayed), where they will need to demonstrate that knowledge, skills and behaviours in future.

### **Functional Skills qualifications**

We are clear that the principal mitigation for Functional Skills qualifications is calculation of results – so the guidance above is all relevant here.

We have worked with awarding organisations that offer Functional Skills qualifications to develop common guidance, which has now been [published](#) by the Federation of Awarding Bodies.

## **How we expect adaptation of assessments to happen**

For some qualifications, a calculated result approach will not be suitable, in particular for those that are designed to signal occupational or professional or regulated competence (including licence to practise). Providing a result that signals competency that has not been evidenced to the usual expected standards creates risks, including those relating to health and safety. It could mean that a student does not possess the skills required by the role to which the qualification relates, or does

not meet the standards set by professional bodies or in regulations. There might also be cases where it is not possible to generate a CAG.

In these cases, the principal mitigation is for awarding organisations to adapt their assessments.

The main options for adapting qualifications that may be considered by awarding organisations include:

- changing the way in which assessments are delivered, for example using an online rather than paper-based test, or carrying out an assessment remotely rather than face to face
- adapting assessment methods, for example using a practical simulation in place of an observation, or professional discussion in place of a practical demonstration
- changing invigilation requirements, for example allowing the use of on-line invigilation
- waiving or adjusting work experience or placement requirements, for example allowing candidates to have undertaken a shorter period of work experience
- changing the way in which a qualification is quality assured, for example allowing for remote or online standardisation or moderation, where this is a change to an assessment strategy

Awarding organisations are considering the most appropriate approaches to adaptation of their assessments, and what is suitable and practicable under the current public health restrictions. They will provide guidance for you on how to deliver any adaptations to assessment.

We recognise that there may be cases where some candidates are unable to access adapted assessments, and that this might vary in different geographies if lockdown restrictions are eased at different times. We have asked awarding organisations to ensure, as far as possible, that any adaptations minimise any disadvantage to learners. We recognise that this might not be possible for every learner, and in some cases, there may be no alternative but to wait until assessment can be rescheduled.

### **Apprenticeship end-point assessments**

The flexibilities for the assessment of apprenticeships are being overseen by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. You can find full details of these on [their website](#). We provide the External Quality Assurance for many apprenticeships. Where we do, we are approving changes to end-point assessments in line with the arrangements we have set out for adapting VTQ assessments.

### **What this means for you**

You should expect clear information from your awarding organisations about what you need to do to ensure that adapted assessments for VTQs and apprenticeships operate effectively, and what arrangements will need to be made for any learners who need reasonable adjustments or are unable to take an adapted assessment.

## Preventing errors and unfair advantage

None of us want things to go wrong or any learners to experience further disruption this summer. We know that awarding organisations will be very alert to risks, and we expect them to do all they can to prevent errors and to put things right as quickly as possible. We are also asking awarding organisations to remain vigilant to the risk of malpractice and other improper behaviour. We expect every effort to be taken to prevent any learner gaining an unfair advantage through these arrangements and we will expect awarding organisations to continue to take active steps to prevent malpractice and to investigate and address any suspected malpractice or other improper behaviour – we will be monitoring awarding organisations' activity in this area. Awarding organisations are also obliged to promptly report any incidents to us and we will monitor their response.

### What this means for you

We trust that you will work within the requirements and guidelines that the awarding organisations set, to prevent mistakes and errors and to prevent any learner being unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged. You may expect awarding organisations to ask you for more evidence or additional information than they would normally.

## Results days

We expect the results of sessional qualifications to be awarded no later than A levels and GCSEs – that's 13 and 20 August respectively. This is so that no learner who is hoping to progress onto further or higher education is disadvantaged.

The results for some qualifications (for example, some Level 3 and Level 2 BTECs) have in previous years been issued the day immediately before A levels and GCSEs respectively, or earlier than that. This year many awarding organisations will align their awarding on the same day – either the 13 or 20 August – to make things simpler and clearer for learners. This should particularly help those learners who have undertaken a mixed programme of study that includes VTQs and GCSEs or A levels.

Not all results will be issued on these 2 days; some that have historically been issued in the weeks before A level and GCSE results days may still be issued earlier this year. Your awarding organisations will be able to confirm their results days.

The results of on-demand qualifications will be awarded at different times.

### What this means for you

If your learners are being awarded qualifications that are used for progression to further or higher education you will need to prepare for the 2 results days to be 13 and 20 August.

You should expect to hear from awarding organisations when they will be issuing results for other qualifications.

In all cases, where awarding organisations provide you with embargoed results data, you should expect that they will continue to do so in good time so you are able to prepare.

## Future assessment opportunities

We are requiring awarding organisations that normally provide an assessment opportunity for learners between September and December to take all reasonable steps to continue to do so.

Where awarding organisations do not normally offer an autumn assessment opportunity, they should do so where there are enough learners who need to take an assessment unless it would be impracticable or create a disproportionate burden to offer one. We expect awarding organisations to work with centres, and to take decisions in the best interests of learners, with safeguards for us to intervene if we decide there is a particular need for an assessment that is not being met by awarding organisations. We are also requiring awarding organisations to seek to ensure that their approach to delivering these assessments minimises burdens and are as deliverable as possible including by Centres and Teachers.

### What this means for you

You may wish to contact your awarding organisations in the first instance to find out their plans for autumn or delayed assessments.

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## Appeals

Centres will be able to appeal against results where they feel that the awarding organisation did not apply procedures consistently or that procedures were not followed properly and fairly. Given the range of qualifications and appeals processes in VTQs we have not prescribed an approach that awarding organisations must take beyond this.

As part of the framework, we have published additional guidance on appeals for awarding organisations for this year to promote consistency in approach and to make clear what awarding organisations should consider in relation to the conduct of appeals. This will build on awarding organisations' existing processes and will encompass whether a Centre has followed a procedure properly and fairly, where relevant, including any issue in relation to bias or discrimination on the part of a Centre in following a procedure.

Our guidance makes clear that awarding organisations are not obliged to consider appeals submitted by individual learners or their representatives unless that is the only way to secure an effective appeal. Our guidance also makes clear that in relation to calculated results it would not be appropriate to allow appeals relating to the professional judgements of Teachers and Centres, so long as those judgements are arrived at in line with the procedure agreed with the awarding organisation.

## What this means for you

Where you feel the relevant process has not been followed correctly by the awarding organisation, you will be able to make an appeal. If, on results day, your learners are unhappy with the results they have received you should contact your awarding organisation about their appeals process. If you decide to proceed with an appeal you must follow the awarding organisation's process in the first instance. If you remain dissatisfied following the appeals process you can contact us to make a complaint.

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## What happens next

This guidance has been updated in light of our consultation outcomes, published consultation on 22 May 2020.

We will keep these arrangements under review. If we need to extend the period of assessments covered by the arrangements beyond 31 July, we will do so. We appreciate you will want to know, as soon as is practical, how long they will continue. We hope to provide an update at the end of June, explaining what our expectations are at that time, so that centres and awarding organisations have sufficient notice to prepare for the next steps.

## Key dates

- 20 March – the cut-off date for evidence counting towards CAGs, in the vast majority of cases
- 22 May – anticipated publication of consultation outcomes
- 1 June – beginning of 3-week window for collection of evidence contributing towards the calculation of a result from centres
- 13 August – results day for A levels and some L3 VTQs
- 20 August – results day for GCSEs and some L2 VTQs

You should refer to your awarding organisations for detailed timelines.



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