

Part of **Education and childcare during coronavirus**



Guidance

Letter to Heads of Centre - Awarding results in vocational and technical qualifications in summer 2020

Updated 18 June 2020

Awarding results in vocational and technical qualifications in summer 2020

As we draw towards the deadline for submitting grading information for many learners taking those vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) receiving calculated grades this summer, I would like to thank you for playing your role in awarding these and all other VTQs. We all know just how essential qualified people with the right technical skills will be to restoring our economy in the months and years to come.

Ofqual is addressing the challenges of coronavirus (COVID-19) for VTQs with the same urgency and focus as general qualifications. The action we have taken on both VTQs and general qualifications has been to ensure:

- as many learners expecting to receive qualification results this summer as possible are able to do so where possible, so they can progress to the next stages of their lives without further disruption
- results are sufficiently valid and reliable so they will be as valued as those of any other year; and
- the arrangements are as fair as possible

As you're aware, the VTQ landscape is complex. Because of that, the approach is different from that taken for general qualifications – a single approach to awarding for 14,000+ VTQs would not be appropriate. The regulatory framework we have put in place, covering assessments that were due to take place between 20 March and 31 July, sets out 3 types of arrangements, aligned to the purpose of the qualification. In the vast majority of cases, learners will be able to progress in their studies or employment with a calculated result or having taken an adapted assessment.

We have made available a new [interactive tool](#) to show the main approach for each qualification. We recognise that playing your part across the range of qualifications with different approaches has been challenging, particularly for centres that use a large number of different awarding organisations, and I thank you for your professionalism and flexibility. We have been actively working to maximise the consistency between organisations to the greatest extent possible, but there will always be differences, given the diversity of qualifications available.

Calculated results

Calculated results is the approach for those qualifications which are principally used for progression to further or higher education, many of which share design features with GCSEs and A levels. Around 30% of VTQs are using this approach, covering well over half of learners. For a calculated result to be awarded, awarding organisations need to be confident that there is enough evidence on which this grade can be based. That minimum evidential basis will vary depending on the qualification, and in many cases has been built on the work learners have done to date and the professional judgement of your staff.

As you know, Friday 19 June is the end of the window for submission to many awarding organisations of centre assessment grades and (where relevant) rank order information for qualifications where calculating results has been possible. We recognise that in some exceptional circumstances where teachers or tutors are unavailable, you may nevertheless be able to submit a centre assessment grade if there is sufficient evidence for another member of staff to use to inform their professional judgement. If you are at all unclear about the evidence that a particular awarding organisation needs, or you are having difficulties achieving the deadline, please do contact them as soon as possible.

We recognise that your staff are having to use their expertise and experience to make judgements in a way and over a timescale that they would not have anticipated. To bring consistency to judgements, all centre assessment grades will be standardised/quality assured by awarding organisations. It is likely that you will see some adjustment to your centre assessment grades. Such adjustments are in the interests of fairness to students because they will ensure, as far as possible, that individual centres have not been too severe or too generous in comparison with others.

Adapted assessments

For qualifications where there is insufficient evidence to support a valid and reliable calculated result, or qualifications which signal competence in practical skills, a calculated result would not be appropriate. Calculation at either qualification or component level could create health and safety or other professional risks, or might undermine or devalue the qualification, which could limit learners' ability to progress. In these cases, awarding organisations have been asked to consider how assessments could be adapted so that results can still be delivered this summer, in a way that continues to secure their reliability and validity and is as deliverable as possible by centres.

We expect around 30% of VTQs will use an adapted assessment. The type of adaptations put in place varies, according to the specifics of the qualification content and usual assessment methodology; many involve online delivery, or simulation instead of observation. We recognise that such adaptations may not always be suitable for all learners in a cohort, but our focus is on ensuring as many learners are able to be awarded a valid and reliable result as possible this summer. The phased re-opening of some centres may allow more assessments to take place on-site, but many adaptations do not rely on access to centres' sites or specialist equipment.

I recognise that in some cases centres have been concerned about how to run adapted assessments, in particular where you are beginning phased reopening but where the number of learners is limited by public health restrictions. You may find it helpful to refer to the Department for Education's [FE Operational Guidance](#), along with their [guidance on apprenticeships](#) and wider [guidance for schools](#). If you are still unsure, your awarding organisation should be able to provide guidance. However, we would still expect them to ensure that adapted assessments, where they take place, lead to valid and reliable results. Where they cannot ensure this, it may become necessary to delay assessments.

I would like to reassure you that the arrangements this summer will not be withdrawn until they are no longer needed, and so, from a regulatory perspective, it is not essential that all adapted assessments take place before the end of July. Awarding organisations have understandably had to impose cut-off dates for adapted assessments to take place for learners needing results in August but our framework will still cover any adapted assessments that need to run after that (including, exceptionally, into the autumn term).

Delayed assessments

Delay has been the option of last resort, where neither a calculated result nor an adapted assessment is possible. Whilst early indications are that around 90% of certificates will be awarded this summer, this does mean that unfortunately some students will face delays to the completion of their qualifications. I know that you are working hard to ensure that these assessments happen as soon as possible. The phased reopening of centres might mean that some delayed assessments may now be able to be delivered on site, but we expect awarding organisations to be talking to you about this to ensure it is deliverable.

Different requirements for different qualifications

In order to maximise the number of valid and reliable results that can be awarded, awarding organisations have had to consider what evidence is available and develop the most appropriate approach. As you will know, they are not always using the same approach for similar qualifications, as it will depend on the purpose of the qualification, its assessment design and how it is delivered – which can legitimately differ between similar qualifications, even those with the same title. Factors such as the ordering of different modules, or timetable for submitting coursework during the year, will affect awarding organisations' decisions. It is the very diversity of the awarding organisation market and the qualifications that they offer that leads to differences in what they need centres to do.

We are aware that there have been some changes in the main approaches that individual awarding organisations are taking (with switches from calculation to adaptation, for example). This is in some cases because awarding organisations are responding to feedback from industry bodies, and in others to achieve greater consistency with other similar qualifications. We do not expect to see many more changes going forward. We are also aware that some centres have sought opt-outs from the main approach, sometimes because they would like a calculated result rather than an adapted assessment, and sometimes vice versa. We do not encourage such opt-outs, which can introduce unfairness; we have been clear that awarding organisations should consider a range of factors, such as the purpose of qualifications, industry expectations, and minimum evidential threshold in designing their approach. If you do have any capacity to administer assessments, priority should be given to those who if they were not able to take them would have their assessments delayed.

We appreciate that meeting the differing requirements of awarding organisations presents challenges, and that this comes on top of the many other strategic and operational pressures that coronavirus (COVID-19) has brought to you and the sector. I am grateful for your ongoing support, and to the sector representative bodies for continuing to engage with us to ensure that the arrangements we put in place – for this summer and beyond – are as fair as possible to learners.

Results days

Results for many VTQs will, this year, be awarded on the same days as their comparable A level (Thursday 13 August) and GCSEs (Thursday 20 August). We are working with awarding organisations to ensure data reaches you in good time, and in helpful formats, for you to process them. I know you will be making plans for issuing results, particularly if public health restrictions remain in place; and for any additional support which might be provided to help students in the circumstances of this summer. We expect awarding organisations to ensure that you have the information to enable you to do that.

Appeals, complaints and opportunities to take assessments next academic year

As in any year, you will be supporting some learners who are disappointed with their results. If you believe that something has gone wrong with a learner's grades you will be able to put in an appeal to the awarding organisation on their behalf. We expect that any mistakes will be quickly found and corrected. We are aware of concerns that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with particular protected characteristics may be less inclined to question their results. To help you make sure your learners, parents and carers know what options are available, awarding organisations will provide information to help you explain the appeals arrangements to them.

Some learners may wish to take (or retake) an assessment. Most VTQs offer multiple assessment windows across the year. Where awarding organisations normally offer an autumn assessment opportunity, they must take all reasonable steps to continue to do so. We are talking with awarding organisations about how they can supplement these plans, and put in place additional opportunities where there are enough learners who need to take an assessment and to do so would not be impractical or disproportionately burdensome. Whatever arrangements are agreed, we expect awarding organisations to give you plenty of notice.

2020/2021 assessments

We recognise that learners expecting to take assessments next academic year, and their parents, teachers and tutors, are concerned about the disruption to teaching and learning caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Our overriding aim is to ensure exams and assessments are as fair as possible and take into account any public health requirements and the well-being of students.

We are very active in the collaborative and educational challenges you are facing and we are working swiftly, in collaboration with the Department for Education, awarding organisations and representative groups, to confirm arrangements as quickly as possible. We are keen to continue to engage across the sector and take on board feedback as we develop our proposals. We know you will need time to prepare, and will keep our [guide for centres](#) updated and highlight changes as appropriate.

Thank you again for all you are doing to ensure that as many learners as possible receive fair and valid qualifications this summer.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Collier

Chief Regulator, Ofqual

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