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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

Contents

- [Updates](#)
- [About this document](#)
- [Arrangements for awarding VTQs in the academic year 2021 to 2022](#)
- [Arrangements for continuing students](#)
- [Performance table qualifications](#)
- [T Levels](#)
- [Functional Skills qualifications](#)
- [Apprenticeship end-point assessments](#)
- [Monitoring the public health situation and contingency planning](#)
- [Results](#)

Related content

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Collection

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Updates

This document was updated on 11 May 2022. We have added sections on [reasonable adjustments](#) and [special consideration](#).

About this document

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, Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) and project qualifications (or 'other general qualifications') are scheduled to take place in the academic year 2021 to 2022.

In this guidance we 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.

For information about the arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels, see [Guide for schools and colleges 2022: GCSEs, AS and A levels](#)

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 be experiencing or have already experienced disruption to their learning or work over the last year as a result of the pandemic. We understand that students may be anxious about completing exams or formal assessments and may need further support from you this year. We also know that this disruption has resulted in considerable additional pressure for teachers, exams officers and other staff in colleges, schools and training providers.

Our regulations can help awarding organisations support you so you can help your students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in assessments. And your students can 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.

We have 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 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.

We are continuing 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 assessments to run smoothly. 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 are a range of different qualification structures and assessment methods used in VTQs. As last year, we are expecting 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. These adaptations could include the provision of advance information where this is appropriate.

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.

Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes made to an assessment or the

delivery of an assessment before it takes place. Awarding organisations are required under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to their assessments for disabled students to reduce or remove a disadvantage caused by a student's disability. Adjustments should be based on evidence that they are needed by the student, should reflect their normal way of working within the centre and be reasonable in terms of cost and time to implement. An adjustment cannot be permitted if it could affect the validity of the assessment or mean that some students could be unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged.

If you believe that some of your students require a reasonable adjustment you should check with your awarding organisation. Some adjustments can be put in place by centres and others need approval by the awarding organisation. Some adjustments may be unique to an individual student and may not be mentioned within the awarding organisation's policy.

You should ensure that you apply for any adjustments needed well in advance of the planned assessment date. This will ensure that there is plenty of time to make arrangements before the assessment takes place. Awarding organisations will be able to provide you with information about when to apply for adjustments for the qualifications they make available. Centres should contact the relevant awarding organisation as soon as possible if they become aware an adjustment is required that hasn't been applied for.

Special consideration

As in pre-pandemic years, special consideration is any adjustment given to a student who has temporarily experienced an illness, injury or other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment which significantly affects their ability to take an assessment or demonstrate what they can do in an assessment. Special consideration is only for things that happen immediately before or during an assessment that has a material effect on a student's ability to take that assessment or on how they performed.

Please be aware that students will not be granted special consideration because their education has been disrupted either by the pandemic or for any other reason.

If you believe a student is eligible for special consideration, then you should follow your awarding organisation's process. The application should be made as soon as possible. Your awarding organisation will be able to confirm the deadlines for applying.

In some cases, due to the type of assessment or the nature of the situation, it might be possible for the student to take their assessment at a later date.

If a student feels unwell on the day of their assessment you should follow [guidance from the Department for Education](#), along with your own procedures.

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 students are planning to take assessments,

when they plan to take them and when they are likely to be ready for certification. You might find it helpful to start capturing this information as early as possible.

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. You can find updates for the arrangements for the 2022 to 2023 academic year [on our website](#).

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, for example on-site visits 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 also 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.

It is worth noting that the Department for Education has [decided not to limit the number of resits](#) that are permitted for qualifications listed in performance tables.

T Levels

The arrangements for the Technical Qualifications of T Levels are in line with other VTQs. This means that there may be adaptations put in place for the core component assessments where this is appropriate 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 further 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.

Table 1: Assessment options for functional skills qualifications

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	On request to the awarding organisation
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
Skillsfirst	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 still possible that further disruption may occur but even if some public health restrictions were to be needed over the coming weeks, it should still be possible for students to take exams and formal assessments safely.

In the unlikely event that the government decides that exams and formal assessments cannot take place in the summer then we expect, as in 2021, some VTQs and other general qualifications will be awarded through TAGs. GCSEs and A levels will also be awarded through TAGs. The evidence for TAGs will 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

If you want to change the timing or delivery of upcoming assessments to take account of local disruption, 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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