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The logo for Ofqual, featuring the word 'ofqual' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters 'o' and 'a' are grey, while 'f', 'q', 'u', and 'l' are a darker grey. Below the letters 'o' and 'a' are two horizontal green bars of equal length.

Consultation outcome

Decisions: Updating Qualification Level Conditions for T Level Technical Qualifications

Updated 10 August 2023

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Introduction

Following receipt of evidence from providers delivering the first T Levels, the Department for Education (DfE) has decided to change the way in which students can take the Core Exam and Core Project at their first attempt. These form part of the Technical Qualification in a T Level. Ofqual [consulted](#), between 20 March and 15 May 2023, on changes to its [Qualification Level Conditions for Technical Qualifications](#), to enable this approach. The consultation was in 2 parts.

In part 1, Ofqual consulted on proposed changes to the assessment requirements to allow students to take the Core Exam and Core Project separately at their first attempt (which is already permitted for retakes). The consultation included updated drafts of Ofqual's assessment requirements to implement this change.

In part 2, Ofqual consulted on minor changes, not related to those included in part 1, to keep the Qualification Level Conditions up to date. These included changes such as updating organisation names, and updating places where the Qualification Level Conditions refer to General Conditions that have been renumbered since publication.

This document sets out Ofqual's decisions following the consultation.

Summary of decisions

Ofqual has decided to implement the proposals as consulted on. The following changes will be made to Ofqual's Qualification Level Conditions for Technical Qualifications, which will allow students to take the Core Exam and Core Project separately at their first attempt. Ofqual will:

- remove the requirement for students' first attempt at the Core Exam and Core Project to be in the same assessment series
- amend the requirements specifying which assessments an awarding organisation must permit to be taken in different assessment series to one another
- amend the minimum required number of assessment series for the Core Assessments, to reflect that the revised policy will require 2 opportunities to take the Core Assessments in each academic year
- update the section on retakes to reflect that the position for retakes and first entries, which currently differs, will in future be the same

The following changes, not related to the Core Exam and Core Project, will also be made, which will ensure the Qualification Level Conditions remain up to date. Ofqual will:

- amend the guidance to General Condition H6 (Issuing results) to refer to the Department for Education (DfE) instead of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)
- amend all references to the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) to instead refer to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)
- correct an error in the assessment strategy requirements under TQ3 where a heading was included as part of the body text
- update references to General Condition H2 (Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny where an assessment is marked by a Centre) and A4 (Conflicts of Interest) to ensure the correct Condition numbers are referenced
- update the definition of a Technical Qualification included in Condition TQ23 (Interpretations and Definitions) to reflect a change to the part of the legislation under which these Technical Qualifications are approved by IfATE

Part 1 – Allowing students to be entered for the Core Exam and Core Project in separate assessment series

Amendments to assessment requirements

What Ofqual proposed

Ofqual proposed to amend its assessment requirements in relation to the timing of assessments set out under Condition TQ6 (Assessment). This was to reflect DfE's revised policy that students will no longer have to take the Core Exam and Core Project together the first time they attempt them (which is already the case for retakes). Students will continue to be able to take the Core Exam and Core Project together if they wish and must still take all assessments for each part (for example, all Core Exam papers) together for both first attempts and retakes. Allowing this will mean awarding organisations will have to offer the Core Exam and Core Project assessments twice in each academic year.

The consultation set out the amended wording of the relevant assessment requirements, and asked respondents if they had any comments on these.

Responses received

Respondents who commented on the specific proposals were supportive and thought that the proposed amendments were clear and would deliver the intended changes. They commented that the revised approach was fairer to students and would have an overall positive impact, by allowing students to focus on, and take, the Core Exam and Core Project individually.

Awarding organisations highlighted some specific considerations relating to implementing the changes. They said there was limited time between decisions being announced and them needing to finalise changes to systems, processes, documentation and training materials, in order that changes were in place from September 2023. Awarding organisations said that schools and colleges may already have accessed existing versions of these materials ahead of the new academic year. Awarding organisations also said they would need to ensure their

centre-facing staff were trained to monitor the new arrangements.

Respondents requested clarity about whether students who started T Levels in September 2022 could take the Core Exam and Core Project separately if they had not yet attempted them, in addition to those starting courses in September 2023.

An awarding organisation asked for clarification about the reason for changing a word in the updated assessment requirements. They asked whether a change from 'scheduling of assessments' to 'availability of assessments', in relation to what should be explained in an assessment strategy, was intended to signal a change in meaning.

Others who responded made general comments about T Levels, rather than about Ofqual's specific proposals. These included a request for further flexibility beyond that being proposed. As overall T Level policy is a matter for DfE, Ofqual is not able to take decisions on these matters.

Decision

Ofqual has decided to implement the changes as consulted on. This will mean students are able to take the Core Exam and Core Project separately at their first attempt from September 2023. For retakes, students were already able to do this, which will continue.

To allow for this approach, awarding organisations will need to offer 2 assessment series each year, in which assessments for the Core Exam and Core Project are both available. This is the approach already taken by awarding organisations but Ofqual's Qualification Level Conditions previously allowed a minimum of one assessment series. This is therefore a change to what Ofqual's Conditions allow but not to what happens in practice.

Ofqual can confirm that the changes apply to all students, meaning those starting courses from September 2023, and those who started in previous years and are already part-way through a course. It is possible some students already on courses will already have taken the Core Exam and Core Project. If this is the case, they will, as currently, be able to retake one or both parts of the Core, together or separately.

In relation to implementing changes from September 2023, Ofqual has sought to make these changes as quickly as possible, following the publication of DfE's T Level action plan. Ofqual has worked closely with awarding organisations to update them on the likely decisions, to enable them to prepare for, although not finalise, any changes.

Ofqual acknowledges that some schools and colleges may already have accessed

documents and training materials before these decisions were announced and that awarding organisations will need some time following these decisions to finalise and implement the changes. Ofqual expects the changes to be implemented from September 2023 so that the new approach is available to students, even where schools and colleges may not yet have updated versions of specifications and other materials available to them. Awarding organisations should be clear in their communications with schools and colleges about the new arrangements, including where specifications do not immediately reflect the changes.

In relation to the use of the word 'availability' instead of 'scheduling' for what an awarding organisation must explain in its assessment strategy, this change does not signal a change in expectation. Ofqual's view is that 'availability' better reflects what an awarding organisation should describe in its assessment strategy. This is not just when assessments are scheduled but also wider considerations, for example how assessments are made available and how they must be taken.

The amended Qualification Level Conditions, including the final wording, have been published alongside these decisions.

Impact of the changes

What Ofqual proposed

Ofqual considered whether the changes could present any risks that might negatively affect students. In particular, Ofqual considered whether the change could increase risks related to the maintenance of standards, given the way the Core Exam and Core Project are combined to give a single aggregated A* to E grade for the Core.

Ofqual's view was that the proposed changes did not materially increase any current risks in relation to the maintenance of standards. Through the consultation, we sought views on this and whether there were any impacts that had not been identified, and if so, how any negative impacts might be mitigated.

Responses received

In relation to the maintenance of standards, awarding organisations commented that the revised approach could lead to changes in entry patterns, with students entered earlier than currently for assessments. They said this could lead to earlier series including students who were less well-prepared, and later series including more students retaking assessments, both of which would have the potential to increase

the complexity in maintaining standards. Awarding organisations also queried the requirements for the standard to be set and maintained for the Core as a whole, given performance standards were often set at individual assessment level.

A small number of respondents commented on the impact of the changes on the number of retakes. Some thought the changes could lead to centres entering students early for one part of the Core, for which they may not be ready. They said this could lead to more retakes, an increase in overall entry costs, and take up teaching and learning time.

Decision

In relation to the maintenance of standards, Ofqual's view is that the changes do not materially increase current risks, given the way standards are set and maintained for the Core as a whole.

Ofqual has considered the specific risks to the maintenance of standards identified by awarding organisations, including those relating to the make-up of cohorts, a possible increase in retakes, and the requirement for standards to be set for the Core as a whole.

Schools and colleges can already choose when and how often to enter students for assessments, although it is possible that having to enter the Core Exam and Core Project together initially may have deterred schools and colleges from entering students early and/or multiple times. Ofqual's view is that despite the changes, it is unlikely schools and colleges will significantly change their approach to enter students earlier than they would currently. This is because students are unlikely to be prepared for an assessment so early into a 2-year course (the first series in the autumn is often used as a re-take series for students who entered the previous summer). It would be possible for awarding organisations to discourage such approaches through their communications with schools and colleges. If entry patterns did change, Ofqual would expect awarding organisations to consider any implications for the maintenance of standards.

In relation to standards being set for the Core as a whole, Ofqual's view is that the approach is not fundamentally different to modular qualifications where the standard resides at overall qualification level. In addition, there are only 2 main parts of the Core, which will limit the complexity in maintaining standards.

Ofqual has decided not to make any changes to what was proposed following these comments but will continue to monitor these risks as part of ongoing work with awarding organisations on setting and maintaining standards.

Part 2 – Other updates to the Qualification Level Conditions, requirements and guidance for Technical Qualifications within T Levels

What Ofqual proposed

Ofqual proposed some minor changes to its Qualification Level Conditions for Technical Qualifications, which did not relate to the changes in part 1. These changes were to bring the Conditions up to date but did not change what awarding organisations were required to do. Examples of these changes were to:

- update references to specific organisations, reflecting changes to their names and roles relating to Technical Qualifications, including updating references to the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) to instead refer to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)
- correct an error in Ofqual's assessment strategy requirements
- update references to the General Condition H2 (Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny where an assessment is marked by a Centre) and A4 (Conflicts of Interest) to reflect changes to the numbering of these Conditions
- update the definition of a Technical Qualification to reflect a change to the part of the legislation under which IfATE approves these qualifications

Responses received

Only a small number of respondents provided comments on these changes, and the comments were supportive of the changes overall. An awarding organisation asked for confirmation of the changes to Condition numbering being made in relation to Condition H2 (Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny where an assessment is marked by a Centre). Respondents also commented on the use of the term Core Project, saying this is more commonly known as the Employer Set Project, and asked whether Ofqual should use the same term. This was not something on which Ofqual was consulting.

Decision

Ofqual has decided to implement these changes as consulted on. These changes will keep the Qualification Level Conditions and guidance accurate and up to date, and do not change what awarding organisations are required to do.

In relation to the suggestion to use the term 'Employer Set Project' in place of 'Core Project' in Ofqual's Qualification Level Conditions, Ofqual has decided not to make this change. We do not consider the current drafting causes any confusion and Ofqual's use of the term Core Project does not prevent others from referring to it differently, as some do now. Given this would require changes throughout the Qualification Level Conditions and guidance, Ofqual does not consider any benefits it might bring would justify this change, and is satisfied that 'Core Project' is suitable for these Conditions.

The updated Qualification Level Conditions have been published alongside these decisions. The changes from the existing Qualification Level Conditions are set out below.

Guidance to General Condition H6 (Issuing results)

The reference to the Education and Skills Funding Agency has been changed to refer instead to the Department for Education.

References to the Institute for Apprenticeships

References to the Institute for Apprenticeships have been changed to refer instead to the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Assessment strategy requirements

Section 3 of these requirements has been amended so the text "Moderation of Centre-marked assessments", which appears at the end of the first bullet point under the Centre monitoring arrangements section, is instead a heading above the second bullet point.

References to Condition H2 (Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny where an assessment is marked by a Centre)

The following updates have been made to reflect changes to Condition H2:

- the title of the Guidance on Condition H2 has been changed to "Guidance on Condition H2 Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny where an assessment is marked by a Centre and Condition TQ10 Moderation arrangements", to reflect the

change in the title of Condition H2

- the existing reference to Condition H2.3 in the guidance referred to above has been changed so that bullet point c) refers to Condition H2.5, to reflect the numbering of the updated Condition

Guidance on the general conduct of reviews and appeals

In the personal interest section, a change has been made to the existing reference to the definition of a Conflict of Interest being included in Condition A4.1(b) and (c) to instead refer to Condition J1.8, which is where the definition is now located.

Condition TQ23 (Interpretations and definitions)

The definition of a Technical Qualification has changed from “A qualification approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships under section A2DA of the Act” to “A qualification approved (or treated as approved) by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education under section A2D3 of the Act”, to reflect a change to the legislation under which IfATE approves these qualifications.

Equality impact

Ofqual is a public body, and therefore the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010 applies. Ofqual did not identify any negative equality impacts as a result of these proposals. Ofqual identified a potential positive impact caused by the greater flexibility, which may reduce the pressure some students might experience when having to take multiple assessments during a single assessment series, and for students for whom assessment series coincide with religious festivals.

Responses received

Respondents agreed with our assessment. One respondent suggested some students, including those with special educational needs and disability (SEND) could be disadvantaged if schools or colleges entered them for assessments earlier than they would otherwise have done, given the increased flexibility. In doing so, these students might be entered before they were ready to take the assessments.

Decision

The point at which students take assessments is not dictated by Ofqual's requirements. Schools and colleges will continue to decide (as they do now) when to enter students, so this risk already exists. The proposals provide greater flexibility, meaning schools and colleges can focus individually on the Core Exam and Core Project and take account of students' individual needs as relevant. Ofqual does not consider that this additional flexibility causes any negative impacts for students.

Regulatory impact

Ofqual identified a potential impact caused by any system changes needed by awarding organisations to allow students to take the Core Exam and Core Project separately at their first attempt. There was also a potential impact caused by the need for awarding organisations to update specifications and other documentation to reflect the updated approach. Ofqual did not identify any negative impacts on innovation as a result of these proposals.

Responses received

Awarding organisations reiterated the impacts identified in relation to the need to update documentation and processes to allow the revised approach. Awarding organisations commented on the need to train staff and communicate the changes to centres and the challenges of doing so by September. They said there would be some additional costs associated with making these changes. These impacts were described in the decisions relating to these changes earlier in this document.

Decision

While Ofqual recognises the timelines for making these changes by September 2023 may be challenging, it does not think this should prevent their implementation. Alongside the decisions relating to these changes which are set out earlier in this document, Ofqual has explained that it acknowledges some schools and colleges may already have accessed documents and training materials before these decisions were announced, so may not immediately have access to updated

versions of specifications and other materials. Ofqual expects awarding organisations to make the revised approach available from September, to communicate these changes to schools and colleges, and to update materials as soon as is practical.

Ofqual has not identified any other regulatory impacts caused by the proposed changes, therefore does not intend any changes to the proposals consulted on.

Next steps

Alongside these decisions, Ofqual has published:

- [analysis of responses to the consultation on Updating Qualification Level Conditions for T Level Technical Qualifications](#)
- [updated versions of the Qualification Level Conditions, requirements and guidance for Technical Qualifications](#)

These changes will come into effect immediately, and awarding organisations will need to allow students to take the Core Exam and Core Project separately from September 2023.

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