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Open consultation

# Sector Subject Area 6 title change

Updated 5 December 2023

**Applies to England**

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## Proposal at a glance

The Sector Subject Area (SSA) classification system is used to classify qualifications into sectors or subject areas. It is owned by Ofqual and used widely across the education and skills system.

Ofqual and the Department for Education (DfE) have been undertaking a review of this classification system to ensure that it remains fit for purpose for future and emerging skills.

Ofqual and DfE therefore issued a joint call for evidence earlier in the year to understand how the classification system is used and how far it meets user needs. Ofqual also published a survey for awarding organisations.

Overall, respondents reported that:

- the SSAs were broadly fit for purpose, although some SSAs were too broad or not clearly defined
- the SSA 6 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) titles needed updating to better reflect the sector and the qualifications in that SSA
- awarding organisations sometimes found it challenging to assign qualifications to SSAs

Based on the outcomes of the call for evidence and survey, Ofqual is now launching a formal consultation on proposed amendments to SSA 6 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as follows.

## Current SSA Titles

### TIER 1

SSA 6 – Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

### TIER 2

6.1 - ICT practitioners

6.2 - ICT for users

## Proposed SSA Titles

### TIER 1

SSA 6 – Digital Technology

### TIER 2

6.1 – Digital technology (practitioners)

6.2 – Digital technology (users)

Ofqual's view is that this should make the title of the SSA more up-to-date and, therefore, a more accurate representation of the qualifications that are currently in this SSA, and the sector that it relates to.

## Audience

This consultation is open to anyone who may wish to make representation but may be of most interest to parties with an interest in and who use the SSA classification system, particularly those with an interest in SSA 6 or the digital technology sector. Responses are particularly welcome from:

- awarding organisations
- education and training providers
- employers
- professional, sector and representative bodies
- academic and educational professionals

## Consultation arrangements

### Duration

This consultation will be open for 8 weeks starting on 4 December 2023 and ending on 29 January 2024 at 23:45.

## Respond

You can respond to this consultation by using one of the following methods:

- complete the [online response](#)
- email your response to [consultations@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:consultations@ofqual.gov.uk) – please include the consultation title in the subject line of the email and make clear who you are and in what capacity you are responding.

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible.

For information on how we will use and manage your data, please see Annex A: Consultation responses and your data.

## Consultation details

### Background

Ofqual classifies qualifications using the [SSA classification system](#). There are 15 tier 1 SSAs, such as Health, Public Services and Care (1). Each tier 1 SSA has further second tiers, such as Medicine and dentistry (1.1). There are 50 tier 2 SSAs in total, with varying numbers of these for each tier 1 SSA.

The current SSA classification system was created in 2001 by the (then) Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the overall system is the one in use today. It therefore may not reflect changes in industries and occupations that have taken place since then.

Ofqual and DfE have been undertaking a joint review of the SSA classification system to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. On 14 December 2022, DfE and Ofqual published a joint call for evidence to understand who uses the sector subject area classification (SSAC) system, how they use it and how far it meets their needs. Ofqual also published a survey for awarding organisations to better understand how they use the classification system and what, if any, changes or improvements could be made.

Overall, respondents reported that the SSAs were broadly fit for purpose but that:

1. some SSAs were too broad or not clearly defined
2. some sectors or industries were not represented in the SSAs
3. it was sometimes challenging to assign qualifications to SSAs
4. it was sometimes challenging to use the SSA classification system alongside other classification systems

5. the title of SSA 6 needed updating to better reflect the sector and qualifications in the SSA

To address the final issue, Ofqual has decided to consult on updating the titles for SSA 6 – Information and Communication Technology.

### **Survey on non-statutory guidance**

Alongside this consultation, Ofqual has also published a [survey seeking views on the non-statutory guidance](#) it has developed, to support awarding organisations in assigning qualifications to SSAs. The draft non-statutory guidance consists of a short description and a list of possible qualification content for each tier 2 SSA. It also includes some factors that awarding organisations may wish to take into consideration when assigning their qualifications to SSAs.

Ofqual would expect awarding organisations to give due regard to the guidance before assigning new qualifications to SSAs or when reviewing their qualification offer. Awarding organisations and stakeholders are encouraged to [respond to the survey](#) to comment on the draft descriptions and possible qualification content.

## **Proposal**

### **Changes to the current SSA 6 title**

Ofqual is proposing to change the title of SSA 6 to Digital Technology. This title has been chosen because the term Digital Technology better reflects the sector at present and is broad enough to stay relevant in the future.

To explain what qualifications would be assigned to SSA 6 in the future, Ofqual has also drafted descriptions and lists of possible qualification content which has been included in the draft non-statutory guidance.

The current titling for SSA 6 is set out below as well as the proposed updated titles, draft descriptions and possible qualification content:

## **Current SSA 6 titles**

### **TIER 1**

SSA 6 – Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

### **TIER 2**

6.1 - ICT practitioners

6.2 - ICT for users

## Proposed SSA 6 titles (with descriptions and possible qualification content lists)

### TIER 1

SSA 6 – Digital Technology

### TIER 2

#### 6.1 - Digital technology (practitioners)

Description: studies and skills in the design, development, testing, installation, maintenance, support and management of digital and information technologies (hardware and software), architectures, systems and networks. This includes managing, maintaining and analysing data.

Possible qualification content: Coding; Computer science; Computing; Cyber security; Digital business services; Data; Information technology; Networking; Programming; Software development.

#### 6.2 - Digital technology (users)

Description: Studies and skills in using digital technology for life, work and study.

Possible qualification content: Digital skills; Internet safety; Using and interpreting data; Using IT systems.

## Questions

### Question 1

Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to change the title of SSA 6?

### Question 2

Do you have any comments on the proposed new title for SSA 6 – Digital Technology?

### Question 3

Do you have any comments on the proposed new title for SSA 6.1 - Digital technology (practitioners)?

### Question 4

Do you have any comments on the proposed new title for of SSA 6.2 - Digital technology (users)?

## Regulatory Impact

In developing these proposals, Ofqual has tried to find a balance between ensuring that the SSA classification system is appropriately up to date and fit for purpose, while minimising any burden on awarding organisations and other users of the classification system.

Ofqual recognises that the proposed title change for SSA 6 may have cost and resource implications, for example, if changes have to be made to systems and processes. This consultation is an opportunity for awarding organisations and other users of the SSA classification system to explain what the implications might be.

Ofqual encourages prospective awarding organisations to describe their scope of recognition using SSAs, but there is no requirement for them to do so. Once an awarding organisation has been granted recognition with a particular description (such as including an SSA), Ofqual cannot change that description.

Ofqual's assumption is that the change to the title of SSA 6, including the description and possible qualification content, will not impact awarding organisations' scope of recognition. However, this consultation provides awarding organisations with the opportunity to inform us if they consider that there would be implications arising from this title change for their scope of recognition.

### Question 5

Are there any regulatory impacts that have not been identified arising from the proposal to change the title of SSA 6? If yes, what are the impacts and are there any additional steps that could be taken to minimise the regulatory impact of the proposals?

### Question 6

Are there any costs, savings or other benefits associated with the proposals to change the title of SSA 6? Please provide estimated figures where possible.

### Question 7

Is there any additional information that Ofqual should consider when evaluating the costs and benefits of the proposal to change the title of SSA 6?

## Innovation

Ofqual has a duty under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to have regard to the desirability of facilitating innovation relating to the provision of regulated qualifications. Ofqual has committed to surveying awarding organisations' views of the impact of its regulatory requirements on innovation and to consider any revisions required in response.

Ofqual has not identified anything in the proposal to change the title of SSA 6 that would prevent innovation by awarding organisations but welcomes views on this.

### **Question 8**

Do you have any comments on the impact of the proposal on innovation by awarding organisations?

## **Equality impact assessment**

Ofqual is a public body, and therefore the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010 applies.

Ofqual has not identified any equalities impacts on students who share protected characteristics, positive or negative, related to this proposal to change the title of SSA 6 but welcomes views on this.

### **Question 9**

Are there any potential equalities impacts (positive or negative) on students who share a particular protected characteristic arising from our proposal that Ofqual should consider? Where possible, please separate your answer by protected characteristic.

### **Question 10**

Are there any steps that Ofqual could take to mitigate any potential negative impacts, resulting from the proposal, on students who share a particular protected characteristic?

## **Annex A: Consultation responses and your data**

### **Why we collect your personal data**

As part of our consultation process, you are not required to provide your name or any personal information that will identify you. However, we are aware that some respondents would like to provide contact information. If you or your organisation are happy to provide personal data, with regard to this consultation, please complete the details below. We would like to hear as many views as possible and ensure that we are reaching as many people as possible. In order for us to monitor this, understand views of different groups and take steps to reach specific groups, we may ask for sensitive data such as ethnicity and disability to understand the reach of this consultation



and views of specific groups. You do not have to provide this information and it is entirely optional.

**If there is any part of your response that you wish to remain confidential, please indicate at the appropriate point in the survey.**

Where you have requested that your response or any part remains confidential, we will not include your details in any published list of respondents, however, we may quote from the response anonymously in order to illustrate the kind of feedback we have received.

## Your data

Your personal data:

- will not be sent outside of the UK unless there are appropriate safeguards in place to protect your personal data
- will not be used for any automated decision making
- will be kept secure

We implement appropriate technical and organisational measures in order to protect your personal data against accidental or unlawful destruction, accidental loss or alteration, unauthorised disclosure or access and any other unlawful forms of processing.

## Your rights: access, rectification and erasure

As a data subject, you have the legal right to:

- access personal data relating to you
- object to the processing of your personal data
- have all or some of your data deleted or corrected
- prevent your personal data being processed in some circumstances
- ask us to stop using your data, but keep it on record

If you would like to exercise your rights, please contact us using the details below. You can also find out [more about Ofqual's privacy information](#).

## Freedom of Information Act and your response

Please note that information in response to this consultation may be subject to release to the public or other parties in accordance with access to information law, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). We have obligations to disclose information to particular recipients including members of the public in certain circumstances. Your explanation of your reasons for

requesting confidentiality for all or part of your response would help us balance requests for disclosure against any obligation of confidentiality. If we receive a request for the information that you have provided in your response to this consultation, we will take full account of your reasons for requesting confidentiality of your response and assess this in accordance with applicable data protection rules.

Members of the public are entitled to ask for information we hold under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. On such occasions, we will usually anonymise responses, or ask for consent from those who have responded, but please be aware that we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

If you choose 'no' in response to the question asking if you would like anything in your response to be kept confidential, we will be able to release the content of your response to the public, but we won't make your personal name and private contact details publicly available.

## How we will use your response

We will use your response to help us shape our policies and regulatory activity. If you provide your personal details, we may contact you in relation to your response. We will analyse all responses and produce reports of consultation responses. In the course of analysis, we will where possible avoid using your name and contact details. We will only process the body of your response, but we are aware that in some cases, this may contain information that could identify you.

## Sharing your response

We may share your response, in full, with The Department for Education (DfE) and The Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (IfATE) where the consultation is part of work involving those organisations. We may need to share responses with them to ensure that our approach aligns with the wider process. Where possible, if we share a response, we will not include any personal data (if you have provided any). Where we have received a response to the consultation from an organisation, we will provide the DfE and IfATE with the name of the organisation that has provided the response, although we will consider requests for confidentiality.

Where we share data, we ensure that adequate safeguards are in place to ensure that your rights and freedoms are not affected.

We use Citizen Space, which is part of Delib Limited, to collect consultation responses and they act as our data processor. You can view [Citizen Space's privacy notice](#).

Your response will also be shared internally within Ofqual in order to analyse the responses and shape our policies and regulatory activity. We use third party software to produce analysis reports, which may require hosting of data outside the UK, specifically the US. Please note that limited personal information is shared. All personal contact information is removed during this process. Where we transfer any personal data outside the UK, we make sure that appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure that the personal data is protected and kept secure.

Following the end of the consultation, we will publish an analysis of responses on [our website](#). We will not include personal details in the responses that we publish.

We may also publish an annex to the analysis listing all organisations that responded but will not include personal names or other contact details.

## How long will we keep your personal data?

Unless otherwise stated, Ofqual will keep your personal data (if provided) for a period of 2 years after the consultation closing date.

## Our legal basis for processing your personal data

Where you provide personal data for this consultation, we are relying upon the public task basis as set out in Article 6(1)(e) of UK GDPR to process personal data which allows processing of personal data when this is necessary for the performance of our public tasks. We will consult where there is a statutory duty to consult or where there is a legitimate expectation that a process of consultation will take place. Where you provide special category data, we process sensitive personal data such as ethnicity and disability, we rely on Article 9(2)(g) of UK GDPR as processing is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest.

## The identity of the data controller and contact details of our Data Protection Officer

This privacy notice is provided by The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). The relevant data protection regime that applies to our processing is the UK GDPR<sup>[footnote 1](#)</sup> and Data Protection Act 2018 ('Data Protection Laws'). We ask that you read this privacy notice carefully as it contains important information about our processing of consultation responses and your rights.

## How to contact us

If you have any questions about this privacy notice, how we handle your personal data, or want to exercise any of your rights, please contact our data protection officer at [dp.requests@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:dp.requests@ofqual.gov.uk)

We will respond to any rights that you exercise within a month of receiving your request, unless the request is particularly complex, in which case we will respond within 3 months.

Please note that exceptions apply to some of these rights which we will apply in accordance with the law.

You also have the right to lodge a complaint with [the Information Commissioner](#) (ICO) if you think we are not handling your data fairly or in accordance with the law. You can contact the ICO at:

ICO,  
Wycliffe House,  
Water Lane,

Wilmslow,  
Cheshire,  
SK9 5AF  
Tel: 0303 123 1113

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1. Please note that as of 1st January 2021, data protection laws in the UK have changed. The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679(GDPR) no longer applies to the UK. However, the UK has incorporated GDPR into domestic law subject to minor technical changes. The Data Protection, Privacy and Electronic Communications (Amendment etc.) EU exit Regulations (DPPEC) came into force in the UK on 1st January 2021. This consolidates and amends the GDPR and UK Data Protection Act 2018 to create the new UK GDPR. [↩](#)

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