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Consultation outcome

Sector Subject Area 6 title change: analysis and decisions

Updated 7 March 2024

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Introduction

Background

Ofqual classifies qualifications using the [SSA classification system](#). There are 15 tier 1 SSAs, such as Health, Public Services and Care (SSA 1). Each tier 1 SSA has further second tiers, such as Medicine and dentistry (SSA 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 the Department for Education (DfE) have been undertaking a joint review of the SSA classification system to ensure that it remains fit for purpose. Following stakeholder feedback that the title of SSA 6 needed updating to better reflect the sector and qualifications in the SSA, Ofqual launched a [consultation](#) in December 2023 proposing to update the titles for SSA 6 – Information and Communication Technology.

Alongside this consultation, Ofqual also published a survey seeking views on the non-statutory guidance it developed for assigning qualifications to SSAs. The final version of the non-statutory guidance [is available here](#).

Proposal

Changes to the current SSA 6 title

Ofqual proposed to change the title of SSA 6 to Digital Technology. Ofqual's view is that the term Digital Technology better reflects the sector at present and the qualifications in it, while being broad enough to stay relevant in the future.

The current and proposed updated titles, tier descriptions and possible qualification content are set out below:

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, study and in the workplace.

Possible qualification content: Digital skills; Internet safety; Using and interpreting data for life, study and in the workplace; Using IT systems.

Summary of decisions

Ofqual has decided to change the titles of SSA 6 as consulted on and set out above.

The updated titles of SSA 6 will come into effect from 1 August 2024, to align with DfE's academic calendar and reporting period.

Details

Approach to analysis

The consultation comprised 10 questions (including equality and regulatory impact questions) and was published on [Ofqual's website](#). Respondents could complete the questions using the online consultation platform or email their responses to Ofqual.

Respondents to this consultation were self-selecting, therefore the sample of those that chose to participate cannot be considered as representative of any group. Efforts were made to engage as many interested parties as possible by holding stakeholder events, as well as posting information on the Ofqual website and Portal for awarding organisations.

The responses to the consultation questions set out in this document are presented in the order they were asked. Respondents were not required to answer all questions.

Who responded?

Ofqual received 20 responses to the consultation via the Citizenspace consultation platform. Fifteen responses were official responses received from the following organisations:

- 10 from awarding organisations
- 2 from other representative or interest groups
- 1 from a school or college
- 1 from a local authority
- 1 from another type of respondent

Ofqual also received 5 personal responses.

All respondents were based in England.

Detailed analysis

Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with the proposal to change the title of SSA 6?

There were 20 responses to this question. All 20 respondents agreed with the proposal. Fourteen respondents provided comments, all of which indicated support for the proposal to update the title of SSA 6.

Five respondents agreed that the current title (Information and Communication Technology) needed updating, with 4 of them suggesting that the title no longer reflected the discipline or the range of qualifications within SSA 6. The other respondent said that ICT was too broad a term and was not clearly defined.

Views on the new title were sought in Question 2 of the consultation but some respondents specifically expressed support for the proposed new title for SSA 6 in their response to Question 1.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on the proposed new title for SSA 6 – Digital Technology?

Nine respondents provided comments in response to this question.

Five respondents suggested the proposed new title for SSA 6 was an improvement as it better reflected both the qualifications within SSA 6, and the current terminology used in the sector. One of these respondents also suggested that the new title

would remain relevant as technology and digital industries evolve.

Three respondents said the proposed new title, Digital Technology was too broad or vague and may lead to confusion. They did not, however, suggest alternative wording. One respondent asked for further clarity on what 6.1 Digital Technology (practitioners) would cover.

Question 3: Do you have any comments on the proposed new title for SSA 6.1 – Digital technology (practitioners)?

Nine respondents provided comments in response to this question.

Four respondents suggested the proposed new title for SSA 6.1 was an improvement as it better reflected both the qualifications within SSA 6, and the current terminology used in the sector.

One respondent welcomed the fact that the new tier 2 titles (SSA 6.1 and 6.2) were consistent with the structure of the current tier 2 titles. However, 3 respondents asked for further clarity on the term 'practitioner', and how it differed from the term 'user'.

One respondent said it would make sense for the tier 2 titles (SSA 6.1 and 6.2) to align with IfATE's occupational standards, including Digital support and service, Digital production, design and technology and Digital business services.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed new title for SSA 6.2 Digital technology (users)?

Ten respondents provided comments in response to this question.

Four respondents indicated support for the proposed new title, with these respondents saying the proposed new title was clear and helpful.

Five respondents said it would be important to clearly differentiate between what was meant by practitioners and what was meant by users.

One respondent welcomed the fact that the new tier 2 titles (SSA 6.1 and 6.2) were consistent with the structure of the current tier 2 titles.

Impact assessments

Regulatory impact and growth

Ofqual's assumption was that the title change, including the description and possible qualification content, would not impact awarding organisations' scope of recognition. However, respondents were asked in the consultation if they thought there would be implications arising from this title change for their scope of recognition.

Ofqual also recognised that updating the titles of SSA 6 was likely to have resource implications for organisations that use or refer to the SSAs, as they may need to update systems and documentation.

Ofqual asked respondents whether there were any regulatory impacts that had not been identified and if there were any steps Ofqual could take to minimise the regulatory impact of the proposals. Ofqual also asked if there were any costs, savings or other benefits associated with the proposals and for comments on the potential impact of the proposals on innovation by awarding organisations.

No respondents said the title change would affect their scope of recognition.

A small number of respondents suggested that qualification titles may need to be amended to reflect the proposed changes to the SSA 6 titles.

Ofqual would not expect this to be the case as the SSA titles do not have to be included in qualification titles. Ofqual's Condition on titling ([E2 – Requirements on qualification titling](#)) requires information about the name of the awarding organisation, the level of the qualification, the type of the qualification (where the qualification has a type) and a concise indication of the content of the qualification, and any endorsement. The concise indications of the content of qualifications included in the qualification titles are not affected by the title changes to SSA 6. For clarity, the content of the qualifications themselves is also not changing.

Some respondents said there may be potential cost implications arising from implementation of the title changes. This included cost to centres, approval process costs, administrative costs to awarding organisations and communication costs. They did not, however, quantify the extent of these costs. Some respondents also suggested that costs may be passed on to students.

Ofqual acknowledged in the consultation that there may be some resource and cost implications arising from implementing the title changes, mainly arising from the need to update systems and documentation. The extent of any administrative changes for awarding organisation systems or documentation will depend on their current processes and any resource or cost implications are expected to be one-off.

As neither the qualification titles nor the qualifications themselves in SSA 6 are changing, Ofqual does not anticipate that the title changes should lead to changes to centre approval or to other costs for centres.

No respondents identified any direct impacts of the proposals on innovation by awarding organisations. One respondent commented on the current digital curriculum, suggesting it was outdated, which was out of the scope of the consultation.

Equality analysis

In the consultation, Ofqual did not identify any equalities impacts (positive or negative) on individuals with protected characteristics arising from the proposals.

Respondents were asked whether there were any potential equalities impacts (positive or negative) on students who share a particular protected characteristic arising from the proposal and whether there were any steps that Ofqual could take to mitigate any potential negative impacts.

Most respondents also did not identify any equalities impacts on students who share protected characteristics arising from the consultation proposals.

One respondent, however, suggested that students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds could be impacted by the changes if they resulted in changes to the titles of qualifications in SSA 6. As mentioned above, Ofqual does not expect the titles of qualifications in SSA 6 to be changed as a consequence of the title change.

Respondents were also asked how Ofqual could mitigate potential negative impacts. One respondent provided general comments on Ofqual's approach to the equalities impact assessment and wider government policy around post-16 qualifications which was out of the scope of the consultation.

Decisions

Ofqual has decided to update the titles of SSA 6 as consulted upon and as set out below:

TIER 1

SSA 6 – Digital Technology

TIER 2

6.1 – Digital technology (practitioners)

6.2 – Digital technology (users)

Ofqual has published, alongside this consultation outcomes document, the final version of the non-statutory guidance to help awarding organisations to assign their qualifications to the most appropriate SSA. Ofqual's view is that the non-statutory guidance (descriptions and lists of possible qualification) will help to clarify the meaning of the terms Digital Technology, practitioners and users.

Ofqual has not used the same titles as in Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) digital occupational standards as it sought to minimise disruption by keeping the structure of SSA 6 the same (with 2 tier 2 SSAs). The non-statutory guidance sets out how IfATE's groupings of these standards as Digital support and service, Digital production, design and technology and Digital business services fit within SSA 6.

The new titles for SSA 6 will be automatically updated online on [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#). Awarding organisations with qualifications in SSA 6 will therefore not be required to take any immediate action as a consequence of the change. As noted earlier, the extent of any administrative changes to awarding organisation systems and documentation will depend on their current processes and any resource or cost implications are expected to be one-off.

As explained earlier, the change to the titles for SSA 6 does not require awarding organisations to make changes to qualification titles or to the qualifications. Ofqual therefore does not expect this SSA title change to result in an increase in costs for centres or students.

Next steps

The updated titles of SSA 6 will come into effect from 1 August 2024, to align with DfE's academic calendar and reporting period. On 1 August 2024, the SSA 6 titles will be automatically updated online on [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#).

Awarding organisations with qualifications in SSA 6 are not required to take any immediate action as a result of the title change but are expected to have regard to

the non-statutory guidance on assigning qualifications to SSAs, published alongside this document, to ensure that their qualifications are in the most appropriate SSA.

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