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▼ Menu

[Home](#) > [Education, training and skills](#) > [Draft sector Subject Area 6 title change](#)



Open consultation

DRAFT non-statutory guidance on assigning Sector Subject Areas (SSAs)

Updated 5 December 2023

Applies to England

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Sector subject areas](#)

[Guidance](#)



[Print this page](#)

Introduction

All levels and types of regulated qualifications may be assigned to a Sector Subject Area (SSA) when they are placed on Ofqual's Register of regulated qualifications.

This draft non-statutory guidance consists of a short description and a list of possible qualification content for each of the 50 SSAs. It also sets out some factors that awarding organisations may wish to take into consideration when assigning their qualifications to SSAs covering:

- cross cutting qualifications
- qualifications that appear to cover more than one SSA
- oversight for assigning qualifications to SSAs

Ofqual expects awarding organisations to give due regard to this guidance before assigning new qualifications to SSAs or when reviewing their qualification offer. Awarding organisations are responsible for ensuring that they have a particular SSA within their scope of recognition and, if not, apply to Ofqual for an expansion.

This guidance is only intended to provide advice for qualifications where there is no DfE SSA requirement in place.

Sector subject areas

1 - Health, Public Services and Care

1.1 - Medicine and dentistry

1.2 - Nursing, and subjects and vocations allied to medicine

1.3 - Health and social care

1.4 - Public services

1.5 - Child development and well being

2 - Science and Mathematics

2.1 - Science

2.2 - Mathematics and statistics

3 - Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care

3.1 - Agriculture

3.2 - Horticulture and forestry

3.3 - Animal care and veterinary science

3.4 - Environmental conservation

4 - Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies

4.1 - Engineering

4.2 - Manufacturing technologies

4.3 - Transportation operations and maintenance

5 - Construction, Planning and the Built Environment

5.1 - Architecture

5.2 - Building and construction

5.3 - Urban, rural and regional planning

6 - Digital Technology

6.1 - Digital technology (practitioners)

6.2 - Digital technology (users)

7 - Retail and Commercial Enterprise

7.1 - Retailing and wholesaling

7.2 - Warehousing and distribution

7.3 - Service enterprises

7.4 - Hospitality and catering

8 - Leisure, Travel and Tourism

8.1 - Sport, leisure and recreation

8.2 - Travel and tourism

9 - Arts, Media and Publishing

9.1 - Performing arts

9.2 - Crafts, creative arts and design

9.3 - Media and communication

9.4 - Publishing and information services

10 - History, Philosophy and Theology

10.1 - History

10.2 - Archaeology and archaeological sciences

10.3 - Philosophy

10.4 - Theology and religious studies

11 - Social Sciences

11.1 - Geography

11.2 - Sociology and social policy

11.3 - Politics

11.4 - Economics

11.5 - Anthropology

12 - Languages, Literature and Culture

12.1 - Languages, literature and culture of the British isles

12.2 - Other languages, literature and culture

12.3 - Linguistics

13 - Education and Training

13.1 - Teaching and lecturing

13.2 - Direct learning support

14 - Preparation for Life and Work

14.1 - Foundations for learning and life

14.2 - Preparation for work

15 - Business, Administration and Law

15.1 - Accounting and finance

15.2 - Administration

15.3 - Business management

15.4 - Marketing and sales

15.5 - Law and legal services

Guidance

SSA 1 - Health, Public Services and Care

1.1 - Medicine and dentistry

Description: Studies and skills in medicine and dentistry. This includes diagnosing, treating or preventing illness, disease and other damage to the human body.

Possible qualification content: Dental nursing; Dental technology Health professional;

Orthodontics; Medical toxicology and ophthalmology; Pre-clinical and clinical dentistry; Pre-clinical and clinical medicine.

1.2 - Nursing, and subjects and vocations allied to medicine

Description: Studies and skills in nursing and other subjects and vocations allied to medicine and dentistry. This excludes studies and skills relating to health and social care as these are included in SSA 1.3.

Possible qualification content: Acupuncture; Anatomy; Ambulance practitioner; Aural and oral sciences; Complementary therapy; Holistic therapies; Hypnotherapy; Medical technology; Midwifery; Nursing; Nutrition for health; Paramedic; Pathology; Pharmacology; Pharmacy; Physiology; Phlebotomy; Surgical aesthetic treatments; Toxicology (other than medical toxicology).

1.3 - Health and social care

Description: Studies and skills in general health, well-being and social care. This includes health and safety, social work and first aid. It excludes studies and skills relating to general health and well-being in children, as these are included in SSA 1.5 and sport and exercise used to improve health and wellbeing which are included in SSA 8.1.

Possible qualification content: Care services; Care worker; Community work; Counselling; First aid; First Person on Scene; Health and safety; Health and social care; Health practitioner; Healthcare; Health education; Mental health work; Personal social services; Social work; Youth work or services.

1.4 - Public services

Description: Studies and skills in the provision of public sector services. This excludes education which is included in SSA 13 and Youth Justice which is included in SSA 15.5.

Possible qualification content: Ambulance and prison services; Central and local government services; Cleaning in public sector settings; Emergency services; Fire safety and services; Protective services; Public sector security; Public services including housing; Uniformed services including armed forces and police services; Waste management in public sector settings.

1.5 - Child development and well being

Description: Studies and skills in child development and the general health and well being of pre-school age children and babies. This excludes studies and skills relating to education for school age children which is included in SSA 13 and Youth Justice which is included in SSA 15.5.

Possible qualification content: Caring for babies and children; Childcare; Child development; Early years education; Parenting; Play work.

SSA 2 – Science and Mathematics

2.1 – Science

Description: Studies and skills in science, scientific models and principles, supported by observation, experiment and measurement.

Possible qualification content: Astronomy; Applied science; Biochemistry; Biology; Biophysics; Biotechnology; Botany; Chemistry; Climatology; Environmental science; Epidemiology; Forensic science; Food science; Genetics; Geology; Meteorology; Materials science; Microbiology; Molecular biology; Ocean sciences; Physics; Psychology; Plant science; Research scientist; Science technician; Space science; Zoology.

2.2 - Mathematics and statistics

Description: Studies and skills in mathematics and statistics. This includes the measurement, properties and relationships of quantities and sets, using numbers and symbols.

Possible qualification content: Algebra; Functions and graphs; Further mathematics; Mathematics; Statistics.

SSA 3 - Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care

3.1 – Agriculture

Description: Studies and skills in farming and agriculture on land or in water including cultivating soil, growing crops, breeding and raising livestock and fish.

Possible qualification content: Agricultural and garden machinery; Agriculture; Agricultural sciences; Aquaculture; Fertiliser application; Fisheries management; Land or countryside management; Land-based engineering and technology; Livestock management; Mixed farming; Pesticide management.

3.2 - Horticulture and forestry

Description: Studies and skills in the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, flowers, ornamental plants and gardens. This includes the planting, cultivation, maintenance and management of woods, forests and landscapes.

Possible qualification content: Amenity horticulture; Arboriculture; Floristry; Forestry; Landscape horticulture; Production horticulture; Tree work.

3.3 - Animal care and veterinary science

Description: Studies and skills in the observation, diagnosis and treatment of illness, disease or damage to animals. This includes studies and skills concerned with animals, their care, nutrition, treatment and management.

Possible qualification content: Animal care and welfare; Care and study of zoo animals; Farriery; Grooming; Horse riding and care (including racehorses); Pest control; Veterinary medicine and nursing.

3.4 - Environmental conservation

Description: Studies and skills in the management, protection and sustainability of natural resources and the environment.

Possible qualification content: Conservation; Conservation consultancy and control; Ecology; Environmental conservation; Environmental management; Sustainability.

SSA 4 - Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies

4.1 – Engineering

Description: Studies and skills in the design, development, manufacture and operation of machines, processes and systems. This includes improvements to processes and systems.

Possible qualification content: Aerospace engineering; Communications Infrastructures; Electronic engineering; Gas engineering; General engineering; Information transmitting technologies; Maintenance electrical or electricity distribution; Mechanical engineering; Minerals extraction; Naval engineering, Performing engineering operations; Process and energy engineering; Production and manufacturing engineering; Servicing; Transmission engineering; Welding.

4.2 – Manufacturing technologies

Description: Studies and skills in making or processing a raw material or product and associated technologies. This includes food manufacturing and improvements to processes and systems but excludes food science which is included in SSA 2.1 and production and manufacturing engineering as these are included in SSA 4.1.

Possible qualification content: Ceramics and glasses; Coatings technology; Design and technology (electronic products, graphic products, resistant materials technology, systems and control, textiles technology); Electronic product assembly; Food and drink manufacturing; Industrial biotechnology; Manufacturing (clothing; footwear; furniture; glass; jewellery; leather; optical; packaging; paper; steels; surface coatings; textiles); Manufacturing operations; Manufacturing processes; Maritime technology; Materials technology; Metallurgy; Minerals technology; Plant installation and maintenance; Printing; Polymers; Textiles and upholstery.

4.3 - Transportation operations and maintenance

Description: Studies and skills in the operation and maintenance of all modes of transportation. This includes improvements to processes and systems.

Possible qualification content: Aviation; Driving Instruction; Handling Air Passengers; Maritime; Motor Vehicle; Road User Studies; Transport driver; Transport maintenance; Transport operations.

SSA 5 - Construction, Planning and the Built Environment

5.1 – Architecture

Description: Studies and skills in the design, management and erection of structures and creation of outdoor areas such as parks or gardens.

Possible qualification content: Architecture; Architectural design theory; Architectural technology; Landscape design; Technical design (built environment); Technical drawing (built environment)

5.2 - Building and construction

Description: Studies and skills in building and construction trades. This includes quantity surveying, civil engineering and the built environment.

Possible qualification content: Building services; Bricklaying; Carpentry and joinery; Civil engineering; Cladding; Construction; Construction planning; Electrical installation and maintenance; Fenestration and glazing; Hazardous waste removal; Heating technician; Highways construction; Insulation installation; Installation and maintenance; Painting and decoration; Piling operations; Plastering; Plumbing; Quantity surveying; Roofing; Site management; Specialised plant machinery; Stone masonry; Surveying; Tiling; Tunnelling operations.

5.3 - Urban, rural and regional planning

Description: Studies and skills in urban, rural and regional planning. This includes the interaction between town and country land use and the use of land for building.

Possible qualification content: Planning (regional, rural, urban); Sustainable Living Spaces.

SSA 6 – Digital Technology

[To note: Ofqual is currently consulting on the title for SSA 6. The final title will be confirmed following analysis of the consultation feedback.]

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.

SSA 7 - Retail and Commercial Enterprise

7.1 - Retailing and wholesaling

Description: Studies and skills in the selling of goods in retail or wholesale.

Possible qualification content: Customer care; Fashion and clothing retail; Retail; Retail operations; Retail sales; Visual merchandising.

7.2 - Warehousing and distribution

Description: Studies and skills in the storage, distribution and movement of goods usually, but not exclusively, for resale or wholesale.

Possible qualification content: Distribution control; Distribution operations and services; Distribution and warehouse operations; Exporting; Importing; Logistics; Packing; Storage operations.

7.3 - Service enterprises

Description: Studies and skills in the provision of goods or services to customers, businesses or the general public in the private sector.

Possible qualification content: Barbering; Beauty services; Cleaning; Facilities services; Hairdressing; Letting and property management; Make-up; Massage; Micropigmentation; Nails; Non-surgical aesthetic treatments; Piercing; Tattooing.

7.4 - Hospitality and catering

Description: Studies and skills in hospitality and catering in domestic or industrial environments, and the processes of food and beverage development. This includes studies and skills in food preparation and nutrition.

Possible qualification content: Accommodation management; Bar service; Cake decorating; Catering; Food and drink service; Food hygiene; Food preparation and cooking; Food preparation and nutrition; Front office operations; Hospitality service; International cooking; Operation of licensed premises.

SSA 8 - Leisure, Travel and Tourism

8.1 - Sport, leisure and recreation

Description: Studies and skills in competitive and non-competitive physical activities, including those participated in for enjoyment. This excludes arts and crafts which are included in SSA 9.2.

Possible qualification content: Activity leadership; Coaching; Community exercise; eSports; Exercise and fitness professional; Leisure and recreation; Lifeguard; Nutrition for exercise or physical activity; Personal training; Physical education; Spectator safety; Sports science or studies.

8.2 - Travel and tourism

Description: Studies and skills in travel and tourism.

Possible qualification content: Air cabin crew; Commentaries and interpretation for tourism; Ecotourism; Heritage and visitor attractions; Leisure and business travel; Overseas resort operations; Tour operations; Travel and tourism; Travel services.

SSA 9 - Arts, Media and Publishing

9.1 - Performing arts

Description: Studies and skills in performing arts including performance and the theory, history, management and production of performing arts.

Possible qualification content: Choreography; Dance; Drama; Music; Music and theatre production; Music technology; Speech; Theatre studies.

9.2 - Crafts, creative arts and design

Description: Studies and skills in crafts, creative arts and design. This includes fine art and photography and the history, management and production of crafts and works of creative art.

Possible qualification content: Art and design; Clothing or fashion design; Craftsperson; Creative crafts; Fine art; Graphic design; Interior design; Multimedia design; Photography.

9.3 - Media and communication

Description: Studies and skills in communication between people through broadcasting, cinema and the press. This includes cinematics (film making) and the study of the media, industry, technical innovations and the role of audiences.

Possible qualification content: Animation techniques Communication; Event production; Film; Film and sound recording; Journalism; Media studies; Moving image techniques; Directing and producing motion pictures; Radio production; Visual and audio effects.

9.4 - Publishing and information services

Description: Studies and skills in publishing and information services including mass communication, publicity studies and documentation.

Possible qualification content: Information management; Library and information services; Publishing.

SSA 10 - History, Philosophy and Theology

10.1 – History

Description: Studies in history. Studies in history including the development of knowledge, skills and understanding of the past including aspects of political, religious, social, cultural, aesthetic, economic, technological, and scientific history from different cultures and periods.

Possible qualification content: History; History by Period, for example, Ancient History; History by Topic, for example, Religious History.

10.2 - Archaeology and archaeological sciences

Description: Studies of past human societies from the analysis and investigation of material remains from excavations of past cultures and other resources to reconstruct and understand the past.

Possible qualification content: Archaeology; Archaeological Conservation; Archaeological Techniques.

10.3 – Philosophy

Description: Studies in philosophy including the critical examination of fundamental beliefs about meaning, truth and reality, right and wrong.

Possible qualification content: Critical Thinking; Metaphysics; Philosophy.

10.4 - Theology and religious studies

Description: Studies in theology and religious studies including the nature of beliefs in their social context.

Possible qualification content: Applied theology; Divinity; Religious education; Religious writings; Theology.

SSA 11 - Social Sciences

11.1 – Geography

Description: Studies and skills in geographical places and environments and the relationship between people and their environments. This includes skills related to geography, such as cartography.

Possible qualification content: Cartography; Geographical information systems; Geography (agricultural geography, cultural geography, economic geography, historical geography, political geography, transport geography, urban geography).

11.2 - Sociology and social policy

Description: Studies in the development of knowledge and understanding of contemporary social processes and structures, and related issues and debates. This includes the application of skills related to sociological methodology and research.

Possible qualification content: Criminology; Ethnicity; Political sociology; Sociology; Social policy; Socioeconomics; Social theory.

11.3 – Politics

Description: Studies in the knowledge and understanding of the nature of politics and the relationship between political ideas, institutions and processes. This includes the development of skills of critical enquiry and communication surrounding politics.

Possible qualification content: Government; International politics; International relations; Political systems and theories; Politics; UK government or parliamentary studies.

11.4 – Economics

Description: Studies and skills in economics including the production, distribution and consumption of resources, together with the organisational frameworks related to these processes.

Possible qualification content: Applied economics; Econometrics; Economics (economic systems, international economics, macroeconomics, microeconomics, political economics); Sustainable development.

11.5 – Anthropology

Description: Studies and skills in the origins and development of human societies and cultures.

Possible qualification content: Anthropology; Physical and biological anthropology; Social and cultural anthropology.

SSA 12 - Languages, Literature and Culture

12.1 - Languages, literature and culture of the British Isles

Description: Studies and skills in languages, literature and culture of the British Isles including the structure of the language, its history, grammar and use.

Possible qualification content: Celtic studies; English; English for Speakers of Other languages (ESOL); English language; English language and literature; English literature; Irish; Welsh; British Sign Language (BSL).

12.2 - Other languages, literature and culture

Description: Studies and skills in ancient and modern foreign languages including their structure, history, grammar and use, study of culture and literature, interpretation and translation. This excludes languages of the British Isles (for example, British Sign Language) which are included in SSA 12.1.

Possible qualification content: American studies; Ancient or biblical Hebrew; Ancient language studies; Arabic; Asian studies; Bengali; Braille; Chinese languages; Classical Greek; Dutch; European studies; French; German; Gujarati; Irish sign language; Italian; Japanese; Latin; Modern and foreign languages; Modern Greek; Modern Hebrew; Persian; Polish; Portuguese; Punjabi; Russian; Spanish; Turkish; Urdu; Community interpreting.

12.3 – Linguistics

Description: Studies and skills of language, its structure, development and acquisition. This includes studies and skills in semiotics.

Possible qualification content: Linguistics; Semiotics.

SSA 13 - Education and Training

13.1 – Teaching and lecturing

Description: Studies and skills in teaching or training in contexts such as schools, further education, adult and community education, universities and work-based learning. This includes studies and skills leading to qualified teacher status and the study of the theory and process of education.

Possible qualification content: Assessment principles; Education studies; Learning and development; Lecturing; Quality assurance in assessment; Research and skills in education; Teaching; Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL); Training assessors; Training teachers.

13.2 – Direct learning support

Description: Studies and skills in directly supporting teaching and learning in contexts such as schools, further education, adult and community education, universities and work-based learning.

Possible qualification content: Education technician; Support staff in further education or community learning; Supporting learning in adult basic skills; Supporting learning in HE; Supporting learning in work-based training; Supporting the learning of learners with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND); Teaching assistants in schools.

SSA 14 - Preparation for Life and Work

14.1 - Foundations for learning and life

Description: Introductory studies and skills that enable personal development and prepare individuals for learning and life. This excludes English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) which is included in SSA 12.1 and essential digital skills which is included in SSA 6.2.

Possible qualification content: Adult literacy; Adult numeracy; Assertiveness; Basic or essential skills; Citizenship; Independent living; Learning skills; Life skills; Personal and social development; Team working.

14.2 - Preparation for work

Description: Studies and skills that prepare individuals for work.

Possible qualification content: Employability skills; Job seeking skills; Preparation for employment; Return-to-work skills; Skills for working life; Work skills

SSA 15 - Business, Administration and Law

15.1 - Accounting and finance

Description: Studies and skills in accounting and finance including the rules, standards and methods of financial accounting, studies and skills in financial systems, regulations and reporting.

Possible qualification content: Accountancy or Accounting; Accounting administration; Accounting theory; Audit; Banking; Book-keeping; Finance; Financial advice; Financial compliance; Financial planning; Financial services; Financial studies; Insurance; Investment; Mortgage advice; Taxation.

15.2 – Administration

Description: Studies and skills in the management and application of the processes undertaken in an office, business, or organisation. This includes the organisation of people, information, and other resources to achieve organisational objectives.

Possible qualification content: Administration; Office skills, Payroll administration; Pensions administration; Secretarial skills.

15.3 - Business management

Description: Studies and skills in planning, organising, directing, and controlling the activities of a business or organisation to achieve its goals and objectives.

Possible qualification content: Business and management consultancy; Business improvement techniques; Business information; Business start-up; Business sustainability; Corporate responsibility; Human resource strategy and management; Leadership; Management techniques; Management; Operational management; Procurement; Project management; Public relations; Quality management; Strategic management; Team leading.

15.4 - Marketing and Sales

Description: Studies and skills in marketing organisations and the skills and commercial functions involved in generating revenue through products and services.

Possible qualification content: Account management; Advertising; Brand management; Customer Relationship Management; Digital and online marketing; Marketing; Marketing communications; Market research; Merchandising; Sales.

15.5 - Law and legal services

Description: Studies and skills in the practise of law and the provision of legal services.

Possible qualification content: Conveyancing; Criminal and civil justice; Enforcement; Jurisprudence; Law; Legal services; Paralegal; Probate; Youth justice.

Additional considerations for assigning qualifications to SSAs

In addition to the descriptions and lists of possible qualification content set out above, this additional guidance is designed to help assign cross cutting qualifications and qualifications that appear to cover more than one SSA and set out possible approaches to enable awarding organisations to have appropriate oversight of the allocation of qualifications to SSAs.

Cross cutting qualifications

In instances where a qualification is assessing a generic skill, such as leadership, it would be appropriate to assign the qualification to the SSA for the relevant skill area, rather than the sector or context in which the skill is taught.

For example, a qualification in First Aid (the skill) for the construction sector (the context), would be more appropriately placed with other First Aid qualifications, rather than with qualifications that are related to studies and skills in construction.

Qualifications which develop skills being taught in the context of emerging sectors, for example, skills for 'green jobs', would be best placed in the relevant skill area. For example, skills related to helping organisations to manage the resources they use and the waste they generate according to environmentally friendly principles, would be best placed in SSA 15 – Business, Administration and Law. Whereas skills in environmental and conservation tasks would be best placed in SSA 3 – Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care.

Qualifications that appear to cover more than one SSA

If a qualification could be assigned to more than one SSA, awarding organisations are best placed to make a best-fit judgement on which SSA is most relevant to the qualification based on the content.

For example, a qualification covering Business Management and Marketing could be assigned to either SSA 15.3 Business Management or 15.4 Marketing and sales. If more of the content covers business management, Ofqual would expect awarding organisations to select that SSA.

Oversight for assigning qualifications to SSAs

Awarding organisations may wish to consider the following to provide oversight when assigning qualifications to SSAs:

1. Being clear about which SSA the qualification should be assigned to at the start of the qualification development stage – this may help awarding organisations to ensure that they have or can seek the appropriate scope of recognition
2. Implementing an approval stage to confirm the assignment of the qualification to an SSA prior to the qualification being added to Ofqual's register of qualifications

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[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

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[Housing and local services](#)

Government activity

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

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[Research and statistics](#)

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