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Regulation

Occupational Certificate qualification level guidance

Published 10 September 2026

Applies to England

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Guidance on Condition OC6 (Assessment)

Condition OC6.1 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to the assessment of Occupational Certificates.

We set out our guidance for the purposes of Condition OC6.1 below.

Approach to assessment design

Condition E4 requires an awarding organisation to ensure an assessment is fit for purpose and can be delivered.

In line with the Occupational Certificate qualification purposes, when determining its approach to assessment design, an awarding organisation should consider -

- how to promote learning and development approaches appropriate to the vocational context and the intended curriculum as set out in the subject content, and
- how to use authentic, vocationally relevant contexts and scenarios so that Learners encounter assessments which are aligned with workplace practice and support progression to the intended destinations.

Assessment methods

In determining which aspects of an Occupational Certificate should be assessed by which assessment method, an awarding organisation should consider which method of assessment would be most appropriate, given –

- (a) the Occupational Certificate qualification purposes,
- (b) the nature of the knowledge, understanding and skills that Learners are required to demonstrate,
- (c) the need for the assessment to reliably differentiate between Learners' levels of attainment across the grading scale,
- (d) the assessment requirements including the need to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in response to authentic, occupationally specific, vocationally-related contexts and scenarios, and
- (e) the impact of assessment design on teaching and learning.

Differences between Assessment by Examination and Non-exam Assessment

Assessment by Examination is defined in Condition OC1.4. The definition does not require written examinations – other forms of assessment, including those which allow students to demonstrate practical or performance skills, may also fall within this definition. For example, if all Learners complete a practical task set by an awarding organisation, taken simultaneously at a time determined by the awarding organisation, under conditions specified by the awarding organisation, and marked by the awarding organisation, this will be Assessment by Examination.

Assessment by Examination can provide the opportunity to directly test Learners' knowledge and understanding of the subject area they are studying and so ensure that the foundations of essential knowledge for vocational ability are in place. It can also assess learning across the full range of the subject content and, in so doing, provide an opportunity to compare Learner performance in Assessment by Examination and Non-exam Assessment. It can also assess the ability of Learners to apply their knowledge and understanding, either by mirroring work-place activities or by situating the tasks in authentic vocational scenarios, using case studies or pre-release materials.

Assessment by Examination can also be used to assess practical skills, supporting the vocational nature of these qualifications. Awarding organisations should consider how assessment arrangements can be designed to support secure and manageable delivery across Centres. For example, where a practical task requires specialist equipment, the assessment design should take account of the resources Centres may need to provide for Learners to complete the assessment as intended.

The definition of Non-exam Assessment covers any assessment which does not meet the definition of Assessment by Examination. A wide range of assessment tasks set by the awarding organisation may fall within the definition of Non-exam Assessment, with task types including extended tasks involving multiple stages or steps and taken over period of time and practical, performance or skills-based tasks.

For example, an on-screen assessment that all Learners in a Centre take at the same time, under controlled conditions, but where the date and time is determined by each Centre and so may therefore differ between Centres, would

be Non-exam Assessment. Alternatively, Non-exam Assessment may include one or more extended task(s) over multiple sessions.

The final product of Non-exam Assessment may be a single document (for example, a write-up of an activity), which may be accompanied by indirect evidence (for example, relating to a professional discussion) of a practical activity. Alternatively, there may be a range and combination of product formats, including written text, artefacts, live performances and recordings. In determining and specifying the product of Non-exam Assessment to be generated by the Learner, an awarding organisation should consider –

- (a) the Validity of the assessment, in terms of measuring appropriately the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills,
- (b) the Manageability of the assessment,
- (c) any threats to the Reliability and integrity of the assessment including risks around the use of artificial intelligence (AI), and
- (d) the need for the assessment to reliably differentiate between levels of attainment across the grading scale and to support accurate classification across the grading scale.

Assessment by Examination is distinct from Non-exam Assessment because the former is designed to be taken simultaneously by all relevant Learners at a date and time determined by the awarding organisation whereas the latter is not. Assessment by Examination must be marked by the awarding organisation. This means that Assessment by Examination is appropriate for the assessment of particular knowledge, understanding or skills for which an awarding organisation identifies that it is important for all relevant Learners to be assessed simultaneously. For example, this may be the case if the nature of the content being assessed or how it is being assessed mean it is important that Learners are not aware of the specific assessment tasks in advance of the assessment to maintain the Reliability of the assessment.

Ensuring the integrity and Validity of assessment

There is a greater potential for malpractice in Non-exam Assessment because Learners are not taking the assessment at the same time and/or are doing so over an extended period. For example, this could give Learners greater opportunity to

access inappropriate assistance, such as by using AI.

In determining its approach to Non-exam Assessment, an awarding organisation should consider –

- (a) any risks of malpractice that may arise,
- (b) the extent to which these risks are likely to crystallise, given the knowledge, understanding and skills that are to be assessed – for example, tasks designed to assess knowledge and understanding only and tasks which are not changed every academic year may be more at risk of malpractice using AI,
- (c) the extent to which these risks may undermine the ability of the assessment to accurately reflect Learners' attainment, and
- (d) the controls that may be required to address risks, such as the specifying the conditions under which tasks should be attempted by Learners, the level of supervision, and arrangements for the security and storage of assessment materials and assessment evidence.

Taking reasonable steps to prevent and manage AI-related malpractice

Where vulnerability to AI-related malpractice is identified, Conditions A6 and A8 will require an awarding organisation to consider what reasonable steps may be needed to prevent malpractice from occurring and, where relevant, to manage its effects. In considering possible steps, the awarding organisation should take account of how far different approaches address the risks identified, and whether they could have unintended consequences for the construct being assessed or for assessment Validity more broadly.

Preventative arrangements aimed at reducing the likelihood of AI-related malpractice occurring should be identified. These may relate to task design, delivery arrangements and to the information and guidance provided to Centres and Learners. Awarding organisations should take account of how far these arrangements can be implemented consistently and effectively across Centres, and how well they support Valid assessment outcomes.

Synoptic assessment

The definition of synoptic assessment for an Occupational Certificate in the assessment requirements is set out as -

Questions or tasks which allow Learners to –

- (a) demonstrate the ability to draw together different areas of knowledge, understanding and/or skills from across the full course of study, and
- (b) construct and develop an extended line of reasoning which is relevant, coherent and effectively structured.

For a task or question covering (a), a Learner should be expected to demonstrate how they have selected and applied relevant knowledge, understanding and/or skills from across the course of study to address the demands of the task or question. Learners do not need to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills from every element of the content in the course of study in an individual task or question.

For a task or question covering (b), a Learner should be expected to produce a response of sufficient length to enable them to demonstrate their ability to develop, connect and organise knowledge, understanding and/or skills. This may take a variety of forms, depending on the vocational context. For example, a written response, the production of an artefact or a live performance could demonstrate an extended line of reasoning that is relevant, coherent, and effectively structured.

Any individual task or question intended to address the synoptic requirement may be designed to assess (a) only, (b) only, or both (a) and (b) together.

A set of assessments within an Occupational Certificate, taken together, must address both (a) and (b). This does not mean that every task or question in an Assessment by Examination or Non-exam Assessment Component has to meet the synoptic requirement.

Depending on the approach taken to the qualification structure and the coverage of the subject content, there may be opportunities for synoptic assessment at the end of the first year as well as in the second year.

Setting and adaptation of assessments

The assessment requirements state that an awarding organisation must set all assessments.

Condition G1.1 requires an awarding organisation in setting an assessment to ensure that the content of the assessment is -

- (a) fit for purpose,
- (b) appropriate for the method of assessment chosen, and
- (c) consistent with the specification for that qualification.

In doing so, an awarding organisation should specify, at least -

- (a) the evidence to be generated by the Learner,
- (b) the knowledge, understanding and skills covered through the assessment,
- (c) the nature of any support that can be provided to Learners,
- (d) whether the assessment must be completed in a specified amount of time,
- (e) any other specified conditions under which the assessment must be completed, and
- (f) any requirements relating to the submission of evidence.

Whilst the awarding organisation must set all assessments, the assessment requirements permit an awarding organisation to allow a Centre to adapt questions or tasks in Non-exam Assessments. This is for the purpose of tailoring the assessment to take account of local contexts and Manageability for Centres. This might, for example, be based on the geographical location of a Centre, or the resources it has available. Such adaptations must relate only to the context presented by that question or task, such as to reflect the facilities or equipment available. For example, if an assessment ordinarily requires the use of a specific software package, an awarding organisation could permit Centres to use a different but equivalent software package. This would ensure the same knowledge, understanding and skills were assessed, with the same Level of Demand and the conditions of the assessment unchanged.

Where an awarding organisation permits a Centre to adapt questions or tasks, it must ensure that the adaptations do not adversely impact the Validity or Reliability of the assessment or change –

(a) the knowledge, understanding and skills assessed, or

(b) the Level of Demand of the assessment,

and must not limit a Learner's ability to achieve any of the specified levels of attainment.

The awarding organisation should consider the measures it will put in place to support a Centre in making acceptable and appropriate adaptations and the monitoring it will undertake to ensure that the awarding organisation has visibility of any adaptations and their appropriateness.

Marking

Condition H1.1 states as follows –

For each qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must have in place effective arrangements to ensure that, as far as possible, the criteria against which Learners' performance will be differentiated are –

(a) understood by Assessors and accurately applied, and

(b) applied consistently by Assessors, regardless of the identity of the Assessor, Learner or Centre.

The assessment requirements allow the Non-exam Assessments for an Occupational Certificate to be marked by –

(a) the awarding organisation or a person connected to the awarding organisation,

(b) a Centre, or

(c) a combination of the two.

Whichever approach an awarding organisation takes, it must still achieve compliance with General Condition H1.1.

When determining the approach to marking Non-exam Assessment, an awarding organisation should consider –

(a) the Validity of the assessment, in terms of measuring appropriately the relevant knowledge, understanding and skills, including -

(i) the nature of the knowledge, understanding and skills being assessed and who may be best placed to assess them,

(ii) the nature of the assessment evidence, including whether the evidence generated by Learners is likely to arise naturally (i.e. not be planned) and/or be ephemeral in nature,

(b) the need for the assessment to reliably differentiate between levels of attainment across the grading scale and to support accurate classification across the grading scale,

(c) the Manageability of the assessment, and

(d) any threats to the Reliability and integrity of the assessment, including the need for marking standards to be consistently applied across Centres over the lifetime of the qualification.

Guidance on Condition OC7 (Standard setting)

Condition OC7.1 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to standard setting for Occupational Certificates.

We set out our guidance for the purposes of Condition OC7.1 below.

Qualification and Component level aggregation

The standard setting requirements do not prescribe a particular approach to aggregation at qualification or Component level. Awarding organisations should adopt the approach that best supports Valid qualification outcomes.

In most cases, this will be a compensatory approach to aggregation at qualification level. However, an alternative approach may be appropriate where the nature of the

occupational content means that achievement in specific areas is essential for progression into employment or further training.

In making this decision, awarding organisations should take account of whether there are specific requirements in relation to the knowledge, understanding or skills needed as a minimum entry requirement for employment in that occupation.

Guidance on Condition D3 (Reviewing approach) and Condition OC4.1(a) (Purposes) in relation to Occupational Certificates

Achievement of an Occupational Certificate is intended to demonstrate that a Learner is ready to progress into employment in occupations aligned to the qualification. Learners can then build towards full level 2 occupational competence through workplace experience, supported learning, apprenticeships, and other relevant technical or professional training.

Condition D3 requires an awarding organisation to review its approach. Under Condition D3.1 -

- an awarding organisation must keep under review, and must enhance as necessary, its approach to the development, delivery and award of its qualifications so as to assure itself that its approach remains at all times appropriate.

Purpose C states that an Occupational Certificate should be designed to -

- provide employers with accurate and consistent information concerning Learners' attainment in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills assessed as part of the qualification.

An awarding organisation should therefore take steps to ensure that the design of its Occupational Certificate complies with these requirements, is relevant to the workplace and enables Learners to demonstrate readiness to progress into employment.

The following indicate approaches through which an awarding organisation may meet

these requirements -

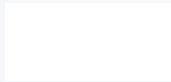
(a) when designing the Occupational Certificate, the awarding organisation seeks and analyses feedback from relevant employers on the qualification's fitness for purpose, and

(b) during its review of an Occupational Certificate, the awarding organisation seeks and analyses feedback from relevant employers on the readiness of Learners who completed the qualification to progress into employment.

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