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Regulation

Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Conditions and requirements

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Applies to England

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Introduction

About this document

This document is part of a suite of documents that sets out Ofqual's regulatory requirements for awarding organisations offering Foundation Certificates. These conditions and requirements come into effect at 2pm on 10 September 2026.

This document sets out the following rules:

- our Qualification Level Conditions for Foundation Certificates, which we have set using our powers under [section 134 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009](#), and
- our requirements in relation to Foundation Certificate assessment strategies, qualification purposes, assessments, grading, and standard setting.

With respect to all Foundation Certificates, awarding organisations must also comply with:

- our [General Conditions of Recognition](#), which apply to all awarding organisations and qualifications,
- any relevant Foundation Certificate Subject Level Conditions, and
- all relevant [Regulatory Documents](#).

Ofqual also sets out guidance in relation to Foundation Certificate assessments, which is designed to help awarding organisations comply with (a) the Qualification Level Conditions and requirements and (b) the General Conditions of Recognition.

Condition FC1: Interpretation and definitions

FC1.1

The rules of interpretation and definitions outlined in General Condition J1 shall apply to the Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Conditions and to the Foundation Certificate Subject Level Conditions.

FC1.2

Except in the circumstances described in Condition FC1.3, the requirements imposed by the Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Conditions and any Foundation Certificate Subject Level Conditions apply in addition to each other and to the requirements imposed by the General Conditions of Recognition.

FC1.3

To the extent that there is any inconsistency between –

(a) a requirement of a Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Condition or a Foundation Certificate Subject Level Condition and an awarding organisation's ability to provide either a particular type of Reasonable Adjustment or Special Consideration, such that the awarding organisation is prevented from providing that Reasonable Adjustment or Special Consideration, the awarding organisation may provide that Reasonable Adjustment or Special Consideration and is not obliged to comply with the requirement of the Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Condition or the Foundation Certificate Subject Level Condition,

(b) in all other cases -

(i) a requirement of a Foundation Certificate Subject Level Condition and a requirement of either a Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Condition or a General Condition of Recognition, such that an awarding organisation could not comply with both such requirements, the awarding organisation must comply with the requirement of the Foundation Certificate Subject Level Condition and is not obliged to comply with the requirement of the other Condition, or

(ii) a requirement of a Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Condition and a requirement of a General Condition of Recognition, such that an awarding

organisation could not comply with both such requirements, the awarding organisation must comply with the requirement of the Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Condition and is not obliged to comply with the requirement of the General Condition of Recognition.

FC1.4

In these Conditions and any Foundation Certificate Subject Level Conditions, the following words shall have the meaning given to them below (and cognate expressions should be construed accordingly) –

Assessment by Examination

An assessment which is –

- (a) set by an awarding organisation,
- (b) designed to be taken simultaneously by all relevant Learners at a time determined by the awarding organisation, and
- (c) taken under conditions specified by the awarding organisation (including conditions relating to the supervision of Learners during the assessment and the duration of the assessment).

Non-exam Assessment

An assessment which is not an Assessment by Examination.

Foundation Certificate

A qualification that has been accredited by Ofqual as a Foundation Certificate under section 139 of the Act.

Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Condition

A Condition of Recognition that applies to a Foundation Certificate and which uses the numbering format 'FCn.n', where 'n' denotes a number.

Foundation Certificate Subject Level Condition

A Condition of Recognition that applies to a Foundation Certificate in a specific

subject only and which uses the numbering format 'FC(x)n.n', where 'x' denotes a particular subject and 'n' denotes a number.

Condition FC2: Disapplication of certain General Conditions of Recognition applying to Foundation Certificates

FC2.1

In respect of each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, the following General Conditions of Recognition do not apply –

- (a) Condition E1.1,
- (b) Condition E1.2, and
- (c) Condition E7.

Condition FC3: Assessment strategies

FC3.1

In respect of each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must –

- (a) establish and maintain an assessment strategy for that qualification,
- (b) ensure that the assessment strategy complies with any requirements which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time, and
- (c) have regard to any guidance in relation to assessment strategies which may be

published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

FC3.2

In particular, an awarding organisation must ensure that the assessment strategy for a Foundation Certificate sets out how the awarding organisation intends to secure, on an ongoing basis, compliance with its Conditions of Recognition in respect of the assessments for that qualification.

FC3.3

An awarding organisation must ensure that all assessments for a Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, are designed, set, delivered and marked in compliance with its assessment strategy for that qualification.

FC3.4

An awarding organisation must –

- (a) keep under review its assessment strategy for a Foundation Certificate, and revise it where necessary, so as to satisfy itself that the assessment strategy, at all times, meets the requirements of Conditions FC3.1 and FC3.2,
- (b) review its assessment strategy for a Foundation Certificate promptly upon receiving a request from Ofqual to do so, and subsequently ensure that its assessment strategy complies with any requirements that Ofqual has communicated to it in writing, and
- (c) promptly notify Ofqual of any revisions made by it to any assessment strategy.

FC3.5

An awarding organisation must –

- (a) upon receiving a request from Ofqual to do so, demonstrate to Ofqual's satisfaction that it has complied with its assessment strategy for a Foundation Certificate in respect of any particular assessment for that qualification, or provide an explanation to Ofqual as to why it has not so complied, and
- (b) give effect to any recommendation that Ofqual may make in respect of its compliance with its assessment strategy.

Condition FC4: Purposes

FC4.1

An awarding organisation must ensure that each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available –

- (a) meets the general purposes for such qualifications published by Ofqual and revised from time to time, having regard to any guidance which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time, and
- (b) has one or more specific purposes which are consistent with the general purposes.

FC4.2

An awarding organisation must ensure that each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, is designed so as, where there is a conflict between two or more general purposes such that compliance with one general purpose will reduce the degree to which an awarding organisation can comply with another –

- (a) priority is given to the general purposes in accordance with their hierarchy, with the greatest priority being given to compliance with purposes further up the hierarchy, and

(b) without prejudice to Condition FC4.2(a), compliance is secured with all of the general purposes to the greatest extent possible.

Condition FC5: Total Qualification Time

FC5.1

In respect of each Foundation Certificate that it makes available or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must –

- (a) design that qualification such that the number of hours for Guided Learning will be in line with any requirements set by the Secretary of State,
- (b) assign to that qualification that number of hours of Guided Learning, and
- (c) assign to that qualification a number of hours for Total Qualification Time by applying the Total Qualification Time Criteria.

Condition FC6: Assessment

FC6.1

An awarding organisation must ensure that in respect of each assessment for a Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, it complies with any requirements, and has regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

Condition FC7: Standard setting

FC7.1

An awarding organisation must ensure that the specification for each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, sets out the specified levels of attainment which comply with any requirements which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

FC7.2

In respect of each Foundation Certificate that it makes available, an awarding organisation must comply with any requirements, and have regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time in relation to –

(a) the promotion of consistency between the measurement of Learners' levels of attainment in that qualification and similar qualifications made available by other awarding organisations, and

(b) the setting of specified levels of attainment.

FC7.3

In setting the specified levels of attainment for a Foundation Certificate which it makes available, an awarding organisation must have regard to an appropriate range of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

FC7.4

An awarding organisation must maintain a record of –

(a) the evidence to which it has had regard in setting the specified levels of attainment for each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, and

(b) its rationale for the selection of and weight given to that evidence.

Condition FC8: Content

FC8.1

In respect of each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must –

- (a) comply with the requirements relating to that qualification set out in the relevant document published by the Secretary of State and specified in the [list published by Ofqual](#) and revised from time to time,
- (b) have regard to any recommendations or guidelines relating to that qualification set out in that document, and
- (c) interpret that document in accordance with any requirements, and having regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

FC8.2

An awarding organisation may expand upon the content set out in the document referred to in Condition FC8.1(a) so long as –

- no content set out in that document is removed, and
- any such elaboration does not cause any change to the number of hours of Guided Learning to be assigned to the qualification.

Assessment strategy requirements

Condition FC3.1(a) requires an awarding organisation to establish and maintain an assessment strategy for each Foundation Certificate which it makes available or proposes to make available. Condition FC3.2 requires an awarding organisation to

ensure that the assessment strategy for a Foundation Certificate sets out how the awarding organisation intends to secure, on an ongoing basis, compliance with its Conditions of Recognition in respect of the assessments for that qualification.

Condition FC3.4 requires an awarding organisation to keep its assessment strategy under review, and to promptly notify Ofqual of any revisions made to it. An assessment strategy should be treated as a live working document which should be updated as necessary, considering evidence from assessment development, delivery and monitoring, so qualifications and assessments continue to be fit for purpose.

Condition FC3.1(b) requires an awarding organisation to comply with any requirements in relation to assessment strategies published by Ofqual.

We set out our requirements for the purposes of Condition FC3.1(b) below.

General requirements

An assessment strategy for a Foundation Certificate must provide a comprehensive picture of the steps and approach an awarding organisation will take to secure compliance with its Conditions of Recognition in relation to the design, delivery and marking of assessments for, and the award of, that qualification.

An assessment strategy must clearly set out how an awarding organisation will ensure its Foundation Certificate is fit for purpose in line with Condition D1.1. In doing so, the strategy must:

- provide a clear and well-structured explanation of the overall approach
- explain the rationale behind key design and delivery decisions, supported by relevant evidence or examples where appropriate
- explain the risks and trade-offs in the approach and the mitigations for those risks

An assessment strategy must explain how an awarding organisation will ensure that the qualification, and the assessments for it, are fit for purpose. In particular, it must include information and evidence to show how an awarding organisation promotes and acts on feedback between the different stages of the qualification lifecycle to keep its approach under continuous review, making improvements where appropriate, to ensure the assessments for the qualification continue to be high-quality and fit for purpose.

Assessment strategy structure

It is for an awarding organisation to decide how to structure its assessment strategy. The assessment strategy is a live document that must be used and updated throughout the lifetime of the qualification. An awarding organisation should structure it in a way that supports this.

In doing this an awarding organisation may, for example, choose to develop separate parts of its assessment strategy that:

- are generic to a qualification type or to all of its qualifications (for example, all of its Foundation Certificates)
- are specific to an individual qualification (for example, a Foundation Certificate in a particular subject)

The separate parts of the assessment strategy could be presented as separate documents, or as a main document with annexes. An awarding organisation should explain clearly how any separate parts of an assessment strategy relate to each other. It should also explain how each of these separate parts will be kept under review, and revised where necessary, considering the others. Taken together, such parts should form a coherent and integrated whole.

Detailed requirements

We set out below our detailed requirements on the specific information and evidence an awarding organisation must include in its assessment strategy. The amount of information and evidence that can be included may vary across the areas identified, depending on the relevant point in the qualification's lifecycle to which a particular area pertains and the extent to which Ofqual has determined the regulatory approach in relation to a particular issue.

These detailed requirements are intended to indicate the minimum information that an assessment strategy must include. They are not intended to provide a template specifying the form that it must take, since the optimal structure and content of an assessment strategy will depend on the approach that is being proposed by an awarding organisation.

These requirements are divided into two sections. Each of these is further divided into subsections which follow, broadly, the key phases of the qualification lifecycle. There is also a specific scheme of assessment section in the individual qualification section.

Information that is applicable in general to a suite or qualification type:

- Qualification development
 - Meeting regulatory requirements
- Assessment development
 - Meeting regulatory requirements
 - Assessment development process
- Qualification and assessment delivery
 - Marking/assessing performance
 - Administering assessments
 - Standard setting and maintenance
 - Attainment and reporting
- Qualification and assessment monitoring
 - Availability of data
 - Approach to monitoring qualification and assessment performance
 - Reviewing the approach

Information that is applicable to a specific individual qualification:

- Qualification design
 - Purposes
 - Subject requirements and approach
 - Demand
 - Progression
- Assessment design
 - Coverage of subject content
 - Assessment structure and type
 - Optional assessment
 - Number of marks

- Generating outcomes at assessment and qualification level
- Assessment times
- Availability of assessments
- Controls on taking assessments
- Question/task design
 - Question/task types and mark schemes
 - Question and task validity
 - Example questions/tasks and rationale
- Approach over time
 - Coverage of subject content
 - Predictability and malpractice
 - Optional assessment
- Impact of assessment design on teaching and learning
- Qualification and assessment delivery
 - Attainment and reporting
 - Any further evidence for an individual qualification
- Qualification and assessment monitoring
 - Any further evidence for an individual qualification
- Scheme of assessment

Assessment strategies should give examples, as appropriate, to support any points or arguments made within the document (for example, questions, tasks and mark schemes). Assessment strategies should also refer, as appropriate, to existing policies or procedures to support an awarding organisation in demonstrating how it will seek to ensure that the qualification meets the requirements in the Conditions in relation to assessments (for example, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration policies).

General to a suite or qualification type

Qualification development

Meeting regulatory requirements

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation complies with relevant Conditions of Recognition and statutory requirements when developing qualifications. This should include a description of how an awarding organisation engages with appropriate Users and how it uses evidence gathered from Users, such as employers, higher education institutions and schools and colleges, when it develops qualifications.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important for an awarding organisation to show how it has considered views from Users of the qualifications in ensuring that they can meet their intended purposes.

Assessment development

Meeting regulatory requirements

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation's approach to developing assessments for qualifications ensures that it meets its regulatory requirements, including:

- the principles an awarding organisation uses to underpin the development of Valid assessments
- how an awarding organisation has considered the [‘Guidance for designing and developing accessible assessments’](#) in the development of their assessments

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important for an awarding organisation to show how its approach facilitates Valid assessment, which enables Learners to fully demonstrate the knowledge, skills and understanding that the assessment is intended to measure.

Assessment development process

Describes the systems and process in place to support development of assessments, including:

- the different stages and personnel involved
- the approach to training individuals who will be responsible for setting assessments, including ensuring security and mitigating any Conflicts of Interest
- how an awarding organisation ensures that assessment developers have the assessment expertise required to design questions or tasks and mark schemes that will promote Validity and Reliability

- how an awarding organisation specifies and commissions questions or tasks and mark schemes
- whether and how artificial intelligence (AI) is used for developing assessments
- how an awarding organisation quality assures or controls question or task and mark scheme development
- how assessments are quality assured and reviewed before being taken by Learners
- how an awarding organisation engages with a suitable range of equality groups and minimises unintended bias
- where appropriate, details of how employer representatives have been engaged in the development process

Explains how an awarding organisation ensures that there are no significant overlaps between assessments and any course materials or guidance that it has produced or endorsed.

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation has considered the Manageability of assessments for Centres. This should include a description of the factors that impact on the Manageability of the assessments for Centres and how those have been considered.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

The design of assessments must be justified in relation to:

- alignment with the purposes of the qualification
- effectiveness in assessing the knowledge, understanding and skills set out in the content
- conduciveness to achieving Reliable outcomes for Learners

An awarding organisation must demonstrate how it has engaged with a suitable range of equality groups, including any that represent the interests of Learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Qualification and assessment delivery

Marking/assessing performance

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation promotes accurate and consistent marking by giving details of standardisation procedures and any wider training for examiners/Assessors and explaining the effectiveness of that standardisation and

training.

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation promotes accurate and consistent marking by giving details of:

- how marking processes will operate, including who carries out the marking, i.e. the awarding organisation and/or Centres, any different systems used (and the role of automated marking systems and artificial intelligence (for quality assurance) if applicable)
- any variation between assessments in relation to these processes
- any principles used to guide the selection of marking systems for assessments with different properties, for example different question types
- processes to monitor marking quality (and issuing of results) and take remedial action where necessary

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation promotes consistency of standards within and across Centres through its Moderation of Non-exam Assessments by giving details of:

- its sampling regime, including sample sizes, tolerances and any evidence which shows the robustness of its approach
- how it determines and applies any adjustments to Centre-marked assessments

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation promotes effective Centre marking of Non-exam Assessments to ensure they discriminate effectively between Learners by giving details of the approach to guidance and training for Centres, including the nature and frequency of training opportunities and whether these are mandatory or optional.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

An awarding organisation must justify its approach to marking, monitoring and Moderation in relation to the qualification purposes and the need for accurate and Reliable outcomes.

An awarding organisation must describe its approach to training and standardising Assessors (both external Assessors and Centre Assessors). This could include, for example, any specific training for new or senior Assessors, as well as any wider training available. An awarding organisation must describe its standardisation procedures, including, for example, how it will determine whether an Assessor can

assess reliably.

Administering assessments

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation effectively administers assessments by giving details of:

- how it ensures the secure transmission, distribution and storage (including by Centres) of materials
- how it has considered Centre and system capacity and ensures Centre readiness where on-screen assessments are used
- how it ensures the proper conduct of assessments by Centres, including where Learners are permitted to have access to assessment materials before assessments are taken
- how it will minimise the opportunities for and address any malpractice or maladministration by Centres

For assessments which may be adapted by Centres, details of:

- the extent to which Centres will be permitted, or required, to adapt assessments set by an awarding organisation
- monitoring that is in place to ensure that the awarding organisation has visibility of any modifications, their appropriateness, including that there is consistency across Centres and when checks take place, i.e. before or after assessments have been taken
- the support offered to ensure these assessments are Valid and fit for purpose
- how an awarding organisation will manage its responsibilities under equalities law

Details of the approach to guidance and training for Centres around adapting assessments, including the nature and frequency of training opportunities and whether these are mandatory or optional.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

Inadequate approaches to security can undermine Reliability – if, for example, assessment scores do not accurately reflect Learners' attainment.

It is important that an awarding organisation ensures that it demonstrates its approach for all modes of assessment, including for any on-screen assessments that might be provided to Centres and taken by Learners electronically so that

particular risks, including technical failure, are appropriately managed and mitigated.

It is important that an awarding organisation details any specific risks considered about the level of responsibility delegated to Centres in quality assuring adaptations to assessments.

Standard setting and maintenance

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation sets and maintains appropriate grading [\[footnote 1\]](#) standards in line with the prescribed regulatory approach and promotes Comparability between awarding organisations and over time by giving details of:

- the technical methodology employed in the standards setting process, including the personnel roles involved
- the range of qualitative and quantitative evidence used to inform standards setting and maintenance and the weight given to different evidence
- how the approach may be adjusted, including any variation between initial standard setting and maintenance of standards

Demonstrates how decisions from the standards setting and maintenance process are subject to appropriate internal scrutiny and governance within an awarding organisation, including details of the personnel roles involved in this process.

Demonstrates how decisions in relation to standards setting and maintenance promote Comparability, over time and between awarding organisations, and are kept under review by giving details of:

- how Comparability between different versions of assessments and different modes of assessment (i.e. on-screen versus paper-based) is ensured, both where these are available at the same time and on an ongoing basis
- how evidence generated in line with any requirements set by Ofqual in relation to inter-awarding organisation Comparability will be used to inform decisions on standard setting

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important the approach to standard setting and maintenance follows an appropriate technical methodology. An awarding organisation must set out the technical methodology for determining Component and qualification level grade boundaries.

An awarding organisation must justify its approach to effectively setting and maintaining appropriate grading standards within the qualification, both over time and with similar qualifications it makes available. Where possible, an awarding organisation must also demonstrate how it will effectively set and maintain standards with similar qualifications offered by other awarding organisations.

It is important the approach to standard setting and maintaining:

- includes full consideration of the strengths and limitations of the different types of available evidence, and the weight given to different evidence
- leads to securing fair and Reliable outcomes over time and between Learners

It is important to ensure that standards are maintained when there are multiple modes of assessment.

An awarding organisation must describe how it ensures Comparability between different modes of assessment, for example when assessments are set, marked and assessed, including any separate awarding processes.

Attainment and reporting

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation aggregates results for individual assessment Components in line with regulatory requirements and in a manner that is technically sound.

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation will issue results in a timely fashion and that are clear for users of the qualifications. This should include details of its approach to publishing expected dates and timescales for the issue of results.

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation deals with Reviews of Marking, Moderation and Appeals (RoMMA) to ensure that concerns over the accuracy of marking and/or Moderation are addressed adequately and appropriately by giving details of:

- how they are investigated fairly, thoroughly and in a timely fashion, and the associated fees
- how justified concerns over inaccuracy are resolved by following an appropriate process

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

The approach must be justified in relation to the content and purposes of the

qualification.

An appropriate aggregation method is needed to ensure appropriate discrimination between Learners, so their overall qualification result fairly and Validly reflects their performance at Component level.

An appropriate process is fundamental to ensuring that appropriate inferences are drawn from results.

Qualification and assessment monitoring

Availability of data

Details the data that will be collected to monitor the delivery and ongoing performance of the qualification.

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation ensures that any qualification or Component-level data that may be required by Ofqual can be provided within a reasonable time, including details of the systems and procedures in place to support this.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

The assessment strategy should explain how an awarding organisation has identified the data necessary to monitor the delivery, performance and standards of the qualification and its Components. Data such as this is important for Ofqual's monitoring of the delivery of these qualifications and the maintenance of standards in these qualifications.

Approach to monitoring qualification and assessment performance

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation monitors how assessments function as a whole by giving details of:

- how it collects metrics to monitor how well the assessments function, such as Component-to-subject correlation
- how it uses these metrics to monitor or support assessment design and support Validity

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation monitors how individual assessments function by giving details of:

- how it collects metrics to be used to monitor how individual assessments function, such as: spread of marks; grade boundary position; and correlation of assessment Component marks with other measures of performance

- how it uses these metrics to monitor or support assessment design and support Validity

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation monitors how questions or tasks function by giving details of:

- the metrics it collects, such as facility indices, discrimination indices and performance for different subgroups of the entry in terms of performance
- how it uses these metrics to monitor or support assessment design and support Validity

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation monitors Reliability and accuracy of grading classification by giving details of:

- how it collects metrics, such as Reliability coefficients and grading classification accuracy statistics, estimated at Component and subject level where the assessment framework permits
- how it uses these metrics to monitor or support assessment design and support Validity

Describes techniques and measures used to monitor and risk assess key aspects of the qualification that may affect its Validity, for example:

- security or malpractice issues or incidents, including those related to the use of artificial intelligence (AI)
- feedback through engagement with Users of the qualification
- how an awarding organisation assesses whether any aspect of the qualification may be disadvantaging a group of Learners who share a Characteristic

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation monitors the impact of its assessment design on teaching and learning in Centres, for example:

- feedback from Centres on delivery approaches and pedagogy
- evidence relating to curriculum coverage and sequencing in practice
- identification of unintended consequences such as curriculum narrowing

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

Failure to consider the ongoing Validity of the qualification increases the likelihood of threats manifesting themselves and/or assessment processes ceasing to remain fit

for purpose.

Reviewing the approach

Demonstrates how an awarding organisation feeds monitoring outcomes back into qualification and assessment development by giving details of:

- the processes through which it monitors the key aspects including the quality of assessments, susceptibility to malpractice and maladministration and standard setting and maintenance processes
- how the assessment approach is kept under review and, where applicable, refined over time, based on evidence of its effectiveness
- the sources of evidence and feedback included when reviewing the effectiveness of a qualification

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important to have appropriate processes in place to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the qualification, using data at relevant points in qualification development, to maintain its ongoing Validity. The assessment strategy should demonstrate that monitoring and evaluation activities are planned, proportionate and capable of identifying risks.

Specific to an individual qualification

Qualification design

Purposes

Demonstrates how the qualification fulfils the general purposes specified under Condition FC4.

Details the specific purposes of the qualification and demonstrates how it fulfils those purposes.

Details of any competing purposes, what trade-offs have been considered and how these have been resolved.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

A clear purpose will ensure that Users of the qualification are not misled.

Considering the relative importance of the purposes in terms of the intended priority order set out in Condition FC4 is likely to aid an effective qualification design process by informing the range of trade-offs required when making design decisions.

Subject requirements and approach

Demonstrates that the qualification covers the required subject content and types of assessment which must comprise specific proportions of Assessment by Examination and Non-exam Assessment.

Includes a mapping grid of specification content against subject content.

Demonstrates that the qualification supports any subject aims and objectives for the course of study.

Describes the approach to amplification of the subject content, where required, how it ensures that this is appropriately demanding for the qualification, and consistent with the qualification size.

Includes a rationale for any optional routes through the qualification, including details of any optional content with reference as appropriate to any optional routes specified in the Secretary of State's subject content and, where applicable, the difference between specifications offered in the same subject, and explains how such optional routes will be comparable in terms of the Level of Demand and the amount of subject content required to be taught and on which Learners will be assessed.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

Poorly defined qualification content can lead to:

- Learners being insufficiently prepared for assessments
- the development of assessments and assessment criteria or mark schemes that fail to appropriately target the content in a way that is fair and/or transparent
- the qualification failing to meet one or more of its general or specific purposes

It is important for an awarding organisation to provide clear, coherent and consistent mapping or tracking grids, supported by clear explanation, to show how the subject content has been covered in the qualification. If there are multiple grids, then it will be important to understand if/how they interrelate and for them to portray the information in a clear and consistent way, for example, through a consistent level of granularity in the mapping between documents.

The presence of optional routes may have implications for content coverage (for example, where one or more routes may omit key elements of the content).

Where optional routes are included, the awarding organisation must explain its rationale for including them and how it has determined the content for each optional route. This may include justification as to how different routes represent a comparable Level of Demand and volume.

An awarding organisation must explain how it has determined the content for each optional route, with reference to other approaches it considered. An awarding organisation should demonstrate why its chosen approach is optimal for balancing the educational and/or motivational value of the included optional content, the potential impacts upon teaching and learning, and the maintenance of standards.

Demand

Details of the steps taken to ensure that the Level of Demand of the qualification content is set appropriately.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

An awarding organisation must demonstrate that it has considered the Level of Demand of the qualification in relation to the target group(s) and, where appropriate, to other qualifications at the same level.

Progression

Identifies qualifications from and to which Learners will be likely to progress and explains how this is supported.

Demonstrates that Users support the qualification.

Provides feedback from Users about the qualification.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important for an awarding organisation to demonstrate that the qualification can support the intended progression routes.

Assessment design

Coverage of subject content

Explains the approach to coverage of the subject content, including:

- coverage of the content, overall and in each assessment
- how the Level of Demand will be set

Demonstrates that the division of subject content across assessment Components supports Valid assessment and adheres to any regulatory requirements.

Demonstrates how the questions or tasks in a single assessment will represent a sufficient sampling of the subject content.

Demonstrates that the subject content structure across Components is logical and coherent. This should include how the division of subject content across Components supports synoptic assessment where appropriate.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

A sampling methodology must demonstrate adequate coverage of the full range of subject content both over time and in relation to individual assessments.

It is important for an awarding organisation to provide clear, coherent and consistent mapping or tracking grids, supported by clear explanation, to show how the subject content has been covered in the assessments. If there are multiple grids, then it will be important to understand if/how they interrelate and for them to portray the information in a clear and consistent way, for example, through a consistent level of granularity in the mapping between documents.

Assessment structure and type

Details of how assessments will be structured and a rationale for the approach, for example in terms of covering the required subject content effectively, supporting Validity, and balancing Reliability and Manageability. For example:

- number of assessments
- number of tasks or questions in an assessment
- number of sections in an assessment
- number of assessments in a Component
- relative weightings of assessments
- approach to differentiating for the available grade range
- how different elements of the subject content are targeted by the different assessments

- rationale for determining the method(s) of assessment (for example, a written or practical examination)
- balance between the method(s) of assessment
- consideration of Characteristics
- consideration of the range of Reasonable Adjustments that might be required and would be appropriate for the qualification
- that the specific modes of assessment to be used are appropriate to the construct being measured and comply with regulatory requirements

Determines the level of adaptability of any Non-exam Assessments (for example, assignment briefs), and a rationale for this.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

An awarding organisation must justify how the key structural aspects of the assessment have been designed to be:

- consistent with the purposes of the qualification
- appropriate in relation to the subject content
- conducive to the development of robust standard setting and standards maintenance processes

It is important to demonstrate how Comparability is assured in relation to any Centre adaptation of assessments set by the awarding organisation.

It is important that an awarding organisation demonstrates how the Non-exam Assessment maximises assessment Validity, what the key threats to Reliability and Validity are, and how these have been mitigated - In particular, how the awarding organisation has considered any threat posed by artificial intelligence (AI) and the steps taken to prevent the occurrence of malpractice involving AI.

Optional assessment

Where applicable, includes details of any elements of the assessments that are optional.

Where applicable, explains how Comparability of optional routes will be appropriately ensured.

Where appropriate, explains how the approach to optional elements in the

assessments has considered and mitigated any risks of negative impact on teaching and learning (for example curriculum narrowing or strategic teaching).

Where appropriate, explains how any risks of Centres and Learners navigating optionality incorrectly will be addressed.

Where appropriate, explains how design choices around optionality balance considerations around the maintenance of standards, the educational and/or motivational value of the included optional content, and the potential impacts upon teaching and learning.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important to ensure that standards are maintained when there are optional routes.

Number of marks

Where the assessments are numerically marked, includes the number of marks overall and for each individual Component, and a rationale for those numbers of marks.

Where the assessments are numerically marked, explains how the number of marks supports differentiation across the available grade range.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

An awarding organisation must justify how the number of marks for each individual assessment is appropriate in terms of covering the required subject content effectively, supporting Validity and balancing Reliability and Manageability.

Generating outcomes at assessment and qualification level

Explains the approach to generating outcomes for individual assessments, including how Learners' level of attainment for each Component is determined, and aggregated to reflect Learners' attainment in the qualification as a whole. This should include, as appropriate, reference to mark-based assessments and/or directly graded assessments.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important to ensure that the approach to generating outcomes:

- is in line with the purposes of the qualification and the aspects of the subject content that it is assessing
- discriminates effectively between Learners of different abilities
- enables awarding organisations to monitor and control standards

Assessment times

Includes total assessment time, and a rationale for this.

Includes individual assessment time for each Component, and a rationale for these, including how the time allowed is sufficient for Learners to complete the assessments.

Where more than one assessment is used in a Component, includes the assessment time for each assessment, and a rationale for these.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

An awarding organisation must justify how the total assessment time and individual assessment time for each assessment is appropriate in terms of covering the required subject content effectively, supporting Validity and balancing Reliability and Manageability.

Availability of assessments

Details the approach to availability of assessments, including:

- number of assessments to be available (for example in an academic year and/or if available in different modes)
- scheduling of assessment series in each academic year
- approach to Learners retaking assessments

Explains how its approach is appropriate, including consideration of:

- the amount and weight of material to be covered
- the extent to which different aspects would be covered sequentially or concurrently
- the need to ensure that enough time is available for sufficient learning to have taken place
- how the approach will support standard setting

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

An awarding organisation must:

- justify its approach in relation to the purpose of the assessment
- detail specific risks that have been identified (such as to the Comparability, predictability and security of assessments), and how these have been mitigated

Controls on taking assessments

Details of the controls to be in place for taking assessments, including:

- specified Learner access to assessment materials before the assessment is taken
- specified time limits
- support permitted during assessment
- resources permitted during assessment (for example own notes, open-book, internet, artificial intelligence)
- supervision/Invigilation
- permitted collaboration
- the approach to Authenticating work

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important that any controls have been fully considered and specified to ensure assessments are Valid, Reliable and appropriate for the qualification purpose.

Question/task design

Question/task types and mark schemes

Includes for each assessment:

- an explanation of the range and balance of question or task types to be used (for example multiple-choice, short answer, extended response, practical observation) and how these will credit the full range of target Learners and promote effective discrimination between them to support Valid assessment of the subject content
- the principles by which the mark scheme for each question or task has been developed, including the correlation of mark schemes to question or task requirements, the suitability of mark schemes to credit the full range of target

Learners and promote effective discrimination between them, and how mark schemes are utilised to ensure the Reliability of judgements

- how the questions or tasks and mark schemes used will promote (as far as possible, bearing in mind Validity requirements) the Reliability of marking, including accuracy and consistency
- how the questions or tasks in a single assessment and over a number of consecutive assessment series will mitigate predictability, such as in terms of what they target, how they are expressed and any associated Stimulus Materials

Where applicable, demonstrates that the criteria used in directly graded assessments are clearly articulated, aligned to the qualification content, appropriate for the qualification level, and can be reliably interpreted by assessors.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It could be difficult to elicit Reliable information regarding the proficiency of Learners if assessments are poorly designed.

Question and task Validity

Details of the steps taken to ensure that questions/tasks elicit the assessment evidence they ought to elicit and provide evidence relating to their intended Validity, including how they are designed to target their intended demands and intended level of difficulty, as well as promote accessibility and Minimising Bias. For example, how an awarding organisation ensures that:

- each question or task elicits its intended learning outcomes
- Learners understand what each question or task is asking them to do
- bias and other construct irrelevant factors are minimised
- Learners have sufficient time to complete questions or tasks
- the intended level of difficulty is appropriate, and how this has been established
- accessibility has been promoted
- Minimising Bias has been achieved

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It could be difficult to elicit Reliable information regarding the proficiency of Learners if assessments are poorly designed.

Example questions/tasks and rationale

Provides as part of its assessment strategy examples of questions/tasks and associated mark schemes, representing the range to be used in assessments, with commentaries explaining the approaches and illustrating how questions/tasks and mark schemes will be constructed in assessments. These examples may or may not be drawn from any related sample assessment materials.

Provides a rationale for the questions/tasks (or question/task types) to be used, including their suitability for the subject domain and for the full range of target Learners to demonstrate their abilities.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important for an awarding organisation to provide item commentaries to show its approach to item construction and why certain types of items are suitable in different contexts.

Approach over time

Coverage of subject content

Explains the approach to coverage of the subject content, including:

- sampling of the subject content
- approach to coverage of subject content over time, including over what period the full content will be sampled and how this is tracked and monitored
- how the risk of predictability will be minimised
- how the Level of Demand will be maintained
- how Learners' interests will be protected if there are changes to content

Demonstrates how the questions or tasks over a number of consecutive assessment series will represent a sufficient sampling of the subject content.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

A sampling methodology must demonstrate adequate coverage of the full range of content both over time and in relation to individual assessments.

It is important for an awarding organisation to provide clear, coherent and consistent mapping or tracking grids, supported by clear explanation, to show how the subject content has been covered in the assessments. If there are multiple grids, then it will

be important to understand if/how they interrelate and for them to portray the information in a clear and consistent way, for example, the level of granularity in the mapping between documents.

Predictability and malpractice

Demonstrates that where the same assessments are used over time, these are not susceptible to issues of predictability and malpractice.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important that an awarding organisation demonstrates how its approach maximises assessment Validity, what the key threats to Reliability and Validity are, and how these have been mitigated.

Optional assessment

Where applicable, explains how Comparability of optional routes will be appropriately ensured.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important to ensure that standards are maintained when there are optional routes.

Impact of assessment design on teaching and learning

Demonstrates how the design of the qualification and its assessments is intended to promote effective teaching and learning, for example, how the assessment design:

- supports delivery of the full intended curriculum
- has had regard to the possible influence on pedagogical approaches
- supports effective sequencing of teaching and learning and encourages sustained learning, rather than short term preparation for assessments
- supports Learners to draw together knowledge, understanding and/or skills from across the full course of study
- mitigates for overly atomised or fragmented teaching approaches
- supports the authentic assessment of vocationally relevant skills for the subject, while ensuring that standards can be applied reliably and consistently

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

The design of assessment has a significant influence on teaching and learning. It is important that assessment promotes effective teaching and learning that align with the intended curriculum.

Qualification and assessment delivery

Attainment and reporting

Details of how the assessments generate Reliable information in line with the proposed grading.

Details of:

- the characteristics that differentiate Learners who have demonstrated different levels of attainment
- the steps that have been taken to ensure that there is sufficient difference between adjacent levels of attainment

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

The characteristics of the specified levels of attainment must follow clearly from relevant elements of the content.

An awarding organisation's approach to differentiating between adjacent levels of attainment must be justified in terms of the scope to generate Reliable information.

Any further evidence for an individual qualification

Presents any further evidence of processes and procedures that are specifically relevant to this qualification rather than common across qualifications and an explanation as to how these are necessary in context of the specific qualification.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important for an awarding organisation to set out any information and evidence that is specific to an individual qualification to show why a specific approach is needed in certain contexts.

Qualification and assessment monitoring

Any further evidence for an individual qualification

Includes any further evidence of processes and procedures that are specifically relevant to this qualification rather than common across qualifications and an explanation as to how these are necessary in context of the specific qualification.

Why is this important and what must an awarding organisation include in its assessment strategy?

It is important for an awarding organisation to set out any information and evidence that is specific to an individual qualification to show why a specific approach is needed in certain contexts.

Scheme of assessment

The purpose of the scheme of assessment is for the awarding organisation to set out key information about the qualification and the design of the assessments within it.

Awarding organisations must include one or more tables in their assessment strategy document including the aspects set out in the tables below. Where response options are given in the table, these should be used by an awarding organisation in its own table where possible. However, awarding organisations may use alternative response options if more appropriate to their design.

For the qualification overall:

Aspect	Response
Number of Components Learners must take	[Enter numerical value]
Number of routes through the specification	[Enter numerical value]

For each individual assessment:

Aspect	Response
Reference, for example, assessment code	[Enter text]
Title	[Enter text]
Assessment method, for example written paper or extended assignment	[Enter text]
Is the assessment mandatory or optional?	Mandatory or Optional
Weighting	[Enter percentage]
Duration	[Enter numerical value]

Assessment series availability, for example January and/or June	[Enter series]
Mode of assessment, for example on-screen or paper based	[Enter text]
Is the assessment marks-based?	Yes or No
Total assessment marks	[Enter numerical value]
Is the assessment directly graded?	Yes or No
Grading method	Awarding process separate to marking
	Directly graded by Assessors

Qualification purposes

Condition FC4.1(a) allows us to specify requirements in relation to the purposes which a Foundation Certificate must meet.

We set out our requirements for the purposes of Condition FC4.1(a) below.

General purposes

An awarding organisation must ensure that each Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, meets the following purposes –

(a) To provide Learners with nationally agreed knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to a broad vocational area, to prepare them for level 3 study in a relevant subject area (General Purpose A).

(b) To provide Learners with the ability to apply knowledge, understanding and skills to practical work-related activities (General Purpose B).

- (c) To motivate Learners to complete the qualification and to progress to further study at level 3 (General Purpose C).
- (d) To provide accurate and consistent information concerning Learners' attainment in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills assessed as part of the qualification (General Purpose D).
- (e) To provide information about a Learner's readiness to progress to level 3 study (General Purpose E).
- (f) To provide a basis for schools and colleges to be held accountable for the performance of their Learners (General Purpose F).

Assessment requirements

Condition FC6.1 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to the assessment of Foundation Certificates.

We set out the requirements for the purposes of Condition FC6.1 below.

Assessment structure

An awarding organisation must design a Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, to comprise Components that may be assessed at different points during the qualification, the results of which are combined to give an overall result.

Synoptic assessment

In designing and setting the assessments for a Foundation Certificate qualification which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must ensure that, taken together, those assessments include 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.

Contexts and scenarios

In designing and setting the assessments for a Foundation Certificate which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must ensure that both the Assessments by Examination and the Non-exam Assessments each include questions or tasks which allow Learners to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in response to authentic, vocationally-related contexts and scenarios.

Assessment by Examination

An awarding organisation must ensure that the assessments for a Foundation Certificate include one or more Assessments by Examination through which 40% of the contribution to the overall qualification grade is made available.

In each academic year, an awarding organisation must provide either one or two assessment series during which Learners can complete the Assessment(s) by Examination.

Non-exam Assessments

An awarding organisation must ensure that the assessments for a Foundation Certificate include one or more Non-exam Assessments through which 60% of the contribution to the overall qualification grade is made available.

In each academic year, an awarding organisation must offer either one or two submission windows for Centres to submit marks or grades for the Non-exam Assessments. An awarding organisation may determine whether or not a submission window for Centres to submit marks or grades for Non-exam Assessment coincides with an Assessment by Examination series.

An awarding organisation must set all Non-exam Assessments for a Foundation Certificate.

In doing so, the awarding organisation must specify –

- (a) the assessment questions or task(s), and
- (b) the conditions under which Learners must complete the questions or task(s).

An awarding organisation may permit a Centre to adapt questions or tasks in Non-exam Assessment. Such adaptations must relate only to the context presented by that question or task, for example to reflect the Centre's local area or the facilities or equipment available to the Centre.

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 and skills being 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.

Marking of assessments

An awarding organisation must ensure that evidence generated by Learners in the Assessments by Examination for a Foundation Certificate is marked by the awarding organisation or a person connected to it.

Evidence generated by a Learner in a Non-exam Assessment for a Foundation Certificate may be marked –

- (a) by the awarding organisation or a person connected to the awarding organisation,
- (b) by a Centre, or
- (c) through a combination of (a) and (b)

Retakes

An awarding organisation may allow a Learner to retake an Assessment by Examination for a Foundation Certificate.

An awarding organisation may allow a Learner to retake a Non-exam Assessment for a Foundation Certificate through submission, in a new or revised form, of evidence generated by that Learner which he or she has submitted for the purposes of taking the assessment on a previous occasion.

Standard setting requirements

Condition FC7.1 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to the specified levels of attainment that must be used for Foundation Certificates.

Condition FC7.2(b) allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to how those specified levels of attainment are set.

We set out our requirements for the purposes of Conditions FC7.1 and FC7.2(b) below.

For ease of reference, the specified levels of attainment used in Foundation Certificates are referred to below as 'grades'.

Setting specified levels of attainment

In relation to each Foundation Certificate, an awarding organisation must ensure that the specified levels of attainment take the form of a 3-point scale as specified below, where Distinction represents the highest level of attainment –

Distinction

Merit

Pass

A Learner who does not meet the criteria to be awarded a specified level of attainment on the three-point scale must be issued with a result of 'unclassified'.

The outcomes from Components must be converted to a standardised scale to allow the aggregation of Components taken across different series. The scheme of aggregation at qualification level must be compensatory.

Marks-based assessments

The 2 key grade boundaries for Foundation Certificates are –

(a) Pass/unclassified

(b) Distinction/merit

An awarding organisation must set these key grade boundaries for each marks-based Component. In doing this, the awarding organisation must have regard to achieving suitable qualification level outcomes.

An awarding organisation must determine the Merit/Pass grade boundary arithmetically –

(a) The grade Merit/Pass boundary mark is calculated by dividing the mark interval between the Distinction/Merit and Pass/U boundaries by 2.

(b) Where there is a remainder of one, the extra mark is added to the Distinction to Merit mark interval.

List of subject content documents

Foundation Certificate subjects

For the purposes of Foundation Certificate Qualification Level Condition FC8.1, Ofqual specifies the following subject content documents published by the Secretary of State relating to Foundation Certificates –

Foundation Certificate: Digital systems and data

[Foundation certificate subject content: digital systems and data](#)

Foundation Certificate: Education

[Foundation certificate subject content: education](#)

1. For ease of reference, the specified levels of attainment used in Foundation Certificates are referred to in these requirements as 'grades', with the setting of those specified levels of attainment referred to as 'grading'. [↩](#)

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