Centre guidance for adaptations to delivery and assessment of Essential Digital Skills Qualifications 2021/2022

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About this guide

This document is intended for tutors/assessors, internal quality assurers, centre quality managers and other staff within Gateway Qualifications recognised centres and/or prospective centres.

It provides guidance on the approach to adapting qualification delivery and assessment of Essential Digital Skills Qualifications under the Vocational and Technical Qualifications Contingency Regulatory Framework (VCRF). It replaces all previous guidance.

The guidance should be read in conjunction with the following Gateway Qualifications' guidance:

Centre guidance for adaptations to qualification delivery and assessment 2020-2022

The guidance should be read in conjunction with the following Ofqual publications:

Vocational and technical qualifications contingency regulatory framework, COVID-19 Conditions and Requirements (August 2021)

Vocational and technical qualifications contingency regulatory framework, COVID-19 Guidance (August 2021)

Support and guidance

For further support and guidance please contact

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Introduction

As circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic continue to impact all areas of life, it is recognised that provision for delivery, assessment and awarding arrangements is required for the academic year 2021/22.

Ofqual implemented the Vocational and Technical qualifications contingency regulatory framework (VCRF) to enable awarding organisations to make adaptations to delivery and assessment arrangements and the requirements for their qualifications. In 2020/21 Ofqual had made provisions for some qualifications, to be issued results based on Teacher Assessed Grades. Following a joint consultation of the Department for Education and Ofqual it has been confirmed that assessments should go ahead in 2021/2022. As a result Ofqual will withdraw the Category B classification in the VCRF so that all qualifications are awarded based on evidence from examinations and other assessments. Results for examinations and other assessments taken after 1 September 2021 will not be based on Teacher assessed grades (TAGs) for qualifications which previously fell into Category B. Awarding organisations will however be permitted to make adaptations to their assessments and qualifications to account for any further pandemic related disruption and to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on learning.

In 2021/2022 all qualifications should be awarded in line with the principles that already exist for Category A qualifications. These principles are provided in Appendix 1.

Purpose of this guide

This guide is intended to provide guidance on adaptation of assessment of Essential Digital Skills Qualifications in 2021/2022 to accommodate centres' local circumstances. It provides explanations of the adaptation parameters and examples of how adaptations may be made within the scope of the qualifications as they are currently designed.

Decisions on whether to apply any of the adaptations rest with the centre. If you wish to talk through a particular approach and its application to a qualification, please contact Enquiries@gatewayqualifications.org.uk

The guide may be reviewed and updated as required to reflect the latest government and regulatory advice.

Qualifications

Which qualifications are covered by this guide?

This guide covers all Essential Digital Skills Qualifications as listed below.

Qualification Number	Qualification Title
603/5985/7	Gateway Qualifications Entry Level 3 in Essential Digital Skills
603/5986/9	Gateway Qualifications Level 1 in Essential Digital Skills

Learners

Which learners are covered by these arrangements?

The arrangements apply to all learners who are taking qualifications and assessments from 1st August 2021 until such time we give notice.

Principles and approach

Our approach

Gateway Qualifications' approach to adaptation is based on the principles in Ofqual's

Vocational and technical qualifications contingency regulatory framework, COVID-19 Conditions and Requirements and builds on the flexibility already embedded within our Essential Digital Skills Qualifications which allows centres to plan and deliver assessments to reflect the needs of different learner groups. Adaptations to assessments should only apply if a learner is not able to be assessed in the way outlined in the qualification specification.

Centres may adapt the controls on where, when and how assessments can be taken to offer a greater degree of flexibility and to support centres to assess learners remotely when they are ready.

This document outlines the adaptations that are permitted.

In all situations, the health and safety of learners must be considered. Centres must follow public health guidance including measures for social distancing and wearing of face coverings.

Centres are not permitted to make any further adaptations to the assessments beyond what is set out in this document.

General guidance on planning assessments

Wherever it is possible and safe within government guidelines, centres should continue to conduct assessments at their sites.

When planning assessments, you may wish to consider:

- learners' access to and familiarity with any technology required.
- giving learners access to a remote mock assessments in order to check the functionality of their technology.
- the technical expertise of the assessment tutor/supervisor as they may be required to assist learners with any technical difficulties encountered during the assessment. Any member of staff who is new to supervising online assessments must be briefed on the supervision requirements, including how to address any IT issues.
- whether supervision requirements can be met logistically

Entry 3 observation

In relation to the EDSQ Entry Level 3 observed tasks, the timing of the assessments of these tasks may be adapted. Rather than completing the observed tasks during the two-week assessment window following the test, they may be completed at any point in advance of the scheduled test.

Observation may take place face to face or remotely. The requirements for the observed tasks will be made available to centres on Quartzweb. At the point of Qualification Approval, the centre's Administration Contact and Course Administration Contact will be able to download the Observation Record from Quartzweb.

EDSQ Surpass online assessments – Entry 3 and Level 1

At both levels, centres may supervise the Surpass online assessments remotely using staff other than the EDSQ tutor provided they are made aware of the supervision requirements and requirements for the conduct of the online assessment.

Assessments must take place under supervised conditions and learners must not be given keycodes to access assessments until the time of the assessment. The supervisor must be able to authenticate the identity of the learner, monitor the assessment and ensure that the work is the learner's own unaided work.

Any room in which an assessment is held must provide learners with appropriate conditions for taking the assessment. A suitable location is one in which the learner is able to complete the test undisturbed by others, is not overlooked or aided by others and with no potential interruptions.

Candidates may use a paper based or online bilingual dictionary in the assessment room. Where learners access an online dictionary, it should be on the same device that is being used for the live assessment.

Candidates must have their cameras on at all times and be in sight of the supervisor throughout the assessment.

In addition, as required by the specification, the supervisor will need to ensure verification of the Learner's identity. The supervisor will also need to keep a record of the location and time/date of the assessment and make this available upon request.

Should learners encounter problems uploading their files to Surpass during the test, these may be forwarded to the supervisor (e.g. via email or Google Classrooms) who may upload them on the learner's behalf providing authenticity can be guaranteed.

All assessments

For all assessments, tutors should note that:

- they are summative and must take place under supervised conditions;
- they are time-bound;
- keycodes may only be provided at the time of the assessment and learners must have no prior knowledge of the assessment content;
- they must be entirely the learners' own unaided work.

Resits

Candidates who do not successfully pass an assessment may resit but they must currently wait 10 days until they can take a different test. This is to ensure that candidates are able to undertake sufficient further learning and/or have additional time to practice before they resit to increase their chances of passing. We realise that there have been instances where this requirement has prevented learners from taking an assessment, in particular where they have been on a short intensive one week course and then unable to resit at a later date due to the pandemic. We have therefore removed this requirement for the coming year. However, we would advise centres to continue to ensure that further learning and teaching takes place before a learner resits an assessment. We will continue to monitor patterns of resits

Centre practices

Centres may already have in place protocols and practices to support their approach to learning and assessment where social distancing and other public health requirements are in place, including the use of online or blended learning.

To support the external quality assurance of qualifications and to enable learner achievement centres are encouraged to continue their good practices in relation to record keeping and authentication of learner work.

Where centres cannot implement the adaptations, we encourage you to stagger assessment taking where feasible, spreading assessment taking over different days for groups of learners to support social distancing measures and in accordance with PHE guidelines.

General considerations

If you are planning to allow your learners to be remotely supervised you may find it helpful to consider the following:

- the learner's hardware and software meets the system requirements for Surpass, available on our website
- the learner has sufficient access to devices to complete the assessment, especially if they are sharing devices with other members of the household.
- the learner has access to a reliable internet connection.
- you have a secure and reliable means to distribute keycodes and PINs to learners.

You should also share the EDSQ Surpass Candidate Guide with your learners, which is available to download from Prism. This contains useful tips on how to access the assessment.

We have also created a PowerPoint presentation you may wish to use at the start of the remote session which contains information on how to access the assessment and conditions around how the assessment should be taken.

Record keeping

Centres will already have in place documentation used for assessment recording (i.e., The Invigilation Pack downloaded/printed from within Surpass), IQA planning and recording. As part of that record keeping please keep records of any adaptations you have applied, for example the location of the learner taking the online assessment.

Centres must record details of when and where the assessment took place and this information will be requested during sampling by the EQA.

Centre practices, such as ensuring on-going marking and IQA and its recording, should continue as normal.

Authenticating learner work

Learner work must be authenticated by both the learner and the supervisor. At the end of the assessment, the learner will be required to confirm that assessment evidence is their own work. The supervisor can easily confirm authentication by signing the statement below:

Supervisor declaration: I confirm that *learner's name* completed the assessment on their own, unaided and did not copy from anywhere else and was supervised by me during the entire the assessment.

During sampling, the EQA will check to ensure that learner work is authenticated.

IQA practices

Gateway Qualifications supports an approach to IQA that is outlined in the EDSQ Centre Handbook. This will support the validity of assessment evidence and qualification claims during EQA sampling activity.

Ensuring equalities for learners

When putting in place adaptations centres should consider the fairness of arrangements, to ensure that all learners have equal access to learning and assessment opportunities. In particular some learners may not have access to technology or may not have conducive conditions to work at home. Centres may need to consider alternative arrangements for those learners who cannot access the required technology.

Applying Special Considerations

Special considerations can be applied as per our Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy. With regards to the current pandemic, adaptations should always be explored before applying special considerations to mitigate the impact of public health arrangements for the current pandemic. Applications for special considerations should be applied for in the usual way, as specified in our Policy:

Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy

Gateway Qualifications Quality Assurance Process

It is important you retain information on how you have adapted assessments as this may be requested as part of our quality assurance process.

Other resources

On the Gateway Qualifications website there is a page dedicated to information about coronavirus arrangements and this is updated as and when circumstances change, or new information is made available.

Appendix 1

Ofqual Principles in relation to Category A qualifications which from 1 September 2021 apply to all qualifications.

An awarding organisation must take all reasonable steps to comply with the principles below when complying with Condition VCR2

Principle A1 – As far as possible and without prejudice to the other principles, an awarding organisation must seek to ensure that the Adaptations which it makes to a qualification assist with mitigating the impact on teaching, learning or assessments caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on Learners taking that qualification.

Principle A2 – An awarding organisation must seek to ensure that, where it makes any Adaptations to its qualifications in accordance with the VCR Conditions, the Validity and Reliability of those qualifications is maintained.

Principle A3 – An awarding organisation must seek to maintain standards, as far as possible, within the same qualification in line with previous years, and across similar qualifications made available by the awarding organisation and by other awarding organisations.

Principle A4 – An awarding organisation must seek to ensure, as far as possible, that the Adaptations which it makes to a qualification do not serve to advantage or disadvantage Learners taking that qualification against their peers taking similar VTQs or, where relevant, general qualifications not covered by the VCR Conditions.