Digital functional skills guidance

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Contents

Introduction

This document (highlighted in the figure below) is part of a suite of documents which outlines our guidance for awarding organisations offering digital functional skills qualifications.

This guidance comes into effect at [time] on [date] and applies to the following digital functional skills qualifications –

- Qualifications awarded to all learners registered on or after [date].

- All qualifications awarded on or after [date].

This guidance supports both the *General Conditions of Recognition* and the *Digital Functional Skills Subject Level Conditions and Requirements*.

This document constitutes guidance for the purposes of section 153 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the '2009 Act'), and Conditions DFS7.1 and DFS8.2.

An awarding organisation has a legal obligation under the 2009 Act to have regard to this guidance in relation to each digital functional skills qualification that it makes available or proposes to make available. Conditions DFS7.1 and DFS8.2 impose the same obligation in respect of the guidance below which is issued under those conditions.

An awarding organisation should use the guidance in this document to help it understand how to comply with the General Conditions of Recognition, as they apply to digital functional skills qualifications, and the Subject Level Conditions and associated requirements for such qualifications.

An awarding organisation must also have regard to the *Guidance to the General Conditions of Recognition* which applies to all qualifications. However, in the event of any inconsistency between that guidance and the guidance contained in this document, an awarding organisation must have regard to the guidance in this document.

Guidance on assessments

Condition DFS7.1 allows us to specify guidance in relation to the assessment of digital functional skills qualifications. We set out our guidance for the purposes of that condition below.

On-screen and Online Assessment

The subject content for digital functional skills qualifications is set out in the Secretary of State's [Digital Functional Skills qualifications: subject content](#) .

Digital functional skills qualifications will enable Learners to initiate and participate in digital and online activities safely in the workplace and in other real-life contexts. Therefore, even outside the requirements of the Content Document, we expect the assessments to be delivered to Learners on-screen and online.

The skills and knowledge to be assessed under the Content Document require that some elements of assessment be completed on-screen/online using digital devices. For example, the assessment of the ability to use a suitable application to enter, edit and format text at entry level, or to save a file on cloud storage using one device and open it on another device at Level 1. The use of on-screen/online assessment will therefore be driven in many cases by the requirement in Condition DFS1.1(a) to comply with the requirements of the Content Document.

Where the Content Document indicates that some elements of the assessment could be assessed otherwise than on-screen/online, it nevertheless remains our expectation that all of the assessment will be completed on-screen/online unless an awarding organisation can demonstrate exceptional circumstances in its assessment strategy meaning that a different assessment approach is needed.

On-screen assessment describes where a Learner reads and answers the questions of an assessment on-screen, either by typing or clicking the correct response or by assembling digital evidence of achievement.

Online assessment describes where the assessment materials for an on-screen assessment are delivered to the Centre, and where a Learner's responses to that assessment are returned to the awarding organisation, via the internet.

Assessments set by the awarding organisation

Our requirements under Condition DFS7.1 state that an awarding organisation must set all assessments for a digital functional skills qualification that it makes available.

By this we mean that an awarding organisation sets specific questions and/or tasks to which a Learner must respond to be awarded a mark or marks.

Real-life focus and connections between skill areas

At both entry level 3 and Level 1, assessments should be designed so that they are authentic and relevant to today's workplace and everyday life. The tasks and activities in the assessments should require Learners to make connections between the skills areas set out in the Content Document.

Differentiating between qualification Levels

Progression between entry level 3 and Level 1 should be evident in the assessments designed by an awarding organisation in terms of:

- the complexity of the tasks and activities, and any related information;
- the number of stages within tasks and activities; and
- the extent to which the requirement(s) is set out for, or has to be determined by, the Learner.

For example:

Using devices and handling information

At entry level, Learners might be provided with folder hierarchy whereas at Level 1, they would be expected to create one.

Communicating

At Level 1, Learners might be expected to produce an email or online message which is significantly more substantial in scope and length than that expected at entry level.

Transacting

At entry level, Learners might be expected to complete a single page form whereas at Level 1, Learners would be expected to carry out a multi-stage process that will include managing account settings and/or uploading documents or images.

Assessment availability

We have not set any requirements with respect to when an awarding organisation must conduct assessments for a digital functional skills qualification that it makes available.

This means that an awarding organisation may choose its own approach to when assessments are taken. It may, for example, choose to set a number of assessment windows each year, and/or it may offer 'on-demand' assessments which can be taken by a Learner at any time.

Whatever approach an awarding organisation adopts to the availability of assessments, it must ensure that it meets the requirements in the General Conditions of Recognition in relation to the maintenance of standards, comparability and avoiding predictability (for example, Conditions D1, G1, G9, H2 (where applicable) and H3).

Different approaches to assessment availability will give rise to different risks with respect to these issues and, as outlined in our requirements for the qualification, we will expect an awarding organisation to set out in its assessment strategy how it has sought to identify and deal with such risks.

Specific risks to the maintenance of standards apply in relation to on-demand assessments. If an awarding organisation chooses to offer this type of assessment, we will expect the assessment strategy to set out how the awarding organisation will identify and deal with risks to assessment design, delivery, monitoring and awarding.

As set out above, given that this is a qualification testing digital skills, we do not expect to see assessment using paper-based assessment materials other than in exceptional circumstances.

In particular, we would expect an awarding organisation to ensure that any of their Centre that wished to use paper-based assessment materials in an assessment can justify that there is a need to do so. An awarding organisation should explain to us in its assessment strategy how it has ensured that any such use is justified.

Where an awarding organisation makes available both on-screen and paper-based assessment materials, it should set out in its assessment strategy how it will ensure that the two assessment formats will be comparable and fair.

Where an awarding organisation is proposing to use on-demand, paper-based assessment materials, this will give rise to particular risks around assessment security and we will expect to see clear mitigations set out in its assessment strategy.

In relation to assessment design, an awarding organisation should consider:

- how many assessment versions there are,

- how the number of assessment versions ensures that Learners do not take the same assessment more than once,

- how the number of assessment versions mitigates risks around Centre malpractice (including explicit sharing of assessment versions and inappropriate use of assessment versions as a basis for teaching),

- how assessment versions are developed to ensure Comparability, and

- how the replacement of assessment versions interacts with the number of assessment versions available, and the approach to re-sitting where assessments are replaced.

In relation to delivery, an awarding organisation should consider:

- how Learners are entered for and take assessments (individually or as a group),

- how evidence produced by a Learner is Authenticated,

- the time between a Learner being entered for an assessment and actually taking that assessment,

- the modes of assessment available to Learners and why those modes are available,

- the arrangements in place for Invigilating or storing assessments including who is permitted to Invigilate and/or have sight of, or physical access to, the assessments before, during or after they take place,

- how Learners access assessments that are on-screen and online,

- the security arrangements that are in place while on-screen assessments are being taken (for example, if Learners can access other computer programmes and/or the internet while taking the assessments, how this access is monitored),

- how any on-demand, paper-based assessments materials, where permitted, are delivered to Centres,

- how far in advance of assessments being taken on-demand, paper-based assessment materials are delivered to Centres,

- the controls there are around the storage and destruction of on-demand, paper-based assessment materials in Centres,

- what happens to on-demand, paper-based assessment materials that are not used by Centres (for example, if a Learner is absent),

- how assessment versions are allocated to Learners on their first attempt and on resit attempts,

- how assessment versions are allocated to groups of Learners within a Centre who are taking the assessment on the same occasion or different occasions, and

- how long each version of the assessment is available and how to avoid it being taken a large number of times (within individual Centres and more generally).

In relation to monitoring, an awarding organisation should consider its approach to:

- inspecting or monitoring Centres (up front and on an ongoing basis),

- monitoring or detecting whether any security breaches have occurred (for example, via social media),

- preventing other Learners from taking an assessment version in relation to which security has been breached (for example, by being shared publicly),

- refreshing or replacing assessment versions,

- monitoring the performance of assessment versions, and

- monitoring the performance of assessment items.

In relation to awarding, an awarding organisation should consider:

- when awarding takes place,

- what standard setting method is used,

- what evidence is considered,

- who is involved in the process,

- how Comparability is ensured between different assessment versions, and

- how the outcomes for each assessment version are monitored.

Guidance on standard setting for digital functional skills qualifications

Condition DFS8.2(b) allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to the setting of specified levels of attainment for digital functional skills qualifications.

We set out below our guidance for the purposes of Condition DFS8.2(b).

Condition DFS8.3 states that in setting the specified levels of attainment for a digital functional skills qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must have regard to an appropriate range of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Condition DFS8.4 states that such evidence will only be appropriate if it includes evidence of –

(a) the Level of Demand of the assessments for that qualification,

(b) at Level 1, the level of attainment demonstrated in those assessments by –

> (i) an appropriately representative sample of Learners taking that qualification, or

> (ii) individuals (whether Learners or otherwise) as part of robust technical pre-testing of those assessments,

(c) at entry level 3, the level of attainment, where available, demonstrated in those assessments by –

> (i) an appropriately representative sample of Learners taking that qualification, or

> (ii) individuals (whether Learners or otherwise) as part of robust technical pre-testing of those assessments,

(d) where available, the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners taking that qualification in a –

> (i) prior assessment (which was not for that qualification), whether or not that assessment was for a regulated qualification, or

> (ii) prior qualification, whether or not that qualification was a regulated qualification, and

(e) following the first time that a Component designed in line with these Subject Level Conditions is awarded, the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners who have previously been awarded that Component.

Without prejudice to any requirements that Ofqual may set in relation to the weight to be given to evidence in the first awards, examples of the evidence that may be used

by an awarding organisation in setting the specified levels of attainment for a digital functional skills qualification which it makes available may include –

- question papers/tasks and final mark schemes,
- senior Assessor input into decisions, for example comments on how the assessments have worked or are likely to work, and recommendations for the setting of specified levels of attainment,
- technical information about how the assessments, and/or any similar assessments previously and concurrently available, have functioned, for example mark distributions, mean marks, standard deviations, item-level statistics,
- samples of current Learners' work selected from a range of Centres and assessed/Moderated by Assessors/moderators whose work is known to be reliable,
- details of changes in entry patterns and choices of options,
- archive Learners' work exemplifying specified levels of attainment in previous assessments for the qualification, together with the relevant question papers/tasks and mark schemes,
- inter-awarding organisation evidence for digital functional skills qualifications,
- pertinent material deemed to be of equivalent standard from similar qualifications or other relevant qualifications,
- information on Learners' performance in previous assessments for the qualification, and
- marking guides for assessments where the evidence is of an ephemeral nature.

We expect the weight placed on such evidence to decrease over time as the awarding organisation builds an archive of evidence of the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners in the reformed qualification.

In determining whether it has sufficient evidence of the level of attainment demonstrated, or likely to be demonstrated, in the assessments for a digital functional skills qualification by an appropriate percentage of the Learners taking that qualification, an awarding organisation should consider whether the marks on its system, or the equivalent information it has available, reflect –

- all possible routes through the qualification and/or Component, and
- a representative proportion of Learners' marks for, or likely to be achieved in, the qualification and/or Component.

In setting the specified levels of attainment for a digital functional skills qualification that it makes available, we expect an awarding organisation to use the appropriate balance of evidence for –

- its assessment approach, and
- the cohort taking the assessment.

For example, in a sessional award and where prior attainment data is available for many or most Learners, an awarding organisation might combine –

- senior Assessor judgement regarding the Level of Demand of the relevant assessment,

- qualitative and quantitative evidence of Learners' actual attainment in the assessment, and
- information regarding Learners' prior attainment in other assessments.

In an on-demand award and where there is little or no prior attainment data available for Learners, an awarding organisation might –

- when an assessment is first introduced, place greater weight on senior Assessor judgement regarding its Level of Demand, using a robust and recognised technical methodology, and
- incorporate consideration of qualitative and quantitative evidence of Learners' actual attainment in that assessment, and/or other versions of that assessment, once that evidence becomes available, and before results are issued.