

GUIDANCE

Arrangements for the assessment and awarding of Vocational and Technical Qualifications and Other General Qualifications in 2020 to 2021

Advice for teachers, trainers and tutors; learners, parents and carers; employers and professional bodies on vocational and technical qualifications, and other general qualifications

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About this document

This advice notice aims to provide users of vocational, technical and other general qualifications with answers to some common questions about arrangements for the assessment and awarding of vocational and technical qualifications, and other general qualifications in 2020 and 2021 in the context of Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Introduction

Background

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has resulted in a loss of education and training since March. It is also likely that some public health restrictions will be in place during the next academic year, and that further disruption may occur on a localised basis, both of which may further affect teaching, learning and assessments for the rest of 2020 and possibly 2021.

Government's expectation is that assessments will take place in 2020 and 2021 as this is the best and fairest way of giving results to learners. To bring this about, we have been working with awarding organisations and other stakeholders to identify ways in which we can make assessments more manageable and flexible, and free up teaching time— whilst at the same time maintaining standards – to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on learners.

Our aims

We want to mitigate the effects of disruption to teaching, learning and assessment so that, as far as possible:

- learners taking VTQs and other general qualifications have the opportunity to receive a fair result and are not disadvantaged by the longer-term effects of the current pandemic
- learners taking those qualifications most similar to GCSEs, A and AS levels are not disadvantaged compared to their peers taking those qualifications and when competing for the same progression places

In line with our statutory objectives, we also need to ensure that assessments lead to the award of qualifications that are a valid and reliable indication of the knowledge; understanding; skills or practical competence they are intended to cover, and that, as far as possible, standards are maintained.

As far as possible, we will expect awarding organisations to take the same approaches to adaptation for similar qualifications, and we will facilitate and support their engagement with stakeholders, such as sector and professional bodies, so that any adaptations maintain the validity and reliability of the qualifications.

Achieving those aims

To achieve our aims, we are consulting of the following proposals which will apply to assessments taken and qualifications awarded during 2020 and 2021:

Adaptations to assessments and qualifications

We want to enable awarding organisations to mitigate the impact of disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment through adaptations to assessments and qualifications which will:

- free up time for teaching and learning
- make the delivery of assessments more manageable and flexible
- help to build resilience and so safeguard against any future disruption

We are in the process of [consulting](#) on a set of objectives to guide awarding organisations' decisions about how assessments and qualifications should be adapted.

In parallel with this, we are working with awarding organisations and sector and professional bodies on the development of additional statutory guidance to support the implementation of our proposed approach and to make sure that consistent approaches are taken across similar qualifications. We intend to consult on this additional statutory guidance later in August 2020.

Introducing an Extended Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (Extended ERF)

In our consultation, we also propose to introduce a second version of the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) – the Extended ERF.

The current ERF, which we introduced in summer 2020, was written to address the immediate challenges we faced earlier in the year when centres had closed and, in many cases, assessments could not be carried out. The steer from the government was to maximise results to learners and the ERF permitted awarding organisations to issue calculated results and to make adaptations to assessments which would not normally be permitted under our regulations.

The issues we are facing now and going forward are different and the Extended ERF will allow awarding organisations to make changes, or adaptations, to assessments and qualifications where this is necessary to ensure that, as far as possible, learners have the opportunity to receive fair results and are not disadvantaged by the longer-term impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19).

As assessments are expected to take place in the rest of 2020 and in 2021, we are proposing not to make provision for the issuing of calculated results, which was a temporary measure we introduced to allow learners to receive results when assessments could not take place.

We may also consult on additions or changes to the Extended ERF later in August if we find that that is necessary as we develop the additional statutory guidance.

Qualifications and learners in scope

Which qualifications are covered?

The arrangements we are proposing to put in place will apply to all Ofqual regulated qualifications apart from GCSEs, AS and A levels, and apprenticeship end-point assessments. This is a broader scope than under the current ERF, which excluded most qualifications that are not publicly funded, and qualifications above Level 6.

Which learners are in scope of these arrangements?

All learners who are taking regulated qualifications which fall under these proposed arrangements are in scope.

What is the position with apprenticeships?

Apprenticeship end-point assessments are not covered by these proposed arrangements.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has overall responsibility for policy on end-point assessments.

For those apprenticeship standards where we provide external quality assurance, we have worked with the Institute to provide [advice](#) on arrangements for adaptation of assessments, where appropriate. Details of the flexibilities agreed for apprenticeship standards can be found on [the Institute's website](#).

What is the position with qualifications in other parts of the UK?

Ofqual-regulated qualifications taken in other parts of the UK are in scope of the new arrangements.

We have long-standing collaborative arrangements with the regulators of qualifications in the UK. This is particularly the case with Qualifications Wales and CCEA Regulation (Northern Ireland) because many of the same qualifications are awarded in the same way in these 2 countries. Given the high degree of coherence of both the qualifications available and our regulatory approaches, Qualifications Wales and CCEA Regulation are considering whether they will put in place similar arrangements for 2020/21 for Ofqual-regulated qualifications awarded in England when they are awarded in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Qualifications Wales, CCEA Regulation and SQA Accreditation will have specific requirements in relation to qualifications designed specifically for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland (respectively).

What is the position with qualifications offered internationally, as well as in the UK?

Awarding organisations can decide whether or not to make assessments available to learners taking their qualifications outside the UK under the Extended ERF.

Under our proposals, awarding organisations would be able to adapt assessments and qualifications where necessary but they would not be able to issue calculated results.

We would expect awarding organisations to determine whether they need to adapt assessments and qualifications based not just on the purpose served by the qualifications, but also on the needs of the market in which they are operating overseas. This may include requirements set out by other regulatory authorities in other countries.

We would also expect awarding organisations to consider the particular risks presented by their individual markets, including any risks of malpractice or corruption.

About the Extended Extraordinary Regulatory Framework

What is the Extended Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (Extended ERF)?

We are proposing to introduce the [Extended ERF](#) so the awarding organisations that we regulate can make changes, or adaptations, to their assessments and qualifications, which they would not normally be able to do under our normal regulations.

The current [ERF](#) was written as a temporary measure to address the immediate challenges we faced earlier in the year when centres had closed and, in many cases, assessments could not be carried out. The steer from the government was to maximise results to learners and the ERF permitted awarding organisations to issue calculated results and to make adaptations to assessments which would not normally be permitted under our regulations. The ERF and its associated arrangements applied to all learners who were due to sit assessments between 20 March and 31 July 2020.

The issues we are facing now and going forward are different. We are proposing to introduce a second version of the ERF, to be called the Extended ERF, which will allow awarding organisations to make adaptations to assessments and qualifications where this is necessary to ensure that as far as possible, learners have the opportunity to receive a fair result in 2020/21 despite the disruption to teaching, learning and assessment.

What are the differences between the current ERF and the Extended ERF?

In the current ERF, awarding organisations were permitted to make adaptations to assessments which would not normally be permitted under our rules so that learners could receive results and progress.

If the Extended ERF is implemented, awarding organisations will still be permitted to make adaptations but it will allow them to make adaptations to the assessments of a greater range of qualifications than for those qualifications for which they previously offered calculated results. It will also permit them to make wider adaptations to their qualifications, where it is appropriate for them to do so. They will also be permitted to make wider adaptations to qualifications where necessary to free up teaching and assessment time, for example, by streamlining assessments.

Awarding organisations will have to ensure that any adaptations they make maintain the validity and reliability of the qualifications and that they maintain standards. They will also have to take account of and mitigate any risks of malpractice.

We have removed all references to calculated results and delays to assessments in the Extended ERF to make it clear that those mitigations will no longer be applicable in 2020/21.

The statutory guidance from the current ERF has been taken forward into the Extended ERF but it has also been revised so that it only covers those areas that remain relevant in the context of 2020/21.

How long is the consultation on arrangements for 2020/21?

We are taking a 2-stage consultation approach.

We are carrying out a 2-week [consultation](#) (3 August to 14 August 2020) on our overall approach to 2020/21, the Extended ERF and the proposed objectives to guide awarding organisations' decisions.

We plan to consult on the additional statutory guidance and any changes or additions to the Extended ERF later in August and to publish the final versions in early September.

We have adopted a 2-stage consultation approach, with shorter than our usual timescales for responses, so that we can provide more certainty about arrangements for 2020/21 to awarding organisations, learners and teaching staff as quickly as possible by the start of the academic year.

We will be developing the additional statutory guidance together with awarding organisations during August so that, as far as possible, they can be confident that the adaptation approaches they are proposing to take will be consistent with the guidance when we are consult on it later this month. This will enable awarding organisations and centres to be clear about arrangements early in an academic year and as soon as possible for those qualifications not following an academic cycle.

We recognise we normally allow a much longer time period for consultation, but we believe the approach we are taking is necessary and reasonable in the current

situation when we dealing with the consequences of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

How long will the Extended ERF last?

If we implement our proposal to introduce the Extended ERF, it will be a temporary measure. It will be in place for the minimum time possible to manage the longer-term impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and will apply in addition to our normal rules – the General Conditions of Recognition. At this point, we will disapply the Extended ERF and the current ERF.

Will the current version of the ERF will be withdrawn?

We are not proposing to withdraw the current version of the ERF at this time for the following reasons:

- firstly, there may still be circumstances where learners, who should have received a calculated result for an assessment or qualification, have not yet received that result but should still do so. It is therefore important that the current ERF remains in place to capture outstanding calculated results that are yet to be determined by awarding organisations. This will only apply to learners who were eligible for a calculated result because they were expecting to take assessments for named qualifications between March to 31 July 2020. Details of these qualifications can be found on our summer and autumn qualification [explainer tool](#)
- secondly, appeals and complaints may arise from decisions taken by awarding organisations under the current ERF. It is therefore necessary for the ERF to continue so that those appeals and complaints can be made

However, we only expect the ERF to apply in these very limited circumstances. In all other circumstances the Extended ERF will apply; in that awarding organisations must decide if adaptations are necessary and then comply with the Extended ERF if they decide to make adaptations.

What is the position if awarding organisations decide that no adaptations are necessary?

In the Extended ERF, we are proposing to require all awarding organisations to make decisions about whether adaptations should be made to their assessments and qualifications to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on learners, and to keep a record to explain and justify their decisions. We propose to have oversight of those decision records.

However, we do not propose to require awarding organisations to make adaptations – only to permit them to do so where necessary. If it is possible for assessments to continue as normal, or, where adaptations are not possible without undermining the validity and reliability of assessments, or where the disruption caused by an adaptation would outweigh the benefits; our proposals do not prevent this.

We think that some qualifications which are made available on-demand or on a roll-on/roll-off basis, in particular small qualifications, may not need adaptations now that

more centres are opening and are able to run assessments in line with public health guidance.

Where assessments and qualifications are made available as normal, awarding organisations must comply with our General Conditions of Recognition when making assessments available, awarding qualifications and issuing results.

How the framework will work

Will the same adaptation approach be followed with all VTQs?

Vocational and technical qualifications are used for a variety of purposes; some are used to signal occupational competence for specific job roles, whilst others are mainly used to support progression to further or higher education. However, most vocational and technical qualifications are used in different ways by different learners, either to progress onto further study or into, or through, employment.

The qualifications are also of different sizes, have different learning objectives and use different assessment methods aligned to their purpose and use. Some require the demonstration of practical skills in response to assignments or work-based tasks, which are internally assessed by teachers and tutors, and then quality assured by awarding organisations – either on roll-on/roll-off basis or at specific points in the year. Others test underpinning knowledge and understanding through the use of examinations. Some examinations are available on-demand whilst others are only available in specific windows. Many qualifications use a combination of approaches.

For these reasons, we don't think that a single adaptation approach is possible. We think that awarding organisations should make decisions on a case-by-case basis, as they are best placed to judge what adaptations are possible without undermining the validity or reliability of their qualifications or undermining standards.

We know that there is a risk of inconsistent approaches if awarding organisations take decisions individually, and so, where qualifications are intended to assess similar knowledge, understanding and skills and use similar assessment methods, we will expect them to use the same adaptation approaches as far as possible.

In our consultation, we are proposing to issue a set of objectives to guide the decisions made by awarding organisations and to support the development of consistent approaches.

What objectives will awarding organisations use to guide their decisions around adaptations?

The proposed objectives are:

- learners taking VTQs and other general qualifications should have the opportunity to receive fair results and not to be disadvantaged by the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- as far as possible, standards should be maintained when qualifications are awarded in 2020/21

- adaptations to assessment and qualifications should not undermine the validity and reliability of the qualifications
 - we do not expect that the content to be taught for a qualification is reduced. Changes to the content should only be considered in exceptional circumstances where it is the only way of minimising disadvantage to learners as a result of the pandemic. The views of sector and professional bodies and other stakeholders must be also be sought before any changes are made
 - any changes to assessment requirements or delivery should also be carefully considered so that they do not undermine the validity and reliability of the qualification
- common approaches to adaptation should be followed where qualifications signal similar knowledge, understanding and skills, or practical competence, and have the same assessment approaches
- the manageability of assessments should be maximised to allow for an increase in teaching time. Any streamlining of assessments should be carefully balanced with the need to ensure that qualifications remain sufficiently valid and reliable
- flexibility in how, and how often, assessments are delivered should be maximised to reduce the impact of disruption, illness or lockdown
- the opportunities presented by the inherent flexibility of the modular delivery modes of many vocational and technical qualifications should be maximised so that learners can bank assessments as soon as they are ready, in order to safeguard against future disruption
- communications should be streamlined and coordinated to support centres implementing adaptations and the users of the qualifications
- a coordinated system-wide approach should be developed to address the risks impacting on learners' results which are outside the scope of Ofqual regulation, working with partners, stakeholders, other regulators and government

Alongside this, we are already working with awarding organisations and, where appropriate, sector and professional bodies, to develop guidance to support the consistent interpretation and implementation of these proposed objectives on a sector-by-sector and qualification type basis.

We propose to consult on this additional statutory guidance, to which awarding organisations must pay due regard, later in August.

Why does Ofqual not expect the volume of content to be taught to be reduced?

Whilst Ofqual is not a curriculum agency and does not generally take a view on content, we believe that reducing the volume of content to be taught could risk undermining the validity and reliability of the qualification, and would risk damaging the confidence that users had in that qualification. This is particularly the case for qualifications signalling occupational competency, where if learners were not taught

some of the skills or knowledge, there could be implications for health and safety and for the ability of the learner to practice in that job role.

Centres also teach the content of qualifications in different ways and at different times. There is a risk that removing content could further disadvantage some learners if the content to be removed was content they had already been taught.

We therefore propose that changes to content should only be considered in exceptional circumstances where it is the only way of minimising disadvantage to learners as a result of the pandemic. The views of sector and professional bodies and other stakeholders must be also be sought before any changes are made.

When will awarding organisations confirm which qualifications will have adaptations and what those adaptations will be?

We know that some awarding organisations have already been in contact with their centres to understand how they have been affected by the current public health crisis and to start to explore ways in which they might adapt assessments and qualifications.

We expect awarding organisations to be in a position to confirm the final details of their approach in September, when the final version of the Extended ERF is published, but we know that some awarding organisations will be communicating with centres between now and then as their adaptation approaches are developed.

For some qualifications, the awarding organisations are likely to take forward the adaptations they introduced this summer under the current ERF.

What oversight will Ofqual exercise over awarding organisations to make sure that learners' interests are protected and the results issued in 2020/21 are fair and valid?

In the Extended ERF we have included the following principles which we have carried forward from the current ERF. In the current drafting, awarding organisations must make their decisions in line with these principles.

- **Principle 1** – An awarding organisation must seek to issue results that
 - a) meet the requirements of the Conditions in the Extended ERF, and
 - b) in particular, are based on evidence (whether from an assessment or otherwise) which ensures that they are sufficiently valid and reliable, to as many learners as possible who are taking a VTQ or other general qualification which it makes available
- **Principle 2** – An awarding organisation must ensure that each result issued to a learner for an adapted qualification which it makes available is as reliable as possible and reflects, as far as possible, the learner's level of attainment as demonstrated in the assessments for the qualification

- **Principle 3** – An awarding organisation must seek to ensure that its approach
 - a) minimises burdens as far as possible, and
 - b) is as deliverable as possible, including by centres and teachers, with appropriate oversight by Ofqual
- **Principle 4** – An awarding organisation must seek to maintain standards, as far as possible, within the same qualification in line with previous years
- **Principle 5** – An awarding organisation must seek to maintain standards, as far as possible, across similar qualifications made available by the awarding organisation and by other awarding organisations

We have asked for feedback on these principles in our current consultation as we are not sure if they remain appropriate in the context of 2020/21 and may make changes as a result when we consult later in August if we find that is necessary to implement our 2020/21 approach.

As is the case in the current ERF, we are also proposing that awarding organisations record their decisions around adaptation and justify how they have taken account of the need to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in line with the principles and objectives. We will take a targeted approach to the review of these records.

We are also proposing to retain our ability to issue Technical Advice Notices where we find it necessary to address any issues we identify in awarding organisations' decision records and proposed adaptation approaches.

Our work with sector and professional bodies to develop consistent approaches to adaptation for similar qualifications and to ensure that adaptations do not undermine the validity and reliability, will also support the award of fair and valid results.

What is Ofqual doing to help centres to implement adapted assessments and qualifications?

As part of our work to develop the additional statutory guidance to ensure, as far as possible, consistent approaches across similar qualifications, we will continue to engage with centres and their representative bodies, such as the Association of Colleges and the Association and Education and Learning Providers, to take their views into account.

We are also working with awarding organisations and wider stakeholders to develop a streamlined and coordinated communications strategy to make it easier for centres to implement the adaptations and so that users of the qualifications can understand the changes.

We will work with awarding organisations to agree common deadlines for the communication of key information to centres and will consider how best to communicate that information; for example, when a centralised communication from Ofqual may helpfully complement awarding organisations' own communications to centres.

We also expect awarding organisations to clearly reflect in their communications if and how their approach to adaptation aligns with sector or subject based

agreements, or qualification type agreements, and to make information about their approach to 2020/21 easily accessible to their centres.

Adaptations to assessments and qualifications

What might the adaptations look like?

Awarding organisations have not yet confirmed their decisions around adaptations but some have shared their initial proposals with us.

For some qualifications, awarding organisations may wish to take forward the adaptations to assessment they introduced in the summer. Under the current ERF, they were permitted to:

- change the way in which assessments are delivered, for example, by using an online rather than paper-based test, or carrying out an assessment remotely rather than face-to-face
- adapt assessment methods, for example, by using a practical simulation in place of an observation, or professional discussion in place of a practical demonstration
- change invigilation requirements, for example, by allowing the use of online invigilation so that assessments can take place in a wider range of settings
- waive or adjust work experience or placement requirements, for example, allowing learners to undertake a shorter period of work experience
- change the way in which a qualification is quality assured, for example, by allowing for standardisation to take place remotely or on-line

For those qualifications most like GCSEs and AS and A levels where previously adaptation were not permitted and calculated results were issued, awarding organisations are considering:

- widening assessment windows to provide greater flexibility (the period of time during which an assessment is conducted)
- encouraging the banking of modular assessments throughout the course of study to mitigate the risk of future disruption
- changing the conditions under which internal assessments may be completed
- looking to change some assessment requirements where this is the only way to deal with the impact of any ongoing social distancing measures, for example, in sport or performing arts qualifications where learners are currently assessed working in a group
- streamlining assessments to free up teaching and learning time in centres

In making their decisions around adaptations, awarding organisations must:

- take account of the proposed principles in the Extended ERF and our proposed objectives

- consider and weigh the risks involved in making the adaptation against the benefits

Do awarding organisations have to comply with the requirements set out by professional bodies or employer groups when deciding on their approach to adaptation?

In the Extended ERF, we have proposed that awarding organisations should have 'due regard' to sector and professional body requirements. This means we expect them to fully consider the details that the professional body has set out. They should give these requirements appropriate weight when deciding how they want to approach an adaptation.

Where sector and professional bodies are in place, we are working with awarding organisations on a sector-by-sector basis to facilitate the agreement of common approaches to adaptation across similar qualifications. This will inform the development of the additional statutory guidance we will consult on later in August.

Awarding organisations may choose not to follow what has been specified by the professional body, where they think that is necessary, but we would expect the awarding organisation to explain and justify their reasons for doing so.

What is the position if sector and professional bodies do not put in place any specific requirements around adaptation?

If there are no specific requirements set out by a sector or professional body, then we encourage awarding organisations to gather the views of employers and other users of their qualifications to ensure that the qualifications continue to meet the needs of employers. The Extended ERF will of course still apply when awarding organisations decide on their adaptation approach.

Information for different groups of learners

Will these arrangements only apply to learners completing a qualification in 2020/21? What about learners who are starting a 2-year qualification this autumn?

The approach we are proposing to take will apply to all regulated qualifications. The adaptations we are permitting awarding organisations to make will apply to all learners taking their qualifications in 2020/21 where there is a need to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Awarding organisations may, however, take account of the different situations faced by learners continuing and completing their qualifications and new learners as they develop their adaptation approaches.

What is the position for learners who received or will receive a calculated result for assessments which they expected to sit between 20 March - 31 July but who are not completing their qualification until later in 2020/21? Do their calculated results still count after 31 July 2020?

Learners who were eligible to receive a calculated result for any assessments they expected to take this summer can carry forward their results into 2020/21 (or later) when they complete their qualifications.

Can learners still receive a calculated result if they are unable to sit some assessments in 2020/1, for example if there are local lockdowns?

As assessments are expected to take place in the rest of 2020 and in 2021, we are proposing not to make provision for the issuing of calculated results for assessments in 2020/21. The issue of calculated results was a temporary measure we introduced for this summer to allow learners to receive results when assessments could not take place.

However, we would anticipate that were learners in the position where they could not sit assessments, for example because of local lockdowns, then special consideration might be given (see the question below for further details).

Will special consideration apply to adapted assessments and qualifications in 2020/21?

Special consideration may apply for any assessments that take place in 2020/21.

We recognise that there may be some learners who miss or do not complete assessments which they were preparing to take in 2020/21, due to factors outside of their control. Such a situation could arise as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

Our General Condition of Recognition [G7](#) requires awarding organisations to have in place arrangements to give special consideration to learners where they have temporarily experienced an illness or injury, or some other event outside of their control, which has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on their ability to take an assessment or to demonstrate his or her level of attainment in an assessment.

Special consideration could include, but is not limited to, awarding additional marks where a learner has been able to take an assessment but where their performance has been affected by an illness, injury or other exceptional event outside of their control; awarding a qualification to a learner who has not completed all of the assessments but who has completed the minimum amount of assessment evidence for that qualification; or allowing an alternative assessment opportunity for a learner at a later date.

We do not expect awarding organisations to provide special consideration where this would alter or prevent the qualification from providing a reliable indication of the knowledge, understanding and skills being measured, or where this would unfairly advantage or disadvantage learners.

We propose to work with awarding organisations to explore whether there is a need for more detailed guidance on Special Consideration in the context of 2020/21.

How will these arrangements affect private learners?

There will be some learners who are studying vocational, technical and other general qualifications independently. Some of these learners may be registered directly with an awarding organisation, others may be registered for a qualification through a centre but may not be receiving education directly from them. These are all considered to be 'private learners.'

Where awarding organisations make adaptations to their assessments and qualifications, they must offer the same adaptations to private learners in as similar a way as possible to other learners.

How will these arrangements affect learners with protected characteristics, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), or other vulnerable learners?

We know that learners taking vocational and technical qualifications are, on average, more likely to be disadvantaged and come from lower socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds than their general qualifications counterparts, making it particularly important that our arrangements limit any further disadvantage to these learners as far as possible.

The draft Extended ERF recognises that as a result of the current circumstances, there is a risk that all learners could be potentially disadvantaged. The Extended ERF seeks to minimise the extent to which this is the case. This potential

disadvantage could apply to all groups of learners including those with protected characteristics, special educational needs or disabilities. We are seeking to ensure that as far as is possible, these groups of learners are not further disadvantaged as a result of their protected characteristics, having special educational needs or disabilities, their socio-economic status or belonging to another vulnerable group.

Awarding organisations are required to take account of the impact of any adaptations to assessments and qualifications on learners with a protected characteristic as part of their judgement about whether and how to make any adaptations. Our Extended ERF sets out principles which awarding organisations must follow when deciding how to adapt assessments and qualifications, and we would expect them to ensure through their approaches that, as far as possible, learners are not disadvantaged as a result of belonging to a particular group or having a particular protected characteristic. We explicitly reference, within the Extended ERF, awarding organisations' equalities responsibilities and the need to minimise equalities impacts.

We have included an [equalities impact assessment](#) within our consultation to make sure that our proposed approach to adaptation takes full account of equalities issues. We will engage with equalities groups and stakeholders as we develop this impact assessment.

We recognise however that there will be some impacts which we cannot address through our regulation of qualifications and will work with partners, stakeholders, other regulators and government to address the wider risks impacting on learners' results which are outside the scope of Ofqual regulation.

How will these arrangements affect apprentices?

Apprentices taking vocational and technical qualifications as part of their apprenticeships may find their assessments and qualifications are adapted, just as they will be for learners taking these assessments and qualifications outside of apprenticeships.

Arrangements for end-point assessments (EPAs) are not covered by our Extended ERF.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has published [guidance](#) outlining what flexibility there may be in adapting assessments where the rescheduling or delay of an EPA would cause hardship to the apprentice, and has confirmed that approaches to calculate results cannot be used with EPAs.

Results and progression

Will results issued in 2020/21 carry the same weight as results issued in previous or future years?

The approach we are proposing to take manage the longer-term impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is designed to balance the need to take all reasonable steps so that learners are not disadvantaged, with the need to maintain the validity and reliability of qualifications and to maintain standards.

As far as possible, we will expect awarding organisations to take the same approaches to adaptation for similar qualifications, and we will facilitate and support their engagement with stakeholders, such as sector and professional bodies, so that any adaptations maintain the validity and reliability of the qualifications. Through our regulatory oversight of awarding organisations, any adaptations which undermined the validity and reliability of qualifications would not be permitted.

We therefore expect that the results and grades awarded to learners during 2020/21 should have equal status to the results and grades awarded in other years and should be treated in this way by universities, colleges, sixth forms, training providers and employers.

Can employers have confidence in the qualifications that will be awarded in 2020/21?

The approach we are proposing to take to manage the longer-term impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is designed to enable employers to be as confident in the qualifications that are awarded this year as they are currently in those already awarded or will be awarded in the future.

We are already working with awarding organisations and sector and professional bodies, on a sector-by-sector basis, to facilitate and support the development of valid and reliable approaches to adaptation which will have the support of employers and ensure that they have confidence in the qualifications awarded in 2020/21.

Appeals

Can learners appeal their results?

Learners will be able to appeal their results on the same basis as in any other year.

Each awarding organisation is required by our General Condition of Recognition [1](#) to have appeals arrangements in place. They are required to establish, and then maintain and comply with, an appeals' process which provides for appeal of:

- the results of assessments
- decisions regarding reasonable adjustments and special consideration, and
- decisions relating to any action to be taken against a learner or a centre following an investigation into malpractice or maladministration

If learners think that they have reason to appeal, they should contact their centre in the first instance.

Will there be a cost for appeals?

Fees for all aspects of the assessment process are set by the awarding organisations. They will share further information on any fees for appeals in due course.



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