

ANALYSIS OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Regulatory arrangement for the awarding of Vocational and Technical and Other General Qualifications in 2020 - 2021

The VTQ Contingency Regulatory Framework

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Summary

The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has led the Department for Education (the Department) to reach the policy view that it is not viable for external exams to go ahead for some Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications.

We consulted on the detail of the regulatory framework we propose to put in place to enable awarding organisations to issue results to learners taking these qualifications so that they can progress to the next stage of their education. This regulatory framework will be called the VTQ Contingency Regulatory Framework (VCRF).

The consultation ran between 25 February 2021 and 11 March 2021 and received 81 responses, submitted either through an online form or by email. This document provides a summary of the responses received.

Background

The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic means that, in line with the approach set out for GCSEs, AS and A levels, it is the Department's policy position that external exams for many VTQs and other general qualifications should not take place as planned. Some students may also not be able to complete other forms of assessment because of the ongoing disruption arising from the pandemic.

We consulted on our proposed arrangements for 2021 in 2 stages.

The [first consultation on the alternative arrangements for the award of VTQs in 2021](#) ran from 15 January to 29 January 2021 and was in 2 parts. In Part A of the consultation, the Department asked for views on which qualifications fall in scope of their policy that exams should not take place. They also asked for views on any equalities implications of their policy. In Part B of the consultation, we consulted on the alternative regulatory arrangements we would need to put in place to enable students and other learners taking VTQs and other general qualifications to receive results if exams and other assessments did not take place.

Following this consultation, the Secretary of State issued a direction [add link] to Ofqual. In this, he set out his policy intentions for the award of VTQs and other general qualifications; identifying 3 broad groups where different approaches would apply.

We then consulted on the detail of the regulatory framework (the VCRF) we proposed to put in place to enable awarding organisations to issue results to learners in line with the approaches set out in the direction.

We did not consult on any changes to our overall regulatory approach but had refined our thinking around the detail of the framework in light of feedback from the previous consultation and our engagement with awarding organisations.

Approach to analysis

[The consultation](#) included 28 questions and was published on the Ofqual website with an online form for responses.

This was a consultation on the views of those who wished to participate and, while we tried to ensure that as many respondents as possible had the opportunity to reply, it cannot be considered as a truly representative sample of any specific group.

We present here summaries of the responses to the consultation questions in the order in which they were asked. For each of the questions, we presented our proposals and then asked respondents whether they had any comments on what we had proposed. Respondents did not have to answer all the questions. Some respondents chose to provide general comments instead of responding to the specific proposals. Where percentages are provided, these figures are rounded to the nearest full number and so responses for each question may not always equal one hundred percent. During the analysis, we reviewed every response to each question. In some instances, respondents answered a question with comments that did not relate to that question. Where this is the case, we have reported those responses against the question to which the response related rather than the question against which it was provided.

Who responded

We received 81 responses to our consultation. 80 respondents completed the survey online – these are recorded in the figures shown against each question. We also received 1 free text response; this is not included in the quantitative data we provide below but relevant comments have been included against the appropriate questions. We list the organisations who responded to the consultation in Annex A.

In addition to the formal consultation, we also held engagement events with a wide range of stakeholders including awarding organisations, colleges and different sector and professional bodies. The purpose of these events was to support awarding organisations in developing consistent approaches, and to identify and understand potential issues, and how these might be addressed.

The views expressed at these events were not formal consultation responses (although some of those attending may have separately responded to the consultation) and as such are not reported in this analysis document. We have

considered the responses to this consultation and the views expressed at consultation events when developing our final policy position.

Table 1: Breakdown of official consultation responses

Official responses	Count
Awarding organisation	34
School or college	16
Other representative or interest group	6
Private training provider	1
Academy chain	1
Local authority	1
Total	59

Table 2: Breakdown of personal consultation responses

Personal responses	Count
Teacher (responding in a personal capacity)	11
Exams officer or manager	4
SLT (Senior leadership team)	2
Other	2
Parent or carer	1
Awarding organisation employee	1
Total	21

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they were based in England. We received a small number of responses from Wales, Northern Ireland and other non-EU countries.

This was a public consultation on the views of those who wished to participate. We were pleased to receive a large number of responses, although we recognise that the responses are not necessarily representative of the general public or any specific group.

Detailed analysis

The VTQ Contingency Regulatory Framework

The Overall Approach to the Determination of results

Question 1

Do you have any comments on our proposed overall approach to the determination of results in the VCRF?

A total of 63 responses were received to this question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges. There were no significant differences in respondent types.

The majority of respondents welcomed the proposed approach and comments were largely supportive. Most respondents welcomed the flexibility of the approach which would allow awarding organisations to tailor the method used to meet the particular circumstances of different qualifications.

Other respondents that supported the approach were pleased that the VCRF had been proposed as an evolution of the earlier emergency regulatory frameworks rather than something totally new. It was felt that this would reduce the need for awarding organisations to redesign qualifications and that existing processes could be continued to be used where appropriate.

Some of those that supported the proposed approach felt it provided clarity for awarding organisations by reducing the number of frameworks they would be working under. It was felt that one framework, rather than the two frameworks that had existed previously, would reduce the burden on awarding organisations.

Many respondents welcomed that the proposals appeared to offer parity in the determination of results between vocational qualifications and general qualifications. However, a discrepancy was noted between the draft awarding frameworks for vocational and general qualifications. They highlighted that the draft General Qualification Alternative Awarding Framework had no mention of maintenance of standards, whereas this requirement was in place for Category B1 qualifications. They asked for further clarity on this point and that appropriate guidance be made available.

Some respondents supported the overall proposed approach, but raised concerns about how it could be consistently applied across awarding organisations. For these

respondents, it was felt that some aspects would be too open to different interpretations, e.g. on the level of moderation required, which could lead to a difference in approach between awarding organisations.

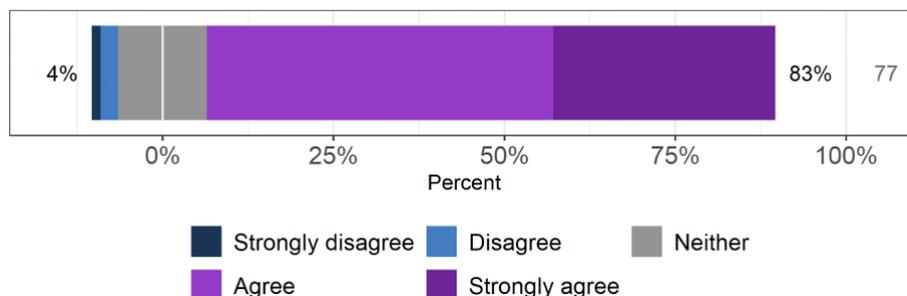
The most commonly raised concern among respondents related to the timescales for the implementation of the proposals. A large number of responses asked that there be a timely communication of all decisions made by Ofqual and the Department as soon as possible, to allow more time for the proposals to be enacted.

There were also a number of concerns raised regarding “mid-flight” learners, described as learners who are part way through their course of study and not due to get an overall result in their current academic year. Respondents in this group felt that the approach used with mid-flight learners should be linked to that which was used with mid-flight learners last year, where grades had been calculated.

Question 2

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal that we should bring the ERF and Extended ERF to a close?

Figure 1: Responses to question 2



A total of 77 responses were received to the question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges.

83% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposal to bring the ERF and the Extended ERF to a close, compared to 4% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 13% neither agreed nor disagreed. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

A total of 46 respondents provided comments.

The vast majority of respondents agreed with our proposal that we should bring the ERF and Extended ERF to a close. The main reason given for this view was that it was felt it would simplify the process by bringing the process under one framework

(the VCRF). It was felt that two frameworks running concurrently alongside the VCRF could lead to confusion, and by closing the two frameworks and having a single framework, there would be more clarity for stakeholders. This group of respondents also felt that the new framework that was being proposed would render the two frameworks obsolete and they should be discontinued as a result.

Some respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposed closure of the ERF and Extended ERF. Reasons given for this view included:

- that the ERF and Extended ERF should remain for students that are part way through their course of study, but will not receive a grade this academic year. Comments on this asked that “mid-flight” learners be offered the same opportunities as those in the same position last year. It was felt that by closing these frameworks then the ability for these learners to receive calculated grades could be affected
- there should be a lessons learnt exercise completed from the previous frameworks prior to any new frameworks being proposed
- the proposal was not felt to be clear enough for one respondent to make a decision

A minority of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with our proposal to close the ERF and Extended ERF. Comments received from this group did not directly relate to the closure of the frameworks, but emphasised that there should be no disadvantage to students taking vocational qualifications in the approaches taken.

Structure of the VCRF

Question 3

Do you have any comments on the two proposed categories of qualifications within the VCRF?

A total of 54 responses were received to this question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

The majority of responses saw the categorisations outlined in the consultation document as clear and appropriate. The reasons given for this view included:

- having 2 categories was seen as a positive due to its clarity and simplicity
- that the categories were clear and distinct, which would help with understanding in centres and awarding organisations and make the process of categorisation easier to judge

- different qualification types would need different approaches and this categorisation allowed for qualifications to be treated differently in line with their requirements

Many respondents who welcomed the proposed categories of qualifications within the VCRF also requested the release of further guidance to help aid understanding and ensure consistency in approach. Examples and scenarios for each category were suggested to be helpful to the consistent classification of similar qualifications. There were requests that any additional guidance be made available to all stakeholders.

A number of respondents requested further guidance on specific elements of the proposal to help with understanding in centres. This group felt that it was important that any guidance for Category B qualifications is clear and communicated in a timely manner to centres. They said that centres may offer qualifications covering all of the proposed categories so a clear delineation between the categories would help centres' understanding of the process and manage expectations.

There were some comments questioning the approach to the categories that had been used, especially the number of categories. It was felt that Category B containing two sub-categories may lead to confusion, and that this should have been further split out into Category C. There were also comments received that asked that the categories be renamed to reflect the types of qualifications that sit within them, which may make the categories clearer.

One respondent questioned the categorisation of qualifications, which although not linked to occupational competence, may include practical and safety-critical elements that are needed for progression. The respondent felt that these qualifications should be aligned with Category A as they are closer in type to this category.

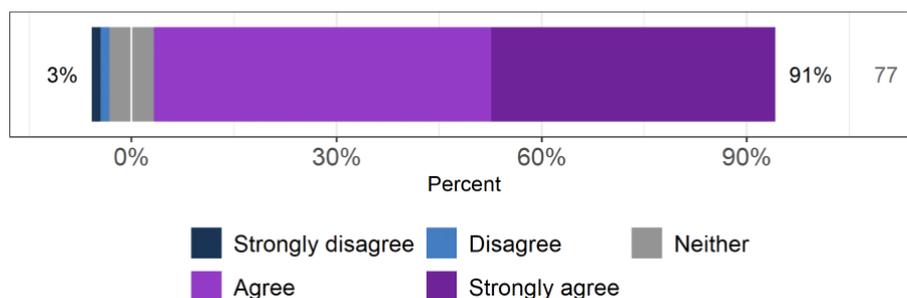
There were some comments asking that there be a further review of the qualification categories in the coming months and that there should be a mechanism for stakeholders to input on the categorisation of qualifications.

Principles

Question 4

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to have separate principles for qualifications in Category A and Category B?

Figure 2: Responses to question 4



A total of 77 responses were received to the question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges.

91% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposal to have separate principles for qualifications in Category A and Category B, compared to 2% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 7% neither agreed nor disagreed. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

A total of 36 respondents provided comments.

The vast majority of respondents supported our proposal to have separate principles for qualifications in Category A and Category B. The main reasons given for this view were:

- the categories and the qualifications that sit within them are distinct from each other. Therefore, it was felt to be appropriate to have differing sets of principles
- the proposal builds in some future proofing into the system, where the need to use and continuation of Category B provisions can be reviewed in the future
- carrying forward principles from the Extended ERF provided continuity for Category A qualifications

Some respondents that agreed with the proposal for separate principles also provided further comments on the need for guidance. They highlighted the need for additional guidance so that all stakeholders were aware of the process to issue

results and the likely timelines. Communication to centres and students were seen as especially important and flagged in these comments as an area where guidance should be focused.

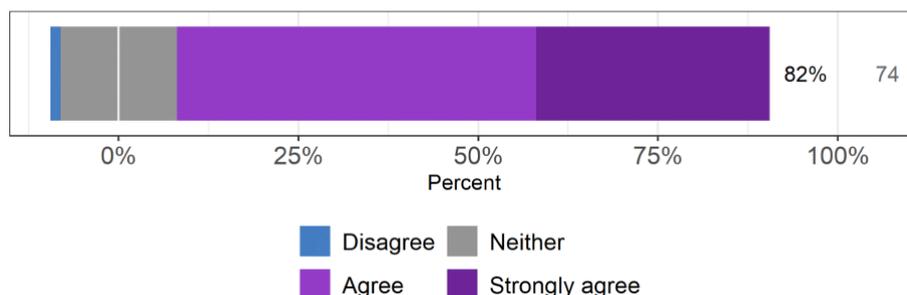
Those respondents that disagreed or strongly disagreed did so because of the apparent complexity of the proposal. One respondent felt that stakeholders would not be able to understand the categories and a simpler solution should be found. Another respondent felt that qualifications should all fall under the same category, where the same approach would be used.

Those that neither agreed nor disagreed provided no further comments to expand on their reasons for this view.

Question 5

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed principles for qualifications in Category A set out above and in the VCRF?

Figure 3: Responses to question 5



A total of 74 responses were received to the question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges.

83% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed principles for qualifications in Category A, compared to 1% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 16% neither agreed nor disagreed. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

A total of 33 respondents provided comments. The majority of respondents supported the proposed principles for qualifications in Category A.

Of those who commented in support of the principles, comments included that:

- the principles would be workable for performing arts graded exams
- they provide a standardised approach which will ensure rigour and consistency and minimise the risk of prejudice or discrimination
- the approach would help maintain comparability between qualifications and would provide a degree of consistency
- the continuity between the principles in the VCRF and Ofqual's previous frameworks (the ERF and Extended ERF) was helpful. This would create less burden for awarding organisations and centres as it is likely similar approaches could continue to be used

Some respondents commented on specific principles. These included that:

- principle A1¹ must continue to recognise that awarding organisations may not be able to fully mitigate the impact of the pandemic through their approach to adaptations
- principle A4² (ensuring VTQ students are not disadvantaged compared with those taking other VTQs or GCSEs, AS or A levels) is the most important, and it was helpful that this specified 'where relevant'
- it would be important for any adaptations to take account of any further disruption, particularly if students have difficulty accessing remote learning

¹ **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 Covid19 pandemic on Learners taking that qualification.

² **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.

Where respondents raised concerns with the approaches in the principles, these included:

- the likely challenge posed by the need to work effectively across awarding organisations
- that under principle A3³, while maintaining standards across similar qualifications is important for fairness, the reference to previous years does not adequately account for the impact of the pandemic

Some respondents commented on the relative importance of the different principles:

- an awarding organisation commented that principles A3 and A4 would be more difficult to comply with, and noted that it felt these were also less important than principles A1 and A2⁴
- an awarding organisation commented that it agreed that these principles should not be subject to a hierarchy
- although the principles are not hierarchical, the need to ensure results are in line with previous years was more important than its position as principle 3 suggests

A number of respondents commented that it would be important to ensure that regulatory expectations around the application of the principles were clear and consistent. Where particular approaches are required, these should be set out clearly. Respondents commented that any further guidance on the principles would be welcome. Respondents also commented that they would welcome clarification about how they should evidence and document their approach to the principles and that the approach should be consistent and simple.

A small number of respondents also provided the same general comment that it would be important to consider how best to support students given the amount of disrupted learning they had faced.

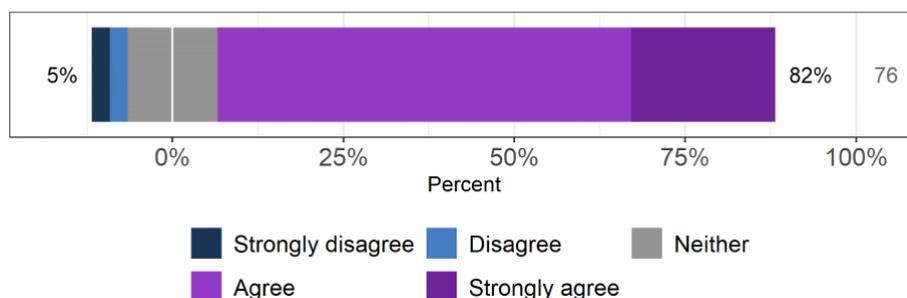
³ **Principle A3** - An awarding organisation must seek to maintain standards, as far as possible, within the same qualification in line with previous years, and across similar qualifications made available by the awarding organisation and by other awarding organisations.

⁴ **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.

Question 6

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed principles for qualifications in Category B set out above and in the VCRF?

Figure 4: Responses to question 6



A total of 76 responses were received to the question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges.

82% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with proposed principles for qualifications in Category B and in the VCRF, compared to 6% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 12% neither agreed nor disagreed. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

A total of 39 respondents provided comments.

The vast majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed principles for Category B qualifications. The main reason given for this support of the principles was that it was felt that they would lead to results that are sufficiently valid and reliable. Many highlighted the importance of a consistent approach to awarding between awarding organisations. A number of respondents welcomed the proposal to carry forward many of the same principles from the ERF and respondents also stated that this approach would help to maintain comparability with the same qualifications taken in previous years.

Some of those that agreed also requested further information on the application of the principles. There were requests from awarding organisations that the regulatory expectations around these principles are made as clear as possible. This group of respondents asked for further specific guidance to help with the implementation of the principles, or that the expectations are outlined in regulations, and that the processes for recording decisions should be as near to normal as possible. Some spoke of the potential challenges that may result from their implementation. Setting and maintaining standards was seen as the biggest challenge and many asked that expectations in regard to this are set out by Ofqual.

An awarding organisation commented that the principles as proposed could lead to awarding organisations taking different approaches in similar qualifications if there was not suitable guidance in place.

A number of respondents commented on the hierarchical approach proposed for the principles, or on what they perceived to be the relevant importance of some principles over others:

- a number commented that the hierarchical approach was helpful and welcomed the suggested ordering
- some respondents commented that those principles relating to standards should be higher up in the order of priority
- a respondent commented that principle B4⁵ was the most important
- an awarding organisation noted that it should be recognised that awarding organisations may have to make the 'least-worse' decision given the circumstances and that in this context, principles B6⁶ and B7⁷ may be difficult to meet and welcomed that these were required to be met 'as far as possible'

The majority of the respondents that neither agreed nor disagreed did so as they felt there needed to be further guidance from Ofqual or changes made to the proposals to make them clearer.

Respondents made a number of specific comments relating to particular principles:

- an awarding organisation commented that it would be challenging under principle B3⁸ for awarding organisations to ensure that students were not disadvantaged
- a representative group welcomed fairness being reflected in principles B3 and B4, but commented that they would welcome these references being expanded to cover all students taking qualifications this year

⁵ **Principle B4** - An awarding organisation must seek to ensure, as far as possible, that the arrangements which it puts in place to award a Category B Qualification do not serve to advantage or disadvantage Learners taking that qualification against their peers taking similar VTQs or general qualifications not covered by the VCR Framework

⁶ **Principle B6** - An awarding organisation must seek to maintain standards, as far as possible, within the same qualification in line with previous years.

⁷ **Principle B7** – 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.

⁸ **Principle B3** - An awarding organisation must seek to ensure, as far as possible, that the arrangements it puts in place to award a Category B Qualification do not serve to advantage or disadvantage different Learners or groups of Learners taking the same qualification.

- an awarding organisation requested further clarity about what the phrase ‘with appropriate oversight by Ofqual’ meant in relation to principle B5⁹ and whether this meant Ofqual having to effectively sign off results
- a number of respondents felt that there needed to be a clearer definition of standards in the new framework, including whether these referred to standards set in 2020. They were unsure from the information provided what the precise definition of standards would be, which they felt could have implications in the setting of standards in their own organisation and across awarding organisations
- one respondent felt that the suggested approach to maintain standards in Principle B6 lacks fairness. This respondent felt that students who may have expected improved grades this year may be unfairly penalised due to the low performance of their centre as a whole. They felt that the focus should be on individual student achievement as much as possible
- another respondent disagreed with the focus of Principles B6 and B7, where they felt there was a disparity with the requirements for general qualifications. They felt the focus on maintenance of standards in these principles was not reflected in the related requirements for GCSEs, AS and A levels. They asked that this is reviewed as it could result in disadvantage for students taking the qualifications in this category compared to those taking general qualifications
- a small number of respondents commented that it would be important to clarify Ofqual’s expectations of the perceived level of collaboration required under principle B7 in relation to maintaining standards across similar qualifications offered by other awarding organisations

In addition to commenting on the principles, some awarding organisation respondents made specific drafting suggestions for the wording of the principles, which are not reported here, but have been considered as we have finalised our Conditions and requirements. A number of awarding organisations who commented on the drafting welcomed the use of the term ‘as far as possible’ in the drafting. One respondent commented to say they disagreed with the proposed principles as they could result in differences in how different awarding organisations approach assessment in similar qualifications. They suggested that further guidance and further discussion with Ofqual and across awarding organisations would help improve consistency in the approaches taken between awarding organisations.

A respondent commented that the flexibility that teachers have in determining the evidence used to support Teacher Assessed Grades could make it difficult for

⁹ **Principle B5** - An awarding organisation must seek to ensure that its approach to awarding a Category B Qualification– (a) minimises burdens as far as possible, and (b) is as deliverable as possible, including by Centres and Teachers, with appropriate oversight by Ofqual.

awarding organisations to maintain standards, particularly where results were based on 100% coursework.

Qualifications in Category B

Alignment with GCSEs, AS and A levels

Question 7

Do you have any comments on our expectation that the approach to awarding qualifications in Category B aligns with the approach to awarding for GCSEs, AS and A levels, where possible and appropriate?

A total of 57 responses were received to this question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

The majority of respondents welcomed the proposed approach and comments were largely supportive. A number of respondents noted that consistency of approach between academic and vocational pathways was important to reflect parity of esteem. It was also welcomed as 'pragmatic', as processes that were as comparable as possible would make it less confusing for staff administering these qualifications in centres, while it was also recognised that there would have to be some differences due to the nature of the type of qualifications. For example, it was recognised that unitised qualifications might not be able to fully align.

Several respondents commented that the phrase "where possible and appropriate" was key, as where the different design and delivery model of a vocational or technical qualification was different to that of GCSEs, AS and A Levels, it would not be appropriate to align awarding with that approach. In addition, one respondent noted that while they agreed with the suggested approach in principle, it would not always be possible to achieve it in practice, where the qualification structure or assessment methods were different to GCSEs, AS and A levels. Some respondents said that it would be essential to communicate clearly with centres on this point to avoid creating confusion or inadvertently setting inappropriate expectations.

Some respondents commented on the definition of qualifications in Category B. Respondents queried whether qualifications which may follow an academic cycle, and be taught in schools, but which also include an element of occupational competence fell under Category B. A few respondents also commented that any alignment with the approach to awarding for GCSEs, AS and A levels would not apply to all qualifications within Category B, in particular those qualifications which had different characteristics, such as Functional Skills qualifications.

Respondents questioned whether expectations around the use of historic data within the draft VCRF were inconsistent with those proposed for GCSEs, AS and A Levels. The point was also made that even where approaches were aligned, it should not be assumed that guaranteed that outcomes across VTQs, GCSEs, AS and A levels would be aligned.

In terms of putting the approach into practice, respondents suggested it might be helpful for awarding organisations to be given visibility of relevant documents to help align with the approach being proposed for GCSE, AS and A Levels. They also pointed out that it was not yet possible to know what alignment with GCSE, AS and A Levels would look like as their arrangements had not yet been confirmed. It was also noted that “As far as possible” (para 41), and “where possible and appropriate” are both subjective and so this would require work across awarding organisations to ensure assessment organisations could provide a consistent and fair approach for learners.

Respondents questioned whether alignment of approaches would extend to release of results, in other words whether results would have to wait to August to be released, alongside GCSE, AS and A Levels, or whether VTQ results could continue to be released immediately following an assessment or on a rolling basis throughout the year, as holding results back could in some cases have a detrimental impact on a student.

Respondents commented that alignment of approaches should include suspension of non-examined assessments as has occurred in GCSE, AS and A Levels. A few respondents suggested greater consideration needs to be given to the position for mid-flight learners.

It was suggested that it was important to make clear that the final grades issued to learners would also be determined by the quality assurance process that wrapped around the use of Teacher Assessed Grades.

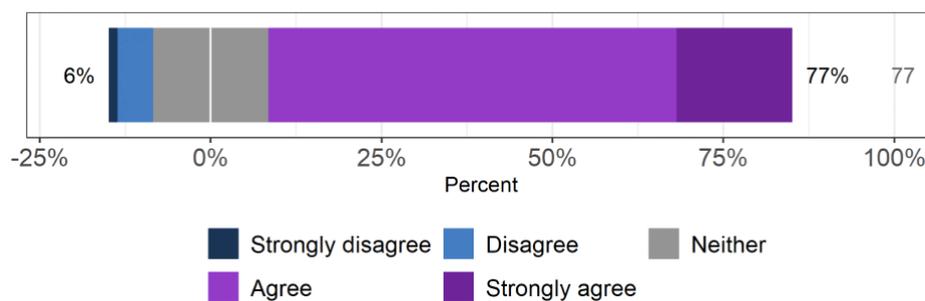
There was some concern that delays in classifying qualifications into different categories could lead to confusion, and that if teachers were not allowed to apply consideration of the challenges faced by students in lockdown, it would result in large numbers of students being downgraded.

Determination of results and the role of the minimum evidential threshold

Question 8

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the determination of results and the role of the minimum evidential threshold?

Figure 5: Responses to question 8



A total of 77 responses were received to this question. Of those who responded the majority were official responses from awarding organisations, schools and colleges and personal responses from teachers.

Of those that responded, 77% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach, compared to 6% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 17% neither agreed nor disagreed. Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed were all responding on behalf of awarding organisations.

A total of 50 respondents provided comments.

In general respondents agreed with the evidence-based approach proposed and there were no significant differences in the types of comments received from those who agreed compared with those who disagreed with the proposals.

Many of those who provided comments on our proposed approach commented on the proposed requirement for awarding organisations to set out the minimum evidential threshold upon which it is safe to award a result. Most of these respondents requested further clarity and guidance on the minimum evidence threshold and many of the respondents felt that as drafted it was not clear what was required.

Respondents also highlighted the risk that without further clarity the minimum evidential threshold would not be interpreted and applied consistently by awarding organisations.

Points raised included:

- there would be a risk to public confidence if some awarding organisations had lower minimum evidential thresholds to others
- any differences in how awarding organisations interpreted the requirement would undermine Principle B4 regarding not advantaging or disadvantaging learners against their peers

Respondents also highlighted the perceived inconsistency with the approach proposed for GCSEs, AS and A levels, with several respondents commenting that a minimum evidential threshold was not explicitly required for GCSEs, AS and A levels. Respondents reported that this difference could mean that centres felt that a higher bar was being set for VTQs. In addition, it was suggested that this difference would make it difficult for awarding organisations to comply with Principle B4 regarding not advantaging or disadvantaging learners against their peers taking GCSEs, AS and A levels.

To avoid the perceived differences between VTQs and GCSEs, AS and A levels, it was suggested that instead of setting a minimum evidential threshold, awarding organisations should provide advice to centres on the sufficiency of evidence and stipulate topics which must be covered where this was necessary, particularly for competency-based qualifications.

Some respondents also highlighted challenges with implementing the minimum evidential threshold. For example, one sixth form college highlighted the need for flexibility in order to accommodate the different levels of evidence that would be available as a result of the differing ways qualifications are taught in centres. In addition, an awarding organisation reflected that it would be better for awarding organisations to set the minimum evidential threshold after centres have provided the evidence used to determine a Teacher Assessed Grade to ensure that awarding organisations did not set the threshold too high.

Some respondents highlighted the importance of setting a minimum evidential threshold. For example, an awarding organisation commented that this was particularly the case for qualifications which also provide occupational competency.

Respondents also commented on the requirements surrounding the internal and external quality assurance processes. Most of these respondents commented on the challenges of using historic data and the requirement for centres to be able to explain why its results were significantly out of line with past performance.

In particular, respondents highlighted the challenges associated with looking at historic grade distributions for:

- on-demand qualifications where:
 - there would not be clearly defined prior cohorts to make the comparison with
 - a single submission deadline and results day would be required which could mean learners would have to wait for extended periods before receiving their result
- qualifications which are marked by centres and so awarding organisations may not ordinarily receive fail information
- qualifications which do not have a hierarchy of grades
- centres which had small cohorts for a qualification
- centres which had not delivered the qualification before and so there would not be any historic data

Concerns were also raised that this requirement could lead to changes in centre behaviour, either by switching to other awarding organisations in an attempt to hide their historic data or use the historic data as a bar to work towards.

In addition, several respondents also requested further clarity on what was required. For instance, a definition of 'significantly out of line' was requested so that a consistent approach could be used across awarding organisations and it was questioned how this requirement would work alongside the acknowledgement that there was not an expectation that the national distribution of grades would follow a similar profile to previous years.

Respondents also highlighted a potential difference in approach to GCSEs, AS and A levels where there was no reference to checks with past performance.

Awarding organisations also commented on the proposed requirement that awarding organisations would not issue results until concerns raised by the quality assurance process were resolved. The respondents asked whether this requirement would mean awarding organisations should not issue results on planned results days if an issue was identified and what actions awarding organisations were expected to take as a result of issues if they were not expected to amend results.

Respondents also commented on the guidance for centres highlighting the importance of timely communications on what evidence centres needed to collate to use for a Teacher Assessed Grade and for teachers to familiarise themselves with the guidance. Respondents also commented on the importance of any guidance for centres not being subject to frequent changes which would be disruptive and would disadvantage students.

Several respondents highlighted an inconsistency within the drafting of the VCRF on how 'standards' was defined. They requested further clarity on what the expectations were to aid consistency across awarding organisations and avoid awarding organisations making their own interpretations.

A few respondents agreed that allowing awarding organisations to have flexibility to use a different approach to quality assurance to their usual Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny process was necessary to take into account their approach to determining results in 2021.

Respondents also raised concerns around the term Teacher Assessed Grade stating that the term is both inaccurate and inappropriate because a result will be determined by the centre rather than by an individual teacher. It was suggested that 'teacher proposed grade' could be used instead of Teacher Assessed Grade.

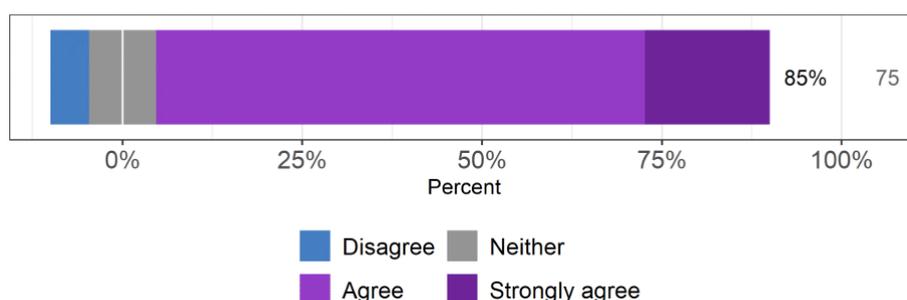
Respondents also highlighted concerns that it would be challenging for centres to consider the impact of reasonable adjustment when producing evidence and suggested that further guidance for awarding organisations and centres on Ofqual's expectations would be helpful.

Internal assessment

Question 9

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to internal assessment?

Figure 6: Responses to question 9



A total of 75 responses were received to this question. Of those who responded the majority were official responses from awarding organisations, schools and colleges and personal responses from teachers.

Of those that responded, 85% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach, compared to 5% who disagreed. 9% neither agreed nor disagreed. The vast majority of those who disagreed were either teachers

responding in a personal capacity or respondents responding on behalf of schools or colleges.

A total of 41 respondents provided comments.

Many respondents that commented agreed that internal assessment should continue where it was possible to do so, highlighting it as a valuable source of evidence to inform the Teacher Assessed Grades. However, respondents also noted the need for flexibility, reporting that for some students or groups this would not be possible, for example due to computer or internet access at home; and so requiring internal assessment to continue would disadvantage those learners.

Respondents also agreed with the importance of participation in teaching and learning continuing.

Some respondents also commented on the importance of consistency across awarding organisations. For example, one awarding organisation stated that a lack of consistency in the approach to internal assessments could cause issues relating to public perception and the experiences of centres and students.

Some respondents also commented on whether moderation and verification should continue for internal assessments. Comments received included:

- the approach should be consistent with GCSEs, AS and A levels where moderation and verification would not be required
- all awarding organisations should take the same approach to moderation, i.e., either all adapt, all do some or all do none
- an adapted form of moderation would be helpful, especially in confirming standards

A small number of awarding organisations requested further clarity around the requirements for moderation and verification and General Condition of Recognition H2. It was reflected that for qualifications with mixed approaches (i.e. where assessments and Teacher Assessed Grades were running in parallel) awarding organisations would have to complete external quality assurance and moderation or verification in parallel, which would be a considerable burden on both awarding organisations and centres.

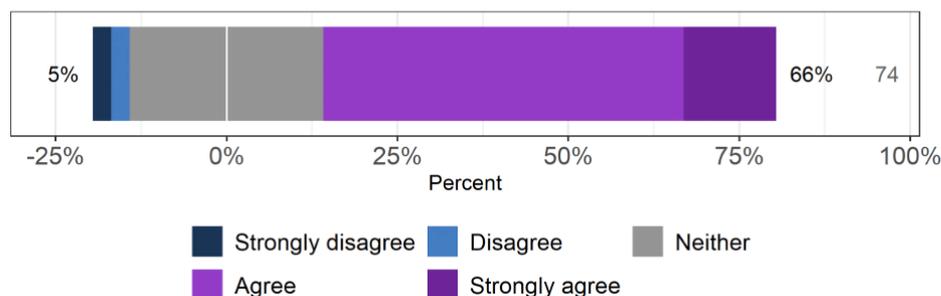
An awarding organisation who disagreed with the approach commented that for some subjects there would be safety implications if internal assessment did not continue.

Learners who sat or expected to sit exams in January 2021

Question 10

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to issuing results to January learners?

Figure 7: Responses to question 10



A total 74 responses were received to the question.

67% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approaches for issuing results to January learners, compared to 6% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 28% neither agreed nor disagreed. There was no significant difference between respondent groups that responded to the question.

A total of 41 respondents provided comments.

Personal responses from teachers and organisational responses from schools and colleges that agreed with the proposal commented that the approach reflected the difficulties faced by students and was the fairest approach for all students, regardless of whether the student had sat an assessment in January or not.

In addition, while some teachers, schools and colleges agreed with the overall approach, they also felt that:

- more consideration was needed for mid-flight students, so they would not be disadvantaged and forced to repeat the exam next year
- it was important for clear guidance to be provided to centres so that they can use the full range of evidence and that sitting the January exams or not would not be a limiting factor
- externally assessed units should have a calculated grade in the same way as last year, based on internal assessed units, as this worked well last year and is the only fair and comparable way

- to avoid any discrimination between those students that did and those that didn't take the exam in January, all students should receive the higher of a Teacher Assessed Grade or their actual achieved grade if they sat the exam

Representative organisations that agreed with the proposals stated they felt it was fair approach but emphasised the challenges in achieving consistency and fairness in a complex and mixed landscape. They stated they would appreciate further discussions and engagements to explore the issue and how to avoid candidates being disadvantaged.

Responses received from awarding organisations that agreed with the proposals also commented that reliability and fairness may be an issue, and about the challenges in achieving consistency and fairness in a complex landscape.

We received some comments that suggested that the wording of the proposals was confusing and could mislead centres and students. It was suggested that they may expect exam results to be issued in summer 2021, even where an awarding organisation may decide to collect a Teacher Assessed Grades instead, or issue the result later when more evidence is available or offer the students another opportunity to sit the examination without it being counted as a resit opportunity.

Respondents also stated that some awarding organisations offered exams in previous months as well as January 2021 and asked if those students be offered the same opportunities as those students that sat exams in January and would welcome further guidance.

There were only a few comments received from respondents that disagreed with the proposal.

Comments received from schools reflected differing views, with some stating that Ofqual, rather than awarding organisations, should make the decision to not issue the January results and instead to account for the result within a Teacher Assessed Grade. Others said that it would be fairer for the result to stand for the January series and for Teacher Assessed Grades to be made available only where students were absent. We also received feedback that student and teachers were confused, with students not being sure what to do for the best.

Some responses received from some awarding organisations that neither agreed or disagreed stated that the question wasn't relevant to their organisation or had no additional comments. Others who commented stated that:

- they felt it was a reasonable approach to take for those qualifications similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels but further consideration was needed for qualifications with practical elements that cannot be replaced by a Teacher Assessed Grade

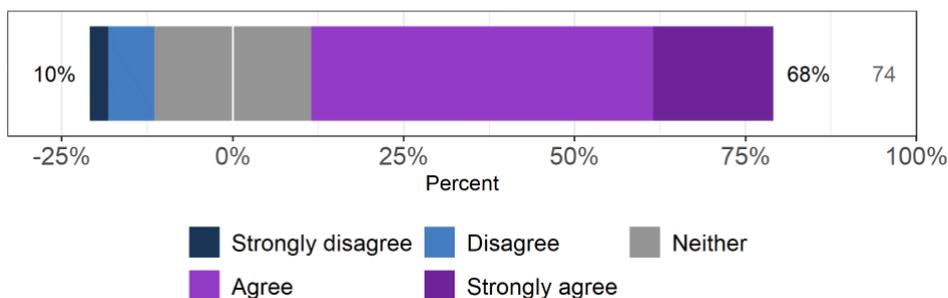
- it would be preferable to allow certificating learners to also receive a result based on a Teacher Assessed Grade to help ensure parity across different groups and students. It was recognised, however, that not being able to use Teacher Assessed Grades until the VCRF came into effect would mean that results for these students are delayed.

Banked assessment

Question 11

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to permit but not require awarding organisations to issue alternative results for banked assessments based on a Teacher Assessed Grade?

Figure 8: Responses to question 11



A total 74 responses were received to the question.

68% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach to permit but not require awarding organisations to issue alternative results for banked assessments, compared to 10% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 23% neither agreed nor disagreed. There was no significant difference between respondent groups.

A total of 40 respondents provided comments.

Awarding organisations and a representative body stated that they welcomed the flexibility and felt that the proposed approach would allow awarding organisations to take the most appropriate approach for their qualifications. They also felt that further guidance would be helpful to ensure consistency and fairness.

The need for consistency was also raised by some centres. While some respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal, they also highlighted concerns that learners could be disadvantaged if banked assessments counted towards a learner's results, and that Teacher Assessed Grades would allow learners to receive a fairer grade.

Responses received from respondents that neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal stated that they were unclear what was meant in the consultation document as to whether awarding organisations could issue lower or higher results than those banked. Others commented that it should either be a requirement and not left to the discretion of the awarding organisation. Some also said that the question was not relevant to their organisation.

Respondents also felt that it was not clear why awarding organisations should be permitted to issue alternative results for banked assessments but not be required to issue them, and under what circumstances this would be appropriate. Further detail was needed for teachers and students.

There were a small number of respondents that disagreed with the proposals and their comments included:

- a banked assessment is already effectively a Teacher Assessed Grade so why require any additional work to generate a Teacher Assessed Grade.
- centres should only have banked grades if sufficient content has been completed
- concerns around the potential of centres inflating grades and not basing their Teacher Assessed Grades on a robust evidence base
- if the banked assessment had been subject to internal quality assurance and students know this grade, it should not be changed as this might be open to too much appeal and change
- banked assessment results should stand. If a student resubmits work or resits the assessment, then this should be counted as a new assessment and is therefore not the initial 'banked' assessment

One awarding organisation that disagreed questioned how to ensure consistency and fairness to all learners as this is permitted but not required in the VCRF and said different approaches may be used by different awarding organisations.

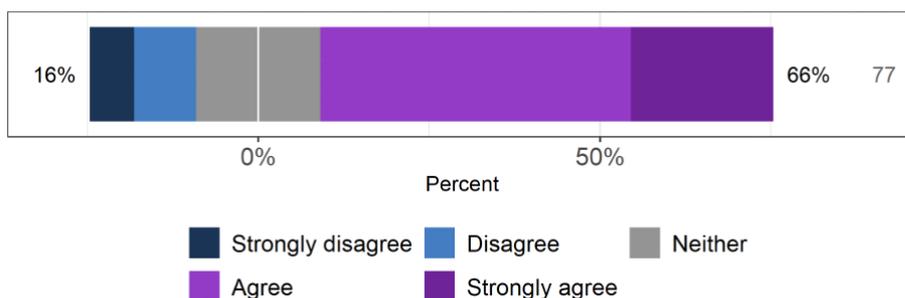
There were also responses which did not directly answer the questions and instead commented on the proposed approach for January exams, unit certification and the terminology used for Teacher Assessed Grades.

Unit certification

Question 12

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal not to require awarding organisations to issue a result for each unit and to instead only issue qualification level results?

Figure 9: Responses to question 12



A total 77 responses were received to the question

66% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approaches for unit certification, compared to 15% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 18% neither agreed nor disagreed. There was no significant difference between respondent groups.

A total of 43 respondents provided comments.

Respondents from schools and teachers that either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal made the following comments:

- they agreed with this approach for certificating students but not for mid-flight students (non-certificating learners)
- although it seemed to be a fair approach, there may be a need to be able to provide unit grades for progression into employment or moving into specialist areas
- some concerns as to whether this approach would prevent students enrolling onto an HE programme
- it was unclear whether this removed the need for external moderation of individual units

Representative bodies who agreed with the proposal reflected that in some circumstances, unit level results would be required.

Awarding organisations agreeing with the proposal stated that they welcomed the flexibility and that it seemed a sensible approach to take. Some felt that permitting unit level awarding could lead to confusion in trying to achieve a standardised approach and requested further guidance. Others felt that unit level awarding was essential and that awarding organisations should have the choice. They added that for some qualifications, they issued unit transcripts as part of their certification process. This is because not all students achieve their full qualification in the year or at the same centre and so the approach allows for recognition of prior learning and progression.

A few respondents that neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal also identified a number of concerns. They were concerned that the approach might lead to excessive appeals, there could be inconsistency across awarding organisations, and that centres needed to use individual unit grades to help arrive at an overall grade and Teacher Assessed Grade.

Respondents also stated they were unclear why awarding organisations would not be required to issue unit certificates as some organisations may find this useful when students are progressing.

Responses were received from different respondent groups that disagreed with the proposals. Some teachers, schools and colleges stated that:

- without unit certification, learner achievement could not be counted towards recognition of prior learning for progression
- having a transcript of unit-by-unit results is important to some students, especially those at lower levels
- while they agreed with the approach for certificating learners finishing their qualifications this academic year, non-certificating learners should be eligible for unit level Teacher Assessed Grades this academic year, so that learning in year 2 is not overburdened and/or further disrupted
- the wording in paragraph 69 (change in requirements for AOs to issue unit results) is too vague about the circumstances in which it would be allowable for an awarding organisation to take this approach, including when they might take a different approach to that proposed for GCSEs, AS and A levels, and further explanation would be helpful
- many higher education institutions make unit-specific offers for some programmes and so without unit grades, higher education institutions would not know if the students have covered the relevant content or achieved the required grade. In contrast, for GCSEs, AS and A levels students will continue to receive separate grades for endorsements in order not to impact their

progression. Therefore, this might mean that VTQ students are disadvantaged against their GCSE, AS and A level peers

- centres should be allowed to predict grades for each unit based on students' work

Comments from awarding organisations included:

- because the proposed approach was not prescriptive, awarding organisations might not go beyond the minimum requirements
- changes would need to be made to internal systems to allow the certification of students without complete grade profiles which would increase staff time, costs to process the information and might not be possible to implement in the timescales
- it is important that students received recognition of the units they have achieved

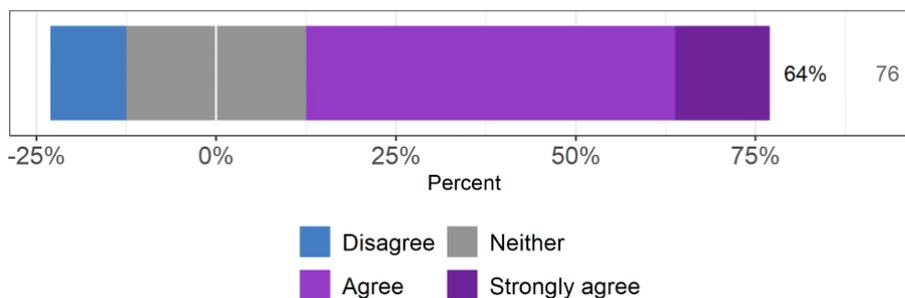
A representative body that disagreed with the proposal stated that feedback from its college members indicated that unit level results are important to students and sometimes required by HE providers.

Eligibility

Question 13

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the issue of results for non-certificating learners?

Figure 10: Responses to question 13



A total 76 responses were received to the question.

64% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approaches for issuing results for non-certificating learners, compared to 11% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 25% neither agreed nor disagreed.

There was no significant difference between respondent groups.

A total of 34 respondents provided comments.

Responses received from awarding organisations in agreement with the proposed approach to the issue of results for non-certificating students stated that they felt the approach was logical and fair and welcomed the flexibility.

Comments included:

- it would allow students to gain unit certification now and to complete outstanding units to gain a full qualification later
- mid-flight learners had been as affected as certificating learners and it was only fair they should also have the option for Teacher Assessed Grades. It might not be possible for learners to complete the 'missed' assessment in the next academic year

Respondents noted that there was a possible contradiction between paragraph 70b (unit results for non-certificating learners) and paragraph 69 (change in requirements for AOs to issue unit results). It was felt that a greater distinction could be made in the terminology as there are other ways to "issue results" as well as through a "unit certificate". This includes full achievement, partial achievement, partial achievement which then becomes full achievement. Therefore, further clarification would be helpful.

Responses from representative bodies that agreed with the proposals stated:

- it is appropriate for awarding organisations to be given flexibility to issue results to non-certificating learners. Communication from Ofqual and the Department would be key to explain why arrangements may differ across awarding organisations
- there is a need for early discussions about the approach for awarding in 2022 as students on the first year of a two-year programme expecting to complete their qualification next summer will have encountered a great deal of disruption

Responses from schools and teachers that agreed with the proposals included:

- students should be allowed Teacher Assessed Grades for units completed and that further clarification would be useful
- this would set a precedent for the future and that all students should receive unit certificates for all they achieve not just the overall outcome
- non-certificating students needed reassurance that they had completed year 1 and could focus on year 2
- centres should be able to resubmit evidence that would help students that have been disadvantaged to re-address this in a fair way.

Respondents from teachers, schools and colleges that neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposals stated that:

- further clarity would be needed on the re-sit opportunities for non-certificating students if they received a Teacher Assessment Grade in summer 2021
- all non-certificating students should be awarded unit level Teacher Assessed Grades based on their work up until summer 2021 unless professional competences are an aspect of the qualification
- extending the eligibility window to 31 August could delay getting results
- awarding organisations need to be consistent with their approach to non-certificating learners and be able to provide reassurance that the evidence they have for grades in 20/21 is being recorded to prevent issues in progressing to year 2
- apprentices typically do not achieve in the timeframe expected when they were originally registered and this needs to be considered
- there is uncertainty for non-certificating students who had missed external assessments as they do not know how their grades will be awarded and may not know until next academic year
- current and potential future disruption would impact on students' ability to complete all the units and having a clear path in how their qualification will be awarded would reduce the mental pressure and anxiety felt by students and teachers.

Responses from awarding organisations that neither agree nor disagree with the proposals stated that:

- the most valid and reliable way for non-certificating students to receive results would be at the point of qualification-level certification, when further evidence is available for both centres and awarding organisations, given the level of disruption that some centres and learners had faced over the last year
- both options (Teacher Assessed Grades or an awarding organisation qualification grade) should be available for awarding organisations who defer unit results to the point of certification. This would give the greatest flexibility to both centres and awarding organisations and ensure that learners are not disadvantaged and are treated fairly compared to their peers
- due to the variety of ways vocational programmes are delivered and in order to ensure parity of approach, where it was appropriate, they would welcome further discussions on the impact of the continued disruption for non-certificating students and how these should be mitigated

- the proposals contradict the proposed approach to January assessment for certificating learners
- unit awarding would be more problematic with non-certificating learners who may be claiming, based on partial completion of the assessments
- the ability to award both certificating and non-certificating students would reassure centres who have held back from registering their students due to uncertainty of their completion options

Respondents who disagreed with the proposal mainly came from schools and colleges who stated that:

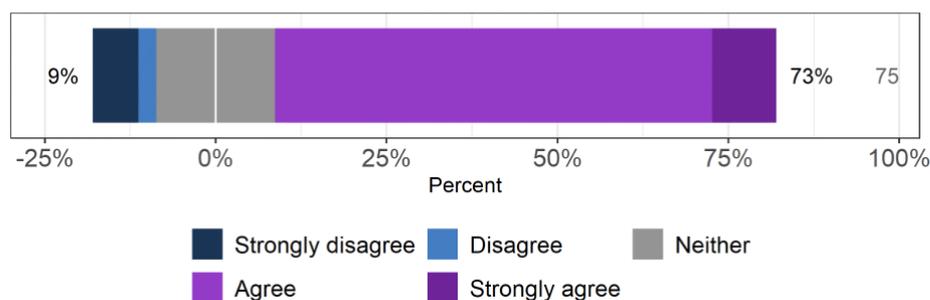
- there needs to clarity before results are issued
- it should not be left to awarding organisation to decide, they should use the same process as last year to ensure parity
- this approach has the potential for students to disengage with the qualification. It devalues the skills moving into employment and progress onto further/higher education
- all non-certificating students scheduled for assessment should be awarded 'interim' unit level results in the same way that Centre Assessed Grades were awarded to mid-flight learners in 2020. Not doing so now adds undue stress to those students that would have been anticipating such results and deferring the grades until certification is unfair.

One awarding organisation that disagreed commented that mid-flight students who normally take all their assessments in the final year of study were not covered by the proposals because they would not have planned to take the assessments during the eligibility period. These learners had been affected by disruption and so could struggle to complete all remaining teaching and learning and all assessments in 2022. As a result, the awarding organisation felt there would need to be an element of Teacher Assessed Grades to make up for this loss of learning and so the framework and the period it covers needed to be sufficiently flexible to allow this.

Question 14

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to the eligibility window for learners to receive results for qualifications in Category B?

Figure 11: Responses to question 14



A total of 80 responses were received to the question.

73% percent of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach compared to 10% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. 17% neither agreed nor disagreed. There was no significant difference between respondent groups.

A total of 31 respondents provided comments.

The majority of comments made were from awarding organisations and schools or colleges. There were no significant differences between the respondent groups with the majority agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposal.

One respondent did not specifically address the question and commented that centre or Teacher Assessed Grades, or internal assessment should continue to be used.

Two comments received from respondents, one in support of the proposal and one neither for nor against the proposal, raised concerns about the potential ongoing impact of COVID-19. They called for the eligibility window to be reviewed, should COVID-19 continue to disrupt learners.

Several respondents in support for the proposal and one respondent who disagreed with the proposal raised the following concerns:

- greater clarity was needed on the statutory guidance for awarding organisations on monitoring the risk of abuse
- the timelines for eligibility do not capture all learners and qualifications. One respondent asked for clarification for learners who were due to complete qualifications shortly after the eligibility window. Another respondent questioned whether the proposal included non-certifying students. Another

commented that it does not explicitly cover November 2020 learners. The respondent suggested that the guidance needs to be clearer and include a facility for retrospective access to Teacher Assessed Grades for these learners

- one respondent also advised that learners who would normally take all their assessments in the final year of study (i.e. they were not expecting to take assessments in their first year of study but will have been affected by the disruption arising from the pandemic) and these non-certificating students were also not covered by the arrangements. The respondent has asked for flexibility and for the alternative arrangement to continue beyond August 2021 where necessary
- the respondent has also recommended that consideration be given to learners expecting to certificate in summer 2022.

One respondent who disagreed with the proposal questioned why an eligibility window was applicable. Another respondent suggested that results for qualifications in Category B should be available by 31 July.

Respondents that strongly disagreed commented that centres will not be able to advise learners appropriately or prepare them fully for the next stages of learning if they do not know what the learners have achieved.

Appeals

Question 15

Do you have any comments on the statutory guidance on appeals in the draft VCRF?

A total 43 responses were received to this question.

The majority of those that responded to this question were awarding bodies or exam boards and schools or colleges. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

There were also a small number of responses which stated that this question was not applicable to them. One awarding organisation reported that they would follow the same approach to appeals as those for GCSEs, AS and A level and shared their concerns with the proposed General Qualifications Alternative Awarding Framework.

Where respondents did address the question, the majority welcomed the flexibility offered in the statutory guidance on appeals but highlighted the difficulty in making decisions as part of any appeal which would involve making a judgement on a Teacher Assessed Grade. One respondent commented that they would wish to

avoid making this level of subjective judgement. They recommended that Ofqual preclude any new evidence being presented which had not been considered in the Teacher Assessed Grade and the inclusion of objective evidence of significant failure of the reasonable exercise of academic judgement. Another asked for further guidance or webinars in this area.

One respondent questioned whether learners would be expected to appeal to the centre or the awarding organisation when appealing a Teacher Assessed Grade.

Several respondents commented on the need for parity between VTQs and GCSEs, AS and A levels.

Several respondents requested more guidance and clarity around the appeals process, with one respondent commenting that the appeal route is not clear enough to students.

One awarding organisation commented that the statutory guidance in the VCRF refers to qualifications “similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels”. They asked for clarity on which VTQs this includes. They also asked for the guidance to recognise that learners cannot appeal where no results have been issued by the awarding organisation. The respondent has also highlighted the resource and time implications for awarding organisations and centres processing appeals. They recommended that centre errors be corrected in an alternative process to a formal appeal.

Another awarding organisation raised concerns about the risks of legal challenges for the awarding organisation by following the approach to GCSEs, AS and A levels and allowing appeals on the basis of unreasonable exercise of academic judgement.

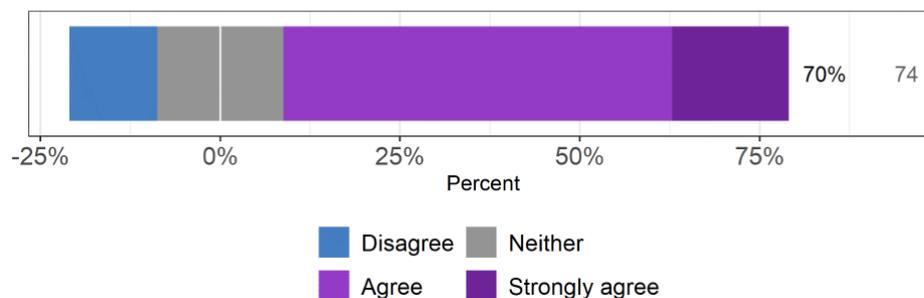
Other comments included:

- requests for additional guidance on the reasonable grounds for an appeal, what information should be provided as part of an appeal, and the timelines awarding organisations should follow
- one respondent who agreed with the proposed statutory guidance requested details on the proposed appeals process for the diploma programme
- one respondent recommended that where a result has been changed, a reason for this change needs to be included
- two respondents requested further clarification on the rationale for the proposed disapplication of H6.3(a) and questioned why an awarding organisation would not change a result if an appeals process identified that the result was incorrect (this point relates to question 16 below).

Question 16

To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to correcting incorrect results following an appeal?

Figure 12: Responses to question 16



A total of 80 responses were received to the question.

70% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed approach to correcting incorrect results following appeals, compared to 12% who disagreed. 18% neither agreed nor disagreed with our proposed approach. The majority of schools or colleges disagreed with our proposed approach, whereas the majority of awarding organisations agreed or strongly agreed with our approach.

A total of 31 respondents provided comments.

The majority of respondents who agreed with the proposal highlighted the need for learners to not be disadvantaged or placed in a detrimental position following an appeal. Respondents also called for parity with the approach for GCSEs, AS and A levels. Respondents recommended that where an appeal finds that a grade should be lower, it should only be changed if it is found to be too high due to maladministration.

Several respondents in support of the proposal asked for further guidance on Ofqual's proposal. One respondent asked for clarity on the circumstances where it would not be appropriate to correct the result. Another asked for guidance on the process when centres identify errors in results after the appeal window has closed.

Several respondents who disagreed with the proposal and one respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed questioned why an awarding organisation would not change a result if an appeals process identified that the result was incorrect.

One respondent who disagreed with the proposal commented that learners should be able to appeal to a centre to have their grades reviewed and not have to appeal to the awarding organisation. The respondent recommended that this appeal

process should be designed by the awarding organisation but undertaken at centre level.

One respondent who neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal raised concerns about the risk of legal challenges for the awarding organisation by following the approach to GCSEs, AS and A levels and allowing appeals on the basis of unreasonable exercise of academic judgement.

Assessment opportunity in autumn 2021

Question 17

Do you have any comments on the arrangements we should put in place for the provision of assessment opportunities in autumn 2021?

A total of 55 responses were received to this question.

The majority of those that responded to this question were awarding organisations and schools or colleges. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

There were a small number of responses that did not specifically address the question, with the respondents commenting instead that Teacher Assessed Grades, or internal assessment should continue to be used. There were also a small number of responses which stated that this question was not applicable to them.

Where respondents did address the question, the majority agreed with using the same approach as last year and some felt that assessment opportunities should be made available to learners in autumn 2021 if they require them to improve on a result based on a Teacher Assessed Grade. Many respondents commented on the need for parity between VTQs and GCSEs, AS and A levels.

Respondents also recommended that arrangements for autumn 2021 should follow a similar pattern to that used in in autumn 2020 which worked well for students for whom there was insufficient evidence to base a centre assessment grade earlier in the summer.

A number of respondents also identified areas where further clarification was needed. This included:

- whether learners that received a lower grade during their autumn assessment would be able to keep the higher grade originally issued
- whether this provision would only be available to learners who have completed their course of study

- what was the maximum number of external assessment attempts that a learner could take, whether a Teacher Assessed Grade would count towards these attempts and if so, when this would be confirmed for students wishing to undertake an assessment in autumn 2021.

A small number of respondents also commented on the need for the VCRF to remain in place should the ongoing impact of the pandemic continue to disrupt teaching and learning. Respondents also said that awarding organisations must ensure that they are providing centres which guidance on how to capture relevant evidence during the period of study should the autumn assessment opportunities not be able to go ahead.

A couple of respondents questioned the timing of assessment opportunities in autumn and asked for flexibility. One respondent explained that autumn provision may clash with learner enrolment in centres.

A number of awarding organisations, while agreeing with the proposed approach, highlighted that they already offer additional assessments throughout the year and questioned whether there would be much demand for additional autumn assessment opportunities. One commented that it should be left to the discretion of the awarding organisations to decide whether or not it would be appropriate to provide autumn assessment opportunities for some or all of their qualifications.

Some highlighted that not all qualifications are suited to an autumn assessment opportunity and asked for clarity on what should be included in any autumn provision. One awarding organisation commented that holding an autumn assessment opportunity would not be feasible for their qualifications which are assessed via a project evidenced based portfolio which would take several weeks to complete.

One awarding organisation commented that where qualification level Teacher Assessed Grades were being collected and individual unit grades were not being captured, it was not clear how resitting an exam would enable a learner to improve their result. It would not be possible to base a valid result on a single assessment without the inclusion of moderated non-examined assessment.

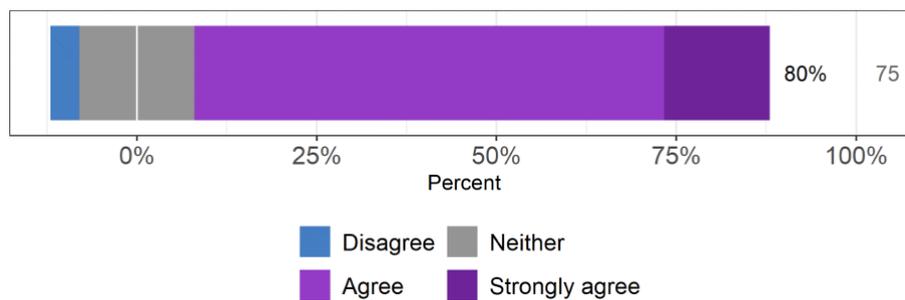
One respondent disagreed with the proposal and commented that it did not feel that it would aid learners' progression.

Adaptation of assessments and qualifications in Category A and Category B

Question 18

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed changes made to the requirements and proposed statutory guidance on adaptation?

Figure 13: Responses to question 18



A total of 75 responses were received to this question. 80% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes made to the requirements and proposed statutory guidance on adaptation, compared to 4% who disagreed. 16% neither agreed nor disagreed. There were no significant differences between respondent groups.

A total of 27 respondents provided comments. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses, from awarding organisations, academy chains, representative groups and schools and colleges.

Most respondents who agreed commented that they were pleased with the proposed approach as it was based on the Extended ERF with minimal changes. Respondents welcomed that the new framework allows centres to offer a Teacher Assessed Grade if students are not able to sit exams, which was not allowed under the Extended ERF. They also agreed with the flexibility given to awarding organisations to decide on their approach to the assessment of learner outcomes.

Some respondents commented that they agreed that delaying assessments should be kept to a minimum and only where learners need to prove occupational or practical skills. In those instances, consideration needs to be given as to how schools and colleges manage delayed assessments.

Some respondents wanted greater clarity and asked:

- for clear guidance on which qualifications require a delayed assessment and that this should be agreed between Ofqual and the awarding organisations
- for clarity for teachers of what it will mean for the qualifications that will be offered next year, for example if the adaptations will be carried forward to ensure fairness for students
- for clear guidance for teachers, students and employers on the arrangements for qualifications in Category B, which include an element of occupational assessment but which provide progression to higher education
- that awarding bodies should work together and have a consistent approach for similar qualifications

Respondents who disagreed suggested that there should be no delayed assessments. Instead, qualifications could be awarded using simulated assessment and a provisional licence to practise issued, pending a first year in employment with a follow-up observation. They commented that colleges are concerned of the overall impact of delayed assessment for qualifications in Category A.

These respondents also highlighted that not all awarding organisations offered remote assessment or invigilation, which meant that learners have not been assessed. They asked for these adaptations to be made available.

Some respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed commented that although adapted assessments were appropriate for certifying students, non-certifying students should receive Teacher Assessed Grades in all units that should have been completed in year 1 of study with a view (and hope) that next year pupils will be able to complete and be assessed in all units that are required in year 2.

A few respondents did not specifically address the question. One respondent commented that they were pleased to see that the importance, consideration and rigour of validating learners' occupational competence has been accounted for, enabling learners to develop their practical competency in addition to the theoretical knowledge. One respondent suggested that it would have been better to allow the submission of partially completed work for moderation for centres to have support from the moderators.

Other provisions

Question 19

Do you have any comments on the proposed provisions in the VCRF related to these decisions?

A total of 16 comments were received to this question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses from awarding organisations, academy chains, representative groups and schools and colleges.

The majority of respondents' comments were around the potential burden for awarding organisations, centres, teachers, exam officers and students. Comments included:

- the need for guidance to be provided in timely manner to help manage the resources
- where regulatory oversight and record-keeping activities would be required, it would be valuable if this could be recorded/communicated centrally rather than via lots of individual Responsible Officer notices
- consideration should be given to assessment burden on students to ensure that it is not greater for VTQs which are being studied as an equivalent to or alongside A Levels
- the burden on centres for results days cannot be underestimated and that early clarity over which VTQs will receive their results on results days is important
- awarding organisations commented that they would do everything possible to support centres in terms of limiting the burden of evidence that needs to be provided and how TAGs should be presented for external moderation (also considering the short time frame)
- burden on centres around recording adaptations needs to be considered and one respondent suggested that if an adaptation is an accepted form of assessment, then evidence should be kept for IQA and EQA but should not need to be submitted to the awarding organisation by the centre with the grade in a different format to normal
- colleges needed to have enough time to upload results before results day

Awarding organisations expressed concerns that the VCRF requirement for awarding organisations to maintain a record of their decisions on awarding qualifications falling under Category B would place a considerable resource burden

on smaller awarding organisations. They also expressed concerns about the shorter timescales to issue results in line with the dates agreed for GCSEs, AS and A levels and the impact on resources, particularly for smaller awarding organisations.

Awarding organisations commented that information around reasonable adjustments needed to be embedded in the operation of the alternative approach to awarding to ensure that learners who require them are not disadvantaged. They felt that additional guidance around the application of special considerations was also needed to support centres.

Respondents from colleges also made the following comments about the approach to awarding Functional Skills qualifications:

- clarity was needed regarding the threshold at which the college or awarding organisation can consider Teacher Assessed Grades
- it was important that all awarding organisations have the same arrangements in place to ensure parity across awarding organisations as well as between GCSEs and Functional Skills qualifications
- where colleges felt it would be appropriate for students to receive a Teacher Assessed Grade there should be a simple and transparent process to achieve this agreed by all awarding organisations
- there would be challenges of running assessments, especially at scale and for multiple papers when colleges are working under social distancing
- remote assessment and invigilation were not possible at scale – digital poverty, unreliable wi-fi, and sufficiently supporting students with learning difficulties need to be considered
- Functional Skills assessment would be based on the whole syllabus, which was not equitable with GCSEs
- there would not be sufficient time for students to take the multiple assessment opportunities they often need to pass which will impact progression

Question 20

Do you have any other comments on any other proposed provisions in the VCRF?

A total of 21 comments were received to this question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses from awarding organisations, academy chains, representative groups and schools and colleges.

A small number of respondents commented that they were happy overall with the proposed framework and did not provide any further information.

One respondent commented that they found the VCRF and accompanying documents more difficult to digest than previous frameworks and suggested a clearer referencing between documents.

One awarding organisation expressed concern that decisions on the VCRF were being made extremely late in the academic year considering exams were due to be sat in May-June. The awarding organisation added that this timescale would create significant additional risks because awarding organisations would have to implement an “untested” assessment method. They also requested the same reassurance from Ofqual that was provided in 2020: that if awarding organisations work in good faith and make the best decisions in the difficult circumstances, then Ofqual would not act in a punitive way.

Other respondents commented more generally on aspects of the regulatory approach, the use of Teacher Assessed Grades, and communications with centres rather than on the drafting of the VCRF.

Comments included:

- Functional Skills qualifications should come under group 1 of Category B and be considered for Teacher Assessed Grades as the starting point; otherwise student achievement would be impacted negatively because colleges would have to manage the high volume of students requiring exams while at the same time conforming to health and safety requirements
- all parties would need to be clear that Teacher Assessed Grades would be used where adapted assessment cannot be utilised
- there was a risk that centres would push to use Teacher Assessed Grades for qualifications where awarding organisations deemed it inappropriate. This would undermine the framework and may place a significant additional regulatory burden on awarding organisations by radically increasing the number of Teacher Assessed Grades they have to process. The use of Teacher Assessed Grades should be the exception rather than the ‘normal’ method of certification and that any communication around this needs to be consistent and clear
- there was a need for timely, clear and consistent communication from awarding organisations to colleges and centres, clearly signalling who to contact for queries and further information
- it was important to be mindful of the burden on learners and on teachers as the timescales for quality assuring and issuing results in 2021 were very challenging
- there was a need for clarity on how results would be issued to year 12 students who had missed exams this summer

One awarding organisation commented that maintaining public confidence in qualifications for the summer 2021 awarding process is critical, however, this depends on more factors, rather than just the information individual awarding organisation provide to centres.

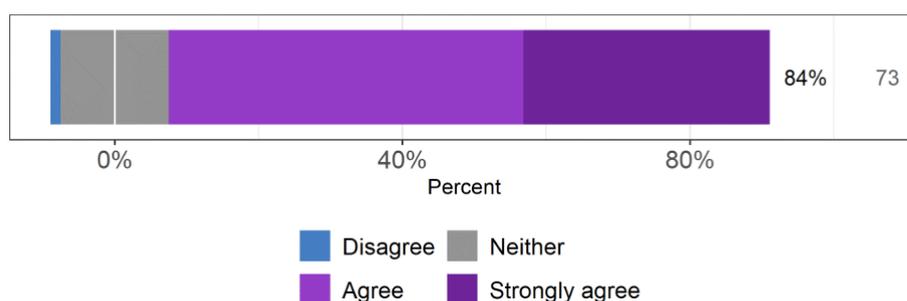
One respondent commented that they welcomed the additional guidance provided relating to special considerations, including further clarification on when they can be applied.

Equality Impact Assessment

Question 21

To what extent do you agree or disagree that it would be helpful to provide VTQ centres with information about making objective judgements?

Figure 14: Responses to question 21



A total 73 responses were received to the question.

61% of those who responded to the question either agreed or strongly agreed that it would be helpful to provide VTQ centres with information about making objective judgements, compared to 1% who disagreed. 11% neither agreed nor disagreed.

A total of 40 respondents provided comments. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges.

Respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal felt it was important for ensuring fairness and equality. Some noted that unconscious bias needed to be recognised in order to make objective judgements.

Respondents thought that Ofqual providing the information, rather than individual awarding organisations, would ensure consistency and reduce burden on centres offering qualifications from multiple awarding organisations. Some noted that the guidance should be generic, and apply equally to VTQs and GCSEs, AS and A levels. Any differences in approach should be clearly identified. Some respondents noted that such guidance could help support conversations about how grades were reached, particularly with students and parents or in the context of appeals.

Some respondents noted that this information would be particularly helpful for centres used to delivering externally assessed qualifications.

Some respondents stressed that the information should be provided quickly if it was to be effective, as in some centres the early stages of the teacher assessment process was already underway.

A few respondents commented that it would be helpful if other support was provided as well as information on making objective judgements, including:

- a standardised check sheet
- online training modules for centres and teachers
- webinars or other staff development and support
- wider sector standardisation

Only one respondent said that it would not be helpful to provide information for VTQ centres, as they felt that teachers should be capable of assessing students correctly without further guidance.

Of those who stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal, some awarding organisations understood this question to refer to advice on making objective judgements to be provided by awarding organisations to centres. They said that while they agreed with the proposal in principal, they were unclear about the scope of what was intended and concerned about the potential burden for themselves and the feasibility of producing such guidance in a short timescale.

One awarding organisation commented that the information Ofqual had provided on making objective judgements the previous year had been too 'esoteric' and insufficiently applicable and suggested that if information were to be provided this year, it should aim to be more practical, digestible and applicable.

Question 22

Do you have any comments on the information that should be included in the proposed information for centres about making objective judgements to meet the needs of VTQ centres and learners?

A total of 36 responses were received to this question. Of those who commented, the majority were official responses from awarding organisations, representative groups and schools and colleges.

Several respondents commented that information given should be brief, accessible and easily digestible. Some respondents also suggested that it should be practical and applicable rather than theoretical, with some requesting a simple checklist or set of prompts for staff to follow, to aid the decision process. Other respondents wanted fuller information including exemplar materials.

Respondents suggested that the information given should be similar in principle to information already provided, to avoid confusion.

Respondents thought guidance on the following should be included in the proposed information for centres:

- types of bias, including specific examples, advice on both positive and negative discrimination, and how to avoid unconscious bias
- practical suggestions for marking objectively to avoid bias, such as anonymised marking, examples of good and bad judgements, and using student data to check the objectivity of judgements
- guidance on the evidence required, for example a definition of valid evidence, examples of the types of evidence that can be used, and the minimum required evidence. Respondents also requested guidance on using incomplete assessments as evidence
- internal quality assurance processes, such as the methods and processes for reaching assessment decisions and how to standardise this across teachers
- how to avoid conflicts of interest
- a reminder that centres should continue to apply for and apply reasonable adjustments, and to retain records of where this has occurred

A number of respondents, including some awarding organisations, wanted information on how to take into account any adverse circumstances due to lockdown (such as where a learner had to self-isolate, had different levels of support, were mentally affected, etc). This included:

- whether to take these into account when deciding on the Teacher Assessed Grades
- how or if to apply Special Consideration where students have not been able to access the support they would normally have access to at centres due to lockdown or where students have experienced traumatic events such as a death in the immediate family which has had an impact on the students' performance
- factors which should not be taken into consideration when offering Teacher Assessed Grades, such as comparative rates of attendance between learners

One awarding organisation emphasised that the information for centres should include clarification that the student performance is the primary source of grading evidence and that data should only be as another source of evidence to add assurance to the judgements made, based on the performance evidence of the individual student.

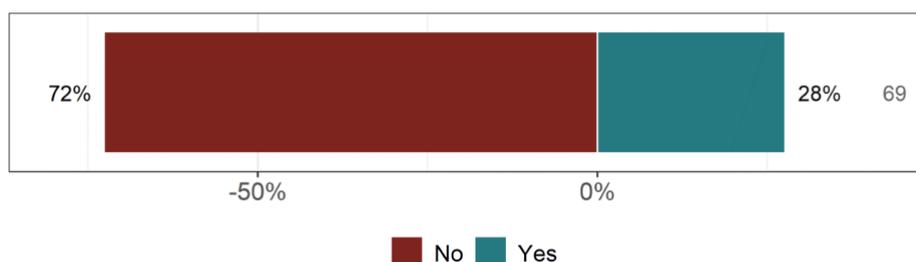
A representative body noted that while the general Public Sector Equality Duty setting out a legal requirement for equality impact assessments to be completed has been removed, public bodies must still give due regard to the need to avoid discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for all protected groups when making policy decisions. As such, centres should be required to make a declaration alongside their submissions stating they have taken into account the interests of students with protected characteristics, within the meaning of equalities law.

Some respondents commented that online training sessions or webinars as well as written guidance would also be helpful.

Question 23

Are there any potential positive or negative equality impacts arising from the proposed provisions in the VCRF, apart from those we have explored?

Figure 15: Responses to question 23



Sixty-nine respondents responded to this question. Of these, 50 said there were no additional impacts, and 19 said that there were additional impacts which had not been identified. Twenty-nine respondents provided additional comments to this question. Of those who commented, the majority (23) were official responses from awarding organisations, academy chains, representative groups and schools and colleges. We received comments from 6 individuals, including teachers, centre staff, parents and carers.

Comments to this question covered equalities considerations from across our proposals. Some respondents commented on issues we had identified as part of the equalities impact assessment, others highlighted additional issues that they did not feel had been considered. We set out in this section the key themes that were identified. In the main, most themes were raised by a range of respondent types, however where a theme appeared to be raised more often by a particular respondent type we have set that out.

Teacher Assessed Grades

A large number of the comments received related to Teacher Assessed Grades. These comments included:

- a large number who felt that Functional Skills should receive Teacher Assessed Grades in the same way as GCSEs. Respondents thought it was unclear under what circumstances these would be permitted. They also commented that the timing of the release of Teacher Assessed Grades would need to take account of the uses of Functional Skills qualifications, for example where they are required by students to complete apprenticeships
- the need for a standardisation approach to be put in place to identify and rectify unconscious bias in the grades determined by teachers
- the potential for students to be disadvantaged where teachers or centres are unfamiliar with qualifications, in particular where qualifications have recently been revised
- the potential for some students to be disadvantaged based on parental pressure for high grades being greater at some centres than others
- the difficulty of taking account the reasonable adjustments that students would normally have had in place, when determining Teacher Assessed Grades. Respondents commented that awarding organisations would have limited ability, beyond providing guidance for centres, to account for this
- that the flexibility in the evidence that can be used for Teacher Assessed Grades means that there may be high levels of subjectivity when determining grades
- that it would be important to ensure that when applying criteria for selecting centres to sample, these did not lead to certain types of centre, such as those with higher proportions of SEND students or students from disadvantaged backgrounds, being more likely to be selected and potentially have the Teacher Assessed Grades adjusted than others.

Differential impacts and lost learning

A number of respondents were concerned about the differential impact of the disruption on students, and the potential for lost learning to disadvantage some students more than others. Impacts identified included:

- the difficulty of assessing the impact on individual students as all will have been affected differently. Respondents commented that the Head of centre should be responsible for finding out exactly how each student has been impacted

- the impact of a lack of normal support for students, including SEND students
- that it would be important to ensure that any assessments that are taken are accessible and take account of the needs of individual students (for example those with visual impairments)
- the need to consider the impact on young carers and students who have experienced illness or grief
- in addition to the impacts on students, different teachers would have been affected differently, which could impact the way that Teacher Assessed Grades are awarded in different centres
- that students who have been unable to access the curriculum, through no fault of their own, may be disadvantaged if guidance and support provided for centres was insufficient
- that many students had not had access to equipment or facilities they would normally have, due to public health restrictions. They commented that the impact of this would be felt particularly by SEND students studying in a mainstream setting.

Maintaining standards

Respondents commented on the potential for students to be disadvantaged depending how standards are set.

An awarding organisation commented on the difficulties of ensuring VTQ students are not disadvantaged compared to those taking GCSEs, AS or A levels, as there was currently insufficient information about the national standards that would be set for these qualifications. An awarding organisation commented that the nature of the arrangements means that standards will be set at local level, and it would be difficult to ensure standards at a national level.

Two awarding organisations commented that the VCRF allowed sufficient flexibility to ensure as many students as possible were able to access assessments. They commented that some students could be disadvantaged, however, due to expectations from some students and teachers that all qualifications should use a similar approach to assessment, even where it may not be appropriate to do so. In particular, there were concerns about students and parents having an expectation that grade standards would be lower in 2021, even for assessments where Teacher Assessed Grades were not being used. They commented that it would be important to be clear in communications that alternative approaches to Teacher Assessed Grades would be used in some qualifications.

Unit grades

A small number of respondents commented that some students could be disadvantaged if awarding organisations do not report unit grades. They said this would particularly affect 'in-flight' students. Respondents also commented that students from disadvantaged backgrounds or certain ethnic minorities may be more likely to be taking qualifications where unit grades may not be issued, so could be disproportionately affected.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

Question 24

What new activities do you expect to carry out as a result of these proposals and what additional costs will you incur across the range of qualifications you offer? *Please give monetised values for these additional costs where possible, covering for example, direct delivery; people and staff; equipment and administration.*

Fifty-six respondents provided comments in response to this question. Responses to this question were from across a range of respondent types. The majority of responses (56) were organisational responses, with most of these (36) from awarding organisations. We also received organisational responses from schools, colleges, academy chains and training providers, and representative groups. We received 10 personal responses from teachers, centre staff, parents and carers.

Respondents generally felt it was difficult to provide accurate estimates of costs. While some provided estimates, the majority of those who responded provided more general views of the types of activities they would undertake, but not the specific costs associated with carrying out these activities. We set out in this section the key themes identified and group them under the following headings: direct delivery costs, people and staff costs, opportunity costs.

Direct delivery costs

Qualification delivery costs - general

The biggest area where additional costs were likely to be incurred were general administrative costs. These included:

- provision of centre support and communication of new arrangements to centres, which would be on top of the costs of communicating arrangements under the previous frameworks
- provision of 1:1 support for centres or other support, such as webinars and creating dedicated support resources on websites. It was possible that some temporary staff may be required to support these activities which would have an associated cost
- costs associated with exam booking and registration
- running delayed assessments, if these happened outside of normal teaching time
- the cost of equipment needed to deliver assessments remotely
- for centres, the time cost for additional staff marking, moderation and quality assurance, as well as the costs of evidence collation and retention
- costs associated with exam preparation and revision costs, including for any additional assessment series that are made available.

Awarding organisations commented on the additional costs of system devolvement to process and manage Teacher Assessed Grades. In some instances, these would be changes to existing systems. In others, entirely new IT solutions were being implemented to deliver this. Awarding organisations were also considering investing in remote invigilation systems to manage remote assessments.

Awarding organisations commented on the potential costs associated with centres who decided not to register students and to hold back taking assessments due to the uncertainty about how results would be determined. They said this was particularly the case for those qualifications where developing the skills as part of the qualification was more important than achievement of the qualification itself.

Developing new assessment arrangements for the VCRF

Awarding organisations commented on the additional costs of developing processes and procedures, developing assessments themselves, and potential system development costs for implementing these. They also referred to additional costs associated with engaging with centres, producing new guidance and support documents, and implementing alternative quality assurance processes. Awarding

organisations would also incur additional staff costs for the work involved in implementing alternative arrangements. Some expected this process would be more costly this year than in 2020, as there are likely to be a greater number of students who are eligible for Teacher Assessed Grades or who require adapted assessments.

Delivering assessments

Respondents identified a number of additional costs relating to the delivery of assessments. These included:

- running and invigilating mock exams, and the cost of additional marking for teachers
- the additional costs of delivering practical assessments due to having to meet public health requirements
- the cost of delivering any other assessments that take place. Additional sessions or rooms may be needed, alongside staff to administer these additional assessments, while complying with public health requirements.

Quality assurance

A number of respondents commented on the costs of additional activities relating to quality assurance that would need to be put in place. These included:

- the potential for an increased number of audits, moderation and verification activities
- additional costs of quality assuring the delivery of adapted assessments, and Teacher Assessed Grades
- costs of sampling of centre assessments
- the cost of reviewing risk ratings for centres in light of adapted approaches
- modifications to internal systems to facilitate alternative quality assurance arrangements
- implementation of proctoring systems for online invigilation
- increased costs as a result of the likely increased number of appeals.

People and staff costs

As well as the people and staff costs included in the direct qualification delivery themes, respondents also highlighted further impact on staff. There is further analysis about this theme under question 26.

Respondents commented that additional sessions would be needed over weekends and evenings to complete practical training and assessment, and ensure skills

development to enable progression. Respondents also commented that even where activities taking place were not new, the timing of these, occurring alongside teaching and learning, would pose an additional burden on centres.

The impact of results days being brought forward would impact on staff costs, particularly where temporary staff were needed to cover staff who had already booked holidays.

Opportunity Costs

Some awarding organisations commented that their arrangements would remain similar to those in place last year, so the framework itself would not result in additional activities. They did however comment that the activities associated with the consultation process, and the need to update guidance to reflect the new framework and principles, as well as the delay in assessments while this process took place, had posed an increased burden. These activities had diverted awarding organisation resources away from other planned activities.

Specific costs

Where specific estimated costs were provided, these included estimated costs of:

- customer engagement, marketing and communications (£75k - 100k)
- developing and implementing IT systems required for qualification delivery (£16k - £300k)
- quality assurance and regulatory activity (£7.5k - £25k)

Question 25

What savings do you expect to make as a result of your proposed approach? Please give monetised values where possible for any savings you may realise, compared with a normal qualification year and also compared with qualification delivery in 2020.

Fifty respondents provided comments in response to this question. The majority of responses (42) were organisational responses, with most of these (27) from awarding organisations. We also received organisational responses from schools, colleges, academy chains and training providers, and representative groups. We received 8 personal responses from teachers and centre staff, and awarding organisation employees.

We set out in this section the key themes that were identified.

The majority of those who commented did not identify savings. A number of respondents including teachers, centres and awarding organisations commented that there would be no savings. Where respondents did identify savings, these included:

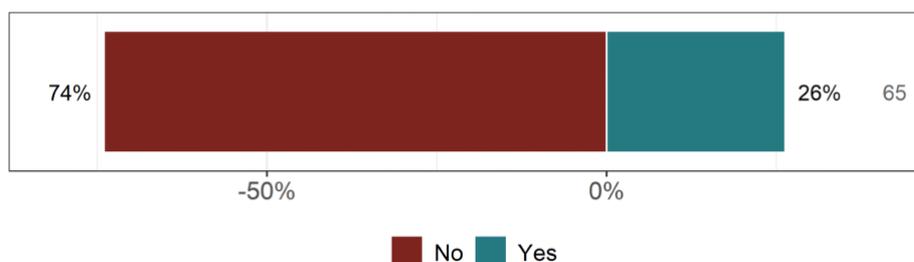
- not having to pay for exam invigilation
- savings resulting from using remote assessments. In particular, this could be the case where examiner travel costs are saved for international assessments, although some of this would be offset by the cost of equipment needed to deliver such assessments remotely
- potential savings with external verification due to there being less student evidence to consider. There may also be savings in relation to travel costs of external verifiers
- teachers and centres commented that there may be potential savings if awarding organisations refunded exam fees or the cost of exam entries
- where exams do not go ahead, there are small savings for not having to book external venues to host assessments or invigilate these
- savings such as printing and postage costs
- savings on the cost of examiners, although some of these would be passed back to centres through refunds of external assessment booking fees.

A number of respondents who did identify potential savings commented that any savings would be likely to be offset by the additional costs associated with other activities they would need to carry out as a result of the alternative arrangements.

Question 26

Are there any other regulatory impacts, costs or benefits associated with the implementation of our proposals that have not already been identified?

Figure 16: Responses to question 26



Twenty respondents provided comments in response to this question. The majority of responses (15) were organisational responses, from awarding organisations, schools, colleges, academy chains and training providers, representative groups and local authorities. We received 5 personal responses from teachers, centre staff, parents and carers.

We set out in this section the key themes that were identified.

- respondents were concerned about the impact of the new requirements on teacher workload. A representative group commented that the additional work required to issue results this summer would increase teachers' workload, and there was 'no slack in the system' to allow them to take up these additional duties. They also commented on the additional workload as a result of having to run assessments in line with public health requirements. They suggested that expectations around administrative or ancillary tasks could be reduced to help teachers manage this workload. Respondents also commented that there may be an increased workload for HE admissions staff of having to update offers, especially for qualifications that do not provide unit level results.
- respondents commented on the cost of students catching up on lost learning, to be able to perform effectively in assessments. They also commented on the cost of ensuring students are prepared for practical assessments, where these are continuing because the qualification signals occupational competence.
- respondents commented on the potential for increased stress and anxiety which could lead to staff illness and a decline in students' mental health.

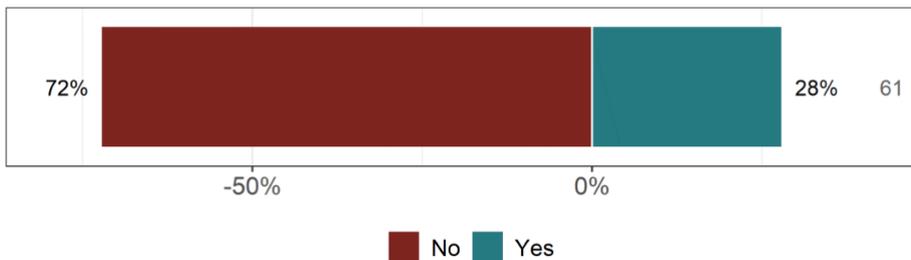
- some respondents commented that an increased number of appeals, compared to a normal year, would negatively impact the time, money and resource available.
- some awarding organisations noted the impact of having to familiarise themselves with the new requirements over a short time period. Awarding organisations commented on the impact of other work, such as the implementation of Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny arrangements, which added to the burden on them of meeting the VCRF.

Some respondents also commented that because the arrangements built on those put in place last year, many of the adaptations previously put in place would be able to continue and would provide some degree of stability for centres. An awarding organisation commented that there would be some benefits as a result of the remote approaches being developed potentially continuing in the long run, which could be a benefit to awarding organisations, students and centres.

Question 27

Do you anticipate any overall impact on qualification fees as a result of these proposals?

Figure 17: Responses to question 27



Thirty-two respondents provided comments in response to this question. The majority of responses (26) were organisational responses. Sixteen of these were from awarding organisations, with the rest from schools or colleges and representative groups. We received 6 personal responses from teachers, centre staff, parents and carers.

Views on this question varied between those who thought fees should be reduced, those who thought they may need to increase and others who thought they were likely to remain the same. Generally, respondents thought it was too early to be able to confirm the impact on fees, as this would depend on the costs of delivering assessments, which was currently unknown.

We set out in this section the key themes that were identified.

Reduced fees

A number of respondents, including teachers, centre staff, parents and carers commented that they thought awarding organisations should charge less as they would not be marking assessments. They felt that awarding organisations would be making savings on the delivery of assessments, and these savings should be passed on to centres.

Some awarding organisations commented that where costs were reduced as a result of the new arrangements, and these savings were not offset by costs elsewhere, they would seek to pass savings on to centres where possible.

Increased fees

A representative group commented that there was a risk of fees being increased to offset the cost of the alternative arrangements put in place for 2021.

Some respondents, including awarding organisations, commented that while current fees may not be increased, or may be refunded in some instances, overall costs for awarding organisations had increased, which may ultimately lead to some increases. Many cost increases to date have been absorbed by awarding organisations, but this may not be possible in future. Some respondents commented that fees may have to increase to cover specific costs for taking assessments in certain ways, for example additional charges to cover the cost of remote invigilation for those taking assessments remotely.

No change

Some awarding organisations commented that they did not plan to increase fees as a result of meeting the requirements of the VCRF. Awarding organisations generally commented that where possible, they would seek not to increase fees if possible, but could not guarantee this.

A number of awarding organisations commented that their costs had increased as a result of the new arrangements, and that where possible, they had not passed these additional costs on to centres to date.

Some respondents commented that it was not possible to predict costs accurately at this stage, therefore fees would remain the same, but may need to be reviewed and revised as any costs or savings become clearer.

Future changes

Respondents commented that new approaches introduced as part of the pandemic may lead to alternative ways of delivering qualifications in the future. As such, the approach to fees, and the activities covered by those fees, may need to be reviewed

and changed in future, although it is not possible currently to specify exactly what these changes may be.

Question 28

Are there any additional or alternative approaches we could take to minimise the regulatory impact of our proposals?

Thirty-six respondents provided comments in response to this question. The majority of responses (29) were organisational responses. Twenty of these were from awarding organisations, with the rest from schools or colleges, academy chains and training providers, and representative groups. We received 7 personal responses from teachers, centre staff, parents and carers.

We set out in this section the key themes that were identified.

Reduce burden on centres

Respondents commented that awarding organisations should focus on reducing the burden on centres not just in relation to Teacher Assessed Grades, but also following the issue of results. They commented that awarding organisations should share best practice with one another and make it easy for centres to correct any mistakes that are identified.

Respondents commented that consistent approaches and timely communications from awarding organisations, as well as ensuring sampling approaches are manageable, would help minimise the impact.

Qualifications categories

Some respondents commented on the categorisation of qualifications between Category A and Category B of the VCRF. An awarding organisation commented that not all qualifications would fit neatly into the two categories and it would be important to ensure consistency between awarding organisations, so similar qualifications are categorised in the same way.

Regulatory approach

A number of awarding organisation respondents made comments relating to the potential impact as a result of Ofqual's regulatory approach. These comments included:

- it would be helpful for all communications from Ofqual to be put in a central place to ensure that important communications are not missed. Awarding

organisations commented that having clear and timely communications, sufficient advance notification, and reasonable timescales for any requests for information or data would help manage the impact of meeting any requirements

- that other work they were involved in with Ofqual would impact on their implementation of the VCRF. In particular, awarding organisations were concerned about the timelines for implementing new Centre Assessment Standards Scrutiny requirements, and requested that these were delayed to allow awarding organisations to focus on the VCRF
- concerns about the burden of complying with data requests from Ofqual, particularly if these were ad hoc and had short timelines for responding
- that while the flexibility in the VCRF was welcomed, if there were specific expectations on awarding organisations, then these should be made clear. They commented that Ofqual should ensure its regulatory approach was proportionate and awarding organisations were given sufficient time to respond to requests for information
- that future regulatory activities, such as the statement of compliance process, should follow a similar simplified approach to that which was put in place in 2020
- it would be important that record-keeping expectations were reasonable, so that awarding organisations could focus on delivering assessments, and not on filling in forms.

Annex A: List of organisational respondents

When completing the consultation questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

These are the organisations that submitted a non-confidential response:

- ABMA Education Ltd
- ABRSM
- ACCA
- Active IQ
- Ada, the National College for Digital Skills
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- AQA
- ASCL
- ASDAN
- Association of Colleges
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers
- bbodance
- Bedford College Group
- Blackpool Sixth Form College
- Cambridge Assessment International Education
- Cambridge Assessment International Education
- Cheshire College South and West
- Christ's Hospital
- CILEx
- City & Guilds
- CPCAB
- Dudley College of Technology
- EAL
- Foundation school
- Gateway Qualifications Ltd
- Graded Qualifications Alliance
- IBO
- Incorporated Society of Musicians
- Joint response from Skills and Education Group Awards and BIIAB Qualifications Ltd
- King's College School Wimbledon
- Lantra
- Laser Learning Awards
- Mark Rutherford
- National Education Union
- NCFE
- NCTJ Training Ltd
- Newfield School
- OCN London
- OCR

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General Qualifications in 2020 - 2021*

- Open College Network NI (OCN NI)
- Pearson Education
- Saint Francis Xavier Sixth Form College
- SFJ Awards
- sfjawards.com
- South Thames Colleges Group
- St George CofE Foundation School
- St George's C of E School
- The Chalk Hills Academy
- The Mirfield Free Grammar
- TQUK
- UAL
- University and College Union
- WALTHAM FOREST ADULT LEARNING SERVICE
- WCSM
- WJEC



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