

GUIDANCE

The awarding of vocational and technical qualifications, and other general qualifications, in summer 2020

Guidance for centres

Version 4, 20 August 2020

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Note: this is version 4 of the document first published on 14 April and updated on 22 May and 29 July. Substantive changes are indicated by an update box, with the date of the update shown below it. [Previous versions of this document can be accessed via the National Archives](#).

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About this document

This document is for those working in colleges, training providers and other settings (“centres”) where assessments for vocational and technical (VTQs) qualifications were scheduled to be taken in summer 2020.

In this guidance we explain the awarding of VTQs and general qualifications other than GCSEs, AS and A levels this summer¹. We outline what we expect from awarding organisations and what centres should expect to happen over the coming weeks.

The awarding of VTQs is different this summer

Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions have led to the cancellation of exams and prevented many assessments from being taken as planned.

We designed an approach that ensures, as far as possible, that learners receive results to enable them to progress to the next stage of their lives without further disruption. Awarding organisations drew on a range of evidence to ensure that results are as reliable and consistent as possible, so that they are worthy of public confidence and education providers and employers can be confident this year’s results carry the same currency as previous and future years. It is important that learners who have completed VTQs are not disadvantaged compared to their peers who have completed GCSEs and A levels. It is also important that learners receiving results this year are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged compared to learners in previous or subsequent years.

The implementation of these temporary arrangements was challenging, especially when we are all living and working within the necessary public health restrictions. These arrangements require time, effort, understanding and different ways of doing things – by learners, centres, and by awarding organisations. We have carefully balanced these impacts with the need to generate fair and reliable results that allow learners to progress.

You will know that the VTQ landscape is complex. Unlike GCSEs and A levels, there is no single approach to awarding that would work for all types of VTQs because of the very different qualification structures and assessment methods used.

¹ Details on arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020>

The statistical standardisation approach, which had been used in A levels and GCSEs, was not used by Awarding Organisations in most vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs). Most VTQs are structured differently to A levels and GCSEs, and so the approach to awarding developed by awarding organisations has also been different. The way in which results are arrived at will vary, and arrangements for different types of qualifications differ, depending on their primary purpose.

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There is some variance in the mitigations used by different awarding organisations offering similar qualifications (and even, in a few exceptional cases, variances for different learners on the same qualification).

In the majority of VTQs, awarding organisations were able to use evidence of work already completed during the course, and use this as a basis for calculating the results they issued. This has meant that results have been calculated from a trusted evidence base that includes completed assessments. Indeed, for many qualifications, learners have taken adapted assessments and so there was no calculation process needed at all. Of those qualifications where awarding organisations did use calculation, not all used centre assessment grades (CAGs). And where CAGs were used, awarding organisations did so in a range of ways, usually as one of a number of sources of evidence and often at unit level rather than qualification level. This means that where CAGs were used in VTQs, they had less influence on the final grade.

That's why we have seen little divergence between the results that schools and colleges thought learners would get, and the results that have been issued for the majority of qualifications awarded this year. awarding organisations have largely not found it necessary to moderate downwards their results based on statistical standardisation.

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We recognise that this has complicated arrangements for centres but it is inevitable; each awarding organisation has had to make judgements about what evidence they need in order to award results safely. In this document we set out our expectations, which are designed to promote a consistent approach between awarding organisations.

Our expectation is that, through these arrangements, the majority of learners who planned to take exams and assessments this summer for progression to either further or higher education or to employment, will receive a result or be able to take an adapted assessment. But we recognise that, for various reasons, it will not be possible for all learners who were registered to take an assessment this summer to receive a result, and they might have to wait for the next available assessment opportunity.

The awarding of vocational and technical qualifications, and other general qualifications, in summer 2020

Some qualifications – in particular, those which are not used for progression – fall outside the scope of the extraordinary regulatory framework that we put in place (though this does not necessarily mean that awards will not be made). Awarding organisations will provide further information about the arrangements for these qualifications.

BTECS and other Level 2 and 3 qualifications

Those few awarding organisations that used statistical modelling to determine the result have considered what the changes with A levels and GCSEs mean for their qualifications. We have been informed that a small number of awarding organisations are going to reissue results as a result.

Those awarding organisations that used qualification-level centre assessment grades have been able to recalculate results and issue them on time. Others will need more time, because their approach is more complex.

OCR have said that their Cambridge National results will issue next week (week commencing 24 August 2020). Pearson, which initially did not think there would need to be significant changes made, has now decided to revise its arrangements to ensure that student qualification-level results better reflect the unit-level results that students have already secured through internally-assessed units. We have been assured by awarding organisations that no grades will be reduced as a result of this process.

Awarding organisations are working as quickly as possible to confirm results as soon as possible, recognising the impact that delays are having on schools, colleges and students. No learner's result will go down as a consequence of regrading.

If students have questions about vocational and technical qualifications they are taking, they should speak to you in the first instance. There is more information about the [grading of vocational and technical qualifications](#) on our website.

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What this means for you

- Calculated results were the starting point for qualifications used for progression to further or higher education. Most learners taking most qualifications in this category received a calculated result.

Some calculated results are now being reissued and may arrive later than you would have originally expected. You should keep in touch with your awarding organisation to understand if this affects results you are expecting and what this means for your learners.

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- For some qualifications, calculated results were not appropriate – for example, those that are used to signal occupational competence, are about having the skills required for the job, or that could have professional or health and safety implications, or where there is insufficient evidence to support a calculated result. Awarding organisations have adapted assessments for these types of qualifications.
- Despite this, a delay to the assessment of some qualifications was unfortunately inevitable; for example, where there was no way of calculating a result or adapting an assessment in a way that did not undermine its reliability. In some circumstances we know that it was not appropriate to issue results at all, as to do so would undermine confidence in the qualifications.

Where calculated results were to be issued and/or adapted assessments taken, we expected that all reasonable measures were taken to ensure those assessments and results were safe, valid and reliable, with standards maintained as far as possible.

We made available information about how results will be arrived at for the majority of learners (referred to as the “principal mitigation” – that is, calculate, adapt or delay) for each qualification we regulate. [An interactive tool is available](#), which allows centres and learners to easily search for qualifications and find this information.

Which learners these arrangements apply to

These arrangements applied to learners who were due to take assessments towards unit or qualification results between 20 March (when classroom-based delivery was suspended) and 31 July 2020. This includes those learners who may be only part way through their programme of study (for example in year 12) and will continue with learning towards their qualification after this date – for example, if they had planned to take an assessment on one or more units of a modular course half-way through a 2-year programme of study.

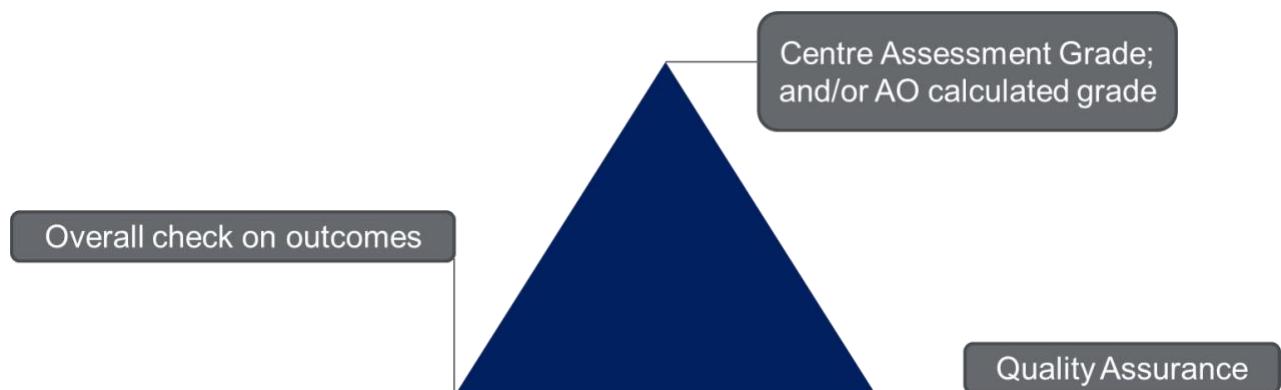
Calculated results

Qualifications where the principal mitigation was calculated results vary widely in their size, assessment structures, grading structures and delivery models. Learners taking these qualifications may have completed different amounts of formal assessment before 20 March. This means that awarding organisations have had to implement different approaches to calculating results that are appropriate within different contexts.

We worked with awarding organisations to ensure that, despite these variations, there is as much consistency in their approach as possible. In most cases similar qualifications and/or qualifications with similar contexts have had similar ways of calculating results for learners, but awarding organisations have needed to introduce some variations to secure necessary evidence of learner ability.

One of the ways we helped awarding organisations take a consistent approach to generating calculated results was by being clear about the 3 essential elements that must be in place:

1. A centre assessment grade (generated by the centre) and/or a calculated grade (determined by the awarding organisation) based on results they already hold for the learner.
2. Quality assurance of the overall calculated result.
3. A check of overall qualification level outcomes and results profile, to confirm it is in line with expectations.



Calculated results drew on a range of different types of evidence, and this may have varied depending upon the qualification. Awarding organisations have considered what evidence is available to them and developed the most appropriate approach for each qualification. Awarding organisations may have asked you to provide one or more of the following:

1. A centre assessment grade (CAG) – this is derived from evidence held within the centre and is the judgement about the grade that each learner is most likely to have achieved had they been able to complete their assessments in summer 2020. A CAG could be at unit level or for the qualification overall, depending upon the structure of the qualification and the proportion of units already completed.
2. A rank order of learners, for them to use as part of the quality assurance.
3. Internal assessment grades for completed work that has not yet been externally moderated or verified.

To generate calculated results, and as part of their quality assurance, awarding organisations may have also drawn on evidence they already held, including:

- banked marks or grades for completed unit assessments – including external assessments as well as internal assessments where the marks/grades have already been through the normal moderation or verification process
- data about how their qualifications function, for example, whether performance on one component is predictive of performance on another component
- data and information about each centre, for example their historical performance qualification outcomes, risk profiles, centre visit information and records of any investigations
- prior attainment data, where this is appropriate

The quality assurance process and the overall check on outcomes are both important parts of the process, because they ensure that the results awarded will be fair and sufficiently reliable. So, we have asked awarding organisations to ensure that they use at least one source of trusted evidence along with a sufficiently robust basis for quality assurance.

In cases where there was little or no banked unit data, or where CAGs were not possible and/or there was little opportunity or evidence to support the generation of CAGs, or to support the quality assurance process, an awarding organisation may have determined that this is below the minimum evidential threshold. In these cases, it was not possible to calculate a result and learners affected will have been offered an adapted assessment wherever possible, or will have had to wait until assessments can be rescheduled.

We recognise that the process of using CAGs as the basis of calculated results relies heavily on teachers' and tutors' judgements. The [Department for Education has confirmed that it will not hold schools/colleges to account on the basis of exams and assessment data from summer 2020](#), and that the data should not be used by others, such as Ofsted, local authorities, academy trusts, and so on to hold

schools/colleges or teachers to account. DfE will not be publishing, or sharing, institution-level school/college accountability measures, such as Progress 8 and Level 3 Value Added, using the summer 2020 data.

Those few awarding organisations that used statistical modelling to determine the result have considered what the changes with A levels and GCSEs mean for their qualifications. We have been informed that a small number of awarding organisations are going to reissue results as a result

Those awarding organisations that used qualification-level centre assessment grades have been able to recalculate results and issue them on time. Others will need more time, because their approach is more complex.

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Adapted assessments

For some qualifications, a calculated result approach would not have been suitable, in particular for those that are designed to signal occupational or professional or regulated competence (including licence to practise). Providing a result that signals competence that has not been evidenced to the usual expected standards creates risks, including those relating to health and safety. It could mean that a student does not possess the skills required by the role to which the qualification relates, or does not meet the standards set by professional bodies or in regulations. There might also be cases where there was insufficient evidence on which to base a calculated result.

In these cases, the principal mitigation is for awarding organisations to adapt their assessments. The main options for adapting qualifications that have been used by awarding organisations include:

- changing the way in which assessments are delivered, for example using an online rather than paper-based test, or carrying out an assessment remotely rather than face to face
- adapting assessment methods, for example using a practical simulation in place of an observation, or professional discussion in place of a practical demonstration
- changing invigilation requirements, for example allowing the use of on-line invigilation
- waiving or adjusting work experience or placement requirements, for example allowing candidates to have undertaken a shorter period of work experience
- changing the way in which a qualification is quality assured, for example allowing for remote or online standardisation or moderation, where this is a change to an assessment strategy

Awarding organisations considered the most appropriate approaches to adaptation of their assessments, and what is suitable and practicable under public health restrictions. They have provided guidance for you on how to deliver any adaptions to assessment.

We recognise that there may be cases where some candidates are unable to access adapted assessments, and that this might vary in different geographical areas where public health restrictions vary. We asked awarding organisations to ensure, as far as possible, that any adaptations minimise any disadvantage to learners. We recognise that this might not be possible for every learner, and in some cases, there may be no alternative but to wait until assessment can be rescheduled.

Although the process of submitting CAGs is now complete, we expect that use of adapted assessments will continue at some centres until further notice.

What this means for you

You should have received information from your awarding organisations about what you need to do to ensure that adapted assessments for VTQs and apprenticeships operate effectively, and what arrangements will need to be made for any learners who need reasonable adjustments or are unable to take an adapted assessment.

You can continue to deliver adapted assessments over the summer unless and until you are told by the awarding organisation that they are being withdrawn. You should expect to have adequate notice.

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Functional Skills qualifications

The principal mitigation for Functional Skills qualifications was calculation of results.

Now that awarding organisations have collected CAGs from centres, they are starting to make assessments available again to learners, including those who were not able to receive a calculated result.

At the moment, it might still be difficult for some centres to run assessments as normal and comply with government and other public health guidance. You should seek advice from your awarding organisation on how they can support you.

Some awarding organisations have already introduced or are expecting to introduce online assessments with remote invigilation. In some cases, remote invigilation is only available to learners sitting assessments in centres/workplaces, rather than in their own homes. You should seek advice from your awarding organisation on what arrangements they have in place and how they can support you.

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Apprenticeship end-point assessments

The flexibilities for the assessment of apprenticeships are being overseen by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. You can find full details of these on [their website](#).

We provide the External Quality Assurance for many apprenticeships. Where we do, we have approved changes to end-point assessments in line with the arrangements we set out for adapting VTQ assessments.

Preventing errors and unfair advantage

None of us want things to go wrong or any learners to experience further disruption this summer. We know that awarding organisations will be very alert to risks, and we expect them to do all they can to prevent errors and to put things right as quickly as possible. We asked awarding organisations to remain vigilant to the risk of malpractice and other improper behaviour. We expect every effort to be taken to prevent any learner gaining an unfair advantage through these arrangements and we expect awarding organisations to continue to take active steps to prevent malpractice and to investigate and address any suspected malpractice or other improper behaviour – we are monitoring awarding organisations' activity in this area. Awarding organisations are also obliged to promptly report any incidents to us and we will monitor their response.

What this means for you

We trust that you will work within the requirements and guidelines that the awarding organisations set, to prevent mistakes and errors and to prevent any learner being unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged. You may expect awarding organisations to ask you for more evidence or additional information than they would normally.

Results days

The results of on-demand qualifications will be awarded at different times throughout the summer and throughout the year.

This year many results of sessional qualifications were awarded on 13 and 20 August, in line with AS and A levels and GCSEs respectively. The results for some VTQs, such as some functional skills qualifications, were issued earlier than that.

We are aware that some awarding organisations made changes to when they were issuing results, in some cases at very short notice. Awarding organisations are working as quickly as possible to confirm results as soon as possible, recognising the impact that delays are having on schools, colleges and students. No learner's result will go down as a consequence of regrading.

For learners planning to progress to higher education, UCAS is now working with both you and universities to support learners to understand their options and to support learners to use their results to secure the best possible outcome.

For those learners who were not placed with their firm (or insurance) choice university, UCAS advise that they don't need to make their decision immediately. Learners should speak with their parents and teachers, and then their first conversation will need to be with their firm (or insurance) choice university. Once their university has their result from the awarding organisation, the university can make a decision as to whether there is a place at their preferred choice.

UCAS will be issuing new advice for you and your learners and this will be sent directly to learners as soon as they are able to take a decision.

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What this means for you

We received feedback from centres concerned about the amount of results data they are likely to receive in a short space of time. This is a particular challenge for large centres, such as FE colleges which may work with many awarding organisations.

We have therefore asked awarding organisations to be clear to centres about when you will receive results data and in what format, so you can prepare effectively to process results through Management Information Systems (MIS), resolve any queries and produce communications to learners before results are released.

For students to get their grades on time to make progression decisions, and maximise the time available for centres to process their results, we are asking all awarding organisations to prioritise the release of results data for certificating learners on Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications that carry UCAS points and/or are used to progress to further or higher education

We have asked awarding organisations releasing results through their secure website to take all reasonable steps to:

- ensure results data is available **at least 48 hours** before the learner results date, to allow you to review, process and query any anomalies
- make the results data available to download and export in a format that can be imported into a MIS, such as comma-separated values (CSV) files, to avoid problems with proprietary formats
- clearly identify qualification and results data
- include key learner identifiers, such as the Unique Learner Number
- share with you the template of the data format **at least 10 days** in advance of results days, so you can develop a process to import data into your MIS

We have asked awarding organisations releasing results through data exchange systems (EDI) for MIS to take all reasonable steps to ensure results data is available **at least 24 hours** before the learner results date to allow you to review, process and query any anomalies.

Please ensure that you have someone available at your centre who can respond to queries if necessary and help prepare for the publication of results.

A summary of information from awarding organisations on their plans around the format of results data releases is available [here](#).

Functional skills qualification results will be issued by awarding organisations from July 2020 onwards. The dates will vary between awarding organisations and may differ from the approach taken in other years. Please contact the awarding organisations that you work with to find out when and how they will be issuing results to you.

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Future assessment opportunities

We are requiring awarding organisations that normally provide an assessment opportunity for learners between September and December to take all reasonable steps to continue to do so.

Where awarding organisations do not normally offer an autumn assessment opportunity, they should do so where there are enough learners who need to take an assessment unless it would be impractical or create a disproportionate burden to offer one. We expect awarding organisations to work with centres, and to take decisions in the best interests of learners, with safeguards for us to intervene if we decide there is a particular need for an assessment that is not being met by awarding organisations. We are also requiring awarding organisations to seek to ensure that their approach to delivering these assessments minimises burdens and are as deliverable as possible including by Centres and Teachers.

What this means for you

You may wish to contact your awarding organisations in the first instance to find out their plans for autumn or delayed assessments.

We have [updated our interactive tool](#) to include information about when the next assessment opportunity will be for particular qualifications. The updated version is available for use by centres, learners, parents and all other interested parties.

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Appeals

Centres will be able to appeal against results where they feel that the awarding organisation did not apply procedures consistently or that procedures were not followed properly and fairly. Given the range of qualifications and appeals processes in VTQs we have not prescribed an approach that awarding organisations must take beyond this.

As part of the framework, we have published additional guidance on appeals for awarding organisations for this year to promote consistency in approach and to make clear what awarding organisations should consider in relation to the conduct of appeals. This will build on awarding organisations' existing processes and will encompass whether a Centre has followed a procedure properly and fairly, where relevant, including any issue in relation to bias or discrimination on the part of a Centre in following a procedure.

Our guidance makes clear that awarding organisations are not obliged to consider appeals submitted by individual learners or their representatives unless that is the only way to secure an effective appeal. Our guidance also makes clear that in relation to calculated results it would not be appropriate to allow appeals relating to the professional judgements of teachers and centres, so long as those judgements are arrived at in line with the procedure agreed with the awarding organisation.

What this means for you

Where you feel the relevant process has not been followed correctly by the awarding organisation, you will be able to make an appeal. If, on results day, your learners are unhappy with the results they have received you should contact your awarding organisation about their appeals process. If you decide to proceed with an appeal you must follow the awarding organisation's process in the first instance. If you remain dissatisfied following the appeals process you can contact us to make a complaint.

What happens next

We have collated and published [links to awarding organisations' webpages on their appeals processes](#).

We have published [guidance for students](#) regarding appeals, malpractice and complaints.

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Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU

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