

Vocational and Technical Exams



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Consultation

- The impact of the pandemic has meant that, in line with the approach set out for GCSEs, AS and A levels, the Department's policy position has been that external exams for *many* vocational, technical and other general qualifications should not take place as planned – but not all
- A joint consultation in January 2021 covered A-Levels/GCSEs but also VTQs (Vocational and Technical Qualifications)
- The consultation recognised that VTQs are a diverse landscape: qualifications differ in their purpose; the extent to which they are knowledge based or designed to denote competency; the settings in which they are taken; the age, stage and circumstances of learners; the assessment structure and method, the size of qualifications and length of course.

So What Was Decided?

- The joint DFE/Ofqual decision document is here:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964973/6748-1_-_Decisions_-_VTQ_Consultation_on_awarding_grades_in_2021.pdf
- The broad outline is that because of the diverse range involved, VTQs are separated into three groups, and different approaches are outlined for each.
- It is an 88-page document which sets out all the finer detail

Category 1: Used for Progression

- The first group includes those VTQs which are most similar to GCSE, AS and A levels, in that they are used for progression to further or higher education.
- These include VTQs such as many BTECs, Cambridge Nationals and Technicals, and many Technical Awards and Technical Certificates, as well as other general qualifications that are not GCSEs, AS and A levels, such as the International Baccalaureate, Pre- U, Core Maths, Extended Project Qualification and Advanced Extension Awards.
- **Exams for these VTQs should not go ahead.** Instead, results should be awarded using similar arrangements to GCSEs and AS or A levels (which has been covered by another talk) – but not identical

Category 1: Continued

- Awarding bodies will issue guidance to providers and colleges about what evidence is needed for teacher assessed grades and timelines for information to be submitted

Category 2: VTQs Used Directly for Employment

- The second group is VTQs used to enter directly into employment.
- Examples are construction, accountancy, plumbing.
- **Exams or assessments should continue** where they are “critical” to demonstrate occupational or professional competence and can be delivered in line with PHE measures.
- Where the assessment cannot take place safely, it will need to be delayed. These may be written or practical exams and assessments.

Category 3: Mixed Purposes

- The third group includes smaller qualifications taken for mixed purposes that are unlike GCSEs and A levels in their qualification and assessment structure, such as Functional Skills qualifications ('on-demand' when learner is ready) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).
- Exams and assessments for these should continue where they can be delivered in line with PHE measures or remotely, but with alternative arrangements available for those who cannot access the assessments.
- This was a bit controversial but the decision means that wherever possible, learners should take an assessment, and alternative arrangements should only be considered for those who cannot access one. This solution is said to ensure that learners will be supported to progress to the next stage of their studies.

Dates and Timing

- DFE/Ofqual have said that it is “essential” that students taking VTQs and other general qualifications that are not GCSEs or A levels but are used to progress to HE or FE should receive their results no later than their GCSE or A Level peers.
- It is therefore expected that relevant VTQ results are issued to students on or before 10 August for level 3 and 12 August for level 2.
- But results for other VTQs, such as teacher assessed grades for functional skills learners, will continue to be issued throughout the year like usual, but only from April.

Problems?

- January 2021 exams: the government's announcements regarding the January series made it clear that where learners did not feel comfortable sitting assessments, they did not have to. In addition, many centres decided not to run assessments on public health grounds. As a result, many learners who had planned to sit their assessments in January did not do so.
- All students will be able to progress fairly, irrespective of whether they sat an exam in January

Appeals

- Appeals: the statutory guidance will signal that for those qualifications most closely aligned to GCSEs, AS and A levels awarding organisations will be expected to give students access to a right of appeal on the same basis as those set out for GCSEs, AS and A levels.
- Others: depends on the type of qualification (detailed guidance given)
- Schools and colleges will only have to check for errors and whether their own processes were followed in the first instance.
- Then, if students want to take it further, exam boards will review both the school's or college's processes and the evidence used to determine a students' grade to confirm whether the grade was a "reasonable exercise of academic judgement".

Thank you for listening

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