

Arrangements for the assessment and awarding of vocational and technical and other General qualifications in 2020/2021 – Part 2

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

1. Introduction

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 20,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary and further education and skills phases. This places the association in a strong position to consider the issue of assessment and awarding of qualifications from the viewpoint of schools and colleges of all types.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

2. Answers to specific questions

Question 1: Do you have any comments on the proposed principles set out above and in the second draft version of the Extended ERF requirements?

We agree with the proposed principles. However, in relation to each principle, we have concerns that awarding organisations must remain consistent in their approach, especially in terms of assessment adaptations, avoiding disadvantage, ensuring validity and reliability of qualifications and ensuring standards.

We also agree with the proposal to allow awarding bodies the opportunity to set out how the extended ERF will impact on the assessment and awarding of vocational and technical and other general qualifications in 2020/21 for their qualifications.

We reiterate in this response some concerns among of members that, in the summer 2020 series, a few awarding organisations were restrictive in terms of the evidence they were prepared to accept. This was particularly true for some VTQs. Consistency in approach from awarding organisations is key to fair and equitable assessment and awarding of qualifications.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on the proposed guidance on adaptation set out in the second draft version of the Extended ERF?

We would ask that, in the spirit of the four principles set out by Ofqual above and the extended ERF, awarding bodies work together and are required to be consistent in terms of their criteria for substitution of evidence of assessment. No one awarding body should set more rigid criteria for substitution of evidence than another for the same qualifications.

In terms of remote assessment and online invigilation, training will be required for both staff and students. Clarity is also needed on how SEND needs will be met.

In terms of professional qualifications and licence to practise, adaptations must be manageable for staff and students and in line with government public health advice.

In terms of both short and long courses, clarity is needed in the approach to functional skills which can be short and on demand for adults and apprentices, but also delivered as part of an academic year study programme for younger students.

We would expect that that there will be no additional costs to centres.

Question 3: Do you have any comments on the proposed guidance on Special Consideration set out in the second draft version of the Extended ERF?

Adaptation as a mitigation appears sensible. However, the impact of local lockdowns or isolated outbreaks in centres on teaching, learning and assessment cannot easily be predicted. The impact of local lockdowns will need to be monitored throughout the year.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed regulatory arrangements for autumn assessment opportunities?

There needs to be clarity about when the original ERF finishes and the extended ERF begins, and any impact on students.

Question 5: Are there any potential positive or negative equality impacts arising from the proposed principles, the proposed guidance on adaptation and Special Consideration, and the proposed regulatory arrangements for autumn assessment opportunities, apart from those we have explored? If yes, what are they and how might they be mitigated?

The consultation document rightly refers to the diverse range and circumstances of students who take technical and vocational qualifications. This must be considered before any adaptations are put in place, including online assessment or remote invigilation.

Question 6: Are there any potential regulatory impacts arising from the proposed principles, the proposed guidance on adaptation and Special Consideration, and the proposed regulatory arrangements for autumn assessment opportunities that we have not explored? If yes, what are they and how might they be mitigated?

The key for centres is manageability of assessments and costs. We assume there will be no additional costs to centres for assessments, but any adaptive proposal requiring new hardware, software and training for staff and students will have cost implications. It is very important that if there are any requirements to purchase new systems that all awarding organisations agree to use the same assessment systems.

3. Conclusion

Our response relies on feedback from our members and others in the sector. We hope that this response is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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