Assessment and Awarding Arrangements for Vocational Qualifications 2021/2022

➢ **OCN NI Level 2 Award in Information Technology Applications**
Qualification No: 601/8425/5
➢ **OCN NI Level 2 Certificate in Information Technology Applications**
Qualification No: 601/8497/8

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Foreword

The Covid pandemic has provided an extraordinary challenge for the assessment and award of qualifications in Northern Ireland. The Minister for the Economy provided policy direction for qualifications; In April 2020, calculated results were permitted. This aligned with the approach for similar qualifications in England and Wales. From October 2020 adaptations such as remote assessment were permitted. This again aligned with the approach for similar qualifications in England and Wales. In January 2021 policy position permitted the use of TAGs for the remainder of the 2020 to 2021 academic year.

As the Summer Guidance 2021 (Teacher Assessed Grades) window has now closed, this guidance aims to promote practicalities and manageability as it reduces the assessment burden on Centres and aligns itself with the proposed approach for similar qualifications. Providing balance in terms of maintaining the validity, reliability, and comparability and fairness of the qualification for all stakeholders.

OCN NI is now recommending this guidance to centres to help mitigate disruption to teaching, learning and assessments so that, as far as possible, learners taking VTQs and 'other general' qualifications, have the opportunity to receive a fair result and are not disadvantaged by the longer-term impacts of the pandemic.

Presenting capacity and capability to build on best practice from 2020/21, embracing the role of technology to benefit learners, and most importantly managing any further potential disruption that could be caused by a continuation of COVID-19 public health restrictions and a return to normal, framed the guidance set out in this document.

It is the expectation of the Minister for the Economy that vocational examinations and other assessments will go ahead in line with normal arrangements in 2021 to 22 as they are the fairest form of assessment. Consequently, the Qualifications Regulators are permitting awarding organisations to adapt their assessments (where appropriate) to provide greater flexibility and streamline assessments to free up time for teaching and learning.

Practical considerations

As some public health restrictions continue to be in place during the 2021-2022 academic year, and further disruption is occurring on a localised basis, which may affect teaching and learning and the delivery of assessments, OCN NI wants to support centres in protecting learner achievement and has taken steps to protect centres and learners. Our guidance is intended to ensure that assessments lead to the award of qualifications that are a valid and reliable indication of knowledge, understanding and skills, or practical competence, and that, as far as possible, standards are maintained. Therefore, we are introducing consistent approaches across similar qualifications, whilst recognising the diversity of the VTQ landscape.

The introduction of a second version of the Vocational and Technical Qualifications Contingency regulatory framework (VCR), reflects the approach to mitigation and adaptation. The response OCN NI are proposing to take in light of the situation we face in 2021/22 applies high line principles and more specific direction to support full delivery and adapt assessment while retaining its validity and reliability.

OCN NI appreciates that there will be a need to maximise the teaching time that is available and has considered adapting its qualification assessments and developed specific guidance on mitigating the impact of disrupted learning and teaching. A Teach, Assess and Bank approach is encouraged to all centres. The advantage of this approach is that an ongoing record of individual performance and achievement is maintained, and accumulated evidence is validated and reliable.

We recommend that centres reflect carefully on the freedoms to amend assessment while undertaking full delivery of content and contact OCN NI for approval if there is doubt around the reliability of assessments being carried out.

Highline Principles

OCN NI believes there are a number of actions centres can take to mitigate the risk of interruption to learning, since the government departments dealing with education have confirmed that schools, colleges and training organisations should aim to provide full delivery in the interests of learners and learning.

1. Centres should review how they will mitigate the risk of their learners not compiling sufficient evidence.
2. Since our VTQ qualifications are unitised, centres should consider recording informal assessment upon completion of each unit. OCN NI recommends that unit delivery should be systematic with summative evidence being captured progressively as each unit is completed. OCN NI recommends a Teach, Assess and Bank approach.
3. Centres should consider implementing the practice of cumulative informal assessment as part of a 'lifeboat' strategy. This will enable a focussed and reliable indication of learner progress towards achievement and underpin progress with valid and reliable indicators through evidential tracking should there be interruptions to learning.
4. OCN NI recommends that centres identify discrete units in qualifications where there is no reference to learning in other units and deliver and assess these units as early as possible in their class timetable to ensure coverage of the qualification.
5. OCN NI recommends reducing or combining assessments where this is possible, whilst assessing the same or similar content. That would allow for the collection of formative evidence against each of the discrete subjects and mitigate against the risk of these units being unassessed in any way.
6. Centres should review Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria in the qualification specification to identify and map overlaps in evidence so that unnecessary duplication can be avoided. This could occur where an assessment criterion has been covered more than once in different units and in slightly different ways holistic assessment).
7. Where a demonstration by the learner is required, OCN NI will accept an illustration by learners and/or demonstration by the Teacher/Tutor with an explanation of process and outcomes.

Structured Considerations

To reinforce the need for accurate assessment and evidence as collateral for this academic year (as required by the joint regulatory position), OCN NI is recommending that centres look carefully at our highline principles and apply them appropriately to our qualifications without undermining the Learning Outcomes of qualification units.

The bottom line for evidence to support achievement is that it is recorded, tracked, and conducted regularly to avoid gaps which would compromise the integrity of the qualification. Acknowledging that there will be unforeseen interruptions, OCN NI is recommending that formative evidence is also recorded, tracked, and banked where it could be used to offset against interruption to formal assessment. This is not an alternative, rather it is a means of ensuring that there is a mitigation against evidence of assessment. This effectively is a 'lifeboat' approach to protect learners and to ensuring that there is evidence of progression in learning against delivery. Centres should aim to avoid gaps in capturing learner evidence and reflect on how all assessment is reliable and valid. This applies particularly to formative assessment capture.

Once again, due to the unforeseen circumstances there may be a significant number of interruptions to delivery. OCN NI recommends mitigating this through:

- A unitised banking approach
- Tracked progression through units
- Cumulative assessment (externally moderated)

This approach will provide a back up to the internal assessment model which is the standard operating procedure. It will also allow for accurate external verification/moderation monitoring to be carried out against measurable evidence. It is the centre's responsibility to present valid and reliable assessment against evidence that substantiates learner performance. OCN NI will monitor this both remotely and by site visit depending on the PHA guidance and health risks faced by our team.

Use of Remote Technologies

OCN NI is content that many centres are conducting delivery and assessment through on-line technologies where this is feasible. It is important to ensure that recording of evidence and detailed assessment records are maintained to confirm adequate compliance with this guidance and the OCN NI Centre Handbook.

Specific Qualification Guidance

The guidance below is specific to this qualification/qualification suite and should be implemented as part of the centre assessment strategy:

Centres should note that the guidance below is provided in the context of contingencies which should mitigate disruption to teaching and assessment. Where assessment is carried out against mapped assessment criteria in order to reduce duplication, this must be clearly detailed to enable external verification to take place.

- Evidence requires use of hardware and software to produce assessment ready material. Where possible duplication of assessment should be minimised through the use of detailed mapping with clear annotation from the tutor.
- Due to the remote nature of a lot of the evidence provided within this qualification and taking account of the use of contingency adaptations due to the pandemic, centres must clearly be able to authenticate individual learner's work.
- The qualification lends itself to e-portfolio adaptation, which would reduce the time spent printing evidence and assessment documentation.
- Centres should consider devising rich assessment tasks to streamline assessments that address multiple aspects of evidence requirements. This would allow increased teaching time while minimising duplication of assessment.
- Where screen dumps are usually required annotated by learner this could be replaced by the teacher/ tutor signing to indicate this has been completed.
- Where remote learners may not have access to website software during the completion of the 'Website' unit, centres may wish to demonstrate a learners' knowledge and the workings of the coding behind a website by creating a prototype website in PowerPoint. Assessors may wish to ensure learners add some functionality by linking buttons to navigate to "webpages" and demonstrating in the notes section the use of code and where it would go on the web page e.g.: <marquee> "Welcome to my website</marquee>……… this will scroll across top of page from right to left as a banner. They could also use HTML code to embed Google Maps or YouTube videos by pasting this into the Notes section. Whilst debug testing cannot occur, some testing of appearance and fitness for purpose through user testing would be acceptable.

Conclusion

OCN NI recognises the DfE minister's direction is that assessment should be carried out as normal, where this is possible, and is recommending that centres should provide more assessment opportunities and increase informal assessment to support opportunities to track and bank evidence. If some public health restrictions are necessary over the academic year, it should still be possible for learners to take exams and formal assessments safely. However, if the government decides that exams and formal assessments cannot take place, then as in 2021, it is possible that VTQs and other general qualifications may be awarded using Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). For occupational and competence-based qualifications, if exams and assessments cannot take place safely even with prudent adaptations, then they may need to be delayed

To avoid risk, inadequate evidence of achievement or malpractice, centres should ensure that OCN NI guidance on detailed records of assessment and PHA health guidelines are strictly followed.

Contact Details

For further information and support please contact a member of the OCN NI team using the details provided below:

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