



PART OF **nocn** GROUP

ADAPTATION GUIDANCE FOR CENTRES 2021-2

**Guidance for centres regarding the
adaptations in place for the 2021-2
academic year**

Version

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www.nocn.org.uk

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1. Introduction

This document is intended to provide guidance to centres regarding adaptations to assessment which can be implemented by centres in the delivery of NOCN qualifications. This guidance builds upon and replaces the guidance provided for centres in the 2020-1 academic year.

For further information regarding the arrangements that were in place up until the end of August 2021, please refer to our website [here](#).

For further information regarding the awarding arrangements in place from September 2021, please refer to our website [here](#).

From the 1st September 2021, all NOCN qualifications have moved to Category A as defined in Ofqual's [VTQ Contingency Regulatory Framework](#), which means that training and assessment of all qualifications must be delivered by centres to their learners as normal, or through the use of adaptations, unless otherwise notified by NOCN. All arrangements for estimated, calculated or Teacher-assessed grades have now been removed, except for in the cases of appeals, or in cases where a Teacher Assessed Grade should have been issued, but was not at the time.

NOCN recognises that there may be continued disruption to teaching and learning as we enter the 2021-2 academic year and therefore supports the continuation of adaptations to the way assessments are delivered. Centres must try and support learner progression as far as possible by supporting learners to access the training and assessment they require to complete their programme of learning.

NOCN is keeping its adaptations to assessment under review to ensure that they accurately reflect the decisions and stances made by the various sectors in which NOCN has a qualification presence. NOCN has reviewed the content of its qualifications and believes that the majority of assessments can continue to be delivered remotely. This provides NOCN with the confidence that there is continued coverage of the key areas of a qualification to ensure a safe award. NOCN has considered the purpose and function of each of its qualifications to determine whether adaptations to assessment can be made.

This document provides centres with general guidance on the adaptations that are available. Centres should ensure that they consult the NOCN website for further information regarding updates to adaptations, as well as for specific sector guidance. Centres must only implement adaptations to assessment which have been outlined by NOCN (including within this document).

Use of unauthorised adaptations will be investigated in line with the [NOCN Malpractice and Maladministration Policy and Procedure](#).

I. Scope of Learners

This guidance applies to any learner undertaking an assessment from 1st September 2021. There is currently no end date for specific adaptations, as these will be kept under review by NOCN and removed or amended where deemed necessary. Centres are encouraged to refer to the NOCN website for updates.

2. Guidance for Assessment Planning

I. Assessment Planning

NOCN recognises that there may be an increased burden on Tutors and Assessors this academic year due to instances of lost learning, or learners who are not on track to meet their planned assessment date. NOCN therefore encourages centres to conduct thorough reviews of assessment planning to ensure that Tutors and Assessors have sufficient time and resource to prepare learners for assessment. This may mean re-scheduling of planned assessment dates. NOCN provides centres with flexibility regarding the access to assessments due to their on-demand nature, therefore the re-scheduling of assessment should not have a detrimental impact on learners. It is important however to remember that assessment planning must be a learner-centric process and centres continue to inform learners of planned assessment dates and ensure they are supportive of the arrangements.

Centres should, wherever possible, seek to streamline their planned delivery of training and assessment to make the most of Tutor and Assessor time, without compromising the quality of assessment or of assessment evidence. The focus on training and assessment should be on **quality**, rather than on **quantity**, and therefore centres are encouraged to re-examine the design of their assessment tasks to shorten, combine or strengthen them so that they cover multiple assessment criteria, wherever this is possible. Assessors can also look at work completed by a learner so far to determine whether achievement of an assessment criteria has already been demonstrated by the learner and whether future planned assessments can be tailored towards any gaps.

Centres can also make use of Recognition of Prior Learning, wherever this is appropriate and applicable. RPL is not permitted in some assessments, such as those which are externally set assessments. For further information, please refer to the [NOCN Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Procedure](#).

II. Selection of Units

Wherever possible, centres are encouraged to review their planned curriculum, including reviewing the selection of units planned for delivery for qualifications in which there are optional units. This is especially true in cases where units contain assessments which may be more difficult for the Centre to deliver safely, such as units which contain mandatory work placements, or which require learner observation in a particular setting.

Although valuable to a learner's progress and experience, where work placements are optional within a qualification, the completion of these units only provide the same contribution to the award of a qualification as other units of the same credit value or weighting. Therefore, centres should consider whether other optional units within the qualification, which are more manageable to deliver would be more appropriate.

III. Assessment Scheduling

Centres will appreciate that at present, plans to deliver training or assessment may be disrupted at any time and at very short notice. For this reason, NOCN encourages centres to carefully schedule the delivery of training and assessment to allow learners to obtain banked achievements on an

ongoing basis, rather than 'end-loading' assessment until the end of the academic year or the end of a learner's course, wherever this is possible. This also includes delivering units or assessments more suited to an online model first and ensuring that these assessments are assessed internally and internally quality assured, where this has been identified by the Centre's internal quality assurer.

Prioritising the delivery assessments which are less challenging does not necessarily mean that the Centre does not need to adapt or attempt delivery of the more challenging assessments, especially where these are mandatory for a learner to obtain a qualification. Learners must still be assessed in line with all of the requirements of the qualification. It does mean however, that in case of any further disruption to a learner's access to assessment, or if a learner is suddenly no longer to engage in assessment for any reason, that the learner does have banked assessments to put them in the best position possible for any special considerations or alternative arrangements, which may be possible.

IV. Banking Assessments

Where a Centre's assessment and internal quality assurance systems confirm learner achievement of a unit or units, achievements can be claimed at any time by centres using NOCN's quality model. Where a Centre claims for unit achievement, these will either be moderated or verified by the Centre's assigned External Quality Assurer, dependent on whether the Centre has Direct Claims Status in place.

Once claimed and quality assured, all unit achievements will be banked on NOCN systems and will contribute to meeting the rules of combination to award a qualification. This ensures both learners and centres are well placed in case of any further disruptions to learning. For further information regarding NOCN's quality monitoring, please refer to the [NOCN Risk-Based Approach to Centre Quality Monitoring Policy and Procedure](#).

V. Use of Technology and Storage of Evidence

NOCN recognises that the majority of its centres have successfully overcome the challenges posed by national and localised lockdowns by transferring to a remote and online delivery model. NOCN supports centres who wish to continue delivering using an online model, but also recognises the move to face-to-face learning as the lessening of restrictions has continued. Centres are able to make use of videoconferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom for the delivery of training and of assessment.

Centres may also wish to make use of VLE platforms or e-portfolio systems. NOCN has its virtual learning environment, V-Learn, which centres may wish to embed into their delivery model. For further information, please contact business-enquiries@nocn.org.uk.

Centres must ensure that they keep full, accurate and auditable records of all planned and completed assessment activities. Although not mandatory, NOCN actively encourages centres to store these electronically as this will support both internal and external quality assurance activities. All assessment records must state clearly where assessments have been adapted.

NOCN does not require or recommend one system or technological solution for the collation and storage of evidence and centres are free to choose a platform or combination of platforms which suits

their delivery and assessment model the most. However, centres need to consider how they capture and store assessment evidence so that this can be externally quality assured by NOCN. This may be providing access to NOCN through a Centre's in-house systems, or access to the Centre's Google Drive or Drop Box account. Centres are also required to consider Data Protection legislation regarding the storage and sharing of sensitive data.

VI. Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations

Centres must continue to consider and apply for Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations from NOCN where they believe that these are required.

NOCN will continue to consider a Special Consideration where a learner's performance in an assessment has been affected, or will be affected, due to circumstances out of their control, including due to COVID-19. NOCN will consider Special Considerations where it can be confident that the integrity of assessment is not compromised or where it does not provide a learner with an unfair advantage or disadvantage over their peers. For further information, please refer to the [NOCN Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration Policy and Procedure](#).

VII. Delay of Assessments

Where a learner is not able to access an assessment, even through adaptations, centres must delay the specific assessments which cannot be accessed. Centres must continue to support learner progression as far as possible and are encouraged to claim for any completed assessments to allow learners to bank assessments. NOCN will issue unit certification for any learner who has partially completed their qualification. Centres must also consider whether the learner is eligible for the award of a smaller-size qualification, such as claiming for an Award instead of a Certificate. NOCN encourages centres to discuss individual cases with their allocated External Quality Assurer where they require further advice.

NOCN will support centres as far as possible, in line with Ofqual's Regulatory Framework, to ensure as many learners as possible are able to obtain a result for their qualifications at the point that they would have reasonably expected to receive it without the disruption.

However, NOCN also has a regulatory responsibility to ensure that qualification standards are maintained and can only award results based on appropriate and sufficient assessment evidence. Therefore, where a practical assessment cannot be completed, or if there is insufficient evidence to allow the determination of a valid and reliable result, centres will be required to delay assessment.

NOCN will facilitate the ongoing active status of a registration to allow the upload of results for learners when assessment can safely resume. Centres do not need to contact NOCN to apply for an extension, although a record should be kept internally to allow this to be reviewed during external quality assurance activities.

3. General Adaptations to Assessment

I. Portfolio-Based Assessments

The majority of assessments which make up NOCN qualifications are available to centres on demand with no set periods or windows of assessment. These tend to be assessed through a portfolio of evidence, which will be assessed and internally quality assured by the Centre, prior to external quality assurance by NOCN.

Where this is the case, NOCN already provides centres with great flexibility in the design and delivery of their own assessments, which must be designed to meet the assessment requirements as detailed within the individual qualification specifications. A portfolio of evidence should contain evidence generated by the learner, which is assessed by the Centre to show the meeting of the NOCN assessment criteria. NOCN encourages centres to consider how they might use alternative approaches to the generation and collation of learner evidence within a portfolio, which they may not currently make use of, for example:

- **Multiple choice and short answer questions** – centres may wish to look at designing tasks such as short response or multiple-choice tests to allow learner assessment of knowledge. Short answer questions allow learners to demonstrate the extent and depth of their knowledge and skills and, as they do not fall under examination requirements, they can easily be delivered remotely and through VLE platforms. Using multiple choice or short answer questions may not meet the principles of assessment on their own, however may be a useful assessment tool to triangulate with other forms of evidence.
- **Professional discussions** – A professional discussion is a two-way discussion between a learner and their Assessor, which can be used to assess a learner's in-depth understanding of their experience and knowledge. Centres are encouraged to utilise professional discussions to build and enhance evidence already provided or demonstrated by the learner - including real work activities, practical tasks, a case study, project or some other form of assessment.
- **Video and photographic evidence** – videos (and in some cases photographs) can be used as appropriate assessment evidence for recording an individual conducting an activity, usually where competency skills are the focus on the assessment. Centres are actively encouraged to make use of video and photographic evidence as this can be assessed remotely. It is important that both video and photographic evidence is supplemented by a narrative by the learner of what they are doing and why. Centres must also consider the authenticity of evidence as well as ensuring that the work can be attributed to the learner.
- **Expert witness testimonies** – where direct observation is not permitted or is not practicable due to localised or national restrictions, expert witness testimonies can be obtained by centres to confirm the observation of learner competence, within the workplace, over time. Centres should ensure they give the required considerations for the competency of the witness themselves and the currency of the evidence. In all cases, the witness' testimony must be in relation to the learner's performance which has been directly observed by the witness to show competence.

- **Simulation** – where a learner cannot gain access to a venue or workplace required to carry out a task due to COVID-19 restrictions, a simulation of the real-world task could be considered by the Centre. This could include role play or mock interviews/scenarios. Simulations may also be carried out remotely and be facilitated by electronic means (such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom). It is important to note that in most competency qualifications, simulation is not permitted (such as in construction) and centres must consult with the sector guidance provided by NOCN at all times.

II. Practical Assessments

Where a practical assessment signifies competence, the assessment can continue and should take place in line with NOCN guidelines, ensuring that government guidelines regarding COVID-19 are followed. Please refer to the sector guidance provided by NOCN for further information.

For some sectors, assessment must be delayed due to the nature of the qualification and the assessments. This includes licence-linked qualifications.

III. Implementing Adaptations

When considering adaptations to an assessment, centres and curriculum areas must ensure that adaptations are permitted by NOCN for the particular qualification in question and that adaptations are in line with the guidance provided in this document. Centres must also ensure that any amended assessment methods are:

- **Valid** - they assess what they are intended to. This can be ensured by mapping new methods and tasks to learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- **Reliable** - that methods produce comparable results irrespective of where or when they are applied.
- **Sufficient** - evidence should be gathered from a variety of sources, where possible. This may be evidence which has already been generated or may involve assessors providing learners with additional and alternative opportunities to demonstrate their competence, knowledge and understanding through a range of reasonable and practicable alternative activities (e.g., open book essay or report writing in lieu of closed book, assessment video observation, time-limited assessments, and professional discussion).

Adaptations to assessment documented by NOCN do not need prior authorisation for their use, although centres must, as always, keep full assessment and internal quality assurance records for external quality assurance purposes. This includes ensuring noting which adaptations have been used and how on assessment documentation.

4. Sector-Specific Adaptations

In addition to the general guidance, NOCN has also produced several sector statements to cover specific adaptations allowed for sectors. These statements were initially produced during the 2019/20 academic year and have been refreshed throughout the ongoing disruption.

All of the adaptations documented on each sector statement have been developed in line with other Awarding Organisations, wherever this has been possible, such as through NOCN contribution and attendance at sector meetings and the joint issuing of statements. NOCN will continue to attend sector meetings, to ensure that its position is aligned with other Awarding Organisations as far as possible and that NOCN centres have access to the latest adaptations agreed across the sector.

Please [click here](#) to view the latest sector statements.

5. Guidance on Remote Assessment and Remote Invigilation

I. Remote Assessment

Where assessments are being conducted remotely, the Centre must ensure that all of the requirements of the assessment are met so that it is of equal vigour and quality of an in-person assessment. Assessments can be completed at a learner's home or workplace, as long as the room they are in is conducive to assessment conditions.

Where any formal assessment is taking place, such as an observation, these must be in the presence of the Assessor, in real-time, to ensure validity and authenticity. Remote assessments must:

- Be agreed with the learner in advance, to ensure that they are adequately prepared for the assessment.
- Be conducted using a strong enough internet connection to support clear video and audio to provide the Assessor with a clear view of the learner completing the required task to allow a valid assessment decision to be made.
- Be accompanied by formal assessment records (ideally electronic) which can be stored and accessed for internal and external quality assurance purposes.

Although not always mandated, NOCN strongly recommends that centres record all remote assessments. For some qualifications, this is mandatory. Where recorded, the Assessor must state:

- The Centre name and NOCN Centre number.
- Their name and the name of the assessment being conducted.
- The learner's full name.
- The date and time of the beginning of the assessment and the time at which the assessment is concluded.

II. Remote Invigilation

For assessments which are externally set by NOCN and require invigilation, NOCN offers online assessments in the majority of cases. NOCN continues to deliver online on demand assessments and centres should continue to book these in the normal way.

To help facilitate learner access to assessments and to coincide with the launch of its Functional Skills online service, NOCN has launched a remote invigilation service for the majority of its examined assessments. This includes the option for centres to invigilate themselves (following an approval process by NOCN) and an option for NOCN to administer the invigilation service itself by its team of trained in-house invigilators. NOCN offers three routes for centres:

- **In Person Invigilation** – traditional invigilation where a Centre-trained Invigilator administers and monitors learners completing the examination in person. This can be conducted at the Centre or a venue identified by the Centre as appropriate where venue and assessment conditions can be adhered to.

- **Remote Invigilation by Centre** – centres are now able to begin invigilating assessments online using NOCN systems remotely. This will allow learners to complete assessments at home, or any other venue where they can gain access to a computer, as long as assessment conditions can be adhered to. The Centre will still be required to invigilate the assessment remotely. To offer remote invigilation, centres must gain approval from NOCN first.
- **Remote Invigilation by NOCN** – where a Centre is not able or does not wish to remotely invigilate learners, NOCN also offers a remote invigilation service where it will provide its own invigilator. In these cases, NOCN will take responsibility for ensuring that the assessment is conducted under the required conditions and that all quality assurance requirements are met. For further information, please contact NOCN directly.

In all cases, centres must continue to ensure the security of assessment material and that the [NOCN Examination and Invigilation Policy and Procedure](#) is adhered to at all times.

NOCN has produced a [guidance document](#) which outlines the requirements of centres conducting remote invigilation and includes guidance on invigilation preparation, the quality assurance checks which are required and the support required for learners.

III. Ending of Relaxation of Invigilation Rules

In the 2020-1 academic year, NOCN relaxed its invigilation rule around requirements of invigilators. Up until 31st August 2021, centres were able to use Tutors/Assessors of the learner, or a Tutor/Assessor of the same subject, to invigilate a learner’s examination, either remotely or in-person. This was to remove what could be a barrier to a learner accessing an assessment and to support the use of covid ‘bubbles.

From the 1st September 2021, this relaxation will end as planned and therefore centres must now comply with the original requirements. This means that from 1st September 2021, the Tutor/Assessor of the learner, or a Tutor/Assessor of the same subject for Reformed Functional Skills Qualifications, can not act as an Invigilator. The use of an inappropriate Invigilator will breach the [NOCN Examination and Invigilation Policy and Procedure](#).

NOCN will keep the relaxation of the ruling under review and may introduce it if it is deemed necessary, such as in cases of a change in Public Health guidance and restrictions.

6. Quality Assurance

All adapted assessments must be subject to the same quality assurance standards as usual assessments. This section details generic guidance for all adaptations and therefore centres must also ensure they consult the specific sector guidance for any quality assurance requirements for individual qualifications within their provision.

I. Internal Quality Assurance

Prior to assessment taking place, Internal Quality Assurers (IQAs) must ensure adapted assessments are valid and appropriate through carrying out the pre-verification of assessment tasks. In a Centre adapting an assessment (in line with NOCN guidance), the IQA must ensure that the task is reviewed to ensure that the task is appropriate, it is inclusive to learners of all needs and does not hinder learner attainment of the NOCN assessment evidence requirements. Records of pre-verification of assessment tasks must be stored for external quality assurance purposes. NOCN has [templates available](#) which IQAs can utilise in carrying out pre-verification of an assessment task.

In all cases where adapted assessments are used, centres must ensure that the required internal quality assurance activities take place to ensure validity in result claims. This includes ensuring that observation of assessment and the quality assurance of Assessor decisions and practice is carried out in line with the IQAs plan of activities. NOCN recommends that IQAs increase their sample for adapted assessments, especially where they are newer to Assessors. It is important that all cases where adapted assessments are used are clearly logged and are identifiable for external quality assurance purposes.

IQAs must also support their team of Assessors in any learning, development or training needs they may have in switching to remote delivery and assessment. This also includes ensuring best practice is shared across the Centre and that regular standardisation activities take place.

II. External Quality Assurance

Adapted assessments will fall into NOCN's standard practices regarding external quality assurance. The practices of the Centre and the actual evidence itself will be externally quality assured by the Centre's allocated External Quality Assurer to the same vigour as assessments which have not been adapted. This is due to the requirement that adapted assessments must still continue to meet all assessment requirements.

The NOCN EQA will plan, select and review their sample of learner work and either perform moderation or verification of Centre claims for certification, dependent on whether the Centre has Direct Claims Status for the qualification in which claims are being made. For further information on the EQA process, please refer to the [NOCN Risk-Based Approach to Centre Quality Monitoring Policy and Procedure](#).

NOCN continues to offer EQA visits and is currently conducting the a portion of visits remotely. Centres are encouraged to contact their EQA directly if they require a visit, either face-to-face or remotely, or if they require information, advice or guidance

III. Appeals

Learners who complete adapted assessments will have the same access to the NOCN Appeals Policy and Procedure as learners who have completed usual assessment. Centres must ensure that their learners are aware of their right of appeal.

To submit an appeal, learners must complete the Stage 1 Appeal by Learner form (available on the NOCN website) and submit the completed form to assurance@nocn.org.uk.

Please note that there are applicable fees at both stages of the appeals procedure.

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