



**FEDERATION OF
AWARDING BODIES**

**Guidance on the Centre
Assessment Grades process
for Functional Skills
Qualifications**

**Federation of Awarding Bodies FSQ
Group**

May 2020

Guidance on the Centre Assessment Grades process for Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs)

About this guidance

This guidance provided in this document was agreed by members of the Federation of Awarding Bodies FSQ Group in May 2020 to ensure consistency in the delivery of centre assessment grades across different awarding organisations (AOs). AOs have published their own version of this guidance, some with additional detail as appropriate for their own centres. AOs may also have slightly rephrased the guidance as presented here to better align with their usual 'voice' when communicating with centres.

The guidance presented here was initially drafted by the Chair of the Federation's FSQ Group, a representative from City & Guilds. This version of the guidance is provided for information only and the specific guidance issued by each AO must be consulted by any centre engaged in the CAG process.

Centre Assessment Grade (CAG) is the term used throughout to refer to the evidence-based, provisional, judgement of a candidate's component result which a centre submits to the awarding organisation.

Terms governing the CAG process

The following terms governing this process have been agreed by all AOs offering FSQs:

1. This is a one-off, time-limited process offered to minimise disruption caused by measures taken by government in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic so that as far as possible, learners due to take assessments during this period are not disadvantaged.
 2. Centres are permitted to make one submission, and this must cover all learners expected to take FSQ assessment between 20 March and 31 July 2020.
 3. Once a submission has been made by a centre, AOs will not consider any subsequent submission by that centre (except as part of issue resolution requested by the AO).
 4. There will be no second submission for 'fail' learners. For externally assessed components, an opportunity to sit the exam will be offered to all learners who do not pass the component as soon as possible after the candidate's final calculated result has been released by the AO.
 5. Subject to the outcome of Ofqual's consultation *on Exceptional Arrangements for Assessment and Grading in 2020 (VTQs)*, for final calculated results that have been approved by the AO, there will be no right of appeal by the centre or learner against the **result**. An appeal based on whether the **process** was followed will be offered. The AO will provide an update on this once the outcome of the Ofqual consultation is known.
 6. The AO reserves the right to review evidence used by centres to reach judgements about CAGs on request. This may be through a quality assurance of the centre's submission and/or through routine EQA when this resumes.
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7. As part of quality assurance of a centre's submission, an AO may ask the centre to reconsider its submitted CAGs but the AO will not itself take action to change CAGs for any learner without the agreement of the centre.
 8. The AO will take all reasonable steps to support centres in resolving quality assurance queries about a centre's submission but as a last resort, may reject all or part of the submission.
 9. It is expected that for a range of reasons related to the current situation, some centres may not be able to participate in the CAG process. These may include for example:
 - Centres with furloughed staff
 - Centres who are operating at the limits of their capacity such as for example, healthcare providers

In such cases, every effort will be made to minimise disadvantage but delaying assessment may be unavoidable.

Overview of the centre assessment process

Role of the Head of Centre

The centre assessment process for FSQs must be overseen and signed off by the Head of Centre.

The Head of Centre's responsibilities are to ensure:

- Only staff who have taught the learner whose provisional component result is being judged are involved in judging that learner's result.
 - All of those who are judging CAGs are briefed on the process as outlined in this document and are familiar with the requirements of this document and associated materials to support the process (i.e. the relevant Functional Skills Standards for the subject and level being judged and, where applicable, the Pass Descriptors for that subject and level).
 - That there is sufficient valid evidence available to underpin the judgements to be made teachers **before** any CAGs are judged.
 - That teacher judgement takes into account any reasonable adjustment that would be made to the assessment in respect of a learner with a disability.
 - That judgements are evidence-based and as far as possible, free of any bias in respect of any candidate with a protected characteristic or any other factor (for example character, appearance, social background or special educational needs) that does not relate to their knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to the subject.
 - That as far as possible, where more than one member of staff is involved in teaching an individual learner for any component, that these members of staff work together to agree the CAG.
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- That where more than one member of staff is responsible for teaching any FS component, these staff work together to standardise their judgements in the way described below.

The Head of Centre must contact the AO to discuss additional support and options before any CAG is judged where:

- no member of staff is available who has taught any learner whose component CAG is being judged.
- no evidence is available to support judgement of a CAG for any learner.

CAGs must not be submitted based on judgements made by staff other than those who have taught the learner on the component for which the CAG is submitted.

CAGs must not be submitted for any learner where there is no valid evidence on which to base the judgement.

Once the process has been completed, the Head of Centre must sign off a single submission covering all FSQ learners whose CAGs they plan to submit. This must be a single submission covering all FSQ components that the centre intends to submit at all levels offered for both legacy and reformed qualifications (where applicable). Submissions cannot be staggered or submitted in batches. Sign-off is in the form of a declaration that the process has been followed in full.

The declaration includes:

- for all learners, confirmation that:
 - for all components, where a CAG is submitted, only staff with experience of teaching that component to the learner provided their CAG
 - at least one piece of valid evidence (see below) per learner was used to reach judgement.
- an indication of the types of evidence used for the component.
- confirmation that the Head of Centre has overseen a sense check comparing the numbers and proportions of pass and fail CAGs for each component with expectations about how each cohort of learners would perform under normal circumstances (see below).
- description of any factors which account for divergence between historic achievement rates and the achievement profile of the CAGs.

Sense checking the submission

This process covers any FSQ assessment which would have taken place between 20 March and 31 July 2020.

As part of a final sense check ahead of submitting CAGs to the AO, the Head of Centre must oversee a comparison between:

For all components:

- the number of CAGs submitted for each component and
- the number of results they submitted for each component for an equivalent historic period (e.g. 20 March to 31 July 2019). Approximate figures may be used where it is not possible to generate exact figures.

Any variance between the two for any component should be accounted for as part of the submission.

For examined components:

The Head of Centre should oversee a sense check comparing the numbers and proportions of pass and fail CAGs for each component with expectations about how each cohort of learners would perform under normal circumstances. A comparison with centre records for an equivalent period of time (eg 20th March – 31st July 2019) should be used for this. The extent of the similarity should be noted and known factors to account for this fed back to the AO as part of the submission.

Scope

This guidance covers CAGs for the following qualifications.

Legacy FS Qualifications:

- Maths
- English
- ICT

At all levels (Entry 1 to level 2).

Reformed FS Qualifications:

- Maths
- English

At all levels (Entry 1 to level 2).

Eligible learners

Centres should submit CAGs for all FS learners affected by the Covid-19 disruption. This is defined as **all learners who they would expect to have taken the assessment / exam between 20 March and 31 July**. This includes:

- Learners attempting the assessment / exam for the first time
 - Learners resitting the assessment.
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It is acknowledged that learners may have both attempted for the first time and resat an exam/assessment during this period.

Centres must **NOT** submit CAGs for any learner they would not expect to have taken the exam/assessment during this period.

Component submissions

Centres must submit CAGs at the component level.

Functional Skills English Qualifications at each level (Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2) comprise three separately-assessed components: Reading; Writing and Speaking, Listening and Communication.

Functional Skills Mathematics Qualifications at each level (Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2) comprise one component. This applies to both legacy and reformed Functional Skills Mathematics Qualifications. Assessment for reformed FS consists a single component assessed in two parts, a non-calculator and a calculator section.

Functional Skills ICT at each level (Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1 and Level 2) comprise one component.

Centre assessment grades required by subject

For each component, centres should submit the following:

- For components assessed by exam (i.e. Maths level 1 and 2; English Reading level 1 and 2; English Writing level 1 and 2; ICT level 1 and 2), the centre will submit:
 - For each learner, an evidence-based judgement of whether the learner would pass or fail the component.
- For components assessed internally (i.e. Speaking Listening and Communication at level 1 and 2; all components at Entry level), the centre must submit:
 - Judgement of the tutor, using evidence, about which learners would have passed the assessment only (i.e. not those learners who they judge would have failed).

Evidence

For each learner, the member/s of staff judging the CAG must consider all available valid evidence which demonstrates the learner's progress towards the learning aims of the qualification. The evidence should be used in conjunction with the member of staff's professional expertise to form a judgement about whether the learner would pass or fail the component. All available evidence should be used and the minimum requirement for judging a learner's CAG is that there must be one piece of valid evidence available.

The following forms of evidence should be used to support judgement, where these are available:

- Previous centre-marked attempts at FS practice tests
- Previous attempts at the live exam (based on feedback previously supplied by the AO)
- Formative assessment results. Formative assessment is defined as assessment undertaken to check learning has taken place and assess progress towards the FS level. This can be centre-devised or a commercially-available product. This does **not** include initial and diagnostic assessment (see below).
- Any other learner work towards the qualification (i.e. work they have independently undertaken in class or at home)
- Learner work demonstrating the skills assessed by FS qualifications that has been completed in support of another qualification learning aim.

Results of initial and diagnostic assessment can be used but only in the following ways:

- As a benchmark to gauge progress made towards the component requirements by the learner
- Where this provides evidence that the learner had already met one or more of the component's assessed requirements at the point at which the initial / diagnostic assessment was taken.

Other forms of evidence may be acceptable, but it is recommended that the centre discusses these with the AO before judging CAGs.

It is acknowledged that these forms of evidence would not normally be considered in assessing these qualifications. It is also acknowledged that available evidence may only show partial achievement. So, teachers will need to exercise judgement and discretion in reaching decisions about which learners would have passed or failed. This includes a judgement, where learning has been disrupted, about whether the candidate would have passed had they completed the full programme of learning. Centres should bear in mind the learner's progression aim when providing a 'pass' CAG for a learner and that this means they believe that the learner would be able to progress to the next FSQ level or operate in an employment setting in respect of the skills that will be certificated

- For components assessed by exam (i.e. Maths level 1 and 2; English Reading level 1 and 2; English Writing level 1 and 2; ICT level 1 and 2), the centre will submit:
 - For each learner, an evidence-based judgement of whether the learner would pass or fail the component.
 - For components assessed internally (i.e. Speaking Listening and Communication at level 1 and 2; all components at Entry level), the centre will submit:
 - Judgement of the tutor, using evidence, about which learners would have passed the assessment only (i.e. not those learners who they would not judge to have passed).
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All evidence used to support judgement of CAGs may be subject to inspection by the AO and must be retained by for six months unless otherwise notified by the AO.

Guidance for teachers judging learners' CAGs

A learner's CAGs should only be judged by teachers with direct experience of teaching that learner the subject and component for which the CAG is being judged.

Where more than one teacher is responsible for teaching a learner a component, these teachers should work together to reach a judgement about the learner's CAG.

Where more than one teacher is responsible for teaching a subject / component at a particular level, they should work together to standardise their judgement in the way described below.

- Judgements must be made in an impartial, balanced and unbiased way; such that the assessment grades are based on evidence of attainment and avoid bias as far as is possible, so that learners are not systematically advantaged or disadvantaged by having or not having a protected characteristic or any other factor (for example character, appearance, social background or special educational needs) that does not relate to their knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to the subject. Protected characteristics are defined by the 2010 Equality Act as, age; disability; gender reassignment; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity.

Before judging CAGs

Teachers should be familiarised with:

- The guidance on the process issued by the AO.
 - The standards for the FS subject and level being assessed. These can be accessed from Ofqual's website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/functional-skills-qualifications-requirements>. For legacy FSQs (i.e. Maths and English pre September 2019 and ICT), the relevant legacy criteria should be used. For Maths and English learners from September 2019, the standards are published within the Conditions and Requirements documents as appendices.
 - For legacy and reformed Maths and English at levels 1 and 2, the AO common pass descriptors (guidance given below).
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Judging CAGs

Only learners affected by the Covid-19 disruption should have CAGs submitted. This is defined as:

All learners who they would expect to have taken the exam between 20 March and 31 July.

This includes:

- Learners attempting the assessment / exam for the first time
- Learners resitting the assessment / exam.

It is acknowledged that learners may have both attempted for the first time and resat an exam /assessment during this period.

Centres must **NOT** submit CAGs for any learner they would not expect to have taken the exam / assessment during this period.

Teachers should identify eligible learners before starting the process of judging learner CAGs.

The teacher should consider each eligible learner in turn. For each learner whose CAG is being judged, the teacher should consider:

- At least one piece of valid evidence that demonstrates the learner's progress towards the assessment requirements of the component.
- The assessment requirements of the component.
- (Where available) the pass descriptor for the component being considered.
- Their knowledge of the learner's ability.
- Any permitted support that would have been given to that learner in completing the assessment (at Entry level).
- Any reasonable adjustment that would have been made to the assessment for that learner in respect of a disability.

Using their professional expertise, teachers must reach a considered judgement about whether that learner would have passed or whether the learner would have failed the component had they taken the assessment in the usual way.

The evidence used may only show partial achievement of the component's requirements. In reaching a decision about each learner's component CAG, teachers must make a judgement that includes a reasonable consideration of whether the candidate would have passed had the scheduled programme of learning taken place and been completed by the learner.

Centres should bear in mind the learner's progression aim when providing a 'pass' CAG for a learner and that this means they believe that the learner would be able to progress to the next FSQ level or operate in an employment setting in respect of the skills that will be certificated.

In some cases, it may be considered that a learner would have been on the borderline between passing and failing the assessment, but the teacher may feel unable to reach a definitive judgement. In such cases it is recommended that:

- where possible, such cases are discussed as part of standardisation.
- particular attention is paid to the pass descriptor provided by the AO (where this is available for the component being considered).
- comparison is made between the evidence for that learner and evidence considered for other learners felt to be around the borderline but where it has been possible to reach a pass or fail decision.

It is further recommended that borderline decisions could be noted and reconsidered as part of the centre's QA check in relation to the overall profile of the CAGs for the component relative to expectations based on an equivalent historic period.

The teacher/s judgement for each learner should be recorded and the evidence retained in line with instructions given by the AO.

Standardisation

Where there is more than one teacher responsible for delivering a component within the centre and involved in judging CAGs for that component, these teachers must work together to standardise their judgements.

At the start of the process, teachers should individually consider an initial sample of learners and make provisional judgements about whether each would pass or fail. Any learners who are felt to be on the borderline of pass and fail should be noted. Before judging any further CAGs, the teachers should collaborate to discuss and compare their CAGs, the evidence used, and the judgement applied and reach agreement about the characteristics of pass and fail learners.

As a result of this process, judgements reached about the initial sample of learners may be revisited.

The teachers should then complete judgement for all learners but may wish to discuss any borderline decisions with colleagues as required.

Completing the CAGs judgement process

When CAGs have been judged for all learners for a particular component within an individual centre, the following should be recorded for each component:

- a) Total number of learners for whom a CAG has been judged
 - b) Total number for whom a 'pass' is recommended
 - c) Total number for whom a fail is recommended (where applicable)
 - d) The types of evidence used to support the process.
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The CAGs for each learner and a-d above should be passed to the Head of Centre for checking and submission to the AO.

Guidance on the Pass Descriptors for Level 1 and 2 Mathematics and English Reading and Writing

Pass descriptors have been provided for Maths, English Reading and English Writing at level 1 and 2. These should be used by teachers judging assessment CAGs for these components for both legacy and reformed FSQs. These are used to help ensure a common understanding of the minimum requirement for a pass for each component.

As part of the process leading to the implementation of reformed FSQs from September 2019, AOs worked together to develop an approach to standardise awarding of the FSQ components assessed through an exam.

AOs separately considered exam scripts for these components and noted the characteristics demonstrated by learners who had achieved the same total number of marks as the exam pass mark (e.g. learners who achieved 28 marks where the pass mark was 28 out of 40). This is defined as a 'minimally-competent' learner.

AOs then came together to agree common descriptors of the skills and capabilities typically demonstrated by a 'minimally-competent' learner.

It was noted, and this is acknowledged by the descriptors, that not all minimally competent learners are the same and that in some cases, weak performance against some of the assessed requirements is compensated for by strong performance against other requirements. Teachers should apply this consideration in reaching judgement.

These common descriptors are used by FSQ AOs as part of each AO's process for setting exam pass marks in order to support:

- A common interpretation of the standard required in order to pass the exam
- Consistency between the pass standard required for legacy and reformed qualifications.

The evidence used to develop the descriptors was taken from assessments for legacy qualifications and they are used to support awarding for reformed qualifications. Therefore, these are appropriate, and should be used to support judgements, for both legacy and reformed assessments.

Reformed assessments

For reformed assessments, the descriptors are being kept under review and it is planned that further work will take place to consider requirements that have been added or revised as part of FS reform. At the present time, this work has been suspended on account of the Covid-19

disruption. At the point in time at which the disruption took place, the reformed qualifications had only been established for about 6 months. This means that evidence is incomplete and still emerging about the reformed pass standard and where awarding for reformed assessments has taken place, this will have taken into account unfamiliar aspects of the new specifications.

The following guidance is given in respect of this:

- Throughout the FSQ reform programme, Ofqual have given AOs guidance that while aspects of the requirements for each component have changed, there was no steer from Government that the *overall standard* required to pass any FSQ assessment should change.
- For awards made so far for reformed FSQs, Ofqual have asked AOs to take into consideration any impacts on achievement caused by the relative unfamiliarity of the requirements of reformed FSQs and to take these into consideration in setting pass marks. In practice, where there is evidence of such impacts, this means that pass marks may be set a few marks below where these would be set for a more established qualification. It was expected that the process of the new requirements becoming established would have continued throughout the first year of the reformed qualifications and this includes the period for which CAGs are judged. Teachers judging CAGs should therefore apply a similar judgement in judging learners CAGs for reformed Functional Skills assessments.