

Assessment mitigation centre guidance communication in relation to Covid-19 disruption, 2021 for Health and Social Care and Childcare/Early years

This is a joint communication from all the Awarding Organisations/Bodies (AOs/ABs) as identified by their logos and it applies ONLY to the Health & Social Care and Childcare/Early Years qualifications offered in England Wales and NI. The content of this document applies to those qualifications where assessment requirements are outlined in assessment principles published by either Skills for Care & Development, Skills for Health or both.

This document DOES NOT apply to qualifications with Wales only, NI only and Wales and NI in the titles.

In addition, adaptations for qualifications relating to First Aid Pharmacy Services and Dental Nursing are detailed in separate documents, which can be found on the relevant Awarding Organisation web pages.

The adaptations within this document may apply to learners who are expecting to complete their qualifications by the end of academic years 2020/21

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has resulted in continued disruption to education and training and further disruption may occur. Due to continued requirements to adhere to social distancing and restrictions this may affect either or both learner or assessor access to employer sites.

The Awarding Organisations are working collaboratively with Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA and with the relevant workforce regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to agree on the proposed mitigations applicable to all other qualifications not covered by the guidance for NI and Wales as mentioned above.

Following on from the mitigation documentation issued in November 2020 we have now worked together as part of the Joint Awarding Organisations/Bodies Quality Group (JABQ) (AOs/ABs) to review this Assessment mitigation centre guidance document in line with the ongoing challenges across the sector

The principles underpinning our shared approaches include the expectation that planning continues for all learners to achieve **full placement hours** (where mandated in the qualification specification) unless specific guidance has already been issued by individual AOs/ABs.

In extremely exceptional circumstances, where learners have not been able to access the required number of placement hours, Awarding Organisations may consider adaptations, as outlined below.

Health & Social Care qualifications with specified placement hours

As long as these qualifications are not recognised as licenses to practice, then Awarding Organisations may:

- issue guidance to their centres outlining alternatives to how the criteria associated with work experience may be evidenced.

- reduce the number of placement hours required based on what evidence learners have already had assessed.
- confirm with centres that ALL Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria must be evidenced and assessed as being met, before learners can be certificated.

Early Years and Childcare qualifications

For any qualification which has been approved by the Department for Education's (DfE) as meeting the Early Years Educator or Early Years Practitioner criteria, the following adaptations may apply:

- mandated placement hours in work based and license to practice qualifications are relaxed so giving students a greater chance to achieve the qualification within a limited placement experience when they are not employed in the setting
- adapting guidance regarding the requirement for the learner to have experience and evidence of working with more than one age group of children
- the DfE Early Years Educator/Practitioner (EYE/EYP) criteria have been risk rated to maximise and optimise the student's opportunities within the real work environment. A mapping document has been provided for Early Years Educator/Early Years Practitioner qualifications to guide the Assessor through the risk rated approach to inform planning. By using the risk rated approach students will be able to focus on high risk competencies during limited placement time and use additional methods such as professional discussion to ensure triangulation of evidence before criteria is fully met. Please refer to the Early Years Educator and Early Years Practitioner mapping documents on each individual AO's website.
- there MUST be evidence of performance, based on either assessor observation and/or Expert Witness Testimony, which is sufficient to support the learner's claim to competence, as outlined in the Mapping Document referred to above.

In all cases the evidence produced by the learner MUST meet the relevant DfE criteria – Early Years Practitioner or Early Years Educator, which effectively means that ALL Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria must have been evidenced, assessed and achieved.

Learners who are progressing from the Level 2 qualifications with mandated work placements to Level 3 during this academic year (2020/21) are permitted to carry forward up to 25% of the total work experience/practice hours that were undertaken during the completion of their Level 2 qualification.

Work based and License to Practice qualifications

The adaptations below can apply to any work based learning qualification requiring the proof of competence in Healthcare, Health & Social Care, Adult Care and Children and Young People's Workforce:

Skills-based competencies must include direct observation of the learner's performance as the main source of evidence and assessment method. This must only be carried out by a centre based assessor, where it is deemed safe and appropriate following a robust COVID-19 risk assessment process, which takes into account all relevant and current guidance and national/local directives.

Where it is not safe to gain direct observation of performance by the assessor, the following approaches should be considered - a combination should be used to create a robust triangulation of performance-based evidence for the learner.

Expert Witness Testimony (EWT)

The use of an Expert Witness is permitted to undertake and provide observations of performance of the student if an observation by a qualified assessor cannot be completed.

An Expert Witness must:

- have a working knowledge of the units for which they are providing Expert Witness Testimony
- be occupationally competent in their area for which they are providing Expert Witness Testimony
- have EITHER any qualification in assessment of workplace performance OR a work role which involves evaluating the everyday practice of staff within their area of expertise.

The Expert Witness must be provided with induction, training and ongoing support from the assessor/IQA that is timely, meaningful, and appropriate, in order to encourage the provision of a robust statement of the student's performance against agreed standards or criteria. Centres must retain records on the occupational competence of Expert Witnesses. Suitable Expert Witnesses should be explored with the learner and the workplace.

Centres should enable Expert Witnesses to provide and present their evidence in an efficient way which does not compromise validity and reliability. This could include:

- the use of voice and audio recordings, or
- through remote discussions where the main assessor could scribe the Expert Witness contributions (for example via Teams or Zoom) ,or
- over the telephone where the assessor could scribe the testimony.

Additionally, centres must adapt their Internal Quality Assurance strategies to ensure that Assessor judgements based on EWT are prioritised for standardisation and sampling activities.

The use of Professional Discussion and Reflective Accounts can be used to support other forms of evidence but are not direct evidence sources which can replace the observation requirement. These can be used to support the triangulation of evidence.

Remote Technology

The use of remote technology is prohibited within early years, school, childcare and health and social care settings where there is a potential risk of users of the service or their carers/ families being inadvertently seen or heard. This includes the use of all recording and streaming devices such as iPads, mobile phones, laptops and tablets. Please note that technology must not be used to view assessments remotely, even when not recording. For example, Assessors cannot complete remote observations to prove competency by viewing learners 'live' using remote technology.

The use of remote technologies **could** be considered to support aspects of the student's performance. For example, this may include planning sessions, on-line meetings and remote activities in which the student is contributing, and where the assessor could also attend remotely or observe through use of technology. In these examples, the learner **MUST** be in an environment away from any service users. The use of technologies could also be considered for capturing Expert Witness Testimonies

Assessment Principles for qualifications endorsed by Skills for Care and Skills for Health

Centres should be aware that both Skills for Care and Development, and Skills for Health have published documents which outline flexibilities to their assessment principles to support learners to progress through their qualifications wherever this is possible.

These documents can be found at the links below

[Skills for Care](#)

[Skills for Health](#)

Centres should be familiar with the content of these documents, which is reflected in this Joint AO adaptation guidance.

Use of remote technology

Each of the above documents is clear that the use of remote technology is not permitted where there is a risk of compromising the privacy, dignity or confidentiality of any individual, child, young person or family using services.

The use of remote technologies could be considered to observe aspects of the learner's performance where the above circumstances would not be compromised. Examples of this could include:

- Assessment planning and feedback
- Professional discussions
- Planning for supervision
- Team meetings where the information shared is not confidential and the appropriate consent has been given.
- Simulated activity- where allowed in the qualification.

Simulation

Assessors will find useful information about simulation and where it is permitted in the individual unit guidance or qualification assessment strategy or adaptation/risk rated mapping documentation on each AO's website.

Good practice tips

Here are some of the good practice tips for centres to consider. These will help reassure employers and help you to plan and prioritise the work placements for learners expecting to complete their qualifications in academic year 2020/21.

- Make use of an Expert Witness Testimony and support Expert Witnesses to provide valid evidence.
- Working with employers to plan for placements. Centres to have a strategy in place for reducing the risk and following local protocols
- Planning for placement and phasing these
- Consider block placements rather than weekly
- Supporting employers by preparing learners and assessors in infection prevention and control and associated risk assessments
- Assessors/teachers/tutors to prioritise direct observations during visits and make use of outdoor environments to minimise risk especially in Childcare
- Creating a bubble by using a single assessor/teacher/tutor for each setting rather than by learner, which limits the risk and allows assessors/teachers/tutors to see more learners during visits

We recommend that all centres continue to develop and maintain relationships with employers on accessing placement/work experience for ongoing support and assessment. We appreciate that is still a challenge and we hope that the revised information will support centres and students toward success in their vocational career journeys. We will continue to review and revise this guidance accordingly and in a timely manner.

