

# Assessment mitigation centre guidance for Wales and Northern Ireland only, in relation to Covid-19 disruption, 2021-22

**Guidance for the Health & Social Care and Child Development and Well-being,  
Wales, and Northern Ireland qualifications only**

**Version 1.2 (August 2021)**



## Version control

Version	Amendment type	Section/Qualification
1.0 (September 2020)	Document created and published	All
1.1 (May 2021)	Vocational and Technical Qualification Contingency Regulatory Framework” (VCRF) information added	Page 3
	Updated deadline of when these adaptations are available until	All
	Guidance added in relation to ‘mid-flight’ students/learners	Page 5
	References to student/learner amended to refer to ‘learner’ only	All
	Information regarding “Qualifications for which no adaptation is necessary” amended	Page 12
	Teacher Assessed Grades signposting added	Page 12
1.2 (August 2021)	VCRF information amended and reduced	Page 3-4
	Confirmation of extension to adaptations	Page 3-4
	Removal of detail re Category B qualifications	Page 3-4
	Information on return to assessor observation	Page 3-4
	In-flight and new learners	Page 3
	Assessment of professional supervision and appraisal	Page 6
	Clarification on triangulation of evidence	Page 6
	Accessing Early Years Placements	Page 9
Change to Level 1 and TAG	Page 10; page 14	

Throughout 2020 to 2021, awarding organisations made changes to their qualifications (adaptations) in response to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

### **The Vocational and Technical Qualification Contingency Regulatory Framework” (VCRF)**

Following a technical consultation on the detail of a new regulatory framework, the new “VTQ Contingency Regulatory Framework” (VCRF) (March 2021), and the Qualifications Wales Vocational Qualifications Contingency Regulatory Framework (April 2021) were launched.

The frameworks set out a number of [categories of qualifications](#) eligible for alternative assessment for the period 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021. The risks associated with Covid-19 remain an ongoing concern and it is likely that public health restrictions will continue to impact the lives of individuals and communities, locally and nationally.

As a result, in **instances wherein normal assessment is not possible for a prolonged period of time<sup>1</sup> and where this interruption relates to Covid-19** these alternative assessment arrangements will **continue through the academic year 2021/22** and will be available to both ‘inflight’<sup>2</sup> and new learners, only.

#### **Category A qualifications**

The qualifications referred to within **Appendix 1** of this document have been categorised as Category A qualifications<sup>3</sup>. This category of qualifications is used to demonstrate learner occupational or professional competence for entry directly into employment. This includes NVQs, licence to practise qualifications and qualifications that form part of an apprenticeship framework. Where these types of qualifications cannot be completed safely, even with permitted adaptations in place, learner progress will need to be delayed until such times as assessment can safely continue.

As for previous adaptations, the flexible approaches outline in this document have been applied specifically where:

- there are requirements to include direct observation as the main source of evidence
- where work experience/practice hours are a mandatory requirement of the qualification

When considering the ongoing relevance of the agreed adaptations and their extension, the Awarding Organisations/Bodies referenced in this document have

---

<sup>1</sup> Continuous and sustained disruption interrupts learner progression or access to assessment and they are disadvantaged

<sup>2</sup> includes all learners who have been unable to complete their qualification during 2019/2020 or 2020/21

<sup>3</sup> As defined by the Vocational Qualifications Contingency Regulatory Framework, category A qualifications are used to demonstrate occupational or professional competence in order to enter directly into employment

worked collaboratively with Social Care Wales and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and other industry stakeholders, including employer bodies. In doing so issues relating to the manageability, validity and reliability of the relevant qualifications and their assessment have been considered, whilst simultaneously responding to the prospect of ongoing disruption during through the remainder of 2021 and during 2022.

Whilst there is a risk of further disruption, the expectation is that wherever possible teaching, learning and assessment should return to normal, pre-Covid 19 activity. Where direct observation by a qualified assessor is normal practice then this should be prioritised as the primary approach to enable robust and reliable assessment of competency.

These arrangements apply to qualifications operated by the following Awarding Organisations/Bodies:

- City & Guilds
- NCFE CACHE
- Pearson
- OCN NI
- BIIAB
- Agored Cymru

## Observation of practice – competency-based qualifications

Where it is safe<sup>4</sup> to do so, observation by an occupationally competent and qualified assessor is preferred as the **main source of evidence for all learners**.

Where this is not possible due to protracted disruption caused by Covid-19 restrictions, the Awarding Organisations/Bodies will accept testimonies provided by a suitably experienced employer/manager/leader recruited by the centre to undertake the role of an Expert Witness (EW).

Centres must ensure that EWs fulfil the specific requirements detailed in the Skills for Care and Development<sup>5</sup> Assessment Principles<sup>6</sup> and/or their recently published 'flexible arrangements' document<sup>7</sup>. This includes the requirement to provide EWs with induction, training and ongoing support that is timely, meaningful, and

---

<sup>4</sup> Does not contravene national and/or local restrictions and following a robust and appropriate Covid-19 risk assessment

<sup>5</sup> Skills for Care and Development is Skills for Care and Development (SfCD) is the UK sector skills council (SSC) for social care, children, early years and young people. Its structure for realising the SSC remit is via a partnership of four organisations: Care Council for Wales, Northern Ireland Social Care Council, Scottish Social Services Council and Skills for Care (adult social care only)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SfCD-assessment-principles- updated-Feb2019-1.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Adaptions-to-Assessment-Principles-Covid-19.pdf>

appropriate. Please note that Expert Witness Testimony (EWT) can be captured digitally which is often a more accessible approach for all concerned.

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

The appropriate use, recording, standardisation, and sampling of EWT and the process of EW recruitment, induction, training, and support will be subject to External Quality Assurance by the Awarding Organisations/Bodies.

**Certification will not be possible for any competency-based qualification unless substantial assessor observations and/or EWT are present in a learner's portfolio and that these are based on experience within a real work setting.**

Please note that the Skills for Care and Development Assessment Principles and the associated 'Flexible Arrangements' are endorsed by Social Care Wales (please refer to Appendix 2) and by the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (please refer to Appendix 3).

### Recording of Expert Witness Testimony

Centres should enable Expert Witnesses to provide and present their testimony in an efficient way ensuring that this 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 EW contributions. **Please note that both paper and online forms are permitted.**

Throughout the process centres must ensure that the confidentiality, dignity and privacy of individuals, children, young people, or families using services remains paramount and must not be compromised. This is particularly important when video and/or audio streaming or recording is being used.

### Use of technology to support assessment

In order to protect their confidentiality, dignity, and privacy the use of video and/or audio streaming or recordings is **not permitted for direct observation** where an individual, child or young person, or their families may be present or wherein personal information about their care is being discussed.

Additionally, please refer to the additional guidance provided by Social Care Wales and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council regarding the use of technology to record supervision or appraisal meetings.

Video and/or audio streaming and recording **can** be used to gather evidence in the following situations only:

- assessment planning, feedback, and review

- team meetings – only aspects of the Agenda that are general in nature e.g., not linked to the specific care of an individual, child or young person, or their families
- Planning and/or review of the learner’s training and development
- Planning of supervision/appraisal
- Professional discussion
- Planning and recording EWT
- Learner reflection

### Triangulation of evidence

The requirement to capture evidence of competence, and applied knowledge and understanding, continues to be best practice and is essential to robust assessment. Triangulation of evidence during this period **must** include the following, please refer to page 8 wherein more detailed guidance is provided for each assessment method:

- Assessor observation and/or EWT
- Learner reflection<sup>8</sup>
- Professional discussion<sup>9</sup>

### Simulation

Simulation is a useful way to learn new skills and to develop and gain confidence in a safe and supported environment, for example, when learning how to use a hoist. In some circumstances, it can be used to judge competency, for example the assessment of first aid skills, including different forms of CPR.

Within competency qualifications, simulation is **ONLY** permitted where explicitly detailed within a specific unit. Simulation must **NOT** be used in any other circumstances.

---

<sup>8</sup> Reflection on experiences in real working environments – reflections based on simulation, case studies or scenarios will not be accepted

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

## Mandatory work experience/practice hours

Where a work experience/practice requirement is a mandatory requirement within a qualification, wherever possible Awarding Organisations/Bodies expect **all learners** to achieve this requirement in full. Where this is not possible due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, learners will only be able to progress to certification in the following circumstances:

- The learner has completed at least 70% of the required work experience/practice hours and all attempts to access further hours have been exhausted – **please see table below for relevant calculations**
- Steps have been taken to support the learner to achieve the required work experience/practice hours,<sup>10</sup> including part-time employment, bank and relief options, volunteering, work during holiday periods
- Actions taken to secure the full requirement of work experience/practice hours have been recorded and are available for internal and external quality assurance

Level	Qualification Title	Mandatory Placement Hours	70% Flexibility – hours required
<b>Child Development and Well-being</b>			
Level 2	Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development (Wales and Northern Ireland)	280hrs	196hrs
Level 3	Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development (Wales and Northern Ireland)	700hrs	490hrs
Level 3	Extended Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development (Wales and Northern Ireland)	700hrs	490hrs
Level 2	Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development (Northern Ireland)	350-400hrs	245 – 280hrs
Level 3	Diploma for Children’s Care, Learning and Development (Northern Ireland)	600-700hrs	420 – 490hrs
Level 3	BTEC Nationals in Children's Care, Learning and Development	Variations up to 800 hours <sup>11</sup>	Variations up to 560 hours
Level 4	BTEC Higher National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care	375 hours	263 hours
Level 5	BTEC Higher National Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care	525 hours	368 hours
<b>Health and Social Care</b>			
Level 3	Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) (Northern Ireland)	100hrs	70hrs
Level 3	OCNNI Diploma and Health and Social Care <sup>12</sup>	600hrs	420hrs

<sup>10</sup> In relation to childcare qualifications the search for placements has included the full spectrum of regulated and inspected early years provision including full day care, sessional care and childminding settings

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to the relevant qualification specification to confirm the required mandatory hours for each specific qualification and seek specific guidance from the Awarding Organisation/Body

<sup>12</sup> This new OCNNI qualification is **NOT** available in Wales

In extremely exceptional circumstances<sup>13</sup>, certification may still be possible for learners who have completed less than 70% of the required work experience/practice hours. Awarding Organisations/Bodies will continue to work collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders to monitor learners' ongoing access to work experience/practice. Any further adaptations relating to work experience/practice hours will only be considered by the Awarding Organisations/Bodies where robust triangulation of evidence is present within a learner's portfolio, as follows:

- Significant Expert Witness Testimony (EWT) from the employer which details the learner's competence has been consistently displayed **over time**, across all units within the qualification and is sufficient to meet the specified assessment criteria. Please note that a single EWT will not be accepted as enough evidence.
- Substantial and holistic learner reflection across all units within the qualification clearly evidencing the integration of knowledge into practice. Reflections must be linked solely to the learner's work experience/placement; reflection based on simulation, case studies or scenario-based reflection **will not be accepted**
- Significant professional discussions between the learner, assessor, and Expert Witness. These will occur **over time** and provide opportunity for the:
  - Learner to expand on submitted reflections for the purposes of VARCS<sup>14</sup>
  - The EWT to enrich and validate the learner's reflections
  - The Assessor to gather evidence relating to outstanding areas of competency, particularly in relation to the integration of knowledge into practice and/or aspects of practice occur infrequently

In light of the levels of uncertainty currently being experienced with regard to access to work experience/practice and to help ensure the best opportunity for a successful outcome, centres should use this model of triangulation for **all** learners who are completing competency-based qualifications.

## Supporting access to Early Years placements

**Northern Ireland:** The NI employer Forum is keen to support employers to access high quality placement experiences. Please contact:

- Jenny Adair: [jenny.Adair@hscni.net](mailto:jenny.Adair@hscni.net)
- Diane Koplewsky: [dianekoplewsky@outlook.com](mailto:dianekoplewsky@outlook.com)

---

<sup>13</sup> Extremely exceptional circumstances relates to instances of protracted and persistent placement disruption for a duration longer than 4mths i.e. an academic term

<sup>14</sup> VARCS- Validity, authenticity, reliability, currency, and sufficiency

## 2020/21 'progressing' Level 2 CCLD learners

Learners who are progressing from the Level 2 CCLD<sup>15</sup> to Level 3 (2020/21 and/or 2021/22) 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. This allowance will only be available if the learner can:

- Evidence recent (within the previous 2 years), authenticated and relevant work experience which reflects some of the competency requirements of the Level 3 qualification to which they are progressing.

All learners seeking to access this adaptation must undergo initial assessment against the requirements of the qualification, and an individual learning plan produced. Internal Quality Assurance strategies must be adapted to ensure adequate sampling of this process and its outcomes with the associated documentation for both aspects made available for External Quality Assurance.

## External quality assurance activity

The external quality assurance activity undertaken by Awarding Organisations/Bodies will confirm that assessment and internal quality assurance have been conducted in line with the qualification specification and/or the adaptation outlined above. Where the adaptation has been applied, the EQA will check the following:

- The validity and reliability of the process used
- That EWT has been used appropriately and only where permitted
- All possible routes to secure work experience/practice have been exhausted before the 70% adaptation has been applied or additional reduction pursued
- IQA has been planned and implemented as appropriate to the adaptations applied
- Appropriate use of technology for video/audio streaming and/or recording.

## External Assessment

The guidance on external assessment will be issued by individual Awarding Organisations/Bodies, where applicable.

## Monitoring of any ongoing impact resulting from Covid-19 restrictions

The Awarding Organisations/Bodies will continue to monitor and review any ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and their potential to disrupt learner access to work experience/practice and qualification assessment.

---

<sup>15</sup> Learners completing L2 CCLD (NI) and learners completing L2 CCLD (Wales and Northern Ireland)

## Qualifications where no adaptation is required

For some category A qualifications, it will be the case that no flexibilities or adaptations are required as assessments can continue to be delivered and assessed in the usual way according to the acceptable approaches within the assessment strategy/plan.

### Level 1 qualifications

The suite of Level 1 qualifications support progression to further or higher study or into employment and therefore under the **Vocational Qualifications Contingency Regulatory Framework** (Ofqual, March 21; Qualifications Wales, April 21) had been classified as Category B1 qualifications. Please note that a TAG process is currently no longer available for these qualifications.

From 01 September 2021, the delivery and assessment of these qualifications should continue in accordance with the approaches identified in the assessment strategy/plan.

## Appendix 1

### Pearson qualifications where adaptations apply

Level	Qualification Title	QAN
<b>Child Development and Well-being</b>		
Level 2	Diploma in Children's Care Learning and Development (Wales and Northern Ireland)	501/1814/6
Level 3	Award in Children's Care, Learning and Development	500/1814/0
Level 3	Certificate in Children's Care, Learning and Development	500/1813/9
Level 3	Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development	500/1812/7
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Learning and Development: Advance Practice (Wales & Northern Ireland)	501/2250/2
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Children's Care, Learning and Development: Management (Wales & Northern Ireland)	501/2251/4
Level 4	BTEC Higher National Certificate in Early Childhood Education and Care	603/3899/4
Level 5	BTEC Higher National Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care	603/3900/7
<b>Health and Social Care</b>		
Level 3	<b>Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) Wales and Northern Ireland</b>	501/1835/3
Level 3	Diploma in Health and Social Care (Children and Young People) Wales and Northern Ireland	501/1427/X
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care Services (Children and Young People's Advanced Practice) Wales & NI	600/0521/X
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care Services (Adults' Advanced Practice) Wales & NI	600/0279/7
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care Services (Children and Young People's Residential Management) Wales	600/0060/0
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care Services (Children and Young People's Management) Wales.	600/0050/8
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care Services (Adults' Residential Management) Wales & Northern Ireland	600/0292/X
Level 5	Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care Services (Adults' Management) Wales & Northern Ireland	600/0051/X

## Appendix 2 Social Care Wales statement



Skills for Care and Development Assessment principles: Flexible arrangements to support existing principles and approaches to unit/qualification assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Published August 2020

We have been asked to provide some additional information about the recently published Skills for Care and Development Assessment Principles.

The regulator for qualifications in Wales is Qualifications Wales. Any generic assessment principles developed as a 4-nation approach should therefore be considered within specific arrangements agreed by the Qualification Regulator for qualifications offered in Wales.

Information for adaptations to the new restricted suite of health and social care and childcare qualifications in Wales has been published on the Health and Care Learning Wales website <https://www.healthandcarelearning.wales/covid-19-coronavirus-advice/>, any further changes to these adaptations must be agreed by the Qualifications Regulator.

The adaptations set out within the Skills for Care and Development Assessment Principles can be applied to the 'legacy' qualifications, i.e., those qualifications for health and social care and childcare which were the predecessors to the new suite of restricted qualifications in Wales. We would stress however that observation would be the first option for assessment of practice, only where this is not possible due to restrictions imposed because of Covid-19 should Expert Witness Testimony be used.

Karen Wakelin

**Rheolwr Datblygu a Gwella**

**Improvement and Development Manager**

## Appendix 3



**Arrangements to support existing principles and approaches to Health & Social Care and Early Years learner placements, observation, and assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

### **Introduction**

This approach to placements, observations and assessments have been developed in partnership and approved by the Social Care Council's Qualification and Development Panel (QUADP).

This guidance is in addition to the Skills for Care and Development (SfC&D) Assessment Principles (COVID-19) issued August 2020. This guidance should be used in conjunction with the SfC&D Assessment Principles.

<https://skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SfCD-assessment-principles- updated-Feb2019-1.pdf>

These adaptations will be reviewed in June 2021 and apply to adult social care, early years, and childcare qualifications in Northern Ireland.

## Arrangements as Agreed

### Direct observations

Competence based assessment requirements must include direct observation of performance of the learner as the main source of evidence, where it is deemed safe and appropriate and following an appropriate placement/organisation COVID-19 risk assessment process. **Learner placements and direct observation of performance remains the preferred method of assessment.** The Social Care Council will work with employers, training providers and awarding organisations to support placements for students/learners where it is safe to do so.

The Social Care Council's Qualification and Development Panel (QUADP) members offered the following advice for securing placements during COVID-19:

- I. Work with local employers to secure placements and be agile in how placements take place, i.e., 3 block work placements by the same learners – the panel felt this would reduce the risk of infection by allowing the learners to be in 'one' place for a number of weeks therefore reducing contact with others outside of the placement, instead of previous 2/3 day a week placement over a longer extended time.
- II. Consider negotiating with employers about employing learners part-time and using this part-time work as evidence – it is noted however that there may be insurance, funding, and benefits issues but it was felt that this could and should be explored as an option. A number of employers on the panel noted they would be keen to consider this option.

Appendix 1 (page 4) of NISCC guidance is a preplacement risk assessment for providers and employers to consider along with their own risk assessments.

The Social Care Council's guidance and the Pre-Placement Risk Assessment has been developed to ensure as much as possible that:

1. Learners undertaking competence-based H&SC and Early Years Qualifications during the COVID-19 pandemic are given opportunities in services to learn from experienced H&SC and EY colleagues in order to ensure the opportunity to evidence competence.
2. Learners acquire the necessary skills and develop competence in skills from 'real life' opportunities
3. That employers offering opportunities for placements to learners are confident that all necessary risk assessments have taken place
4. That employers offering employment opportunities to learners can be confident that they (learners/students) have developed the skills and competency as required by the diploma they are undertaking and that students/learners will not be disadvantaged by lack of access to appropriate placement opportunities

**It is accepted that there are occasions where it is not safe to place students in services or gain direct observations of performance, the approaches outlined in the SfC&D COVID-19 Assessment Principles should be considered**

<https://skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SfCD-assessment-principles- updated-Feb2019-1.pdf>