Distance learning and assessment policy

Document summary

This policy is for centres who are applying to use distance learning or assessment as defined by Pearson in our vocational qualifications and outlines the minimum requirements needed to deliver our qualifications in this way.

Formal approval for distance learning will require the completion of the Self-Assessment section of this policy document and submission to Pearson.

Contents

Pearson Education Ltd – our mission and values

Our purpose is simple: to help people realize the life they imagine through learning. We believe that every learning opportunity is a chance for a personal breakthrough. That's why our c. 18,000 Pearson employees are committed to creating vibrant and enriching learning experiences designed for real-life impact. We are the world's lifelong learning company, serving customers in nearly 200 countries with digital content, assessments, qualifications, and data. For us, learning isn't just what we do. It's who we are. Visit us at pearsonplc.com.

We are regulated by the UK qualifications regulators Ofqual (England), CCEA Regulation (Northern Ireland) and Qualifications Wales (Wales). Our regulatory policies are integral to our approach and articulate how we meet regulatory requirements. These policies are designed to support centres and students and set out clearly our approach to the design, delivery, and award of Pearson qualifications and services.

1. What is distance learning and assessment?

1.1 **Distance learning** is a mode of delivering education and instruction, often on an individual basis, to learners who are not physically present in a traditional setting such as a classroom.

Examples of distance learning

- Learners studying remotely in a virtual learning environment, using, for example, online packages, posted resources, telephone/online support, or live virtual delivery (individual or group).

What is not distance learning

- Learners released from employment to attend classroom-based theory sessions.
- Learners undertaking practical experience, outside of the classroom, that is part of the qualification.
- An integrated learning environment where classroom based and remote teaching and learning become complementary, with the purpose of giving learners a more diverse and engaging learning environment. This is considered by Pearson to be blended learning.

1.2 **Distance assessment** is a method of assessment completed by learners away from a centre, with no face-to-face contact with tutors. Unsupervised e-assessment activities are designed to be carried out by the learner, while contributing to Total Qualification Time. Distance assessment enables learners to be assessed if they are in situations/settings where traditional methods of assessment may be difficult or impossible. Distance assessment may be used where this is most suitable and valid to meet individual learner's requirements.

Examples of distance assessment

- Use of e-portfolio / e-assessment where this is the sole means of contact between the learner and the assessor.
- Assessments completed in a location remote from the assessor, without direct supervision from a centre. For example, assignments completed using a Virtual Learning Environment or assessments completed as part of correspondence courses.

What is not distance assessment

- Learners are assessed in their workplace by an assessor, for a work-based learning programme (for example, NVQ Construction).

- Pearson-set assessments that must be completed under supervision (on demand tests) and either JCQ inspected or approved to follow Pearson Instructions for the conduct of Examinations ICE.
- E-portfolios which are being used in traditional learning settings.

Distance learning and assessment are not appropriate where:

- Practical skills and/or interaction with individuals/equipment must be demonstrated and assessed.
- The assessment methods chosen by the centre to meet the requirements of distance learning are not appropriate to assess learners' achievement of the learning outcomes.
- There are externally set and marked examinations which must follow JCQ and Pearson ICE requirements.
- There are group work situations/units where collaboration with others is needed.
- There is a requirement for learners to be overseen in person by centre staff at a specific physical location, under controlled conditions. This includes observations of performance in SVQ/NVQ type competency-based qualifications and Pearson externally set and marked examinations and controlled tasks.

Example of distance assessment: Pearson Higher National Diploma Level 5 in Business

Learners are home-based. Programmes are delivered and assessed in unsupervised conditions through:
- Learners working from their computers at home.
- Video conferencing.
- Videos are provided.
- Online learning materials e.g. uploaded files, links to third party resources
- Electronic chat forums and virtual classrooms.
- Assignments submitted by post, email or by online submission e.g., Turnitin and assessed by the tutor.
- E-portfolio.
- Pre-recorded lectures/presentations, live sessions using software e.g. Zoom.

Support is provided to the learners by:

- Online tutor support by chat, phone or email during centre opening hours.
- Online instructor announcements, message boards and discussion forums.
- Assignments assessed and returned to learners within a published framework.
- A technical support helpline for learners.

Learners' work is authenticated by:

- Live presentations/submission of recorded presentations.
- Text matching software, e.g., Turnitin, Copyleaks, Safeassign.
- Use of Lockdown browser for online tests and quizzes.
- Supervised assessment activities.
- Use of password controlled/voice recognition software.
- Telematic equipment (online or telephone questioning with the learner).
- Employer authentication of the learner's work.

2. Scope of policy

2.1 This policy applies to centres wishing to apply for the delivery of programmes of learning leading to Pearson vocational qualifications, through the means of distance learning and/or assessment. This policy does not apply where centres require short term contingency arrangements due to unforeseen circumstances affecting delivery at national level. This policy outlines the minimum requirements that you must meet to use distance learning or distance assessment.

2.2 It is essential that you understand, and follow, any qualification-and unit-specific requirements for delivery or assessment that are set out in the qualification specification. Some vocational qualifications cannot be approved for distance delivery, including those with external assessment or practical units that require face to face assessment. Contact our teams who will be able to advise on programme requirements.

2.3 [Education and Skills Funding Agency](#) (page 45) states within their **apprenticeship** funding rules that funding **cannot be given to off-the-job training delivered by distance learning**. Off-the-job training can be funded if it provides a mixed delivery model, for example, distance, online or blended learning as per the limit of the funding band.

2.4 Distance learning and assessment may not be the right approach for some learners, so it is important that you recruit with integrity. Learners who study remotely will need to have the technical and communication skills, and **appropriate resources** to enable them to work independently and communicate effectively. **The provision of [Reasonable Adjustments](#) must also be considered for learners that require them when recruiting for distance learning.**

2.5 Any newly approved centre or any existing centre which has recently gained approval for a Higher National qualification must contact us through the [Pearson support portal](#) before applying for distance learning. This is so that we can review the information we have on record prior to you completing an application.

3. How to apply to use distance learning or distance assessment

Step 1: Complete and submit a Distance Learning Self-Assessment (DLSA) Form when you apply for qualification approval

3.1 You must have approval for a distance learning or assessment mode of delivery. It is important that you **do not start delivering a programme** by distance learning or distance assessment **without approval** as this could lead to specific sanctions or withdrawal of your centre or programme approval. For **centres delivering a qualification for the first time**, please submit your DSLA application alongside your programme approval documentation. This can be found in Appendix A of this policy.

3.2 Applying to us means that we can put quality assurance procedures in place to support you and your learners. [Visit our qualifications approval page](#) for details on how to apply for approval.

3.3 **If you are already approved** for qualifications which you now want to deliver by distance learning or assessment, you will need to let us know by submitting a completed DLSA Form and send it via the [Pearson Support Portal](#).

3.4 We may ask to see the evidence that you have recorded in the DLSA Form.

3.5 We may need to visit your centre to confirm how the approval criteria can be met for this mode of study. You will need to demonstrate how your quality systems will support distance learning or assessment to ensure our approval requirements are met.

3.6 Please see section 6 for other useful documents to support you.

Step 2: Outcome of your application

3.7 There are three possible outcomes to your application:

- Your application is successful. We will contact you to confirm your approval and you can then start delivering distance learning and/or assessment.
- Your application is incomplete. We will ask you for further information.
- Your application is unsuccessful. We will contact you to explain why you have not been successful. If you wish to reapply for approval later, you will need to develop an action plan to address any requirements.

Step 3: Register your learners (after receipt of approval confirmation)

3.8 When you register learners, you must tell us which learners are being taught or assessed at a distance.

3.9 When you register your learners, select the distance learning option under 'mode of delivery'.

3.10 We will continue to support and monitor your use of distance learning or distance assessment through the normal Standards Verification / External Examinations quality assurance processes.

4. Policy review date

4.1 This policy will be reviewed in November 2026.

5. Regulatory references

5.1 UK regulators require all awarding organisations to establish and maintain their compliance with regulatory conditions and criteria. As part of this process, policies

and guides that relate to Pearson's status as an awarding organisation will reference any conditions and criteria that they address.

5.2   This policy addresses the following regulatory criteria and conditions:

Qualification regulator or relevant governing body	Regulatory rule or guidance document	Regulatory condition or criteria
Ofqual	General Conditions of Recognition	C1; C2; D2; E4; E7; G1; G6; G8; G9
CCEA Regulation	General Conditions of Recognition	C1; C2; D2; E4; E7; G1; G6; G8; G9
Qualifications Wales	Standard Conditions of Recognition	C1; C2; D2; E4; E7; G1; G6; G8; G9

6. Helpful links and documents

- Distance Learning Quality Self-Assessment (DLSA) (please see Appendix A of this policy).
- Individual qualification specifications (available to download from our website).
- Additional qualification-specific guidance relating to the conduct of assessment and moderation is available alongside our specifications on our website.
- JCQ Suspected malpractice: policies and procedures.
- The Education and Skills Funding Agency Funding Rules.
- Apprenticeship funding: rules and guidance for employers.

Pearson Quality Assurance Handbooks (available to download from our webpage).

Other Pearson regulatory policies and guides (available from our webpage):

- Equity, diversity, and inclusion in Pearson qualifications and related services policy.

- A guide to recruiting learners onto Pearson qualifications.
- Centre guidance: Dealing with malpractice and maladministration.
- Internal assessment in vocational qualifications: reviews and appeals policy.
- Recognition of prior learning policy and process.
- Collaborative and consortium arrangements for the delivery of vocational qualifications policy.
- Pearson's Self-Regulated Framework policy.
- Policy on the removal of centre and programme approval.
- Guidance for reasonable adjustment and special consideration in vocational internally assessed units.

7. Useful contacts

7.1   Centres can contact the approvals team via the [Pearson Support Portal](#).

8. Version control

Version	Changes	Date
2.4	1.1 Removal of the word permanent	28th November 2025
2.4	2.1 Clarification that this policy does not apply for short term contingency requirements.	28th November 2025

Appendix A Distance Learning Quality Self-Assessment (DLSA) with guidance notes

I. Quality Assurance (QA) of distance learning, as defined in Distance Learning and Assessment Policy, is a subset of QA at Pearson with special focus and attention on nine quality categories: Centre governance, Technology Support, Centre Support, Learner Support, Course Design, Course Structure, Teaching and Learning, Learner Engagement, Evaluation and Assessment.

II. The DLSA contains positive quality indicators grouped in the nine categories, and these must be fully met. Our experts may ask you to provide the evidence you list to support this assessment. The examples given are for your guidance and are not an exhaustive list.

III. The DLSA will help you review your readiness to deliver and assess Pearson programme(s) at a distance. There are three possible outcomes from this approvals process:

- Your application is successful. We will contact you to confirm your approval and you can then start delivering distance learning and/or assessment.
- Your application is incomplete. We will ask you for further information.
- Your application is unsuccessful. We will contact you to explain why you have not been successful. If you wish to reapply for approval later, you will need to develop an action plan to address any requirements.

IV. Please check that the information on the DLSA Form is correct at the time of submission to us. Falsifying information could lead to sanctions being imposed or withdrawal of approval.

The Self-Assessment

Name of centre	
Centre number	
Name of qualification including pathways	
Please provide a link/ access to the platform you will be using	
Expected number of students in Year 1 of delivery	
Expected number of students in Year 2 of delivery	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
1 Centre governance		
You have an appropriate governance structure to guide and enable effective planning, decision making and continuous improvement relating to distance learning programmes.	- Governance structures. - Course review documents.	
The distance learning programmes are fully integrated into your policies, processes, and structures. Please attach examples of where distance learning has been included.	- Assessment policies. - Internal verification policies. - Course handbook. - Prospectus.	
You have a process for planning and allocating sufficient resources and a well-defined budget for distance programmes.	- IT support. - Teaching staff with expertise.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
2 Technology support		
A technology strategy and plan including electronic security measures is in place to ensure established standards and regulatory requirements are met.	• There is password protection, encryption, and security of data.	
The technology delivery platform and systems are highly reliable and operate within established, measurable technology operating standards.	• System downtime tracking.	
A contingency plan is in place to ensure continuity of data centres operation, student access and support services in the event of prolonged service disruption.	• List of back-up facilities in the event of system failure. • A contingency plan. • Archives of individual learner evidence on appropriate media e.g. CD ROM, Flash memory sticks.	
Centre staff and learners are well supported and kept informed in developing the required knowledge and skills to effectively use technologies.	• Training on how to use e- assessment. • Course handbook. • Staff induction. • Training materials. • Learner induction.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
Whether you maintain and manage your own data centres and technology platform or contracts/outsources hosting services, all systems are managed in line with established data management practices including power, backup, and disaster recovery plans.	• A full Disaster Recovery process or plan. • Evidence of agreements with, and monitoring of, supplier(s).	
A process and development standards are in place that ensure permissions are in place for appropriate use of online course materials.	• Creative commons, copyright, or fair use permissions in place.	
Usability tests are conducted and applied to ensure courses are meeting Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs) and recommendations for improvement are implemented where needed before the course is available for student enrolment.	• Usability test reports and evaluations.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
3 Centre support		
The centre staff receive: • Training, assistance, and support before teaching on distance programmes. • Ongoing training and professional development related to evolving and improving practice in distance teaching and learning. • Training and support materials related to fair use, plagiarism **including the use of AI**, and legal and ethical concepts relevant to copyright and use of digital and web-based resources.	• Training materials. • Technology helplines. • Staff induction. • Staff training days. • Training materials. • Access to internal policies.	
Clear standards are established and monitored for staff engagement and expectations concerning distance teaching.	• Staff handbook with clear response times to communication and feedback.	
Staff have information on the ways in which learner's evidence of achievement will be assessed and the way workplace-based and performance evidence will be assessed and how this will be facilitated.	• Assessment policy	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
4 Learner support		
You should have controls in place to ensure that you are recruiting with integrity, and learners can confirm their identity. Delivery by distance learning means that you may not have evidence of an individual's identity at the point of admission. You should keep documents safe, and that when learners submit work, they can identify themselves either by re-submitting the documents or can provide information about that document to demonstrate who they are.	• Process for checking a learner's identity (for example gathering key documents to provide evidence of learner identity or activities to take part in for authentication purposes).	
Before starting on a course, a learner is assessed to ensure that: • They have the capabilities and understanding to be successful on a distance learning programme. • They understand about the mode of delivery. • They have access to the minimum technology skills and equipment required.	• Pre-enrolment assessments of learners. • Interviews for suitability. • English language testing for HNs. • Course syllabus.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
During their study learners have access to: • Information and training in how to access required materials through electronic databases, digital material repositories, Learning Management System (LMS) and other sources. • Required course materials in digital and/or print format, such as textbooks, course readings and online teaching and learning resources before the course start date. • Library professionals and resources. • Appropriate technical assistance and technical support staff. • Effective, scheduled, and ongoing academic, personal, pastoral, career advice and counselling.	• Online or on-site technology support available. • Online course materials. • Online or print resources available. • Syllabus clearly outlines learner-tutor contact times. • A proposed contact schedule for each student for the duration of the programme. (This may be produced annually depending on the length of the programme).	
Learner support services are focused on meeting the needs of distance learners rather than fitting into existing on campus services.	• Online or on-site technology support available. • Data captured to enable suitable support services to be provided according to individual needs.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) or Just in Time (JIT) tutorials are provided to help learners find answers to the most common questions related to studying at a distance.	• FAQs. • Online tutorials.	
Guidance and tutorials are provided to learners in the effective use of all technologies used for course delivery.	• Training and guidance materials. • Online or on-site tutorials available.	
5 Course design		
A course development process is followed that ensures courses are effectively designed for distance delivery and learners can develop the necessary knowledge and skills to meet measurable learning outcomes at the course and programme level.	• Course syllabus. • Course materials. • Assessment strategies. • Student feedback.	
A course review process is in place to ensure consistency in course development for learner retention and quality of the learning experience.	• Review process.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
Clear course development standards and guidelines for distance course development are in place and are followed to ensure appropriate engagement between staff and learners, and interaction with content and courseware.	• Course guidelines.	
6 Course / Programme Structure		
All courses in the distance programme include a syllabus clearly outlining course objectives, learning outcomes, assessments and assessment methods, books and required readings and supplies, technical and proctoring requirements, and other related course information making all course requirements clear and transparent.	• Course handbooks. • Induction pack. • Prospectus.	
The structure of all courses ensures that all learners, regardless of physical location, have access to library / learning resources that adequately support the learning experience.	• Equal Opportunity policy. • Access and special consideration policy.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
Instructional materials and teaching and learning resources are accessible to all learners (including learners with disabilities), easy to use, and may be accessed by multiple operating systems, devices, and applications, including assistive technologies.	- IT policy. - Equal Opportunity policy. - Access and special consideration policy.	
Opportunities and tools are provided to enable and encourage collaboration where appropriate and standards for appropriate online behaviour are established and clearly communicated within every course.	- Learner registration forms. - Course/learner handbook. - Learner induction.	
There is a clear schedule for the delivery of the distance learning package and associated resources and study materials.	- Course syllabus/ information booklet. - Assessment plan.	
7 Teaching and Learning		
Learner-to- learners and centre-to- learner interactions and engagement are effectively facilitated.	Communication options available such as post, phone, face-to-face, email, online chat.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
Feedback on learner progress, assignments, and questions is constructive and provided in a timely manner.	• Assessment policy.	
Centre use effective strategies to create and maintain a presence in the course.	• Communication options available such as post, phone, face-to-face, email, online chat, video conference.	
8 Learner engagement		
Learners are provided with appropriate tools and opportunities to interact with peers and centre as an online community.	• Online or on-site support available.	
Learners are provided with opportunities to: • Engage with other learners in collaborative and reflective learning activities or discussions where appropriate. • Engage, both on request and on their own initiative, with centre and support staff.	• Online or on-site facilities available (e.g. forums). • Syllabus clearly outlines learner-tutor contact times. • Online or on-site technology support available.	
The online learning environment encourages and enables formal and informal learning interactions.	• Student feedback. • Chat forums. • Feedback on assignments.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
9 Evaluation and Assessment		
A variety of data (academic and administrative) are used to evaluate programme effectiveness and guide changes toward continual improvement, annually.	- Internal course reviews. - Departmental meetings. - Student voice feedback. - Assessment boards where applicable.	
Annual course evaluations collect feedback from learners on: - The effectiveness of instruction and teaching and contribute to the assessment of staff performance and planning of professional development. - The quality of course materials and support services.	- Programme evaluation forms. - Annual course review.	
There is a clear schedule for final summative assessment of learners' work.	- Assessment plans. - Assessment policy. - Internal verification policy and plans. - Learner/course handbook.	

Positive quality indicators	Evidence may include	Your evidence
There are clear instructions on the way in which you will ensure that evidence submitted by each learner is authentic.	- Instructions on authenticity of learner work - Learner/course handbook	

Signed (Head of Centre):
Name:
Date:

Appendix B Additional guidance

Tips on authenticity of learner work and detecting plagiarism (including the use of AI) in distance assessment

V. It is important that learners understand that it is their responsibility to submit only evidence that is their own, and that they are aware of any activities they will be expected to take part in for authentication purposes. As part of external quality assurance, Standards Verifiers will review the process through which centres confirm the authenticity of learners' evidence.

VI. You should have controls in place to prevent and detect plagiarism (including the use of AI) and which allows each learner to generate evidence that is valid and can be authenticated. You should refer to the JCQ Plagiarism in Assessments guidance.

VII. Through rigorous assessment and internal quality assurance processes, you should ensure that:

- Evidence submitted by each learner can be authenticated as their own work.
- Learners and assessors complete a declaration of authenticity.

VIII. Some ways of authenticating learner work include:

- Using electronic tools and software that are designed specifically for minimising or eliminating opportunities for impersonation.
- Using personal logs or personal statements.
- Using witness testimonies or summative assessment.
- Audio or video taped evidence.
- Signing and countersigning learners' work.

Tips on the movement of learner evidence of achievement and data

IX. You should take time to review and understand any restrictions on the collection and storage of data on learners and on their evidence of achievement both within and across the borders of countries in which you operate. Please refer to your specific government's website.

X. If you decide to use postal means for the movement of learners' evidence and for the movement of assessment records and internal quality assurance records, you must make sure that, in the event of loss of these materials in transit, learners are not disadvantaged, and the security of the assessment process is not compromised. You should keep original copies of learners' evidence, assessment records and internal quality assurance records, providing authenticated copies of these for assessment through postal means as defined by the verification procedures and guidelines.

XI. Systems should have sufficient capacity to store, retrieve, generate, and share all necessary data, including the ability to exchange data securely with other internal and external systems, as required, without endangering the integrity of the data.

Tips for using e-portfolios for assessment and system access and security

XII. If you are using e-assessment it's important to make sure that it is securely, readily, and easily accessible for:

- Learners.
- Assessors.
- Using witness testimonies or summative assessment.
- Any other interested and validated organisation or person.
- Internal Verifiers.
- Standards Verifiers.
- Users at locations remote from the centre.

XIII. Check that access to your e-portfolios and their contents are controlled through:

- A defined hierarchy of user access Assessors.
- Unique security passwords/IDs provided for each level of user.
- Read-only rights provided to those with limited access.
- Facility to differentiate between qualified and non-qualified assessors.
- Isolation of completed units following final assessment.
- Facility to grant remote access to allocated Pearson standards verifiers.

XIV. Learners should be confident that their evidence of learning will not suffer interference and will be correctly attributed to them.

XV. Your distance learning / distance assessment system should be easy and intuitive to use for all users – learners, assessors, Internal Verifiers and Standards Verifiers – and to be capable of:

- Storing the full range of file types – text, sound, scanned images, digital pictures, video, templates, and standard software applications.
- Being customised for candidates with special access requirements.
- Providing links to other documents/areas, such as your centre policies and procedures, Pearson qualification documentation and the relevant Sector Skills Council and professional bodies' websites.
- Providing a full range of user support material, including Frequently Asked Questions and user guides.

XVI.   Portfolio evidence must be retained and accessible for standards verification and audit, assessment and internal verification records must be kept for at least three years. The e-portfolio product should:

- Meet our requirements for retention of evidence.
- Safeguard against removal or modification of archived documents.