

# Ofqual decisions on awarding vocational and technical qualifications this summer

Last month, we launched a consultation on [our proposals for awarding vocational, technical and other general qualifications this summer](#), following disruption to exams and assessments caused by Coronavirus (COVID-19).

We received 1,512 responses and there were high levels of support for our proposals. We are today, Friday 22 May, [confirming that we will be adopting the policy approach we consulted on](#), with [additional guidance and strengthened requirements set out in our extraordinary regulatory framework](#) to take account of feedback received.

Recognising the complexity of the vocational and technical qualifications (VTQ) landscape, we are confirming different approaches will apply to cater for the different categories of qualifications:

- qualifications primarily used for progression to further or higher education. In line with government policy, and like for GCSEs, AS and A levels, where possible, learners should receive calculated results for these qualifications
- qualifications which are primarily used to signal occupational competence. It would not be suitable for these learners to receive a calculated result because it would not be clear they possessed the skills required for the job, which could have health and safety – or other professional – implications. As such, the starting point for these qualifications is for awarding organisations (AOs) to adapt the assessment or delivery model so that assessments can be completed under the current public health restrictions
- qualifications with a mixed purpose may receive either a calculated grade or be awarded based on an adapted assessment. AOs will need to make a decision based on the qualification's principal purpose and the approach most appropriate to deliver a valid result. We will monitor these arrangements to ensure that an appropriate approach is taken and that, where necessary and possible, there is consistency between awarding organisations

Our regulatory framework sets out clear expectations about the approaches AOs should take in relation to these different categories – with key principles to make sure results remain sufficiently valid and reliable. Only where this is not possible, should assessments be delayed.

To help navigate the approach for VTQs this summer, we have launched [a new interactive tool](#). The tool allows users to search for a specific regulated qualification to find out how results will be generated for the majority of learners.

Sally Collier, Ofqual Chief Regulator, said:

In the vast majority of cases this summer, learners taking other general, vocational and technical qualifications will be able to progress in their studies or employment with calculated grades or having taken an adapted assessment. Our new interactive tool will help learners, and the users of these qualifications, understand what's happening with the qualifications which matter to them, so they have the certainty they need to move on in their lives.

## **Equalities**

In our consultation we set out that we expected AOs to consider how they would minimise disadvantage to vulnerable learners and those with special educational needs or protected characteristics, and to take any appropriate actions. This included managing the risk of bias in the process of calculated grades. Having listened to feedback through our consultation, and from further engagement with groups specialising in these issues, we have published further guidance and have developed our framework to further highlight AOs' responsibilities in relation to equalities.

## **Autumn assessment opportunities**

We proposed that learners unable to receive, or seeking to improve, a result this summer should have an opportunity to take an assessment in the autumn – the majority of respondents agreed. We have listened to concerns about holding assessments during the September to December window. We will require that where AOs normally offer an autumn assessment opportunity, they must take all reasonable steps to continue to do so. Where they do not normally offer an autumn assessment opportunity, they should do so where there are enough learners who need to take an assessment or where it would be unfair not to. We expect AOs to work with providers, and to take decisions in the best interests of learners, with safeguards for us to intervene if we decide there is a particular need for an assessment that is not being met by AOs.

## **Appeals**

Our existing rules already require AOs to have in place an appeals process and that will apply to decisions made under the extraordinary regulatory framework. We have introduced guidance to the regulatory framework to highlight the issues AOs should consider this summer when handling appeals. The guidance also explains where AOs can align their approach to that being applied to GCSEs, AS and A levels, where qualifications are similar.

## **Malpractice**

Many of the decisions AOs will need to take this summer will be underpinned by how they intend to manage the risk of malpractice in their qualifications. Given this, and following further engagement with AOs (including, in

particular, around situations where risks might be heightened, such as in some overseas delivery) we have set out additional statutory guidance in the regulatory framework which confirms AOs' ongoing malpractice obligations.

## **GCSEs, AS and A levels**

We have published the [outcomes of our consultation on GCSEs, AS and A levels qualifications](#), confirming the exceptional arrangements for awarding these qualifications this summer.

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## **Further visa extensions for those unable to return home due to coronavirus**

Overseas nationals who cannot return home due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will be able to extend their visa until the end of July to give them peace of mind that they can stay in the UK until they are able to return home safely.

The extension will last until 31 July and will apply to anyone whose leave expired after the 24 January and cannot leave the country because of travel restrictions or self-isolation.

While the government has offered this extension to help those who are unable to get home prior to 31 July, those currently in the UK on temporary visas, such as visitor visas, should return home as soon as it is safe and possible to do so.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

By extending people's visas further, we are giving them peace of mind that they are able to stay in the UK until the end of July if they are unable to leave the country safely.

This is one of a number of unprecedented measures the government has made to support people during this time, however, as we begin a cautious return to normality those currently in the UK on expired visitor visas should return home as soon as possible.

Today's announcement builds on the previous extension which lasts until 31 May, and ensures people who are not able to leave the UK are not impacted by circumstances outside of their control.

A dedicated coronavirus immigration team is continuing to work with individuals to make the process as straightforward as possible. Anyone in this situation, who has not contacted them already, just needs to contact the team via an [online form](#) to let them know their visa has expired and they will be issued with an extension.

To help those who want to apply for visas to stay in the UK long-term, the Home Office is also extending the in-country switching provisions until 31 July.

This will mean people can apply to switch into long-term routes whilst remaining in the UK. UKVI will continue to process applications as quickly as possible, however some applications may take longer than usual due to coronavirus related operational pressures.

Many foreign nationals have found themselves unable to return home since the outbreak of coronavirus due to flight cancellations and border restrictions.

Those who contact the Home Office for these visa extensions will be expected to return to their home countries as soon as possible once flight and border restrictions are lifted. No immigration enforcement action will be undertaken during this time for those who email the Home Office as outlined above.

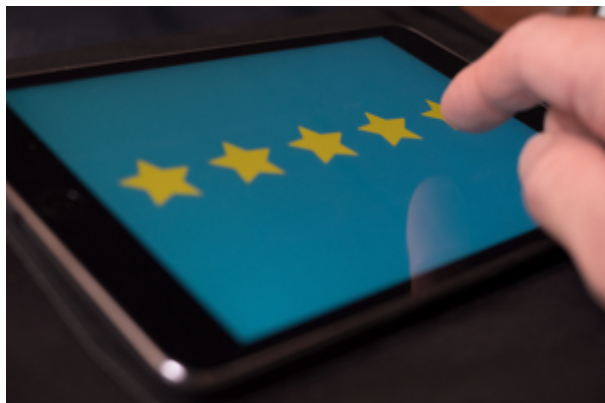
In light of the current advice on self-isolation and social distancing, the Home Office is also waiving a number of requirements on visa sponsors, such as allowing non-EU nationals here under work or study routes to undertake their work or study from home.

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## [CMA investigates misleading online reviews](#)

News story

The CMA has launched an investigation into several major websites to see whether they are doing enough to protect shoppers from fake and misleading reviews.



As people rely increasingly on shopping online during the lockdown, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will examine how these sites currently detect, investigate and respond to fake and misleading reviews. It will look into issues such as:

- suspicious reviews – where, for example, a single user has reviewed an unlikely range of products or services;
- whether businesses are manipulating the presentation of reviews about their products and services by, for example, combining positive reviews for one product with the reviews for another; and
- how these websites handle reviews about products or services that the reviewer has received a payment or other incentive to review.

Andrea Coscelli, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

Most of us read online reviews to help decide which products or services to buy. During lockdown, we're more dependent than ever on online shopping, so it's really important that the online reviews we read are genuine opinions. If someone is persuaded to buy something after reading a fake or misleading review, they could end up wasting their money on a product or service that wasn't what they wanted.

Our investigation will examine whether several major websites are doing enough to crack down on fake reviews. And we will not hesitate to take further action if we find evidence that they aren't doing what's required under the law.

The CMA is not currently alleging that any website has acted illegally. Through this work, the CMA wants to ensure that the sites have robust systems in place to find and remove fake reviews or reviews that mislead people about a product or business. But if it finds that any of these websites are not doing what is legally required, the CMA will take enforcement action to secure the necessary changes, pursuing action through the courts if needed.

If appropriate, the CMA will identify the companies involved at this point.

This announcement comes as the CMA has [secured commitments from Instagram](#), which is operated by Facebook, to tackle the risk that people can buy and sell fake online reviews through its platform. Instagram has committed to provide for more robust systems to detect and remove this kind of harmful material from Instagram. This builds on the CMA's previous work on online reviews, where it identified the trading of of fake reviews on Facebook and eBay and secured commitments from them to tackle this issue. The CMA is not alleging that Facebook, eBay or Instagram intentionally allowed this content to appear on their websites.

For more information, visit the [online reviews](#) web page.

For media queries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or [press@cma.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gov.uk)

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## [Funding boost to crack down on the Illegal Wildlife Trade](#)

Protected species across the globe including tigers, Asian elephants and chimpanzees have been given a boost today (Friday 22 May) as the government announces £3.4 million for new projects from the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund.

From today, the government is also [inviting new projects to apply for the next round of funding](#).

The Illegal Wildlife Trade is a criminal industry worth more than £17 billion each year threatening wildlife, bringing species to the brink of extinction and causing despair for communities. The [IWT Challenge Fund](#) supports projects around the world that tackle the illegal wildlife trade by strengthening law enforcement, reducing demand for illegally traded wildlife products, and empowering people to shift away from trading illegal wildlife to more sustainable livelihoods.

The latest round of the Challenge Fund will fund important wildlife conservation projects across the globe, including five in Asia, two in Africa and South America respectively and one in Europe.

Projects that will receive funding include:

- combatting jaguar losses in Bolivia by expanding intelligence networks to combat poaching

- protecting pangolins, elephants and chimpanzees along the Nigeria-Cameroon transboundary Green Corridor through improved cooperation between enforcement agencies
- empowering communities in Indonesia to shift away from trading illegal wildlife to more sustainable alternatives
- strengthening law enforcement in protected areas in Guatemala to reduce the poaching of valuable hardwood species and fauna
- supporting more sustainable harvest methods of orchids by rural communities in Nepal to reduce their illegal trade

To date, the Challenge Fund has supported 85 projects to a value of more than £26 million.

International Environment Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

I am delighted to announce this latest boost to our IWT Challenge Fund on the International Day of Biological Diversity. Our fund is driving change to protect illegally trafficked wildlife across the globe.

We are committed to taking global leadership to protect the world's most endangered species. The illegal wildlife trade brings misery to local communities and holds back development in some of the world's poorest countries, and today marks another milestone in helping to end this vile trade and protect these amazing species for future generations.

Conservation charity [Fauna & Flora International](#) has received funding for two new projects including helping communities in Southern Myanmar to combat the threat of poaching endangered species including tigers, Asian elephants and pangolins.

Joanna Elliott, Senior Director for Conservation Partnerships, Fauna & Flora International, said:

Fauna & Flora International is delighted that two of our wildlife trade projects have been selected by Defra for this round of IWT Challenge Fund support. The UK government funding for our work to combat illegal wildlife trade is helping FFI to deliver real benefits for endangered species and for local people across multiple countries.

The Covid-19 crisis highlights the direct links between nature conservation and human well-being, and FFI is committed to ending illegal wildlife trade, and to addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss and zoonotic disease emergence, notably high-risk wildlife trade, deforestation and unsustainable land-use changes.

This latest move follows the [£220m biodiversity fund](#) announced by the Prime

Minister in September dedicated to addressing biodiversity loss, tackling the illegal wildlife trade and alleviating poverty through sustainable development. The UK is investing more than £66 million between 2014 and 2024 to take action to counter the illegal wildlife trade.

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## Important work in tackling future risks restarts at Sellafield

Sellafield Ltd is now carefully reintroducing operational work on a phased basis after ramping down operations at the start of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Chief Executive Martin Chown visited the First Generation Magnox Storage Pond to see first hand the restart of work preparing for the maintenance of a Skip Handler crane which will be vital for getting nuclear waste out of the legacy pond once more work restarts later in the summer.

A nuclear site which normally has more than 8,000 people working on it was reduced to around 1,500 key workers in late March as an initial protective measure.

Now the number of workers is being carefully and cautiously brought back up, with the current restart trajectory expected to reach 3,000 people on site by mid-June. Initial plans have imposed a cap of 3,500 on the site at any one time and then review that situation, to allow people to more readily socially distance themselves from other workers.

It means thousands of employees have adapted to working differently and remotely and the company putting in place a process of prioritising the work packages where people need to come back to work.

Three high-profile areas of work have restarted in the last week, marking a significant step forward in Sellafield Ltd progressing its core mission of environmental remediation and safely storing nuclear material.

These are:

- restarting the work on commissioning the Silo Emptying Plant (SEP2) waste retrievals machine inside our highest hazard legacy storage facility, the Magnox Swarf Storage Silo
- restarting the work to repackage cans of plutonium into new containers.
- maintenance work on the Skip Handler Crane in the First Generation Magnox Storage Pond, with similar work starting next week in its 'sister' legacy pond, the Pile Fuel Storage Pond.

Allied to this have been the recent restart of construction work on the The Box Encapsulation Plant Product Store Direct Import Facility (BEPPS-DIF)



major project – a key facility needed to store legacy waste in the future – and the return of some specialist nuclear designers into offices.

Of course, all along, around 1,500 key workers have been doing their vital work to keep the Sellafield site safe and secure throughout the global crisis.

Sellafield Ltd Chief Executive Martin Chown paid a visit to the legacy pond to meet those who have been continuing to go to work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and learn more about the safety measures being put in place following the risk assessment work the business has been doing to allow people to work safely.

Martin also visited the BEPPS-DIF site, the first of our project construction sites to bring people back in.

The site was used as a test bed for a number of safety initiatives designed to keep people safe, with learning from that restart used in further project construction restarts over coming months.

Martin said:

I really enjoyed my time spent on the major construction sites and within our nuclear operations,

The preparations we have made in plants enable everyone to come back to work with confidence. I was most impressed with the commitment and positive attitude from all of our staff, who are an asset to our business.