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NCFE **Functional** **Skills support** **guidance**

**Information for centres on the eligibility
process for Functional Skills Teacher
Assessed Grades (TAGs)**

Version 1: April 2021

Introduction

This document has been created to support you in identifying whether your learners are eligible for a Functional Skills Teacher Assessed Grade (TAG). It identifies NCFE's approach and eligibility requirements for the initial submission phase for permission to submit a TAG for your learner.

For full information on how to submit a TAG and our approach to awarding in 2020-21, please refer to the information on our [Covid response hub](#).

Approach

For Functional Skills qualifications, it is the Department for Education's (DfE) policy position that assessments should continue to proceed where they can be delivered in line with public health measures, including remotely. This means that normal assessment arrangements via testing, continue to be available to centres.

Ofqual's guidance on the awarding of Functional Skills in 2021 makes clear that there are three ways learners will be able to access a result:

1. Assessments can continue to take place in a training provider, college, school, employer premises or alternative location, where it is safe for them to do so in line with public health guidance.
2. Assessments can be taken remotely or online.
3. Where neither of these options is possible and it is not possible for the learner to delay their assessment, then the grade can be awarded through alternative arrangements.

The alternative arrangements will use TAGs to determine the result.

Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) are available for Functional Skills only as a last resort, where a centre can demonstrate the following for individual learners, who are assessment ready:

- it is not possible to delay the assessment,
- it is not possible to deliver the assessment face-to-face and,
- it is not possible to deliver assessment remotely.

Centres should refer to the DfE guidance which outlines how to run assessments in line with Public Health England (PHE) guidance. This can be found [here](#).

We have put a series of adaptations in place to make assessments accessible to learners, including remote invigilation and employer led invigilation, and these available adaptations should be fully exhausted before going down the TAG route.

Where learners are ready to take assessments, require a result for progression without delay, and are unable to access any of the adaptations in place, then they can make a submission for eligibility for a TAG.

For Functional Skills English, TAGs are issued at component level rather than qualification level. Eligibility should be applied per component.

When all options have been exhausted and the centre feels that a TAG is the only route for their learner, they should take the following steps:

- The centre must gather all appropriate evidence that will support a submission. Evidence will be required to demonstrate each the following:
 - the learner is assessment ready
 - the learner cannot safely access an assessment in any format
 - all possible adaptations that allow a learner to safely take an assessment have been exhausted
 - the learner's assessment cannot be delayed
 - the learner has sufficient evidence to support a TAG.You must be able to provide appropriate evidence upon request for each the above statements.
- The centre will apply for approval of eligibility by completing the spreadsheet template available on the website.
- The submission will be on a learner-by-learner basis with evidence being applied on an individual basis rather than at a cohort level.
- We will review the submission for eligibility and inform the centre whether it has been approved or rejected.
- Upon approval, the centre will then follow the normal TAG process and make a submission through the Portal.

Eligibility requirements

Live testing, either remotely or in person, remains available throughout this period and must always be the primary option. Adaptations to delivering live tests have been made, and centres must explore and exhaust all of these options before considering a TAG for any learner. There is a clear expectation from DfE that TAGs will be an exception process rather than the 'norm' for Functional Skills qualifications. Therefore, eligibility for a learner to be considered for a TAG has to be clearly established by the centre before any teacher judgement based on supporting evidence is considered.

A learner who has completed their course of study could be considered for a TAG application provided the centre can demonstrate the below points can be met:

- the learner's end date is in the past (learner has left the course)
- the learner would have been eligible for a TAG at the time they intended to take a live test
- the centre has supporting evidence to demonstrate the learner was assessment ready
- the centre can demonstrate it is not safe to invite the learner back to take a test and has explored all possible adaptations to test.

To help support the decision process for this we have created a flow chart that you can access [here](#).

Evidence of all these points must be retained by the centre as we may ask for evidence while completing our External Quality Assurance validity checks in line with our TAG approach. It is important to note that TAGs cannot be used to compensate for lost teaching and learning within Functional Skills, teaching and learning should continue where possible.

The primary option for Functional Skills learners should be live testing. We offer the following routes for this:

- on demand paper-based assessments
- on demand online assessments

- remote invigilation online assessments.

We also allow centres to use employers as invigilators to carry out assessments in the workplace, should that be appropriate. Centres **must** explore all options available to them. Should these options not be suitable at this current time then they must, where appropriate, look to delay the assessment until it is safe to do so.

A key part of the eligibility judgement must include consideration of when each learner requires the result and whether there is likely to be a clear opportunity for that learner to access a live test safely in any way before that date. If there is no such opportunity, centres must clearly justify why each learner is eligible for a TAG by providing clear evidence of the options they have explored to access live testing for each learner.

If you have fully explored all possible options for live testing and established that a learner is eligible, you may consider applying for a TAG.

You **must** have:

- evidence of the efforts made to live test
- evidence the learner is assessment ready
- evidence of the learner's ability to pass the qualification.

We will review your application and advise you of the outcome. An application can still be rejected at this stage if we are not satisfied that the evidence supports it.

Across the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB) Functional Skills group we have agreed the below criteria which should support eligibility judgements. Centres will need to have clear records in place which may be reviewed as part of the quality assurance process, to provide reassurance that the learners selected are eligible and any outcomes are robust and a true reflection of the learner's achievement.

Requirement for TAG application	Evidence to support TAG application
<p>Reason why learner is eligible including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • why learner cannot take a live test • why a learner needs a result now • that the learner is assessment ready. 	<p>Rationale from the centre with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clear evidence to demonstrate efforts to live test (both face-to-face and remotely) • need for a result by a set date to support progression • readiness for assessment between 1 August 2020 and 31 August 2021.
<p>Supporting evidence for the TAG:</p> <p>Centre must have a body of evidence that a teacher can use to form the basis of their TAG judgement</p>	<p>Recommended evidence includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completed sample/past paper taken as a mock test including the conditions the mock was taken under • formative assessment results.

	<p>This could be further supported by other evidence which may include, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>Supporting the TAG:</p> <p>Using the evidence, the teacher can confirm that they believe the learner would have passed/achieved the assessment.</p>	<p>Evidence described above plus commentary from the teacher using agreed pass descriptors to demonstrate how the evidence aligns.</p>

While the use of a past/sample paper is not mandated, we **highly recommend** the use of this material as a key part of any supporting evidence as these tests have been produced by the awarding organisation and are therefore seen as a standardised source of evidence.

Conditions for completion of the mock test will not be mandated but the test used and the mark scheme applied must be an awarding organisation produced sample, practice or past paper made available by us for this purpose. NCFE will provide clear guidance on the pass threshold to enable accurate assessment that will reflect the standards within the live assessments.

While conditions for collating evidence are not mandated, centres will need to consider the conditions through which this evidence is gathered and should implement measures to ensure they are confident that the evidence is authentic to the learner, the evidence is reliable and comparable to those going through live testing.

Centres must therefore record the conditions under which the evidence has been produced, and where evidence has been gathered without control, they should include other supporting evidence to corroborate this to provide reassurances of the learner's overall ability to achieve the qualification and progress.

Submission process

Should you have learners who meet the above requirements then you will now need to supply the information to NCFE following the below steps:

1. [Download the template spreadsheet from our website](#)
2. Complete **all** boxes on the template with the relevant information
3. Return spreadsheet to FSTAG@ncfe.org.uk

We will review your submission and will advise by email if your learner/s meet the requirement for a TAG and if you can proceed with a submission through our TAG Portal. We will respond within 5 working days to each application.

If we have any queries about your submission then we will be in touch with your designated contact in due course, this may delay the final response timeline. Please note you should not proceed with any Functional Skills TAG submission until you have final approval from NCFE.

This submission process is to approve a learner's **eligibility** for a Functional Skills TAG, but **does not** approve a final TAG. Once approval is given at this stage, you should then follow the documented [process for submission for a final TAG](#). Please note that a [TAG strategy form](#) must be completed for your centre by **7 May 2021** before you submit any TAGs.

Submission deadline

Please note, latest date for submitting a Functional Skills teacher assessed grade application is **18 June 2021**.

You must complete a TAG strategy form before submitting and this can be found [here](#).