



OCN NI Guidance for Essential Skills (NI) Qualifications Delivery and Assessment

1st September 2021 – 31st August 2022

Revised: January 2022

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Background Information

OCN NI recognise the extraordinary challenges centres have experienced over the past two academic years. While a number of alternative arrangements were made during this timeframe, the emphasis has always been to preserve standards, maintain public confidence in the qualifications, and meet the reasonable needs of all users of these qualifications.

During the course of the Covid-19 pandemic to date, a range of exceptional arrangements for assessing and awarding Essential Skills qualifications have been put in place. These arrangements have facilitated the issuing of results for Essential Skills qualifications. They were proportionate to irregularities and disruptions to assessment administration and as outlined above, the arrangements have been subject to review and revision as local and national circumstances changed.

As the Covid-19 vaccination programme progresses and we are looking towards recovery, shared feedback from stakeholders reveals an appetite for normal arrangements for the award of Essential Skills (NI) qualifications in 2021 to 2022. However, given the need for compensatory actions over the past 15 months, stakeholders recognise the need for contingency planning. Also relevant is the desire to learn from any successes that have emerged from the resilience that has been built over the course of the pandemic.

Following a review of the new CCEA Regulation directive for the assessment of Essential Skills for September 2021 – 2022 (issued 17 July 2021), OCN NI has produced this guidance document to help our centres prepare for the coming academic year. Our priority is to ensure that Essential Skills NI Learners continue to receive fair and robust results over the coming months that reflect their efforts and allow for due consideration of progression pathways, whether that be to further study or employment.

This information is provided in context to the most up-to-date advice for educational settings provided by the Department of Education, Department for the Economy, HSC Public Health Agency and is compliant with CCEA Regulation guidance.

Qualifications In Scope

This document is relevant to Centres offering Essential Skills NI qualifications provided by OCN NI from 1st September 2021 – 31st August 2022.

Qualifications that fall in scope of this guidance:

- Level 1 Certificate in Essential Skills - Application of Number (601/8943/5)
- Level 1 Certificate in Essential Skills - Communication (601/8941/1)
- Level 2 Certificate in Essential Skills - Application of Number (601/8944/7)
- Level 2 Certificate in Essential Skills - Communication (601/8942/3)
- Entry Level Certificate in Essential Skills - Adult Literacy (601/8226/X)
- Entry Level Certificate in Essential Skills - Adult Numeracy (601/8225/8)
- Level 1 Certificate in Essential Skills - ICT (601/8213/1)
- Level 2 Certificate in Essential Skills - ICT (601/8214/3)

How will Essential Skills NI be awarded?

Essential Skills NI qualifications are taken by a wide range of Learners, including apprentices, and play an important role in supporting progression to both further study and to employment.

In line with the expectation of the Northern Ireland Minister for the Economy (July 2021, CCEA Regulation, Arrangements for the Award of Essential Skills (NI) Qualification in 2021-2022):

- Examinations and assessments for all Essential Skills NI qualifications are to go ahead as per normal Essential Skills NI policy for summative assessments. For clarity, availability of paper-based end tests will be a normal assessment arrangement for this academic year. OCN NI will publish an examination schedule for centres via the OCN NI website. Remote assessment of Speaking and Listening is permitted as a normal assessment method for Level 1 and Level 2 Communication qualifications. This guidance does not permit issuing results through alternative evidence.
- Awards are to be made on the basis of normal examination and assessment evidence.
- To facilitate contingency planning, should the need arise on public health advise, centres are required to retain trusted sources of formative and summative assessment evidence for learners participating in Essential Skills NI courses from 1st September 2021 to 31st August 2022. **OCN NI encourage a Teach, Assess and Bank approach to all centres. The advantage of this approach is that an ongoing record of individual performance and achievement is maintained, and accumulated evidence is validated and reliable.**

Building capacity and capability

Centres should ensure they are in the strongest possible position to manage any further disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. To address any further disruptions, centres must ensure they retain the information necessary to confirm achievement should moderation be required in the absence of an examination process.

OCN NI require the retention of:

Formative Evidence

- Examples of learner progression against Essential Skills NI curriculum. This evidence should be appropriately assessed and annotated with feedback to the learner which provides them with guidance on areas for improvement. Formative evidence should be dated and signed.

Summative Evidence

- Mock Examination(s) completed under controlled conditions when candidates are deemed “exam ready”, should be dated and signed. Sample papers can be accessed via the centre login section of the OCN NI website.

Centre Checklist

In order to aid centre staff build in contingency arrangements for the delivery and assessment of Essential Skills Qualifications, OCN NI has created a sample checklist:

Checklist	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conduct screening/initial assessment to determine the appropriate level of qualification for the learner
<input type="checkbox"/>	Register the learner(s) onto OCN NI QuartzWeb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Undertake delivery of the qualification
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gather and retain formative evidence at each stage of the curriculum
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conduct mock examination, assess and retain this summative evidence
<input type="checkbox"/>	Request examination paper for learner(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Learner will sit the examination (under normal circumstances)

In the event that Ministerial direction advises examination processes cannot be undertaken as normal, OCN NI may request formative and summative evidence for each candidate to verify the award