Dear Colleague

# Essential Skills Northern Ireland – Alternative Arrangements for awarding until 31 August 2021

As you will be aware the Minister for the Economy in Northern Ireland has advised that Essential Skills external assessments will be cancelled from 1 March 2021 until 31 August 2021. In their place will be a teacher judgement approach based upon suitable evidence. This document sets out which qualifications are covered and how Pearson intends to manage this process between now and the end of the academic year.

## Qualifications covered

This arrangement covers the following qualifications:

* Level 1 Certificate in Essential Skills - Application of Number
* Level 1 Certificate in Essential Skills – Communication
* Level 2 Certificate in Essential Skills - Application of Number
* Level 2 Certificate in Essential Skills – Communication

All other ESNI qualifications, including ICT and the Speaking, Listening and Communicating (SLC) element of ESNI Communication will continue to be assessed as normal. Adaptation to allow SLC to be assessed remotely using video conferencing software has already been put in place and this will continue.

## What do you need to do

* If you want to submit learners for a Centre Determined Grade (CDG) you will need to assess each learner and make a judgement on whether they should pass the external assessment.
* You will need to clearly identify why learners are eligible.
* You should use the criteria in the table below to support your judgements of a learner’s eligibility.
* You will need to have clear records in place which we may request and review as part of any external 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 likely achievement

## Guidance on evidence

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| Requirements | Evidence to support CDG |
| Learner **must**:   * have completed learning and * have clear supporting evidence in place to demonstrate progression and readiness for assessment * be due to complete during the submission period | IRL data. Tracking of learner progress to demonstrate the learner’s journey and readiness for assessment |
| Centre **must** have a body of evidence that a teacher can use to form the basis of their judgement | **Recommended evidence** includes, but not be limited to:   * Completed sample/past paper taken as a mock test including the conditions the mock was taken under * Formative assessment results * IRL data showing progress     This **must** be further supported by other evidence which may include, but is not limited to:   * Any other learner work towards the qualification (ie 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. |
| Using the evidence, the teacher can confirm that they believe the learner would have **passed/achieved** the assessment | Evidence described above plus declaration from the teacher to demonstrate how the evidence aligns with ESNI subject criteria. |

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 Pearson and are therefore seen as a standardised source of evidence. We have made one of our past papers available for centres to use as part of this process.

### Head of Centre declaration

You will need to complete a robust Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) process, in line with our normal practices, to demonstrate that all learners put forward have been scrutinised carefully and all submissions have been verified before they are submitted. The centre declaration must include a clear record of the evidence used to arrive at the final decision for each learner.

The Head of Centre must also confirm they are satisfied that all submissions are correct and accurately reflect the expected outcome for the learners included in any submission.

We are planning to run the CDG process in a number of set ‘windows’ with results released towards the end of each window. A separate declaration will be required within each window to cover all submissions made during that period.  Further detail on this approach will be provided shortly.

### Evidence

You must retain the supporting evidence within the centre for use as part of any quality assurance process we may put in place to verify the outcomes for all learners.

If you decide to make use of the past/sample test materials, the test used must be a Pearson produced sample, practice or past paper made available for this purpose. While conditions for completing the mock tests are not mandated, we would expect tests to be completed within the normal duration specified.

As test conditions are not mandated it is essential that centres:

* record the conditions under which mock tests have been completed and
* retain other supporting evidence to corroborate the mock test outcome and provide reassurances of the learner’s overall ability to achieve the qualification and progress.

## Internal Quality Assurance

We already have in place clearly defined Internal Quality Assurance processes for Essential Skills elements which are internally assessed and externally verified. Centres should adopt the principles of these processes and keep clear records of all internal processes used to arrive at the outcomes produced for each individual learner so they can demonstrate each individual judgement has been verified to ensure the risk of malpractice or unconscious bias is removed.

You are reminded of the need to ensure suitable supporting evidence is used and retained as it may be requested as part of any external quality assurance process the awarding organisation chooses to adopt.

### External Quality Assurance

We will need to be satisfied that your internal process is robust and leads to fair and accurate outcomes for the learners submitted for a CDG. It is vital that you retain all evidence and clear records as we may request access to:

* All or some of the supporting evidence for all or some of the learners submitted
* All or some of the Individual Learner Records
* Records of IQA process and the learner evidence reviewed at each stage
* Head of Centre declaration of the outcomes

We may choose to complete an administrative check to ensure that the centre is following its own processes adequately. We may choose to extend these checks to review a sample of the evidence used and in extreme cases, where concerns remain, may ask to see all evidence for all learners to provide reassurances of the validity of the outcomes produced.

We may use all evidence at our disposal to decide on the nature of the checks we carry out for each centre which may vary on a case-by-case basis. We may, for example, choose to increase any sampling in cases where a significant volume of learners is submitted in any given window.

We do not expect you to use the CDG approach for learners not yet reaching a pass threshold. As part of our external quality assurance process we may choose to carry out additional checks of data we hold for individual centres to satisfy ourselves that the volume of learners being submitted is valid. If we have any outstanding concerns regarding an individual centre’s CDGs we may withhold results until we are satisfied of the validity of your submission.

## Timelines and Issuing results

Once we have assured ourselves of the validity of your submission in any given window, we will release the results on a rolling basis. You can start to gather the evidence now for your learners and we will advise you of the process for submitting your CDGs and when to expect those results shortly.

## Malpractice and maladministration

Where we have any concerns regarding the validity of a centre’s submission we may choose to take further action over and above the quality assurance activities outlined above. Where serious concerns are identified we may choose to withhold results for any or all learners included in a centre’s submission pending the outcome to any further investigation.