# CSSC response to Ofqual Consultation part 2 on arrangements for VTQ and other general Qs 2021

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) was set up in September 2016 to represent and support the interests of the controlled sector in Northern Ireland. To date 95% of controlled schools have chosen to register with CSSC.

The controlled sector is:

* large – it accounts for 49% of all schools and caters for over 144,719 children, making it the largest education sector in Northern Ireland
* diverse – providing education across all school types – nursery, primary, secondary, grammar and special schools. Within this, controlled integrated and controlled Irish Medium schools are included
* inclusive – providing education for children of all faiths and none (62% of pupils define as Protestant, 10% Catholic, and 28% ‘other’) and over a two fifths of newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland.

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on, the Arrangements for the assessment and awarding of Vocational and Technical and Other General Qualifications in 2020/2021 (part 2) published by The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual).

Please note this is an officer response. To meet the time frame it has not been possible to bring to Council for approval.

**Question 1: Do you have any comments on the proposed principles set out above and in the second draft version of the Extended ERF requirements?**

CSSC recognises the necessity and urgency to make changes to the principles and the Extended ERF requirements to enable Awarding Organisations (AOs) to assist with mitigating the impact on teaching, learning or assessments caused by the coronavirus pandemic. CSSC also acknowledges that there may be situations and scenarios in the future that AOs cannot reasonably control or plan for but that all will work together for the benefit of the learners taking qualifications and to ensure that any adaptations will neither advantage or disadvantage learners when compared to peers taking general qualifications. CSSC agrees that maintaining the validity and reliability of qualifications is critical to enable learners to progress successfully to employment or to higher/further education/training and that standards should compare favourably with previous years and across similar qualifications.

**Question 2: Do you have any comments on the proposed guidance on adaptation set out in the second draft version of the Extended ERF?**

CSSC welcomes the flexibility afforded to AOs in deciding on their approach to adaptation. Being mindful of the great diversity of VTQs and other general qualifications that AOs provide, this flexibility of approach is necessary to enable AOs to respond appropriately to meet the needs of the various learners, employers, higher/further education/training and

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government departments. CSSC considers the expectation of AOs’ engagement with centres to ensure adaptations are acceptable and manageable is positive.

CSSC welcomes Ofqual’s recognition of the need for clear and timely information to centres regarding the approaches to adapted qualifications and assessments. This is critical to enable centres to plan effectively and to mitigate against localised lockdowns. However, CSSC requests that this communication be expedited as schools in Northern Ireland have already completed their fifth week of learning and teaching. The impact of delayed information on the wellbeing of learners, teachers and school leaders cannot be underestimated.

**Question 3: Do you have any comments on the proposed guidance on Special Consideration set out in the second draft version of the Extended ERF?**

CSSC welcomes the proposed ongoing flexibility and possibility for further adaptations to qualifications and assessments in the event of future disruptions to learning and teaching as a consequence of Covid-19.

In the exceptional event of Special Consideration, centres require clarification regarding the amount of evidence a learner must have completed successfully before a qualification can be awarded. Furthermore, information must be provided regarding the specific knowledge, understanding and skills or practical competence that must have been assessed and evidenced to avail of Special Consideration.

**Question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed regulatory arrangements for autumn assessment opportunities?**

CSSC welcomes the clarification regarding the autumn assessment arrangements. AOs must have unambiguous and accurate information regarding the regulatory requirements for assessments offered in the autumn if they are in turn to provide clear and timely information to centres. If there is any confusion, this may lead to learners and teachers becoming disadvantaged.

**Question 5: Are there any potential positive or negative equality impacts arising from the proposed principles, the proposed guidance on adaptation and Special Consideration, and the proposed regulatory arrangements for autumn assessment opportunities, apart from those we have explored? If yes, what are they and how might they be mitigated?**

CSSC affirms the flexibility of the modular delivery modes of many vocational and technical qualifications and the opportunity for learners to bank assessments as soon as they are able, in order to safeguard against future disruption.

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CSSC welcomes the recognition that some learners may not have equal access to technology due to socio-economic circumstances.

One potential negative impact that doesn’t appear to have been considered is the challenge posed by connectivity in some geographical areas if online assessments are required during a localised lockdown. If AOs maximise the modular delivery mode and provide flexibility in the timing of assessments, this would mitigate against learners being disadvantaged.

**Question 6: Are there any potential regulatory impacts arising from the proposed principles, the proposed guidance on adaptation and Special Consideration, and the proposed regulatory arrangements for autumn assessment opportunities that we have not explored? If yes, what are they and how might they be mitigated?**

No further regulatory impacts have been identified.