

# **Regulations for the Conduct of Digital Skills Assessments**

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| v1.1           | Sep-26 | Annual review – The term 'Functional' has been removed from the title to align with EDSQ. The document has also been updated throughout to ensure EDSQ is accurately reflected. |

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## Introduction

This document is intended for schools, colleges, training providers and employers conducting on-screen Entry Level 3 and Level 1 Digital Functional Skills assessments and Essential Digital Skills Both the head of centre and the examinations officer **must** familiarise themselves with the entire contents of this document.

Each centre **must** have a designated manager who is responsible for system security, the quality of provision and resources within the centre.

All centres running Entry Level 3 and Level 1 Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills qualifications **must** be approved by NCFE. Centres **must** have an official email address. Personal email addresses such as Yahoo, Hotmail and Gmail are not acceptable. Emergency contact details **must** also be provided, which may be a mobile telephone number or a personal email address.

NCFE reserves the right to conduct audits to ensure assessments are being administered correctly through unannounced visits.

Centres **must** ensure that the JCQ Information for candidates' documents (on-screen examinations and social media) are distributed to all learners either electronically or in hard-copy format prior to the assessments taking place. These documents may be found on the [JCQ website](#).

Document will be made available on the NCFE website.

## 1. Centre roles and responsibilities

### 1.1. Examinations officer

**The examinations officer is responsible for:**

- allocating invigilators
- managing the security of keycodes

### 1.2. Head of centre

The head, principal or chief officer of a centre, approved by NCFE, is defined for the purposes of this document as the head of centre.

The head of centre is the individual who is accountable to NCFE for ensuring that the centre is always compliant with the published regulations and NCFE requirements **to ensure the security and integrity of the assessments.**

### 1.3. Quality nominee

The quality nominee **must** ensure that:

- suitably qualified and experienced adults invigilate the assessments
- appropriate arrangements are in place to enable invigilators to carry out adequate checks on the identity of all learners

### 1.4. Tutor

Anyone familiar with the Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills subject content and NCFE's Qualification Specification, who uses these to prepare learners for assessments, is classed as a tutor. A tutor may also be described as an assessor, a lecturer, a supervisor, a teacher or a trainer.

This will include anyone involved in the following activities:

- preparing and delivering Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills learning
- conducting formative assessments, including the use of Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills sample assessments
- providing feedback on learner progress
- providing guidance to learners on how to attempt questions in Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments
- making decisions about a learner's readiness for Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments

## 2. Administration of assessments

- 2.1. A tutor of a Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills qualification **must not** be involved in the administration of online assessments for Entry Level 3 and Level 1 assessments in that subject, regardless of the level they teach.

Assessments are locked down until the time a learner starts their assessment and once completed the assessment is inaccessible. Advice **must** be sought from NCFE if a tutor is the only person available to undertake any of the administration activities.

## 3. Invigilation of assessments

- 3.1. Invigilators are responsible for conducting the assessment in the presence of the learners.
- 3.2. The head of centre **must** ensure that invigilators are suitably qualified and experienced adults. Whilst the head of centre has discretion to decide who is suitably qualified and experienced, any friend, relative or peer of a learner in the assessment room **must not** be the sole invigilator.
- 3.3. Staff who have combined vocational and Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills tutor roles **must not** invigilate if their tutor role covers the activities detailed in **section 1.4**
- 3.4. Many learning programmes incorporate the development of digital skills. Some staff are involved in the teaching and learning process but are not directly engaged in delivering content for, or preparing learners for, Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments.

The following staff may invigilate:

- staff who solely carry out initial and diagnostic assessments
- staff who direct learners to online/e-learning programmes, who set up online/e-learning programmes for learners and/or support learners to access e-learning
- vocational staff who incorporate digital skills into lessons where they occur in vocational programmes, but are not responsible for preparing learners for Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments
- staff who administer Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments

The following staff **must not** invigilate:

- staff who directly support learners working towards Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments, even if they are not the learner's main Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills tutor

- staff supporting learners using online/e-learning programmes, where these include Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessment preparation

**3.5.** A centre **must** ensure that it has suitable invigilators available for all Entry Level 3 and Level 1 Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments.

There are no automatic exceptions to this rule. In exceptional circumstances, where only a tutor can access the assessment location and/or the learners, an adjustment may be granted by prior arrangement with, and at the discretion of, NCFE. These exceptional circumstances may include:

- restrictions within the centre on the grounds of security or safeguarding
- the remote location of the learner's workplace/assessment location
- as part of a reasonable adjustment for an individual learner.

Any exception on these grounds **must** be agreed by NCFE in advance of the assessment date. Centres can submit an invigilation exception request via our [Invigilation exception requests: Functional Skills](#) webpage. NCFE will respond to the request within three working days. An exception may also require the centre to agree to additional measures to ensure the security of the assessment materials and additional monitoring.

**3.6.** Sufficient invigilators **must** be appointed to ensure that the assessment is conducted in accordance with the following requirements:

- at least one invigilator **must** be present for every 30 learners
- invigilators may be changed during the assessment, provided that the number present in the assessment room does not fall below the prescribed number
- when only one invigilator is present, they **must** be able to summon assistance easily, without leaving the room and without disturbing the learners
- an invigilator **must** be able to observe every learner in the room at all times

**3.7.** The following documents **must** be available to every invigilator in the assessment room:

- Regulations for the Conduct of Digital Skills Assessments
- Qualification Specific Instructions for Delivery

**3.8.** The current JCQ Warning to Candidates and Unauthorised items posters **must** be displayed outside the assessment room.

**3.9.** Display materials (such as diagrams and wall charts) that might assist learners in answering questions **must** be removed.

**3.10.** Possession of unauthorised items is an infringement of the regulations and could result in disqualification from the assessment. Unauthorised materials, in particular mobile phones, regardless of whether they are switched on or off or

within reach, **must not** be in learners' possession.

**3.11. An invigilator must not:**

- re-phrase a question for a learner
- explain any subject-specific or technical terms to a learner
- give any indication of the time elapsed or remaining where a question paper consists of distinct sections.

## **4. Seating plans**

- 4.1.** A seating plan is required for every assessment even if there is just one learner present. The seating plan, which must be produced prior to the assessment, **must** clearly show how learners were seated during the assessment and provide an accurate record of how the assessment room was set up.

This is to ensure:

- the assessment is being conducted as per the published regulations
  - invigilation is not intrusive
  - the learner has appropriate space to complete the assessment
- 4.2.** Centres **must** keep records of the seating plan and invigilation arrangements for each assessment session for three months after the date of the assessment. NCFE may request these records at any time during that three-month period for the purpose of enquiries about results, appeals or investigations.

## **5. Identification of learners**

- 5.1.** Centres **must** check the identity of learners at enrolment and record the item(s) of identification seen.

It is the centre's responsibility to check learner identity and confirm that learners have taken the correct assessments. To ensure this:

- The invigilator **must** check the identity of each learner to ensure that the keycode is issued
- 5.2.** A learner who is not known to the centre **must** present original photographic documentary evidence that they are the same person who was entered for the assessment. This check **must** take place before each assessment.

Appropriate photographic evidence would include, for example, a valid passport, a national ID card, or a photo card driving license.

- 5.3.** If a learner sits an assessment in another learner's name (whether it is intentional or not), this may constitute malpractice and **must** be reported to NCFE immediately.

## 6. The people present

- 6.1. Only learners taking the assessment(s) and persons authorised by the head of centre are allowed in the assessment room.

NCFE reserves the right to visit centres at any time to inspect the arrangements made for the security of confidential assessment material and the conducting of the assessments.

## 7. Supervision of learners

- 7.1. Invigilators **must** supervise the learners throughout the whole time the assessment is in progress and give their complete attention at all times.

## 8. Learners with disabilities and learning difficulties

- 8.1. Centres should refer to NCFE's website for information about the available access arrangements/reasonable adjustments for the assessment and processing arrangements.
- 8.2. None-centre delegated access arrangements and reasonable adjustments **must** be added to the NCFE Portal.
- 8.3. Extra time **must** be applied to each booking in the online assessment platform.

## 9. Malpractice

- 9.1. Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments rely on the integrity of the learners. Where malpractice occurs, or is thought to have occurred, this will be investigated by NCFE. This may lead to learners having their result placed on hold.
- 9.2. The head of centre **must** ensure that all cases of alleged, suspected or actual learner malpractice or any infringement of the regulations are reported to NCFE without delay. Further guidance will then be provided by NCFE's Provider Assurance team.

Centres should provide as much information as possible, including:

- full details of the incident
- names and roles of individuals involved
- signed statements

Specific content or photographs of a live assessment **must not** be provided to NCFE.

Any infringement of the regulations may lead to the disqualification of the learner. The decision to disqualify a learner, rests solely with NCFE.

- 9.3.** The invigilator should remove and retain any unauthorised material discovered in the learner's possession and make a note of the circumstances.
- 9.4.** The head of centre may remove a learner from the assessment room. However, this should only occur if it is considered essential or if the continued presence of the learner would cause disruption to others in the room.

## **10. Invigilation**

- 10.1.** Invigilators **must** be familiar with the on-screen assessment software and ensure any pre-release materials are in an accessible location for learners.
- 10.2.** An IT technician **must** be available at the start of the assessment. The IT technician **does not** need to be in the room thereafter but **must** be in the vicinity of the assessment room and **must** be contactable by phone to deal with any technical difficulties that may arise. The IT technician **must not** be involved in the delivery of Digital Functional Skills or Essential Digital Skills as per **section 3**.
- 10.3.** An IT technician or a dedicated administrator **must**:
- be familiar with the relevant software, for example 'User Guide' and the procedures for logging on, uploading learner assessments (where required) and exiting the assessments
  - set up the assessment room before learners enter the room by switching on computers and opening up the assessment software
- 10.4.** It is a condition of NCFE approval to offer on-screen assessments that suitable technical support is provided.
- 10.5.** Invigilators **must not** allow a learner to login under the name of another learner.

## **11. Security of assessment materials**

- 11.1.** Assessment software **must** be securely managed at all times so that no unauthorised person has access. The centre **must** be able to demonstrate that appropriate security systems and processes are in place to prevent unauthorised access to the assessments on their computer system.

The security and confidentiality of the assessments must be maintained at all times.

- 11.2.** The centre **must** ensure that:
- only administrators have access to keycodes which allow access to the on-screen assessments
  - computers are set up to prevent access to any software which is prohibited whilst the assessment is in progress. It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that AI tools and any other prohibited software are disabled;

- only learners who have been entered to take the assessment are permitted to do so
- all pre-release materials are made accessible to learners
- all learner work is deleted from devices and shared locations on completion of assessments

**11.3.** The centre **must** have the available expertise to:

- administer and access the assessments using secure uploading and downloading
- deal with any issues or technical difficulties that may arise during an assessment

**11.4.** Assessment content **must** be protected from unauthorised access at all times, including before, during and after the assessment session.

**11.5.** NCFE **must** be informed immediately if the security of the assessment material is put at risk or has been breached (for example, cyber security, fire, flood, IT system failure or through malpractice).

## **12. Starting time for assessments**

**12.1.** When more than one learner is taking an assessment in the same room, the assessment should be scheduled with the same starting time to cause the least disruption to learners.

The centre **must** inform each learner of the starting time of the assessment session.

## **13. Resources for assessments**

**13.1.** Learners **must not** have access to any materials, including books and unauthorised software, whilst they are sitting the assessment. Learners are allowed dictionaries in Digital Functional Skills and Essential Digital Skills assessments.

**13.2.** The invigilator may have rough paper and pens available to help learners plan their answers. Learners **must** request this at the start of the assessment.

Invigilators **must** collect all rough paper at the end of the assessment and ensure it is securely destroyed.

**13.3.** Learners may be required to access and carry out a search using a search engine.

Invigilators **must** remain vigilant that learners are only using search engines for questions that require them to do so.

Where a learner has used a search engine for a question which does not require them to do so, this would constitute malpractice and **must** refer to

**section 9.**

- 13.4.** Learners **must** be warned that the possession of any unauthorised material will be considered an infringement of the regulations, in the same way as the possession of any other unauthorised items.

If unauthorised items are present in the assessment room, whether or not learners intend to use them, this may constitute malpractice. The learner(s) could be subject to sanctions as detailed in the JCQ document, [Suspected Malpractice: Policies and Procedures](#).

**14. General environment/layout of the assessment room**

- 14.1.** To ensure an appropriate assessment environment, the centre **must** ensure that:
- the accommodation is suitable for use as an assessment room
  - the area is quiet and free from external disturbances
  - attention has been paid to matters such as heating, lighting and ventilation
  - the workspace provided for the learner allows access to equipment
  - the arrangement of the workstations and the position of the invigilator's desk facilitates detection of any unauthorised activity by learners, such as communication with others or the use of unauthorised material
- 14.2.** It is advised that the workstations are isolated by at least a space of 1.25m measured from the nearest outer edge of one screen to the next or separated by a partition.

**15. Accommodation**

- 15.1.** The way in which the IT technician has installed the system will determine how many learners can sit an assessment at one time. Spare PCs should always be available.
- 15.2.** The assessment room **must** be set up with all PCs logged on and the assessment software open **before** learners enter the room.
- 15.3.** Each workstation **must** be tested on completion of installation of the assessment software.
- 15.4.** The assessment time will be determined by the clock on the learner's PC. However, a reliable clock **must** be visible to each learner when sitting in the assessment room.
- 15.5.** Another external assessment may be held in the assessment room at the same time, provided that this does not cause any disturbance. The centre **must** ensure that learners are not interrupted whilst taking an assessment.
- 15.6.** Each workstation **must** have pre-release materials available in an accessible location

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Invigilators **must** pay particular attention to minimising disturbance through learners entering or leaving the assessment room whilst other learners are still completing their assessment.

## 16. Hardware, software and pre-release materials

**16.1.** Hardware **must** meet the technical requirements outlined on NCFE's [Online assessment](#) webpage.

**16.2.** There **must** be adequate back-up provision in case of equipment failure. Provision can include:

- spare workstations (of the required specification)
- spares of easily replaced items (such as mouse and screen)

**16.3.** Hardware **must** be maintained to minimise the likelihood of failure during an assessment.

**16.4.** Up-to-date virus protection measures **must** be in place.

It is the centre's responsibility to ensure that any pre-release materials are set up on the learner's computer prior to the assessment taking place.

Centres **must** ensure that all pre-release materials are downloaded, unzipped and accessible to learners during the assessment.

At no point should a learner set up their own pre-release materials independently without guidance and support from the centre.

Pre-release materials and guidance can be accessed from the qualification pages under 'Assessment Materials' on the NCFE website.

**16.5.** Learners **must** be familiar with how to create zip files prior to sitting the assessment.

## 17. Starting the assessment

**17.1.** In addition to the general instructions for invigilators, (see **section 3**) the invigilator(s) **must**:

- ensure that learners start the assessment in accordance with the specific instructions provided
- draw learners' attention to the instructions on the screen at the beginning of the assessment and ask them to check that they have been provided with the correct assessment for the correct subject and level
- inform learners that they **must not** use the Finish button without first asking an invigilator
- inform learners to enter the required information on their screen when prompted to do so at the start of the assessment
- inform learners about the instruction screens that will appear prior to the start of the assessment

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- inform learners that any scrap paper given to them **must** be returned to the invigilator at the end of the assessment and **must not** be taken out of the room

## 18. Emergencies and technical problems

- 18.1. The assessment may be paused while learners are out of the room and then restarted when they return. If the technical issue cannot be immediately resolved, then the on-screen assessment should be abandoned. A further set of on-screen assessments **must** be scheduled when the fault has been rectified and the system tested.
- 18.2. If there are difficulties with individual PCs or the whole centre system during the assessment, and the failure cannot be rectified within 30 minutes, then the on-screen assessment should be abandoned. A further set of on-screen assessments should be scheduled when the fault has been rectified and the system tested.
- 18.3. If the system is not up and running successfully at the scheduled start time, the assessment should be delayed by no more than 15 minutes for the problem to be resolved. After this time, the on-screen assessment should be rescheduled when the fault has been rectified and the system tested.
- 18.4. Where a learner is present for an on-screen assessment but is disadvantaged for any reason due to a technical problem or emergency, please refer to NCFE's [Special Consideration](#) webpage.

## 19. Finishing the assessment

- 19.1. The assessment will close either when the allocated time has elapsed, or when the learner completes the assessment earlier than the allocated time.
- 19.2. The centre **must** keep attendance registers and invigilator reports that are produced at the end of the assessment for every learner present. These are to be used as proof of attendance and **must** be stored in the centre for three months after the assessment. These may be requested at any time during this period by NCFE.
- 19.3. Any scrap paper used by learners during the assessment **must** be collected by the invigilator and securely destroyed. Learners **must not** take any notes out of the room at the end of the assessment.
- 19.4. All assessments **must** be uploaded to the online assessment platform. If an assessment is not uploaded, it will not be marked, and the learner will not receive a result.
- 19.5. Following the assessment learners **must** be instructed delete any completed files/folders.

Centres are responsible for making sure any materials saved by the learner are

completely deleted from the computer used so the invigilator **must** check the device to ensure any completed files/folders have been deleted by the learner and if not, they **must** delete them.

## **20. Leaving the assessment**

- 20.1.** Learners who have completed the assessment may leave the room at the discretion of the invigilator, subject to ensuring that no disturbance is caused to other learners. The invigilator **must** turn off the computer screens to ensure other learners cannot see them. The learners **must not** be allowed back into the room.

## **21. Appendices**

### **Appendix A – Warning to candidates poster**

Please refer to the [Instructions for conducting Functional Skills assessments \(English and Mathematics\)](#)

### **Appendix B – Unauthorised items posters**

Please refer to the [Instructions for conducting Functional Skills assessments \(English and Mathematics\)](#)

### **Appendix C – Invigilator's checklist**

Please refer to the [Instructions for conducting Functional Skills assessments \(English and Mathematics\)](#)