HM Government

T-LEVELS

Chief Examiner Report

T Level Technical Qualification in Digital Support Services
QN: 603/6901/2

Autumn 2025 – Core Paper A and Core Paper B

NCFE

Introduction

Autumn 2025 – Core Paper A and Core Paper B

Assessment dates: Core Paper A 03 December 2025
Core Paper B 10 December 2025

Paper numbers: Core Paper A P003017 (paper-based) and P003018 (onscreen)
Core Paper B P003019 (paper-based) and P003020 (onscreen)

This report contains information in relation to the externally assessed component provided by the chief examiner, with an emphasis on the standard of student work within this assessment.

The report is written for providers, with the aim of highlighting how students have performed generally, as well as any areas where further development or guidance may be required to support preparation for future opportunities.

Key points:

- grade boundaries
- standard of student work
- responses to the external assessment questions
- administering the external assessment

It is important to note that students should not sit the core examinations until they have received the relevant teaching of the qualification in relation to this component, and that both papers must be taken in any given series that a student sits the core examinations.

Grade boundaries

Raw mark grade boundaries for the series are:

	Overall	Notional boundaries	
		Paper A	Paper B
Max	237	106	131
A*	202	92	109
A	177	83	94
B	152	71	81
C	128	59	68
D	104	48	55
E	80	37	43

Grade boundaries are the lowest mark with which a grade is achieved.

Students receive a grade for the core exam component as a whole, and although there are no official grades for the individual assessments in the core exam, it can be useful for students and tutors to see how the core exam grade was achieved. The grade boundaries given for each assessment are known as 'notional grade boundaries', as they are for illustrative purposes only. For further information on

notional grade boundaries, please see our guide T Levels: Notional boundaries for the Core Exam assessments (Paper 1 and Paper 2) available on the qualification page on the NCFE website.

For further details on how raw marks are converted to uniform mark scale (UMS), and the aggregation of the core component, please refer to the Qualification Specification.

Administering the external assessment

The external assessment is invigilated and must be conducted in line with our Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment document.

Students must be given the resources to complete the assessment, and these are highlighted within the Qualification Specific Instructions for Delivery (QSID) document.

Standard of student work

In this series, students generally performed well. Overall, students answered the majority of questions across paper A and B. However, there were instances where chunks of questions were not answered by a large number of students, for example, Section D in Core Paper B. Many responses were not attempted, and those that were attempted often resulted in lower marks within this section. It would be beneficial for providers to focus on these areas in more depth.

There was a range of achievement seen throughout, including some exceptional answers on the 15-mark questions from a small selection of students.

Responses to the external assessment questions

Core Paper A

Section A: business context and culture

It was pleasing to see many students achieved high marks in this section.

Question 1: for this multiple-choice question (MCQ), the majority of students achieved this one-mark question, showing a clear understanding of the purpose of an organisational code of conduct.

Question 2: it was pleasing to see more than half of the students within this series could identify at least one of the two mitigation techniques which can reduce the impact of the unsafe use of digital technology.

Question 3 (a): many students could successfully identify one risk that outdated servers could pose to a business.

Question 3 (b): many students achieved one or two marks for explaining one reason the business is communicating the benefits of the change to the technicians. However, some students lost a second mark for not explaining how their response linked back to the scenario. For example, ‘This communication will help the technicians understand how the migration will make their jobs easier, such as spending less time repairing the old servers (1). This understanding may increase their motivation to learn how to use new tools and processes as they will realise the advantages of this (1).’

Question 4 (a): many students could identify one way an increased reliance on digital technology may impact company culture.

Question 4 (b): many students achieved one or two marks for this question for explaining one way the increasing reliance on the employee monitoring system may have an ethical impact on employees. Some students lost the second mark for not linking their response back to the scenario. For example, ‘The use of system logs and cameras to monitor employees in real time may raise ethical concerns as it could be seen as an invasion of their privacy (1). This level of surveillance could damage trust between employees and management (1).’

Question 5 (a): many students were able to identify at least one of the two key factors that can influence the business environment.

Question 5 (b): many students were able to explain at least one way an app will provide value to the students. There were no common or typical responses which were incorrect.

Question 6: students were able to explain at least one type of stakeholder that may be involved in the app development process. Where students lost a mark is by only explaining one type of stakeholder, rather than two.

Question 7: this question asks students to assess the potential impact Chloe’s disturbed sleep pattern could have on her exam revision, and we were looking for students to include reasoned judgements and a conclusion, such as the following example: ‘Although Chloe is trying to revise for her exams, she is experiencing irregular sleeping patterns which may affect her ability to concentrate on her revision (1). This could have a serious impact on Chloe’s performance and her ability to achieve the grades she expects (1). Ultimately, if Chloe does not improve her sleep habits, her academic performance may suffer, making it essential for her to develop a better sleep routine before her exams (1).’ Many students did not provide a conclusion and often lost the final mark due to struggling to understand the command verb ‘assess’. This also applies to many AO3 questions, which have a similar comment. Students would benefit from practising providing responses with a drawn conclusion.

Question 8: students were asked to discuss how the change management steps could help the senior management team to reinforce the change. Similarly to question 7, we were looking for reasoned judgements and conclusions, and often students lost the final mark due to no conclusion. For example, ‘Senior management can monitor how employees are using the new project management software by tracking its usage and identifying areas where it is being underused (1). This step would allow management to identify barriers, such as a lack of understanding or technical issues, and take targeted action to support, such as refresher training (1). By addressing these issues early, management can ensure that the new software is consistently adopted across all teams helping to build trust in the new system while reinforcing the change made (1).’

Question 9: students were asked to evaluate the measurable value that digitalisation will bring to Hutchinson Automotive Solutions. This was a 15-mark question, and it was pleasing to see that many students achieved high marks and reached the higher bands. For those that received lower marks for this question, they usually did not provide enough depth or evaluative comments. For example, they may have highlighted that the CRM would automate tasks but did not consider the planning that this may involve and provide enough depth behind their response.

Section B: diversity, inclusion and digital environments

Students performed better in the first half of this section.

Question 10: most students were able to state one business benefit of diversity and inclusion.

Question 11: many students were able to identify one method a business could use to create a resilient digital environment.

Question 12 (a): most students were able to successfully identify one benefit of virtual computing systems.

Question 12 (b): many students achieved one mark for this question by explaining one reason Eva has been advised to use a type 2 hypervisor, although some students lost the second mark for not linking their explanation back to the scenario. For example, 'Eva has been advised to use a type 2 hypervisor as this type of hypervisor is an add-on feature to the Windows operating system (1). This would be perfect for Eva as a college student due to its simple installation; this only requires enabling through a control panel (1).'

Question 13: many students struggled with the topic in this question, where they had to explain why implementing routing protocols will prevent this from happening again. It would be beneficial for providers to deliver further learning on this topic, as many students either did not respond to this question or did not get any marks due to insufficient knowledge on routing protocols.

Question 14 (a): many students struggled with this question and were unable to accurately identify two other contexts that IoT may be used in that are not domestic. Responses we were looking at were, for example, traffic lights for smart city context. Whilst most students did attempt this question, they provided responses within a domestic context.

Question 14 (b): a low proportion of students achieved high marks for explaining one way Walter may ease concerns surrounding the use of personal data when presenting information. However, many students received only one mark, or failed to answer the question correctly, resulting in zero marks.

Question 15 (a): most students were able to identify two principles of digital inclusion.

Question 15 (b): many students achieved full marks for explaining how the approaches can be used by the company to directly address the findings of the recent review.

Question 16: students often lost one or two marks for this question, where they were asked to evaluate how one of the back-up options would be the best solution for the graphic design studio, due to not including reasoned judgements and a conclusion.

Question 17: students often lost some marks for this question, where they were asked to evaluate how the effects of digital inclusion can impact Suzie's organisation, due to not including reasoned judgements and a conclusion. For example, 'Digital inclusion can help Suzie's organisation make more money because it can help workers to do their jobs faster / make less mistakes (1). Office workers could also use digital skills to communicate more efficiently with their customers, which may help them sell more products (1). However, it could take time to see the profits because the organisation will need to spend money on the digital tools and training first, in addition to training staff (1).'

Question 18: many students achieved very high marks for this question, where they were asked to discuss how cloud computing could be implemented by the e-commerce company to improve efficiency and operations. It was pleasing to see a good understanding of the types of cloud, cloud services and the benefits of cloud computing.

Section C: learning and planning

Students performed relatively well within this section, with some high marks awarded for some questions.

Question 19: many students were able to successfully identify one advantage of personal and professional development in the digital sector.

Question 20: many students were able to identify one consequence of ineffective project planning.

Question 21 (a): most students were able to identify one factor of reliability or validity when undertaking research.

Question 21 (b): not all students understood what was meant of the term ‘blockchain’, and some struggled to explain one way blockchain can address the company’s supply chain issues.

Question 22 (a): a low proportion of students were able to identify one other project planning technique that can be used in software development projects. It would be beneficial for providers to give further support to students on this topic.

Question 22 (b): many students were able to explain one way that the CPA project planning technique can keep the application development project on track, although some students lost a second mark for not linking their response back to the scenario. For example, ‘Critical path analysis (CPA) would help to streamline the requirement-gathering stage by identifying which tasks depend on others (1). By mapping out key activities (for example, defining app objectives, identifying target users, gathering stakeholder requirements) it will highlight the longest sequence of dependent tasks, ensuring no critical steps are delayed (1).’

Question 23 (a): many students struggled to identify two reflective techniques. It would be beneficial for providers to focus on this topic for future learning.

Question 23 (b): a low proportion of students were able to explain how two aspects of design thinking could be implemented by the product manager to improve the success of the website, although many students often lost marks on this question, mainly due to not responding to the question.

Question 24: some students were able to discuss the importance of the resource requirements when planning this project, although they often lost marks due to not providing reasoned judgements and conclusions. For example, ‘People and skills are crucial for the success of the project because the company needs employees with the right knowledge to operate new machinery / manage the increased production (1). Hiring skilled workers will ensure that production runs smoothly, while training current employees in new processes and technology may increase productivity (1). Without the right skills the company could experience delays / inefficiencies / safety concerns which would impact the success of the project (1).’

Core Paper B

Section A: digital support services pathway

Students performed relatively well within this section, with some high marks awarded for some questions.

Question 1: this question was answered correctly throughout the majority of answers marked.

Question 2: many students were able to identify two skills that are required to work in a digital support role.

Question 3 (a): many students were able to identify two factors that should be taken into consideration when communicating to an audience in a digital support services context.

Question 3 (b): many students could explain at least one way the school's digital support services could be improved to allow better interaction with technical and non-technical staff.

Question 4 (a) and (b) and Question 5: most students often achieved full marks for all of these questions.

Question 6: some students only achieved one mark, instead of the two marks here, due to not fully explaining one way a root cause analysis approach can be used to resolve this issue. When explaining their response, the students needed to link it back to the scenario.

Question 7: most students often failed to achieve the full three marks for this question due to missing out on three discussion points. Many students provided one or two discussion points for this question but did not provide a conclusion to reach a third mark.

Question 8: similarly to question 7, students failed to provide three discussion points for this question, often resulting in only one or two points mentioned. Students generally performed equally across both detection and response and often failed to provide conclusions. Here is a typical example of an expected response for detection: 'By applying the detection principle, the healthcare organisation could have improved its handling of the incident by putting real-time monitoring tools in place to help detect unusual access to patient records / large data transfers (1). Early detection would have triggered alerts for the IT team, allowing them to act straight away rather than discovering the breach days later (1). This would have meant patients could be notified quicker, limiting reputational damage to the healthcare organisation and giving it a chance to better protect its information (1).'

Section B: tools and testing

Students performed relatively well within this section, with some high marks awarded for some questions.

Question 9: a low proportion of students achieved full marks for this question as most students got confused and identified frameworks which were not agile, such as 'waterfall'.

Question 10 (a): some students seemed to be confused with this question, where they were asked to identify two uses of presentation tools, with many listing types of presentation tools rather than uses.

Question 10 (b): many students achieved full marks for being able to explain one way the use of dashboards could help the marketing team present their findings.

Question 11: most students had good explanations for this question, with many achieving the full two marks.

Question 12: this question was generally answered well by the majority of students, and both stages of root analysis were addressed and applied back to the scenario.

Question 13 (a): most students were able to state one purpose of testing digital components other than compatibility testing, although some lost a mark by identifying examples of testing, such as ‘stress testing’.

Question 13 (b): most students provided a good reason for testing compatibility, answering this question well.

Question 14: many students failed to achieve full marks, either by missing key assessment points or by having insufficient knowledge of Agile. Some students did not attempt the question at all. Although most students provided one or two assessment points for this question, they failed to achieve the full three marks.

Question 15: students often failed to achieve the full three marks for this question due to missing out on three discussion points. Many students provided one or two discussion points but did not provide a reasoned conclusion at the end for the third mark. For example, ‘Stress testing could have helped mitigate these issues by identifying the system's maximum capacity, ensuring it could handle a high volume of booking requests before going live (1). However, this would have increased the costs associated with the system development, which may have been outside the dental clinic's budget, resulting in further delays / cancellation (1). As a result, this activity may have been out of scope, but the clinic would have been better prepared for higher demand, preventing system crashes and reducing confusion for staff / patients (1).’

Section C: security and legislation

Students performed relatively well within this section, with some high marks awarded for some questions.

Question 16: most students were able to state one example of commercially sensitive information.

Question 17: this question asked students to state two financial consequences. Many students were able to state financial consequences, although some students lost marks for stating other non-financial consequences, such as ‘damage to reputation’.

Question 18 (a): students answered this question generally well, although some students lost marks for not identifying types of malware. We had responses such as ‘phishing’, which isn’t a type of malware.

Question 18 (b): most students answered this question well by explaining how one type of malicious spam could be the reason for the attack.

Question 19 (a): most students were able to identify at least one key feature of UK GDPR.

Question 19 (b): many students achieved at least one mark for this question, where they were asked to explain one way the pharmacy could comply with the UK GDPR key feature of purpose limitation.

Question 20: some students were able to explain one way a professional code of conduct could guide James in responding to this situation, although some lost the second mark for not linking the response to the scenario.

Question 21: most students were able to explain at least one way that adherence to the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 would have helped to prevent the injury. Some students lost high marks for not explaining a second point.

Question 22: many students often failed to achieve the full marks for this question. Many students provided one or two discussion points for each part of the question but did not provide a reasoned judgement or conclusion to achieve the full marks. The following is an example of a good typical response we would expect to see: ‘Installing robust anti-malware software across all staff devices would have helped detect / isolate malicious attachments which may have reduced the risk of malware spreading across the leisure centre’s systems (1). However, its effectiveness depends on regular updates and user awareness so staff might still ignore warnings if they are not properly trained (1). Therefore, it is not only important that the leisure centre install anti-malware but also that they regularly update and maintain it (1).’

Question 23: many students often failed to achieve the full marks for this question. Many students provided one or two assessment points for each part of the question but did not provide enough assessment points to achieve full marks.

Question 24: students were asked to evaluate how processes and protocols of internet security assurance could help the university protect its systems from potential cyber threats. This question allowed up to 15 marks. It was pleasing to see many students achieved high marks for this question, with many achieving marks in the higher bands. For those that received lower marks for this question, they usually did not provide enough context or evaluative comments.

Section D: data and digital analysis

Many students struggled within this section, with many not attempting to respond to most of these questions. In many instances, many questions were left blank, it was hard to tell if students were struggling with the topics or if they were running out of time. Students may benefit from looking at ways to manage their time in exams more effectively and developing a deeper understanding for these areas of the specifications.

Question 25: most students were able to identify at least one example of on-premises data storage.

Question 26: this question asked students to identify two types of access control methods, such as role-based access control (RBAC) or mandatory access control (MAC), as within the specification for R3.9. However, many students did respond with access control techniques such as biometric (R3.8 of the specification). Marks were still awarded for this response under 'any other suitable response'.

Question 27 (a): most students performed well with question 27 (a). For those that did not achieve marks for this question, this was due to responding with answers such as ‘Gantt chart’.

Question 27 (b): students generally responded to well, with many students explaining one way a flowchart could help the software developer design the shift change request feature.

Question 28: many students answered this question incorrectly. Perhaps this was due to insufficient knowledge of the characteristics of finiteness and unambiguity.

Question 29 (a): many students either did not respond to this question or incorrectly identified actions used in computational thinking. Many incorrect responses we received were, for example, ‘algorithms’ or ‘programming’. Students would benefit from further support from providers to understand computational thinking.

Question 29 (b): most students answered this question well and were able to explain how pattern recognition may be used in relation to the scenario.

Question 30 (a): almost all students were able to identify two methods for visualising data.

Question 30 (b): most students were able to explain at least one way the fitness company may use the data the app collects, although some lost marks for not providing a second explanation.

Question 31: students seemed to struggle with decomposition and, as such, either did not respond to this question, or they failed to achieve the full four marks due to missing four discussion points. Many students provided one or two discussion points for this question but often did not provide a conclusion to reach a final fourth mark.

Question 32: students either did not respond to this question, or they failed to achieve the full four marks due to missing four discussion points about the risk of data errors in a booking system. Many students provided one or two discussion points for this question but often did not provide a conclusion to reach a final fourth mark.

Question 33: students were asked to discuss how the hotel chain could use the data it collects to improve business performance and manage its operations more effectively. This question allowed up to fifteen marks for this question. It was pleasing to see many students achieving high marks for this 15-mark question, which allowed the higher bands to be reached. For those that received lower marks, they usually did not provide enough context or evaluative comments in their discussion.

Document information

NCFE is authorised by the Department for Education to develop and deliver this T Level Technical Qualification.