



SOLAR Centre Operating Guide

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Summary of changes

Version No	Revision date	Section	Page	Change
1.12	29 January 2025	Introduction	1	Additional point on reading and understanding guide.
1.12	29 January 2025	Assessments	4	New section
1.12	29 January 2025	Authenticating candidates' work	7	New section
1.12	29 January 2025	Re-assessment	7	Additional point on not scheduling same assessment repeatedly.

A summary of changes prior to version 1.12 is available on request. Contact our Digital Services Support Helpdesk at das.helpdesk@sqa.org.uk.

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Introduction

SOLAR (Scottish OnLine Assessment Resources) is SQA's free digital assessment system for all approved SQA centres.

This guide sets out the arrangements for centres delivering assessments to their candidates using SOLAR, the principles on which SOLAR is managed, and the roles and responsibilities of SQA and of centres in using SOLAR. SOLAR operates within the scope of the Centre Operating Agreement where this is in place between your centre and SQA. In using SOLAR, you confirm that you have read and understood this guide and you confirm that you know how to use SOLAR correctly and effectively.

This guide does not provide any information on how to use SOLAR. User guides and training materials can be accessed via the [SOLAR website](#).

Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator

Your centre must have one nominated Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator. This may also be your centre's SQA Co-ordinator. Your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator will be

- our main point of contact for all specific communications regarding SOLAR
- responsible for maintaining access to SOLAR for any other staff within your centre who require it.

You must notify us if your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator leaves your centre and nominate a new Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator. You can also contact us to request a change to your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator if required. Any requests to change your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator should come via your centre's SQA Co-ordinator.

Access

Centre access

Your centre can request access to SOLAR if you are an SQA-approved centre. Your nominated Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator will be granted access to SOLAR. Your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator can grant access to additional centre users within your centre.

Your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator is responsible for maintaining access to SOLAR within your centre. Your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator must only grant access to additional centre users within your centre where required. Your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator must retire any centre users who no longer require access to SOLAR or who have left your centre.

We will periodically review centre SOLAR users and any user accounts that have been inactive for 24 months will be retired. Retired users will be unable to access SOLAR. If you need to reactivate a retired account, you must contact our Digital Services Support Helpdesk at das.helpdesk@sqa.org.uk.

When requesting access to SOLAR, you can request access to assessments for any qualification for which your centre is approved to deliver. At any point, you can request access to additional assessments for any qualification for which your centre is approved to

deliver. All requests for access to assessments must be made by your Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator or one of your centre SOLAR users.

Candidate access

Candidates entered via SQA Connect for units in certain qualifications will be automatically created in SOLAR. This applies to the following qualifications:

- Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver
- Certificate Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver SCQF level 5
- Health and Safety in a Construction Environment Award SCQF level 4
- Street Works

For any other qualifications, you must create candidates in SOLAR before they can access SOLAR. You must only create valid candidates with an SCN in SOLAR.

Candidates will access SOLAR to sit assessments, including practice assessments, and to review feedback after sitting assessments, if provided. Access to assessments and feedback is controlled by keycodes, generated when scheduling assessments and reviews.

You control candidate access to SOLAR through the scheduling of assessments and reviews and the issue of keycodes to them. It is your responsibility to ensure that only permitted candidates are given keycodes and can access SOLAR.

Information security

Access to SOLAR is controlled and managed using role-based permissions. You will be assigned a role according to your centre role, either a Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator or a Centre SOLAR User. This will permit you access to only the specific areas and functionality in SOLAR you require.

You must ensure you protect access to SOLAR and to the information held within SOLAR. You must only use SOLAR for the purpose for which you have been granted access for.

You must not:

- disclose your SOLAR password or security question/answer to anyone
- allow anyone else to use your SOLAR account
- disclose any of the information held in SOLAR to anyone unless specifically required to do so as part of your role
- access the content of any live summative assessments in SOLAR unless specifically required to do so as part of your role.

You must report any actual or potential breaches of security of information held in SOLAR to our Digital Assessment Services Helpdesk at das.helpdesk@sqa.org.uk.

Data

Centre users

To create a Centre SOLAR Co-ordinator, we will request your name, email address, centre name and centre number. On creating your account, we will create a username in the format: *InitialSurnameCentreNumber*. When creating other centre users, you must create a username using the same format.

Candidates

To create a candidate in SOLAR, you must provide the candidate's name, SCN and date of birth. You must not provide any other candidate personal data when creating a candidate.

Find out more about how we use your and your candidates' personal data on the [SOLAR website privacy statement](#).

System requirements

It is your responsibility to ensure that all devices, software, and the internet connection being used to sit SOLAR assessments meet the minimum system requirements for delivering assessments on SOLAR. Where candidates are using their own devices, software, and internet connection to sit SOLAR assessments, it is your responsibility to ensure candidates are aware of the minimum system requirements for delivering assessments on SOLAR and that they meet these requirements.

The software on which SOLAR runs is periodically updated, and where any software updates result in a change to system requirements, you will be notified as soon as is practicable.

To administer assessments on SOLAR your devices, software and internet connection must meet the minimum system requirements for administering assessments on SOLAR.

Access the [SOLAR system requirements](#).

User guidance

Before using SOLAR, you must refer to the user guides and training materials available via the [SOLAR website](#) to ensure you understand how to use SOLAR effectively.

Testing and practice

Before candidates sit any SOLAR assessments, you must test that any devices, software, and internet connection are functioning correctly.

We recommend that you have practised using SOLAR and are familiar with the requirements and conditions of any assessments you are going to deliver in SOLAR before candidates sit any SOLAR assessments.

We recommend that candidates have a chance to practice using SOLAR before sitting any SOLAR assessments.

Practice assessments are available in SOLAR for centre users to practice or test using SOLAR or for candidates to practice using SOLAR.

Contingency arrangements

It is your responsibility to have contingency arrangements in place when delivering SOLAR assessments. Many SOLAR assessments are only available online via SOLAR with no paper-based alternatives available as a backup. Contingency arrangements you should have in place include, but are not limited to:

- having spare devices in case of device failure before or during a SOLAR assessment
- having a backup in case of significant internet connection failure before or during a SOLAR assessment, for example a mobile internet connection or an alternative location.

Note: SOLAR has built-in resilience that saves progress during an assessment and can cope with short-term loss of internet connectivity.

Assessments

SOLAR summative assessments are secure, confidential assessment materials, developed and quality assured by SQA and our appointed subject specialists. They are valid, reliable instruments of assessment that meet the standards set out in the unit specifications. The unit specifications provide all the information on the outcomes, knowledge and/or skills, and evidence required to achieve the unit. Some SOLAR assessments are compulsory to complete to achieve a unit, while other SOLAR assessments are optional for centres to use. Where the SOLAR assessment is optional, assessment support packs may also be available, or centres can devise their own assessments.

Information on all the assessments available on SOLAR can be found on the SOLAR website [List of Available Assessments](#).

Assessment conditions and invigilation

You are responsible for scheduling assessments for your candidates in SOLAR. You are responsible for ensuring your candidates are suitably prepared for sitting a SOLAR assessment.

The assessment conditions for any assessments available via SOLAR can be found in the unit or group award specification or assessment strategy for the qualification. You are responsible for ensuring assessment conditions are met including invigilating candidates where necessary.

Guidance on managing assessment conditions can be found in the Appendix of our [Qualification Verification Criteria: Guidance for Centres](#). The Digital Assessments section is of relevance for SOLAR assessments with assessment conditions which specify that the assessment must be invigilated or supervised.

Be vigilant of the condition that states that environments must “prevent candidates from accessing applications that may be of assistance to them in answering questions/generating evidence”. As SOLAR is a web-browser-based digital assessment platform this includes ensuring

- that the device and web browser being used has no extensions, plugins or applications installed or enabled that may be of assistance to candidates in answering questions/generating evidence
- that candidates are unable to install or enable extensions, plugins, or applications on the device or in the web browser during the assessment that may be of assistance to them in answering questions/generating evidence.

Extensions, plugins, and applications include generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot and Google Gemini. Access our [position on generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in assessments](#).

Where candidates are completing the assessment remotely from your centre and the assessment conditions specify that the assessment must be invigilated or supervised you will need to use technology to support remote invigilation. Access our [guidance on remote assessment](#).

You must meet the condition that states that environments must “prevent candidates from accessing applications that may be of assistance to them in answering questions/generating evidence” in whatever assessment situation you are delivering SOLAR assessments:

- in your centre with centre-provided devices
- in your centre with candidate devices
- remotely from your centre with centre-provided devices
- remotely from your centre with candidate devices.

General guidance on assessment can be found in our [Guide to Assessment](#).

Assessment arrangements

Assessment arrangements allow candidates who are disabled, and/or have been identified as having additional support needs, access to appropriate arrangements to complete the assessment without compromising its integrity. Assessment arrangements may also be referred to as reasonable adjustments.

SOLAR has several accessibility features to support candidates who are disabled and/or have been identified as having additional support needs.

- Adjustments can be made to the duration of assessments when scheduling assessments.
- Candidates can adjust the colour scheme and contrast of assessments as required.
- Candidates can zoom in and out of assessments as required.
- Assessments can be navigated using a keyboard.
- SOLAR works with assistive technology applications such as JAWS, NVDA, Dragon NaturallySpeaking and Windows Magnifier.

If you need support implementing or using these accessibility features, you can contact our Digital Services Support Helpdesk.

You do not need to contact us to request approval of assessment arrangements for internal assessments on SOLAR. You must however have appropriately verified the candidate’s need for the assessment arrangements, and the assessment arrangement must not compromise the assessment in terms of its reliability, validity, and integrity. You must also

retain a record of any assessment arrangements applied, including the reason for the application of the assessment arrangement, for verification purposes.

For Ofqual-Regulated Qualifications, you must use form VQ/IA, available from [the JCQ website](#), to record any assessment arrangements applied. On SOLAR this applies to the Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver qualification.

Access further information on [assessment arrangements](#) in our [Assessment Arrangements Explained: Information for centres guide](#), our [Guide to Reasonable Adjustments in Regulated Qualifications](#) and our [Reasonable Adjustments for SVQs and Related Qualifications guide](#).

Adverse impacts on assessment

Any event outwith a candidate's control could adversely impact their performance during an assessment. Adverse impacts include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ a personal event, eg a sudden bereavement, illness or injury shortly prior to, or on the day of the assessment
- ◆ a physical interruption, eg a fire alarm or other emergency requiring evacuation of the location in which the assessment is taking place during the assessment
- ◆ a technical interruption, eg the device, software or internet connection malfunctions during the assessment

Personal event

If the assessment hasn't started, and you are made aware of a personal event likely to impact on a candidate's performance, if it is possible to reschedule the assessment, and that is the candidate's preference, then the assessment should be rescheduled to a later date. Where the personal event occurs immediately prior to, or during the assessment, the candidate should be asked to complete the assessment if they feel able to. To ensure the candidate receives the full allocation of time for the assessment, you can pause and resume the assessment in SOLAR. Any assessment conditions must be maintained during the break in the assessment.

Physical interruptions

Where a fire alarm sounds, or other emergency requires the evacuation of the location in which an assessment is taking place, you must follow the evacuation procedures in place at the location. Where it is permitted and safe to return to the location at which the assessment was taking place, and if this is within the time allowed for the assessment, candidates should be asked to complete the assessment if possible. Any assessment conditions must be maintained during the break in the assessment, where possible.

Technical interruptions

Where the device, software, or internet malfunctions and interrupts an assessment, you must attempt to rectify the issue as soon as possible to allow the assessment to continue. If you need support in attempting to rectify the issue you can contact our Digital Services Support Helpdesk. If the issue is resolved in a reasonable time, candidates should be asked to complete the assessment if possible. When the connection to SOLAR is lost, the assessment time will be paused, and will resume when the connection is restored. Candidates will not lose any allocation of time for the assessment unless, because of the

interruption, the end time of the scheduled window for the assessment is reached. Any assessment conditions must be maintained during the break in the assessment.

Following the assessment, and whether the candidate fully or partially completed the assessment, if the candidate feels their performance in the assessment was adversely impacted by their personal event or any interruption, and they did not achieve the result they were hoping to achieve, you may wish to reschedule the assessment to a later date to allow them to re-sit it. You must retain evidence of the personal event or interruption as per our published evidence retention requirements. If the assessment is part of the Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver at SCQF level 5 or the Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver qualification, you must apply special consideration if the candidate wishes to re-sit the assessment because of their performance being affected by an adverse impact. See Appendix: Special consideration for details.

Marking and internal verification

SOLAR assessments may be wholly automatically marked, partially automatically marked and partially human marked, or wholly human marked. Any SOLAR assessments that are either partially or wholly human marked must be marked by your centre. You may wish to carry out internal verification on SOLAR assessments that have been human marked in your centre. It is also possible to review and verify automatically marked assessments if required. Marking and internal verification must be completed, and scripts submitted within 60 days of the assessment being completed. SOLAR will automatically void any human marked assessments that have not been marked and submitted within 90 days of the assessment being completed. After this point, you will not be able to access and mark the assessment and candidates will not receive a result.

Authenticating candidates' work

Condition 4.4 in our [Qualification Verification Criteria: Guidance for Centres](#) states that “assessment evidence must be the candidate’s own work, generated under SQA’s required conditions.” Some SOLAR assessments are completed over time with minimal supervision or control or open book assessment conditions. With the availability of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot and Google Gemini, which can quickly produce human-like text, it is important that you are aware of the appropriate authentication steps to take. Access our [position on generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in assessments](#) and [authenticating learners' work: good practice advice for centre staff](#).

Re-assessment

There may be an opportunity for re-assessment when a candidate does not pass a SOLAR assessment. Certain qualifications have conditions under which re-assessment can take place, and you must abide by these conditions. Where re-assessment is taking place in SOLAR, you are responsible for scheduling assessments for your candidates at an appropriate period after the original assessment has taken place and after appropriate remediation has taken place. Candidates may be directed to feedback from their original assessment in SOLAR, which may help to inform areas where further learning is required. When re-assessing candidates, you must not give them the same assessment repeatedly. Re-assessment may not be possible using SOLAR.

Guidance on re-assessment can be found in our [Guide to Assessment](#).

Results

Results for assessments in certain qualifications will be automatically transferred to SQA's main database. This applies to the following qualifications:

- Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver
- Certificate Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver SCQF level 5
- Street Works (Reassessed units only)

For all other qualifications, where the SOLAR assessment is a component of the qualification the candidate is entered for, you must submit the result to SQA through normal resulting channels. It is your responsibility to ensure that the correct result, as achieved by the candidate in SOLAR, is submitted, or combined with any other assessments that form part of the unit before being submitted. The result must be submitted following any internal verification or re-sits that the candidate may have completed. Results must be submitted to SQA in a timely manner after the result has been achieved and internally verified in SOLAR.

External verification

SOLAR assessments may be subject to external verification. External verifiers will be given access to your centre's schedule of assessments, invigilation arrangements, results, and all completed candidate assessments in SOLAR for a specified period, for the qualification being verified.

Support

Contact our Digital Assessment Services Helpdesk for support using SOLAR. Our helpdesk is available from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Complete the [Digital Assessment Services Support Form](#)

Phone: 0345 213 5060

Email: das.helpdesk@sqa.org.uk

Follow SOLAR on X (formerly Twitter) for SOLAR updates: [@sqasolar](#).

Find SOLAR information, guidance and updates, and access SOLAR via our website at: <https://www.sqasolar.org.uk>.

Appendix: Special consideration

Applies to the Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver at SCQF level 5 and the Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver qualifications only.

Special consideration may be applied when an event outwith a candidate's control has actually or potentially adversely affected the candidate's performance in an assessment. If you are applying special consideration, you may reschedule the assessment to allow the candidate to re-sit it. You must notify SQA as soon as possible and within 10 working days of the date of the assessment taking place if you are applying special consideration. In your notification you must provide:

- your centre name and centre number
- the name of the affected assessment
- the date and time the affected assessment was scheduled for
- the name(s) and Scottish Candidate Number(s) of the affected candidate(s)
- details of the personal event, physical or technical interruption that affected the candidate(s)

Notifications that you are applying special consideration must be emailed to our Higher National and Vocational Qualifications (HNVQ) team at operationshmvq@sqa.org.uk with the subject 'Notification of special consideration'. You must retain evidence of the personal event or interruption as per our published evidence retention requirements.