



## Case Study

# Transforming vocational assessments with Surpass



This case study explores the longstanding partnership between Surpass Assessment and NCFE, a relationship that has spanned over 15 years. The case study shows how Surpass Assessment's innovative solutions have supported NCFE's commitment to promoting and advancing learning through high-quality vocational and technical qualifications.

Discover:

- How Surpass was able to support the transformation of NCFE's assessment process.
- The flexibility with Surpass to navigate the challenges of having on-demand vocational qualifications.
- The role of Surpass in delivering remote assessments, providing security, flexibility and valuable insights into learner behaviour.

**“Working with the Surpass platform, and having everything, digitally, in one place, makes things a lot easier day to day. We can create, manage, deliver, mark and analyse our assessments from the same place. There is a lot of functionality within the platform that we don't use yet, but we're keen to continue building and growing our digital assessment bank and capabilities, to offer a more functional and appropriate assessment.”**

Toni Brooks, Assessment Platform Manager, NCFE

## Background

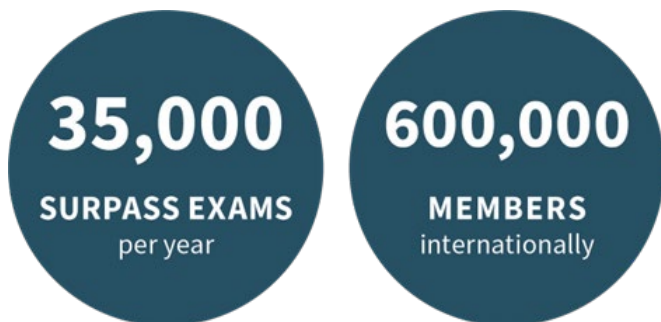
Surpass and NCFE have worked together to navigate the challenges of different modes of assessment, particularly providing learners with an alternative examination method to paper-based assessments.

Together, they aimed to:

- Increase the efficiency of NCFE's assessment processes.
- Improve the learner experience.

## About NCFE

Established in 1848, NCFE has a rich history rooted in the belief that no learner should be left behind. Today, over 175 years later, they continue to uphold this cause with renewed energy. As a long-standing customer of Surpass Assessment for over 15 years, NCFE is committed to helping to create a fairer, more inclusive society through the power of education. NCFE supports over 600,000 learners per year, focusing on each individual's journey and how learning and qualifications can support them into their next steps in life.



During its collaboration with Surpass, NCFE has introduced on-demand Functional Skills, Essential Digital Skills, T Levels qualifications, and V Certs (vocational qualifications for 14-16 year olds).

## Aims

NCFE has worked in partnership with Surpass Assessment for over 15 years, delivering assessments primarily for Functional Skills in English, Maths, and ICT. During this period, NCFE faced challenges with different modes of assessment. Surpass Assessment has been instrumental in addressing these challenges, offering an alternative mode of assessment that caters to the unique needs and abilities of all learners.

Together, they have worked to:

- Increase the efficiency of NCFE's assessment processes.
- Improve the learner experience.

NCFE uses Surpass to deliver Functional Skills assessments on demand, and more recently three additional key assessments:

- Essential Digital Skills – enabling learners with essential digital skills for everyday life.
- T Levels (available through Surpass from 2023) programme equivalent to 3 A-levels, including an industry placement for a minimum of 315 hours.
- V Certs – a Level 1/2 technical award measuring technical and applied abilities, vocational qualifications for 14-16 year olds.

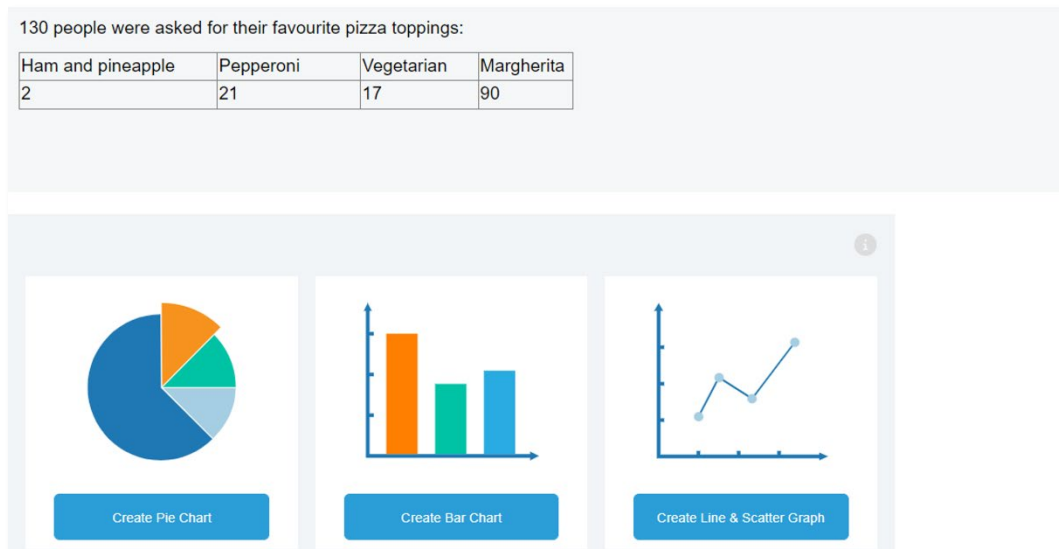
The delivery of these new qualifications presented new challenges and opportunities. Surpass Assessment has helped to navigate these challenges, supporting NCFE to expand its range of qualifications, and reach a broader spectrum of learners.

## Solutions

In summer 2023, NCFE first began delivering T Level assessments digitally and will offer 6 T Levels through Surpass in 2024. They will also work with Surpass on assessments for all 12 V Cert qualifications in 2024.

### Increased efficiency of assessment processes

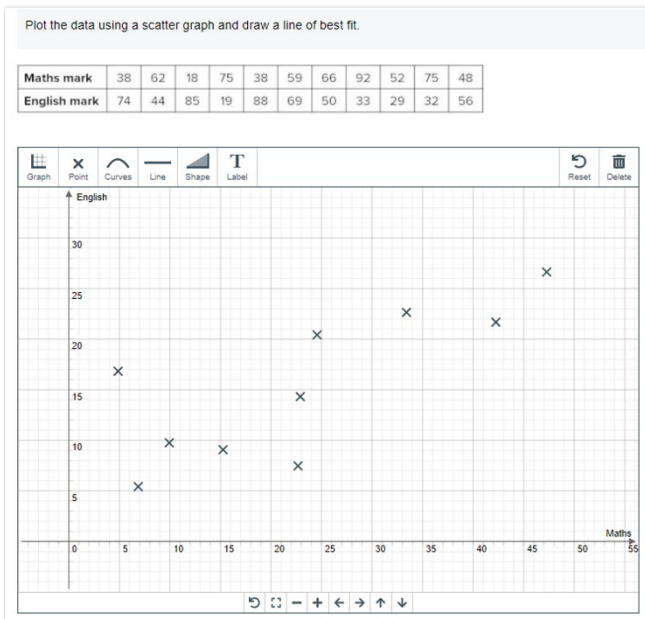
NCFE uses Surpass' Customisable Question Types (CQTs) predominantly for Functional Skills maths assessments. The use of CQTs, such as the diagram creator, has been particularly beneficial for Level 2 maths, where elements like bar charts, line graphs and scatter graphs are requirements for assessments.



### *The Graph Selector in Surpass*

The use of graphs and the spreadsheet CQT in assessments had to be intuitive for administrators to create and also for learners to complete in the test. The potential steep learning curve for creating diagrams meant the teams had to ensure the design made the test better and improved the experience for the learner. In addition, NCFE needed to ensure the test would be comparable to the paper-based version and at the same difficulty level. Surpass were able to support NCFE's needs to

allow them to deliver these tests in creative ways while ensuring requirements were met.



### *The Line and Scatter Graph in Surpass*

NCFE also uses Surpass for digital qualifications like Essential Digital Skills. Surpass CQTs allow the creation of innovative question types, for testing learners' digital skills, such as email skills, and their ability to use the internet and scan for viruses. The use of CQTs in these areas has been effective in

providing an efficient and learner-friendly experience.

The screenshot shows a digital assessment interface. At the top, a black header bar contains the text "Question: Section 2 Email questions", "Section: Question types", a clock icon with "Total Test Time Remaining 01:54:03", and a green "Finish Test" button. Below this is a green bar with "Test: Practice EL3 Digital Functional Skills" and "Candidate: USER Demo". On the left, a vertical sidebar shows question numbers 1 through 11, with question 9 highlighted in green. The main content area is titled "Email questions" and contains the following text: "You may be asked to send an email. You will complete the email fields, message, and any attachments in Surpass." followed by "Example:" and question 9: "Write an email to Charlie Smith telling them you are learning how to use Surpass for your assessment. Make sure you include:". A bulleted list follows: "the correct email address of the recipient (cmith@mail.com)", "a relevant subject line", "an opening greeting and closing sign off", "a message telling them you are learning how to use Surpass for your assessment", and "an attachment of the **Demo document**". Below this, it says "The question may be part of a group of questions to create an email with an attachment. Check to see if you should **scroll** to the next part of the task." and "In this example, you have been asked to add an attachment." Another bullet point states: "In this demo tool you will not be able to upload an attachment. The button to upload will appear as those in the following image:". Below the text are four input fields labeled "To", "Cc", "Bcc", and "Subject". At the bottom of the main area is a rich text editor toolbar with icons for bold, italic, underline, bulleted list, numbered list, indent, outdent, undo, redo, font color, background color, link, unlink, subscript, and superscript. The bottom of the interface has a black bar with a gear icon, a flag icon, and "Back" and "Next" buttons.

Testing learners' digital skills, such as email skills

**Question:** Section 2 Uploading zipped folders  
**Section:** Question types  
**Test:** Practice EL3 Digital Functional Skills  
**Candidate:** USER Demo

**Download and upload questions - .zip folders**

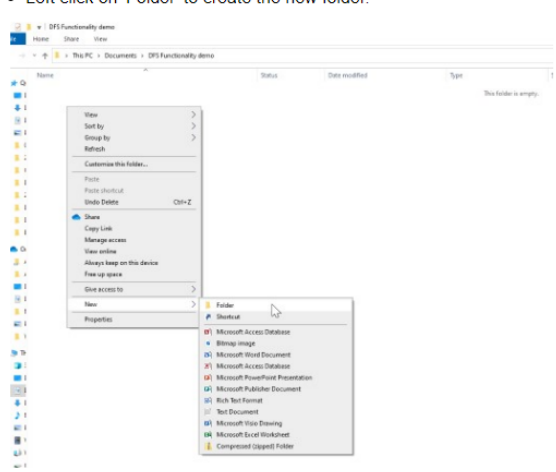
In some questions, you will be required to locate folders on your computer or create folders. You will then be required to compress this to a .zip folder to upload as evidence

Example:

**8** Create a folder, rename it **Demo folder** and upload as a zip folder.

To create a folder:

- Locate the area you want to create the folder
- Right click to open the options shown below
- Hover over the 'New' option which will open a new list
- Left click on 'Folder' to create the new folder.



To rename the folder:

- Right click on the new folder

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*Innovative question types, for testing learners' digital skills*

### Improved learner experience

Furthermore, Surpass enables NCFE to offer its Functional Skills assessments on-demand, providing their learners with the flexibility they need - centres can book their on-demand assessments in Surpass themselves, at short notice if required.

Assessments for qualifications such as T Levels and V Certs are scheduled by NCFE customers through their customer 'Portal' which is pushed directly into Surpass via their API integration.

### Results

The impact of working with Surpass has been significant for NCFE.

Surpass has been a reliable solution for NCFE for 15 years, helping them achieve their aims to increase the efficiency of their assessment processes.

One key component of this, available in test centres, is Surpass SecureClient which is unique in the market for providing fully internet-resilient and offline test delivery on any device (Windows, Macs and iPads), allowing organisations to deliver their assessment program securely and reliably anywhere in the world. Surpass SecureClient for Windows has been particularly useful to NCFE for Functional Skills, V Certs and T Levels.

In addition, approximately 22% of NCFE Functional Skills assessments are delivered and proctored/invigilated remotely in Surpass, providing flexibility for providers with learners all over the country or for those in the workplace where space may be limited.

The progression of digital assessments, and the transition to Surpass remote-proctored tests in particular, has also given NCFE valuable insights into how learners sit assessments. For instance, NCFE can review error messages and recordings, which is particularly useful in cases of malpractice.

The transition to digital assessments offered by Surpass has brought numerous benefits. It eliminated the need for posting or storing 30,000 paper tests, allowed for easy access to candidate data within the system, and facilitated the distribution of tests for candidates within the workplace.

The result is an easily manageable digital system, enabling quick delivery, an easy marking process and quick results - much simpler than the paper-based process, which involved scanning, processing, and managing candidate assessment papers. Through the use of Surpass' innovative solutions, NCFE has been able to develop their digital assessment process further, making it more efficient and learner-friendly. This partnership has not only helped NCFE overcome the challenges of traditional assessment methods but has also opened up new avenues for delivering qualifications.

Finally, the progression to the digital platform has not only improved the efficiency but also the overall process for the organisation and, crucially, the learner experience.

**Learn more and get in touch at [www.surpass.com](http://www.surpass.com)**