Pearson Edexcel GCSE (9–1)
Computer Science 2020

Pearson Edexcel

Paper 2: Application of Computational Thinking

Frequently Asked Questions

🔊 Connections and set up

What if I can't get the onscreen assessment on the school network?

No install is required. There is just one small text file containing python code snippets that needs to be placed in the candidates' exam user profile. During the assessment candidates can be working on completely standalone computers – but can also be networked with appropriate restrictions. It is up to you and your centre to decide how to do this.

What if the school's internet connection goes down?

You don't need an internet connection to run the exam. You will need an internet connection on the morning of the exam to download secure coding files and an electronic version of the Programming Language Subset (PLS). The file size for these will be small enough that it could be downloaded using a 3G mobile phone signal if there was no internet connection.

What if the school network goes down?

We recommend that centres give themselves enough time in advance of the examination date to set up each candidates' user area. Details on what needs to be done can be found in our *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination (ICE)* document for Paper 2 which will be available on our website along with the published specification and SAMs. A network will be very helpful to enable IT support staff to do this. However, once the examination starts this network connection is not needed.

My Exams Officer isn't a computer scientist – will it be difficult to set up and run?

Candidates' exam user profiles need to be in place before the day of the examination. These profiles need to be set up to provide candidates with all the required software and to restrict access to network and internet. This is a technical task that needs the attention of IT specialists that support your school. It is not an unusual setup or configuration but does need to be done correctly and is no different to the situation that has been in place for some years with respect to special coursework accounts.

⟳ Logistics

What distance do computers have to be from each other and how do I ensure we meet the conditions?

Appendix 1 in the JCQ ICE documents covers the requirements for onscreen assessments. The current distance between screens is quite large, however it is acceptable to reduce this with judicious use of screen dividers and screen privacy filters. We are on hand to help with these discussions.

How will I fit all of my students into the ICT suite/computer classroom for exam conditions?

Getting enough computers available and meeting JCQ requirements may prove to be a challenge and will require some planning in advance of the examination date. Screen distance recommendations can be greatly reduced by using screen dividers and privacy filters. In extreme cases it is possible to stagger the start/ stop times to enable more candidates through on the day of the exam. We realise that this logistic challenge is new and we will do what we can to help.

Can we run the exam in two or more sittings (a window of assessment) and how would this work?

The assessment for Paper 2 must be sat on a specified date and time. The assessment cannot be completed during a window. However, there may be situations where resource constraints necessitate centres scheduling the examination over more than one session due to examination clash or multiple sessions needed due to the size of the cohort and number of computers available. You will able to timetable the examination sessions back-to-back, with the first session starting within half an hour of the published start time. Please refer to the JCQ document, section 7 regarding timetable variations. Candidates who take an examination later than the published start time must remain under centre supervision from 30 minutes after the published start time until the time when those candidates begin their examination.

If you have concerns, contact us and we can discuss this with you.

⚙ Preparation and practise

I want students to experience the onscreen assessment beforehand and I want to see how the system works. How can I do this?

The Paper 2 SAM is a good starting point, you can run a mock/practise with this. We will also provide two additional papers in advance of the first live assessment in 2022, giving you and your students three practise papers. It is very important that students have practised and are familiar with this assessment, as how it will look and feel is going to influence how confident they will feel during their exam. Once you have seen the way the assessment works you will be pleased at the clear straightforward approach, and classroom practice and mocks will ensure that students can perform well.

Can you reassure me that Edexcel have trialled this with real schools?

Not only have we trialled it with students and teachers in the UK when we were developing the qualification, the design is also based on our International GCSE model where Component 2 is a similar onscreen assessment which performed well in its first live assessment in summer 2019.

✎ Content

Why have you used only one programming language?

We decided to opt for only one programming language so we could be 100% confident that our assessment is fair and reliable to all students. Having one programming language has removed any potential comparability issues that arise when multiple languages are used. It also enables us to adopt one standard in terms of description of algorithms outside of an actual programming environment. By doing this, this has meant that we do not now need to promote unrealistically the requirements for a pseudocode language (Haggis) as a means of communicating to students. Pseudocode in its true sense is now covered in the subject content as a written description of an algorithm rather than pretending that it has a syntax. We believe that this will make the teaching and learning of this computer science qualification more straightforward.

Why have you used Python as a programming language?

The choice of Python was driven by the overwhelming popularity of this language compared to alternatives. It has the greatest wealth of resources and training and is the leading language used in education today. We believe that it is the best choice for teachers but more importantly for students, with it being accessible and widely supported. We believe opting for Python as the only programming language is in the best interests of students.

Get in touch

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