Microsoft Certifications
Updates to Azure certification exams announced in January 2020

FAQ
V1.0 - Updated 2/5/2020

1. What updates have been announced?

On January 24, 2020, Microsoft announced on the Microsoft Learning Blog (Updates to Several Azure and Data & AI Certifications are Coming Soon) upcoming changes to several exam numbers related to Microsoft Azure role-based certifications as a result of careful reviews of the skills needed for success in the associated job roles. Given the significant nature of these changes, we will be releasing a new version of these exams with new number and in beta version.

These are the changes announced:

Related certification	Current exam	Will become exam	Estimated release date
Microsoft Certified: Azure Administrator Associate	AZ-103: Microsoft Azure Administrator	**AZ-104**: Microsoft Azure Administrator (beta)	Late March 2020
Microsoft Certified: Azure Developer Associate	AZ-203: Developing Solutions for Microsoft Azure	**AZ-204**: Developing Solutions for Microsoft Azure (beta)	Late February 2020
Microsoft Certified: Azure Solutions Architect Expert	AZ-300: Microsoft Azure Architect Technologies	**AZ-303**: Microsoft Azure Architect Technologies (beta)	Late April 2020
Microsoft Certified: Azure Solutions Architect Expert	AZ-301: Microsoft Azure Architect Design	**AZ-304**: Microsoft Azure Architect Design (beta)	Late April 2020

2. Why is Microsoft making all these changes?

Microsoft is committed to reviewing certifications periodically to ensure they remain relevant, are technically accurate, and are assessing the right skills our customers and partners need to thrive as digital companies.

Our review ensures that we are assessing not only the right skills for a given role but also that we are assessing only what really needs to be assessed for that job role. This allow us to have a coherent portfolio of certifications with less duplication of skills and an increased emphasis on what is truly important for each job role.

It is a common industry practice to assign new exam number when there are significant changes in the content domain being assessed through the exam. In this occasion, changes will be to Azure certifications, but in the future, there may be similar changes in other portfolios.

3. Why are these new exams beta version?

Because many of the skills measure by these exams are new – which is the reason for the new exam number, we must develop many new questions to cover those skills. These new questions make up a substantial portion of the new exam and need to be pilot tested to ensure they are psychometrically sound, valid, reliable, and fair. The beta process allows us to ensure the quality of the items that we include on the live exam and that we are measuring the right skills.

Through the beta process, we give candidates an active voice into the certification and exam design because their data and comments are used to evaluate the quality of the items, identify fixes needed to improve accuracy and clarity, and flag questions that must be removed. The data and information we gather through the beta process is, perhaps, the most important part of ensuring the validity and overall quality of the exam.

4. Will certification names change with the new exam numbers?

No, the name of related certifications will not change. Regardless if candidates earned them with the current exam or with the new one, the certification will have the same name, but the skills on the badge will match the ones for the exam(s) they passed to earn the certification.

5. What will happen to current exams once the new ones are published?

We will be publishing the updated exams in the next few months, and the <u>current exams will stay in market for 90 days after the new versions become available</u>. We are doing this to give candidates time to transition to the new exam. If candidates have been preparing for the current version of the exams, they can still take them during this transition period; however, these versions of the exam will retire at the end of the 90-day window.

6. Candidates have been studying for the current version of the exams. What should they do, continue this path or start on the new one?

Candidates need to assess what makes sense in their certification journey. If they feel confident taking current version of the exams now, because they have been preparing, then they should do so; however, if they just started their preparation journey, they should consider refocusing their studying efforts on the new exams.

Regardless of which exam they take, they will receive the corresponding certification upon passing and that certification will be valid for two years. The main difference going for one or the other is the list of skills that appear on the certification badge—those skills will reflect what was covered on the exam that they took.

One benefit of taking the new version of the exam while is in beta is that they can renew the certification at a discounted rate. With these beta exams, we are offering an opportunity to validate skills that we believe are more closely aligned to the job role today, but candidates can take the current version of the exam.

7. Do exams AZ-300 and AZ-301 and new exams AZ-303 and AZ-304 need to be a matched set in order to achieve the Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification?

A candidate can use any combination of AZ-300/AZ-303 and AZ-301/AZ-304 to earn the Azure Architect certification for two years after passing the first exam required for the certification.

For example, if candidates already passed AZ-300 and they pass AZ-304 they will earn Azure Solutions Architect Expert certification if they pass AZ-304 within two years of passing AZ-300.

8. Is there any promotion to take these new beta exams?

These new exams will follow the regular beta process, and as a result, candidates will be able to take them at an 80% discount. Further, when candidates pass this exam, their badge will reflect competence on the updated skill set, and if they already have the certification, passing the new exam will automatically update expiration date by two years.

9. Will Microsoft Learn content and Microsoft Official Courses be updated at the same time as you make the changes?

We are committed to having [Microsoft Learn](#) content updated within 7 days of the release of the updated exams and Microsoft Official Courses will be updated within 30 days.

Microsoft Learning Partners might continue offering training associated with the version of the training associated to old exams as they have planned, until exams retire; some will provide both versions, and some will transition immediately to the new version. Candidates should confirm with Learning Partners what version of the course is being delivered.

10. When will Microsoft update certification and exam pages with these changes?

We continuously update exam pages with upcoming and applied updates. Candidates should revisit those pages frequently to be up to date of changes both minor and significant that might be happening to an exam and when they will go into effect.

Candidates can subscribe to [Microsoft Learning blog](#) or follow [@MicrosoftLearn](#) to stay informed on relevant news regarding Microsoft Certifications.

11. What are the certification types that Microsoft offers?

Our complete portfolio of training and certifications is designed to meet industry and market needs, with roles, skills, and capabilities needed for the job, including specializations, hands-on experience, and practice requirements. [Learn more about Microsoft Certifications](#).

We have created different certification types; each validates different aspects of how people use technology to solve business problems:
- **Fundamentals**: Validate foundational understanding, with mixed concepts and applied learning, of Microsoft technologies. They are a springboard into deeper role-based learning paths and certifications
- **Role-based**: Focus on solutions rather than just products to validate technical skills required to perform industry job-roles on Microsoft platforms and technologies
- **Specialty**: Validate deep technical skills and ability managing industry solutions, including 3rd-party solutions, on or with Microsoft platforms

12. How does Microsoft define training, certifications and exams? What is a Job Task Analysis (JTA)?

We define our Learning offering with our customers' and partners' digital transformation goals in mind. We aim to support them in building the teams they need to thrive as digital companies.

One important step is to understand the roles needed for digital transformation, what people in each of those roles must know, and what skills they must have. For this, we perform extensive Job Task Analysis (JTA) obtaining detailed information on knowledge, skills, and technical expertise needed to be successful, as well as gathering information on what organizations need and what the market, external experts, and analysts are saying is needed to meet skills gaps.

We align our training and certifications to these industry and market needs, with skills and capabilities needed for the job, including specializations, hands-on experience and practice requirements.

13. What is a beta exam?

Exam questions are pilot tested in an exam-like situation known as a "beta exam." This ensures that only the best content is included in the live exam. Through this process, Microsoft gathers psychometric data on the quality of the questions. Based on this data as well as candidate comments, Microsoft works with subject matter experts to finalize the items that will be scored and appear on the live exam and sets the cut score. For this reason, if candidates take the beta exam, they won't receive a score immediately. However, they will have a meaningful voice in what will be included on the final exam. This is one of the few opportunities where someone outside the exam development subject matter experts can have significant influence on the exam content.

For questions about the timing of beta exam scoring and live exam release, see the blog posts The Path from Beta Exam to Live Exam and More Tips About Beta Exams. Review Microsoft exam policies and FAQ.