



BTEC Higher Nationals Centre Guide to Quality Assurance and Assessment

2026/27

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Summary of Changes

Welcome to the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals Centre Guide to Quality Assurance and Assessment 2026-27.

External Examination is outlined in the BTEC Centre Guide to External Examination.

[Sign up for VQ Bulletins](#)

[BTEC Broadcast – sign up for updates | Pearson qualifications](#)

The key updates for this year are detailed below:

BTEC Higher National programmes in England must be assessed in English. Centres must, therefore, ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English at the required standard. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

Acceptable evidence of capability in English includes **certified achievement at CEFR B2 or above**, including (but not limited to):

- **IELTS (Academic or General Training):** overall score **5.5 or above**
- **Pearson PTE Academic:** overall score **51 or above**
- **TOEFL iBT:** overall score **72 or above**
- **Cambridge English Qualifications: B2 First (FCE)** – Pass (Cambridge English Scale **160+**)

or another externally assessed recognised English language qualification explicitly benchmarked to CEFR B2.

BTEC Higher National programmes in Wales must be assessed in Welsh and/or English. Centres must, therefore, must ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English and/or Welsh at the required standard. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

BTEC Higher National programmes in Northern Ireland must be assessed in English and or Irish. Centres must, therefore, ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English and/or Irish at the required standard. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

Acceptable evidence of capability in Welsh or Irish includes **certified achievement to an equivalent standard to CEFR B2 or above**, including (but not limited to):

- **WJEC** Uwch (Welsh for Adults)
- **CIOL** Language Level Assessment
- **TEG** (Maynooth)

All centres delivering the Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications wholly or partially in a language other than English, but who are assessed in English, must ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English at a standard equivalent to the levels set out above, on completion of the programme. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

Introduction

This guide is designed for **Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals programme** teams and provides essential guidance on the planning and implementation of internal assessment.

All BTEC Higher Nationals units are assessed through internal assessment, which means that centres can deliver the programme in a way that suits students and relates to local needs. The way in which centres deliver the programme must ensure that assessment is fair and consistent as defined by the requirements for national standards and that these standards are consistent over time.

To achieve this, it is important that centres:

- Make sure that there is a Programme Leader in place, who can support the whole programme team in understanding higher level assessment standards
- Make full use of materials provided by us which define and exemplify assessment requirements such as specifications, Authorised Assignment Briefs, other support materials and guidance
- Plan the assessment of units to fit with delivery – the plan should allow for the links between units, such as where one unit needs to build on another
- Write suitable assignments (for example, projects or case studies) or select assignment briefs from available resources, adapting them as necessary
- Plan the assessment for each unit in terms of when it will be authorised by the Internal Verifier, when it will be taught and assessed, and how long it will take
- Ensure each assessment is fit for purpose, valid, will deliver reliable assessment outcomes across Assessors, and is internally verified before use
- Provide preparation and support for students in order that they are prepared for summative assessment. This should include a clear strategy for formative assessment.
- Ensure clear assessment strategy for formative and summative assessment of work based learning and practice.
- Make careful and consistent assessment decisions based only on using the defined assessment criteria and unit requirements and the overarching approach to grading
- Ensure that all student evidence submitted for assessment is valid and authentic
- Validate and record assessment decisions carefully and completely
- Work closely with us to ensure that implementation, delivery and assessment are consistent in meeting quality assurance standards.

- Work proactively and in a timely manner with their allocated External Examiner to ensure students are able to complete and progress when they need to.

Which qualifications does this guide cover?

This guide applies to centres in the UK and internationally.

This guide covers:

- BTEC Higher Nationals at Levels 4 to 5 (RQF)
- BTEC Higher Nationals at Levels 4 to 5 delivered as the knowledge- based component of BTEC Higher Apprenticeships
- BTEC Higher Nationals at Levels 4 to 5 (RQF) delivered as part of HN Flex
- Higher Nationals on Pearson’ s Self Regulated Framework (SRF)
- Higher Technical Qualifications Levels 4 to 5 for England
- Level 7 Strategic Management & Leadership

This guide does not cover:

- BTEC qualifications Levels 2 to 3
- BTEC Levels 3 to 4 Foundation Diploma in Art and Design (FAD)
- BTEC Professional qualifications at Levels 4 to 7
- BTEC Professional qualifications at Levels 4 to 7 delivered as the knowledge- based component of BTEC Higher Apprenticeships.

Self Regulated (SRF) Higher Nationals (from September 2016)

Through the Custom Design Higher National service, centres are able to commission bespoke Higher National qualifications. This allows them to work with Pearson in creating complete bespoke Higher National qualifications; or designing new units, to meet a

specific skill requirement. Further information about the SRF and Pearson's Self Regulated Policy can be found at building a bespoke BTEC Higher National qualification.

Pearson Self Regulated Framework qualifications are not regulated by external bodies such as Ofqual, SQA Accreditation or any other UK regulatory body. However, they are required to be the same standard as the Ofqual regulated Higher Nationals. They are also required to be delivered in such a way as to meet Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) expectations.

Custom Design Higher Nationals follow the same assessment policies as regulated Higher Nationals on the RQF offered from September 2016. They also need to meet the same requirements for Total Qualification Time (TQT) and Guided Learning Hours (GLH). All enhanced quality measures apply to the customised Higher Nationals in addition to the centre quality assurance procedures.

Higher Technical Qualifications for England

Higher Technical Qualifications, or HTQs, are technical qualifications that are at the higher education level. The BTEC Higher National qualifications (HNs), which are already developed in collaboration with industry, are submitted to be recognised by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) as Higher Technical Qualifications.

BTEC Higher Nationals still exist as a distinct qualification type. The HTQ quality mark that they receive when approved as HTQs signals to employers and students that they are considered high quality technical education, developed with employers and aligned to Occupational Standards.

Programme Approval for New Centres

Centres that are new to the delivery of Pearson programmes will be required to seek approval initially through the centre approval process and then through the programme approval process. Programme approval for new centres is considered through a 'Review and Approval' visit to the centre.

Prior to programme approval being given, centres will be required to submit evidence to demonstrate that they:

- Have the human and physical resources required for effective delivery and assessment
- Understand the implications for external examination and agree to abide by these
- Have a robust internal assessment system supported by 'fit for purpose' assessment documentation
- Have a system to internally verify assessment decisions, to ensure standardised assessment decisions are made across all assessors and sites.

Applications for programme approval must be supported by the head of the organisation, (Principal or Chief Executive, etc.) and include a declaration that the centre will operate the programmes strictly as approved, and in line with Pearson requirements.

Programme Approval for Existing Centres

The process for existing centres seeking to renew their approval is called the Programme Review and Approval (PRA) and further detailed information about guidelines and processes can be found [here](#)

This sets out the different processes for approval depending on whether a centre:

- Is actively delivering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals
- Is approved, but not actively delivering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals
- Is in the process of seeking approval to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals.
- Has not yet started an application seeking to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals.

The document also sets out the pricing structure for the different types of approval.

Approval to deliver the BTEC Higher Nationals at additional sites

Some centres may wish to deliver the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals at additional sites. Guidance concerning approval for delivery and assessment at additional sites is provided in the [Additional Sites Statement](#).

The document:

- Clarifies the requirements for approved centres that have more than one physical location
- Explains how Pearson control any regulating and reputational risk when establishing relationships with external bodies.

Collaborative Arrangements

Some centres may wish to work in collaboration with other centres to deliver the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals. [The Collaborative Arrangements Policy](#) provides further information on this. The policy defines collaborative arrangements in the UK and internationally and describes the different models of collaborative arrangements and their associated principles.

A collaborative arrangement is an agreement where an approved centre (the lead centre) works collaboratively to deliver a vocational qualification(s) with other organisation(s) that will normally be an approved Pearson centre(s).

The three models of collaborative arrangements are:

Informal Collaboration: This is when two or more Pearson-approved centres work together to share information, assignments, staff and physical resources. There is no shared assessment, and each has total ownership of its own quality assurance. No additional Pearson approval is required.

Consortium collaborative arrangement: Two or more Pearson-approved centres gain permission from Pearson to work together to deliver specific Pearson qualifications. They are jointly responsible for the assessment and quality assurance of the qualification(s).

Each centre has equal responsibility for the registration and certification of students. Pearson approval is required for this type of arrangement.

Exceptional collaborative arrangements: Other collaborative arrangements may be allowable. Such arrangements must always be agreed beforehand with Pearson's Responsible Officer on a case-by-case basis. Approval and written agreement between all participating centres are required.

If a centre delivers a Higher Nationals programme(s) via an exceptional collaborative arrangement, the External Examiner will be provided with a copy of the approval documentation by Pearson and will be required to review each site within the arrangement.

Meeting Local Needs Approval

Centres may wish to 'import' units from another regulated Higher National qualification through the Meeting Local Needs (MLN) process. Centres can import up to 30 Level 4 credits into the HNC and 60 credits into the HND (up to 30 Level 4 credits and up to 30 Level 5 credits for RQF HNDs). More information regarding MLN, including the online application form, can be found on our [website](#).

Please note that units can only be imported from the same qualification suite. For example, only RQF units can be imported into an RQF qualification. For RQF qualifications, the unit being imported must be of the same level as the unit being substituted, i.e. Level 5 units cannot be imported into the HNC.

Meeting local needs, however, does not apply to the new suite of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) for England.

Distance Learning

If students undertake the qualifications through distance learning, then it is important to be aware of the [Distance Learning and Assessment policy](#). The policy outlines the minimum requirements that Pearson expects must be met by centres when delivering Pearson qualifications through distance learning. Centres must ensure that when using distance learning, the method of delivery meets in full any specified requirements for the delivery and assessment of the qualifications and units being delivered.

Completion of the distance learning self-assessment is mandatory for all centres delivering Higher Nationals through distance learning and can be found in Appendix A of the policy.

HN Flex

[HN Flex](#) offers students the chance to study stackable skills within a single BTEC Higher National qualification from our full range of over 40 subjects, with the progression opportunity to a Higher National Certificate (HNC) or Higher National Diploma (HND) qualification, achieving a Certificate of Unit Credit (CoUC) upon completion of the individual units studied.

Centres must be approved to deliver a full HN to be able to deliver HN Flex units.

Approved centres will apply using the HN Flex Intention to Deliver form.

Centres may choose to focus **on individual unit delivery** (HN Flex) only, for example:

- to meet the needs of employers;
- to meet the requirements of an apprenticeship standard;
- to upskill/reskill employees;
- to provide an opportunity for students to return to study and enable a progression route onto a full HN.

HN Flex units are available at Level 4 or Level 5. Students may study HN Flex units, assuming they have the **prerequisite entry requirements** for each level, as detailed in the subject specification.

Only 15 credit units will be available via HN Flex, with students being able to achieve a maximum of 60 credits (4 x 15 credit units).

Removal of Centre Approval

Regardless of the type of centre, Pearson reserves the right to withdraw either qualification or centre approval when it deems there is an irreversible breakdown in the centre's ability either to quality assure its programme delivery or its assessment standards as outlined in the [policy on the removal of centre and programme approval](#).

The decision to remove centre or programme approval may arise because:

- The Pearson Malpractice Committee determines this is an appropriate sanction to impose, following a malpractice investigation
- The centre has breached the terms and conditions of its centre or programme approval
- There are significant and/or repeated quality issues identified through Pearson's quality assurance processes
- There are long-standing financial issues which have not been resolved by the centre

- The centre has approval for programmes but is no longer active
- Pearson no longer has confidence in the centre's senior management team.

There is a process of appeal against the decision which is also outlined in this policy.

Higher Technical Qualifications for England

Use of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ) quality mark.

When delivering the BTEC Higher Nationals that are 'for England' only, centres must take care to ensure that they use the HTQ quality mark with due care and attention on promotional material.

The quality mark must be only used by centres in relation to an approved Higher Technical Qualification to demonstrate that the qualification has been:

- approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), and to advertise a specific course leading to a Higher Technical Qualification
- for careers advisory purposes, to explain and promote the Higher Technical Qualifications programme as a whole.
- It should only be used to promote approved Higher Technical Qualifications and must not be used in a way that could reasonably be misinterpreted as a wider endorsement of any other qualifications or your centre overall.

For more information about who can use the quality mark, and how it should be used, please refer to The Higher Technical Qualification quality mark Guidelines at:

<http://www.gov.uk/guidance/higher-technical-education-reforms>

Essential Guidance

BTEC Qualification Specification

The specification for each BTEC qualification is the document that Programme Leaders and teams **must** use as a first point of reference for all planning and assessment.

Specifications are accompanied by important assessment, teaching and learning resources, and delivery guidance which provide support and advice for each qualification. All BTEC specifications are freely available on our website.

BTEC Centre Guide to External Examination

We use quality assurance to check that all centres are working to UK national standards. It gives us the opportunity to identify and provide support where it is needed in order to safeguard certification. It also allows us to recognise and support good practice. Every year we publish this updated [BTEC Centre Guide to External Examination](#) to explain our quality assurance processes for the coming academic year.

Pearson support materials

A wide range of support materials have been produced by Pearson to support centres with the implementation, delivery, and assessment of RQF Higher Nationals programmes. A collection of assessment guidance videos has been produced and is available on the qualification pages for each Higher Nationals subject.

In addition, past training content from Pearson is available for centres to access on the qualification pages for each Higher Nationals subject. Training sessions available include:

- BTEC Higher Nationals: HN Flex – An Introduction
- Planning and developing engaging interactive online learning sessions for BTEC Higher Nationals
- Supporting new and existing students for online and blended learning
- Online Assessment methods as part of blended learning programmes
- Supporting the Student Journey for BTEC Higher Nationals
- Supporting students studying online for BTEC
- Planning and teaching online for BTEC

- Developing resources for online delivery for BTEC
- Introduction to remote online delivery for BTEC

Pearson also continues to offer live training events for centres, both online and face to-face, at multiple venues throughout the year for the new BTEC Higher Nationals (RQF). BTEC Higher National sessions available include the below titles:

- Introduction to Teaching and Assessing (RQF) for each individual sector
- An Introduction to Assessment and Assignment Writing for new BTEC Higher Nationals (RQF)
- Assessment Planning and Assignment Writing for new BTEC Higher Nationals (RQF) for each sector
- Grading Standardisation workshop for BTEC Higher Nationals in sector
- Workshop for Developing Assignments in BTEC Higher Nationals in Sector
- BTEC Higher Nationals Generic Internal Verification and Preparing for External Examination (RQF).
- An introduction to the principles of Quality Assurance RQF BTEC Higher Nationals
- Networks for each sector

A schedule of events, and a form to book onto national events, can be found on our [website](#).

If no national events are currently scheduled or available for a specific training course, or if a centre would prefer a training course be delivered just for them, we can arrange for one of our specialised trainers to come and deliver centre-based (in house) training

Any training courses from our national programme can delivered within the centre and more information, including a form to request centre-based training, can be found on [our website](#). In accordance with Ofqual guidance, we cannot customise the content of our training, but our trainers may be able to pitch the training at the delegates' level of knowledge and experience.

HN Global

HN Global is an online resource that supports students and helps centres to plan and deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals by providing appropriate teaching and learning resources. Pearson offers HN Global to all learners. This is a toolkit that supports the delivery, assessment and quality assurance of BTEC Higher Nationals. The HN Global website provides a wealth of support to ensure that students have the best possible supported experience during their course. With HN Global, students can search, share, comment, rank and sort a vast range of learning resources via an online digital library and tutors can create and annotate reading lists for students.

Edexcel Online (EOL)

Edexcel Online (EOL) is a multifunctional system for centres. Access is password protected and is managed by the centre's examinations officer(s). Screens show programmes and students within a centre and allow for new registrations or withdrawals. External Examiner allocations and consequent external examination reports can be viewed here. EOL can be accessed at <http://www.edexcelonline.com>. Support for the use of EOL can be found on our website.

Student Registration Administration

Interim Claims

Pearson has made it easier for all centres to enter interim grades onto Edexcel Online at the end of each assessment cycle. Entering grades annually ensures transparency in relation to student achievement and progression. It is not necessary to print an interim Notification of Performance, but printing can be requested if needed.

Pearson requests that interim claims are made at the end of year of study, ahead of full certification being made.

Deletion Periods

Deletions for all Higher Nationals, regardless of whether your programme follows an academic year, must be made within 49 days of the student starting the programme of study (not from the date of registration). **Any deletions made 50 days or more after the student's start date will not be eligible for a full refund.** It is important that the 'enrolment date' for your students is updated in Edexcel Online to reflect their actual start date if that is

different to the pre-populated enrolment date of 01 September. More information on how to make deletions can be found [here](#).

Accuracy of Student Registrations

Ensuring student data is accurate is important, in particular the management of student estimated completion dates and the timely withdrawal of students no longer studying.

Should a student still be on programme but be due to finish after their estimated completion date, this date should be updated via EOL.

Students no longer on programme should be withdrawn via EOL. Pearson monitors and will follow up directly with centres where student data appears to require adjustment.

Forms and templates

We publish a range of useful forms and templates on our website for centres to use and can be accessed via [HN Global](#) | [BTEC Higher Nationals](#) | [Pearson qualifications](#). These forms are not mandatory but using them will help to ensure that centres are meeting requirements.

The forms and templates provided include:

- Internal verification of assignment briefs
- Authorised Assignment Brief/Example Assessment Brief (EABs) templates for HNs
- Internal verification of assessment decisions
- Assessment tracking documents
- Tutor observation records and witness statements
- Student declarations.

Regulation and Oversight

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

As well as meeting the quality requirements for the delivery of Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals, centres should also meet the quality and standards expectations of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). This is the independent body responsible for monitoring and advising on standards and quality for UK higher education, and this includes UK qualifications delivered outside the UK. As such, Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals should also be delivered by centres in a way that meets the quality standards expected in the QAA Quality Code.

The QAA has developed a [Quality Code](#) in liaison with the higher education sector and it is maintained and published on the sector's behalf, by the QAA. The QAA published its revised Quality Code 2024 in June 2024. The new code is in a transitional phase for implementation depending on the location of the provider. Details of which code is applicable in each UK nation can be found [here](#). For Pearson approved centers outside the UK, Pearson would expect centres to follow the principles set out in the new Quality Code 2024 for their Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals. The Quality Code offers guidance via an internationally recognized framework, which can support providers to show their ability to provide of a high quality student experience.

The Quality Code comprises three elements that work together to provide a reference for effective quality assurance.

- **Sector-Agreed Principles** (aligned to European Standards and Guidelines) fundamental to securing academic standards and the provision of a high quality student learning experience.
- **Key Practices** that enhance the student experience and underpin the delivery of the principles.
- **Advice and guidance** that helps all providers of higher education to develop and maintain effective quality assurance and adhere to the Sector-Agreed Principles.

QAA Review Methods

The Quality Assurance Agency has a number of different review methods depending on the location and the type of higher education provider. Details of the various review methods can be found [here](#).

Regulation

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and is a non-ministerial department.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is the regulator for all qualifications in Northern Ireland.

For Wales, Qualification Wales is the regulator for all qualifications, except degrees. Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals do not operate in Scotland.

Office for Students (OfS)

The Office for Students is the government-approved regulator and competition authority for higher education in England. The Office for Students' mandate is to ensure that students:

- Can access, succeed in, and progress from higher education
- Receive a high-quality academic experience
- Have their interests protected during study
- Can progress to employment or further study
- Receive value for money.

For centres (providers) in England registered with the Office for Students, the quality and standards of their higher education courses must meet a minimum set of requirements or conditions. A provider is assessed when it first registers with the OfS, and once it is registered, the OfS monitors the provider to ensure it meets the conditions on an ongoing basis.

Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications are aligned to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and have been accredited to the Ofqual Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).

The Competition and Markets Authority

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) work to promote competition for the benefit of consumers, both within and outside the UK. Their aim is to make markets work well for consumers, businesses and the economy. In terms of the delivery of Higher Education, it has an important function for students and providers of Higher Education.

UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law’ applies to Higher Education through the relationship between providers of higher education and their students. Providers are required to provide information about courses, costs, terms and conditions and complaint handling prior to students starting courses. Information must be clear and transparent. If these obligations are not met, then providers could be in breach of consumer law and students may have the right to take legal action. Therefore, it is essential for providers to comply with these requirements. Further information can be found on their website.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)

The OIA is an independent body which oversees a student complaints scheme in England and Wales the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) was designated to operate this scheme. From the outset, all universities in England and Wales were required to subscribe to the Scheme.

Examples of complaints that the OIA deal with are those relating to teaching provision and facilities, accommodation, bullying and harassment, disciplinary matters, unfair practice, discrimination, procedural irregularities and academic appeals. The OIA does not deal with academic or professional judgements. More information can be found at the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

Through induction and the student handbook, subscribers to the OIA need to ensure that students in England and Wales are made aware of the services offered by OIA.

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

In Northern Ireland if a student has raised a complaint through their institution’s complaints process and remains dissatisfied, the student can complain to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.

Quality assurance

This section outlines the quality assurance process for Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals.

What is quality assurance?

Quality assurance underpins all vocational qualifications:

- Quality assurance is used to ensure that managers, Internal Verifiers and Assessors are standardised and supported
- Pearson uses quality assurance to check that all centres are working to national standards. It provides the opportunity to identify and provide support where it is needed in order to safeguard certification. It also enables the recognition of good practice
- It ensures that the standards and requirements for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) are met
- It facilitates a high-quality learning experience for students to enable high achievement.

Pearson's quality assurance system for all Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes is benchmarked to Level 4 and Level 5 on the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will ensure that centres have effective quality assurance processes to review programme delivery. It will also ensure that the outcomes of assessment are to national standards. As it includes additional elements that are not required for other Pearson qualifications, we term this 'enhanced' quality assurance.

The enhanced quality assurance process for centres offering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals programmes comprises of five key components:

- The approval process
- Monitoring of internal centre systems
- External examination
- Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR)
- Annual Student Survey.

External Examination

What is external examination?

External examination is how we check that centres are operating appropriate quality assurance and maintaining national standards for our Higher Nationals programmes. Information and guidance, that provides more information on the processes and support to help centres prepare, can be found in the [BTEC Centre Guide to External Examination](#).

All centres delivering BTEC Higher Nationals programmes will receive remote visits from Pearson-appointed External Examiners (EEs). Onsite centre visits may also be approved for centres where this would benefit the centre, where quality concerns exist and/or programme teams are new to delivering Higher Nationals.

The outcome of external examination will be:

- To confirm that internal assessment is to national standards and allow certification, or
- To set actions to improve the quality of internal assessment before certification can be released.

Centres must give full and serious consideration to the actions and recommendations contained in external examination reports. The actions taken as a result of reports, or the reasons for not following recommendations, should be formally recorded and circulated to those concerned.

Centres must ensure that student representatives are given the opportunity to be fully involved in the external examination process, enabling them to understand all of the issues raised and the centre's response. At centre-level, the general issues and themes arising from the reports should be reviewed whilst maintaining the confidentiality of the students whose work has been sampled.

Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR)

The Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR) is a mandatory annual review for centres to reflect on the previous teaching year. It helps Pearson enhance the quality assurance of BTEC Higher National programmes by sharing good practices and addressing issues. All Pearson UK and International centres must submit their completed APMR by mid-February, with specific dates provided each year. The APMR focuses on the overall Higher Nationals provision, and non-submission can lead to a higher risk rating affecting re-approval and registration decisions.

Annual Student Survey

Feedback from students completing each stage of their programme is essential to enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning experience. Pearson will conduct an annual survey of the experience of Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals students each year.

The purpose of the survey is to enable Pearson to evaluate the student experience as part of the quality assurance process, by engaging with students studying on these programmes.

The annual Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals Student Survey has been designed to provide valuable and quantifiable feedback on the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals to inform the future design of the qualifications, to triangulate other aspects of the quality assurance mechanisms, and to support the development of resources for Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals students globally. The survey will also provide a global perspective of student opinion from around the world and will be detailed in an overview report each year.

The survey will be sent annually to all centres delivering Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications, and it will form part of the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals' quality assurance cycle. **Centres are expected to promote student participation in the survey.**

As part of Pearson's responsibilities as the awarding organisation for the qualification suite and in response to the expectations of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) regarding students' experiences, the results from the survey will provide data to better inform the continued development of the Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications and their efficacy. Pearson has a responsibility to consider and act on the information received. Anonymised results will be shared with centres and Pearson will seek to address what may be common issues, and, where necessary, Pearson will provide appropriate support to both students and centres.

The programme team

The programme team consists of all the staff responsible for the delivery, assessment and verification of a BTEC qualification. It is extremely important that sufficient systems and procedures are in place prior to delivering a BTEC programme. As BTECs are vocational qualifications, it is very important that the programme team includes individuals with up to date and relevant vocational experience or knowledge, in order to get the best out of the qualifications. The roles undertaken by the programme team include the following:

Role	Function
Quality Nominee / Centre Lead for Higher Nationals	BTEC centres have a Quality Nominee who takes responsibility for the effective delivery of BTEC qualifications from Entry Level to Level 7. The programme leader can support this by providing training and guidance to assessors and internal verifiers. The enhanced quality assurance measures for Higher Nationals require additional oversight. In some centres, responsibility for Higher Nationals provision is not undertaken by the centre Quality Nominee. The Centre Lead for Higher Nationals could be a Head of Department/Programme Manager or the individual who is responsible for establishing and maintaining centre policies and procedures related to Higher Nationals, qualification approval, and for ensuring the accuracy of public information. This role is available on Edexcel Online for centres to designate the person responsible for Higher Nationals across the centre.
Programme Leader	A Programme Leader is a person designated by a centre to take overall responsibility for the effective delivery and assessment of BTECs in their subject. The Programme Leader may also act as an Assessor and/or Internal Verifier.
Assessor	An Assessor is anyone responsible for the assessment of students and acts under the guidance of the Programme Leader, who will direct Assessors to appropriate training, support and standardisation. Typically, Assessors will devise assignment briefs, deliver the programme of study and assess the evidence produced by students against the assessment criteria in the programme specification
Internal Verifier	Internal Verifiers conduct quality checks on assessment processes and practice to ensure that they meet national standards and that

all students have been judged fairly and consistently. An Internal Verifier can be anyone involved in the delivery and assessment of the programme that is able to give an expert “second opinion”. Where there is a team of Assessors, it is good practice for all Assessors to be involved in internally verifying each other

Please note that Internal Verifiers cannot internally verify their own assignments or assessment decisions. There is no requirement for a Lead Internal Verifier (LIV) to be registered for BTEC higher level programmes. It is essential Internal Verifiers are suitably trained, up to date with Higher National quality assurance processes and the specification for the programme.

Staff Qualifications

Please refer to the programme specification for expectations regarding staff qualifications.

It is expected that centres recruit all delivery, assessment and internal verification staff with integrity; and have robust staff recruitment processes in place. It is expected that staff hold a nationally recognised qualification at or above the level of the qualification being delivered and/or equivalent relevant experience.

Pearson’s staffing requirements state that:

- The centre is committed to employ, train and support a sufficient number of appropriately qualified staff to ensure appropriate management, delivery, assessment and quality assurance
- Authenticated qualification certificates and CVs for staff involved in delivery are available upon request
- Systems are in place to ensure ongoing staff development and updating, including a research and scholarly activity policy for staff involved in the delivery of Pearson qualifications
- The trainers, tutors and Internal Verifiers hold relevant qualifications to deliver units/ qualifications, as started by either the qualification specification or standards setting body

- The staff involved in the assessment process fully understand internal verification and how to apply the internal verification process.

Staff handbook

A handbook for the teaching and delivery team will give key messages and clarify the major differences between BTECs and other qualifications that they manage. A staff handbook is recommended to help support full- and part-time members of a delivery team.

A handbook for staff to support their delivery of the BTEC Higher Nationals should provide essential information. Indicative content could be:

- Programme title
- Programme structure
- Progression opportunities
- Assessment plans, including dates, terms, semesters, assessment timings
- Student complaints and appeals procedure (including the role of Pearson and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator)
- Plagiarism policy and other types of Malpractice (such as the use of Artificial Intelligence)
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- QAA Expectations
- Assessment Boards and how to process results
- Academic regulations
- Internal verification plans, timings, and responsibilities,
- Role of External Examiners (EEs) and Pearson quality assurance visits
- Staff roles and responsibilities
- Conflict of Interest policy
- Continuing Professional Development (CPD)/Staff Development policy
- Internal verification policy
- How to conduct a mitigating circumstances claim
- Learning and Teaching policy
- Equality Diversity and Equal Opportunities policy
- Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations policy
- Pearson Annual Student Survey
- Pearson Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR)
- Work based learning policy including policies for work experience/placement components

All staff should be made aware of how to report suspected staff malpractice or maladministration to Pearson. Staff should complete the [Notification of suspected malpractice or maladministration involving staff](#) (JCQ M2(a) form) and send it to pqsmalpractice@pearson.com.

For more guidance on quality assurance procedures, please refer to the [Centre Guide to External Examination](#).

Student handbook

A student handbook is essential in terms of guiding students through the course so that they are aware of course requirements, know what is expected of them and understand their rights as students.

- General Information about the centre
- Course specific information (for example, course title HNC/HND, pathway, units available, mode of study, course dates)
- Progression opportunities
- Student rights
- Available resources, including HN Global
- Recognition of Prior Learning(RPL)
- Assessment and Feedback
- Mitigating circumstances
- Late submissions
- Centre and placement key contacts(such as tutors, administrators, technical support, pastoral support)
- Student support(information about where to go for different types of support, such as academic, health/wellbeing, and financial)
- Plagiarism and other types of malpractice(such as collusion and cheating)
- Referencing
- Student complaint and appeal procedure(including the role of Pearson and The Office of the Independent Adjudicator)
- Student participation and feedback
- Annual Student Survey
- Work experience/placement guidance and support

Programme specifications

It is a Pearson requirement that all centres delivering BTEC Higher National programmes produce a programme specification(s).

What is a programme specification?

A programme specification is a concise description of both the intended outcomes of learning from a higher education programme and the means by which these outcomes are achieved and demonstrated. The programme specification should not be confused with the standard Pearson BTEC qualification specifications that comprise the full guidance and units for each of these qualifications. The latter are the nationally devised and accredited structures, curriculum content and related guidance. They do not define the local dimension that the centre's programme specification is intended to capture.

Programme specifications should make explicit:

- The intended learning outcomes of the programme
- The teaching and learning methods that enable students to achieve these outcomes and the assessment methods used to demonstrate their achievement

The teaching and learning methods that are to be applied through work- based learning components, including work experience/ placement.

The relationship of the programme and its elements to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and, where appropriate, subject benchmark statements.

A good programme specification will improve student understanding of how and when learning occurs, and of what is being learned, and thereby inform reflection upon personal learning, performance and achievement, and subsequent planning for educational and career development.

Who will use a programme specification?

Programme specifications are used by:

- Students and prospective students seeking information and understanding of a programme
- Institutions and teaching teams, to promote discussion and reflection on new and existing programmes and to ensure that there is a common understanding about the aims and intended learning outcomes for the programme
- Internal and external reviewers as an important source of information
- External Examiners (EEs), so that they can refer to and review the assessment guidance and methodology
- Employers seeking information about the skills and other transferable intellectual abilities developed by the programme.
- Work experience /placement providers who offer placements to Higher National students
- Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) who accredit and/or recognise higher education programmes
- Staff during programme validations, annual monitoring and review, and teaching and learning discussions regarding the delivery of learning outcomes and support methods
- Centres, as a basis for gaining feedback from students or recent graduates on the extent to which they perceived that the opportunities for learning were successful in promoting the intended outcomes.

When is a programme specification required?

A separate programme specification is required for each and every Higher National programme on offer. There are no Pearson rules regarding which qualifications should be included in each programme specification, as long as every BTEC Higher National programme and pathway is included in a programme specification. For example, centres may wish to:

- Produce one programme specification for the entire department that includes the relevant information for each individual programme (for example, a HN Engineering programme specification that includes sections on the HNC General Engineering, HND General Engineering, HNC Mechanical Engineering, and HND Mechanical Engineering)
- Produce separate programme specifications for each and every programme (for example, four separate programme specifications for the HNC General Engineering,

HND General Engineering, HNC Mechanical Engineering, and HND Mechanical Engineering)

- Produce separate specifications for each pathway/ specialism, even if they are within the same sector (for example, two separate programme specifications for HN Engineering: one for HNC/D General Engineering and one for HNC/D Mechanical Engineering).

In programmes with a number of pathways, any units and learning outcomes that are specific to each pathway should be identified, together with the relevant teaching, learning and assessment strategies. It is appropriate to produce a template containing all relevant generic information and to use this for the production of programme-specific programme specifications.

Is there a recommended format and style for programme specifications?

There is no recommended format and centres are free to decide upon the format that best suits their provision. The programme specification should contain all the information required by the student but should avoid educational jargon wherever possible. Any specialist terms that cannot be avoided should be defined and explained and the entire programme specification should be written in the most accessible style possible.

What information should be included in a programme specification?

The Following information should be included as a minimum

- Name of awarding organisation (Pearson)
- Name of teaching institution
- Details of accreditation
- Precise title of the final award
- Programme title
- UCAS code (if applicable)
- Aims of the programme
- Relevant subject benchmark statements
- Programme outcomes; knowledge, understanding, skills, and other attributes
- The role of the awarding body and information on external examination
- Date at which the programme specification was written
- Date at which the programme specification will be revised
- The names and contact details for all members of staff involved in the delivery and assessment of the programme
- The appeals process, including students' rights to appeal to Pearson and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator
- Distinctive features of the programme
- Admission criteria
- Assessment regulations
- Practical workshop rules, e.g. etiquette and health and safety details, etc.
- Centre policies and rules, e.g.
- Malpractice, Authenticity and
- Assessment, Appeals
- Use of AI
- Information on attendance, late work policy, drugs, smoking, college information, helpline details
- Programme team and other key personnel details, where appropriate
- Quality indicators
- Learning support provision
- Methods used to evaluate and improve quality and standards
- Name of programme leader
- Mode of study
- Duration of programme
- Level of programme within the Framework for Higher Education (FHEQ), if appropriate (does not apply to HNC)
- Date of last Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject review
- Details of accreditation /recognition by professional bodies
- Work-based learning elements and work experience/placement support

Stage 1 – Programme Team

Planning	Implementation
• Discusses the qualification specification to ensure a shared understanding and awareness of relationships between units Creates assessment plan Plans assessment activities and timescales. • Agrees entry requirements for the programme • Develops external links with employers and other sources of relevant vocational input • Identifies staff development needs and opportunities • Selects appropriate units relevant to students' needs and the local context Considers resource needs for the • programme including published, digital, staff, external inputs • Develops programme handbooks.	• Delivers programme according to agreed assessment plan • Ensures timescales are met

Internal Verification

- Adheres to agreed process for internal verification
- Ensures understanding of the documentation used, keeps it up to date, and makes use of electronic and paper versions as agreed

Stage 2 – Assessor

Planning	Implementation
• Undertakes standardisation with team Applies assessment arrangements to deliver national standards • Designs, adapts and uses assessment instruments • Identifies formative and summative assessment opportunities for the student	• Delivers content using effective approaches and takes account of support materials • Checks that all student work is authenticated and that any evidence accepted for assessment is the students' own work • Assesses student work according to the agreed assessment plan and against national standards • Provides constructive formative feedback to student • Provides guidance for the student to enhance assessment achieved on formative assessment • Provides interim/summative assessment decisions • Tracks student achievement and maintains accurate records • Plans next steps with the student • Oversees any permitted resubmissions/repeat units

Internal Verification

- Completes any remedial action identified by the Internal Verifier

Stage 3 – Internal Verifier

Planning	Implementation
• Works with assessment team to ensure standardisation • Ensures that an assessment and internal verification plan is in place and operational for all qualifications • Confirms the quality of assessment instruments as fit for purpose • Advises on the interpretation of national standards • Coordinates assessment arrangements including additional sites, if appropriate • Approves and signs the programme assessment plan	• Ensures an effective system of recording student achievement is in place • Advises on opportunities for evidence generation and collection • Keeps records of the verification process • Liaises with the External Examiner (EE) where appropriate Monitors course files • Ensures appropriate corrective action is taken where necessary • Takes part in the formal stages of any appeal • Advises programme team on any training/standardisation needs • Approves requested additional assessment opportunities for students • Provides feedback to the programme team, senior management and Pearson as required

Internal Verification

- Provides advice and support to Assessors on a regular basis
- Undertakes internal verification, covering all Assessors and all units, in line with the internal verification plan
- Checks the quality of assessment to ensure that it is consistent, valid, fair and reliable
- Confirms whether assessment decisions meet national standards

Stage 4 – Student

Planning	Implementation
• Completes induction to BTEC programme • Agrees to abide by the centre's policy on assessment including producing valid evidence for assessment	• Produces work for assessment to meet national standards as set out in assignments • Meets deadlines for assessment • Responds to formative feedback • Confirms authenticity of own work • Receives assessment decisions and feedback from the Assessor • Plans next steps with the Assessor

Stage 5 – Pearson External Examiner (EE)

Planning	Implementation
• Allocated by us, according to BTEC programme requirements • Contacts centre to negotiate arrangements for external examination visit and sampling of students' work	• Prepares visit schedule covering allocated programmes • Checks management of the programmes is effective and meets our requirements and those of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education • Undertakes sampling in line with current requirements • Checks consistency of the interpretation of national standards by each Assessor • Identifies whether assessment decisions meet national standards • Confirms that student evidence meets the grading criteria awarded • Confirms student work has been accepted as authentic by the Assessor

- 
- Checks that timely and effective internal verification has been carried out on assignments, assessment decisions and feedback to students
 - Gives verbal feedback to the programme team or other centre nominated person on decisions made
 - Completes online report clearly identifying whether national standards are being met
 - Where required, identifies any remedial action required for resampling and conducts re-sample

Planning

Good planning is the first step to successful programmes. It is the best way of making sure everything is in place to ensure unit coverage is robust and achievable

- Agree annual assessment plan
- Develop assessment activities
- Standardise Assessors
- Review assignment deadlines
- Design assignments
- Produce programme specification

- Plan internal verification schedule
- Check assignments to track unit coverage
- Internal Verifier checks assignment briefs prior to issuing to students

Programme delivery:

- Formative assessment tracking for students
- Summative unit grading
- Continuous update and tracking of student progress

- Internal Verifiers Build in team standardisation activities
- Internal Verifier samples assessment decisions
- Assessor undertakes action where required

Assessment Board monitors

- Grades achieved by students
- Extenuating circumstances
- Cases of cheating and plagiarism
- Progress of students to the next stage
- Awards to be made to students

External Examination

- Ensures national standards are being met and management of the programme meets requirements
- **RELEASE, CERTIFICATION PENDING – CENTRE ACTION REQUIRED** (limited certification for achieving students) or **NOT YET FULLY SAMPLED (NYFS)**
- Second sample completed if any programme that is not released
- External Examiner (EE) **RELEASES** certification
- External Examiner (EE) does not release certification and escalates to the
- Pearson HN Assessment and Quality Team for remedial action: **CERTIFICATION PENDING – PRINCIPAL STANDARDS SUPPORT**

Units, credits and Total Qualification Time (TQT)

All units are usually 15 credits in value, or a multiple of this. These units have been designed from a learning time perspective, and are expressed in terms of Total Qualification Time (TQT). TQT is an estimate of the total amount of time that could reasonably be expected to be required for a student to achieve and demonstrate the achievement of the level of attainment necessary for the award of a qualification. TQT includes undertaking each of the activities of Guided Learning, Directed Learning and Invigilated Assessment. Each 15-credit unit approximates to a TQT of 150 hours and 60 hours of Guided Learning.

Examples of activities which can contribute to Total Qualification Time include:

- Guided Learning
- Independent and unsupervised research/learning
- Unsupervised compilation of a portfolio of work experience
- Unsupervised e-learning
- Unsupervised e-assessment
- Unsupervised coursework
- Watching a pre-recorded podcast or webinar
- Unsupervised work-based learning

Programme structure

The programme structures for Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals specify:

- The total credit value of the qualification

- The minimum credit to be achieved at the level of the qualification
- The core units
- The specialist units
- The optional units
- The maximum credit value in units that can be centre commissioned.

When combining units for a Pearson BTEC Higher National qualification, it is the centre's responsibility to make sure that the correct combinations are followed.

More detail of the specific structure of individual Pearson BTEC Higher National Certificate and Diploma programmes can be found in the **qualification specifications**.

QAA expectations specify that providers of higher education should establish a formal process for agreeing the programme structure and delivery. The purpose of this is to ensure that there is a strong academic case for the delivery of programmes and that they are embedded within the academic/quality structures of the organisation.

Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

Guided Learning Hours are defined as the time when a tutor is present to give specific guidance towards the learning aim being studied on a programme.

This definition includes lectures, tutorials and supervised study in, for example, open learning provision, work experience/placement supervision and learning workshops. Guided Learning includes any supervised assessment activity; this includes invigilated examination and observed assessment and observed work-based practice.

Some examples of activities which can contribute to Guided Learning include:

- Classroom-based learning supervised by a tutor
- Work-based learning supervised by a tutor
- Employer supervision while on work experience/placement
- Live webinar or telephone tutorial with a tutor in real time
- E-learning supervised by a tutor in real time.

All forms of assessment which take place under the immediate guidance or supervision of a tutor or other appropriate provider of education or training, including where the assessment is competency-based and may be turned into a learning opportunity.

Students should be informed of the guided learning they should expect to receive in addition to the total number of additional study hours they will need to undertake independently to achieve the qualification.

Modes of study

Students can study for the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals, either as a part time or full- time student or through a blended / distance learning approach. Whatever the mode of learning students should have access to a high-quality teaching and learning experience. This should include a qualified and experienced staff, an interactive and engaging curriculum, access to high quality learning material and a support system that caters for the pastoral as well as academic interests of students. Further guidance relating to teaching and learning can be found in the programme specification.

Engaging with employers

Employer engagement with the curriculum adds value to the student experience, particularly in transferring theory into practice.

Centres should consider a range of employer engagement activities. These could include:

- Field trips to local businesses
- Inviting members of the local business community to present guest lectures
- Using employers to judge the quality of assessed presentations
- Employer advice on assessments
- Provision of 'live case book material's
- Creating work experience/placement opportunities for students

Engaging with students

The student voice is very important in providing valuable information to enhance quality improvement. This input could include taking into account their views on how teaching and learning will take place either onsite or during work experience/placement their role in helping to design a curriculum, or on the assessment strategy that will test their knowledge and understanding.

The students' voice can be captured both formally and informally. For example, through formal representation at course team meetings, election of a student representative for each cohort and student forums could also take place periodically throughout the year. Students should be encouraged to complete the Pearson Annual Student Survey. Informal opinions could be captured through feedback on assessments and tutorials, and work

experience/placement evaluations.

Resources

A criterion for centre approval is the need for material resources and suitable workspaces to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals. For some units, specific resources, for example simulation equipment, video conferencing, telephone equipment are required, and this is clearly indicated in the unit descriptors.

Planning Assessment

Plans should be developed jointly by the programme team and agreed by the Programme Leader.

Key areas to consider are:

- Unit sequencing or integration Assignments and projects including
- specialist staff
- Timetabling, events, shows and trips
- Scheduling of work experience/ placement and availability
- Schemes of work
- External resources available to plan assignment deadlines across the programme, to ensure that students are not overwhelmed at key points
- Feedback from students and from external sources, such as progression providers
- How authenticity of student work can be assured
- How the use of AI is managed and assured
- Covering assessment of work experience/placement.

Conflict of interest

Assessment staff may encounter a potential conflict of interest in their work. Examples of these may include:

- A close relation, spouse or partner within the centre who is either a student or another member of staff
- A close relation, spouse or partner acting as an External Examiner (EE) or other external quality assurance role.

A formal log of potential and actual conflicts of interest should be kept up to date within each centre, including actions taken to minimise risk. This record must be made available on request. Individuals must always disclose an activity if there is any doubt about whether it represents a conflict of interest.

The JCQ guidance on conflict of interest can be found on their website.

Planning internal verification

Internal verification is the quality assurance system centres use to monitor assessment practice and decisions.

It ensures that:

- Assessment plans and schemes of work are in place to ensure full coverage of the qualification
- Assessment instruments are fit for purpose

It is essential that internal verification is planned for at the start of a programme.

An internal verification schedule must be agreed, to ensure that sufficient time and support is allocated plus that the process is rigorous and developmental.

- Assessment decisions accurately match student evidence to the unit grading criteria and assessment guidance
- Assessors are standardised and assessment and grading is consistent across the programme

Student recruitment and induction

Student recruitment

It is crucial that students are **recruited with integrity** onto the correct programme and level. There is a carefully designed progression route within the BTEC framework of qualifications. The appropriate levels are set against the equivalent expectations of achievement at Foundation Learning level, GCSE and GCE. **Every BTEC specification has clear guidance on the level of the qualification.**

Entry Requirements and Admissions

Although Pearson does not specify formal entry requirements, it is the centre's responsibility to ensure that the students recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

Centres are required to recruit students to Higher National programmes with integrity.

They will need to make sure that applicants have relevant information and advice about the qualification, to make sure it meets their needs. Centres should review the applicant's prior qualifications and/or experience to consider whether this profile shows that they have the potential to achieve the qualification.

For students who have recently been in education, the entry profile is likely to be a level 3 qualification or for those who have returned to learning, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) could be considered. **Please refer to individual programme specifications for student profiles and any specific entry requirements.**

Pearson's equality policy requires that all students should have an equal opportunity to access their qualifications and assessments, and that qualifications are awarded in a way that is fair to every student.

Pearson is committed to ensuring that:

- Students with a protected characteristic (as defined by the Equality Act, 2010) are not, when they are undertaking one of our qualifications, disadvantaged in comparison to students who do not share that characteristic
- All students achieve the recognition they deserve for undertaking a qualification and that this achievement can be compared fairly to the achievement of their peers.

English language requirements

BTEC Higher National programmes in England must be assessed in English. Centres must therefore ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English at the required standard. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

Acceptable evidence of capability in English includes **certified achievement at CEFR B2 or above**, including (but not limited to):

- **IELTS (Academic or General Training):** overall score **5.5 or above**
- **Pearson PTE Academic:** overall score **51 or above**
- **TOEFL iBT:** overall score **72 or above**
- **Cambridge English Qualifications: B2 First (FCE)** – Pass (Cambridge English Scale **160+**)

or another externally assessed recognised English language qualification explicitly benchmarked to CEFR B2.

BTEC Higher National programmes in Wales must be assessed in Welsh and/or English. Centres must therefore ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English and/or Welsh at the required standard. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

BTEC Higher National programmes in Northern Ireland must be assessed in English and or Irish. Centres must therefore ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English and/or Irish at the required standard. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

Acceptable evidence of capability in Welsh or Irish includes **certified achievement to an equivalent standard to CEFR B2 or above**, including (but not limited to):

- **WJEC** Uwch (Welsh for Adults)
- **CIOL** Language Level Assessment
- **TEG** (Maynooth)

All centres delivering the Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications wholly or partially in a language other than English, but who are assessed in English, must ensure that all students can demonstrate capability in English at a standard equivalent to the levels set out above,

on completion of the programme. This is to ensure that students who are recruited have a reasonable expectation of success on the programme.

Enrolment records

It is a Pearson requirement that each centre holds an enrolment record for every student. Although there is no exhaustive list of what should be contained within a student's enrolment record, as a minimum it should include the following information about the student:

Personal details (i.e. contact information)	Qualification and education history
Next of kin contact details	Work and relevant experience history
Residency status	English language ability, including testing information if the student is a not a native English speaker
Photographic ID	Programme registration details
Equal opportunities information (i.e. any disabilities or learning difficulties that may require additional learning support)	Expected date of completion
Funding and finance information	Mode of study (i.e. part-time, full-time, distance learning).
Criminal convictions declaration	

Centres must retain enrolment records for three years following certification and they must be made available to External Examiners upon request.

Student induction

The induction the student receives is key to the success of the student on their chosen qualification.

Students must understand the programme specification, including:

Programme structure (how and when units are assessed)	Assessment grading
Programme/unit content	Level of programme and equivalency
Purpose of the assignment briefs for learning and assessment	Relationship between the activities given in an assignment and the grading criteria
Nature of vocational and work- related learning	Responsibilities they have in the learning process (e.g. the importance of meeting assessment deadlines and using opportunities for wider attainment)
Importance of presenting authentic work and being clear on what constitutes as plagiarism	Rules relating to submission and resubmission of evidence
Appeals procedure	Arrangements for any units that have external assessment or other exceptional assessment (e.g. through performances, trips, exhibitions).
Arrangements for any work experience/placement components	The presentation and formatting of submitted work to meet expectations of the level of the qualification

Student attendance

Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals currently carry a maximum registration period of five years. When a student is topped up from the HNC to the HND, the five-year period resets as a new Pearson registration number is generated. However, it is important, and expected, that students complete their studies in a timely manner, in line with both the advertised programme duration and the expected completion date set at the time of registration. Centres offering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals programmes are required to review student registration information annually to ensure that it is accurate and up to date. For students who are no longer active on a programme, their registration must be withdrawn from Edexcel Online (EOL) at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst Pearson does not set a minimum percentage attendance requirement, for BTEC Higher Nationals, centres must ensure that their attendance policy and processes are followed and that they enable and encourage their students to fully participate in the learning opportunities offered.

Annual student fee

The annual student fee will not apply to students in the first year of their study, as this is already built into the qualification registration fee charged to centres.

Please note that this fee will be charged for each subsequent year students take to complete an HNC/D programme, after their first year of study. This means that if students complete the HND in two years, their centre will only have the annual fee to pay once in their second year, whilst for any students who complete the HND in three years, their centre will have the annual fee to pay twice (in their second and third years).

Further details regarding the annual student fee can be found [here](#).

Unit structure

BTEC units follow a standard structure. There may be slight variance between Higher Nationals and other Professional qualifications, but the basic principles remain the same.

Unit Structure	Guidance
Level	Each unit is assigned a level, indicating the relative intellectual demand, complexity and depth of study, and student autonomy. All units and qualifications will have a level assigned to them, which represents the level of achievement. There are nine levels of achievement, from Entry Level to Level 8. The level of the unit has been informed by the relevant level descriptors and, where appropriate, the National Occupational Standards (NOS) and/or other sector/professional benchmarks.
Credit Value	Each unit in Pearson BTEC qualifications has a credit value which specifies the number of credits that will be awarded to a student who has achieved all the learning outcomes of the unit. Students will be awarded credits for the successful completion of whole units.
Unit introduction	The unit introduction gives the reader an appreciation of the unit in the vocational setting of the qualification, as well as highlighting the focus of the unit. It gives the reader a snapshot of the unit and the key knowledge, skills and understanding gained while studying the unit. The unit abstract also highlights any links to the appropriate vocational sector by describing how the unit relates to that sector.
Learning outcomes	The learning outcomes identify what each student must do in order to pass the unit. Learning outcomes state exactly what a student should 'know, understand or be able to do' as a result of completing the unit. Students must achieve all the learning outcomes in order to pass the unit.
Essential content	The unit essential content identifies the breadth of knowledge, skills and understanding needed to design and deliver a programme of learning to achieve each of the learning

outcomes. This is informed by the underpinning knowledge and understanding requirements of relevant institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education IFATE Occupational Standards where appropriate.

Each learning outcome is stated in full and then the key phrases or concepts related to that learning outcome are listed in italics followed by the subsequent range of related topics. The information below shows how unit content is structured and gives the terminology used to explain the different components within the content (this is given in **bold** at the beginning of each section of content):

- **Italicised sub-heading:** it contains a key phrase or concept. This is content which must be covered in the delivery of the unit. Colons mark the end of an italicised subheading
- **Additional topics and guidance below amplify the sub-heading.** They must also be covered in the delivery of the unit
- **The use of 'include'** is to expand on content matter and topic areas to support tutors with further guidance as to what is required. If content matter states 'to include' or 'including' before the amplification, it means that this content is mandatory.
- **'e.g.'** is a list of examples used for indicative amplification of an element (that is, the content specified in this amplification that could be covered or that could be replaced by other, similar material).

Assessment Criteria

Each unit contains statements of the evidence. statements of evidence that identify the learning that needs to be present in the assessment evidence. Assessment Criteria have been designed to provide students and assessors with a clear description of the learning that must be evidenced for a student to achieve at each specified level.

It is not a requirement of the unit specification that all of the content is assessed however it is important that students are delivered the content across the range of grades to give them the best opportunity to achieve the best grade they are capable of

Planning units

Each unit contains statements of the evidence. statements of evidence that identify the learning that needs to be present in the assessment evidence. Assessment Criteria have been designed to provide students and assessors with a clear description of the learning that must be evidenced for a student to achieve at each specified level.

How centres plan assessment of units may differ from subject to subject, and relates to the timetable, Assessor expertise, resources available, etc. Centres should always take full account of the published guidance for each unit to ensure a coherent programme of study. For example, core units often provide a platform of underpinning knowledge for other units and centres should think carefully about how these units fit together for delivery.

More information and guidance regarding single unit, single unit (staged) and integrated assessment can be found in our [assessment and feedback guidance for centres/tutors](#).

Individual Learning Outcomes should not be split across assignments or require extra assignments or activities to meet the Merit or Distinction criteria within a unit.

Single unit assessment

A BTEC qualification comprises individual units that cover specific topics. For many sectors, a unit-by- unit approach to delivery is a valid and appropriate method. A unit may be broken down into two or more assignments if appropriate.

Activities should be written to allow opportunities for the full achievement of Pass, Merit and Distinction criteria.

Single Unit Assessment is when all of the learning outcomes of a unit are assessed together through a single assignment. The assignment may be made up of different pieces of work, but they are submitted and assessed together; as a single body of evidence. This type of holistic assessment encourages students to develop an awareness of how different areas of their learning may relate and support each other.

Single Unit (Staged) Assessment allows for learning outcomes, in a single unit, to be assessed through two or more assignments. In this case, each assignment will be designed to provide students with an opportunity to show their achievement of one or more of the learning outcomes.

Integrated assessment

In certain sectors, the unit delivery can be integrated so that evidence can be mapped into two or more units. This approach may lead to a deeper understanding of the content and its application. It is important to map the assessment of evidence against unit criteria across units and keep accurate records of student achievement.

When using the staged approach to assessment, it can be considered good practice to wait until all assignments have been submitted before assessing the evidence and providing a grade. This is because although the student may not have achieved all of the targeted learning outcomes within one assignment, they may have achieved the missing learning outcomes in a later assignment, even if that assignment did not directly target the learning outcomes in question. Waiting until all assignments have been submitted before grading allows centres to holistically assess the student's performance for the entire unit across all assignment briefs, rather than assessing and grading the student's performance for each individual assignment brief in isolation.

Teaching and learning strategies

Teaching and learning in the BTEC Higher Nationals should be vocational, active, motivational and progressive. It will be closely linked to assessment, allowing development of skills, knowledge and attributes that will enable the student to complete assessments. From the start, it is important to consider the most effective way of delivering and assessing a unit or assignment.

Teaching and learning strategies may include:

- Project work carried out as an individual or as part of a group
- Work-based learning
- Lectures and seminars
- Facilitated activities
- Visits to companies with a facilitator to structure the visit
- Visiting speakers from the vocational sector.

The emphasis should be placed on active learning, drawing on materials gained from the working environment or industry wherever possible. This will help students to develop the transferable skills necessary in a changing and dynamic working environment.

A large proportion of units are practical in nature, giving students the opportunities to tackle 'real life' examples to apply their skills and knowledge to case studies or projects. As well as Assessors in the programme team having vocational experience, having someone currently

working in the sector, providing an active role in an assignment, will increase the relevance of the assignment and further motivate the student.

When assessment has taken place, it is important that formative feedback informs students what they are able to do to improve the quality of the outcomes for a particular assignment. Feedback should be recorded to clarify this, and a further deadline agreed leading to the summative assessment decision.

External links

Where possible, work-related programmes will benefit from external links with those working in the vocational sector. These links could be provided in any of the following ways:

- Checking the vocational relevance of the assignments
- Provision of 'live' case study material that is company or organisation based
- Student visits to companies and other vocational settings
- Professional input from companies and vocational practitioners, especially where vocational expertise is clearly identified in the delivery section of the units
- Work placement that is specifically related to the qualification
- Tutor placements to enhance vocational expertise.

Assessment strategies

The assessment programme must be designed so that skills and knowledge can be developed in line with the assessment criteria.

There is a range of assessment methods that can be utilised, such as:

- Presentations, written reports, accounts, surveys
- Log books, production diaries, reflective journals
- Work based projects
- Recorded discussions/debates
- Case studies
- Role play
- Observations of practical activities or performance
- Articles for journals, press releases
- Production of visual or audio materials, artefacts, products and specimens
- Peer and self assessment

- Professional discussion.

Using a variety of assessment methods enhances learning and should improve the validity of assessment. They improve the knowledge of the learning outcome and what is required to gain higher grade achievement. Some assessment methods are more suitable than others for meeting the evidence requirements of different Learning Outcomes and skills domains; cognitive, affective or psychomotor.

Peer and self assessment

While self assessment is not sufficient on its own, it can provide valuable additional evidence of learning and formative assessment. Ask students to self assess by providing them with self assessment criteria or helping them to develop their own. Self assessment has been shown to improve attainment if it is used consistently. It ensures

students take responsibility for their own learning and focuses attention on criteria for success and increases effort and persistence.

Where appropriate, peer assessment impacts on self assessment by enabling individuals to become self critical and evaluative. It can provide a useful first and second stage prior to tutor assessment. It should generate action plans that are followed up prior to summative assessment.

Group work

Working in groups is an accepted part of learning within higher education. There are widely recognised benefits of collaborative group work in terms of learning and skills development. When groups work well, students can produce quality learning outcomes and develop specific teamwork skills, as well as generic skills valued by employers.

Most students can benefit from learning in groups, provided the groups are well managed and there are clear and fair assessment requirements. In a group assignment, it is essential that each student provides their own individual contribution to meeting each of the unit assessment criteria.

It is important that Assessors clearly identify the purpose of using group work within an assessment:

- Generally, it is not the group work activities themselves that will form the basis of the assessment activity

- Group learning activities and skills, such as team building, leadership, etc. may be assessed towards gaining transferable skills and recorded as being achieved and feedback given, but they are not to form part of the assessment decisions for specific units.

Concerns about group assignments can be reduced by:

- Developing a suitable process for the selection of the team and having an interim appraisal and assessment process to check that each individual makes a sufficient contribution to the group work
- Helping students to understand the criteria to be assessed for the group product and process, where process is being assessed
- Informing them how individual contributions to the group will be measured and assessed against the unit specific learning outcomes, assessment and grading criteria
- Developing assignments with activities that have multiple sub-activities that students can select and allocate to one another within the project
- Reviewing and agreeing all assessment decisions and overall grading in the Assessment Board.

Guidelines on assessing group work

- Group projects should be included in the assessment schedule for a unit only where one or more learning outcomes of the unit indicate that they might be appropriate. In other words, does the learning outcome naturally fit the device of a group assessment?
- QAA expects a variety of assessment methods and consequently where appropriate, group working skills should be developed
- Students should be informed, in detail and in advance, of the basis for assessment of group projects, including the methods to be used to measure the extent of individual contributions
- If the group project or its assessment places on students an obligation to exercise skills or judgements beyond those required for the subject (e.g. peer assessment), then adequate training should be provided to assist students to exercise that judgement
- If there is to be peer assessment of the contribution of the students to a group project, then the process for collecting feedback should be confidential between the individual student and the Assessor. If peer assessment includes the measurement of the

contribution, the method should be clear and simple to use and self-assessment should also be included

- A common group grade should not be assigned to all members of the group; individual contributions should be measured and graded against the learning outcomes, the assessment and grading criteria
- Evidence of observation of presentations and discussions (with peers, Assessors etc.) should be detailed and mapped to criteria in order to provide evidence of achievement of individual contributions
- It is good practice to encourage students to reflect on what they have learnt from the group work experience and produce a written evaluation
- In some cases, presentations may provide evidence only sufficient for Pass criteria, for example where a presentation contained no corroborated detail of individual activities undertaken by members of the group. In such cases, evidence for higher grades may be achieved through formalised questioning of individual students mapped to the assessment criteria, or having the students produce a supplementary report of their activities
- Feedback can be directed to the group with reference to individual contributions and achievement
- For graded programmes, the achievement of the Merit and Distinction grade descriptors should be measured against individual contributions and the method of measurement should be clear within the assignment brief.

Time constrained assessment activities

The word 'test' is used below to describe any type of time limited assessment activity.

The widespread use of time limited assessment activities (e.g. tests) is supported within BTEC Higher National qualifications, as this assessment method is common in top-up degrees offered by higher education institutions (HEIs). Where tests are used, the programme team should ensure that their use can be justified and that they are valid for the purpose stated.

When planning this type of assessment, the following points should be considered:

- Is the test an integral part of an overall unit assessment plan?
- Is the test structured validly to satisfy the targeted learning outcomes and assessment criteria? If used, are grade descriptors appropriately contextualised?
- Does the unit (and programme) have an appropriate spread of assessment activities?
- Is the test assessed according to the relevant assessment procedures?

Integration within a unit assessment plan

All units should have a unit assessment plan, indicating where assessment and grading opportunities are available within the various assessment activities of the unit.

An individual assessment activity should show which of the learning outcomes are being targeted. Activities must further be contextualised within a relevant vocational scenario, as well as a narrative description of the activity that appropriately reflects how the activities will enable the student to access the full range of assessment criteria within the targeted learning outcomes. From the context and activity description, a judgement can then be made regarding the validity of the assessment in terms of the grading opportunities.

The same principles apply to a test. A test should clearly specify which learning outcomes are being targeted. The action used in each of the questions can then be attributed to individual assessment criteria/ and thus confirm that the test is valid in terms of content and level.

The test should also be valid in terms of purpose. Tests provide a high level of certainty where authenticity is an issue. As such, a test could be a valid method of assessment, where the principal requirements are confirmation that a student has an 'on-demand' factual knowledge of an aspect of a subject and if necessary, the ability to apply or explain it.

If appropriate, a test may be a reasonable means of reassessment after a late submission at summative assessment.

Tests could be constructed to address only selected assessment criteria or to include material relating to contextualised grading descriptors and so discriminate between Pass, Merit and Distinction levels of performance.

In designing test instruments for HN (RQF) assessments, the targeted Learning Outcomes on each test instrument must be clearly indicated to provide a focus for students and to assist with internal standardisation processes.

The test activities should enable students to produce evidence within the timeframe specified, that meets the Learning Outcomes of the unit across all grades of achievement. Criterion-based referencing should not be used within HN) tests, as assessment should take place holistically across all of the student evidence submitted.

There are some exceptions to this however, notably in units where the testing of students' learning requires students to demonstrate discrete application of information (typically numerical data) against Assessment Criteria that cannot be examined holistically in the context of the relevant Learning Outcomes.

It is not permissible to use multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank question types in RQF tests.

Spread of assessment activities

A holistic view of the programme should be taken to ensure there is an appropriate spread of assessment activities within and across the units. The units making up the programme should collectively allow students opportunities to develop, and be assessed in, higher level skills, such as analysis, literature searching, teamwork, management responsibilities, effective communication etc. Where tests are used, they should not be so numerous as to skew the balance of skills that can be best developed through written assignments, case studies, experimentation, investigative activities etc.

BTEC assessment procedures

It is not acceptable to use a numerical system to assess individual questions or to aggregate numbers to arrive at a final grade e.g. percentage weighting. Within the assessment of BTEC qualifications, there is no process whereby a relatively poor performance in one aspect of unit achievement can be offset by a good performance in another aspect. These fundamental features of outcome-based assessment must be taken into account in test-based assessments. The same assessment model must be applied to test-based assessment as to the rest of the programme assessment.

Authenticity and authentication

Only evidence for assessment that is authentic should be accepted, i.e. that is the student's own and that can be judged fully to see whether it meets the assessment criteria.

Centres should ensure that authenticity is considered when setting assignments. For example, ensuring that each student has a different focus for research will reduce opportunities for copying or collaboration. On some occasions, it will be useful to include supervised production of evidence. Where appropriate, practical activities or performance observed by the Assessor should be included.

Students must authenticate the evidence that they provide for assessment. They do this by signing a declaration stating that it is their own work when they submit it. For practical or performance activities observed by the Assessor, this is not necessary.

Assessors should only assess student evidence that is authentic. If they find through the assessment process that some or all of the evidence is not authentic, they need to take appropriate action, including invoking malpractice policies as required.

It is important that all evidence can be validated through verification. This means that it must be capable of being reassessed in full by another person. When practical and performance evidence are used, centres need to think about how supporting evidence can be captured through using, for example, videos, recordings, photographs, handouts, activity sheets etc.

The authentication of student evidence is the responsibility of each centre. If during external examination, an External Examiner (EE) raises concerns about the authenticity of evidence, or student declarations of authenticity are not available, the EE will not release certification. Concerns will need to be resolved within the given timeframe.

Electronic signatures are permitted on all assessment documentation if there is an audit trail to support its authenticity. This could include either:

- an email from the student/Assessor with the record attached to show that it has been sent from them
- a system log to show that the student/Assessor has submitted the record
- a dated comment on the assessment documentation stating 'Signed: Assessor or Student Name

Plagiarism

There are many definitions of what constitutes as plagiarism. All of them agree that plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct or, put more simply, a form of cheating. Plagiarism is much more than simple copying from another student, or from books or the Internet, and can be taken to include paraphrasing, sub-contracting the work to someone else, submitting the same piece of work for two different purposes, etc. Ultimately, plagiarism is attempting to pass off other people's work and ideas as your own.

Plagiarism is fundamentally wrong and provides students with an unfair advantage. Assessment procedures are compromised if the work submitted is not the student's own and the External Examiner (EE) will set the programme's status to Certification Pending –

Centre Action Required if they find evidence of student plagiarism that has not been detected by the centre.

It is a strong Pearson recommendation that all student work is checked for plagiarism by staff and by anti-plagiarism software. Please note that some anti-plagiarism software is unable to read text that has been placed inside text boxes, such as the one on this page. Assessors should not accept student work that makes use of text boxes; this should be returned to the student, so the text boxes can be removed and resubmitted in the correct format. Pearson will consider assignments assessed in this format as an incorrect assessment decision and the External Examiner will not release certification for a programme if they find use of text boxes within students' work submitted. If centres are unsure, prior to assessment, as to whether student work has been submitted in the correct format, they should contact Pearson via the Customer Support portal.

Anti-plagiarism software is an aid to detecting plagiarism, other potential indicators include:

- changes in font/font size
- inconsistencies/changes in topic/subject (e.g. change of company under discussion)
- presence of foreign language accents, marks or numerals where not expected
- changes in topic/flow of text/tone
- text having passages which read oddly (potentially indicative of use of rewording tools to avoid plagiarism detection)
- changes in writing style across assignments.

It is also extremely important that centres have policies and procedures in place to address contract cheating, the use of third-party services and essay mills. QAA has produced a guidance document providing further information which can be found [here](#). JCQ guidance on preventing, detecting and dealing with plagiarism can be found [here](#)

Where centres identify staff or student malpractice concerns, the JCQ process for reporting it to the Awarding Body should be followed.

In the event of malpractice being suspected or proven, Pearson may be required to complete additional quality assurance checks before certification can take place.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

JCQ guidance in relation to the use of AI can be found [here](#). Whilst the principles above remain, centres may wish to consider additional assessment methods to address the potential use of AI.

The QAA has also provided updated guidance for providers in relation to the increase in the use of AI within higher education, and potential risks to academic integrity. The guidance can be found [here](#).

Additional Pearson guidance can be found [here](#)

Observation records and witness statements

We strongly recommend the use of witness statements, Assessor observation records or other paperwork. However, in order for these to be useful, they must record achievement at criterion level against the activity that is being observed. Checklists prepared against unit grading criteria are one way of doing this.

Tutor observations and witness statements are very useful supplementary evidence of achievement. However, an observation sheet or witness statement on its own may not be considered sufficient evidence for verification. It is important that it is supported by other evidence, such as audio/visual records of the activity, production reports, notes, self-evaluation by the student, etc. that can substantiate that the activity took place as described.

Observation records

An observation record is used to provide a formal record of an Assessor's judgement of student performance (process evidence e.g. during presentations, practical activities) against the target grading criteria. The record will:

- Relate directly to the evidence requirements in the grading grid of the unit specification
- May confirm achievement or provide specific feedback of performance against national standards for the student
- Provide primary evidence of performance
- Be sufficiently detailed to enable others to make a judgement about quality and whether there is sufficient evidence of performance

- Confirm that national standards have been achieved.

Observation records should:

- Be accompanied by supporting/additional evidence. This may take the form of visual aids, video/audio tapes, CDs, photographs, handouts, preparation notes, cue cards, diary record or log book and/or peer assessments records, etc.
- Note how effectively these were used to meet the grading criteria
- Record the Assessor's comments
- Be evidenced in student's portfolios when assessment is carried out through observation along with relevant supporting evidence
- Be completed by the Assessor who must have direct knowledge of the specification to enable an assessment decision to be made
- Be signed and dated by the Assessor and the student
- Also include students' comments.

Witness statements

A witness statement is used to provide a written record of student performance (process evidence) against grading criteria. Someone other than the Assessor of the qualification/unit may complete it. This may be an Assessor of a different qualification or unit, a work placement supervisor, a technician, a learning resources manager, or anyone else who has witnessed the performance of the student against a given grading criteria. It can be someone who does not have direct knowledge of the qualification, unit or evidence requirements as a whole but who is able to make a professional judgment about the performance of the student in the given situation.

The quality of witness statements is greatly improved, and enables the Assessor to judge the standard and validity of performance against the grading criteria if:

- The witness is provided with clear guidance on the desirable characteristics required for successful performance
- The evidence requirements are present on the witness testimony, but this may need further amplification for a non-Assessor
- The student or witness also provides a statement of the context within which the evidence is set.

The witness statement does not confer an assessment decision. The Assessor must:

- Consider all the information in the witness statement
- Note the relevant professional skills of the witness to make a judgment of performance
- Review supporting evidence when making an assessment decision

- Review the statement with the student to enable a greater degree of confidence in the evidence
- Be convinced that the evidence presented by the witness statement is valid, sufficient and authentic.

When a number of witnesses are providing testimonies:

- It may be helpful to collect specimen signatures
- All witness testimonies should be signed and dated by the witness
- The job role/relationship of the witness with the student should also be recorded.

These details add to the validity and authenticity of the testimony and the statements made in it. Centres should note that witness testimonies can form a vital part of the evidence for a unit, but they should not form the main or majority assessment of a unit.

Assignment design

Assessment instruments designed by centres should collectively ensure coverage of all learning outcomes within each unit and should provide opportunities for students to generate evidence across all grades of achievement.

For HN assignments, the targeted learning outcomes must be clearly indicated on each assessment instrument as key information to provide a focus for students and to assist with internal standardisation processes. Activities and guidance should enable students to produce evidence that meets the learning outcomes of the unit across all grades of achievement.

There should not be any criterion-based referencing within HN (RQF) assignments, as assessment should take place holistically across all of the student evidence submitted.

When assessment instruments are being designed, centres need to ensure that they are valid, reliable and fit for purpose, building on the application of the learning outcomes.

Centres are encouraged to place emphasis on practical application of the learning outcomes, providing a realistic scenario for students to adopt, making maximum use of work-related practical experience and reflecting typical practice in the sector concerned. The creation of assessment instruments that are fit for purpose is vital to achievement.

Programme planning at the beginning of the year must include assignment mapping. This will ensure that the content of the units are fully met during delivery and that students are able to provide evidence for assessment that demonstrates full achievement of all the learning outcomes .

Assignments activities will enable the learning outcomes being assessed to be achieved at the full range of achievement for all grade levels. Activities should be challenging rather than easily achievable, differentiated by outcome so that they stretch the most able but are open to lower achieving students.

Assignment mapping will allow centres to monitor:

- that all learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria from every unit being delivered will be assessed
- arrangements for staffing and resourcing of assessment activities where learning outcomes from two or more units might be integrated in one assignment
- the planning of the internal verification of assessment during the programme

A good assignment brief will:

- Make clear what evidence the student must submit and the format, word count, length of the individual elements
- Present a vocational scenario that provides a professional context in which the student will produce work
- Use language that is clear and precise both in defining the vocational scenario and in describing the evidence required
- Make clear the range of levels of achievement (Pass, Merit, Distinction) through the use of the same or similar command verbs found in the assessment criteria, as long as they are of the same demand and imply the same action of the published command verb.
- Clearly indicate the learning outcomes and assessment criterion that are covered by the assignment in key information sections only.
- Individual learning outcomes and assessment criterion should not be referenced or repeated anywhere within the assignment brief activity and guidance.
- Allow a student to achieve a learning outcome (or multiple learning outcomes) at any of the levels defined by the assessment criteria

An assignment brief must not:

- Change the wording of learning outcomes or assessment criteria
- Add any additional assessment criteria
- Use 'multiple-choice' or 'fill-in the missing word' activities (these are not appropriate for Level 4 or Level 5 qualifications)
- Use numerical marking or percentage weighting

- Penalise students for exceeding word counts or limits
- Associate the assignment with a single assessment criterion
- Split distinction criteria where it spans more than one learning outcome

When writing assignments, the work a student is required to produce should be described using the same (or similar) verbs as those used in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. **A different verb can be used, but this must be of the same demand and imply the same action as the published command verb.**

Assignment briefs

The assignment brief is the document issued to students at the start of the assessment process. Clear assignment briefs will:

- Inform the student of the activities set
- Inform the student of the methods of assessment
- Set clear deadlines for submission of work.

Centres can send **two assignment briefs per qualification framework** to the External Examiner (EE) to review prior to their visit, for which they will provide formal feedback.

We provide assignment templates for centres to use under 'Teaching and Learning Materials' on the subject pages of our [website](#), however centres are free to design their own. However, any assignment brief must contain the following information:

Key Information

- Assignment title
- Assessor
- Date issued
- Deadline (for assessment and grading)
- Title and level of qualification (as published in the specification)
- Unit(s) covered (as published in the specification)
- Duration (approximate time it is expected that the assignment will take to complete).

- The brief must state exactly which learning outcome and associated assessment criteria are being addressed as key information.

Vocational Scenario

- Vocational scenario (if appropriate, giving the opportunity to place the assignment within a vocational context).
- This could be a simple situation or a full, detailed set of vocational requirements that motivates the student to apply their learning through the assignment.

Assignment Brief Activity and Guidance

- This section of the assignment brief should include simulated 'real life' activity(ies), and guidance that direct students as to the work that needs to be completed and submitted in order to meet the learning outcomes for the unit
- The assignment should define an action or assessment activity(ies) for the student to undertake that will allow them to achieve the Learning Outcome(s) at Pass, Merit or Distinction.
- The activity(ies) and guidance should contain sufficient information and direction to allow students to achieve all of the targeted learning outcomes for the assignment
- Individual learning outcomes and assessment criterion should not be referenced or repeated anywhere within the assignment brief activity and guidance.
- Holistic assignment briefs can use the command verbs, as published in the qualification specification, or make use of different verbs as long as they are of the same demand and imply the same action of the published command verb
- Activities should be written in appropriate language for students at the level of the qualification
- Include details about any specific preparation students will need to make.

Submission Format

- A clear statement of what the student is expected to produce as evidence
- Guidance on how the evidence will be assessed.
- Make clear what evidence the student must submit and the format, for example word count and length of the individual elements

Other Information May Include

- Resources and reference materials
- Wider assessment opportunities built into the assignment or mapped within the specification
- Employer links
- **Word count:** Where written evidence is required, a word count may be included to direct the student about the volume of evidence required. Students cannot be downgraded if they do not achieve or exceed the word count. Their performance in the assignment is based on achievement of the relevant learning outcomes

Assignments Involving Group Work

In assignment briefs, students should be provided with a full explanation of the requirements for the assignment in writing together with the usual assessment details

(scenario, hand-out and hand-in dates, learning outcome/s and associated assessment criteria, etc.). It is suggested that this should include:

- The activities to be undertaken
- The basis for group membership
- Rules that cover the operation of the group
- Confidentiality agreements over what occurs within the group
- Activity allocation within the group
- The learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria for assessing the group report/ presentation (product)
- The criteria for assessing the group process, if it is to be assessed
- The procedure for assessing individual contributors mapped to the learning outcome/s and associated grading criteria

- Who will carry out the assessment (e.g. Assessor, peers, employers, self, etc.)
- The fall-back position if a group loses a member or an individual's contribution does not meet the requirements of the activities.

Internal verification of Assignment Briefs

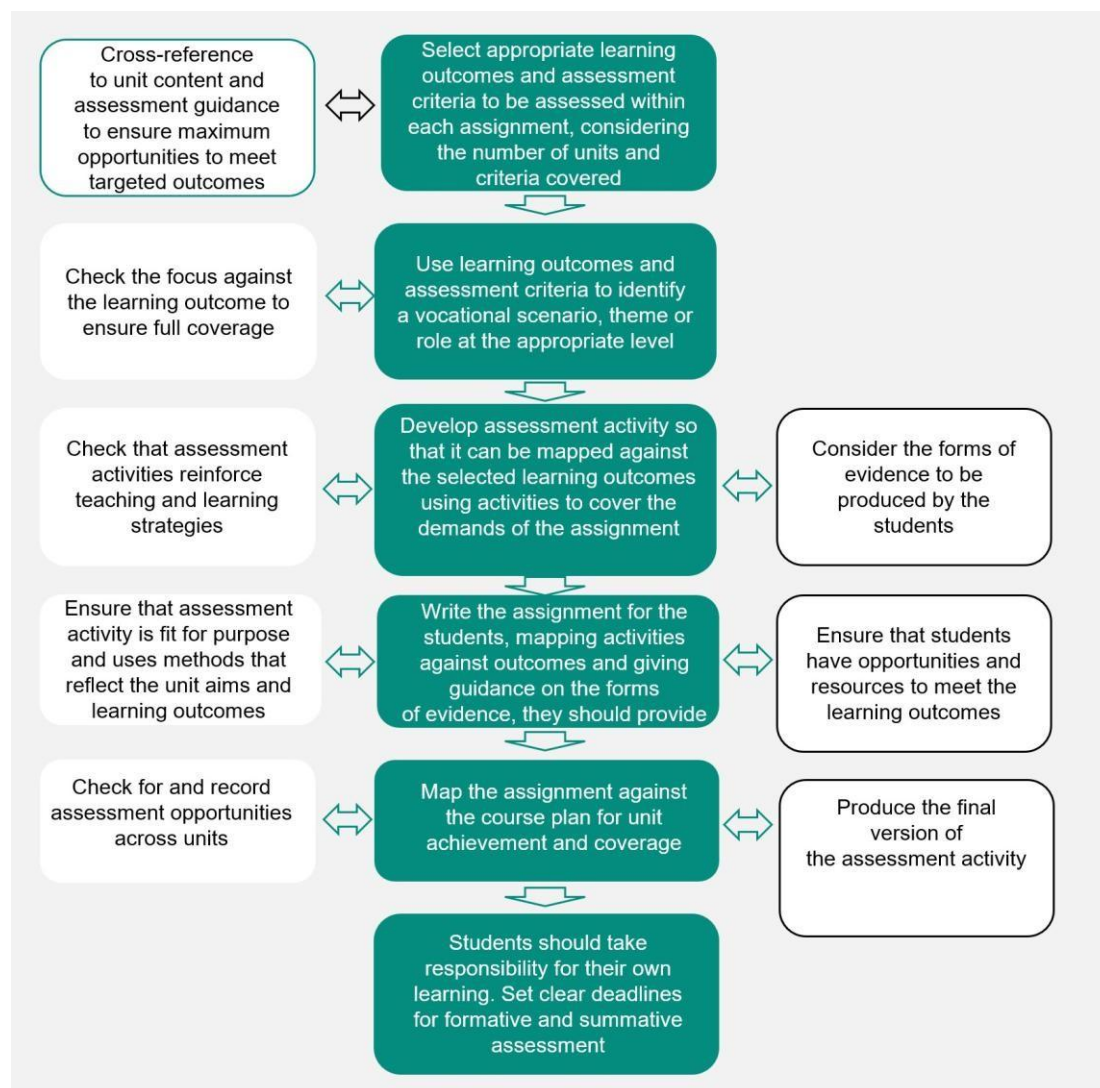
All assignment briefs, including Authorised Assignment Briefs (AABs) and Internal verification of the assignments should be carried out by a staff member who is familiar with BTEC assessment at the appropriate level and has subject knowledge within the programme area. Internal verification should always be reported and recorded. If further actions are identified by the Internal Verifier, the Assessor is required to complete all actions and return it to the Internal Verifier for review and sign off. Once the assignment has been signed off as being fit for purpose by the Internal Verifier, it may be issued to the students.

Example Assessment Briefs (EABs) must be internally verified every year, prior to issue to the student.

The purpose of internal verification is to confirm that the brief is fit for purpose, by ensuring:

- The activities and evidence will allow the student to address the targeted learning outcomes
- The brief is written in clear and accessible language
- Students' roles and activities are vocationally relevant and appropriate to the level of the qualification
- Timescales and deadlines are appropriate
- Equal opportunities are incorporated.

Assignment Planning



Assessment and grading

Assessment tracking and recording

It is essential to track and record student achievement throughout a BTEC programme. All assessments must be recorded in such a way that:

- Assessment evidence is clearly measured against UK national standards
- Student progress can be accurately tracked
- The assessment process can be reliably verified
- There is clear evidence of the safety of certification

Centres should plan a timetable of assessment activities with clearly identified evidence requirements and target completion dates. Include internal verification of:

- Assessment plans
- Assignment briefs prior to distribution to students
- Assessment decisions

This enables a holistic approach to assessment of the programme and organises the sequence of delivery and assessment of units.

Prepare assessment tracking to record all assessment activities for the qualification on a unit-by-unit basis, at criterion level. Incorporate time for regular formative feedback. This helps to motivate students and provide learning targets and goals.

Track student progress, recording what each student has achieved and what still has to be done. This helps to ensure full coverage of the units and provide opportunities for grading. It also helps enable internal verification and provide samples for External Examiners (EEs) and other external audits as required.

Formative assessment

Students working at higher levels should be capable of undertaking independent study and research, developing strategies to improve their own performance, supported by teaching staff. Formative assessment is an integral part of the BTEC assessment process, involving both the Assessor and the student in a two-way conversation about their progress. It takes place prior to summative assessment and does not confirm achievement of grades, but

focuses on helping the student to reflect on their learning and improve their performance. The main function of formative assessment is to provide feedback to enable the student to make improvements to facilitate summative assessment achievement. When giving formative feedback it is important to avoid giving students advice that directly informs the work that they may do for summative assessment. This is referred to as 'coaching' and is inappropriate. Feedback should provide students with general advice on how to progress in their studies, but should not tell them what to do. For example, a tutor might say "...your analysis of the research is not clear, you will need to look at the research more critically..." rather than "...what you should be writing is..." In the former, the tutor is supporting the student understand their current progress and how to improve. While the latter is 'coaching' the student.

Formative feedback is given to students during the learning journey. This is to say that it relates to formative assessment that may be undertaken, at any point, prior to the summative assessment. Just as formative assessment is undertaken to support students to understand their progress, the associated formative feedback must be aimed at helping the student to recognise their current position and how to move forward.

This feedback should be prompt so it has meaning and context for the student and time must be given following the feedback for actions to be complete. Students should be provided with formative feedback during the process of assessment and be empowered to act to improve their performance. Feedback on formative assessment must be constructive and provide guidance and actions for improvement.

The role of feedback in motivating students must not be underestimated. We recognise that informal verbal feedback is an ongoing process and is an important part of the Assessor/student relationship. However, it is good practice to plan for at least one formal opportunity to provide written formative assessment feedback on each assessment, at a point when students will have had the opportunity to provide evidence towards all the assessment criteria targeted. This should be built into the Assessment Plan and be formally recorded. This will help Assessors to manage their assessment workload by avoiding multiple assessments, and also reduces the risk of malpractice.

Usually, further formal opportunities for formative feedback should not be necessary. However, if it is clear at the formative assessment stage that students have misinterpreted or have been misdirected by the assignment brief, there may be the need for another formative assessment once issues have been addressed.

Professional judgment should be used to determine when this is appropriate and should ensure that an advantageous situation is not created for one student. All assessment procedures should be operated in line with the responsibility of being a member of a Pearson approved centre.

Following formative assessment and feedback, students are able to:

- Revisit work to add to the original evidence produced to enhance their work to achieve grades. Submit evidence for summative assessment and final unit grade.

All records should be available for auditing purposes, as we may choose to review records of formative assessment as part of our ongoing quality assurance.



Please note: if an External Examiner feels that the Formative Feedback has been used inappropriately, such as indicating summative grades and/or Coaching students, they may be unable to release certification.

Summative assessment

Summative assessment is the final consideration by an Assessor of a student's assignment, agreeing which learning outcomes, and to which level of achievement, the student has met in the assignment and recording those decisions. However, students should be aware that summative assessment is subject to confirmation by the Assessment Board, and thus is provisional and can be overridden by the Assessment Board plus the outcomes of External Examination. It is at this stage that resubmission opportunities can be formally processed and granted by the Assessment Board.

Assessors should annotate on the student work where the evidence supports their grading decisions, and feedback. Students will need to be familiar with the assessment criteria so that they can understand the quality of what is required. They should be informed of the differences between grading criteria so that higher skills can be achieved.

Marking presentation, legibility, spelling, punctuation and grammar

It is important that student assessment evidence demonstrates quality written communication; that is appropriate and professional to convey information clearly for different purposes and audiences. Student written communication should be clear, grammatically correct and properly punctuated. It is an expectation at this level of learning that students should be able to demonstrate the following language proficiencies:

- Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints and develop arguments without much conspicuous searching for words/signs, using some complex sentence forms to do so.
- Produce clearly legible, intelligible, continuous writing which follows standard layout and paragraphing conventions.
- Spelling and punctuation are reasonably accurate but may show signs of mother-tongue influence.
- Generally high vocabulary control, though some confusion and incorrect word/sign choice does occur without hindering communication.
- Have a good command of simple language structures and some complex grammatical forms.

Improving English proficiency levels can be supported and addressed in assignment brief design, to include written communication requirements clearly stated in the submission format, and to sign-post students to relevant support resources for English.

It is good practice for Assessors to “mark” spelling and grammar, i.e. correct mistakes on student work and expect the student to either correct them (at the formative feedback stage) or note them (at the summative feedback stage). Assessors should be providing comments/annotations on the student work that refers to use of English language. If student work has consistently poor spelling, grammar or language it should not be accepted for grading but should be returned to the student to be corrected. The student must be given a deadline by which to correct the work.

Assessors can decide not to assess submitted work until it is submitted to the appropriate standard.

If student assignments are accepted by Assessors where either:

- the mistakes are so problematic that they undermine the evidence of student understanding; or
- specific assessment criteria require good communication, spelling and grammar and/or correct use of technical language;
- the presentation and formatting is substandard i.e. below the expected level of the qualification;

then the outcome from external examination will be to class it as an incorrect assessment decision, and a release of certification would not be agreed.

For further guidance please refer to the Pearson Global Scale of English for detailed proficiency learning outcomes for reading, writing, speaking and listening at the required level of English requirements for the Higher Nationals.

Grading Higher National units

The grading of BTEC Higher National qualifications is at the unit and the qualification level. Each successfully completed unit will be graded as a Pass, Merit or Distinction.

- A Pass is awarded for the achievement of all outcomes against the specified assessment criteria
- Merit and Distinction grades are awarded for higher level achievement.

Assessment decisions for Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals are based on the specific assessment criteria given in each unit and set at each level of attainment in that unit and at the qualification level. The criteria for each unit have been defined according to a framework to ensure that standards are consistent in the qualification and across the suite as a whole. The way in which individual units are written provides a balance of assessment of understanding, practical skills and behavioural attributes appropriate to the purpose of the qualifications.

The assessment criteria for a unit are based on a hierarchy. For example, if a merit criterion requires the student to show 'analysis' and the related pass criterion requires the student to 'explain', then to gain a merit the student will need to cover both 'explain' and 'analyse'. The unit assessment grid shows the relationships among the criteria so that assessors can apply all the criteria to the student's evidence at the same time.

Assessors must show how they have reached their decisions using the criteria in the Unit descriptor. When a student has completed all the assessments for a unit, the assessment team can give a grade for the unit. This grade is based on the highest level the student is judged to have met for all the criteria.

The role of the External Examiner is to review the decisions made rather than assess the student work. If the decisions made are not clear then it is difficult to confirm the standards have been met and certification is likely not to be released.

- Grading Higher National units to achieve a Pass, a student must have satisfied all the Pass criteria for the learning outcomes, showing coverage of the unit content and therefore attainment at Level 4 or 5 of the national framework.
- To achieve a Merit, a student must have satisfied all the Merit criteria (and the Pass criteria) through high performance in each learning outcome.

- To achieve a Distinction, a student must have satisfied all the Distinction criteria (and the Pass and Merit criteria), and these define outstanding performance across the unit as a whole.

The award of a Pass is a defined level of performance and cannot be given solely on the basis of a student completing assignments. Students who do not satisfy the Pass criteria should be reported as Unclassified.

Submission of late work

Centre will need to develop and publish its own assessment regulations relating to BTEC higher level programmes, that is aligned with expectation B6 of the QAA Quality code. The regulations should include a code of practice on how late submission of student work is dealt with.

It is good practice for assessment regulations to be:

- Made available to students as well as the programme team: key regulations could be included in the programme specification
- Presented in an accessible and easy-to-understand format.

Meeting assessment deadlines and mitigating circumstances

Centres must have a policy for dealing with mitigating circumstances if students are affected by adverse circumstances, such as illness, which result in non-submission or late submission of an assessment.

Students need to be aware of the importance of meeting assessment deadlines. Centres need to have a policy on assessment regulations which includes completing assignments by the deadlines given to them. Students may be given authorised extensions for legitimate reasons, such as illness, at the time of submission, in accordance with the centre's policies. This means that students are all assessed according to the same conditions and that some are not advantaged by having additional time or opportunity to learn from others.

It is good practice for assessment regulations to be:

- Made available to students as well as the programme team and for key regulations to be included in the programme specification; and

- Presented in an accessible and easy-to-understand format.

In accordance with a centre's own policy, they may apply a grading cap to work that has been submitted late. However, the submitted work should be assessed 'without penalty' in the first instance, the late submission should be recorded, and the student should be made aware that the lateness of submission may have an impact on their grade.

In addition, the student should be informed that they may wish to submit 'mitigating circumstances'; if there are circumstances that have related to the late submission. A decision can then be made (following the centre's own policy) as to whether any exceptional/mitigating circumstances are accepted. Decisions will be ratified by the centre's Assessment Board or some form of Exceptional/Mitigating Circumstances Panel.

Further guidance concerning reasonable adjustments and special consideration in Pearson vocational internally assessed units is available on our [website](#).

Extensions

Students should only be given authorised extensions for legitimate reasons and extenuating circumstances, such as illness at the time of submission. It is best practice to have a clear, published assessment procedure (e.g. in the code of practice and programme specification) for a student to formally apply for an extension if they have genuine reasons for not meeting a deadline. If an extension is granted, the new deadline must be recorded and adhered to. A student who is not in a position to meet the extension deadline based on continuing extenuating circumstances should be able

to apply for further extensions. The process for not meeting extension deadlines, and further concessions granted should be made clear within the centre's internal mitigating policy.

Extension requests should be made prior to the assessment deadline and should be formally approved by the Programme Leader. The duration of extensions should be consistent across all students and should not be after summative feedback has been issued to the other students on the programme. All extensions granted by the Programme Leader must be recorded and made available at the Assessment Board and to the External Examiner (EE). Recording details of extensions enables the Assessment Board and the EE to confirm that the programme is operating consistently in accordance with the centre's and Pearson's policies and guidance.

Alternatively, it can be considered good practice to convene an 'Exceptional Circumstances Panel' that would be responsible for reviewing and accepting or rejecting extension requests from students. While there are no formal guidelines regarding the

membership of such a panel, the Programme Leader must be present in order for the panel to be quorate. Minutes of Extenuating Circumstances Panels (if held) must be retained and made available to the Assessment Board and the EE.

Resubmissions

The key points regarding resubmissions on RQF HNs have been summarised in the following table, with further guidance on the rules and procedure detailed below.

RQF

One resubmission is allowed if a student does not achieve a pass on first submission (same assignment).

The reassessment opportunity will be capped at Pass for that Learning Outcome.

A student will not be entitled to be reassessed in any component for which a Pass or higher has already been awarded.

Please note that the rules and procedures regarding resubmissions in this guide must be adhered to at all times. Contravention of HN resubmission rules will result in the programme's status being set to Certification Pending – Centre Action Required due to incorrect assessment decisions being made. For example, if the External Examiner (EE) identifies that an RQF student has been offered a resubmission after achieving a Pass and has subsequently been awarded a Merit, thus contravening HN resubmission rules, certification for the relevant programme would be set to

Certification Pending – Centre Action Required until the centre 'rolls back' the grade to Pass.

Resubmissions

A student who, for the first assessment opportunity, has failed to achieve a Pass for that unit specification shall be expected to undertake a reassessment.

- Only one opportunity for reassessment of the unit will be permitted
- Reassessment for course work, project or portfolio-based assessments shall normally involve the reworking of the original activity
- For examinations, reassessment shall involve completion of a new activity
- A student who undertakes a reassessment will have their grade capped at a Pass for that Learning Outcome

- A student will not be entitled to be reassessed in any component of assessment for which a Pass grade or higher has already been awarded.

Procedure for resubmissions

If the Programme Leader or Assessment Board does authorise a resubmission, the following conditions apply:

- The resubmission must be recorded in the relevant assessment documentation
- The student must be given a clear and realistic deadline for resubmission that is consistent across all students granted a resubmission. We recommend that students be required to resubmit work within 15 working days of the student being notified that a resubmission has been authorised
- The resubmission must be undertaken by the student with no further guidance
- The original evidence submitted for the assessment can remain valid and be extended, or may need to be replaced partially or in full
- Arrangements should be made for resubmitting the assessment in such a way that does not adversely affect other assessments and does not give the student an unfair advantage over others.

The programme team may opt to conduct a resubmission of the assignment under supervised conditions, even if this was not necessary for the original assessment. For example, this may be necessary to ensure that plagiarism cannot take place.

The External Examiner (EE) is likely to want to include assessments that have been resubmitted as part of the sample they will review.

Repeat Units

RQF

A unit can be repeated if the centre and the Assessment Board decide it is an appropriate course of action.

The unit must be studied again.

The unit can only be repeated once.

Please note that the rules and procedures regarding repeat units in this guide must be adhered to at all times. Contravention of HN repeat unit rules will result in the programme's status being set to Certification Pending – Centre Action Required due to incorrect assessment decisions being made. For example, if the External Examiner (EE) identifies that a student has repeated a unit and been awarded a Merit, thus contravening the repeat unit rules, certification for the relevant programme would be set to Certification Pending – Centre Action Required until the centre amends the grade to a Pass.

When a student repeats a unit, they should not be treated any differently to those students completing the unit for the first time, in terms of the deadlines given and the assessments provided.

Any evidence previously produced by the student for the unit being repeated that did meet the Pass criteria remains valid and may be used for assignments within the repeat unit. Students who are repeating a unit only need to generate evidence for any Pass criteria that they did not achieve in their previous submissions.

Repeat Units The following applies to a student who, for the first assessment opportunity and resubmission opportunity, still failed to achieve a Pass for that unit specification:

- At the centre's discretion and Assessment Board, decisions can be permitted to repeat a unit
- The student must study the unit again with full attendance and (if required) payment of the unit fee
- The overall unit grade for a successfully completed repeat unit is capped at a Pass for that unit
- Units can only be repeated once.

A student who, for the first assessment opportunity within a repeated unit, has failed to achieve a Pass for that unit specification shall be expected to undertake a reassessment. This reassessment will be subject to the standard RQF resubmission rules and regulations as stated above.

If a student repeats an RQF unit and still does not achieve a Pass in neither their first submission nor resubmission, they will be required to either complete a different unit in full or take the unit as compensation. In either instance, the centre must make sure that the relevant rules of combination and requirements have been met.

The External Examiner is likely to want to include assessments that have been re- submitted as part of the sample they will review.

Internal verification of assessment decisions

Internal Verifiers must sample assessed work for each assignment to check the accuracy of assessment decisions. Internal verification of assessment decisions should be carried out by a staff member who is familiar with BTEC assessment at the appropriate level and has subject knowledge of the programme area.

More sampling should be undertaken with new or inexperienced assessors and/or with new BTEC qualifications.

During the course of the programme, internal verification sampling should cover the following:

- Every Assessor
- Every unit
- Work from every assignment
- Every assessment site (for multi- site centres)
- Pass, Merit and Distinction achievement (a student who has not yet achieved or a referred student is also a valid selection).

Feedback from the Internal Verifier to the Assessor should comment on the quality of their feedback to the student and the effective completion of documentation. The Internal Verifier should also give developmental feedback to the Assessor telling them what could be improved e.g. annotation of assessment evidence to show where grades are achieved. Internal verification of assessed work should be clearly recorded. If the Internal Verifier requires action, the Assessor should complete this and return it to the Internal Verifier for their review and sign off.

Internal verification of assessment decisions must not be end-loaded. It is important that it is undertaken as soon as possible after assessment as this will improve the quality of assessment practice and not disadvantage students. Internal Verification must be undertaken before work is returned to the students.

Student appeals

A student appeal is a request to review decisions made by a centre on their progression, assessment and awards.

Centres should have in place a means for ensuring all students and staff are aware of:

- What constitutes an academic appeal and what is considered assessment malpractice
- The related processes for instigating an appeal or investigating malpractice
- The possible outcomes that may be reached
- The consequences of both internal and external outcomes
- The process that exists to enable students to make an appeal with Pearson relating to external or internally awarded assessment outcomes.

Procedures should be known and understood by students and staff. Malpractice issues can be minimised by ensuring students and staff are aware of the issues: plagiarism, collusion, fabrication of results, falsifying grades, fraudulent certification claims; referencing skills; promoting a zero tolerance approach. Centres do not need to inform Pearson of student malpractice for internally assessed units and the centre's malpractice policy should be followed in resolving the matter. If an External Examiner (EE) discovers plagiarism that has not been identified and/or dealt with by a centre, they will set the status of the relevant programme(s) to Certification Pending – Centre Action Required.

The appeals process must be understood by students and staff. It should be transparent and enable formal challenges to assessment grades. A thorough student induction programme could cover this. The student handbook is also a useful way to ensure the key information about assessment and appeals policies are communicated.

Students have a final right of appeal to Pearson, but only if the procedures in place at the centre have been fully utilised or if the student is dissatisfied with the outcome. Further details are given in the [Enquiries and appeals about Pearson vocational qualifications policy](#).

If students are not satisfied with the result of their appeal after following their centre's processes, they can also request that the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#) for England and Wales, review their complaint. The OIA will not deal with complaints about academic judgment but will look at academic appeals. Centres can check if they are a member of the OIA scheme in the [list of providers covered in the OIA scheme](#).

Following the OIA process does not prevent students from pursuing a complaint or appeal with Pearson and they may choose whichever route(s) they feel is the most appropriate. Students in Northern Ireland may raise their complaint with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

Student complaints

A student complaint is the expression of a specific concern about matters that affect the quality of their learning opportunities.

Centres must have procedures in place to enable students to constructively complain about their learning opportunities, to enable provision to be enhanced in a timely way. Making a complaint should not disadvantage the student. Centres must publish their complaints procedure to students.

The Pearson External Examiner (EE) will ask to meet with students annually when they visit the centre. They will ask the students directly about their experiences of teaching and learning on the programme and report appropriately in their report.

Students (studying in England or Wales) may also raise their complaint with the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#) and students in Northern Ireland may raise their complaint with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO). Students can make their complaint to one of the above recognised external bodies simultaneously with any complaint [submitted to Pearson](#).

Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a method of assessment that considers whether students can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and so do not need to develop through a course of learning. It is used sparingly and can be applicable to adult students returning to education.

Pearson encourages centres to recognise students' previous achievements and experiences whether at work, home or at leisure, as well as in the classroom. RPL provides a route for the recognition of the achievements resulting from continuous learning. RPL enables recognition of achievement from a range of activities using any valid assessment methodology. Provided that the assessment requirements of a given unit or qualification have been met (through evidence that the relevant unit learning outcomes have been met by a students' prior learning), the use of RPL is acceptable for accrediting a unit, units or a whole qualification. Evidence of learning must be valid and reliable.

Centres are expected to develop their own RPL policy in line with Pearson policy. Further guidance can be found in Pearson's [recognition of prior learning policy and process](#).

Mapping achievement

Some of the current HN (RQF) units have been mapped against the previous HN (QCF) units, and mapping information can be found on the relevant qualification pages of our website. As the current HN (RQF) qualifications are significantly different from the previous HN (QCF) qualifications, the RPL route will require students to complete considerable work to fulfil the missing learning outcomes required.

The Pearson policy regarding RPL can be found [here](#)



Where **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** evidence is being assessed against graded units, Pass, Merit and Distinction criteria can be awarded.

Retention of student evidence and assessment records

Student evidence and assessment records must be kept safely and securely to ensure that they are available for verification. Up to date, securely stored assessment records also help to minimise the risk of assessment malpractice, or potential issues if an Assessor leaves during a BTEC programme.

Centres will need to:

- Store all assessment records securely and safely relating to both internally and externally set assessments
- Maintain records of student achievements that are up to date, regularly reviewed and tracked accurately against national standards
- Retain both internal and external assessment records for centre and awarding body scrutiny for a **minimum of three years following certification**
- Have all current student evidence available for verification purposes.
- Retain all student work for a **minimum of 12 weeks** after certification has taken place. In certain cases, it may be more feasible to retain photographic evidence of three-dimensional pieces of work rather than retaining the work itself.

All assessment records (including internal verification records) must be secure against hazards like theft and fire, etc. The records must be of sufficient detail to show exactly how assessment decisions were made (i.e. to assessment criterion level). Data should only be

accessible by relevant staff. Records must be securely kept for Pearson audit and in case of student appeals, certification issues, etc.

Up to date and accurate student progress information regarding registration, student feedback and progress, and achievement (at assessment criterion level) must be recorded. Staff must check the accuracy of the information recorded.

Student records and monitoring information should be kept in an appropriate and accessible format. This may be electronic. Records must be available to Pearson for audit on request. This is particularly important when there are changes to assessment staff.

Experience tells us that this is a common cause of quality issues.

Student work must be made available to Pearson as required. On occasion, the regulator may also request portfolios of student work and assessment records. The format and storage of evidence must allow for this: security needs to be maintained. This is usually at programme team level. It is a risk to allow students to keep work long term while on programme. Wherever possible, evidence produced by students still on programme should be kept at the centre. Electronic archiving is acceptable, providing it is sufficient and accessible on request.

Assessment Boards

It is a formal Pearson requirement that centres hold Assessment Boards for all of their BTEC Higher National programmes. Centres are not required to hold Assessment Boards for their BTEC Professional programmes.

The main purpose of an Assessment Board is to make recommendations on:

- The grades achieved by students on the individual modules or units
- Extenuating circumstances
- Cases of cheating and plagiarism
- Progression of students onto the next stage of the programme
- The awards to be made to students
- Referrals and deferrals.

The main Boards are normally held at the end of the session, although if a centre operates on a semester system there may be (intermediate) Boards at the end of the first semester. There may also be separate Boards to deal with matters such as repeat units and mitigating circumstances. The Assessment Board can also delegate certain responsibilities to Programme Leaders, such as the power to authorise resubmissions.

Where a centre does not currently have such a process, the External Examiner (EE) will discuss this with the Quality Nominee and Programme Leader, stressing the requirement for Assessment Boards from Pearson and an expectation from the QAA that assessment and classification an expectation from the QAA that assessment and clarification processes are reliable, fair and transparent.

Preparation for an Assessment Board

All members of Assessment Boards must be aware of the associated policies and procedures prior to the meetings taking place. Written information should be provided about:

- Membership
- How the views of those unable to attend might be recorded.
- The quorum for meetings and how to deal with the meeting being inquorate
- Provision for Chair's action, its limitations and the recording and reporting of such decisions
- The exercise of discretion in a consistent manner, for example in relation to extenuating/mitigating circumstances, and borderline cases.

It is essential that centres develop these policies prior to organising an Assessment Board and that they have been accepted by the formal structures of the centre's quality assurance systems.

Good preparation prior to the Assessment Board is essential if it is to be effective. Ways of ensuring this are to:

- Plan meeting dates for the academic year and circulate them to the members of the Assessment Board
- Ensure that these dates are after the External Examiners' (EEs') visit
- Collate all information regarding students' achievement and ask appropriate staff to indicate which students will need discussion at the Assessment Board, for example because of mitigating circumstances (this will save time during the meeting)
- Circulate an agenda in good time before the Assessment Board meeting and ask members to confirm their attendance. This is important as meetings must be quorate in accordance with the centre's policies
- Include a declaration of Conflicts of Interest as a standing agenda item so that members can abstain from specific discussions if they need to
- Identify who will minute the meeting and that he/she is aware of the responsibilities of this role.

Membership

It is advisable that the Chair and the Secretary of an Assessment Board are, as far as possible, independent of the programme under consideration. Larger centres often use the head of a different department, or a Faculty Dean, or even a Head of Quality Assurance to ensure this. Likewise, the Secretary can be from another department or from the Quality Assurance department. It is more difficult for small centres to arrange for this requirement. The main point is that the Programme Leader should not chair Assessment Boards.

Centres cannot insist that Pearson's External Examiners (EEs) attend Assessment Boards, although it is essential that they have the right to attend. It may be possible for centres to arrange with their External Examiner (EE) an examination visit that includes time for them to attend the Assessment Board. Alternatively, they will need to see the minutes from the most recent Assessment Board(s) held.

All members of the programme team should attend the Assessment Board. Clearly, absences are sometimes unavoidable, but it would become a quality issue if certain members were regularly absent, or if attendance were to be persistently poor.

In larger centres the agenda is normally determined centrally, so that all Assessment Boards operate in the same way. In smaller centres this may be left to the department. The style of agenda will vary from centre to centre, but should cover the main purpose of Assessment Boards.

Centres with little experience in operating higher education programmes may request advice from the External Examiner (EE) in developing good practice for Assessment Boards.

It can save time if the programme team has discussed results prior to the Assessment Board meeting, although these discussions must remain strictly confidential.

Assessment Board decisions

There must be clarity for students and staff about when and how results will be provided, and about whom students can contact should they require clarification of their results or advice on decisions affecting their future study. Consideration should be given to how students obtain results when they are released during vacations, or for students who are away from the location of delivery. When results are provided, they should include clear information about whether each result is provisional or final. If provisional, the information must make clear when the results will be finalised. Students also need to be aware of the timescale for lodging an academic appeal or complaint following final results.

Centres should implement an explicit policy detailing the length of time for which records of decisions and student results will be retained. This process helps to demonstrate that

assessment processes have been properly applied through the records of Assessment Board discussions. This is particularly important in the event of an academic appeal or student complaint.

Note, the Chair would be required to review and agree should any grade require amendment after the assessment board has been held.

If a Pearson External Examiner (EE) attends an Assessment Board, it is in the capacity of an adviser; they have no power of veto at the Board. If an EE feels that a wrong decision is being made, they can only register disagreement with the decision in their report.

Minutes

Assessment Boards are responsible for ensuring that assessment decisions are recorded accurately, supported by taking adequate minutes of any discussions when extenuating/mitigating circumstances are considered. Such an approach provides assurance and transparency. The minutes of the Assessment Board must be made available to the External Examiner (EE).

The minutes would be expected to state:

- Who was present and in what capacity
- Who was in the Chair
- The duration of the meeting
- The results/outcomes for each unit and each student.
- The factors influencing decisions on extenuating circumstances, resubmissions, repeat unit(s)
- The meanings of abbreviations and technical/jargon terms.

The minutes should be confidential but should not include information of a sensitive nature. They should enable somebody who was not there to judge whether the decisions were appropriate.

Confidentiality

Centres should be extremely careful about what happens to the documentation used in the meeting. Practice varies, with some centres insisting that only the Chair and Secretary keep the documentation, while others allow the programme leader and External Examiners (EEs) to keep them too. Centres must have clear regulations on how students are informed of

their results. No discussion of individual results or counselling of students should take place until after the results have been formally ratified and results lists have been published. It is good practice for only certain people, authorised by the Assessment Board to do so, to discuss results with students.

Example materials

Blank templates of the following documents are available on the assessment and verification forms section of our website. These documents may be used as a starting point to help plan, deliver, assess and verify BTEC programmes. They are not mandatory and may be amended to suit the requirements of each centre.

- Assessment planning
- Assignment brief – BTEC (RQF)
- Internal verification of assignment brief – BTEC (RQF)
- Observation record
- Witness statement
- Assessment tracking
- Internal verification of assessment decisions – BTEC (RQF).

For HN (RQF) qualifications, Example Assessment Briefs (EABs), Authorised

Assignment Briefs (AABs) and Schemes of Work (SOW) have been produced for some units. Centres can use these documents as a template for their own delivery, contextualising them to meet their students' needs. These documents can be found on HN Global.

Assessment and feedback guidance for centres and Assessors for HN (RQF) qualifications has also been produced and is available on HN Global.

Glossary of BTEC terminology

Academic Management Review (AMR)	This is the annual centre quality visit for UK Alternative Providers.
Annual Programme Monitoring Report (APMR)	The Annual Programme Monitoring Report is a written annual review form that provides an opportunity for centres to analyse and reflect on the most recent teaching year.
Assignments and Assessments	Assessment refers to the process of measuring the level of a student's achievement of required learning. An assignment is the articulation of the work that a student will be required to undertake, in order to provide evidence that can be evaluated in the assessment. Effectively, the assignment enables assessment to take place.
Centre Quality Manager (CQM)	Centre Quality Managers (CQMs) are an important part of our partnership and are full-time managers who work in Centre Management. They support Vocational Quality Standards to maintain effective quality assurance within Pearson vocational centres. CQMs provide support to maintain regulatory requirements and the integrity of centre assessment, delivery and quality assurance. They also monitor the Academic Management Review (AMR) process, including 'block recommended' centres. The CQMs can be contacted at qualitymanagement@pearson.com .
Edexcel Online (EOL)	This is a multifunctional system for centres. Access is password protected and is managed by the centre's examinations officer(s). Screens show programmes and students within a centre, allow for new registrations or withdrawals, and provide access to External Examiner (EE) allocations and reports. EOL can be accessed at www.edexcelonline.com . Support for the use of Edexcel Online can be found on our website here .

Exams Officers	Our Exams Officers team provides support to the Exams Officers at centres with a range of queries and issues, such as those relating to administration. The team also sends weekly communications to Exams Officers and conducts face-to-face and online training sessions to help Exams Officers navigate through Pearson's systems. They can be reached at examsofficers@pearson.com .
External Examiner (EE)	The External Examiner (EE) is a subject assessment specialist appointed by the awarding body to conduct external examination. This verifies that centre management of programmes and assessment decisions meet national standards. External examination is conducted by an annual visit
Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	Guided Learning Hours are defined as the time when a tutor is present to give specific guidance towards the learning aim being studied on a programme. This definition includes lectures, tutorials and supervised study in, for example, open learning provision and learning workshops. Guided Learning includes any supervised assessment activity, this includes invigilated examination and observed assessment and observed work-based practice
Higher Nationals Assessment	The Higher Nationals Assessment team is responsible for the quality assurance of all BTEC Higher National qualifications. The Assessment team manages External Examiners (EEs) and are centres' main point of contact for quality assurance and assessment concerns and queries.
Internal Verification (IV)	This is a centre-/team-based process. Internal Verifiers check the quality of assignments before delivery to students and verify the accuracy of assessment decisions to meet national standards. Centres should have an internal verification plan to manage the process.

Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)	The Joint Council for Qualifications is a membership organisation comprising the eight largest providers of qualifications in the UK. The JCQ provides a single voice for its members on issues of examination administration and, when appropriate, qualification and wider education policy.
Office for Students (OfS)	A regulatory and competition authority for England that is responsible for distributing funding to institutions delivering higher education programmes, promoting fair access to higher education, administering the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the Register of Higher Education Providers.
Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)	The regulator of qualifications, exams and tests in England. Qualifications Wales has responsibility for education in Wales, and the Department for Education (Northern Ireland) has responsibility for education in Northern Ireland.
PQS Malpractice	This area is formed of two parts: Candidate Malpractice Investigations Processing Team – This team manages incidents of suspected malpractice within Pearson qualifications. For internal units, all incidents of suspected or actual malpractice identified after the student has signed their declaration of authentication must be declared to candidatemalpractice@pearson.com. The Candidate Malpractice Investigations Team will review the information provided and advise on the next steps. In cases where the student has not completed a declaration of authentication, you should follow your centre's policy in dealing with the suspected malpractice. PQS Investigations Team – This team manages incidents of suspected staff and centre malpractice (including maladministration) affecting Pearson qualifications. All reports of alleged, suspected, or actual malpractice must be reported to pqsmalpractice@pearson.com. The PQS Investigations Team will review the information provided and advise on the next steps.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)	This is the independent body responsible for monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education, this includes UK qualifications delivered outside the UK. As such Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals must meet the quality standards prescribed by the QAA.
QAA Quality Code	The QAA has developed a Quality Code in liaison with the higher education sector and it is maintained and published on the sector's behalf, by the QAA. It sets out the Expectations that all providers of UK higher education are required to meet.
Quality Nominee (QN)	This is the person nominated by the centre who acts as main contact for BTEC.
RQF	Regulated Qualification Framework