



# **BTEC Centre Guide to Enhanced Quality Assurance and Assessment 2017–18**

**Level 4 Higher National Certificates  
Level 5 Higher National Diplomas**

**Version 2**



## Scope

This handbook applies to Pearson's new BTEC Level 4 Higher National Certificates (RQF) and Level 5 Higher National Diplomas (RQF) in operation from September 2016. It also applies to Level 4 Higher National Certificates and Level 5 Higher National Diplomas developed through Pearson's Self-Regulated Framework and in operation from September 2016.

Furthermore, it applies to Pearson's BTEC Higher National Certificate Level 4 (QCF), Higher National Diploma Level 5 (QCF) in existence prior to September 2016 and still offered by Centres. It is also applicable to Pearson's Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas developed through Pearson's Self-Regulated Framework and in operation before September 2016 (however, the assessment provisions for pre September 2016 Higher Nationals can be found in [BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4-7](#)).

This guidance is applicable to UK and International Centres offering Higher Nationals. It does not apply to other Pearson qualifications.

Wherever possible the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Quality Code '19 Expectations' are cross-referenced to indicate the practice through which they can be achieved.

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## Introduction and Rationale

This handbook contains additional guidance on quality procedures, assessment and delivery for Centres and programme teams delivering all BTEC Higher National Certificates and Diplomas. The guidance reflects changes made in the assessment and quality assurance of Pearson Higher Nationals with the introduction of the Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) and should be read alongside existing Centre guidance for Pearson vocational qualifications at Levels 4–7.

The rationale for the development of this handbook is to support the delivery of the different types of Higher Nationals through a period of transition from the pre 2016 framework qualifications to post 2016 developments as it is acknowledged that some Centres will deliver both for a period of time across the range of subjects.

## Other 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 and delivery guidance which provide instructions and advice for each unit in the qualification. Please note, in larger programmes with a significant number of units available, the units may be published as separate documents to the initial specification guidance. All BTEC specifications are freely available on our [New BTEC Higher Nationals website](#).

### BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4–7 (QCF)

This guide contains detailed information about QCF and pre 2016 SRF assessment including:

- roles and responsibilities of the programme team
- staff and student handbooks
- student recruitment and induction
- planning assessment
- assessment strategies
- plagiarism
- assignment design
- Assessment Boards.

### Guide to BTEC Quality Assurance Levels 4–7 (QCF)

We use quality assurance to check that all centres are working to the appropriate 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. The Quality Assurance page on the [website](#) has been designed so that you can access both Centre guidance for Quality Assurance and specific guidance for qualifications at Levels 4–7.

# Enhanced Quality Assurance

## What is Enhanced 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 for Higher Education (QAA) are met.
- It facilitates a high quality learning experience for students to enable high achievement.

The Enhanced Quality Assurance measures introduced in 2016 are designed to ensure that Centre procedures and practice in delivering higher education, meet the requirements of the Quality Code.

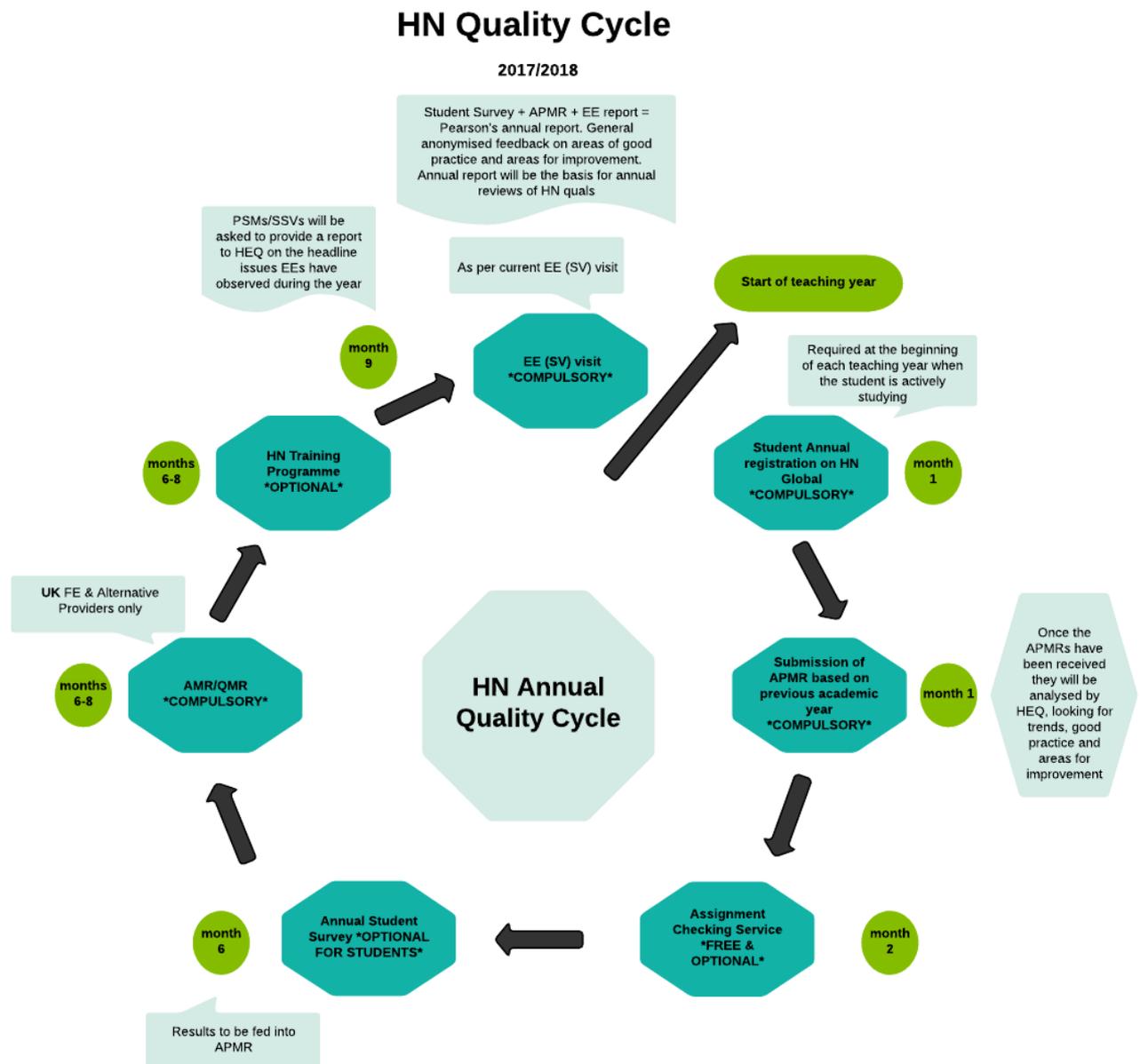
Pearson's quality assurance system for all Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes is benchmarked to Level 4 and Level 5 on the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will ensure that Centres have effective quality assurance processes to review programme delivery. It will also ensure that the outcomes of assessment are to national standards.

The enhanced quality assurance process for Centres offering all Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes comprise five key components:

1. The approval process
2. Monitoring of internal provider systems
3. Independent Assessment Review
4. Annual programme monitoring report
5. Annual student survey.

*(Quality Code Expectation A1, A2.2)*

# The Quality Cycle for BTEC Higher Nationals



Prepared by Director Higher Education Qualifications: June 2017 - Version 2.0

## Terms used within the Quality Cycle

- EE – External Examiner
- SV – Standards Verifier
- APMR – Annual Programme Monitoring Report
- AMR – Academic Management Review – Annual Centre visit for UK Alternative Centres
- QMR – Quality Management Review – Annual Centre visit for UK Further Education Colleges
- FE – Further Education

# Qualification Approval for Higher Nationals

## What is the process for qualification approval?

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

Prior to 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 independent assessment (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 approval must be supported by the head of the organisation, (Principal or Chief Executive, etc.) and, include a declaration that the provider will operate the programmes strictly as approved, and in line with Pearson requirements.

Centres seeking to renew their programme approval upon expiry of their current approval period may be eligible for the Automatic Approval process, subject to the provider meeting the eligibility criteria set out by Pearson.

The process for existing Centres seeking to renew is called the Programme Review and Approval (PRA) and further detailed information about guidelines and processes can be found at [Pearson BTEC Higher National Approval – Guidance assurance measures for the NEW Pearson BTEC](#).

This document sets out the different processes for approval depending on whether a provider is:

- actively delivering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals
- approved, but not actively delivering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals
- in the process of seeking approval to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals
- 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.

*(Quality Code Expectations B1, B4, B6)*

## 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 policy document [Additional sites policy for centres that deliver vocational and/or general qualifications](#).

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.

*(Quality Code Expectation B10)*

## Collaborative Arrangements

Some Centres may wish to work in collaboration with other Centres to deliver the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals. The [Collaborative arrangements for the delivery of vocational qualifications policy](#) provides further information.

The policy defines collaborative arrangements in the UK and internationally.

It describes the different models of collaborative arrangements and their associated principles.

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

The four models of collaborative arrangements are:

- Informal collaboration  
This is when two or more 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 Pearson approval is required)
- Consortium collaborative arrangement  
Two or more 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)
- 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 is required)
- Sharing Self-Regulated qualifications (Pearson approval is required)

*(Quality Code Expectation B10)*

## Removal of Provider Approval

Regardless of the type of provider, Pearson reserves the right to withdraw either qualification or provider approval when it deems there is an irreversible breakdown in the provider'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 provider or programme approval will generally be taken by Pearson Centre Management or Business Improvement and Regulation teams, and approved by the Responsible Officer in each case. This situation may arise because:

- the Pearson Malpractice Committee determines this is an appropriate sanction to impose, following a malpractice investigation
- the provider has breached the terms and conditions of its provider or programme approval
- there are significant and/or repeated quality issues identified through the Quality Assurance programme
- there are long-standing financial issues which the provider has been unable or unwilling to resolve
- the provider has approval for programmes but is no longer active
- Pearson no longer has confidence in the provider's senior management team.

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

*(Quality Code Expectation A3.1)*

# Monitoring of Internal Provider Systems

Centres will be required to demonstrate ongoing fulfilment of the approval criteria over time and across all Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes. The process that assures this is external examination, which is undertaken by External Examiners (also known as Standards Verifiers (SVs)). Centres will be given the opportunity to present evidence of the ongoing suitability and deployment of their systems to carry out the required functions. This includes the consistent application of policies affecting student registrations, appeals, effective internal examination and standardisation processes. Where appropriate, Centres may present evidence of their operation within a recognised code of practice, such as that of the QAA. Pearson reserves the right to confirm independently that these arrangements are operating to Pearson's standards. Pearson will affirm, or not, the ongoing effectiveness of such systems. Where system failures are identified, sanctions (appropriate to the nature of the problem) will be applied, in order to assist the provider in correcting the problem.

*(Quality Code Expectation A3.1)*

## Roles and Responsibilities

Full details of the roles and responsibilities of the delivery and assessment team can be found in the [BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4-7](#).

### External Examiner

External Examiners ensure that Centres are meeting appropriate standards. They are appointed by Pearson and are not members of the programme and assessment team. Their role is essentially that of a moderator, they do not mark work but moderate the decisions made by Internal Verifiers.

They have the right to attend Assessment Boards and are also able to act in an advisory capacity.

External Examination performs the same quality checks as other forms of standards verification. It also ensures that the processes and procedures you have in place are consistent and appropriate for qualifications at higher and professional levels.

### 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 enhanced quality assurance measures for Higher Nationals requires additional oversight. In some Centres, responsibility for Higher National provision is not undertaken by the Centre Quality

Nominee. For 2017–18 we are introducing a new role, available on EOL 'HE Contact', for Centres to designate the person responsible for Higher Education across the Centre.

The Centre Lead for Higher Education is responsible for establishing and maintaining Centre policies and procedures related to Higher Nationals, qualification approval, and for ensuring the accuracy of public information.

## Programme Leader for Higher Nationals

An important role in the management of quality in Higher Nationals is the Programme Leader. A Programme Leader for Higher Nationals is a person designated by a Centre to take overall responsibility for all Higher Nationals offered at the Centre. The Programme Leader may also act as an Assessor and/or Internal Verifier.

The Programme Leader for Higher Nationals is responsible for ensuring that all elements of assessment and quality assurance for Higher Nationals are implemented accurately and consistently across the organisation. This is to ensure the enhancement of learning opportunities for current and future Higher National students.

Detailed guidance relating to Centre management of Quality Assurance for UK and International Centres can be found on the [Guide to BTEC Quality Assurance website](#).

## Conflicts of Interest

All Centres and their staff need to be aware of the potential for conflict of interests when delivering the BTEC Higher Nationals.

A conflict of interest is a situation in which an individual, or provider has competing interests or loyalties. In the case of an individual, the conflict of interest could compromise, or appear to compromise, their decisions if it is not properly managed. It is important that Centres have in place a Conflict of Interest Policy which is available to all staff as a point of reference. The Pearson policy for its staff provides an example of such a policy that could be adapted by Centres for their own organisation. The Pearson [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) defines what is meant by conflict of interest and provides examples of how it can be avoided.

Steps need to be taken by Centres to minimise this risk and a formal log of potential and actual conflicts of interest should be kept up to date by the provider, including the 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.

# Management and Delivery of Higher Level Programmes

The External Examiner (EE) Report will cover the following:

- Actions from your previous report including anything that hasn't been addressed.
- Management of Academic Standards. The EE will be looking for evidence that you have effective management procedures in place including minutes of the Assessment Board and Centre policies and procedures related to assessment submission and appeals.
- Effectiveness of Assessment Instruments. The EE will confirm whether the assessment instruments are appropriate for the level of qualification and that their design and nature permit the aims and learning objectives of each programme to be met.
- Maintenance and audit of records to check that your assessment records are accurate, up to date and stored securely. They will also confirm that your process for maintaining and auditing assessment records is secure and effective.
- Registration and certification claims process for ensuring that student registration and certification information is accurate and monitored effectively.
- Student Support and review. During your visit, the EE will speak to staff and students, reviewing the support given to students.
- Areas of good practice. Any areas of particularly good practice mentioned in other sections of the report will be highlighted.

## Independent Assessment Review

### What is independent assessment review?

The internal assessment outcomes reached for all Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes benchmarked to Level 4 and Level 5 of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), are subject to a visit from a Pearson appointed External Examiner. The outcomes of this process will be:

- to confirm that internal assessment is to national standards and allow certification, or
- to make recommendations to improve the quality of assessment outcomes before certification is released, or
- to make recommendations about the provider's ability to continue to be approved for the Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications in question.

*(Quality Code Expectations A3.3, A3.4, B7)*

## Outcomes of Independent Assessment Review

As outlined in the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, at both Centre and programme level, you must give full and serious consideration to the comments 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.

You should ensure that student representatives are given the opportunity to be fully involved in this process, enabling them to understand all the issues raised and your 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.

Further guidance to help you prepare for External Examination and for making appeals against the outcome of External Examination can be found on the [website](#).

## Annual Programme Monitoring Report

All Pearson UK and International Centres that had approval to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes during 2016–17 must submit a review of their Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals delivery for that period and for each year thereafter.

For delivery in 2016–17 the completed APMR must be submitted by **30th November 2017**.

The Annual Programme Monitoring Report, available to Centres in electronic format, is an opportunity for Centres to analyse and reflect on the previous teaching year. The APMR is not subject specific but focuses on the Assessors Centre's Higher National provision as a whole. By working in collaboration with Centres, the information can be used by Pearson to further enhance the quality assurance of the Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes by sharing good practice, identifying problems and supporting Centres.

The Annual Programme Monitoring Report is an essential part of the enhanced quality assurance measures for approved Pearson BTEC Higher National Centres, as well as being an expectation under the Self-Regulated Quality Code (Programme Monitoring and Review – Chapter B8). Should a Centre fail to submit their online APMR without good reason their External Examiner will be notified. Non-submission could lead to a quality block or to the removal of programme approval.

*(Quality Code Expectation B8)*

Further information regarding the use of the electronic APMR can be found on the following link: [Guidance on the completion of the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals Annual Programme Monitoring Report\(s\) covering 2016–17 delivery](#).

# Annual Student Survey

Feedback from students completing each stage of their programme is essential to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning experience, therefore Pearson will conduct an annual survey of the experience of Pearson BTEC Higher National students.

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 National 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
- to support the development of resources for Pearson BTEC Higher National students globally.

The survey will also provide a global perspective of student opinion from around the world.

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 suite and in response to the requirements 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 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.

*(Quality Code Expectations B4, B5)*

# Regulation and Oversight

## The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education

### The Quality Code

As well as meeting the quality requirements for the delivery of Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals, Centres also need to meet the quality and standards requirements of the 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 also meet the quality standards prescribed by the QAA.

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 Centres of UK higher education are required to meet.

The purpose of the Quality Code is to:

- safeguard the academic standards of UK higher education
- assure the quality of the learning opportunities that UK higher education offers to students
- promote continuous and systematic improvement in UK higher education
- ensure that information about UK higher education is publicly available.

As the Awarding Organisation for Higher Nationals, Pearson has published a guide to provide information and support for Centres preparing for a QAA review. The document is available on the link below:

A detailed overview of the Quality Code can be found at [The UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

For a list of all the Expectations which make up the Quality Code, please see the summary list of [The 19 Expectations](#).

Throughout this guide the Expectations are cross referenced, wherever possible, to specific sections.

## The Quality Code Part A: The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

The FHEQ is an important reference point for Centres of higher education. The FHEQ, and associated guidance for implementation, has been written:

- to assist higher education Centres to maintain academic standards
- to inform international comparability of academic standards, especially in the European context
- to ensure international competitiveness
- to facilitate student and graduate mobility.

Higher Education Centres may find it useful to refer to the FHEQ in their discussions with the main stakeholders in higher education (prospective students, parents, schools and employers) about the outcomes and attributes that each qualification represents.

The qualification descriptors contained in the FHEQ exemplify the outcomes and attributes expected of learning that results in the award of higher education qualifications. Guidance on the FHEQ can be found in Part A of the Quality Code: [Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards](#).

## The Quality Code Part B: Enhancement of Learning Opportunities

Enhancement is defined as the process by which higher education Centres systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. This means that the provider takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities.

Evidence of enhancement is available in the Centre's curriculum planning and quality assurance activities such as:

- Centre Higher Education strategic plan
- Centre Higher Education curriculum plan
- HE policies (may be presented as an addendum to Centre policies)
- HE student engagement
- minutes of meetings (e.g. Assessment Board)
- HE Annual Programme Monitoring Report.

Enhancement is more than a collection of examples of good practice that might be found across a provider. It is about a provider being aware that it has responsibility to improve the quality of learning opportunities, and to have policies, structures and procedures in place to make sure it can do so. It means that the willingness to consider enhancement stems from a high-level awareness of the need for improvement and is embedded throughout the organisation.

## The Quality Code Part C: Public Information

Part C of the Self-Regulated Quality Code provides the following guidance principles to higher education Centres regarding sharing information about the higher education they offer:

- Principle 1: Information that higher education Centres produce about themselves and the learning opportunities they offer should be timely, current, transparent and focused on the needs of the intended audiences.
- Principle 2: Higher education Centres are responsible, and accountable, for the information they produce about the higher education learning opportunities they offer. At the same time, Centres have autonomy regarding the mechanisms and media they choose to communicate this information.
- Principle 3: Information should be available and retrievable where intended audiences and information users can reasonably expect to find it. The format and delivery of information should take account of the access requirements of a diverse audience.
- Principle 4: Information produced by higher education Centres should offer a fair and accurate reflection of the higher education learning opportunities they offer.

## Qualification Titles and Subject Pathways

When referring to one of our qualifications you should always use the full title of the qualification and where applicable, the subject pathway, for example:

'Pearson BTEC Level 5 Higher National Diploma in Business: Accounting and Finance'

A link to Part C of the QAA Quality Code can be found [here](#).

# QAA Review Methods

## Further Education Colleges

In the UK, the QAA will undertake Quality Review Visits on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (DENI) from February 2017.

The Gateway process is one element of the [funding bodies' revised operating model](#) for quality assessment England and Northern Ireland. It applies to Centres seeking to enter the (publicly funded) higher education sector and to recent entrants approaching the end of their developmental period, having undergone a period of enhanced monitoring and scrutiny. A Quality Review Visit may also be necessary where there is evidence of a sufficiently serious problem in an established provider.

Quality Review Visit will:

- rigorously test a new entrant's readiness to enter the higher education sector
- re-test the quality aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements at the end of a new entrant's four-year developmental period
- re-test the quality aspects of the baseline regulatory requirements in an 'established' provider that has been deemed by the relevant funding body to require enhanced monitoring.

In addition, those Centres that were scheduled for QAA Higher Education Review (HER) in 2016–17 and have not had two or more successful reviews under the previous quality assessment arrangements will also receive a Quality Review Visit. This is part of the transition to the full implementation of the new quality assessment arrangements in England and Northern Ireland.

The outcomes of the Quality Review Visit will be considered by the relevant funding body, which will make full use of them in reaching its broader judgement about the provider's readiness, or not, to enter the higher education sector, or to remain in, or exit the 'developmental period' as appropriate.

Further guidance can be found on the QAA [website](#).

## Alternative Centres

Higher Education Review (Alternative Centres) is QAA's principal review method for alternative Centres. The [Handbook](#) available on the QAA website gives guidance to Centres preparing for, and taking part in, this type of review.

For Centres requiring educational oversight for Tier 4 Sponsorship purposes, Higher Education Review (Alternative Centres) has two components. The first component is a check on financial sustainability, management and governance ('the FSMG check'), which has the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure of their education

provider. The second component is a review of the provider's arrangements for maintaining the academic standards and quality of the courses it offers ('the review of quality assurance arrangements'), which aims to inform students and the wider public whether a provider meets the expectations of the higher education sector for:

- the setting and/or maintenance of academic standards
- the provision of learning opportunities
- the provision of information
- the enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities.

For Centres undergoing Higher Education Review (Alternative Centres) for specific course designation for student support purposes, the FSMG check is carried out by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) after the Quality Assurance review has taken place. The FSMG check is conducted entirely separately from the review of quality assurance arrangements.

The review of quality assurance arrangements is carried out by peer reviewers, staff and students from other Centres. The reviewers are guided by a set of UK Expectations about the provision of higher education contained in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Students are at the heart of Higher Education Review (Alternative Centres). There are opportunities for the provider's students to take part in the review, including by contributing a student submission, meeting the review team during the review visit, working with their Centres in response to review outcomes, and acting as the lead student representative. In addition, review teams of three or more normally include a student reviewer.

Higher Education Review (Alternative Centres) culminates in the publication of a report containing the judgements and other findings. The provider is then obliged to produce an action plan in consultation with students, describing how it intends to respond to those findings. Action plans are monitored through the annual monitoring process.

*(Quality Code Expectations A3.3, A3.4)*

## Review of Transnational Education (TNE)

Internationally, the QAA reviews UK Transnational Education (THE) as part of its mission to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered.

Pearson, as the awarding organisation for the BTEC Higher National qualifications, is responsible for their academic standards whether delivered in the UK or through partnerships abroad.

The QAA reviews the partnership arrangements that UK institutions have made with organisations in other countries to deliver UK programmes by way of a Transnational Education review.

It is important to note that it is not the QA's role to review or accredit partner institutions outside the UK. However, guidance is provided by the QAA concerning the selection of partners in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B10](#).

*(Quality Code Expectations A3.3, A3.4)*

A review of Transnational Education is carried out according to the same principles and processes as the QAA review methods for Higher Education Institutions:

- it is a peer reviewed, evidence-based process
- the UK awarding organisation (Pearson) provides a briefing document describing its overseas provision
- overseas review usually involves a one-day visit of a review team to the awarding organisation to meet staff and students, and a similar visit to the partner institution overseas.

The reviews are conducted on a country by country basis. The method for transnational review is customised according to the country in which programmes are located, and the type of programmes being covered. Partnership arrangements are also reviewed through this process.

Some institutions with overseas provision may not be reviewed, but may take part in the information gathering exercise which feeds into the country overview, or in case studies exploring particular aspects of overseas partnership provision.

To meet the QAA requirements, it is essential that senior managers in international partner institutions are fully aware of existing partnership arrangements.

Further Guidance is available from the QAA [Review of Transnational Education](#)

## The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. It is a non-ministerial department. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is the regulator for all qualifications in Northern Ireland. Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications have been 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 RQF was launched in October 2015 and it is now a requirement for Awarding Bodies to describe the size of their qualifications by using Total Qualification Time as a descriptor, (TQT). This provides an indication of how long a typical student will take to study for a qualification. It is also necessary to indicate the number of Guided Learning Hours and this represents the number of hours tutors are available to give guidance to students for learning. The TQT needed for each qualification is given in each Higher National subject specification document. Further information can be found at [Explaining the RQF](#).

*(Quality Code Expectation A2, B9)*

## The Competition and Markets Authority

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) works 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 Centres of Higher Education.

'Higher Education Centres Consumer Law' applies to Higher Education through the relationship between Centres of Higher Education and their students. Centres 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 Centres could be in breach of consumer law and students may have the right to take legal action. Therefore, it is essential for Centres to comply with these requirements.

Further information can be found at [Higher Education Centres: Consumer Law](#).

*(Quality Code Expectation C)*

## Office of the Independent Adjudicator

The Higher Education Act 2004 required the appointment of an independent body to oversee a student complaints scheme in England and Wales and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) was designated to operate this scheme in 2005. From the outset, all universities in England and Wales were required to subscribe to the Scheme.

On 1 September 2015 the relevant section of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 came into force on extending the range of higher education Centres that are required to participate in the Scheme. Subscribers now include Centres offering higher education courses that are designated for student support funding, as well as institutions with degree awarding powers.

Examples of complaints that the OIA deals 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 [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#).

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

*(Quality Code Expectation B9)*

## Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

The Government provides funding for Higher Education in England, which HEFCE allocates. It supports three priorities:

- learning, teaching and student choice
- research
- knowledge exchange with business and the wider community.

This funding, administered by HEFCE, is often called "HEFCE funding" and the institutions that receive directly are sometimes described as "authority funded higher education Centres" or HEFCE-funded Centres.

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 sets out the types of Centres HEFCE can fund. Further Education Colleges in England offering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals are eligible to apply for HEFCE funding.

Currently the Government provides financial support for tuition fees and living costs for students in Higher Education, living in England, and for tuition fees of students from the European Union, who are studying in England. This support ('student support') is made available through the Student Loans Company in the form of grants or loans. The fees are paid direct to the Higher Education Centres on the student's behalf and the maintenance support is paid direct to the student.

Information provided by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) about designated student support and the eligibility of Centres to access it is available at the [HEFCE website](#). Information for other UK regions can be found on the links below:

- [Higher Education Funding Council for Wales \(HEFCW\)](#)
- [Scottish Funding Council \(SFC\)](#)
- [Department for the Economy \(Northern Ireland\)](#).

### Office for Students

Under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, HEFCE will cease to operate on in early 2018. On 1 April 2018, the majority of HEFCE's functions, combined with the work of the Office of Fair Access, will combine to form the Office for Students.

The new public body, the Office for Students, will bring together in one organisation the regulation of all higher education Centres in the sector and operate a single regulatory gateway that creates a level playing field for all Centres. It will bring together existing functions on teaching standards, market entry and widening participation.

# Delivering Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals

## 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 provider commissioned.

When combining units for a Pearson BTEC Higher National qualification, it is the provider'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 subjects see their specifications.

QAA requirements specify that Centres 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.

(Quality Code Expectations A1, A2.1, A2.2, A3.1, B1)

## 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.

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
- 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.

*(Quality Code Expectation B3)*

## Programme Specification and Handbooks

Pearson Programme Specifications contain information for Centres with regards to the purpose, structure and assessment of these qualifications. The Centre should use the Pearson specification to publish a Centre specific Programme Specification. This is to ensure that the information provided to Higher National staff and students is Centre specific for example, units and pathways available; teaching, learning and assessment methods employed.

Staff and Student Handbooks should be produced by the Centre to provide information such as an assessment schedule and the Centre's policies and procedures related to higher education.

Detailed information relating to the content of programme specifications, staff and student handbooks can be found in the [Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4-7](#).

## Entry Requirements and Admissions

Although Pearson does not specify formal entry requirements, it is the provider'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.

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 making 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

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 identified below.

- Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) Level B2
- PTE 51
- IELTS 5.5; Reading and Writing must be at 5.5 or equivalent.

It is up to the provider to decide what proof will be necessary to evidence individual student proficiency.

This is summarised in the chart below:

Language of delivery/assessment	English language requirement
HN is taught and assessed in local language	English language requirements do not apply; students' certificates will continue to state/say "assessed in a language other than English".
HN is taught and assessed in English	<p>Non-native English speakers and those students who have not had their final two years of schooling in English will need to demonstrate one of the following upon entry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) B2</li> <li>• IELTS 5.5 (including 5.5 for reading and writing)</li> <li>• PTE Academic 51 or equivalent (e.g. Centre-devised test).</li> </ul>
HN is taught in a mix of English and local language, and assessed in English	<p>Non-native English speakers and those students who have not had their final two years of schooling in English will need to demonstrate one of the following upon exit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) B2</li> <li>• IELTS 5.5 (including 5.5 for reading and writing)</li> <li>• PTE Academic 51 or equivalent (e.g. Centre-devised test)</li> </ul>

Further guidance can be found in the [Use of languages in assessment policy](#).

## Recognition of Prior Learning and Attainment

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a method of assessment (leading to the award of credit) 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.

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, the use of RPL is acceptable for accrediting a unit, units or a whole qualification. Evidence of learning must be valid and reliable.

For full guidance on RPL please refer to the Pearson policy document [Recognition of Prior Learning](#).

*(Quality Code Expectation B6)*

## Registration Period

Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals currently carry a maximum registration period of five years. 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 National 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.

## Annual student registration fee

How does the BTEC Higher National Annual Registration work?

- From September 2016, we require all Centres to confirm student registrations for second and subsequent years of study.
- An annual registration fee of £20.00 per student/per year will be applicable for those continuing into their second/subsequent years of study.
- This fee is in addition to the initial qualification registration fee applicable at the start of their programme of study.
- The annual registration and associated fee therefore becomes applicable for students who enter into their second year in September 2017.

By recording accurate student registrations in each subsequent year of study Pearson can determine the number of active students on the Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes. 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. For further information see [HN Annual Student Fee](#).

# Teaching and Learning

## Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

In the UK, Government has introduced the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to recognise and reward excellent teaching in UK higher education Centres.

In September 2016, the Department for Education (DfE) published 'Teaching Excellence Framework: year two specification'. It sets out the assessment framework and specifies the criteria, evidence and process for the TEF in Year Two.

HEFCE, working with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, is responsible for implementing the TEF Year Two according to the DfE's specification.

The TEF uses quantitative and qualitative data to assess the quality of teaching and learning including:

- results from the National Student Survey (NSS)
- progression data
- evidence of teaching quality, for example rigour and stretch, assessment feedback
- evidence of a high quality learning environment, for example scholarship, research and professional practice and personalised learning.

Detailed guidance about the Teaching Excellence Framework and the implications for funding can be found on the [HEFCE website](#).

## 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 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 and in the [BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4-7](#).

## Attendance

Whilst Pearson does not set a minimum percentage attendance requirement for the Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals, Centres are reminded of the Expectation in Chapter B3 of the QAA Quality Code:

*Higher education Centres, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent*

*student, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.*

In particular, Indicator 8 states:

*Higher education Centres take deliberate steps to assist every student to understand their responsibility to engage with the learning opportunities provided and shape their learning experience.*

Centres must ensure that their Higher Education attendance policy and processes enable and encourage their students to fully participate in the learning opportunities offered.

## Distance Learning

If students undertake the qualifications through distance learning, then it is important to be aware of the Pearson [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 particular, 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.

*(Quality Code Expectations B3, B4)*

## 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'.

*(Quality code Expectations B4, B5)*

## 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, 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.

*(Quality Code Expectations B4, B5)*

## Resources

A criterion for provider approval is the need for material resources and suitable work spaces to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals. For some units, specific resources are required, this is clearly indicated in the unit descriptors.

## 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 students. 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.

In addition, there is a wide range of free-to-access websites that can be used to support students in developing their learning and academic study skills.

*(Quality Code Expectation B3, B4)*

# Assessment

There are several versions of Higher Nationals currently in use at Centres, each with differing requirements with regards to assessment and grading. The qualifications in use are:

- QCF Higher Nationals approved prior to September 2016 on the Qualification Credit Framework (QCF)
- Pearson Self-Regulated (SRF) Customised Higher Nationals developed prior to September 2016
- Pearson Self-Regulated (SRF) Customised Higher Nationals developed from September 2016
- Higher Nationals awarded by Higher Education Institutions under License
- RQF Higher Nationals developed and approved after September 2016 on the Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF).

The subject specification includes guidance on qualification structure, assessment of the qualification and calculation of the students' final grade for QCF and RQF Higher Nationals.

Detailed guidance about assessment can be found in the [BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4-7](#).

The guide includes general information to support you with the following activities:

- assessment strategies and design, for example, conducting group work, authenticity and plagiarism, and use of witness testimonies
- assessment and grading, for example, the use of formative and summative assessment.

## BTEC QCF Higher Nationals (prior to September 2016)

The [BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4-7](#) includes specific information for Higher Nationals on the QCF about assessment and grading including:

- generic grade descriptors and indicative characteristics
- contextualising the generic grade descriptors
- extensions, resubmissions and repeat units.

All enhanced quality measures apply to the QCF Higher Nationals in addition to the Centre quality assurance procedures for BTEC vocational qualifications.

## Pearson Self-Regulated (SRF) Customised Higher Nationals (prior to September 2016)

Qualifications available on Pearson's Self-Regulated Framework are customised to meet specific needs not already met by regulated qualifications. Pearson Self-Regulated Qualifications are not regulated by Ofqual, SQA Accreditation or any other regulatory body.

Detailed guidance for BTEC SRF Higher Nationals approved prior to Sept 2016 can be found in the [Pearson's Self-Regulated Framework Policy](#).

All enhanced quality measures apply to the SRF Higher Nationals in addition to the Centre quality assurance procedures.

## Pearson Self-Regulated Customised Higher Nationals (from September 2016)

Through the commissioned Higher National service, the provider is able to commission Higher National qualifications. This allows them to work with Pearson:

- in creating complete bespoke Higher National qualifications
- designing locally devised units
- to meet a specific skill requirement
- in importing accredited Higher National units from other Pearson approved Higher National qualifications (Meeting Local Needs).

Further information about the SRF and Pearson's Self-Regulated Policy can be found on the webpage [Building a bespoke BTEC Higher National qualification](#).

Higher Nationals on Pearson's SRF are not regulated by Ofqual and are therefore not on the RQF. However, they are required to be the same standard as the Ofqual regulated Higher Nationals. They are also required to meet QAA expectations.

Commissioned 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 TQT and GLHs.

All enhanced quality measures apply to the customised Higher Nationals in addition to the Centre quality assurance procedures.

## Higher Nationals awarded by Higher Education Institutions under License

Individual Higher National units are graded at either Pass, Merit or Distinction. Where a Licensed HEI uses percentages for grading they should map their unit grading system to Pass, Merit or Distinction.

The procedure used by Licensed Higher Education Institutions in determining the overall qualification grade should be in line with that used for other awards made by the Higher Education Institution.

# BTEC RQF Higher Nationals (from September 2016)

## The Approach to Assessment

On the redevelopment of the BTEC RQF Higher Nationals programmes, changes have been made to more clearly describe the standards of achievement required for students wishing to obtain an HNC or HND programme.

Rather than using de-contextualised Merit and Distinction criteria, criteria are set at Pass, Merit and Distinction within the unit, therefore describing the standard of achievement in the content of the level and the sector of study. This approach should support students in understanding the standards required and Centres in designing assignments to support students in meeting these standards.

When designing assignments Centres should be aware that an atomised approach to assessment is not suitable in the assessment of HN qualifications. Assignments should not usually be broken down into a task per criteria, as this approach does not support the development of the higher-order skills, knowledge and behaviours that should be developed via study on a Higher National. Centres should be aware that exams (open book or closed book) may be used for assessment, if appropriate.

The RQF HN assessment grids have been 'scaffolded' in their construction wherever possible to allow for more 'holistic' design of assignments (i.e. the pass and merit criteria will usually feed into each other, so assessment tasks can be set at the Learning Outcome level rather than at the criteria level).

## 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.

*(Quality Code Expectations A1, A2.1, A2.2, A3.2, B4, B6)*

## Grading Pearson BTEC Higher National Units (RQF)

Assessment decisions for Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals are based on the specific 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.

Assessors must show how they have reached their decisions using the criteria in the assessment records. When a student has completed all of the assessment for a unit then the assessment team will give a grade for the unit. This is given simply according to the highest level for which the student is judged to have met all the criteria. Therefore:

- 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.

# Calculation of the final qualification grade

## Conditions for the award of the HNC

To achieve a Pearson BTEC Higher National Certificate qualification a student must have:

- completed units equivalent to 120 credits at Level 4
- achieved at least a pass in 105 credits at Level 4.

## Compensation provisions for the HNC

Students can still be awarded an HNC if they have not achieved a Pass in one of the 15 credit units completed, but have completed and passed the remaining units.

## Conditions for the award of the HND

To achieve a Pearson BTEC Higher National Diploma qualification a student must have:

- completed units equivalent to 120 credits at Level 5
- achieved at least a pass in 105 credits at Level 5
- completed units equivalent to 120 credits at Level 4
- achieved at least a pass in 105 credits at Level 4.

## Compensation provisions for HND

Students can still be awarded an HND if they have attempted but not achieved a Pass in one of the 15 credit units completed at Level 4 and similarly if they have attempted but not achieved one of the 15 credit units at Level 5. However they must complete and pass the remaining units for an HNC or HND as per the unit rules of combination of the required qualification.

## Calculation of the overall qualification grade

The calculation of the overall qualification grade is based on the student's performance in all units. Students are awarded a Pass, Merit or Distinction qualification grade using the points gained through all 120 credits, at Level 4 for the HNC or Level 5 for the HND, based on unit achievement. The overall qualification grade is calculated in the same way for the HNC and for the HND.

All units, in valid combination, must have been attempted for each qualification. The conditions of award and the compensation provisions will apply as outlined above. All 120 credits count in calculating the grade (at each level, as applicable).

The overall qualification grade for the HND will be calculated based on student performance in Level 5 units only.

Units that have been attempted but not achieved, and subsequently granted compensation, will appear as 'Unclassified' (i.e. a 'U' grade, on the student's *Notification of Performance*, that is issued with the student certificate).

	Points per credit
<b>Pass</b>	4
<b>Merit</b>	6
<b>Distinction</b>	8

#### Point boundaries

Grade	Point boundaries
<b>Pass</b>	420–599
<b>Merit</b>	600–839
<b>Distinction</b>	840+

## 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 task.
- For examinations, reassessment shall involve completion of a new task.
- A student who undertakes a reassessment will have their grade capped at a Pass for that unit.
- 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.

*(Quality code Expectation B6)*

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

*(Quality Code Expectation B6)*

# Managing Assessment

## Record Keeping

For internal processes to be effective, an assessment team needs to be well organised and keep effective records. Centres must keep student evidence and assessment records safely and securely to ensure that they are available for verification. Securely stored, up-to-date assessment records also help to minimise the risk of assessment malpractice, or potential issues if an Assessor leaves during a BTEC programme. You will need to:

- store all assessment records securely and safely relating to both internally and externally set assessments
- maintain up-to-date records of student achievements that are regularly reviewed and tracked accurately against national standards
- retain both internal and external assessment records for Centre and awarding organisation 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.

All assessment 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.

Accurate, up-to-date student progress information must be recorded:

- registration
- student feedback and progress
- achievement (at assessment criterion level).

Staff must check accuracy of 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. Internal verification and assessment records are maintained and checked. These should be of sufficient detail to show exactly how assessment decisions were made (i.e. to assessment criterion level). Records must be securely kept for Pearson audit and in case of student appeals, certification issues, etc.

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.

*(Quality Code Expectation B6)*

## 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 provider'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
- 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.

*(Quality Code Expectation B6)*

## Student Appeals against Assessment Decisions

Centres must have a policy for dealing with appeals from students. These appeals may relate to assessment decisions being incorrect or an assessment not being conducted fairly. The first step in such a policy could be a consideration of the evidence by a Programme Leader or other member of the programme team. The assessment plan should allow time for potential appeals after assessment decisions have been given to students. If there is an appeal by a student, this and its resolution must be documented. Students have a final right of appeal to Pearson, but only if the procedures in place have not been followed. Further details are given in the policy here: [Enquiries and appeals on Pearson vocational qualifications](#).

If students are not satisfied with the result of their appeal after following the provider's processes, they can request the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#) to review

their complaint. The OIA will not deal with complaints about academic judgement but will look at academic appeals.

Centres can check if they are a member of the OIA scheme here: [List of Centres 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.

*(Quality Code Expectation B9)*

# Assessment Boards

Each provider is expected by Pearson to hold Assessment Boards for all of its BTEC Higher National programmes. The main purpose of an Assessment Board is to make recommendations on:

- the grades achieved by students on the individual units
- extenuating circumstances
- cases of cheating and plagiarism
- progression of students on to the next stage of the programme
- the awards to be made to students
- referrals and deferrals.

Assessment Boards may also monitor academic standards.

It is only when the unit results of students' achievement have been considered by an Assessment Board that certification can be awarded. Prior to this the External Examiner will have sampled work and the report will be received by the Assessment Board.

## Timing of Assessment Boards

The main boards are normally held annually, although if the provider operates on a semester system there may be (intermediate) boards at the end of the first semester.

Where a provider does not currently have such a process then the External Examiner (EE) should discuss this with the Quality Nominee and Programme Leader, stressing the requirement for Assessment Boards by both Pearson and QAA and that Assessment Board reports and minutes provide valuable evidence for the QAA's Review of College Higher Education process (Higher Education Review).

Please refer to QAA's Code for further guidance: [QAA Guidance on Assessment Boards – Chapter B6 – Indicators 15, 16 and 17](#).

## Preparation for an Assessment Board

All members of Assessment Boards must be aware of the associated policies and procedures prior to meetings them 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 provider'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 advisory group
- ensure that these dates are after the External Examiners' 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 provider'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 independent of the programme under consideration. The Programme Leader should not chair meetings.

The provider cannot insist that Pearson's External Examiners attend Assessment Board Meetings, although it is essential that they have the right to attend.

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

Centres with little experience in operating Higher Education programmes may request advice from the External Examiner in developing good practice for Assessment Boards.

## Minutes

Examination Assessment Boards are responsible for ensuring that assessment decisions are recorded accurately, supported by taking adequate minutes of any discussions which, in particular, demonstrate the factors taken into account when discretion is exercised or extenuating/mitigating circumstances considered. Such an approach

provides assurance and transparency. The minutes of the Assessment Board should always be made available to the External Examiner upon request.

## Outcomes of the Assessment Board

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 makes clear what 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.

## Confidentiality

Documentation associated with Assessment Board meetings is confidential so Centres need to take appropriate steps to ensure that this is maintained.

Students should all be informed of results through a published list at a given date. Any discussion with students should take place after this date.

*(Quality Code Expectations A1, B7)*

## Forms and Templates

Pearson publishes a range of useful forms and templates for Centres to use, you can find these on Pearson's [Key documents](#) website. These forms are not mandatory, but have been developed to help Centres to meet requirements. They include:

- an assessment plan
- an assignment brief
- internal verification of assignment briefs
- an assessment record
- internal verification of assessment decisions
- a tutor observation record/witness statement
- student declarations.

*(Quality Code Expectations A1, A2.1, A3.2, B4, B6)*

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## **Academic Management Review (AMR)**

This is the annual Centre quality visit for UK Alternative Centres

## **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.

## **Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)**

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) works to promote competition for the benefit of consumers, both within and outside the UK.

## **Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)**

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is Northern Ireland's examination board, which also acts as the regulator of qualifications and awarding organisation in Northern Ireland.

## **Customised Qualification Service (CQS)**

This allows Centres to create and develop their own qualifications whilst still using existing regulated units or to develop their own units

## **External Examiner (EE)**

The External Examiner is a subject assessment specialist appointed by the awarding organisation to conduct external examination. This verifies that the provider's management of programmes and assessment decisions meet national standards. External examination is conducted by an annual visit.

## **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)**

This is the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

## **Guided Learning Hours (GLH)**

Guided Learning hours are a notional measure of the substance of a unit. It includes an estimate of time that might be allocated to direct teaching, instruction and assessment, together with other structured learning time such as directed assignments or supported individual study.

## **HN Global**

HN Global is an online resource that supports provider planning and delivery of Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals by providing appropriate teaching and learning resources.

## **Internal Verification (IV)**

This is a provider/team-based process. The Internal Verifiers check the quality of assignments before delivery to students and verify the accuracy of assessment decisions to meet national standards. An appointed Lead Internal Verifier manages the process.

## **Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)**

The JCQ provides a single voice for its members on issues of examination administration and, when appropriate, qualification and wider education policy.

## **Office of Independent Adjudicator (OIA)**

The Office of Independent Adjudicator is an independent body that operates a higher education complaints scheme in England and Wales.

## **Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)**

Ofqual regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. The Welsh Government has responsibility for education in Wales.

## **Programme Review and Approval**

Process used by Pearson to consider renewing approval for an existing provider to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals.

## **Provider**

Any Centre approved to deliver Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals.

## **QAA The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

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 Centres of UK higher education are required to meet.

## **Quality Management Review (QMR)**

QMR is the annual Centre quality visit for UK Further Education Colleges.

## **Quality Nominee (QN)**

This is the person nominated by the provider who acts as main contact for BTEC.

## **Quality Review Visit (QRV)**

This is the method employed by QAA to review Centres of Higher Education.

## **Self-Regulated Framework (SRF)**

Guidance and support for qualifications that sit outside of any nationally recognised framework. Qualifications that sit on the SRF are customised to meet specific needs not met by regulated qualifications.

## **Total Qualification Time (TQT)**

The requirement for Awarding Bodies to describe the size of their qualifications by using Total Qualification Time as a descriptor, (TQT). This provides an indication of how long a typical student will take to study for a qualification.