

BTEC Centre Guide to External Examination (UK)

2017-18

Levels 4 to 7

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Introduction

Welcome to the guide to external examination for our BTEC Levels 4 to 7 vocational qualifications. This guide provides you with the information you need to be prepared for this process in 2017-2018.

It takes you through:

- what you need to do
- who's responsible at each stage

and gives additional advice and guidance around best practice.

We hope you find this guide useful and we have aimed to cover all of the relevant points to help you successfully deliver BTEC vocational qualifications at Levels 4 to 7.

We're here to help



If you need more information or support at any stage, please contact the Vocational Assessment team at btecdelivery@pearson.com. A detailed list of who to contact within Pearson can be found at the back of this guide.

For other general queries, please visit the [contact us page](#) of our website so your question can be answered as quickly as possible by our teams.

External examination is how we check that you are operating appropriate quality assurance and maintaining national standards for our BTEC Levels 4 to 7 (QCF and RQF) programmes and BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design. This document provides more information on the processes and support to help you prepare. Further information concerning Pearson's role and responsibilities regarding external examination as well as information about the requirements of external examination can be found in Chapter B7 of the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

How to use this guide

1. What you need to do

If you are new to delivering BTEC Levels 4 to 7 qualifications, you should start familiarising yourself with the term ‘external examination’, and how we quality assure the internal assessments that you undertake. Further guidance on the quality assurance process can be found [here](#).

External examination is how we check that you are operating appropriate quality assurance and maintaining national standards at Levels 4 to 7.

2. Read this guide

This guide provides you with information regarding the external examination for:

- BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals (QCF and RQF)
- BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design
- BTEC Professional qualifications at Levels 4 to 7
- Customised BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals on Pearson’s Self Regulated Framework (SRF)

3. Read the associated quality assurance documentation

This guide should be read in conjunction with the relevant Pearson quality assurance handbook, which provides additional information and guidance regarding the delivery of our vocational qualifications at Levels 4 to 7.

Document	Qualification
BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4 to 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals (QCF) • BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design • BTEC Professional qualifications at Levels 4 to 7 • Customised BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals on Pearson’s Self-Regulated Framework (SRF) that were developed before September 2016

UK Guide to Quality and Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals (RQF) • Customised BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals on Pearson's Self Regulated Framework (SRF) that were developed after September 2016
Pearson's Self Regulated Framework Quality Assurance Handbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customised qualifications on Pearson's Self Regulated Framework at Levels 4 to 7

4. Read the relevant qualification specification

You also need to read any specific instructions in the relevant qualification specification document which you can find on the Pearson Qualifications website [here](#). Working from our guidance documents will ensure that you have all of the correct conditions and requirements in place for each stage of the external examination process.

What you need to know

How we verify standards

We allocate an External Examiner (EE), who is a subject expert, to conduct sampling of assessment instruments and assessed student work in order to provide judgments and feedback. External Examiners support you in identifying good practice and areas for further development, giving you guidance on how you can improve your assessment.

If our External Examiner concludes that students have not demonstrated the national standards outlined in the specification through their work, you will agree actions that need to be completed before we will be able to issue certificates to your students. This will include providing a second sample to show that you have responded to the External Examiner's feedback.

The [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) outlines your responsibility to ensure that the External Examiner is informed about your organisational procedures, practices, and academic regulations. You must also ensure that External Examiner feedback to Assessors and students is part of your broader system of quality assurance and enhancement.

If you are delivering a Higher Apprenticeship, the knowledge-based qualifications that make up the apprenticeship will follow the external examination quality assurance model outlined in this guide. However, you should read the information in this document in conjunction with the [BTEC Apprenticeships Quality Assurance Handbook](#).

Roles and responsibilities

It is important that you have a strong team in place at your centre in order to deliver and assess your BTEC programme effectively. Our website provides an overview of the main quality assurance responsibilities for each role [here](#).

Allocation of your External Examiner (EE)

We will begin allocating External Examiners (EEs) to all centres with active registrations each autumn. If a programme is no longer running but still has active registrations, you must either claim certificates or withdraw the students. To ensure that we allocate EEs to the correct programmes, please ensure that student registration information is accurate and up-to-date. For students who are no longer active on a programme, you must ensure that their registration is withdrawn from Edexcel Online (EOL).

Once programmes have been allocated, we will notify the Quality Nominee via email and the External Examiner will then get in touch to ask for contact details for the Programme Leader.

Arranging the visit

External examination usually takes place through an annual visit, although **additional visits may be put in place** to take into account varying programme start and end dates, certification requirements and where additional actions are required.

The External Examiner will agree a date for the visit with your Programme Leader and confirm in writing the programme(s) they have been appointed to. It is important that you identify any customised provision or units added through the Meeting Local Needs process, if you have it. You should also make the External Examiner aware of any UCAS students.

If appropriate, your visit may be timed to fit with your Assessment Board processes towards the end of a programme. **Please note that it is a formal Pearson requirement that all centres delivering Higher Nationals hold Assessment Boards.**

For HN programmes, the External Examiner will want to speak to your students to gauge their opinion on your assessment processes and access to resources. Therefore, visits should be arranged on a day when students are on site.

Where programmes have particularly large cohorts or operate across multiple sites, we may operate a 'team approach' to external examination. This means that an External Examiner will be allocated, but they will coordinate a team of External Examiners who will support them in conducting sampling. For multiple sites, the External Examiner may arrange to visit each site to sample each group of students and talk to staff.

Once a plan for the visit has been agreed, the External Examiner will confirm this in writing.

All sampling activities should be completed by 30th June if certificates are required for mid-August. This is to ensure that students completing in the current academic year have their results in time for college and university admissions.



Preparing for your visit

Before the visit, the External Examiner will request two assignment briefs and the associated internal verification documentation to review. They will then provide feedback to you in advance of their visit by completing an assignment feedback form, and identify any actions for the assignment briefs. The assignment briefs, internal verification documentation and completed assignment feedback forms will also be sent to Pearson by the External Examiner.

Although you are not required to send assignment briefs to the External Examiner in advance of the visit, we strongly encourage the submission of two assignment briefs to the External Examiner, so that you receive early feedback and support.

During the visit, the External Examiner will need access to:

Assignment briefs

- all assignment briefs used to generate student evidence for each unit. The External Examiner will want to see the relationship between any exams and related assignments.

Student evidence and assessment records

- a list of students registered on the programme
- all student work for units that have been assessed (which the External Examiner will sample from)
- assessment records for the student work.

Internal verification documentation

- internal verification documents for the assignment briefs
- internal verification documentation relating to the assessment decisions
- staff documentation.

CVs for all staff with a list of the units that they have delivered and assessed.

For **BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design**, the External Examiner will also need to see:

- the Statement of Intent produced by the students in the sample
- details of who has successfully achieved Units 1-9 (subject to the rules of combination for the level to be claimed)
- the related assessment records showing achievement of Units 1-9

Students can only progress to the Confirmatory Stage (Unit 10) once they have successfully achieved Units 1-9 (subject to the rules of combination for the level to be claimed).

During your visit

During the visit, the External Examiner will make arrangements to meet the relevant people at your centre to discuss the management and delivery of the programmes, and their understanding of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

Your students will be asked for their opinions on teaching, assessment and support, including the:

- quality, variety and effectiveness of teaching methods
- quality, quantity and variety of assessments
- clarity of task descriptions and grading criteria, outcome coverage and skills development of assessments
- quality and promptness of feedback and academic support
- appropriateness of physical resources to support teaching and learning
- effectiveness of the tutorial system in covering academic and pastoral care.

Staff will be asked their views on the management of the programme(s) including:

- how they are kept informed about updates to Pearson policies, including changes to our assessment practices
- how often they meet as a programme team
- how they are given opportunities to develop to support the programme.

The External Examiner may make arrangements to attend an Assessment Board meeting, but you should also provide the minutes from the previous Assessment Board. External Examiners have the right to attend your Assessment Boards, although you cannot insist on their attendance. If an External Examiner attends an Assessment Board, it is in the capacity of an adviser and they have no power of veto. If an External Examiner feels that a wrong decision is being made, they can only register their disagreement with the decision in their report.

Your External Examiner will also sample each programme you are delivering within the sector. Where possible, they will want to see work for whole units, more than one student per unit/Assessor and assessment decisions covering a range of grades.

The sample size will depend on the

- number of students and units delivered
- number of Assessors and the size of the programme team
- levels of units in the programmes.

Number of registrations	Minimum number of individual students sampled
1-8 students	All
9-100 students	9
More than 100 students	18

The minimum sample **will always include no fewer than 3 units reviewed**. Student work is sampled across units; therefore if you have 100 students, your External Examiner needs to see samples for 9 individual students across at least 3 units, not 9 individual students for each of the units.

The sample will always include mandatory core units, and your External Examiner will likely want to sample different units to those sampled in the previous academic year, unless recommendations or essential actions were previously identified for specific units.

Higher National Certificate (HNCs) and Higher National Diploma (HNDs) programmes from the same specification, with the same title, are considered to be 'nested' programmes. Work will be sampled from both the HNC and the HND, however the sample size will reflect that they operate as one. This means that the External Examiner would only need to see work for 9 individual students from the two programmes if you have between 9 and 100 students.

Where units rely on students determining the brief (e.g. project units), the External Examiner may choose to look at several briefs during the visit. For BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design programmes, the sample must include work from the Confirmatory Unit 10.

There is no maximum sample size and the External Examiner may continue looking at evidence if initial sampling suggests that further investigation is required. However, Pearson will need to approve any additional visits required to increase the sample size.



Report A: Management and delivery of higher level programmes

Report A will provide you with feedback on your management and delivery of higher level programmes and may include essential actions or recommendations. Essential actions are mandatory but do not prevent your current students from being certificated.

If a team of External Examiners visited your centre, this part of the report will be completed by the person allocated to your centre.

The report will cover the following:

Actions from your previous report

The External Examiner will check the progress you have made against any actions from your previous report and will highlight anything that has not been addressed.

Management of academic standards

During the visit, the External Examiner will be looking for **evidence that you have effective management procedures in place** that are supported by appropriate systems and regulations/policies. This will include arrangements for any programmes run on a collaborative basis in other institutions.

They will check the operation of your ongoing assessment meetings, including:

- the scope of the minutes of previous meetings
- organisation, conduct and administrative support for the meetings
- decision making processes and fairness and consistency of these decisions.

If an External Examiner does not attend an Assessment Board, they will still need to confirm that:

- Assessment Boards do take place at the centre
- there are appropriate regulations and rules of operation covering their conduct
- minutes of Assessment Boards have been received and recommendations have been discussed with the Programme Leader or Chair of the Assessment Board.

The External Examiner will also review your regulations to ensure you have procedures in place for managing the activities listed below, and provide feedback on how your regulations relate to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#):

- Assessment Boards
- late submission of student work
- resubmissions and repeat units

- extenuating circumstances
- appeals.

Information about these policies must be available for your students, and your External Examiner will review the evidence of how regulations have been applied.

Effectiveness of assessment instruments

Your External Examiner 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**.

They will consider whether:

- the assignment outcomes and related assessment criteria are clearly stated and assessment tasks are matched to the outcomes/assessment criteria and level
- there is a variety of assessment tasks which relate fully to the unit content
- there is clear guidance to students on the content/scope of tasks and the grading
- the assessments are appropriate to the student profile, level and mode of study
- assessments promote learning, allowing students to develop skills as opposed to rote learning/accumulation of facts
- there are both formative and summative assessments
- there are opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and have some freedom of choice for completion
- there is a unit assessment plan detailing coverage of all assessment criteria and grading opportunities
- there are sufficient assessments for each unit and the workload is realistic
- there is equality of opportunity for all students, including those with particular requirements, to achieve the stated outcomes and associated grading criteria.

Maintenance and audit of records

Your External Examiner will 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

During the visit, the External Examiner will check that you have a process for ensuring that **student registration and certification information is accurate and monitored effectively**. This means registering students onto the correct programme by 15th November for students following the traditional academic year and **within one month of the course commencing for any**

students following a non-academic year route and making any amendments, transfers or withdrawals in a timely manner.

The programme team should have a good working relationship with the exams office to ensure that your student registration details accurately reflect your own records. The External Examiner will confirm that you have adequate procedures for:

- checking the accuracy of student registrations
- ensuring that timely and accurate certification claims are checked and verified against assessment records
- checking a sample of certificates received against assessment records, prior to issue to students
- investigating and reporting all inaccurate, early/late and fraudulent registrations or certification claims, via your senior management, to us.

Student support and review

During the visit, the External Examiner will speak to staff and students, reviewing the support given to students. They will provide comments on:

- your assessment process and assessment feedback to students
- the quality of teaching and the expertise and experience of staff
- opportunities available for students to undertake independent learning and how these are integrated into the programme
- opportunities for staff to develop, to better support your students
- availability of learning resources, computer facilities and specialist software required for the programme
- tutorial and pastoral support
- opportunities students are offered to give feedback on their programme
- any concerns your programme team have about the current and future operation of the programme.

Areas of good practice

Any areas of particularly good practice mentioned in other sections of the report will be highlighted.

Report B: Assessment sampling

Report B will provide you with feedback on your sampled student work. If a team of External Examiners visited, the allocated External Examiner will collate the sample evidence for Report B and complete the final report. For multiple sites, feedback from the visits will be collated into a single report.

Essential actions will be identified where your assessment does not meet national standards for any of the students sampled. **Essential actions in Report B will block certification for current students on the programme.**

For each programme sampled the External Examiner will comment on the internal assessment process, including:

Fairness and consistency of grading/validity and standardisation of assessments across assessors

- Are all assessment criteria associated with an outcome being assessed and is there sufficient coverage of unit content?
- Are the contextualised grading criteria for each grade being applied correctly in assignments?
- Are the grading decisions for units correct and consistent with a range of Pass, Merit and Distinction grades within a unit?

Evidence of internal verification

- Is there a documented assessment strategy giving details of internal verification/internal quality assurance expectations? Is this being followed?
- Is there evidence that assignment briefs have been internally verified on an annual basis?
- Is there any indication that assessment decisions have been internally verified?
- Do internal verification records show the names of internal verifiers and students?
- Has the Internal Verifier included any written feedback/comments for authors of assessment briefs/Assessors?

Quality of feedback to students

- Is there written feedback to students indicating errors or omissions?
- Is the feedback sufficient to enable students to correct errors and develop learning skills in future assignments?
- Does the feedback indicate why a grade has been awarded?
- Is there a formal procedure for reaching agreement if Internal Verifiers and Assessors disagree about a grade?
- If student feedback could be improved, this will result in a recommendation but not a programme block to certification.

For each piece of student work sampled, the External Examiner will judge whether:

- the student has achieved the aims of the learning objectives and the targeted criteria at the appropriate level
- the student displays knowledge and understanding; key (transferable) skills; higher level cognitive skills such as evaluation, analysis, literature searching etc.; and subject specific skills including practical/professional skills
- there is a range of Pass, Merit and Distinction grades
- there is a variety of responses/topics/literature sources in students' answers. If not, whether any similarities suggest evidence of excessive staff guidance or plagiarism
- there is progression of higher level skills/subject specific skills/employment skills between assessed work for HNC and HND students

Any evidence of plagiarism in student work will result in an Essential Action and a block to certification.



Outcomes of external examination

Your external examination reports will be available on Edexcel Online (EOL) within 10 working days of your visit. As outlined in the [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. The report is split into Report A (management and delivery) and Report B (assessment sampling), which allows you to share the detail of Report A without compromising the confidentiality of the students sampled.

Report Status	Outcome
Release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have provided a full sample and the External Examiner has confirmed you have adequate quality assurance procedures in place and you are documenting assessment correctly. The External Examiner has agreed that student evidence is valid, authentic and sufficient, and you are assessing students to the national standard. However, they may identify essential actions or recommendations on how to improve on current practice. Certification is released, programme by programme, and a further sample is not required.
Not Yet Fully Sampled (NYFS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The External Examiner has not seen sufficient evidence in order to release certification for the programme. Certification is not released and a second sample will be requested.

Block

You have provided a full sample but **the External Examiner has identified one of more essential actions that need to be addressed before we can release certification**. These may include:

- students have not been assessed to the national standard
- assessment and/or internal verification has not been documented correctly on one or more of the programmes in the sector
- plagiarised work was found in the sample

This means that **certification is blocked and a second sample will be requested**. The External Examiner will give initial feedback on the day of the visit, so you should be prepared for the outcomes of the report.

The external examination report is able to release or block certification separately for each programme within a sector. Therefore, if one or more programmes are subject to a certification block, this does not automatically affect certification of the other programmes.

Submitting a second sample

You will need to submit a second sample if your first sample resulted in a certification block or if further sampling is required in order for certification to be released (NYFS). The External Examiner will get in touch to agree a timescale and to confirm the format for your second sample once you have accessed the original report.



The second sample will usually be conducted remotely.

Your second sample will include:

- the elements of the first sample that caused the original block
- evidence that amendments have been made to address the issues highlighted in the external examination report
- work for additional students so that the External Examiner can check that standards are being reapplied consistently across a programme.

Once your second sample has been reviewed, your External Examiner will submit a second report within 10 working days.

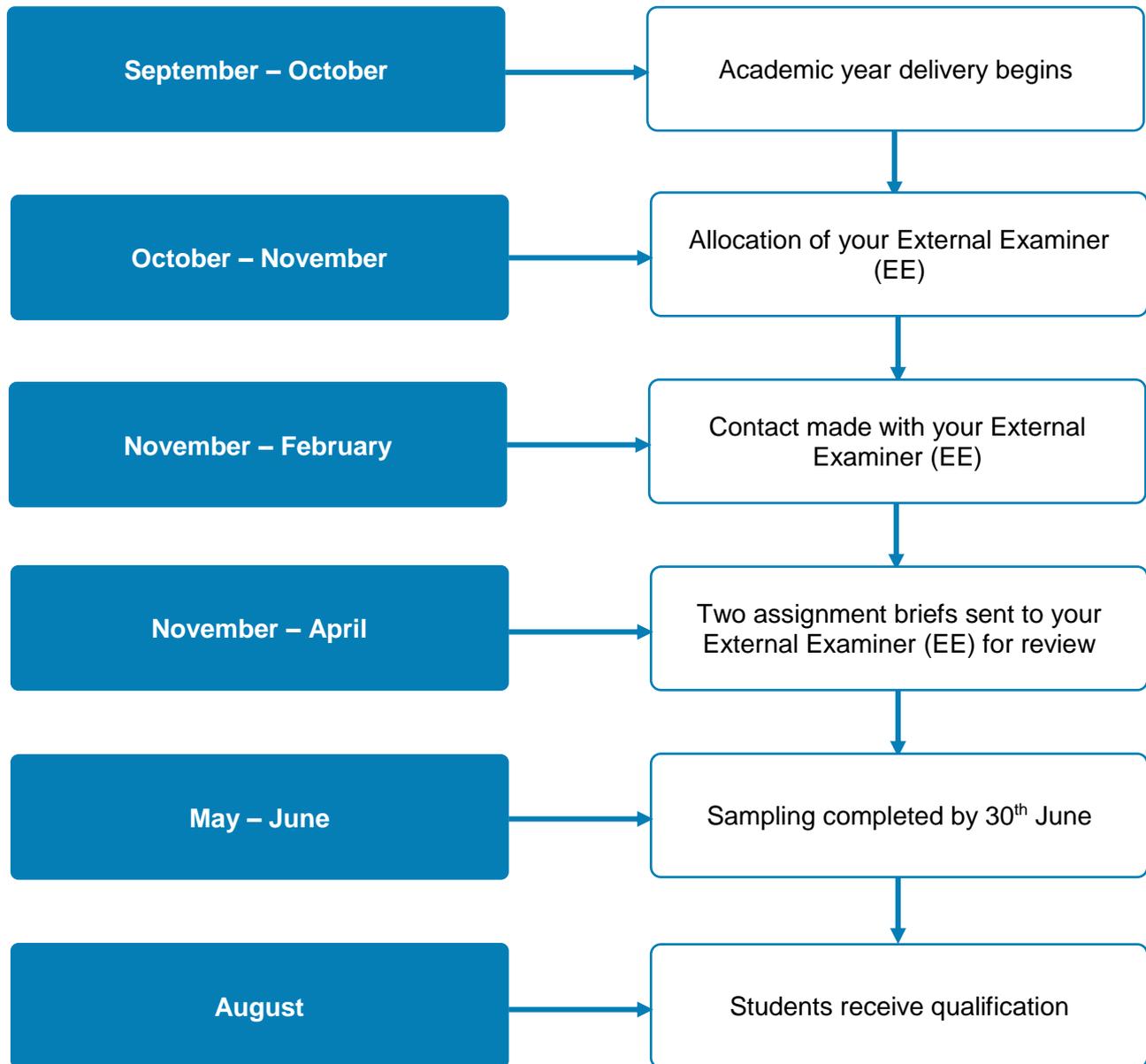
Outcomes of a second sample

Report Status	Outcome
Release (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The External Examiner has agreed that you are now assessing students to the national standard for all programmes but may offer recommendations on how to improve on current practice. Your quality assurance procedures will also have been confirmed as adequate. • Certification is released and no further sampling is required for the academic year.
Remedial Action Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The External Examiner still does not agree that you are assessing to national standards for one or more programmes. • At this point the Principal Standards Manager (PSM) for the relevant sector will meet with you to agree a remedial action plan. You need to complete the action plan before the Principal Standards Manager can release certification.

Appealing the outcome of external examination

We have a formal appeals process to address any concerns you may have about the outcome of the external examination process. This can be found in the [enquiries and appeals about Pearson vocational qualifications policy](#).

Timeline



Glossary of BTEC terminology

Academic Management Review (AMR)	This is the annual centre quality visit for UK Alternative Providers.
Annual Programme Monitoring Review (APMR)	The Annual Programme Monitoring Review is a written annual report that provides an opportunity for providers to analyse and reflect on the most recent teaching year.
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 Quality Management Review (QMR) and Academic Management Review (AMR) processes, including 'block recommended' centres. The CQMs can be contacted at qualitymanagement@pearson.com .
Contracting & Allocations ("VQ Deployment")	The Deployment team issues contracts to External Examiners (EEs) each year and releases allocations for HN programmes. The main reasons for which a centre will contact the team are if they cannot see an allocation and will need certificates, they want to request a rationalisation of their EEs, or they are no longer running a programme. The team can be contacted at vgdeployment@pearson.com .
Edexcel Online (EOL)	This is a multifunctional system for centres. Access is password protected and is managed by your examinations officer. Screens show programmes and students within a centre, allow for new registrations or withdrawals. Lead Internal Verifier registrations and withdrawals will be done through this portal. External Examiner and Centre Quality Reviewer allocations and consequent standards and Quality Management Review status can be viewed here. EOL can be accessed at www.edexcelonline.com .
Exams Officers	Our Exams Officers team provides support to the Exams Officers at your centre with a range of queries and issues, such as those relating to administration. The team also sends weekly communications to your Exams Officers and conduct face-to-face and online training sessions to help your 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 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. It excludes student initiated private study. Centres are advised to consider this definition when planning the programme of study associated with this specification.
Internal Verification (IV)	This is a centre/team based process. Your Internal Verifiers check the quality of assignments before delivery to students and verify the accuracy of assessment decisions to meet national standards. You should have an internal verification plan to manage the process.
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.
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.
QCF	Qualification Credit Framework
Quality Management Review (QMR)	This is the annual centre quality visit for UK Further Education Colleges and is currently conducted by a Centre Quality Reviewer (CQR).
Quality Nominee (QN)	This is the person nominated by the centre who acts as main contact for BTEC.
PQS Malpractice	This team manages incidences of student and staff malpractice within Pearson qualifications. For internally assessed units, you do not need to inform us of student malpractice. If you suspect a staff member of malpractice, you must complete a form and send this to pqsmalpractice@pearson.com , so that our Investigations team can review the situation and advise you.
Principal Standards Manager (PSM)	There is a team of Principal Standards Managers across all sectors whose remit is to ensure that standards are met and maintained for vocational qualifications. The PSM team support, monitor and evaluate quality assurance processes to ensure they remain fit for purpose, making decisions on revisions and changes required and provide sector specific support to centres to ensure that centres provide and maintain effective quality assurance of national standards for vocational qualifications. They work alongside Vocational Assessment teams, Centre Quality Managers, Vocational Quality Advisors and External Examiners to ensure that national and quality standards are met and maintained.

RQF	Regulated Qualification Framework
Vocational Assessment	The Vocational Assessment team is responsible for the quality assurance of Pearson's vocational qualifications. The Assessment team manages External Examiners (EEs) and are your main point of contact for quality assurance and assessment concerns and queries. They can be contacted at btecdelivery@pearson.com .
Vocational Quality Advisor (VQA)	The Vocational Quality Advisors (VQAs) are a team of specialists in vocational quality assurance. They provide support to Quality Nominees, Internal Verifiers and Assessors regarding a range of topics related to quality assurance, such as Quality Management Review (QMR), internal assessment and verification, and standards verification and external examination. In addition, they provide support, communication and development for Quality Nominees both online and face-to-face. They can be contacted at qualitynominees@pearson.com .

