

Introduction of the 'Near Pass' grade and changes to BTEC National qualifications

25 May 2018

Dear Students and Parent/Carers,

We have recently made some changes to the way BTEC Nationals qualification grades are calculated, which have had a positive impact on some learners' achievements from last year; and we want to explain to you directly what we have done.

As you may be aware, new BTEC Nationals, follow a common set of design rules laid down by the Department for Education for 'Tech Level' and 'Applied General' qualifications. Like other qualifications of these types, BTEC Nationals contain one or more externally assessed units (or exams) that a learner must pass in order to achieve the qualification. This rule means that in some cases, learners who narrowly miss a pass grade in one or more external units could find they lose out on an entire qualification, even if they have been successful in all other units. As this made the qualifications more challenging to pass than other types of qualifications, such as A Levels, we have been working closely with Ofqual to support a change to this rule, in favour one which is fairer to learners.

In March, we received notification by letter from Ofqual, encouraging us to make changes to BTEC Nationals to provide a 'safety net' for students who narrowly miss grade a pass on one or more externally-assessed units and therefore miss out on a qualification. We welcome this news as it means that we can ensure that the grades for learners receive for their qualification reflect their performance across the whole programme.

What changes are we making and when do they come into effect?

With a small number of exceptions, all external assessments in BTEC Nationals will no longer be 'must-pass'. Instead, learners will be required to achieve a minimum 'N' grade (which stands for *Near Pass*) in each external assessment. Whereas learners previously had to gain a pass grade or higher, the N grade gives learners credit below a Pass, where they have demonstrated evidence of a positive performance, which is worth more than an unclassified (U) grade.

We are making these changes with immediate effect from summer 2018. Additionally as we know how important these qualifications are in helping learners progress to university and into work, we have retrospectively applied this rule to all learners that sat assessments and completed these qualifications since their introduction in 2016.

This means that there are a number of learners who previously failed a BTEC National, but may now be eligible for a qualification. We are currently in the process of confirming certification for these learners with their schools and colleges and those students will receive certificates in the coming months.

Ofqual fully support and endorse this approach.

Do learners or parents need to do anything?

No, you don't need to do anything. If your previous external assessment grade(s) has changed (from a U to an N) you will receive a notification of that via your school or college and as a result of that, if you are now eligible for a certificate, you will receive that in the coming weeks and months. Any learners who previously achieved a pass or above in an external assessment will see no change in their results and no grades will go down as a result of this change.

If learners are preparing to sit external assessments this summer they do not need to make any changes as a result of this change to the rules. If learners have sat an assessment once or twice already, the highest result will count in their final qualification grade.

We have communicated these changes to UCAS and directly to all universities and are ensuring they fully understand the impact, we anticipate no negative effects on learners this summer as a result.

If you wish to find out more about the background to this change you can read the [Ofqual blog](#) alternatively there are further details about the changes to BTEC Nationals on our [website](#), or speak to your school or college directly if you have any questions about this.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ria Bhatta". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Ria Bhatta
Head of Applied and Sector Development