

QN Quality Insight 9: Delivering Higher Nationals for the First Time

The guidance in this quality focus is designed for centres who are just starting delivery of BTEC Higher Nationals.

BTEC Higher Nationals are internationally recognised at Level 4 and 5 which are equivalent to the first and second years of a university degree, providing progression to both university and employment. The qualifications have been developed with the involvement from universities, employers, students and professional bodies.

Understanding Higher National Qualifications

2010 QCF HN qualifications are currently still available for delivery but redevelopment is going well and are being launched in phases until 2018.

2016-18 RQF - is an improved suite of qualifications to better meet the changing needs of skills, academic knowledge and work readiness. From September 2018 new providers of Higher Nationals will be expected to deliver from this suite of qualification.

Where can you find all the information on the development of the RQF qualifications? Go to the [BTEC Higher Nationals](#) page of the Pearson website where you can also sign up for the BTEC Higher Nationals Newsletter and find details of upcoming training.

How to Gain Approval to Deliver HNs

To apply to deliver a Higher National qualification please contact your Curriculum Development Manager for support. The approval form can be obtained through your Curriculum Development Manager, ukapproval@pearson.com or your Vocational Quality Advisor.

If you are an existing centre and are transferring to the RQF qualifications there is a three stage process in place which allows for a case by case approval process. For the details on this please refer to the [BTEC Higher National Approval Guidance 2018](#)

Building a BTEC Higher National Programme

As with all BTEC programmes the qualifications are designed to contain a balance of Core (mandatory) and Specialist (optional) units. Each subject specification will need to be checked carefully to ensure the correct combinations are chosen for your centre, subject, learners and industry.

Quality Assurance

The annual quality assurance cycle for Higher Nationals is benchmarked to meet the level 4 and level 5 on the Quality Assurance Agency Framework for Higher Education. The annual cycle for Quality Assurance is shown on page 9 and the links to the QAA regulation and oversight is on pages 18 - 20 in the [BTEC Centre Guide to Enhanced Quality Assurance and Assessment 2017-18](#)

Key terminology:

APMR	Annual Programme Monitoring Report - This is a compulsory element of the HN quality cycle. It is an annual written review which requires a centre to analyse and reflect on the whole HN provision for the previous teaching year.
AMR	Academic Management Review - This is a compulsory element of the BTEC quality cycle for Alternative Providers. This is the process by which we quality assure a WBL centre's processes and procedures for managing vocational provision.

QMR	Quality Management Review - This is a compulsory element of the BTEC quality cycle. This is the process by which we quality assure a centre's processes and procedures for managing vocational provision.
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency - Is responsible for safeguarding standards and improving the quality of UK Higher Education. They carry out risk based reviews of Higher Education providers to ensure standards are maintained.
IAR	Independent Assessment Review - This is the external examination process (external sampling). Allocation of EE's is from October. Early communication with the EE is recommended so that planning and support is effective. The final visit and external sampling will take place by 30th June.
AB	Assessment Board - This is a compulsory element of the HN quality cycle. At least one Assessment Board per year is required. The AB must consider and approve the achieved grades BEFORE certification can take place. Further details on the responsibilities and structure of the AB can be found in BTEC Higher Nationals Enhanced Quality Assurance and Assessment Handbook 2017-18 pages 47-49
HN Global	Registration to HN Global is mandatory for students in their second year of programmes in 2017/18. This is an online platform which contains resources to help both tutors and students get the most out of their Higher National experience. Find out more on the HN Global pages of the website
Annual Student Survey	Capturing the learners' voice is very important and for Pearson this is done through an Annual Student Survey, normally released in February - March. The reasons why Pearson holds an annual survey for UK and international students is detailed in this guide

Internal Assessment Rules - awarding higher grades

One of the most confusing aspects of Higher Nationals can relate to the awarding of merit and distinction grades. This table highlights the key differences between the two sets of HNs we offer.

QCF	The generic merit and distinction grade descriptors are not exhaustive. Each assessment does not need to incorporate all of the Merit/Distinction grade descriptors. It is good practice to provide learners at least two opportunities in a unit to achieve merit and distinction criteria.
RQF	The merit and distinction criteria are already contextualised in the specification and link to the pass criteria. If the pass criteria has not been met the merit and distinction grades cannot be awarded; as they are a qualitative extension of the pass assessment criteria.

Internal Assessment Rules - Submission and Resubmission

There are differences between the submission rules on Higher Nationals so please be sure you know the rules for the qualifications you are offering. Remember in all cases any legitimate extensions cannot provide an advantage to a learner and it is essential that you have your own centre policy on submission deadlines that deal with late submissions.

QCF	RQF
Only one opportunity for resubmission will be permitted (new assignment)	One resubmission is allowed if a student does not achieve a pass on first submission (same assignment)
You must not cap resubmissions at pass, although if a student who submitted their work late is offered a resubmission, this is capped at pass	The reassessment opportunity will be capped at pass for that unit
A student may request or be offered a resubmission if they have not met all of the criteria (Pass, Merit or Distinction) available in an assignment	A student will not be entitled to be reassessed in any component for which a pass or higher has already been awarded

Internal Assessment Rules - Repeated Units

There are differences in the rules for repeating units on Higher Nationals so please be sure you know the rules for the qualifications you are offering.

QCF	RQF
A unit can be repeated if the provider and assessment board decide it is an appropriate course of action	A unit can be repeated if the provider's assessment board decide it is an appropriate course of action
The unit will be studied again	The unit will be studied again with full attendance
The unit will be capped at a Pass grade	The unit will be capped at a Pass grade
The provider should have a policy that states the number of times a unit can be repeated	Units can only be repeated once

Independent Assessment Review (External Examination)

External Examiners (EE), who are subject experts, will be allocated to each Principal Subject Area to conduct a review to ensure national standards are being met.

The EE will conduct sampling of assessment instruments and assessed student work in order to provide judgments and feedback. EEs support you in identifying good practice and areas for further development, giving you guidance on how you can improve your assessment.

The process for external examination is fully detailed in the [BTEC Centre Guide to External Examination Levels 4-7](#)

Support and Key Documents

[Web link to BTEC Quality Nominee Information Hub](#)

Throughout the year we will deliver Quality Nominee Network Events which have a Higher National focus; these will be relevant to Quality Nominees, HE Coordinators and HE Programme Leaders. These will be promoted through our QN Newsletters

[Ask the Expert](#) provides you with a direct link to the relevant Subject Advisor for any questions regarding the delivery aspects of the HN i.e. content of the specification, grading criteria, staffing requirements / specialisms

BTEC Internal Assessment support can be obtained from the HN Subject Leaders via btecdelivery@pearson.com

The HN Quality Assurance team can be contacted via hnqa@pearson.com

[BTEC HN - Key Dates](#) - first teach, review dates, certification and end dates

[BTEC Assessment forms and verification tools](#) - links to Pearson designed forms

[BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4 - 7 2017-18](#) - this applies to all HN Levels 4 - 7 except the RQF qualifications and SRF (Self-Regulated Framework) developed after September 2016

[BTEC Higher Nationals Enhanced Quality Assurance and Assessment Handbook 2017-18](#) - this applies to Pearson BTEC Higher National Certificates (RQF) and Higher National Diplomas (RQF) and all other Pearson BTEC Higher Nationals developed or designed and in operation from September 2016

[BTEC Centre Guide to External Examination Levels 4-7 2017-18](#) - this related to the external verification of your programmes.