

Standards verification and external examination

Standards verification is how we check that you are operating appropriate quality assurance and maintaining national standards. **External Examination** is a specific type of standards verification used for our BTEC Level 4-7 (QCF) 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.

How we do it

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 haven't demonstrated the national standard outlined in the specification through their work, you'll agree actions that need to be completed before we'll be able to issue certificates to your students. This will include providing a second sample to show that you've responded to the External Examiner's feedback.

This section provides information on External Examination (standards verification) for our:

- BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals
- BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design
- BTEC Professional qualifications at Levels 4 and above

Why does standards verification for higher and professional level qualifications have a special name?

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

The [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) outlines your responsibility to ensure that your 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're delivering a Higher Apprenticeship, the knowledge based qualifications that make up the apprenticeship will follow the External Examination quality assurance model outlined below. However, you should read the information in this document in conjunction with the **BTEC Apprenticeships Quality Assurance Handbook**.

Allocation of your External Examiner (EE)

We'll begin allocating External Examiners to all centres with active registrations at the start of the academic year. If a programme is no longer running but still has active registrations, you must either claim certificates or withdraw the students.

Once programmes have been allocated, we'll let the Quality Nominee know 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 though **additional visits may be put in place** to take into account their varying programme start and end dates, certification requirements and where additional actions are required.

Your programme leader will agree a date for the External Examiner to visit and confirm in writing the programme(s) the External Examiner is appointed to. It is important that you identify any customised provision or units added through the Meeting Local Needs process, if you have it.

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, your 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, your 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, your External Examiner will confirm this in writing.

All sampling activities must be completed by 30 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

During the visit the External Examiner will need access to:

Assignment briefs

- all assignment briefs used to generate student evidence for each unit. Your 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

For **BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diplomas in Art and Design**, your 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).

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.

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 [QAA 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're 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.

Your External Examiner may make arrangements to attend an Assessment Board meeting, but you should also provide the minutes from the previous Academic Board or Quality Standards Board.

Your External Examiner will also sample each programme you're 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 student samples
1-8 students	All
9-100 students	9
More than 100 students	18

The minimum sample **will always include one sixth of each programme's units with no fewer than 3 units reviewed.** Student work is **sampled across units** so, if you have 100 students, your External Examiner needs to see samples for 9 students across at least 3 units, not 9 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.

For centres delivering the new HN Business (RQF) qualification, the External Examiner will always sample Unit 6 ("Managing a Successful Business Project") and Unit 11 ("Research Project") to ensure that you have devised assessments that appropriately reflect the theme set by Pearson.

Higher National Certificates (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 your External Examiner would only need to see work for 9 students from the two programmes if you between 9 and 100 students.

Where units rely on students determining the brief (e.g. project units), your 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 your 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 won't 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

Your External Examiner will check the progress you've made against any actions for your previous report and will highlight anything that hasn't been addressed.

Management of academic standards

During your visit, your 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

Your 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

[QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education:](#)

- Assessment Boards
- late submission of learner work
- referrals and resubmissions
- 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 your visit, your 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 15 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. Your 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 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 your visit, your 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. Your External Examiner only needs to report in detail on samples which affected the outcome of external examination and advice provided. 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 doesn't 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

Your 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 learners?
- 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

Your 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 learners

Any evidence of plagiarism in learner 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 within 10 working days of your visit. 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. 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 for all programmes	<p>You've provided a full sample and your External Examiner has confirmed you have adequate quality assurance procedures in place and you are documenting assessment correctly.</p> <p>Your External Examiner has agreed that student evidence is valid, authentic and sufficient, and you're assessing students to the national standard. However, they may identify essential actions or recommendations on how to improve on current practice.</p> <p>Certification is released, programme by programme, and a further sample is not required.</p>
Further Sampling Required (FSR)	<p>You have not provided a full sample and your External Examiner has not seen sufficient evidence in order to release certification for the programme. Certification is blocked and a second sample will be requested.</p>
Block for one or more programmes	<p>You've provided a full sample but your External Examiner has identified one of more essential actions that need to be addressed before we can release certification. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● students haven't been assessed to the national standard ● assessment and/or internal verification hasn't been documented correctly on one or more of the programmes in the sector ● plagiarised work was found in the sample <p>This means that certification is blocked and a second sample will be requested. Your 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.</p>

Submitting a second sample

You'll 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 (FSR). Your External Examiner will get in touch to agree a timescale and to confirm the format for your second sample once you've accessed the original report.

The second sample will 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 your 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 your second sample

There are two possible outcomes of your second sample:

Report Status	Outcome
Release (2)	Your External Examiner has agreed that you're 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. This means certification is released .
Remedial action required	Your External Examiner still doesn't agree that you're 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'll 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.

[Enquiries and Appeals about Pearson Vocational Qualifications policy](#)