

Quality Assurance Handbook

2016 – 2017

BTEC Apprenticeship

Version 1 – September 2016

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Introduction

This handbook is effective from **1 September 2016 until 31 August 2017** and addresses the quality assurance arrangements for Work-Based Learning centres delivering NVQs and competence-based qualifications within the BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks.

The handbook should be read in conjunction with the **Pearson Edexcel and Pearson EDI NVQs, SVQs and Competence-based Qualifications – Delivery Guidance** and **Quality Assurance Requirements 2016-17** available on our website: qualifications.pearson.com/en/home.html

Who is this handbook for?

This handbook is designed for Work-Based Learning centres offering BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks. All Quality Nominees, Programme Managers, Internal Verifiers and Assessors at centres offering BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks must familiarise themselves with the contents of this handbook.

If your centre is offering standalone NVQ/SVQs and competence-based qualifications, please refer to the document **NVQ, SVQ and Competence-based qualification Quality Assurance Handbook 2016-17** available on our website: qualifications.pearson.com/en/home.html

External quality assurance for BTEC Apprenticeships

We will assure quality for NVQs and competence qualifications in BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks through visits for standards verification, and across all components where possible.

What is standards verification for BTEC Apprenticeships?

Standards verification is the way in which we check that centres are conducting both internal quality assurance and assessment to the right standards. We call the process of external quality assurance ‘standards verification’ to emphasise that we are verifying that assessment, internal quality assurance and evidence of achievement for the particular sector meets nationally defined standards.

Standards Verifiers will provide advice and guidance and work with you to support you in working to national standards and addressing possible areas of weakness.

Standards verification ensures that you have accurate assessment records and are assessing learners appropriately, consistently and fairly. There will normally be two visits each year for programmes in a sector.

Note: BTEC Apprenticeships and NVQ/SVQs are not in scope for centre Quality Management Review and centres delivering solely BTEC Apprenticeships and NVQ/SVQs will not receive a visit from a Centre Quality Reviewer as part of the external quality assurance process. Standards Verifiers will review the overarching management and support for the delivery of NVQ/SVQs.

Which elements make up the BTEC Apprenticeship framework?

- NVQ and competence-based qualifications regulated by Ofqual
- BTEC Specialist and BTEC Professional knowledge-based qualifications
- Combined qualifications consisting of both competence and knowledge elements
- Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS)
- Employee Rights and Responsibilities (ERR)
- Transferable Skills – Functional Skills or Essential Skills Wales - in English, Maths and ICT as determined by the Issuing Authority for the Apprenticeship sector

Please note: Certain frameworks include Pearson accredited BTEC Work Skills for Effective Learning and Employment qualifications to enable learners to gain credit for PLTS and ERR.

Roles and responsibilities

Pearson

Standards Verifier

We will let you know the name of your Standards Verifier in October. If you are a new centre, or if you offer Apprenticeships in a new sector, then we will aim to tell you 4 to 6 weeks after you register learners on any of the component qualifications. The Standards Verifier is trained to cover all qualifications within the BTEC Apprenticeship framework.

The primary focus of the Standards Verifier is to ensure that staff involved in the planning, delivery and assessment of qualifications within the BTEC Apprenticeship framework:

- maintain the national standard of qualifications awarded by Pearson
- assess learner performance in accordance with national standards and evidence requirements
- maintain a robust mechanism for the internal verification of all programmes within the BTEC Apprenticeship framework
- have a clear commitment to assuring and improving quality.

The Standards Verifier will:

- visit your centre, normally twice in a year and possibly more frequently, particularly if you have a different arrangement with us
- liaise with you to arrange visit dates and plans so that all qualifications are covered
- supplement these visits with remote sampling, if and when necessary
- verify that the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for assessment, internal verification and for the occupational sector are met
- provide advice, support and guidance to the centre on best practice for implementation of assessment and internal verification and for the achievement of the National Occupational Standards for the occupational sector
- provide advice and guidance on the external quality assurance processes and ask for evidence to be sourced relevant to each component of the framework
- provide verbal feedback at the end of their visits
- submit reports within 10 working days of the visit
- recommend certification or otherwise for the respective occupational sectors.

Higher Apprenticeship Adviser

Centres that are newly approved to deliver BTEC Higher Apprenticeships will receive a visit from a BTEC Higher Apprenticeship Adviser. The role of the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship Adviser is to provide support, advice and guidance to the newly approved centre on the implementation and management of the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship.

Senior Standards Verifier

We have a Senior Standards Verifier for each sector who takes an overview of standards within the sector and ensures that all Standards Verifiers have appropriate standardisation. The Senior Standards Verifier may be asked to become involved with a centre at our request.

Centres

Quality Nominee

Each centre appoints a member of staff as the Quality Nominee to act as the main person for us to contact. The Quality Nominee should be someone who has the capacity and authority to act for the centre. Quality Nominees must keep their contact details up-to-date using Edexcel Online.

As a Quality Nominee, you should ensure the effective management of BTEC Apprenticeship programmes and actively encourage and promote good practice. For these programmes, you will be informed who the Standards Verifier is and should liaise with the appropriate Programme Managers, Assessors and Internal Verifiers. You will also be notified that a Standards Verifier has provided a report, which is accessed via Edexcel Online. Any reports that cannot be provided through Edexcel Online will be emailed directly to you by us.

Programme Manager/Internal Verifiers/Assessors

The Programme Manager or Programme Leader is a person designated by a centre to take responsibility for the effective delivery and assessment of BTEC Apprenticeships, Pearson Edexcel or Pearson EDI NVQs and other Pearson qualifications. As the Programme Manager or Internal Verifier, you will:

- liaise with the Quality Nominee to obtain the details of the Standards Verifier and to provide information about the visits and report
- notify the Standards Verifier of any changes to Internal Verifiers or Assessors
- prepare for the Standards Verifier visits including providing any information that the Standards Verifier needs and agreeing a visit plan
- provide information during the visits including evidence related to learners' portfolios and assessment, the internal verification and quality assurance processes
- receive feedback at the end of the visits
- receive the report of the visits, which you must access through Edexcel Online and take actions when required.

Internal Verifiers must be both suitably qualified and occupationally competent and should ideally be involved in the delivery and assessment of BTEC Apprenticeships. You cannot internally verify your own assessment. Where there is a team of Assessors, it is good practice to encourage some of the team to become qualified for the internal quality assurance role.

If there is one main person responsible for delivery and assessment, then another person will need to be identified to undertake internal verification.

In order to ensure that assessment is being carried out consistently and that National Occupational Standards are being met, Internal Verifiers are responsible for monitoring that Assessors maintain their Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as specified in the assessment requirements or assessment strategy for the sector.

As an Internal Verifier, you will:

- ensure your internal quality assurance of assessment process and practice meets the National Occupational Standards for internal quality assurance
- ensure an effective system of recording learner achievement is in place
- develop an internal verification strategy and form an internal verification plan to implement this strategy
- keep accurate and up-to-date records of the internal verification process including standardisation activities
- advise and standardise Assessors on the appropriateness of assessment evidence with regard to level, sufficiency, authenticity, validity and consistency
- use your sector knowledge and experience to sample assessments to verify Assessors' judgements, ensuring that they are consistent, fair and reliable
- provide standardisation activities for Assessors to ensure consistency in the assessment process
- ensure your own assessment decisions are sampled when teaching BTEC Apprenticeships
- ensure that appropriate corrective action is taken where necessary
- take part in the formal stages of any appeal.

In order to ensure that assessment is being carried out consistently and that National Occupational Standards are being met, Assessors must be both qualified for their role and suitably occupationally competent and they should take part in standardisation meetings. Assessors must maintain their CPD as specified in the assessment requirements or assessment strategy for the sector.

As an Assessor, you will:

- ensure that your assessment activity meets the National Occupational Standards for assessment
- use your sector knowledge and experience to assess learners' evidence against the requirements of the qualifications in the BTEC Apprenticeship framework
- engage in standardisation activities to ensure consistency in the assessment process
- keep accurate and up-to-date records of your assessment activity
- engage learners in the planning of assessment and the assessment process
- provide feedback to learners at both formative and summative stages on the suitability of assessment evidence with regard to level, sufficiency, validity and consistency
- support learners to take appropriate corrective action where necessary.

Where there are several NVQs delivered by your centre, it is good practice to ensure that there is coordination across the whole centre. This could be undertaken by a Programme Manager, an Internal Verifier, or the Quality Nominee. This helps us to communicate with you and helps you to coordinate any actions needed following Standards Verifier visits.

Support

- For general BTEC and NVQ/SVQ enquiries, visit: qualifications.pearson.com/en/home.html
- To find out more about BTEC Apprenticeships, please visit:
<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/btec-apprenticeships.html>
- For specific services, such as a review of your in-house training schemes and materials against the requirements of the elements of the Apprenticeship framework, contact your Pearson Account Manager
- For support with Functional Skills assessment such as content of test paper questions, mark schemes and general assessment queries, email fsassessment@pearson.com

Comprehensive information and support material

There is additional information and support material available on the NVQ/SVQ pages at <http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/about-us/qualification-brands/btec/delivering-btec/key-documents.html>. This includes:

- Pearson Edexcel and Pearson EDI NVQs, SVQs and Competence-based Qualifications – Delivery Guidance and Quality Assurance Requirements 2016-17
- Pearson NVQs and SVQs General Guidance for Centres and Learners
- profiles for a wide range of NVQs/SVQs including accreditation information, expiry dates, occupational competence requirements for Assessors and Verifiers, etc
- links to other useful NVQ/SVQ sites
- details of new publications that have become available after the Pearson publications catalogue has been published.

Standards Verifiers and Internal Verifiers should be familiar with the websites and publications for the appropriate Sector Skills Council or Standards Setting Body and any other relevant industry organisation. NVQ centres and Standards Verifiers must ensure they have copies of the following:

- a full set of the relevant occupational standards, usually available from the Standards Setting Body and the National Occupational Standards website: <http://nos.ukces.org.uk/Pages/index.aspx>
- Pearson Edexcel and Pearson EDI NVQs, SVQs and Competence-based Qualifications – Delivery Guidance and Quality Assurance Requirements 2016-17
- the specification for each NVQ programme being delivered, which include the assessment strategy and evidence requirements
- Joint Awarding Body (JAB) Guidance on Internal Verification of NVQs, available as a download from qualifications.pearson.com/en/home.html

There is additional information and support material available for transferable skills on our Functional Skills and the Essential Skills Wales pages:

Functional Skills - <http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-functional-skills.html>

Essential Skills Wales - <http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-essential-skills-wales.html>

Training

We provide customised training and support through Training from Pearson at: qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/training-from-pearson-uk/about.html.

Integrated standards verification for Level 2 and Level 3 BTEC Apprenticeships

What is integrated standards verification?

- A coordinated approach to providing quality assurance for all component qualifications of a BTEC Apprenticeship framework that are internally assessed
- External quality assurance conducted through visits and/or remote sampling arranged flexibly to meet the needs of BTEC Apprenticeship centres
- A process that incorporates a review of centre systems, so there is no requirement to undertake Quality Review and Development, if your centre offers solely BTEC Apprenticeships

What does integrated standards verification cover?

Pearson qualifications within Level 2 and Level 3 BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks or elements of these qualifications that have internal assessment, including:

- Pearson NVQ or competence-based qualifications
- BTEC Specialist Qualifications
- Combined competence and knowledge qualifications
- Functional Skills or Essential Skill Wales
- Pearson BTEC WorkSkills for Effective Learning and Employment

Which centres are involved?

Work-Based Learning centres and FE Business Development Units approved for BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks with learners registered on a full BTEC Apprenticeship framework. **Please note:** if you register learners with us solely for individual Apprenticeship framework component qualifications, please refer to **NVQ, SVQ and Competence-based qualification Quality Assurance Handbook 2016-17** available on our website: qualifications.pearson.com/en/home.html

Standards Verifier allocations

We allocate Standards Verifiers to quality assure all elements of Level 2 and Level 3 BTEC Apprenticeships to:

- centres that have registrations on BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks – indicated by a MASxxx code on Edexcel Online. You need to have registered learners for a full framework
- cover all programmes within the framework.
- Apprenticeship frameworks vary, depending on the particular occupational sector.
- If you are running only one BTEC Apprenticeship, then you will have one Standards Verifier

- If you are running several BTEC Apprenticeships that include BTEC WorkSkills for Effective Learning and Employment, then only one of the Standards Verifiers will verify BTEC WorkSkills for Effective Learning and Employment
- If you are a large centre that has agreed a specific visit plan or coordination across Standards Verifiers with us, then make sure you use this to make arrangements with the Standards Verifier or Standards Verifiers

If the BTEC Apprenticeship is based on a combined qualification with both competence and knowledge units, rather than separate competence and knowledge qualifications, you will still receive two visits per year - please note that combined qualifications will be treated as NVQs for external quality assurance purposes

- For some Technical Certificates you can choose to use onscreen tests for assessment; if you use onscreen tests then the Standards Verifier will not need to verify the units or whole programmes which have been tested
- If your centre is offering BTEC Apprenticeships at both levels 2 and 3 in the same sector, your centre will be allocated the same Standards Verifier for both levels.

The Standards Verifier will liaise first with your Quality Nominee. We will send the Quality Nominee an email giving contact details of the Standards Verifier and the programmes to which the Standards Verifier is allocated. This information is also available on Edexcel Online.

You need to ensure that the Standards Verifier has the right information on each visit, including any changes to the Internal Verifiers or Assessors, to ensure quality assurance is targeted according to our requirements and to your needs.

The structure of integrated standards verification visits

The Standards Verifier will carry out the full quality assurance process for each component qualification of the BTEC Apprenticeship frameworks.

There will be at least two visits for each BTEC Apprenticeship but we may agree a higher number with you, particularly if there are a large number of learners who are spread geographically.

You should advise the Standards Verifier of any particular requirements that you have. If you are assessing over many sites, the Standards Verifier will want to visit all the different assessment sites, over time.

Additional visits are not permitted without consent from our WBL Assessment team. Please make any requests for additional visits or remote sampling to your allocated Standards Verifier, who will contact us on your behalf. Please note that you may be charged a fee for additional visits.

You must register learners promptly (normally within one month of enrolment and as advised in the Pearson Work Based Learning Centre Guide) so that you receive guidance and support from the Standards Verifier as early as possible within the programme cycle. Standards Verifiers can only visit centres to look at programmes with registrations, so you should check registrations carefully when making arrangements. You must ensure that information regarding learners is accurate and up to date so that we can provide appropriate support and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

If you cancel a pre-arranged visit at short notice, you must have a legitimate reason. We may withhold any claims for certification until a verification visit has been completed. We reserve

the right to charge for visits that have been cancelled at short notice.

The Standards Verifier will:

- agree a Visit Requirements Plan with the Programme Manager
- agree a schedule for the visit which will normally include reviewing Internal Verification plans, reports and records, including records of standardisation meetings, assessment records and the validation of assessment judgements through sampling learner portfolios and evidence
- review the internal quality assurance for the qualification – checking the internal verification sampling strategy, Internal Verifier records, records of standardisation meetings and feedback to Assessors
- review the occupational competence and qualifications including the Assessment and Quality Assurance qualifications of the centre team, including professional development plans for Assessors and Internal Verifiers
- ensure that centre staff have all the necessary current documentation
- check assessment practice against the requirements of the overarching assessment strategy and validate the quality and consistency of Assessors' judgements against national standards through sampling assessment decisions at interim and final stages
- inform the Programme Manager promptly of any areas of weakness and agree an action plan for improvement
- provide positive feedback and encouragement when good practice is identified
- make full use of retrospective sampling where necessary. You must retain portfolios for all learners certificated between verification visits in order to allow the Standards Verifier to undertake retrospective sampling
- recommend access to certification or actions to be undertaken by the centre, as appropriate
- where necessary, recommend limitation or suspension of certification, or suspension of registration.

Exceptionally, if we consider that a centre is low risk because it has a good quality history then it is possible to arrange for verification of programmes to be conducted remotely. The Standards Verifier will verify samples of learners' evidence, reviewing Assessor and Internal Verifier's records and possibly contacting learners.

For remote standards verification:

- the Standards Verifier agrees the units, learners, portfolios and other related records required in the sample and confirms arrangements with you in writing
- you should never send original evidence or records unless specifically required
- the outcome for remote sampling is likely to be restricted to limited certification.

First visit for newly approved programmes

The Standards Verifier's first visit to a newly approved programme will include a review of the Pearson recognition and approval criteria to confirm that you are meeting the requirements.

The Programme Manager or Internal Verifier should have a copy of the recognition and approvals submissions available for the Standards Verifier. Where serious discrepancies between the submissions and current practice are found at the visit, the Standards Verifier will notify us.

Arranging the visit and the visit schedule

The Standards Verifier will first check with you which programmes are running, and whether there are learners registered. Standards Verifiers are not allowed to visit centres to look at programmes without registrations unless given prior permission from us.

The Standards Verifier will then agree with you a date for the visit and timings for key activities. The date of this visit should be appropriate for when learners require certification. The Standards Verifier will send you a Visit Requirements Plan setting out what you have agreed.

You should structure activities so that the best use is made of Standards Verifier time. The visit must be of sufficient duration for the Standards Verifier to complete all necessary verification activities in order to make recommendations on certification.

The visit should include time to cover the:

- programmes to be verified
- internal verification plans and their implementation
- records of standardisation meetings
- Assessors and Internal Verifiers to be seen
- evidence to be made available on the day, or in advance
- follow up of action points from previous reports
- observation of assessment practice
- sampling of learner work and interviews with learners
- named sites to be visited, where provision is dispersed
- review of the assessment strategy requirements and their implementation
- feedback to the Internal Verifier/Programme Manager and, in some cases, the assessment team.

In some cases, it may not be practical for the Standards Verifier to complete their report during their visit, but it is important that the main action points are agreed with you during the visit.

Pre-visit information for Standards Verifiers

The Standards Verifier, particularly if newly appointed to the centre, may ask to see materials and documentation before finalising the visit plan, so that they can familiarise themselves with the organisation and highlight any matters for discussion. This information may include:

- a list of designated Assessors and Internal Verifiers for each programme
- any changes to the designated Assessors and IVs for each programme since the last Standards Verifier visit
- CVs and authenticated copies of D units, or, A and V awards for Assessors and Internal Verifiers, or, L 3 Certificate in Assessing Vocational Achievement and L 4 Award in the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practice for Assessors and Internal Verifiers
- registered learners for each programme (and their locations if provision is dispersed)
- details of the assessment methods used
- records of learners certificated since the last standards verification visit.

Preparing for the visit

You need to prepare for the Standards Verifier visit so that best use is made of the time available for both your centre and for us. For each visit, you should have ready the following information.

For learners

- Start date, registration date and number, BTEC Apprenticeships programme
- Initial assessment, including learning needs and Recognition of Prior Learning
- Workplace location, including details of supervisor/manager/mentor
- Assessor allocation
- Progress review dates, including latest action agreed
- Records of assessments and summative decisions
- Unit progress and completion

For Assessors

- Details of any changes to the assessment team since the last visit
- Up-to-date CVs, relevant to the programmes assessed
- Assessment qualification certificates or validated copies of the originals
- Personal development plans for Assessors showing professional updating/development on a rolling basis
- Learner workload including assessment sites (if provision is dispersed)
- Records of monitoring Assessor performance including feedback
- Specimen signatures of Assessors

For Internal Verifiers

- Details of any changes to the Internal Verifier team since the last visit
- Up-to-date CVs, relevant to the programmes assessed
- Quality assurance qualification certificates or validated copies of the originals
- Personal development plans as Internal Verifiers, showing ongoing professional updating/development
- Assessor locations
- Learner locations
- Records of monitoring Assessor performance including feedback
- Specimen signatures of Internal Verifiers

For the programme

- The current version of the Quality Assurance Handbook
- Internal verification sampling strategy, including proposed and actual sampling
- Copies of any written, structured evidence generating opportunities, assessment instruments or assignments and the internal verification records for these

- Monitoring of assessment practice records and feedback
- Sampling of assessment decisions and feedback
- The previous Standards Verification report
- Certification claims for current learners and those made since the last visit
- Records of Assessor meetings and standardisation activities
- Records of internal verification meetings, where there is more than one Internal Verifier
- Specimen signatures of any “expert witnesses”, validated by the Internal Verifier
- Appeals/complaints/malpractice records relevant to BTEC Apprenticeships
- Equal opportunities policy
- Health and safety policy and procedures, including monitoring of placement sites

Much of the above is sensitive information and should be held securely and restricted to named personnel. Where information is stored electronically, access to the system should be password protected and accessible only to those authorised to make amendments. It should be kept up-to-date, preferably by a named officer, and be easily retrievable. You must keep centre records for three years for audit purposes. This includes all learner records, internal verification and assessment reports.

If you have learners who have withdrawn from the BTEC Apprenticeship programme, then you should promptly withdraw their registration through Edexcel Online.

If you are running several BTEC Apprenticeships, then you may want to have full coordination across the Standards Verifier activity. If you contact us, we can agree to nominate one of your Standards Verifiers to coordinate visits and reporting.

The visit

The visit should follow the agreed schedule and enable the Standards Verifier to make a decision whether or not to recommend certification and Direct Claims Status. The Standards Verifier will make decisions based on the centre recognition and approval criteria and our requirements for the delivery of assessment on the report.

As an Internal Verifier, you have responsibility to provide evidence to demonstrate that these requirements are being met. Where there is more than one Internal Verifier on a BTEC Apprenticeship programme, one should adopt the senior or co-ordinating Internal Verifier role and take responsibility for managing the BTEC Apprenticeship programme information.

The Standards Verifier will review:

- resources
- learner support specific to the BTEC Apprenticeship
- assessment and verification
- centre records.

At the end of the visit, the Standards Verifier will discuss the conclusions and agree an action plan with you. If the Standards Verifier decides that assessment criteria and requirements have not been met, in the report they will identify:

- directed actions
- limitation to, or suspension of, certification
- in exceptional circumstances, suspension of registration.

The BTEC Apprenticeship Workbooks and Delivery Guides can be used by your centre to encourage an integrated approach to the delivery of the Apprenticeship and towards a holistic approach to assessment. The BTEC Apprenticeship Workbooks and Delivery Guides are available for a range of different sectors; find out more by visiting the BTEC Apprenticeship website:

Otherwise, we expect that many centres will deliver the BTEC Specialist knowledge qualification first and then the NVQ or competence component. Where this is the case you could agree that the Standards Verifier can make an initial visit for the NVQ and for the BTEC Specialist knowledge qualification sampling, possibly followed by further Standards Verification of the Specialist knowledge qualification through remote sampling. However, the manner in which you deliver the BTEC Apprenticeship programmes will be best determined by your centre and the circumstances around the employment of your apprentices and the Standards Verifier will work with you to accommodate your delivery style.

Internal quality assurance

You must provide copies of all internal verification:

- sampling plans
- internal verification records for any written, structured evidence generating opportunities, assessment instruments or assignments
- sampling records, including feedback to Assessors
- records of standardisation meetings
- records of monitoring assessment practice, including feedback to Assessors.

The Standards Verifier will normally start by reviewing the quality of internal verification to see that it is rigorous and robust. The Standards Verifier needs to be sure that all Internal Verifiers:

- understand centre systems and procedures
- are knowledgeable about the standards and sector assessment requirements/strategy
- are knowledgeable about the learners
- understand their own role in quality assurance and standardisation of Assessors.

Sampling learner evidence

The sampling of learners is central to standards verification. The Standards Verifier will sample learner work at every visit to determine whether national standards are being consistently maintained, with a view to confer or confirm Direct Claim Status. You must make learner work available for sampling at each visit. If you do not make learner work available when requested, the Standards Verifier report will identify actions. If no work is sampled for a BTEC Apprenticeship programme then certification cannot usually be allowed.

Sampling of learner evidence:

- will be carefully planned to ensure that the Standards Verifier can reach a judgement on standards
- should include formative (interim) and summative (final) stages, particularly for new centres or inexperienced teams and where qualifications within the BTEC Apprenticeship framework have changed
- may be portfolio based or in alternative formats, for example work place evidence, video, CD/DVD, audio tape, e-portfolio
- will include the support and guidance offered to learners.

For the NVQ or competence element of the BTEC Apprenticeship framework, or combined competence and knowledge qualification, there is no prescribed size of sample. The selection of the sample for each centre will vary according to the requirements of the Standards Verifier's sampling strategy and the particular BTEC Apprenticeship. Standards Verifiers will ensure that they can select independently some of the learners who are sampled to ensure the validity of the sampling process.

For the BTEC Specialist knowledge qualifications, BTEC WorkSkills qualifications and, where applicable, any other accredited qualifications for Employee Rights and Responsibilities, your centre will need to provide completed and fully assessed units. The number of learners that need to be sampled depends on the total number of learners registered on the units of the respective programmes.

The Standards Verifier will select their sample based on:

- separate standards verification of different level BTEC Apprenticeship programmes in the same sector
- reliability (to be sure sufficient work and Assessors have been seen)
- different assessment methods
- Assessors/Internal Verifiers – changed personnel, number, experience, workload and location
- number of assessment sites and satellites
- learner range, for example full-time/part-time, different employers
- introduction of new/revised BTEC Apprenticeships or additional units
- all units and, in particular, any problem units
- inclusion of verified and non-verified assessment decisions
- opportunities to access assessment
- any special requirements of the assessment strategy
- retrospective sampling of learners for whom certification has been claimed between Standards Verifier visits.

During a visit, a Standards Verifier will normally want to meet relevant practitioners but will also want to review evidence of learner performance relevant to the qualification(s) being quality assured. You and the Standards Verifier may agree that it is appropriate for some sampling of learner portfolios to take place outside visits, for example, sampling for the BTEC Specialist knowledge qualifications.

Meeting the team and learners

The Standards Verifier will meet with staff from the assessment and verification team to discuss and advise on assessment issues and practices. The Standards Verifier will check details such as:

- learner enrolment and registration dates
- access to assessment and to unit achievement
- assessment and verification dates.

The Standards Verifier will want to see evidence that all Assessors and Internal Verifiers meet the occupational competence requirements for the NVQs they are assessing/verifying as part of the BTEC Apprenticeship framework. These are usually set out in the sector assessment requirements/strategy. In some sectors, e.g. hairdressing, this is specified in detail. In others, the requirement to maintain occupational competence is implied rather than explicit.

The Standards Verifier will also want to see evidence of professional development and updating within the assessment team. Your centre should review and agree personal development plans with staff, which will support them in their roles. If you have staff based primarily in education and training, who are no longer actively working in the sector in which they are assessing and verifying, you need to consider how their occupational competence remains current.

The Standards Verifier will check the qualifications for Assessors and Internal Verifiers. Where Assessors or Internal Verifiers are qualified with D units or A and V awards, they must operate to the new standards for assessment and quality assurance. They do not need to achieve the new awards, but an updating session should be held to ensure understanding of the new requirements, particularly with regard to assessment requirements/strategies and independent assessment. Please see our website: qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/nvq-and-competence-based-qualifications/about.html

The Standards Verifier will want to meet with Assessors and learners to discuss the implementation of the BTEC Apprenticeship programme.

Provision should be made for the Standards Verifier to witness assessment practice by observing assessment taking place.

A crucial part of the Standards Verifier's role is to advise and support your centre. The visit should allow time to discuss concerns or to answer queries. Where issues are outside the Standards Verifier's remit or experience they will obtain the relevant information directly (and respond by phone or email) or refer you to the appropriate person/department at Pearson.

Conclusion of the visit

The Standards Verifier will discuss the findings of the visit with you at the end of the visit and advise on actions for improvement. Any action points will be directly related to the non-compliance with the relevant centre recognition and approvals criteria and our requirements for the delivery of assessment, as indicated on the report for each component qualification.

It is important that the actions and target dates agreed are clear and realistic, since failure to complete the actions within the timeframe will lead to limitation or suspension of certification or suspension of registration. As the Internal Verifier, you need to understand any required actions and clarify any issues before the end of the visit.

Accessing the electronic reports

The Standards Verifier will provide separate reports for each of the component qualifications within the BTEC Apprenticeship framework. Each qualification has its own reporting format and outcomes. For BTEC and Pearson Edexcel NVQ components, the reports are available through Edexcel Online.

NVQ e-QRF Reporting outcomes

Once your Standards Verifier has submitted an electronic report, your Quality Nominee will receive an automatic email alert and you can access your report through Edexcel Online. If not already a user of Edexcel Online, please ask your Edexcel Online administrator to set you up with access.

- The e-QRF will show whether each centre recognition and approvals indicator continues to be fully met (i.e. consistently throughout), or not met. Where evidence has not been seen, an explanation must be given. For example, if requested information is not available either before, or at the visit, then the indicator will be marked as “No”
- When an indicator is marked as “No”, the comments box in the appropriate section will be used by the Standards Verifier to explain the reason
- Any indicator marked as “No” will trigger an action point
- The e-QRF will also identify any significant failings in the delivery of programmes where these exist. For example the assessment process is found to disadvantage learners, then the indicator will be marked “Yes”
- When one of these indicators is marked as “Yes”, the comments box in the appropriate section will be used by the Standards Verifier to explain the reason
- Any of these indicators marked “Yes” will result in limitation or suspension of certification or suspension of registration

Maintaining the integrity of Pearson NVQs

Standards Verifiers will provide support, advice and guidance to centres to achieve Direct Claim Status. At each visit, Direct Claim Status is reviewed.

Direct Claims Status (DCS) may be conferred on programmes, as recommended by the standards verifier, where the centre demonstrates that the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for assessment, internal quality assurance and the NOS and requirements for the sector have been **consistently** met.

Standards Verifiers will provide support, advice and guidance to centres on the manner in which to achieve DCS. For programmes that have DCS, the portfolios of those learners for whom certification is claimed between Standards Verifier visits must be retained for retrospective sampling.

Where there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate consistency in the application of the NOS or to reflect other circumstances at a centre, standards verifiers may recommend 'limited certification' to release certification for specified learners.

The Standards Verifier will recommend whether to allow Direct Claims Status or limited certification. Certificates for all newly approved programmes are automatically blocked until the Standards Verifier is satisfied that national standards are being consistently met and that internal quality assurance is robust.

In some situations, for example, where learner evidence meets national standards but this has not been demonstrated consistently over time, the Standards Verifier may recommend limited certification for individual learners.

Where the Standards Verifier identifies quality issues in the delivery of programmes, we will exercise the right to:

- direct you to take action
- limit or suspend certification
- suspend registration.

The Standards Verifier will inform you as the Internal Verifier/Programme Manager that they intend to recommend suspension of certification or suspension of registration and explain the next steps.

The Standards Verifier makes the recommendation through the e-QRF. The recommendations for suspension of certification or suspension of registration will be reviewed by the Senior Standards Verifier for the sector, once the e-QRF is submitted to us. The e-QRF is not available to you when suspension of certification or suspension of registration is recommended until the Senior Standards Verifier has reviewed the circumstances.

If a suspension of certification or registration is confirmed:

- we will inform you directly and provide you with access to the e-QRF
- we will work with you to address the issues
- if additional training is required, we will aim to secure appropriate expertise to provide this
- a charge may be made for consultancy visits arising from a quality issue.

For informal advice or guidance about the centre recognition criteria and the Pearson requirements for the delivery of assessment, please contact our Quality Standards team: vocationalqualitystandards@pearson.com

Claiming NVQ certificates following standards verification

The Standards Verifier will recommend whether to allow Direct Claims Status or limited certification. Certificates for all newly approved programmes are automatically blocked until the Standards Verifier is satisfied that national standards are being consistently met and that internal quality assurance is robust.

Indicating “Yes” to Direct Claims Status on the e-QRF enables you to claim a full NVQ certificate or unit certificates between standards verification visits. You must retain portfolios for all learners certificated between verification visits in order to allow the Standards Verifier to undertake retrospective sampling.

Direct Claims Status can be stopped through the Standards Verifier reporting a “No” on the e-QRF. In exceptional circumstances, we may stop certification directly.

In some situations, for example, where learner evidence meets national standards but this has not been demonstrated consistently over time, the Standards Verifier may recommend limited certification for individual learners. The Standards Verifier can list on the e-QRF learners for whom certification may be released from a drop-down list of registered learners. These learners will have their certificates released once the e-QRF is submitted.

The Internal Verifier is responsible for confirming and authenticating all claims for certification. If sampling reveals problems with assessment, you will be asked to resolve the issues.

The release for claims to certification for both NVQs & SVQs will expire after 365 days, unless there has been a further recommendation for release to claims for certification by an allocated standards verifier through the submission of a further e-QRF.

Centres are encouraged to engage with the standards verification process to maintain the release of claims for certification and direct claims status and avoid any disadvantage to learners.

QCF BTEC Standards Verifier report

For the BTEC Specialist knowledge qualifications, BTEC WorkSkills qualifications and – where applicable – any other accredited qualifications for Employee Rights and Responsibilities, the Standards Verifier will verify the accuracy of assessment decisions made against the unit assessment criteria by your centre’s Assessors, based on the samples that you provide, and complete the QCF BTEC report form to record this.

To ensure the accuracy of assessment decisions you must:

- have appropriate structured evidence generating opportunities, assessment instruments or assignments which guide learners to achieve the criteria
- be assessing accurately to national standards
- have appropriate standardisation of Assessors
- undertake appropriate monitoring of assessment through internal verification.

The number of units required for sampling depends on the BTEC programmes being delivered at your centre.

Qualifications being delivered	Number of units
Level 3 90-Credit Diploma, Diploma or Extended Diploma	Two units
Or, if neither of the above	
Level 3 Certificate or Subsidiary Diploma	One unit
Level 2 programmes	One unit
Level 1 programmes	One unit

New for 2016!

The number of learners sampled for each unit is linked to registrations on the unit:

Size of Qualification	Number of learner-unit samples (number of learners double when more than 250 learners registered)	Extra requirement at second sampling
Certificate	1 units x 3 learners	+4 learners per affected unit
Subsidiary Diploma	1 units x 3 learners	
90 credit Diploma	2 units x 4 learners	
Diploma	2 units x 4 learners	
Extended Diploma	2 units x 4 learners	

To enable the Standards Verifier to carry out their sampling of the BTEC qualifications, you will need to provide:

- copies of the structured evidence generating opportunities, assessment instruments or assignment briefs for the units identified
- internal verification records for the structured evidence generating opportunities, assessment instruments or assignment briefs
- assessment records for the learner work
- internal verification records for the assessment decisions
- learner consent declaration for each piece of learner work
- Lead Internal Verifier declaration.

Once the Standards Verifier has submitted the report, your Quality Nominee will receive an automatic email alert and you can access your report through Edexcel Online. If you are not already a user of Edexcel Online, please ask your Edexcel Online administrator to set you up with access.

New for 2016!

Stand alone BTEC Specialist programmes

If you deliver a BTEC specialist programme as part of an apprenticeship framework and as a stand alone programme, your WBL Standards Verifier will be able to verify these programmes too. You will need to inform your Standards Verifier of the stand alone programme as they will need to sample across both cohorts and complete the BTEC Report form through EOL as normal. Upon submission of the report, your Standards Verifier will notify BTECDelivery@pearson.com to ensure the release of both programmes subject to successful standards verification.

Outcomes of QCF BTEC standards verification

Successful outcome at first sample

If the Standards Verifier agrees that you are assessing to national standards and have effective quality assurance procedures for the BTEC sector, certification will be released and your centre may claim certification, once the learners have fully completed their BTEC qualification.

The Standards Verifier may agree that standards are being maintained but offer recommendations to the centre on how to improve on good practice. You should read the report carefully for recommendations.

Unsuccessful outcome at first sample

If the Standards Verifier finds that any assessment decision is incorrect or that the approach to assessment and verification is not valid, a second sample will be requested.

Your Internal Verifier should then conduct a review of assessment, to determine whether:

- an individual Assessor has not been correctly standardised
- individual learners have not been assessed accurately
- there is consistent misinterpretation of unit specifications.

The outcome of this review should then lead to remedial action being taken. The remedial action may involve:

- further training and standardisation of Assessors
- further training and standardisation of Internal Verifiers
- review of the assessment process and decisions for particular Assessors
- review of the internal quality assurance process and decisions
- additional evidence being provided by learners and further assessment of this additional evidence taking place
- additional internal verification records of any further, additional assessment activity.

The second sample process

The Standards Verifier will contact you when the first standards verification report is submitted to agree a timescale for a second sample to be provided and the format of the sample required.

The second sample should include the elements of the first sample that caused the initial certification block, with evidence to show that the issues have been addressed. These will be clearly identified in the standards verification report.

The Standards Verifier will need to ensure that standards are being reapplied consistently across each programme that was blocked at first sample.

The Standards Verifier will:

- check that amendments have been made to the original sample of learners
- check a further sample of learners to ensure that standards are being correctly applied.

New for 2016!

The number of extra samples will depend on the number of registrations on the units of the qualification.

Size of Qualification	Number of learner-unit samples (number of learners double when more than 250 learners registered)	Extra requirement at second sampling
Certificate	1 units x 3 learners	+4 learners per affected unit
Subsidiary Diploma	1 units x 3 learners	
90 credit Diploma	2 units x 4 learners	
Diploma	2 units x 4 learners	
Extended Diploma	2 units x 4 learners	

Qualifications being delivered	Number of units
Level 3 90-Credit Diploma, Diploma or Extended Diploma	Two units
Or, if neither of the above	
Level 3 Certificate or Subsidiary Diploma	One unit
Level 2 programmes	One unit
Level 1 programmes	One unit

Successful outcome at second sample

The Standards Verifier agrees that you are now assessing to national standards and have successful quality assurance procedures for the BTEC sector.

A successful outcome means certification will be released and your centre may claim certification, once the learners have fully completed their BTEC qualification.

Unsuccessful outcome at second sample

The Standards Verifier still does not agree that you are assessing to national standards, the Principle Standards Manager for the sector will meet with you to agree a remedial action plan. Once the remedial action is completed satisfactorily, the Principle Standards Manager will release certification for the current academic year only.

Standards Verifier support

Standards Verifiers advise and support centres in the delivery and assessment of BTEC Apprenticeships both during and between visits. Standards Verifiers are prepared to advise on:

- current requirements and procedures relating to the relevant qualification areas
- best practice in assessment and internal verification
- meeting the needs of learners with special assessment requirements
- administration, for example completion of forms for the BTEC Apprenticeships
- additional services, publications and products from Pearson.

Enquiries or appeals

If you are unclear about what our requirements are, or you feel you have not had information from us that you need, you can formally complain or enquire to us. If you believe that the Standards Verifier has acted incorrectly or has reached an incorrect decision, then you can appeal. Our Enquiries and Appeals Policy is available on our website.

Electronic management of BTEC Apprenticeship learners

Full instructions for the administration of BTEC Apprenticeship learners can be found in the Pearson Work Based Learning Centre Guide, which is available from www.pearsonwbl.com. It is strongly recommended that your centre's senior decision makers consider the use of electronic management systems for Examination Officers and Administrators.

Edexcel Online is a free resource to help your centre manage the administration function. Information about Edexcel Online is available on qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/Services/edexcel-online.html. Contact our Customer Service Team on 0844 576 0045 for advice on registering.

It is important that copies of the relevant sections of the Pearson Work Based Learning Centre Guide are made available to your Administrators and to all Coordinators and members of staff responsible for the preparation of documents for enrolment, registration, assessment and reporting of achievement for learners on all BTEC Apprenticeship programmes or individual NVQ/SVQ units.

Please adhere to our requirements for prompt registration and certification. Learners should be registered within one month of the start of the assessment of learners against the requirements of the qualification. Please supply us with timely and accurate data when certificates are required. Additional fees may be charged for late registrations resulting in additional work we incur. If the deadlines are not met, we cannot guarantee prompt certification.

Learners for BTEC Apprenticeship programmes should be registered promptly with us using Electronic Data Interchange or Edexcel Online. This ensures that we are aware that a programme is running and that a Standards Verifier visit is required. Learner registration triggers Standards Verifier allocations and visits to allow certification. Changes to centre records should be maintained using Electronic Data Interchange or Edexcel Online.

Making registrations on Edexcel Online

Edexcel Online (EOL) is a web-based service designed to make it quicker and easier for you to administer and access learner information. EOL allows you to make registrations within a few minutes and get immediate confirmation of registration numbers.

You will need to be registered to use this service, either by an existing user at your centre (normally your exams officer) or by contacting us through <http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/contact-us/digital-support.html>.

Making registrations via Electronic Data Interchange

Electronic Data Interchange is a service for you that uses a Management Information System (MIS). If you choose to make registrations and entries by Electronic Data Interchange, we recommend that you still also have an Edexcel Online account so that you can use other facilities, such as Electronic Data Interchange file tracking and access to entry and results reports.

Please note: SAI (BTEC) forms must not be used for NVQ/SVQ learner registrations except in exceptional circumstances. If you wish to make registrations on an SAI (BTEC) form for any reason please contact our Customer Services team at wblcustomerservices@pearson.com. All learner stationery for registration and certification purposes will be sent to the approved centre for the attention of the Examinations Officer at the main centre address. However, if necessary, this may be sent to a sub-centre or separate site address. Any problems that may arise over delivery addresses must be notified to the Customer Services team on wblcustomerservices@pearson.com

Level 4 and 5 BTEC Higher Apprenticeships

Higher Apprenticeship Adviser visit

Shortly after registering learners on a BTEC Higher Apprenticeship for the first time, centres that are newly approved to deliver BTEC Higher Apprenticeships will receive a visit from a BTEC Higher Apprenticeship Adviser. This visit forms a part of the quality model for the delivery of the BTEC Higher Apprenticeships and is central to encouraging centres to engage with the quality cycle for their BTEC Higher Apprenticeship provision.

The role of the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship Adviser is to provide support, advice and guidance to the newly approved centre on the implementation and management of the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship. The visit will provide an opportunity for the centre to focus on and conduct an initial review of the:

- management of academic standards
- recruitment and targeting of learners
- delivery models
- assessment process
- quality assurance process
- training and standardisation of Assessors
- maintenance and auditing of records
- resources

During the visit, the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship Adviser will provide constructive advice and guidance to remedy any issues identified.

Following from the visit, the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship Adviser will provide a summary report of the visit.

Standards Verifier allocations

BTEC Higher Apprenticeship frameworks vary, depending on the particular occupational sector. Some frameworks include separate competence (NVQ) and knowledge (BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional) qualifications. Other frameworks include a 'combined' BTEC Higher National qualification or 'combined' BTEC Professional qualification with both competence and knowledge units.

Generally, we will allocate two different Standards Verifiers for quality assurance purposes to Level 4 or Level 5 BTEC Higher Apprenticeships where there are separate competence and knowledge qualifications. There may be occasions when a Standards Verifier has sufficient expertise and occupational experience to be allocated to both the NVQ and to the BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional qualification, in which case we will use a single Standards Verifier to quality assure both components.

Where the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship framework includes separate Pearson Edexcel NVQ and BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional qualifications, you will receive two visits annually by a Standards Verifier for the quality assurance of the NVQ and one visit annually for the quality assurance of the BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional qualification.

Where the BTEC Higher Apprenticeship frameworks include a BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional qualification composed of competence and knowledge units, you will receive two visits annually by a Standards Verifier for the quality assurance of the BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional qualification.

Here are some key points for Quality Nominees, Programme Managers and Internal Verifiers.

- If you are running several BTEC Higher Apprenticeships that include BTEC WorkSkills for Effective Learning and Employment, then only one of the Standards Verifiers will verify BTEC WorkSkills for Effective Learning and Employment
- The allocated Standards Verifier will liaise first with your Quality Nominee. We will send the Quality Nominee an email giving details of the Standards Verifier and the programmes to which the Standards Verifier is allocated
- You need to ensure that the Standards Verifier has the right information on each visit to ensure quality assurance is targeted according to your needs.

Standards verification visits for BTEC Higher Apprenticeships

Standards Verifiers (NVQ) allocated to quality assure the NVQs in BTEC Higher Apprenticeship frameworks will follow the same procedures as outlined above for the level 2 and 3 BTEC Apprenticeships. These procedures are also separately available and described in the document **Standards Verification for NVQ, SVQ and Competence-Based qualifications 2014-15**, available from our website.

Standards Verifiers (EE) allocated to quality assure the BTEC Level 4+ qualifications in BTEC Higher Apprenticeships will follow the same procedures but with a greater frequency of visits as described below and separately available and described in the **UK BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook 2016-17**.

The external examination process

What will happen?

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will contact your Quality Nominee in the first instance. The Quality Nominee should contact the relevant programme leader
- Appropriate visit dates are agreed for external examination and a visit plan is agreed.
- The Standards Verifier (EE) will submit a copy of this visit plan to you
- The Standards Verifier (EE) works collaboratively with you to consider and review the quality of the assessment planning, the validity of the assessment decisions and the consistency of the assessment and internal verification process
- The Standards Verifier (EE) produces a report on the effectiveness of processes and assessment decisions.
- Where necessary, certification may be blocked until appropriate remedial action is taken

When does it take place?

- For 'combined' BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional qualifications included in BTEC Higher Apprenticeship frameworks, external examination takes place through two visits annually. If appropriate, one of these visits may be timed to coincide with your assessment board processes towards the end of the academic year, but this is not necessarily required
- You need to think about when students will be completing and when evidence can be made available. Visits should be completed by 30th June for certification by the middle of August
- Your Standards Verifier (EE) will be allocated during the early part of the calendar year. Once they accept their contract, you are able to view their contact details via Edexcel Online. However, they should contact you as soon as possible after accepting the allocation

What does external examination look at?

You should provide the Standards Verifier (EE) with:

- the required samples of student work
- assessment records for the student work sampled
- assignment briefs for the units identified
- internal verification records for the assignment briefs
- internal verification records for student work.

Please note that to comply with the **QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education**, learners on higher-level programmes are referred to as 'students'.

Management and delivery of higher-level programmes

At the visit, the Standards Verifier (EE) will arrange to meet the relevant people in your centre to discuss the management and delivery of the programmes and their understanding of the **QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education** (which replaces the Academic Infrastructure with regard to higher-level programmes). This can be found on the QAA website here:

www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality.

You should provide minutes from the previous year's Academic Board or Quality Standards Board wherever possible.

All of the following topics will be included in the external examination report and, if required, Essential Actions and/or Recommendations may be identified. Essential Actions or Recommendations here do not directly affect programme certification, but they will be formally monitored in the next external examination.

Action points from previous report

The external examination report will automatically include any Essential Actions or Recommendations from the previous report. The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at progress made in relation to action points given in previous reports, indicating any that remain unaddressed.

Management of academic standards

The Standards Verifier (EE) will look for the presence of effective management procedures supported by appropriate systems and policies. They will make specific reference to the management of any programmes run on a collaborative basis in other institutions.

The Standards Verifier (EE) will expect to see evidence of your assessment regulations for BTEC higher-level qualifications and how they relate to the **QAA Quality Code for Higher Education**, which can be found on the QAA website here: www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality.

The regulations should include a code of practice on how the following matters are dealt with:

- Assessment Boards
- late submission of student work
- referrals and resubmissions
- extenuating circumstances
- appeals procedures.

This should be made available to students as well as the programme team: key regulations could be included in the programme handbook. Comment will also be made on the operation of on-going assessment meetings, including the:

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

Effectiveness of assessment instruments

For each programme, the Standards Verifier (EE) will look at whether the design and nature of the assessments permit the aims and learning objectives of the programme to be met and are of a standard appropriate to the qualification level. In particular, the Standards Verifier (EE) will look at the following points:

- Are the assignment outcomes and related assessment criteria clearly stated?
- Are the assessment tasks matched to the outcomes/assessment criteria and to the level?
- Is there a variety of assessment tasks?
- Do the tasks relate fully to the unit content?

- Is there clear guidance to students on tasks, content/scope, and grading?
- Are assessments appropriate to the student profile, level and mode of study?
- Do assessments promote learning, allowing students to develop skills as opposed to rote learning/accumulation of facts?
- Are there formative as well as summative assessments?
- Are there opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and have some freedom of choice for completion?
- Is there a unit assessment plan detailing coverage of all assessment criteria and grading opportunities?
- Are there sufficient assessments for each unit?
- Is the workload realistic?
- Is there 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

It is important that accurate and up to date assessment records are stored securely and made available for third party scrutiny on request. The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at whether the procedure for maintaining and auditing assessment records is secure and effective.

Registration and certification claims

The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at the process for ensuring that student registration and certification is accurate and monitored effectively.

Students must be registered correctly on the programme and any amendments, transfers or withdrawals made in a timely manner. It is important that your programme team has a good working relationship with your exams office to ensure that our student registration details accurately reflect your own records. Your centre should have procedures in place for:

- the timely and accurate registration of students
- checking 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
- investigation and reporting of all inaccurate, early/late and fraudulent registrations or certification claims, via internal senior management, to Pearson.

Student support and review

The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at:

- the assessment process and assessment feedback to students
- the quality of teaching and the expertise and experience of staff
- physical resources and learning support for the programme
- tutorial and pastoral support
- opportunities for students to give feedback on their programme.

Points for discussion with staff include:

- How staff are kept informed about developments in Pearson HE programmes, including changes in assessment practices?
- Is there an active and documented staff development policy that supports the programme? List current examples of its application.
- How often does the programme staff meet as a team?
- The opportunities for students to undertake independent learning and how are these integrated into the programme?
- Any concerns from staff relating to the current and future operation of the programmes?

In terms of resources, the Standards Verifier (EE) will look at the following points:

- Is there an overall strategy for provision of learning resources consistent with learning strategies and the student profile?
- Is Library/Learning resource stock adequate and up to date? Are opening hours appropriate to the student profile and the learning regime?
- Are computing facilities sufficient and is there adequate access? Is specialist software sufficient/readily accessible?
- Are there open access learning/IT facilities?

For BTEC Higher National or BTEC Professional qualification programmes, the Standards Verifier (EE) should seek views from students about the assessment process and access to resources. This requires them to meet some students every year. Therefore, visits should be arranged on a day when the cohort of students is on site. Points the Standards Verifier (EE) will discuss with students include:

- all areas relating to the assessment process including assessment quality, quantity, variety,
- outcome coverage, skills development, feedback quality and promptness, academic support and clarity of task descriptions and grading criteria
- quality, variety and effectiveness of teaching methods
- whether physical resources are appropriate in terms of type, quantity and currency in relation to supporting the teaching and learning
- whether there is an effective tutorial system in operation covering both academic and pastoral care
- whether there are effective methods for students to express their opinions about their learning experiences, and are their concerns documented and acted upon?

Areas of good practice

The Standards Verifier (EE) is encouraged to identify any areas of particularly good practice mentioned in other sections of this report.

Assessment sampling

The Standards Verifier (EE) will verify a sample of assessed student work. If the assessment does not meet national standards for any of the students sampled, the Standards Verifier (EE) will identify an Essential Action. Existence of an Essential Action for assessment will block certification for the specific programme.

Assessment process

For each programme sampled, the Standards Verifier (EE) will comment on the internal assessment process, including:

- the fairness and consistency of grading
- suitability of schemes showing criteria for grading
- the quality of feedback to students
- validity and standardisation of assessments across Assessors
- evidence of internal verification of assignment briefs
- evidence of internal verification of assessment decisions.

In particular, the Standards Verifier (EE) will look at the following points:

- Is there consistency of grading for a given Assessor across a range of Pass, Merit and Distinction grades within a unit?
- Are the contextualised grading criteria for each grade being applied correctly?
- Is there written feedback indicating errors or omissions? Does the feedback indicate why a grade has been awarded and how grade improvement can be achieved? Is the feedback sufficient to enable students to correct errors and develop learning skills in future assignments?
- Is there any indication that the grade for the student work has been verified by a second Assessor or Internal Verifier? Has the second Assessor included any written feedback/comments?
- Is there any evidence of internal quality assurance of assignment briefs including feedback to authors?
- Are all assessment criteria associated with an outcome being assessed and is there sufficient coverage in terms of unit content?
- Are the grading criteria appropriate in level/clarity?
- Is there a documented assessment strategy giving details of internal verification/internal quality assurance expectations? Is this being followed?
- Are there completed internal verification records? Do these show the names of Internal Verifiers and students? Are there sufficient written feedback comments from the Internal Verifiers to the Assessor?
- Is there a formal procedure for reaching agreement if Internal Verifiers and Assessors disagree about a grade?

Academic standards and student performance

This section will appear separately, so that you can share the rest of the report with students without compromising the confidentiality of the students sampled. For each piece of student work sampled, the Standards Verifier (EE) 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 achievement in terms of Pass, Merit and Distinction grades
- there is a variety of responses/topics/literature sources in student 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.

Sample size

The size of the sample will depend on the:

- number of units delivered
- number of students
- number of Assessors
- size of the programme team

The Standards Verifier (EE) will always sample a minimum of:

- one sixth of the units on the programme and not fewer than 3 units
- all students across the sampled units if there are up to 9 students on programme
- at least 9 students across the sampled units if there are up to 100 students on programme
- at least 18 students across the sampled units if there are more than 100 students on programme
- Please note, the minimum number of students to be sampled applies across the units, not for each unit individually (e.g. 9 students in total, not 9 students per unit sampled)

There is no maximum size of sample and the Standards Verifier (EE) may continue to report samples, if initial sampling suggests that further investigation is required. The Standards Verifier (EE) only needs to report in detail on samples that are pertinent to the decision and the advice given. Additional visits are not permitted to increase the sample size without consent from Pearson.

For the sampled units, there must be coverage of assessment instruments as follows:

- assignment briefs, paying particular attention to new units or units where the types of briefs used have been amended
- where units rely on students determining the brief, such as project units, the Standards Verifier (EE) may choose to review several briefs
- where examinations are used, the relationship between these and assignments.

Within the sample of units, the Standards Verifier (EE) must review the work of students:

- for whole units
- at different grades, where possible
- for more than one student per unit/Assessor, where possible

Accessing the external examination report

Once the Standards Verifier (EE) has submitted the report, your Quality Nominee will receive an automatic email alert and you can access your report through Edexcel Online. If you are not already a user of Edexcel Online, please ask your Exams Officer to set you up with access.

Outcomes of external examination

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.

Successful outcome

- The Standards Verifier (EE) concludes that you are assessing securely to national standards and documenting assessment correctly
- The external examination report will then release certification qualification by qualification. You should look carefully at any actions and recommendations in the report as these should be addressed by the team

Immediate resampling

- Resampling is required if the Standards Verifier concludes that you are not assessing securely to national standards and/or not documenting assessment and internal verification correctly on one or more of the programmes in the sector
- Essential actions will be identified in the external examination report
- The external examination report is able to release or block certification separately for each qualification within a sector. Therefore, if one or more qualifications are subject to a certification block, this does not automatically affect certification of the other qualifications
- The Standards Verifier (EE) will give initial feedback on the day of the visit, so you should be
- prepared for the outcomes of the report
- The Standards Verifier (EE) will agree a timescale for a second sample to be provided and the nature of the sample required. Useful guidance on sending postal samples can be found in the UK BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook 2016-17:
- qualifications.pearson.com/en/about-us/qualification-brands/btec/delivering-btec/key-documents.html
- The outcome of immediate resampling is either:
 - release of certification
 - further remedial action
- If the Standards Verifier reports a successful outcome after a second sample certification is released for the relevant programmes

Further remedial action

- If the second sample still does not meet national standards, the Standards Verifier (EE) will notify the Principal Standards Manager, who will work with you to help resolve outstanding issues and work towards release of the programmes affected
- Once the Principal Standards Manager is satisfied that the issues have been addressed, they will complete an additional report releasing certification for the relevant programmes.

Appendix I - Realistic Working Environments

Realistic Working Environment

Qualifications that attest to occupational competency – NVQs, SVQs and competence-based qualifications – are delivered and assessed in the actual workplace.

There are – mostly exceptional – circumstances where the delivery and assessment of these qualifications may be undertaken in a simulated environment as permitted and published by the relevant Sector Skills Council or Standards Setting Body for the sector concerned. This provision is published in documents variously titled as ‘Assessment Strategy’, ‘Assessment Requirements’ and ‘Assessment Principles’, as examples.

Where simulation is permitted, the relevant Sector Skills Council or Standards Setting Body for the sector concerned stipulates that this must take place in a Realistic Working Environment’ (RWE).

Where the relevant Sector Skills Council or Standards Setting Body does not fully specify that which constitutes a RWE, Pearson will apply the requirements that follow.

Definition of a Realistic Working Environment

For NVQs, SVQs and competence-based qualifications, the following criteria must be applied to the delivery and assessment environment for the occupational skills to which these qualifications attest. These criteria must be consistently and rigorously applied to ensure that all learners are being taught and assessed in a RWE that properly reflects the environment found in a commercial workplace. This is to ensure that learners taught in this environment are not disadvantaged and are able to develop fully occupational skills that are equivalent to those developed in the workplace.

1. A RWE established in schools, colleges, private training providers, industrial, commercial and other premises approved for the delivery of Pearson Edexcel and Pearson EDI NVQs, SVQs and competence-based qualifications must be managed as a real work situation i.e. learners must operate in and undergo assessment under realistic business, commercial and industry pressures.
2. Learners should provide occupational services that are completed both in a manner and to a timescale that is acceptable to commercial business organisations and in a manner that reflects normal, daily working patterns for the sector concerned.
3. The work rate and volume of work that learners provide must be comparable to that which is acceptable to normal, commercial business organisations.
4. The RWE in which the learner operates must take full account of any by-laws, legislation or local authority requirements that have been set down in relation to the type of work for the sector concerned.
5. The physical space and environment of the work area in which the learner operates must reflect that of a normal, commercial business organisation and comply with Health and Safety legislation as it applies to the sector concerned.
6. The full range of contemporary, industry-standard services, professional products, tools, materials, equipment and ICT facilities must be available for use to enable learners to properly develop the full range of skills required for the occupational sector.
7. Where the occupation demands that learners demonstrate leadership or management skills, the RWE must allow the learner to meet these requirements and to properly discharge their responsibilities in this respect.

8. Where the occupation demands that the learner has additional responsibilities the RWE must allow the learner to properly meet these requirements.
9. Public and customer experience and perceptions of the RWE must properly reflect that for the occupation concerned such that learners meet the requirements for effective and acceptable:
 - written and verbal communication
 - use of Personal Protective Equipment as required by the occupation
 - punctuality and time-keeping
 - customer service
 - personal conduct, appearance and hygiene

At all times the RWE and the conduct of learners must fully comply with Health and Safety Legislation as it applies to the sector concerned.