

A guide to recruiting learners onto Pearson qualifications

Document summary

This guide is for centres delivering Pearson qualifications. It's designed to help you recruit learners fairly, equitably, and appropriately, so both you and your learners can make informed decisions about enrolling on our qualifications.

If you have any questions about recruiting with integrity, please contact the Pearson Support Portal for advice and support.

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Pearson Education Ltd – our mission and values

Our purpose is simple: to help people realize the life they imagine through learning. We believe that every learning opportunity is a chance for a personal breakthrough. That's why our c. 18,000 Pearson employees are committed to creating vibrant and enriching learning experiences designed for real-life impact. We are the world's lifelong learning company, serving customers in nearly 200 countries with digital content, assessments, qualifications, and data. For us, learning isn't just what we do. It's who we are. Visit us at pearsonplc.com.

We are regulated by the UK qualifications regulators Ofqual (England), CCEA Regulation (Northern Ireland) and Qualifications Wales (Wales). Our regulatory policies are integral to our approach and articulate how we meet regulatory requirements. These policies are designed to support centres and students and set out clearly our approach to the design, delivery, and award of Pearson qualifications and services.

1. What does this guide cover?

- 1.1 This guide covers recruitment for non-regulated and regulated qualifications offered in the UK and internationally.

What this guide helps you to do

- 1.2 Make informed decisions when recruiting learners onto qualifications and help learners choose the right programme for their needs.
- 1.3 Ensure a fair and consistent approach to recruiting with integrity across all Pearson qualifications.
- 1.4 Understand our recommendations for the age at which learners should begin studying for general, vocational, higher national and apprenticeship qualifications.
- 1.5 Learn what we mean by 'recruiting with integrity' and how you can meet your commitments under our Terms and Conditions.

2. What does recruit with integrity mean?

- 2.1 Recruiting with integrity means making sure learners are placed on qualifications that genuinely suit their aims, abilities, and chances of success. It's about helping each learner choose a programme that will benefit them and give them the opportunity to achieve. As a centre you must:
 - Only recruit learners onto qualifications that are right for them.
 - Avoid placing learners on programmes where they're unlikely to succeed or that don't match their goals.
 - Make sure your marketing reflects these principles – never guarantee outcomes or promote qualifications to groups who don't meet the entry requirements or age restrictions.
- 2.2 If recruitment isn't handled with integrity, it could be considered malpractice and may lead to the removal of your centre or programme approval. Read more about this in our [Removal of centre or programme approval policy](#).

2.3 For information about entering students for exams in a name that does not appear on official documentation please refer to our [Guidance on learner gender in registration and certification](#).

3. Checklist for recruiting learners

3.1 Before you recruit a learner onto any qualification, make sure they:

- **Meet all eligibility criteria.** For example, some apprenticeships in the UK require learners to have the right to work in England.
- **Understand whether the programme leads to a regulated qualification or not, what it can lead to and whether it meets their needs and aspirations.**
- **Know what's required for the qualification, including how they'll be assessed and the academic standards they'll need to meet.**
- **Receive clear and accurate information and advice about their chosen qualification(s).**
- **Have the language skills that meet the required level for the assessment, especially if the qualification isn't in their first language. These must be sufficient to enable the learner to achieve the qualification (where the language of the assessment is not the learner's first language).**
- **Have had the chance to tell you about any access arrangements they need.**
- **Know what options are available to help them meet assessment requirements, including using evidence from previous learning and experience.** This may also include any reasonable adjustments for learners with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions, if these are allowed by the qualification specification and relevant regulations (including the Equality Act 2010).
- **Understand if there are any parts of the mandatory requirements or assessments, they might not be able to complete even with reasonable adjustments, and any limits on progression that could result.**

4. Recruiting learners onto vocational qualifications

4.1 When recruiting learners onto vocational qualifications, make sure they:

- Choose a qualification at the right level – not so high that it’s out of reach, and not so low that it limits their potential.
- Are registered before the qualification’s final registration date. You can find this date in the specification, on our website, or on the relevant Regulator’s register (such as [Ofqual’s Register of Regulated Qualifications](#)).
- Have the capability and opportunity to achieve. If you’re not familiar with a learner’s ability, it’s good practice to carry out a diagnostic assessment. This helps you understand their knowledge and skills, and whether the qualification is suitable for their learning and progression goals. Use professional and justifiable judgement to check their potential, review mandatory units, and select the most appropriate optional units.
- Can plan and study independently, submitting only their own work as evidence.
- Have access to the resources and facilities they need to complete practical activities or work-based learning, such as work experience and real work environments.
- Can make an informed choice. Give learners the chance to explore different vocational areas or take part in a preparatory programme, so they can get to know assessment methods and learn how to manage their own learning- like planning time, researching, and making notes.

5. Age entry recommendations for qualifications

- 5.1 Some qualifications have age restrictions for legal reasons (for example serving alcohol) or because of funding rules. Before you accept someone onto a programme, always check the qualification specification to make sure they meet all the necessary criteria. It’s also your centre’s responsibility to check funding rules for any restrictions.
- 5.2 Please note, we cannot consider applications for special arrangements or special considerations based on a learner’s age. Make sure you have reviewed the qualification specification and guidance so you’re aware of any age restrictions before enrolling learners.

Guidance on the age of learners taking GCSE and A Levels

- 5.3 There are no formal entry requirements or age restrictions for GCSEs or A Levels, except for the November GCSE series in mathematics and English, which is limited to learners aged 16 and over. When recruiting learners onto these qualifications, make sure they:

- Understand what is expected of them, including their responsibilities to submit only their own work.
- Are aware of any activities they need to take part in for authentication purposes.
- Know what is required of them under exam conditions.

Guidance on the age of learners taking vocational qualifications in England

5.4 Different vocational qualifications have recommended age ranges, based on DfE (Department for Education in England) guidance:

- **Technical Awards** are designed for learners aged 14 to 16. These qualifications provide applied knowledge and practical skills.
- **Technical Certificates and Tech Levels** are for post 16 learners. They help students gain the knowledge and skills needed for skilled employment or further technical study.
- **Applied General qualifications** are aimed at post 16 learners who want to continue their education through applied learning.
- **BTEC Firsts** give 14 to 16-year-olds the chance to take a vocational qualification in their chosen area of study. These programmes help learners build the skills and knowledge they need to progress to further study.

5.5 When recruiting learners, make sure they meet the recommended age requirements for each qualification and understand what each programme involves.

Guidance on the age of learners taking Higher National qualifications

5.6 **Higher National qualifications are usually designed for learners aged 18 or over.** In some exceptional cases, younger learners may be accepted onto a Pearson BTEC Higher National programme.

5.7 If you're recruiting learners for these qualifications, make sure:

- They meet the recommended age requirements.
- You've checked the qualification specification for any exceptions or special guidance.
- They can demonstrate capability in English at a standard equivalent to the levels identified below:
- Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) Level B2
- Pearson Test of English (PTE) Academic 51

- International English Language Testing System (IELTS) 5.5; reading and writing must be at 5.5 or equivalent
- You understand your responsibilities as a Higher Education provider, including following consumer protection law. For more details, see the [governments advice on consumer protection](#) for Higher Education providers.

Guidance on the age of learners taking Apprenticeships

5.8 [Apprenticeships](#) are designed to give employees the skills and knowledge needed for specific sectors or job role. These programmes are supported by the UK government and **cannot be undertaken by people aged under 16**. When recruiting apprentices, make sure:

- During the recruitment process, consideration is made to the achievement of the knowledge, skills, and behaviours, as directed by the assessment plan.
- The apprentice is in the correct role and able to perform all required duties, so they can provide suitable evidence for their Apprenticeship Assessment.
- You have a plan in place to ensure the apprentice receives at least 20% off-the-job training from day one, helping them develop their skills and knowledge.
- Agreements are made between the apprentice, employer, and training provider to provide the right training, support and guidance.
- All evidence is stored in the apprentice's evidence pack, in line with the Department for Education funding rules.

6. Other useful resources

6.1 There are other policies, documents and laws which will support you to recruit with integrity:

- [JCQ Access Arrangements, Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration General and Vocational qualifications](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- The following policies are available on our [website](#):
 - Policy for late registration and certification on withdrawn or expired Pearson qualifications
 - Pearson Policy for the removal of centre and programme approval
 - Pearson Supplementary guide for reasonable adjustment and Special considerations in vocational internally assessed units
 - Pearson Recognition of Prior Learning policy and process

7. Regulatory references

7.1 UK regulators require all awarding organisations to establish and maintain their compliance with regulatory conditions and criteria. As part of this process, policies and guides that relate to Pearson's status as an awarding organisation will reference any conditions and criteria that they address.

7.2 This policy addresses the following regulatory criteria and conditions:

Qualification regulator or relevant governing body	Regulatory rule or guidance document	Regulatory condition or criteria
Ofqual	General Conditions of Recognition	C2; D2; G6
CCEA Regulation	General Conditions of Recognition	C2; D2; G6
Qualifications Wales	Qualification Wales Standard Conditions of recognition	C2; D2; G6
JCQ	General regulations for approved centres	5.3 f; 5.3 g; 5.4; 5.5

8. Review date

8.1 This guide will be reviewed in December 2026.

9. Version control

Version	Changes	Date
2.4	Dates and footers updated.	19 th December 2025
2.4	Plain English revisions throughout	19 th December 2025

