

## **Next generation BTEC Firsts for level 2 learners (NQF): External Assessment (November 2012)**

### **Questions and Answers**

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**Question 1: Why are you introducing an external assessment into BTECs?**

We believe it is essential that BTECs continue to be upheld by employers, parents, universities, other educators and government as rigorous qualifications of high value. BTECs remain predominantly teacher assessed; but to support this, we have introduced an element of external assessment to provide independent evidence of learning and progression alongside the portfolio-based assessment.

The new external assessment will:

- Allow learners to demonstrate that they have acquired the essential subject knowledge, skills and understanding under controlled conditions – an essential element of many courses they may move on to
- Support teachers in their delivery of the qualification by widening the nature and range of evidence on which learners are assessed to give a more rounded picture of their knowledge, skills and understanding
- Confirm achievement around the core knowledge, skills and understanding to a defined national standard
- Ensure that these vocational qualifications are consistent and equally respected wherever they are taken
- Ensure the qualifications meet Alison Wolf's definition of high quality vocational learning, enshrined by DfE in their new list of characteristics that must be demonstrated by non-GCSE qualifications in order to be eligible for recognition in school headline measures from 2014

We firmly believe that the addition of an external assessment will help ensure that standards continue to be upheld, and provide all BTEC learners with the best possible grounding from which to progress into the next stage of their learning, or into employment.

**Question 2: Will it be necessary to do an external assessment for all BTEC qualifications from September 2012?**

Not necessarily. It depends on whether your learners are taking a current QCF or next generation NQF BTEC. The first phase of our next generation NQF BTEC Firsts will all have an element of external assessment (up to 25% of the qualification total), and are available for first teaching from September 2012. All learners registered onto or transferring over to these qualifications will have to take the external assessment. But the existing QCF BTECs will also still be available in September 2012, and these do not have an external assessment.

**Question 3: Will there be an external assessment for every unit?**

No. Teacher-led assessment remains at the heart of all BTECs, and a minimum of 75% of the next generation NQF BTEC Firsts will be internally assessed through assignments set and marked by teachers, and quality assured by Edexcel. For the next generation BTEC First Awards, one unit (25% of the total qualification) will be externally assessed. For the larger sizes of the qualification, an additional unit will be externally assessed.

**Question 4: Will the external assessment be like a GCSE exam?**

No. We have taken great care to design different kinds of external assessment that are suitable for the sector and will give BTEC learners an engaging experience. All external assessments do not have to be taken as a terminal assessment.

**Question 5: When will the new external assessments be available?**

Depending on the sector, the first opportunity will be either June 2013, November 2013, March 2014 or June 2014. The number of opportunities for learners to sit the external assessments for the next generation NQF BTEC Firsts depends on the subject. For the latest information visit [www.btec.co.uk/externalassessment](http://www.btec.co.uk/externalassessment).

**Question 6: Will the external assessment in BTEC have to be done at the end of the course (as with linear GCSE)?**

No. The external assessment can be taken in any of the prescribed windows, and in the case of on-screen tests, whenever the learners are ready. It does not have to be taken as a terminal assessment.

**Question 7: Will learners be able to re-take the new BTEC external assessment? And if so will there be an additional fee?**

Learners will be able to re-sit the externally assessed unit.

- Re-sits for subjects with the production of final outcomes under controlled conditions will be available once a year in June.
- Re-sits for subjects with an on-screen test will be available on demand, once a result has been issued to the learner for the previous assessment.
- Re-sits for subjects with a paper based test will be available in the next specified window.

There will be a fee for re-sits, more information can be found at [www.edexcel.com/2012vocationalfees](http://www.edexcel.com/2012vocationalfees).

**Question 8: What's the recommended course of action where there are large cohorts of learners in a centre who need do the same on-screen test, but only limited numbers of computers?**

Edexcel has gained considerable experience of large cohort on-screen testing in schools and colleges through delivery of its Key Skills and Functional Skills programmes, and we have designed a system which allows centres maximum flexibility while maintaining test security, as follows:

- Centres are required to register with Edexcel to deliver on-screen on-demand tests
- Registration must be a minimum of 24hrs before the first test is required
- Once registered, centres can book test dates and times to suit their needs
- Once a test is booked, the centre is required to download the test file; the test can then be taken up to 4hrs either side of the specified time
- Results will be sent electronically within 30 days of the test closing.

Where large cohorts are involved it is not necessary for all learners to sit the test at the same time, so the centre can split the cohort into smaller groups for testing at different times. For more detailed information regarding our on-screen on demand tests, visit [www.btec.co.uk/externalassessment](http://www.btec.co.uk/externalassessment).

**Question 9: For learners with disabilities which prevent them from taking an on-screen test, will there be an alternative?**

Edexcel takes its accessibility responsibilities very seriously. A number of accessibility tools have been designed into the onscreen test delivery platform to ensure learners with disabilities are not disadvantaged when taking the tests, including:

- 'Virtual' coloured screen overlays to help to address the needs of candidates with dyslexia, colour blindness and mild to moderate visual impairments
- Unlimited magnification of the screen and ability to move the screen left, right, up and down so that candidate can see all parts of the screen whilst magnified
- For those users unable to use a mouse we have developed an alternative way of interacting with the screen via single keystrokes
- For those users with severe or total visual impairment onscreen content will be provided in a format that is fully accessible to screen readers such as JAWS. Ongoing technical development work on our delivery platform may mean that in the short-term this will take the form of an accessible PDF version of the test
- Content will be made accessible to literacy assistant software such as Read&Write Gold e.g. for users with Dyslexia
- Content using sound, where appropriate, will also be supplied with sub-titles for hearing impaired users

Where an individual's needs are not catered for by existing access arrangements, we will work with you to make arrangements that meet the needs of your learner on a case by case basis.

**Question 10: Will the assessment methods for the existing QCF BTECs change?**

No.

**Question 11: Will you be introducing external assessments to other BTEC courses?**

The first phase of our 'next generation' of BTEC qualifications covers our new BTEC Firsts for Level 2 learners. We do plan to develop 'next generation' versions of all our major BTEC qualification suites over the next few years – including our qualifications at Level 1 and Level 3 – and we will be considering whether the introduction of an externally assessed component is the right thing to do in each case.

**Question 12: If a student doesn't pass the external assessment, will they still be able to pass the course overall?**

Yes, but the overall qualification grade that can be accessed might be limited. The external assessment is one of the important mechanisms whereby a learner's work is evaluated. This works alongside the judgments of the teacher (for 75% of the qualification). A compensation model will be used to determine the learner's overall grade, which means that weaker performance in one unit can be counter-balanced by strong performance in another.

**Question 13: What training will you be offering to help me plan and deliver the new external assessments?**

In addition to the Sample Assessment Materials already available online we will be offering a wide range of training events, print and online resources, and in-centre support to help teachers introduce and deliver the new external assessments properly. We also plan to make additional practice tests available.

**Question 14: How have you defined the standard in the new External Assessments?**

We have taken great care to set the right standard for these new qualifications, benchmarking against other level 2 qualifications, and the needs of employers, universities and sector specialists.

One of the criticisms that has frequently been levelled at vocational qualifications is that they don't allow brighter students to demonstrate their ability. The next generation BTEC Firsts external assessment has been designed to offer appropriate stretch and challenge across the ability range and does so through a variety of engaging assessment methodologies.