



Guide for Higher Education Institutions on the Progression of BTEC Level 3 Students to Higher Education

Updated November 2023

Contents

<u>1. Introduction</u>	3
<u>2. Key features of the reformed RQF BTEC National (2016) suite</u>	3
<u>3. List of reformed BTEC subjects</u>	4
<u>4. Points to note about performance outcomes on the reformed BTEC Nationals</u>	6
<u>5. Assessment and grading of the reformed RQF BTEC Nationals</u>	6
<u>6. Data on progression of BTEC students to HE</u>	6
<u>7. Most popular principal subjects taken at degree level</u>	8
<u>8. UCAS Tariff Points</u>	9
<u>9. Other level 3 BTEC qualifications commonly used for entry to HE</u>	10
<u>10. Suggested guidance for Admissions staff when setting university entry requirements</u>	11
<u>11. Information concerning Confirmation and Clearing</u>	12
<u>Annex A – Grading the reformed RQF BTEC Nationals</u>	13
<u>Annex B – other useful links</u>	14

1. Introduction

This guide is intended for Admissions, Widening Participation and Outreach staff in UK Higher Education Institutions.

The BTEC Nationals are vocational qualifications that were first introduced in 1983 and are available in a range of subjects and sizes. Since their introduction, they have been periodically reviewed and updated, and the sizes, titles and grading of the most recent versions are as follows (full details of changes to titling and grading through the years are found in [this guide](#)).

Equivalence in size	Guided learning hours	QCF BTEC title	Reformed RQF BTEC title
0.5 A levels	180	BTEC Level 3 Certificate (graded P, M, D, D*)	BTEC Level 3 National Certificate (graded P, M, D, D*)
1 A level	360	BTEC Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma (graded P, M, D, D*)	BTEC Level 3 National Extended Certificate (graded P, M, D, D*)
1.5 A levels	510/540	BTEC Level 3 90-Credit Diploma (graded PP to D*D*)	BTEC Level 3 National Foundation Diploma (graded P, M, D, D*)
2 A levels	720	BTEC Level 3 Diploma (graded PP to D*D*)	BTEC Level 3 National Diploma (graded PP to D*D*)
3 A levels	1080	BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma (graded PPP to D*D*D*)	BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma (graded PPP to D*D*D*)

In recent years the BTEC Nationals have been designed to aid entry to both employment and Higher Education (HE).

BTEC Nationals are now recognised by over 98% of UK universities and UCAS data shows that in 2021 over 100,000 students who had taken a BTEC entered university. Of those, around one-third had taken a BTEC alongside A levels.

Some students are taking their BTEC alongside qualifications other than A levels. For example, an increasing number are taking a BTEC National as part of the [International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme](#).

2. Key features of the reformed RQF BTEC National (2016) suite

The development of each subject was informed by advisory groups, which consisted of university academics, and representatives from employers and professional bodies. This was to ensure that the qualifications support student progression to both higher education and employment. The changes made included:

- usually, a minimum of 33% external assessments so that students had experience of preparing for examinations
- a larger core of content that was strengthened to give greater emphasis to the areas of the subject deemed most important by stakeholders (including increasing STEM content where appropriate)
- increased development of the research skills needed for higher level study
- strengthening and embedding of mathematics and English skills, where appropriate.
- synoptic assessment to encourage the development of a holistic understanding of the subject – some units are identified as a focus for synoptic assessment

From 2022 onwards, the vast majority of students completing a BTEC National and applying to university will have taken a reformed RQF BTEC National.

3. List of reformed BTEC subjects

This list indicates the subjects offered and the sizes available for each.

Subject	Size relative to A levels				
	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	3.0
Animal Management		0	0	0	0
Agriculture		0	0	0	0
Countryside Management		0	0	0	0
Equine Management		0	0	0	0
Forestry and Arboriculture			0		0
Horticulture		0	0	0	0
Applied Science	0	0	0	0	0
Applied Human Biology	0	0			
Applied Psychology	0	0			
Forensic and Criminal Investigation			0	0	0
Health and Social Care	0	0	0	0	0
Construction and The Built Environment		0	0	0	0
Building Services Engineering				0	0
Civil Engineering				0	0
Engineering	0	0	0	0	0
Aeronautical Engineering				0	0
Computer Engineering				0	0
Electrical & Electronic Engineering				0	0
Manufacturing Engineering				0	0
Mechanical Engineering				0	0
Business	0	0	0	0	0
Enterprise and Entrepreneurship	0	0	0	0	0
Marketing		0		0	0
Applied Law	0	0			
Computing	0	0	0	0	0
Business Information Systems*				0	
Computer Science*				0	
Computer Systems & Network Support*				0	
Computing for Creative Industries*				0	
Information Technology	0	0	0	0	0
Creative Digital Media Production	0	0	0	0	0
Digital Content Production		0			
Digital Film and Video Production		0			
Digital Games Production		0			
Digital Games Design & Development				0	
Film & TV Production				0	
Sound Production**				0	
Digital Publishing*				0	
Film & TV Visual Effects*				0	
Art and Design	0	0	0	0	0
3D Design & Crafts*				0	
Fashion Design & Production*				0	

Graphics*				o	
Photography*				o	
Children's' Play, Learning and Development		o	o	o	o
Performing Arts	o	o	o	o	o
Performance		o			
Music Performance	o	o			
Music Technology	o	o	o	o	o
Digital Music Production		o			
Sound Engineering		o			
Sport	o	o	o	o	o
Fitness Services**				o	
Sport and Exercise Science		o	o	o	o
Travel and Tourism	o	o	o	o	o
Uniformed Protective Services	o	o	o	o	o

* Subject being withdrawn, last awards 2023

** Subject being withdrawn, last awards 2022

The following BTEC National qualifications have been recently developed. These are more skills orientated and have 100% internal assessment as that was deemed the most appropriate scheme of assessment for qualifications of this nature.

Subject	Size relative to A levels				
	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	3.0
Art and Design Practice			o		o
Creative Media Practice			o		o
Esports	o	o	o	o	o
Music			o		o
Performing Arts Practice			o		o
Production Arts Practice			o		o
Sport Coaching and Development			o		o
Sporting Excellence and Performance			o		o
Sport, Fitness and Personal Training			o		o
Sport and Outdoor Activities			o		o

The following are legacy QCF BTEC National qualifications which are continuing for the moment as there is no reformed version that is a direct replacement. These are all scheduled to be withdrawn as indicated.

Subject	Size relative to A levels					Last enrolments
	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	3.0	
Hospitality	o	o	o	o	o	31/08/2024
Creative Media Production	o	o		o		31/08/2024
Aviation Operations	o	o	o	o	o	31/08/2024
Music		o		o		31/08/2024
Music Technology	o	o				31/08/2024
Production Arts	o	o		o		31/08/2024
Dental Technology				o	o	31/08/2023
Blacksmithing & Metalworking	o	o		o	o	31/08/2023
Environmental Sustainability	o	o		o	o	31/08/2023
IT	o	o	o	o	o	31/08/2023

4. Important points to note about performance outcomes on the reformed BTEC Nationals

a) When compared to the outcomes for QCF BTEC Nationals, the outcomes for the reformed BTEC Nationals show that:

- The proportion of students achieving the top distinction* grades is significantly lower
- The proportion of students achieving the distinction grades is lower
- The proportions of students achieving the pass and merit grades are very similar

b) A distinction for a unit is a very high grade and is different from a distinction for the qualification. Achieving a distinction on each unit gives a qualification grade of D*, not D.

c) High performing A level candidates may have an inconsistent achievement across the assessment components. In the 6-unit modular A levels, there were occasions when students failed one of the units but still achieved a grade A for the qualification. If a BTEC student fails one of the exams, they will not achieve the overall qualification.

5. Assessment and grading of the reformed RQF BTEC Nationals

Assessment of BTEC Nationals now includes the following:

- Internally assessed units – in which the criteria have to be met in full to achieve each grade.
- Externally assessed units – in which the assessments are similar to exam assessments of A levels and are set and marked by Pearson and taken under highly controlled conditions.

Rules on assessments

- Students must achieve a certain standard in each externally assessed unit. This standard is the **Near Pass (N) grade** which is usually set roughly midway between zero and the pass grade. (This is not the case in A levels where the qualification grade is determined simply by aggregating the achievements of each component and students could potentially fail an exam but still pass the qualification with a good grade).
- They must pass most or all of the mandatory units.
- A maximum of two resits only are allowed for externally assessed units.
- One resubmission/one retake is allowed for internally assessed units.

The grading process for the reformed BTEC Nationals involves converting unit grades to points, adding up the points across the qualification and reading off the grade in the grading scale points table. Please note that:

- Points are allocated for the grades achieved on each unit
 - For internally assessed units, there are a fixed number of points per grade.
 - For externally assessed units there are a range of points ranges for each grade except for distinction.
- The Diploma size has a double letter grade, and the Extended Diploma has a triple letter grade. The letters in a double and triple letter grade are not separable.

Full details of the grading process are given in Annex A.

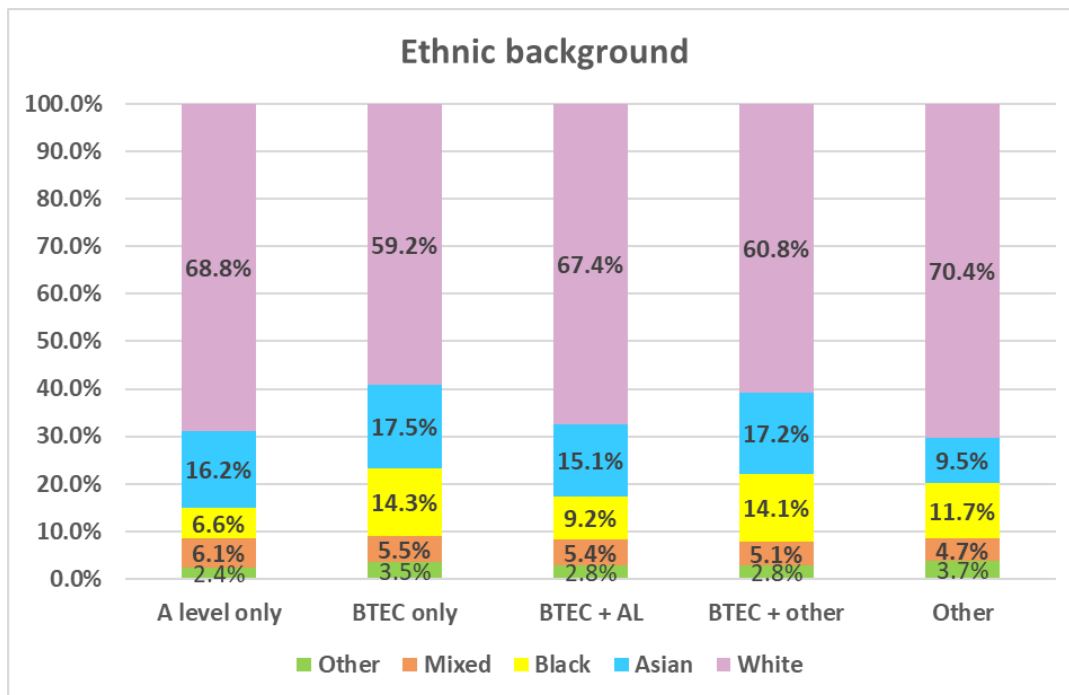
6. Data on progression of BTEC students to HE

In the last decade, there has been an encouraging increase in the progression of students from widening participation backgrounds to higher education.

The BTEC Nationals have made a great contribution to this development as the proportion of BTEC students coming from BAME backgrounds and from the lower socio-economic groups is significantly higher than in students taking traditional qualifications. This is illustrated by the following UCAS data for students entering higher education in 2022/23. (NB: It includes only students whose information was known.)

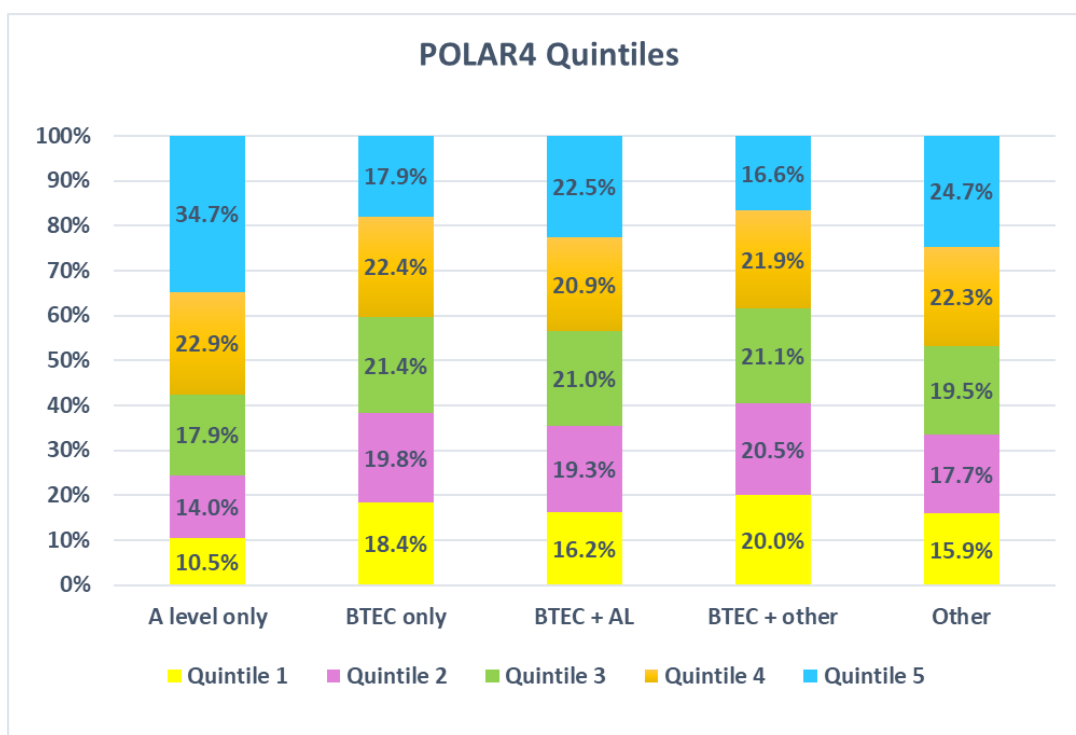
a) Ethnicity

A bigger proportion of students taking BTEC than students taking A levels came from a BAME background. The difference is particularly large for black students. (Source: UCAS data for UCAS applicants accepted into UK HE for entry 2022/23 - including only those whose ethnicity was known).



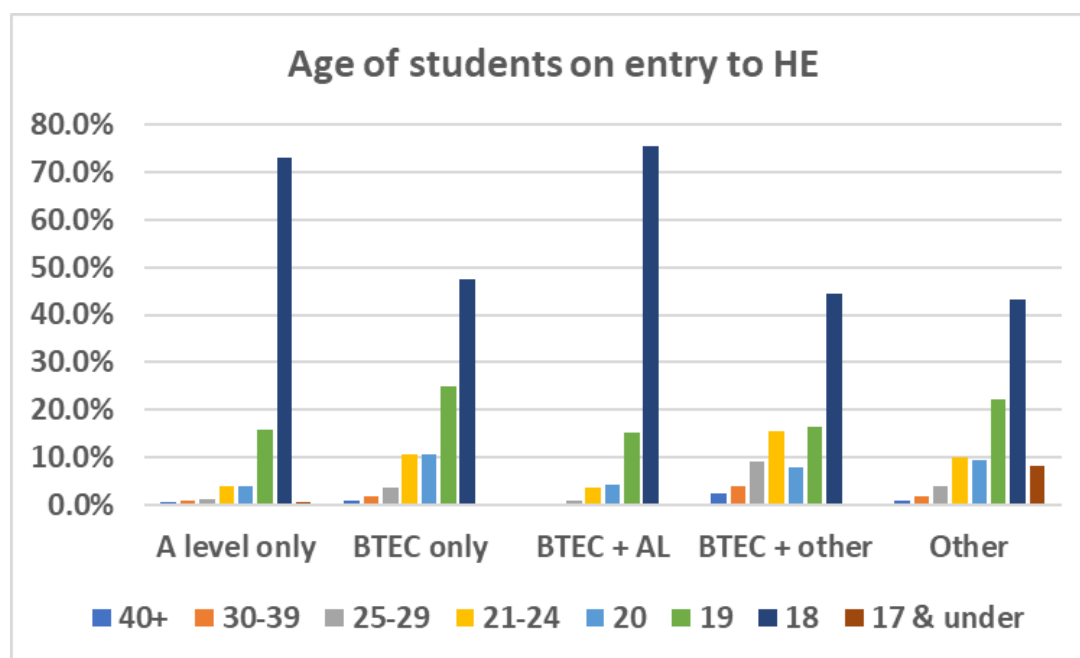
b) Socio-economic background

A bigger proportion of students taking BTEC than students taking A levels came from the lower socio-economic groups. (Source: UCAS data for UCAS applicants accepted into UK HE for entry 2022/23 – including only those whose socio-economic background was known).



c) Age of students on entry

BTEC only students have a higher proportion of older students than A level only students, particularly in the ages 19-24. The 'other' qualification group contains the Access to HE students and so also has a higher proportion of older students. (Source: UCAS data for UCAS applicants accepted into UK HE for entry 2022/23)



d) Proportion of entrants with SEN and those eligible for free school meals

A greater proportion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) achieve a degree via BTEC than with just A Levels and the same applies for those eligible for Free School Meals (see below).

	A level only		BTEC only	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Proportion of students with SEN achieving a degree	3.8%	2.2%	14.4%	8.7%
Proportion of students eligible for Free School Meals achieving a degree	4.5%	5.3%	11.4%	12.2%

This data comes from Pietro Patrignani, Alice Battiston and Gavan Conlon, BTECs, higher education and labour market outcomes using the Longitudinal Education Outcome (LEO) dataset, 2019, Centre for Vocational Education Research <https://cver.lse.ac.uk/textonly/cver/pubs/cverdp024.pdf>

7. Most popular principal subjects taken at degree level

The top 15 subject areas taken in degree programmes in 2022/23 were as follows in descending order (source: UCAS data for UCAS applicants accepted into UK HE for entry 2022/23):

	A level only	BTEC only	A level/BTEC mix
1	Business & Management	Business & Management	Business & Management
2	Psychology	Computing	Creative Arts & Design
3	Engineering	Sport & Exercise Sciences	Sociology, Social Policy & Anthropology
4	Law	Nursing & Midwifery	Psychology
5	Creative Arts & Design	Creative Arts & Design	Law

6	Sociology, Social Policy & Anthropology	Performing Arts	Computing
7	Computing	Sociology, Social Policy & Anthropology	Sport & Exercise Sciences
8	Economics	Engineering	Nursing & Midwifery
9	History & Archaeology	Psychology	Performing Arts
10	Biosciences	Law	Education & Teaching
11	English Studies	Allied Health	Engineering
12	Politics	Medical Sciences	Media, Journalism & Communications
13	Mathematical Sciences	Education & Teaching	Allied Health
14	Geography, Earth & Environmental Studies	Health & Social Care	Health & Social Care
15	Medicine & Dentistry	Biosciences	Medical Sciences

8. UCAS Tariff Points

The BTEC Nationals are all on the UCAS Tariff. The points allocated depend on the size of BTEC and the grade achieved.

Extended Diploma	Diploma	Foundation Diploma	Extended Certificate	Certificate	AS level	A level	UCAS tariff points
D*D*D*							168
D*D*D							160
D*DD							152
DDD							144
DDM							128
DMM	D*D*						112
	D*D						104
MMM	DD						96
		D*					84
MMP	DM						80
							78
		D					72
MPP	MM						64
			D*			A*	56
PPP	MP	M	D			A	48
						B	40
	PP		M			C	32
				D*			28
		P		D		D	24
					A		20
			P	M	B	E	16
					C		12
					D		10
				P			8
					E		6

9. Other level 3 BTEC qualifications being used for entry to HE

a) The Pearson BTEC Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media Practice – also known as FAD

The Pearson BTEC Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media Practice was introduced in 2020 as a replacement for the Pearson BTEC Foundation Diploma in Art and Design. These qualifications are commonly referred to as **FAD**. These are both available at levels 3 and 4 and are usually taken as a one-year full-time study programme. The Level 3 qualification is taken by learners who are looking to broaden their practical and theoretical understanding of art, design and media practice as a bridging year in preparation for higher education.

The Level 4 qualification is suitable for learners who have significant prior learning at Level 3 within the creative sector and wish to develop their skills and understanding at Level 4 before progressing to HE. The level 3 and level 4 qualifications have the same content, and it is the outcome which determines the level achieved.

Both the level 3 and level 4 qualifications are graded P, M, D. The level 3 qualification attracts UCAS points.

b) The Pearson BTEC Level 3 Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)

The Pearson BTEC Level 3 Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge) qualifications are BTEC Specialist qualifications. The different sizes of qualification were designed to meet the various phases of the apprenticeship frameworks and standards for engineering. They are usually taken by students in FE colleges that only have one group for level 3 engineering that has a mix of full-time students and part-time apprentices.

The titling is slightly different from that of the BTEC Nationals, and all sizes have a single letter grade with no D*.

Title	Size	Grading
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Award in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	1 x A level	P, M, D
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Certificate Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	1.5 A levels	P, M, D
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Diploma Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	2 A levels	P, M, D
Pearson BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma Advanced Manufacturing Engineering (Development Technical Knowledge)	3 A levels	P, M, D

It is very similar to the QCF BTEC in Engineering with many units in common, and the old QCF unit, Mathematics for Engineering Technicians is mandatory in all of the above sizes. However, all of these qualifications have two optional maths units from the reformed RQF BTEC National in Engineering, namely 'Calculus to Solve Engineering Problems' and 'Further Engineering Mathematics'. So, as well as making a grade requirement for the qualification, universities could ask for one or both of those units to be taken if they have an interest in the amount of maths taken.

These qualifications are 100% internally assessed and do not feature exams.

10. Suggested guidance for Admissions staff when setting university entry requirements

The following are some points that we would like university admissions departments to consider when setting entry requirements:

- If QCF BTEC entry requirements were set higher than A levels, please consider having alternative entry requirements for RQF BTEC Nationals (given the lower outcomes at the top end of the grading scale for the reformed RQF BTEC Nationals).
- Extended Diplomas are full-time study programmes in themselves and so it is very difficult for students to do an A level as well. Also, a significant number of further education colleges do not actually offer A levels, while in others it may not be possible to timetable them for BTEC students. You may wish to set unit requirements instead for maths or science-related units, in addition to an overall qualification/tariff requirement.
- Content in the mandatory core for the reformed RQF BTECs is larger (usually over 60%) and has been strengthened to support progression to HE. If a university requires additional content to prepare a student for a specific degree programme, it may be possible to achieve it by requesting certain optional units, rather than asking for an A level as well.
- When making unit requirements (in addition to the overall qualification grade), please ensure that the unit(s) requested are necessary for progression onto the degree/programme and do not go beyond the expectations you would have for A Level students (NB: A level specifications from different awarding bodies do not always have the same content; for example the DfE specified content for A level science subjects makes up 60% of the A levels). **(Please note also that students may only pick from the limited range of BTEC units offered in their school or college)**
- If you ask for specific grades on certain units, please remember that a distinction grade on a unit is a very high grade. If students achieve grade D on all their units, they will achieve grade D* on the qualification, not grade D.

Things that are helpful for students, when articulating entry requirements:

- Indicating which BTEC subjects are accepted.
- Indicating whether any units are required (rather than stating that individuals are considered on their merits) – if possible, ask for a range of possible units rather than being too specific as that will give more flexibility for schools and colleges.
- Giving separate entry requirements for:
 - QCF and RQF
 - Each size of BTEC, that is:
 - Extended Diploma
 - Diploma + A level, and which A levels are accepted
 - Extended Certificate + A levels, and which A levels are accepted

Please note: although most students are now taking the reformed RQF BTEC Nationals, universities will continue to receive applications from mature students who took a QCF BTEC some years ago. So, it is important to retain reference to QCF BTEC Nationals in the entry requirements.

11. Information concerning Confirmation and Clearing

a) Where you have asked for a specific grade on an externally assessed unit

Students receive a range of points for a pass or merit grade on an externally assessed unit. For example, for a 120 GLH unit, they receive 12-19 points for a pass, 20-31 points for a merit and 32 points for a distinction. Therefore, if for example you have asked for a distinction grade and the student achieves a merit, the student may have only missed the distinction by a few marks on the assessment and so may have received say 29-31 points. If that is the case, you may be prepared to be flexible and accept the student. The results data that we send to UCAS does not include the points achieved but the school/college will have full details of them. So, we are encouraging students in this position to contact their HEI to indicate this if they have narrowly missed the required grade. We would be happy to authenticate any data if that is required.

b) Support during Confirmation and Clearing

We can offer support to you during Confirmation and Clearing in respect of missing results, appeals, grade changes, etc. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact Ria Bhatta at ria.bhatta@pearson.com

Annex A – Grading the reformed RQF BTEC Nationals

To achieve any qualification grade, learners must:

- complete and have an outcome (D, M, P, N or U) for all units within a valid combination
- achieve the required units at Pass or above shown in the specification, and for the Extended Diploma achieve a minimum 900 GLH at Pass or above (or N or above in external units)
- achieve the minimum number of points at a grade threshold.

a) Internally assessed units

For internally assessed units, assessors use assessment criteria to award a grade for each unit. For each internal unit, points are allocated depending on the grade awarded and the size of the unit. The table below shows the number of points available for internal units.

Grade	Unit size	
	60 GLH	90 GLH
U	0	0
Pass	6	9
Merit	10	15
Distinction	16	24

b) Externally assessed units

For externally assessed units, the examiners award marks for correct responses. As with A levels, awarding meetings are then held to determine grade boundaries for each assessment. Raw marks from the external units are awarded points based on performance in the assessment and on the size of the unit. The table below shows the points ranges for each grade for the two sizes of unit.

Grade	Unit size	
	90 GLH	120 GLH
U	0-5	0-7
Near Pass	6-8	8-11
Pass	9-14	12-19
Merit	15-23	20-31
Distinction	24	32

The points achieved for each unit in the qualification are added together and the qualification grade achieved is then determined.

The following table shows the points threshold for each grade in the Extended Diploma.

Grade	Points threshold
U	0
PPP	108
MPP	124
MMP	140
MMM	156
DMM	176
DDM	196
DDD	216
D*DD	234
D*D*D	252
D*D*D*	270

Annex B – Other useful links

You may be familiar with the following organisations which have done a lot of work supporting the progression to higher education of students who have taken BTECs and other non-traditional qualifications. If not, the following links may be helpful.

- [Linking London](#)
- [NEON](#) and their [Guiding Principles to Support the Successful Progression of BTEC Students to HE](#)

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