



Level 3 BTEC Results Review

A summary of findings and recommendations
of the review into the delays in issuing BTEC
results in summer 2022

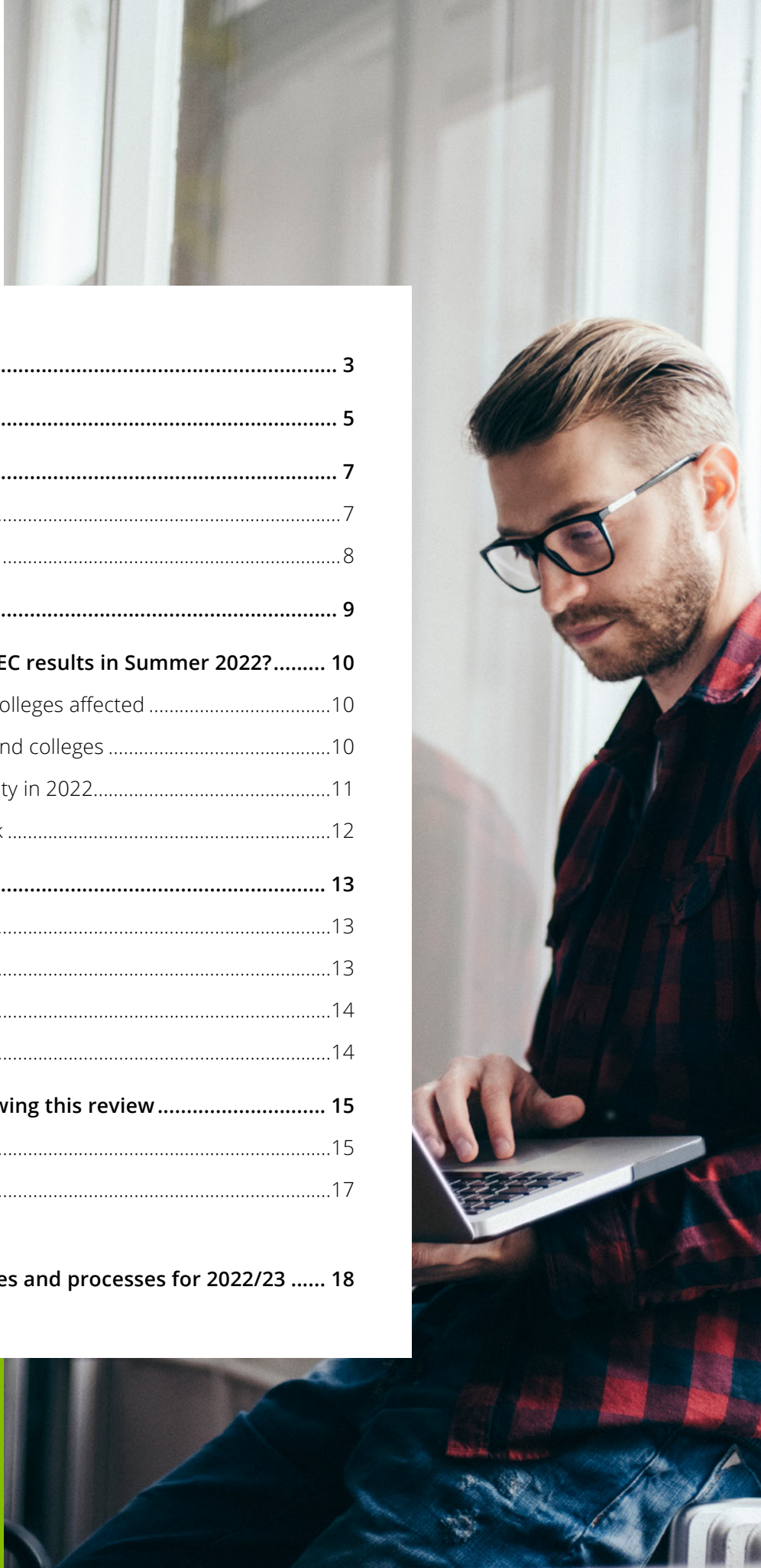
December 2022



Pearson

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Foreword

We are proud of our BTEC qualifications and the broad range of students that take them.

The flexibility they offer students in terms of timing, options and award sizes makes them highly valued qualifications. They support students from all backgrounds, with a wide variety of talents, to progress to employment and higher education. BTECs are accepted by over 140 UK universities and around one in four students enter higher education with a BTEC, amounting to over 100,000 students annually.

In summer 2022, 3.7% of BTEC Level 3 results were issued late. This caused significant concern and inconvenience for those students who were expecting a result on 18 August and did not receive one. As a former chief executive of UCAS, I was particularly conscious of the impact for those holding conditional offers from universities or those awaiting clearing that were dependent on their BTEC results. We apologise for our role in this.

We took immediate steps to support those affected by delayed results and to process outstanding awards as quickly as possible. We are immensely grateful to our partners, including schools, colleges and universities, for working closely with us to resolve the issues and offer reassurance as needed.

We are committed to improvement for future awarding cycles. That is why we have undertaken this review, with valuable insights provided by David Russell as an External Reviewer, to examine forensically exactly what happened in August 2022. We have evaluated our internal processes to understand what needs to be improved, and have sought feedback from students, schools, colleges and the wider education community. This report is a summary of that work.



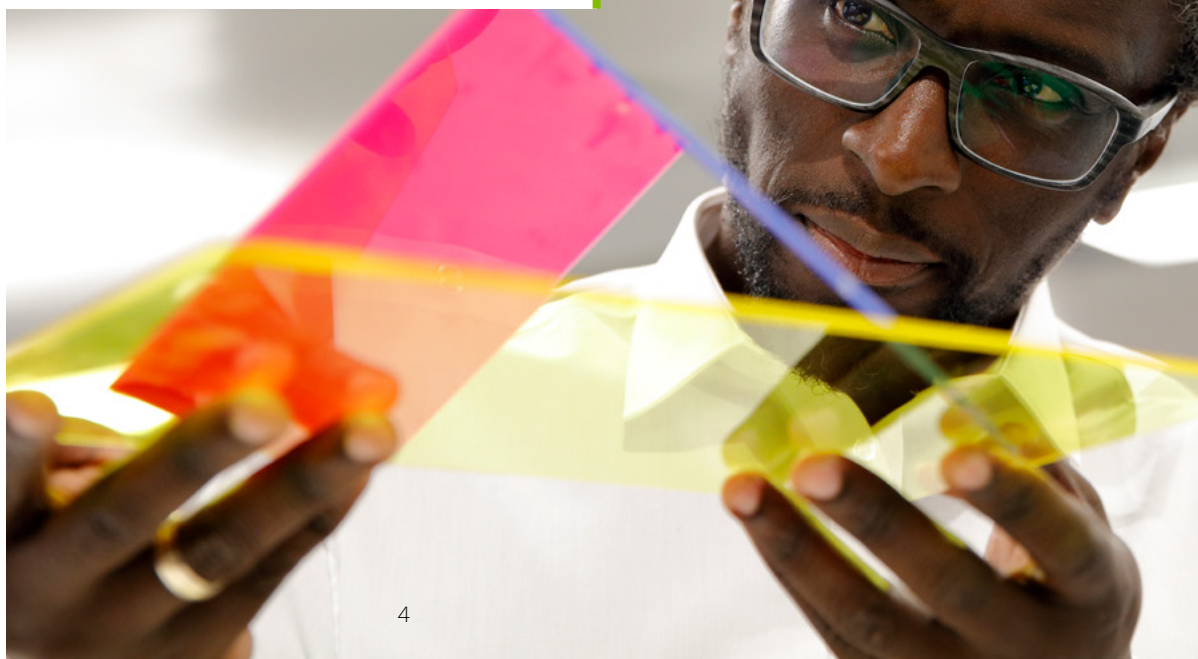
We work in close partnership with schools and colleges to collate the necessary data and award grades to students. With the addition of the pressures of the first post-Covid results and university admissions year, our current system was too complex for some of our hard-pressed schools and colleges to manage the many points of detail across thousands of students' results. There is a clear pattern emerging from our review of overburdened exams officers and colleges and schools struggling to cover the administration of a results system requiring aggregation of multiple data points across multiple awarding bodies.

As an awarding body, it is our job to ensure that the processes we put in place are manageable and are resilient when other pressures arise. The findings of this review allow us to pinpoint the ways we can improve, including both immediate and longer-term steps we must take to improve our IT systems, communications and data sharing practices to better serve our colleges, schools and learners in the future.

Thank you again to all those who took the time to support us with this review.



Mary Curnock Cook CBE
Non-Executive Chair, Pearson UK



Executive Summary

On 18 August 2022 (results day), we issued 226,998 Level 3 BTEC qualifications, accounting for 96.3% of the total number issued in the summer period. Unfortunately, an additional 8,756 (3.7%) of Level 3 results (from 572 schools and colleges) were delayed. The primary objective of this review is to capture the experiences of all those affected by the events of the summer and to ensure these are reflected in system improvements being undertaken at Pearson. These findings will help to ensure these delays will not be repeated and will drive reforms of our systems and qualifications, in order to improve the experiences of schools, colleges and students.

In carrying out this review we talked both to the schools and colleges affected by late results, as well as those unaffected, about their feedback on BTEC processes and systems more generally. We also asked students, parents and stakeholder groups about their experiences of the summer so that we could understand and agree how we can work better together.

Our findings show that:

- **Pandemic adaptations and higher numbers of colleges introducing BTECs with external assessments for the first time led to a set of administration processes for schools and colleges to follow that were more complex than usual.**
- **Colleges and schools with the broadest BTEC offer were hit hardest by the additional strain this brought to the system.**
- **There are aspects of Pearson IT systems and elements of how BTECs operate that need improvement and reform.**
- **Around one fifth of exams officers were new to the role in schools and colleges, managing complex data collation processes not just for BTECs but for many other awarding organisations.**
- **Our communications to schools and colleges were not clear enough.**



We have considered carefully where we should focus to improve services to schools, colleges and students. We will be making a significant investment in our business operations in the coming years to improve the customer and student experience during the results awarding process. Changes will be made to our business processes, communication, customer training and support, and data and systems, we will be doing this in two phases.

With immediate effect in 2022/23, we are making changes to the way we work with schools and colleges to improve delivery of BTEC qualifications and make them easier for schools and colleges to administer. These are:

- **Revising our calendar of key dates with additional checkpoints to allow more reviews to ensure that results are on track.**
- **Improving the way that we communicate and work with schools and colleges to administer BTECs and process results, targeting information to the right staff members with clear instructions.**
- **Funding a comprehensive training and support programme for Exams Officers, teachers, and all those responsible for administering our qualifications.**
- **Implementing effective data sharing protocols and communication plans to enable every organisation to easily access the information it needs.**

Longer term, we are embarking on a deeper set of improvements:

- **Investing to modernise our administration processes and IT systems to make them more straightforward for schools and colleges to use.**



Introduction

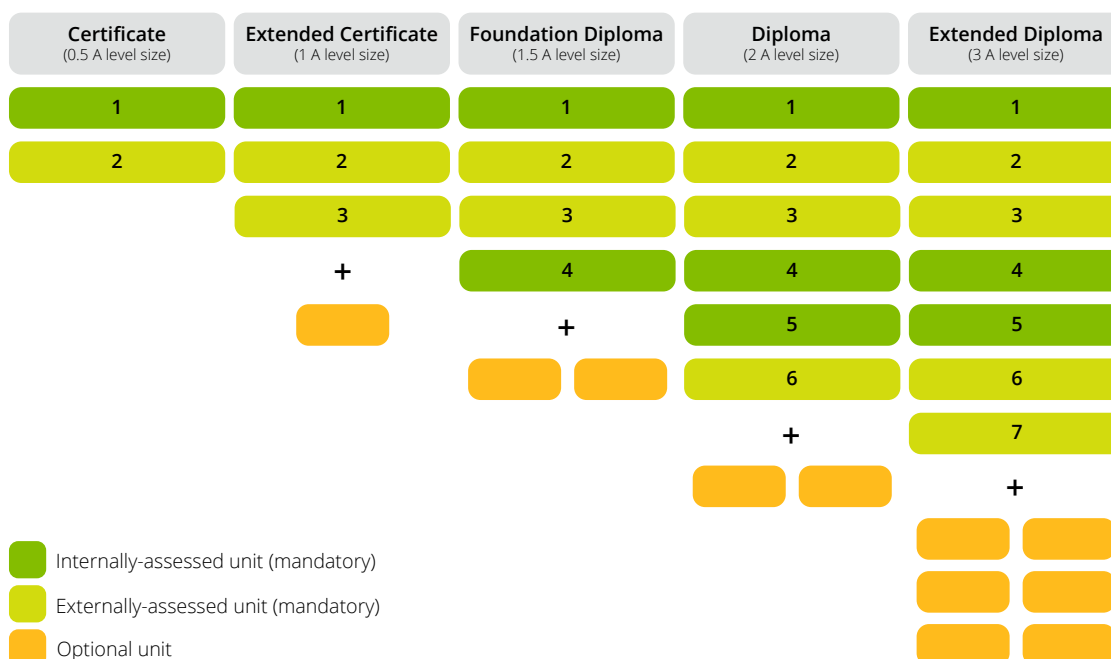
This report summarises the findings of a forensic review carried out during the autumn of 2022 into the delays in issuing results to students studying Level 3 BTEC programmes.

Data gathering and investigations for this review were undertaken by internal teams at Pearson with oversight from Mary Curnock Cook, non-executive Chair of Pearson UK, and David Russell¹ as External Reviewer.

What is a BTEC qualification?

BTECs are vocational qualifications that combine practical learning with subject and theory content in key employment sectors such as engineering, health and social care and construction. They are highly valued by students to progress to employment or higher education, and by employers as a source for the most in-demand skills in the economy. BTECs are designed to be delivered in a flexible, modular format to meet the needs of both students and employers.

A typical Level 3 BTEC National qualification suite structure



The diagram above shows a typical Level 3 BTEC National structure, where each unit can be used in more than one qualification. Many students start off on a smaller-sized BTEC and 'top-up' in the following year to a larger qualification.

¹ David is a leading professional in the Further Education sector, former CEO of the Education and Training Foundation and currently Executive in Residence at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

The inherent flexibility within BTECs means that most, but not all, students will receive their final qualification grade in the summer in any given year. Whilst we expect many Level 3 BTEC National students to finish their studies and receive a grade in August in a typical year, we know others will complete their studies and receive a grade at other points during the twelve-month period. Those students may be claiming a final grade outside of the summer results window because their personal circumstances mean they need to complete their assessments earlier or later in the year than they had planned; some students may decide to switch courses and use their units to count towards a different BTEC qualification to the one on which they had registered, and some students may be studying for their BTEC course outside of a traditional academic institution.

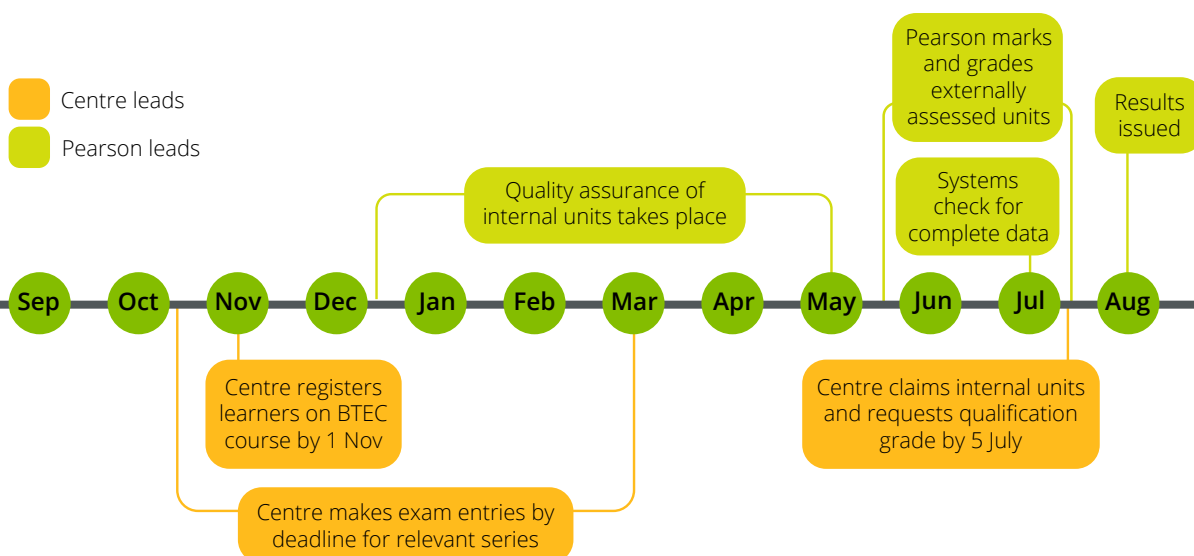
How are BTEC grades awarded?

A student taking Level 3 BTEC Nationals follows a course divided into different units or modules of study. Each of these units is either assessed by the school or college, or externally by Pearson. Internally-assessed coursework takes a wide variety of forms, including written reports, artefacts, oral presentations and performances. Alongside the internal components, between 33% and 65% of a Level 3 BTEC National may be assessed externally. This can take the form of examinations, or practical projects.

At the end of each unit, the student's coursework is assessed by their school or college, following published quality assurance requirements, and they are awarded a unit grade. Their school or college then submits the unit grades to us. Other units are examined externally – we mark the papers and award unit grades and enter the result for processing. A school or college needs to claim a result for a student and, at the point when grading information for all components is complete and accurate, we process the overall grade for their student. A set of dates is published each year detailing activities for schools and colleges to follow in order to receive final qualification grades by results day.

The diagram below shows a process cycle for a BTEC qualification taken over one year. Qualifications taken over longer or shorter periods may reflect different timescales but the cycle of activity remains the same.

Schools and colleges submit information to us to indicate when a student is expected to complete their BTEC programme and if they are expecting to receive a grade in August or at a different point in the year.





Summer 2022 – the numbers

We issued 226,998 Level 3 BTEC qualifications to 2,324 schools and colleges on 18 August.

8,756 Level 3 results (3.7%) were delayed, affecting students at 572 schools and colleges.²

The missing grades can be broken down as:

3,641 were missing because we did not have the complete, or accurate, information needed to award a result on results day. This number sub-divides as:

- 1,560 with missing exams data (from Covid-related mitigations)
- 1,703 with missing coursework unit grades
- 378 due to other late school and college data.

5,115 Level 3 results were missing because schools and colleges notified us that they wanted to claim a final qualification grade after 18 August. In some of these cases, some of the unit data described above was also missing.

This review focuses on Level 3 BTEC results because some BTEC students intending to progress to university were impacted by missing results due to the time-sensitive nature of higher education admissions. However, a total of 1,715 Level 2 results were also delayed on 25 August. The recommendations from this review will extend to Level 2 BTECs also.

² Data in this report represents all UK. Figures cited in reports from Examinations Regulators may differ as they include only BTECs awarded in their country jurisdiction.



What happened to Level 3 BTEC results in Summer 2022?

Profile analysis of schools and colleges affected

Of the 2,324 schools and colleges expecting BTEC Level 3 results in the summer, 572 received one or more students' results after 18 August. Of these 572 centres, 55% of the delayed results were concentrated on 39 schools or colleges. These tended to be those with a high number of different BTEC programmes, or large colleges spread over several sites, often following recent mergers.

Communications with schools and colleges

Ahead of the summer, we followed our normal procedures to identify data received from schools and colleges that was incomplete, inaccurate or where results had not been claimed. We alerted every centre where our system reconciliations showed unit grades were missing and provided reports listing all students with incomplete results so that schools or colleges could identify gaps.

However, we have identified 1,301 Level 3 student results where our communications fell short. These schools and colleges had carried out required processes, such as uploading student scripts from external assessments, but some of that data was incomplete. We did not correctly reconcile this at the time, so those schools and colleges were not informed that information for specific students was missing. This meant that those 1,301 students did not receive a grade on results day. We will work with the schools and colleges impacted to address this.

Our findings show there are areas for improvement in how we communicate about missing data with schools and colleges, and it is clear that we need to check more carefully that information and data requests have been received and are being actioned.

Factors that increased complexity in 2022

In the last three years, colleges and schools have had to contend with a high degree of process change, largely driven by adaptations introduced to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on students. This unprecedented set of changes, all happening at the same time, created additional processes and administrative burdens for schools and colleges. We made the following changes to BTEC processes over that time:

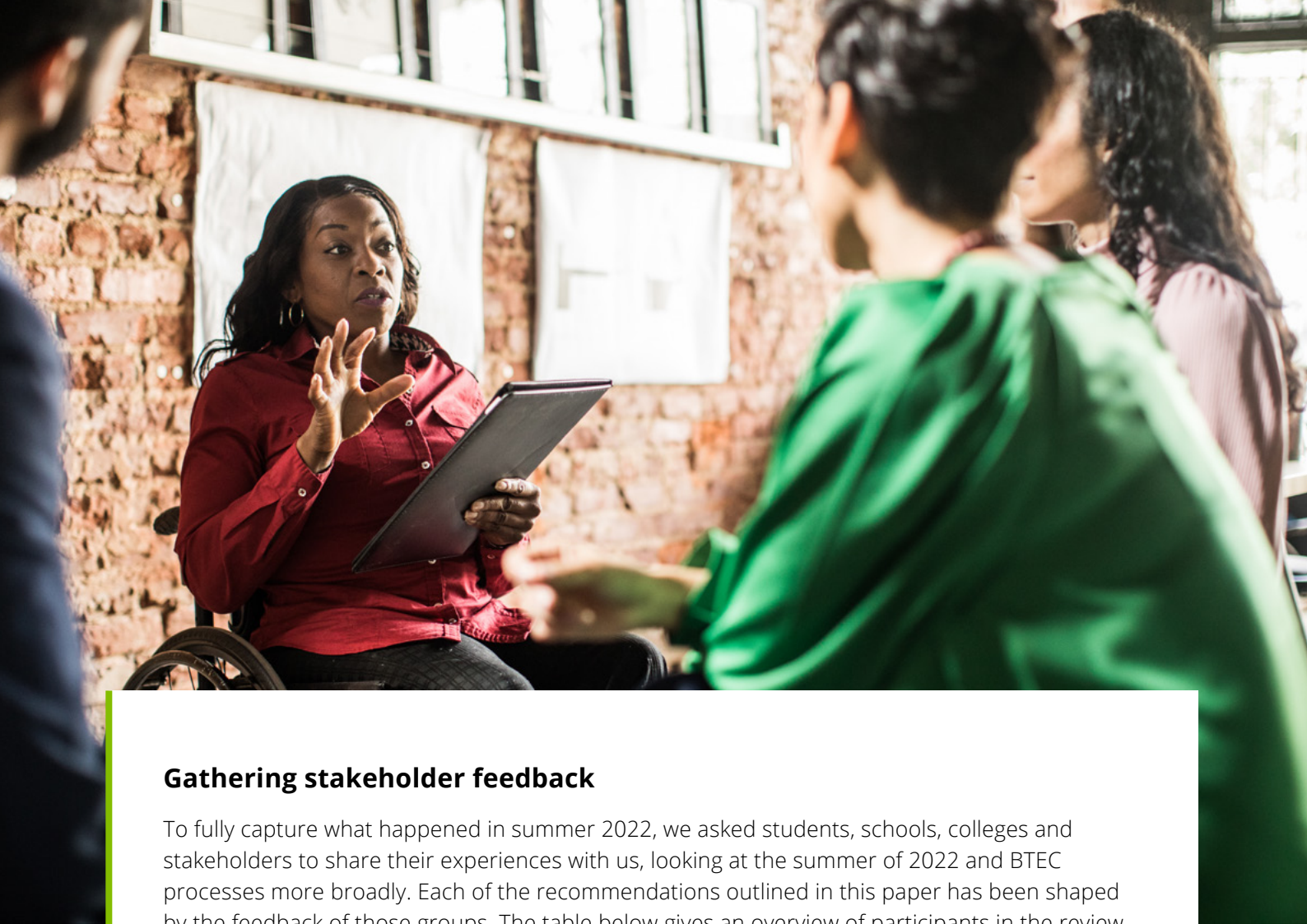
- We required colleges and schools to provide 'UTAGs' for the units that students were not able to complete in the previous academic year (2020/21) owing to the impact of the pandemic. UTAGs are 'unit-based teacher assessed grades' for students completing their BTEC course in summer 2022. UTAGs were required from the first year of their course and so were added retrospectively.
- We needed schools and colleges to make 'Special Consideration' requests for students who were unable to sit exams in 2020/21 or 2021/22 owing to the pandemic. In normal years we would have assessed and awarded grades for those students, but as exams had not been sat, we asked schools and colleges to input these requests into the system instead.
- We introduced modified assessment approaches for course units to take account of lost teaching time in 2020 and 2021.

A number of schools and colleges claimed final grades for BTECs with a mix of internal and external assessments for the first time in 2022, moving from the previous versions of BTECs that required only internal assessment for all units. Externally-assessed units require additional administration tasks to be carried out by schools and colleges.

Alongside this, some exams officers at colleges or schools retired or left the profession during the pandemic. The National Association of Examinations Officers survey found that 22% were new in role in 2022.

Our risk management processes did not anticipate the impact of the cumulative stress on the system caused by these changes.





Gathering stakeholder feedback

To fully capture what happened in summer 2022, we asked students, schools, colleges and stakeholders to share their experiences with us, looking at the summer of 2022 and BTEC processes more broadly. Each of the recommendations outlined in this paper has been shaped by the feedback of those groups. The table below gives an overview of participants in the review.

Online centre survey	463 responses from schools, colleges, and training providers.
Schools and colleges	We spoke to 56 schools and colleges in the early part of the autumn term 2022. These were mostly large FE colleges who experienced most of the issues with delayed results. We also ran four listening groups to collect views from a broader spectrum of schools and colleges.
Stakeholders	We held detailed discussions with: the Association of Colleges, Sixth Form College Association, UCAS, Higher Education Institutions, the Department for Education, The National Association of Examinations Officers, Association of School and College Leaders, and the Baker Dearing Trust.
Students	We spoke to groups of students that had been affected by the delays to results in the summer, and those due to receive BTEC results next summer.
Social Media	We studied the interactions students and parents had with Pearson via social media during the summer as they queried missing results.

Summary of findings

In collating the findings from the review, some common themes were identified. These are summarised below.

Schools and Colleges

In 2022 embargoed results were issued to schools and colleges one day before the results day on 18 August. (Before the pandemic, qualification grades were not issued under embargo). Until they saw those embargoed results, some schools and colleges told us they did not know that there were missing components for their students. Although we had communicated about missing results, messages were not always reaching the right staff in schools and colleges who were able to rectify the issues. When missing results were raised by schools and colleges, there was insufficient time in the 24-hour window to resolve all these issues before results day.

We received feedback that some of our processes and IT systems do not make it easy for exams officers to upload, retrieve or share data within their organisation. Exams teams in schools and colleges felt that many issues could have been avoided if registration, entries, and results information were more accessible and in a format that was easier to share.

Exams officers told us that when data is downloaded from Pearson IT systems it can be difficult to share and communicate it internally with their Senior Leadership Teams. They told us some Pearson systems are incompatible with their own MIS systems and excessive time was spent reformatting their own data outputs to enter into Pearson systems.

Some schools and colleges offering the new version of BTECs for the first time this year told us that there was considerable additional resource required from their exams teams to administer and support new external assessments.

Students and Parents

In focus groups, students with delayed results reported they were surprised not to receive results on time and needed to have more information about why their results were missing. They felt that we should have shown more accountability by communicating more clearly what had happened and when it would be fixed. Whilst we worked closely with universities to ensure they were able to hold places for students with delayed results, we heard this time was particularly stressful for students with conditional offers for university. Students were concerned, at the time, that their places could be in jeopardy and were frustrated that they could not make plans for the start of term or accommodation arrangements, if necessary. Whilst it is not our protocol to communicate results information directly to students, those contacting Pearson about missing results requested information from us rather than being referred to their school or college.



Universities

UCAS and the universities we consulted said they had a high volume of calls from anxious applicants who often did not know why an offer had not been confirmed, or why their result had not been issued. The universities and UCAS told us they were frustrated with the delays to results, but they worked hard to support applicants during this period, which helped to mitigate some of the impact.

Whilst they appreciated the updates we provided during the summer, universities would have preferred more insights into the issue to help them understand how they, and their applicants, were likely to be affected. They confirmed that, generally, they were able to hold conditional offer places for candidates until they received their results. However, some universities told us that because of the time which elapsed waiting for some results to be issued, the course vacancies made available in clearing were available to a smaller pool of applicants than in a normal year.

Stakeholders

Many stakeholder groups stressed they should have been forewarned of any issues with the summer results so that they could have helped prepare their members. Exams officers told us that it would have been better if we had communicated the data issues earlier and had directly spoken to senior managers in their institutions. A high staff turnover during the pandemic meant that more than one fifth of exams officers were new to their role in 2021/22 and unfamiliarity with our processes added to an already complex set of tasks. Other stakeholders wanted to emphasise the fact that many schools and colleges work with up to 40 awarding organisations, each with a different process, so this is a major cause of their administrative burden.

Changes we are making following this review

In light of the findings from our review we have drawn up five key recommendations. Four will be implemented this academic year in phase one and deeper reforms will be implemented in phase two.

Phase One

With immediate effect in 2022/23 we are making changes to the way we work with schools and colleges to deliver BTEC qualifications. These are:

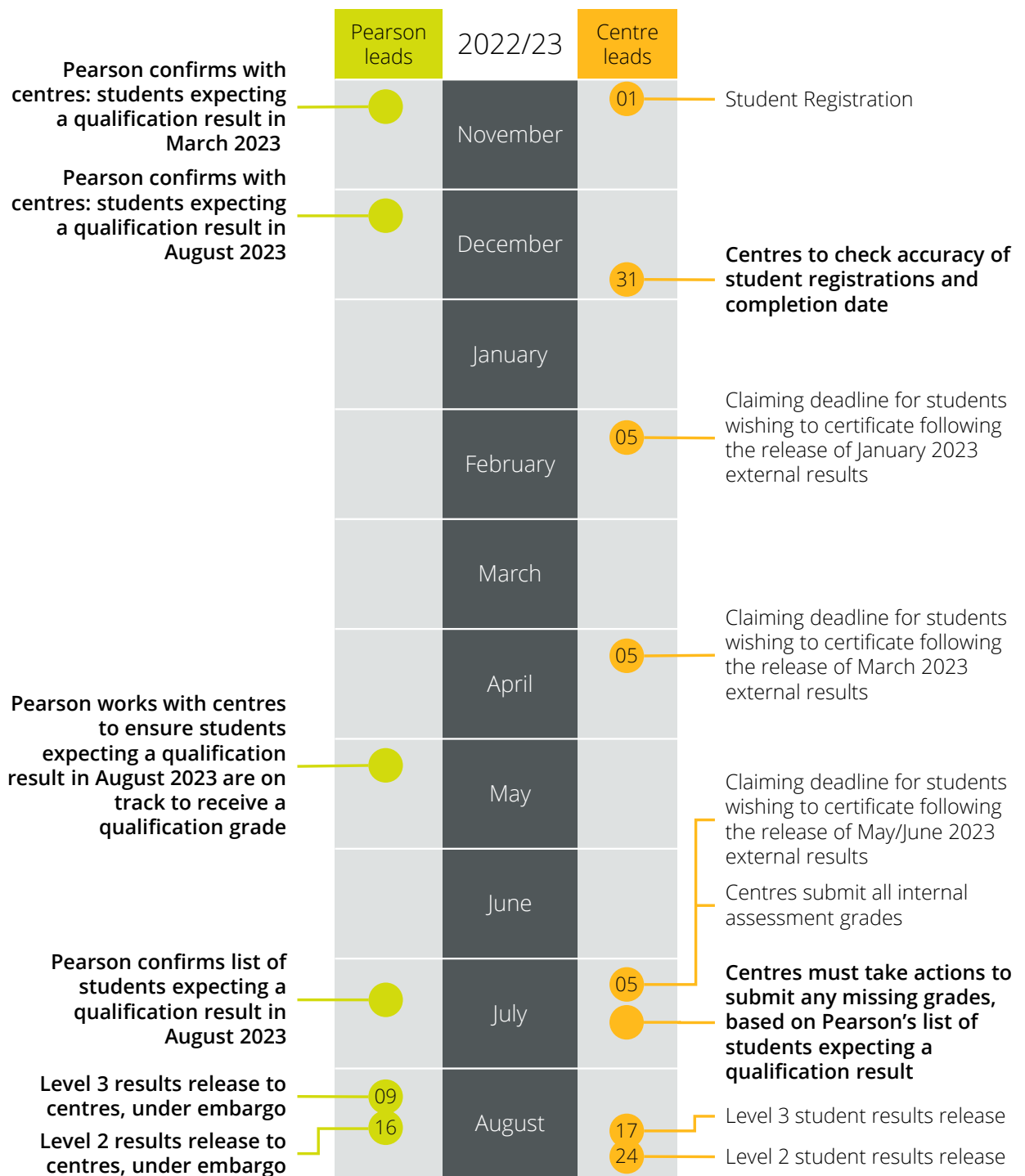
1. Revise our calendar of key dates with additional checkpoints to allow more reviews to ensure that results are on track.

This includes an earlier embargoed release of results, giving college and school staff more time to check each student's grade and query any inaccuracies. There will also be more checkpoints in the year when we will contact schools and colleges to confirm they are on track and processes are running to plan. We recognise that it will be helpful to align across the sector on certain dates to reduce administrative burden, and we have introduced the dates below for 2022/23 as they are close to our current processes. We will consult with other awarding organisations to encourage a streamlined approach to these dates across the sector.

2. Improve the way that we communicate and work with schools and colleges to administer BTECs and process results, targeting information to the right staff members with clear instructions.

For institutions offering the broadest and most complex range of qualifications, we will improve our service, working closely with larger colleges and schools to offer consolidated support that is tailored to their needs. We will be investing in bespoke training and dedicated support resources for those schools and colleges that received a large proportion of results late, targeted at their specific support needs. This additional resource, combined with the overall system improvements outlined above, should ease processes and reduce the administrative load for schools and colleges in future exam series.

We will improve the way we communicate with staff in schools and colleges, making it clear to whom information is targeted and what follow-up activities they need to do. We will help schools and colleges by sharing information about results in formats and in terms that are meaningful to students and parents so that these can be passed on with confidence where they wish to do so.



Key dates of timelines and processes for 2022/23

3. Fund a comprehensive training and support programme for Exams Officers, teachers, and all those responsible for administering our qualifications.

We are making a significant increase in our commitment to training for all schools and colleges. For 2022/23 this includes funding new in-person training events in all regions in addition to targeted training for schools and colleges new to BTEC, and Exams Officers new to the role or those requiring additional support. We are rolling out on-demand e-learning modules for exams teams, covering all elements of the BTEC administration processes. Monthly online update sessions for exams teams will continue as previously but with a sharp focus on the new timelines and processes set out above. We will continue to work closely with the National Association of Examinations Officers to address the need for greater recognition of their members by supporting continuous professional development for examinations professionals.

4. Implement effective data-sharing protocols and communication plans to enable every organisation to easily access the information it needs.

We will enable closer alignment with UCAS on matching data for candidates with university applications, including highlighting known student withdrawals. This will mean we can provide additional data points supporting schools and colleges to ensure all unit results and claims have been submitted in time for results day. We will establish and implement communication plans with key external stakeholders to share updates ahead of results day, highlighting and managing risks as they arise, ensuring those that need visibility have it. All of this will be done within strict data protection controls.

Phase Two

In Phase two, we will make investments in our IT systems and processes which will help streamline and simplify processes. Specifically, we will:

5. Invest to modernise our administration processes and IT systems to make them more straightforward for schools and colleges to use.

We will invest in our IT systems to make them easier for customers to access and use. Over time, this will support our processes and dataflows will become more collaborative between Pearson and schools and colleges. We will seek sector-wide alignment on key processes, reporting, data and dates. We will collaborate with other Awarding Organisations, Ofqual, MIS systems vendors and other key stakeholders to achieve this.

In the longer term, in the next cycle of development for new BTEC qualifications we will simplify BTEC administration by making BTEC structures and external assessments simpler to manage with more uniformity across sectors.

Appendix 1: Key calendar dates of timelines and processes for 2022/23

Pearson will work with schools and colleges to confirm data accuracy throughout the academic year for every key activity listed below.

'Centres' include all institutions Pearson work with to award student results and includes schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, and universities.

Owner	Activity	Key date
Centre	Register students	1 Nov 22
Centre	Check accuracy of student registrations and ensure all qualification completion dates are accurate on Edexcel Online	31 Dec 22
Pearson	Confirm with centres which students are expecting a qualification result in Mar 2023	Jan 23
Centre	Delete student registration for students who have been withdrawn from the qualification	31 Jan 23
Pearson	Confirm with centres which students are expecting a qualification result in Aug 2023	Feb 23
Centre	Claiming deadline for all students expecting a result following the release of the Jan 2023 external results <i>To make a claim, centres must submit all internally-assessed unit grades and make a Full Award Claim for relevant students</i>	5 Feb 23
Centre	Claiming deadline for all students expecting a result following the release of the Mar 2023 external results <i>To make a claim, centres must submit all internally-assessed unit grades and make a Full Award Claim for relevant students</i>	5 Apr 23
Pearson	Work with centres to ensure and confirm students expecting a qualification result in Aug 2023 are on track to receive one	May 23
Centre	Claiming deadline for all students expecting a result following the release of May/Jun 2023 external examination results <i>To make a claim, centres must submit all internally-assessed unit grades and make a Full Award Claim for relevant students</i>	5 Jul 23

Owner	Activity	Key date
Pearson	Confirm with centres which students are expecting a qualification result in Aug 2023	Jul 23
Centre	Submit any missing information, based on communications received from Pearson	Jul 23
Pearson	Release Level 3 Results to centres under embargo <i>Qualification results will be issued alongside external assessment results for May/Jun 2023 external assessments</i>	9 Aug 23
Centre	Check Level 3 Results in time to initiate outstanding remedial actions with a view to resolving by Results day on 17 Aug 2023	9-16 Aug 23
Centre/ Pearson	Work together to complete any outstanding remedial actions for Level 3 Results	9-16 Aug 23
Pearson	Release Level 2 Results to centres under embargo <i>Qualification results will be issued alongside external assessment results for May/Jun 2023 external assessments</i>	16 Aug 23
Centre	Level 3 Results day: Release Level 3 Results to students <i>Qualifications results (and relevant external assessment unit results from May/Jun 2023) released to students</i>	17 Aug 23
Centre	Check Level 2 Results in time to initiate any outstanding remedial actions with a view to resolving by Results day on 24 Aug 2023	16-23 Aug 23
Centre/ Pearson	Work together to complete any outstanding remedial actions for Level 2 Results	16-23 Aug 23
Centre	Level 2 Results day: Release Level 2 Results to students <i>Qualifications results (and relevant external assessment unit results from May/Jun 2023) released to students</i>	24 Aug 23





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