



Pearson

Alternative assessment arrangements for BTEC Level 3 Nationals in 2021

Guide for
Higher Education
Institutions (HEIs)

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Context

The student cohort completing their BTEC qualifications in summer 2021 have in some ways been more impacted by the pandemic disruption than those who completed in summer 2020. They were affected by two national lockdowns (in year one and year two), as well as Covid-related absences in autumn term 2020/21. This cohort has also been impacted by the cancellation of the summer exams, as a result of the pandemic. Meanwhile, some students sat January BTEC exams, whilst others were not able to, depending on the difficult decision made by their individual school/college, whether to run the exams during a national lockdown.

This has been taken into account by DfE/Ofqual as part of their consultation on how grades for students will be issued in summer 2021. Following on from the [outcomes of their joint consultation](#), we are able to confirm some of the headline principles of the alternative assessment arrangements for BTEC.

This guide is intended to support HEIs/universities understand the arrangements this year, which differ to last year and previous years. These arrangements apply equally to UK and international students taking BTEC Level 2 and 3 qualifications (which are in scope for alternative arrangements).

Overview of alternative assessment arrangements

One of the key aims of the arrangements this summer is to enable teachers and students to focus on continued teaching and learning between now and submission of grades in June.

A number of mitigations have been put into place to date including adapting assessments in line with public health guidance (e.g. social distancing guidelines), and reviewing work placement requirements, where appropriate.

Internal assessment will continue, though it is recognised that not all students will be able to complete some of the more practical-based assessments, which require access to specialist resources/equipment. It has been mandated that units linked to a licence-to-practise (e.g. childcare) to gain the associated licence will need to be completed.

There is recognition from Ofqual, DfE and exam boards that the pandemic-related disruption means it will not be possible for all students to complete all unit assessments, as in normal years. Instead, schools and colleges will be asked to put forward a holistic qualification-level teacher-assessed grade, based on 'common sources of evidence', similar to the process used for General Qualifications this summer. This qualification-level grade is

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intended to reflect the grade that students are currently performing at and be based on the content that has been taught.

Quality assurance

The arrangements this year will be underpinned by various quality assurance processes. Schools and colleges will be running internal standardisation activities, supported by our guidance and their designated Quality Nominee(s).

We are enhancing our external verification process this year, and will be conducting:

- a support check-in for all schools/colleges.
- a review of sample student work at all schools/colleges.
- an additional review of qualification teacher assessed grades submitted and discussing any discrepancies with affected schools/colleges.

BTEC student results day in the UK

This is line with General Qualifications this year:

- 10 August 2021 – Level 3 BTEC Nationals
- 12 August 2021 – Level 2 (and below) BTEC suites in scope for alternative arrangements

Please note that international learners, who have applied via UCAS, will also have their results issued on the above dates, for the above qualifications or the international equivalent (BTEC International).

Appeals

There will be an appeals process, similar to that for General Qualifications, which will open from the above student results days. Student consent must be obtained for appeals, given that grades can either go up or down as a result of the review. We will endeavour to process as many Level 3 appeals as possible by the UCAS advisory deadline.

Focusing on the qualification-level teacher assessed grade

Mitigating the impact of the pandemic and differential learning loss

This year the focus on awarding results for BTECs, will be on the issue of qualification-level teacher assessed grades, just as is the case for A levels and GCSEs. This means for this summer, we will not be issuing unit level grades, subject to the outcomes of the [Ofqual regulatory consultation](#).

This is because this year, in line with DfE policy, it would not be fair to expect students to complete assessments for all units, in order to issue unit-level results. This is why the focus is on a holistic qualification-level grade that reflects the standard students are performing at. This will help mitigate against the impact of the pandemic and differential learning loss. To do otherwise would create an unfair assessment burden on students, given the extraordinary conditions of this year. This would also have a disproportionate impact on those from widening participation backgrounds, given that the most impacted would be those faced with digital poverty and with access to support during their studies (e.g. during the lockdown and Covid-related absences). It would essentially penalise those most disadvantaged by the pandemic.

We understand some HEIs make BTEC unit-specific offers to UCAS applicants, particularly to those doing the larger sized BTECs (the two and three A Level equivalent) intending to progress onto STEM and health-related degrees.

We are keen to work with you to ensure that no BTEC students are disadvantaged in relation to their peers taking General Qualifications, particularly those applying to HE this summer, and those who will certificate this year with the intention of progressing to HE in a subsequent year. We have been encouraged by the flexibility HEIs demonstrated last summer and the recognition that this is another unprecedented year.

Ensuring parity with A Levels and GCSEs

This approach is comparable to the one being adopted for General Qualifications (A Levels and GCSEs), where an overall qualification-level teacher-assessed grade will be issued, based on a holistic judgement.

As detailed in the DfE/Ofqual consultation outcomes for General Qualifications:

- students should only be assessed on content that is delivered.
- qualification-level teacher assessed grades should be based on the standard they are performing at.
- there is no minimum requirement for content to be covered for assessment.

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The quality assurance controls for BTEC will be equitable to the approach taken for General Qualifications.

Ensuring parity with other Applied General qualifications

The issuing of qualification-level teacher assessed grades is being adopted by other exam boards for similar qualifications, which are used for progression to HE. Our approach is in line with the preference stated by Ofqual that for Applied General qualifications (which are taken alongside or instead of A Levels), that students are only issued a teacher assessed grade at qualification level (p.47, [DfE/Ofqual consultation outcomes](#)).

Having confidence in teacher assessed grades at qualification level

As for General Qualifications, the Head of Centre will be required to formally declare and sign off that BTEC students are ready for progression to the next stage of learning.

Schools and colleges have been prioritising the delivery of mandatory/core units and units needed for progression purposes. Often these are theoretical units, which lend themselves more to remote learning (over some of the more practical units). The overall teacher assessed grade at qualification level will provide a holistic overview of how students performed on the BTEC qualification, informed by the key units that will have been studied during delivery. We have encouraged schools and colleges to prioritise any units that would be useful for progression purposes for individual students.

It is important to us that stakeholders and students have confidence in the qualification grades being awarded this year, and Pearson will be reviewing a sample of student work for non-examined assessment (i.e. internal assessment) for Level 3 BTEC qualifications, through its supportive standards verification process, which will be a key part of the quality assurance process this year.

Schools and colleges will also be asked to review their judgements in consideration of their historical data.

Finally, we will complete a quality assurance check of the qualification-level teacher assessed grades that have been submitted, and discuss any discrepancies with affected schools/colleges, asking for further evidence where required. These measures will help ensure you can take confidence in the grades being awarded this summer.

Tell us your views

We appreciate this is another unprecedented year and that not issuing of unit grades this summer may impact on the admissions process at some HEIs. We are keen to work with HEIs to ensure no student is disadvantaged and there are no surprises this summer. To that end, we would be grateful if you could complete [this short survey](#), to confirm the

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admissions team at your institution are aware of the new arrangements for BTEC and whether this will impact the admissions process at your HEI, so we can support you and our students.

FAQs for HEIs/universities

What are the key differences between this year's arrangements and other years?

- Summer exams for the RQF/reformed UK BTEC qualifications have been cancelled.
- A teacher assessed qualification grade will be issued instead of exams/assessments which cannot take place, which will be based on a form of teacher assessment and subject to internal and external quality assurance processes.
- Whilst non-examined assessment (i.e. internal assessment) will continue, there is recognition it will not be possible for some students to complete all the assessments (e.g. practical ones requiring access to specialist resources/facilities).
- No unit results will be issued this summer, as it would create an undue assessment burden for BTEC students, especially in comparison to their peers taking A Levels.

How will we know what students have studied?

Students are able to include this information on their UCAS application in the normal way. Centres have prioritised the delivery of core/mandatory units and theoretical units (which are key for progression).

Why is this approach different to other vocational programmes that lead to progression in HE (e.g. Access to HE programmes, HNC/Ds)?

Students on these programmes are older, typically 19+, and their age and mode of the programme (internally assessed) means they lend themselves more to self-study and therefore impacted to a lesser extent by the pandemic.

Why is this different to last year?

Last year BTEC results were largely based on Centre Assessment Grades, which were informed by teachers' **predictions** of how students would have performed had assessments not been cancelled. This year it is based on some form of assessment(s) and other evidence which supports the standard they are currently performing at.

Grades need to be underpinned by some form of teacher assessment and it will not be possible for many students to complete assessments for all BTEC units in the time remaining (due to both the lockdowns in year 1 and 2, and Covid-related absences).

Why not issue unit-level results for those students who have them?

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It would be not be fair to issue unit-level results for some students and not others.

Why not issue a list of units studied for all students?

Students are able to input this information into their UCAS application, like in normal years, should they wish to.

It would be unfair of us to issue this for all students, given that not all students will have been able to study/be formally assessed all the units, through no fault of their own. Practical units (i.e. those unsuitable for remote/online delivery) would be the most likely to come into this category.

This approach has parity with General Qualifications, where there is no minimum requirement for content to be assessed.

Have students been informed they won't receive unit results?

We have already informed all our schools and colleges that we will not be issuing unit grades this summer. We also plan to issue a letter to students about this to reassure them, and this letter will be written in consultation with HE representatives and shared with universities for their reference.

How will you avoid mature applicants (i.e. those who complete in 2021 but apply via UCAS in later years) being disadvantaged in comparison to peers?

Students will still be able to input units they studied into their UCAS application form as normal. We have issued guidance to centres to prioritise those units needed for progression, and will continue to reiterate that.

How can I support BTEC students this summer?

We recommend reviewing whether the new arrangements will have an impact on your admissions process, or offers made to date. We would be grateful if you could complete [this short survey](#) to confirm whether your admissions team are aware of the arrangements for this summer and whether there is an impact.

Some HEIs have indicated they are considering issuing a reassuring message to their feeder schools/colleges, or as a statement on their website. Alternatively, it is possible to add a reassuring statement on our Pearson/BTEC website, via the above survey if you wish.

Where can I get more information?

We will be running a series of webinars for HEIs this spring on the BTEC assessment arrangements, with dates to be shortly confirmed. We are also presenting a breakout session at this year's UCAS admissions conference (1 April, 11-11.50am).

If you have any queries, please contact our Head of Stakeholder Engagement, Ria Bhatta (ria.bhatta@pearson.com), a key contact point at Pearson for UK HEIs and HE-related organisations.