

Notes from NEON BTEC Working Group – 19th September

Amy Smith – Senior Policy Executive, UCAS

- More students entering HE with combined profile between A levels and BTEC
- BTEC students on average coming in at roughly BBC at A level – Set against a backdrop of declining A level attainment
- Only 2% of BTEC students are entering high tariff institutions
- UCAS conducted a national survey with school leavers – Only 13% of respondents said universities understood BTEC & Vocational qualifications
- There were over 400 respondents to the survey, over 200 of these were studying a BTEC pathway
- Amy felt that the onus was on schools and colleges to engage with universities, as much as universities need to engage with young people
- OfS pressure on retention may impact upon practices around BTEC students

Hayley Dalton, Pearson

- Involved in the design of the new BTEC curriculum
- 16-19 education is moving forward really quickly
- Pearson is currently involved in a piece of research with RG universities
- Again, echoed the comments of Amy that there would soon be a “blended student” and we wouldn’t be focusing on the A level/BTEC distinction any more
- Touched on the structure of different BTECs and how this can differ from course to course
- There are still some issues around universities supporting BTEC students onto certain courses – Chimes with Amy’s comments about “only 2% of BTEC students entering high tariff institutions”
- Warned against HEIs setting up pre-arrival projects on the premise that all BTEC students will be free from a certain point or have their results at the same time
- In the ‘new’ BTEC, there will be fewer resit attempts available
- The newer qualification is considered to be more rigorous
- Employers have been giving different feedback on the qualification when compared with HE
- Schools and Sixth Forms have been quicker to adopt the ‘new’ BTEC
- FE slower due to the ‘old’ qualification being part of the Apprenticeship framework

Slides from Kirsti Lord, Association of Colleges – Presented on behalf of Kirsti by Chris Bayes (NEON)

- The lifespan of level 3 qualifications which are not A levels is currently in question
- T level implementation is due to be rolled out in 2020 - Currently no plans to attach UCAS points
- Applied generals may be phased out as T level is introduced
- Kirsti felt the implementation of T levels poses a “big question for recruiting universities”, as if lobbying manages to achieve the attachment of UCAS points to T levels, this could have a big impact on HE progression as “routes are too specialist and practical to transfer skills and knowledge to any degree without same specialism.” - A criticism which has been levelled at BTECs

- Exploring why students choose BTECS, Kirsti highlighted for some it is the only option, for some the stresses associated with exams are too great and for others, they know what industry they want to work in and the BTEC offers a viable pathway towards this
- Touched on how BTEC can prepare some students more for HE than A Levels, but there is inconsistency. The stereotypes surrounding BTEC generally come from the weakest BTEC students

Why are so many colleges hanging onto QCF?

- Colleges putting students first to encourage students to achieve best
- Colleges also question why exams are seen as only rigorous method when better moderation might achieve same result

Data Collection and presentation

- You have a cohort of students who don't do their best in exams, a cohort which increased in proportion significant at the ages of 19 and 20 as students who have done a level 2 year before level 3 follow behind
- Data reporting at ages 19 and 20 is crucial to fully assess impact of Btec on HE success as this is where the biggest % of Btec achievement and unconditional offers converge

Practical measures

- Kirsti called for the sector to set sensible entry requirements and stick to them:
 - If you are offering unconditional places
Or
 - Making an offer and then reducing it when results come out
Or
 - Not asking for skills and qualifications you know are required to succeed
- Highlighted the nurturing role played by colleges (ILPs – individualised learning plans, peer group support, support from teachers – feedback, early intervention when students are struggling)
- Concluded by highlighting that colleges are not just offering education for progression into HE. They are developing young people to achieve their full potential: this may be into work, or onto an apprenticeship rather than HE (and are measured on positive destinations)
- Kirsti's final question for the sector was "Are your expectations realistic and should you be considering how to better support these students?"

Next steps for the group

- Attendees were clearly in favour of the group retaining a national focus, but for meetings to rotate around the country
- In terms of themes for the group to focus on, these are listed below:

- Evidence informed practice – Analysis of effectiveness – NERUPI – Using this framework to map the interventions for BTEC students discussed onto this. Through this, we could develop a collective evidence base.