



Guide for Tutors in UK Schools and Colleges on the Progression of BTEC Level 3 Students to UK Higher Education

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1. Introduction

This guide is intended for any school and college staff supporting students on level 3 BTEC qualifications who wish to progress to Higher Education. This includes teachers/lecturers, personal tutors, exams officers and careers staff.

The main level 3 BTEC qualifications used by students to progress to HE are the BTEC Nationals. These 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, which are taught, are as follows:

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*)

2. List of available subjects in the BTEC Nationals

a) Reformed RQF subjects

Subject	Size relative to A levels				
	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0	3.0
Animal Management		o	o	o	o
Agriculture		o	o	o	o
Countryside Management		o	o	o	o
Equine Management		o	o	o	o
Forestry and Arboriculture			o		o
Horticulture		o	o	o	o
Applied Science	o	o	o	o	o
Applied Human Biology	o	o			
Applied Psychology	o	o			
Forensic and Criminal Investigation			o	o	o
Health and Social Care	o	o	o	o	o
Construction and The Built Environment		o	o	o	o
Building Services Engineering				o	o
Civil Engineering				o	o
Engineering	o	o	o	o	o
Aeronautical Engineering				o	o
Computer Engineering				o	o
Electrical & Electronic Engineering				o	o
Manufacturing Engineering				o	o

Mechanical Engineering				o	o
Business	o	o	o	o	o
Enterprise and Entrepreneurship	o	o	o	o	o
Marketing		o		o	o
Applied Law	o	o			
Computing	o	o	o	o	o
Business Information Systems*				o	
Computer Science*				o	
Computer Systems & Network Support*				o	
Computing for Creative Industries*				o	
Information Technology	o	o	o	o	o
Creative Digital Media Production	o	o	o	o	o
Digital Content Production		o			
Digital Film and Video Production		o			
Digital Games Production		o			
Digital Games Design & Development				o	
Film & TV Production				o	
Sound Production**				o	
Digital Publishing*				o	
Film & TV Visual Effects*				o	
Art and Design	o	o	o	o	o
3D Design & Crafts*				o	
Fashion Design & Production*				o	
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

b) Reformed RQF BTEC Nationals with 100% internal assessment

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

PLEASE NOTE: Even for creative subjects, a small number of the more selective universities prefer qualifications to have some external assessment. Consequently, for those students wishing to maximise their HE progression opportunities, we recommend taking one of the reformed qualifications **with** external assessment.

c) Legacy QCF BTEC Nationals which are still available

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 registrations
	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

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

a) 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. The Level 3 qualification is for 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. So, students taking the two levels may be co-taught in the same group.

The Pearson BTEC Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media Practice is usually taught as a one-year full-time programme. It is particularly suitable for adults wishing to develop or consolidate their practice before progressing to HE. 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. We know that some FE colleges that only have one group for level 3 engineering, with a mix of full-time students and part-time apprentices, are offering these qualifications rather than the BTEC Nationals in engineering.

If a college does not have engineering apprentices, it is much better to offer the BTEC Nationals in engineering as they will be more accepted by universities. Some universities have expressed concern about the following aspects of the Advanced Manufacturing Engineering qualifications:

- There is no external assessment.
- There is only a small amount of mathematics in the mandatory core.

If you are offering the Advanced Manufacturing Engineering and your students are planning to apply to university, then it is advisable to offer the two optional maths units that are from the RQF BTEC Nationals in engineering, namely 'Calculus to Solve Engineering Problems' and 'Further Engineering Mathematics', particularly the calculus unit. You should also advise your students to make it clear in the UCAS application that:

- The titling of the smaller sizes is different from that of the BTEC Nationals, i.e. Award for the 360 GLH size and Certificate for the 540.
- All sizes have a single letter grade P, M D and there is no D*.

4. Trends in the progression of BTEC students to HE

Over 99% of universities in the UK accept BTEC Nationals in their entry requirements for at least one of their degree programmes and over 100,000 students progress to university each year to study undergraduate degrees having taken a BTEC National. The BTEC National is therefore a clearly recognised route into higher education. Around two-thirds take a BTEC only and one-third an A level/BTEC mix. Many other students take shorter Higher Education courses at levels 4 and 5 in further education colleges.

Many degree programmes now have differential entry requirements for QCF and RQF BTEC Nationals. There is a general preference for **RQF BTECs with external assessments**. Fewer HEIs are asking for an A level as well as the BTEC National Extended Diploma, although some of the more selective degree programmes (particularly in STEM subjects) may require specific grades on specific units.

5. Types of higher education courses available to students

Most students progress to a 3-year full time **undergraduate degree** course, although a few universities offer some accelerated degrees taking 2 years.

Some courses are offered as sandwich degrees. These are usually four-year undergraduate courses in which students undertake a placement year, or internship in industry, normally after the second year at university.

Students could take a shorter qualification and, if they wish, top it up to a degree later. These include:

- **one year – A Higher National Certificate (HNC)** is a level 4 higher education vocational qualification equivalent to one-third of a full honours degree. HNCs are offered as a one-year full-time programme, although there may also be the option to study part-time. They are offered at some universities and some further education colleges.
- **two years – A Higher National Diploma (HND)** is a level 5 higher education vocational qualification equivalent to two-thirds of a full honours degree. HNDs are offered as a two-year full-time programme, although there may also be the option to study part-time. They are offered at some universities and some further education colleges. Some universities allow students to top up an HND to a full honours degree through a further year of full-time study. Students will need to check with individual Higher Education Institutions to find out whether they will allow this for the HND they have taken.
- **two years – foundation degree** is a level 5 higher education qualifications that is equivalent to two-thirds of a full honours degree. Foundation degrees are in vocational subjects and are offered as a two-year full-time programme, although there may also be the option to study part-time. Normally students can continue for a further year to gain a full honours degree, which is useful if they decide to go for a full degree after all.
- **One or two years – Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)** are a new category of qualification, recently introduced by the government. They are based on a common set of standards with apprenticeships/T Levels and have been approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education as meeting occupational standards for the relevant sector. The first HTQs have been approved for first teaching in 2022. They may be new qualifications but some existing HNC, HND and foundation degree programmes have been approved as HTQs. The Pearson BTEC HNC and HND in Computing were the first to be approved as HTQs for first teaching in 2022. Further HNC and HND qualifications in Digital, Construction, Healthcare and Sport have been approved as HTQs for first teaching in 2023. Also, HNCs and HNDs in Engineering and Business have been approved as HTQs for first teaching in 2024. Full details of these Pearson BTEC HTQ qualifications may be found on [this Pearson webpage](#). Up-to-date information about all HTQs may be found on the [UCAS HTQ webpage](#).

Full details of **Pearson HNC and HND qualifications** are found on the [Pearson Higher Nationals webpage](#) and students can find out which FE colleges offer them at [this link](#).

Another alternative is to take a **higher apprenticeship** (levels 4-6) or a **degree apprenticeship** (level 6). When taking these, students will spend some time working for an employer. They'll also spend time attending college, a university or training provider, training at work or online. The advantages of these apprenticeships are that they will be paid by the employer and their tuition fees will be paid by the employer and the government. However, there are currently far fewer available than other higher education places. Further details are found in the [UCAS Higher and Degree Apprenticeships Guide](#). The Government's [Find an apprenticeship website](#) is also helpful. This gives information about all levels of apprenticeships, i.e. intermediate, advanced, higher and degree.

If applicants don't quite meet the entry requirements, they may still be accepted at the university to which they have applied. So, it is always worth encouraging the student to contact the university if they don't meet the offer to check whether they will still be accepted. If not, some universities offer a **foundation year** prior to the degree programme, although this will involve an additional year of fees.

6. Pearson's interaction with HEIs

The introduction of the reformed RQF BTEC Nationals has resulted in different outcomes, particularly in respect of the proportion achieving the higher grades. We have visited the vast majority of universities to explain the changes and we make regular communications with all universities to keep them apprised of any developments. In both our in-person and virtual communications to universities, we have:

- Explained the changes to the BTEC Nationals, namely the inclusion of external assessment, a larger mandatory core and content that supports progression to HE, and given details of the changes to titling.
- Explained the grading system, including the introduction of the N grade, and discouraged the practice of some universities of requiring a distinction grade on all units.
- Requested that degree programmes, which have higher entry requirements for QCF BTECs than A levels in terms of UCAS Tariff point equivalence, have lower entry requirements for reformed RQF BTEC Nationals.
- Discouraged the requirement of an A level as well as an Extended Diploma and encouraged them to require certain optional units instead to give them the content that they want covered.
- Encouraged greater clarity in entry requirements for BTEC students.

7. Degree programmes which ask for specific units and/or an A level

Some degree programmes ask for specific units, sometimes with specific grades, and/or an A level as well as the BTEC National. This is usually:

- in STEM subjects – the sciences, engineering, computing, IT, sport & exercise science and some health programmes.
- for courses in the more selective universities such as the Russell Group plus Bath, Aston, Lancaster, Loughborough, etc. However, this includes some selective programmes across a wide range of university types.

The most common examples are:

- Biological Sciences, which may ask for at least an A level worth (360 GLH) of biology content.
- Some health programmes, particularly Physiotherapy, which may ask for an A level as well (we are trying to discourage this for RQF) or at least an A level worth (360 GLH) of biology content.
- Many engineering programmes, which may require a) certain grades on the maths units and b) may also ask for the optional unit Further Engineering Mathematics. Electrical & Electronic Engineering is the most accessible branch of engineering, usually not requiring an A level as well as the Extended Diploma. However, Aeronautical, Civil and Mechanical

Engineering at highly selective universities may require A level Maths as well as the Extended Diploma. Some of these courses will accept the BTEC National Diploma in Engineering together with A level Maths.

- Some Sport & Exercise Science degree programmes, which may require the BTEC National Extended Diploma in Sport & Exercise Science and may not accept the BTEC National Extended Diploma in Sport.

8. Guidance on centre selection of optional units

If you would like your students to apply to certain selective degree programmes, you will widen their choice if you select the right optional units for them. For example:

- Biological Sciences – 360 GLH worth of biology units in Applied Science.
- Health programmes such as Nursing, Allied Health, Physiotherapy – 360 GLH worth of biology units in Applied Science or Health & Social Care.
- Engineering – offer the Further Engineering Mathematics and Calculus (mandatory in the 1080 size) units.
- Construction – offer the Further Mathematics for Construction unit (mandatory in the 720 and 1080 sizes for BTEC Civil Engineering).
- Sport & Exercise Science is better than Sport for getting on to selective health degree programmes, such as Physiotherapy.

If your centre offers both A levels and BTEC Nationals, students wanting to do Computer Science, Aeronautical Engineering, Civil Engineering or Mechanical Engineering at a highly selective university may be better advised to do the Diploma size plus A level Maths.

9. 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

10. Completing the UCAS application form

Firstly, students should use their legal name on the UCAS application, not their nickname or favoured name. It should also be the same as their name on the BTEC registration, otherwise UCAS will be unable to match them with us and their results will not be shared with UCAS in the summer. So **please check that this is the case**.

Secondly, completing the UCAS form can be confusing for BTEC learners as titles of the qualifications have changed and it is important that they select the right one. We have produced a video presentation [Guidance for BTEC students on completing their UCAS application form](#) and so please draw your students' attention to this.

Annex A has further details on supporting your students in their UCAS application.

11. The support Pearson offers during Confirmation and Clearing

We are in regular contact with HEIs during Confirmation and Clearing and would be very happy to support you in any other matters concerning your BTEC students' applications to HE. Please contact Customer Services through the [Customer Service Portal](#).

As you will be aware, 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 the university has 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 between 29 and 31 points. If that is the case, the university may be prepared to be flexible and accept the student. The results data that we send to UCAS does not include the points achieved and 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 support you in this and to authenticate any data if that is required.

Annex A – Guidance for tutors supporting students into HE

Support your students through the process by making sure that:

1. they do thorough research to find the course that they would like to take – see our document **Guide for BTEC Level 3 Students on Progression to Higher Education**,
2. they have the right entry qualifications for the courses that they have chosen – some courses may require an A level and/or specific units in the BTEC National,
3. encourage them to research HE courses thoroughly and select degree programmes at which they are more likely to lead to successful outcomes for them, for example: having the content in which they have a particular interest and that will prepare them well for their intended career; having a scheme of assessment that will work to their strengths with appropriate proportions of exams, practical assessment and assignments,
4. they select the right BTEC qualification on their UCAS form – if they select the wrong award, it may mean that they don't get an offer or receive an offer that they can't meet,
5. they check their application form for spelling and grammatical errors,
6. you write a successful supporting reference (see below),
7. you check that the name, BTEC registration number and qualification title in the form and reference are correct.

You will also get helpful guidance from UCAS if you sign up to their [UCAS Advisers](#) service for teachers and careers advisers.

a) How to become a UCAS centre and manage your students' applications

If you click on [Becoming a UCAS centre](#) you can register your centre as a UCAS centre and then apply to UCAS to get permission to manage your students' applications.

This will give your staff access to the UCAS online Apply service which enables you to oversee your students' applications. You can:

- monitor how much of the application your students have completed.
- create, edit and approve their references.
- check, approve and submit the applications.
- make secure payments on their behalf
- curate the list of qualifications which they can select from (which will make it easier for students to pick the right size and version of the qualification).

UCAS also gives [Guidance for new registered centres](#).

b) Guidance for tutors on how to write a successful reference

(i) UCAS guidance on what to include

Here is their [Guidance on references for advisers](#). This includes [Changes for 2024 entry](#).

(ii) Guidance given by some individual universities and other organisations

Universities	Other organisations
University of Bath	BridgeU
City University	Linking London
University of Derby	Unifrog
University of Exeter	
University of Manchester	

Prepared by: David MacKay

Authorised by: Ria Bhatta