

Five Years of Top Ten Tips for centres on enhancing HE quality 2004-2009

The table below compares the 'Top Ten Tips' provided in the last five years of the external quality assurance regime for BTEC Higher Nationals. The original tip is in standard font, but where a tip has been extended or modified, the additions and/or changes are indicated in italics, together with the year in which the additions and/or changes were first made.

On occasions two or more separate tips have been integrated into a single tip and this is indicated with an asterisk.

Please note the following:

- Some of the tips reappear every year because centres still do not seem fully to be addressing the issues. These include comprehensive and targeted feedback, timely return of student work (and hence timely feedback), plagiarism, referencing and tutorial provision.
- Some of the tips have disappeared only to reappear later, possibly due to staff changes. These issues include internal verification and training and development of new and part-time staff.
- Some tips have disappeared, hopefully not to reappear. These relate to formal assessment boards, the use of percentages and plus/minus grades, late work and referral policies, the importance of delivering the units in the correct order and the use of time-limited activities.
- Some tips have been introduced because of external changes to HE procedures and QAA review methods, improved technology and received good practice. These relate to on-line data bases, virtual learning environments, the Academic Infrastructure, the need for dedicated policies, strategies and internal quality assurance regimes for HE, the importance of research and scholarly activity, the journey to the independent learner and the benefits of programme and module evaluations.
- HE programme teams should examine the table and ask themselves how the information relates to their own provision. It is fervently hoped that the issues referred to above will one day cease to be issues, and that there will be no need to produce another 'Top Ten Tips'.

Tip	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
Provide comprehensive and targeted feedback to all assessed work. This is especially important when assessed work has received a low grade such as Referred or Pass. The student must know exactly why they have been given the grade awarded and what they must do to improve that grade. <i>Continue to improve centre assessment practices in line with the requirements and precepts of the QAA Code of Practice, Section 6: Assessment of students 2007/8</i>	1	1	2	8	1*
Provide a realistic scenario for each assignment and contextualise the generic Merit and Distinction criteria in terms of that scenario.	2	2	3	-	1*
Produce an internal verification plan that encourages sufficiency of internal verification in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Internally verify all assessment instruments prior to issue to ensure consistency of approach across the team. Sample sufficient assessment decisions to 'touch' every learner, every unit and every assessor. Do not rely on a 'tick-box' approach but provide detailed comments to help assessors develop their teaching, learning and assessment strategies within a team approach.	3	3	5	-	1*
Schedule formal assessment boards. Utilise college policies, rules and regulations relating to the conduct of assessment boards where available, and encourage the development of same where they are not.	4	4	-	-	-
Do not use percentages or plus and minus grades such as M ⁺⁺ or D ⁻ when assessing students' work.	5	-	-	-	-
Return assessed work to students within a reasonable and agreed time after submission. Failure to do this is by far the most common negative comment made by students.	6	5	6	9	9
Challenge plagiarism and the over-liberal use of secondary sources such as photocopies and internet downloads.	7	6*	1	4	2
Instruct students in the need to acknowledge sources, systematically reference their work and provide comprehensive bibliographies.	8	6*	4	5	3

Develop a tutorial provision where there is none in place currently. This applies equally to both full-time and day-release modes of attendance.	9	7	8	7	8
Remember, part-time (and new) staff need access to training and development just as much as full-time staff.	10	-	-	-	1*
Look out for the Edexcel guidance on 'Late Work' and use this to develop a coherent policy on the vexatious issue of late work and referral.	-	8	-	-	-
Structure the delivery and assessment of units in the most appropriate order, not the most convenient order.	-	9	-	-	-
Plan to move away from the use of end-tests and examinations as assessment instruments. It is not possible to cover all the grading criteria properly and there is a tendency to encourage compensation and discourage feedback. Develop a centre policy on the use of end-tests and examinations as assessment instruments. <i>Access Specialist Paper 9 Time Limited Activities</i>	-	10	7	10	-
Introduce an on-line database and a virtual learning environment where none currently exist. Use these to enhance the 'journey to the independent learner' and to reduce reliance upon long hours in the classroom.	-	-	9	6	6
Stop awarding notional grades of P, M or D where the grading criteria required to access that grade have not all been achieved. Remember that the final grade awarded for any unit depends on the achievement of grading criteria alone, that a Pass grade can not be awarded until all the Pass criteria have been achieved, a Merit grade cannot be awarded until all the Pass and Merit criteria have been achieved and so on.	-	-	10	-	-
Provide training and development aimed at enhancing staff understanding of the QAA Academic Infrastructure and (for HEFCE funded centres in England) the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) method.	-	-	-	1	4
Develop and use dedicated quality assurance systems specifically for HE programmes.	-	-	-	2	

Recognise the importance of research and scholarly activity in supporting effective teaching in HE and consider some relaxation of contact hours for FE tutors teaching HE.	-	-	-	3	5
Emphasise the importance of the 'journey to the independent learner' at induction and at regular intervals throughout the programme. This is an important part of the learning process at HN level, but students often appear to be failing to use, in a meaningful way, the time and resources made available for independent study.	-	-	-	-	7
After four years of continuous improvement in terms of internal verification, provision of credible scenarios, sufficient and timely feedback to students and contextualisation of generic Merit and Distinction criteria, the system appears to have stalled somewhat this year, with some centres having made little improvement. This seems to be linked to retirements, staff changes and the increasing use of part-time staff and external lecturers. It is essential that all new personnel undergo training and development at an early stage to allow them to deliver and assess BTEC Higher Nationals in a manner consistent with the guidance and unit specifications provided by Edexcel. In particular, centres must ensure that all new staff are made aware of the importance of the QAA Code of Practice, Section 6: Assessment of students.	-	-	-	-	1*
Introduce programme and module evaluation events at the end of every semester and academic year. These meetings should cover every aspect of the provision and, in particular, should be used to ensure standardisation of assessment methods through comparison of the grade profiles for each unit.	-	-	-	-	10