

BTEC Quality Assurance Handbook 2011-12

6b. External Examination: Standards Verification for higher level programmes

Contents

What is external examination?	3
Roles and responsibilities	3
Edexcel.....	3
Centres	4
The external examination process	5
How does it work?.....	5
When does it take place?.....	6
What does external examination look at?	6
Management and delivery of higher level programmes.....	7
Action points from last year's report	7
Management of academic standards	7
Effectiveness of assessment instruments	7
Maintenance and audit of records	7
Registration and certification claims	7
Student support and review.....	7
Areas of good practice	8
Sampling of student work	8
Academic standards and student performance	8
Assessment process	8
Sample size	8
Accessing the external examination report	9
Outcomes of external examination	10
Successful outcome	10
Immediate resampling	10
Further remedial action	10
Process map	11

What is external examination?

What is external examination?

- External examination is the form of standards verification undertaken for BTEC programmes at Level 4-7
- Standards verification is how we check that your centre is operating quality assurance and assessing to national standards. external examination relates to centres operating programmes in the manner associated with higher education or qualifications in a professional context

Why do we do it?

- We undertake external examination to ensure reliability of assessment across all BTEC Level 4-7 centres, and to:
 - provide a thorough review of assessment and verification
 - ensure that correct processes and procedures are being applied, consistent with qualifications at higher levels
 - encourage you to continue to deliver best practice in vocational assessment
 - provide a detailed report on verification and assessment practice for the relevant programme sector

How do we do it?

- We allocate a subject-specific expert to a programme sector to conduct sampling of assessed student work and provide judgements and feedback
- Your Standards Verifier (EE) will work with you to support you in identifying good practice and areas for further development, giving you guidance on how you can improve your delivery

Which qualifications does external examination cover?

- BTEC Level 4 HNC and Level 5 HND
- BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diploma in Art & Design
- Other BTEC Professional qualifications at levels 4 and above

Roles and responsibilities

Edexcel

Standards Verifier (EE)

We will appoint a Standards Verifier (EE) to each programme sector, who will be a subject specialist and whose primary focus is to ensure you are working to national standards.

Your Standards Verifier (EE) will:

- support you in demonstrating how you are working to the standards and addressing areas of weakness, providing advice and information
- address how far centre-wide processes and procedures are being applied effectively and consistently in your programme area

Senior Standards Verifier

We have a Senior Standards Verifier who takes an overview of standards within a Principal Subject Area and ensures that all Standards Verifiers have appropriate standardisation and training. We may ask the Senior Standards Verifier to be directly involved with a centre where external examination outcomes suggest this may be necessary.

Regional Quality Manager

Your centre has a designated Regional Quality Manager who has a responsibility for centres within a geographical area and provides quality assurance support and guidance for anyone managing or delivering BTECs and NVQs.

Where a second sample has been undertaken and national standards still have not been met, the Regional Quality Manager will work with the centre to agree a remedial action plan. If major concerns are raised by a Standards Verifier at any point in the process, the Regional Quality Manager will be able to provide centre support.

A UK Map with Regional Quality Manager contact details can be found here:
www.edexcel.com/quals/BTEC/support

Centres

Quality Nominee

You will appoint a member of staff as to act as the main point of contact between Edexcel and your centre. Your Quality Nominee should ensure the effective management of BTEC programmes and actively encourage and promote good practice. You **must** keep the Quality Nominee details up to date on Edexcel Online.

The Quality Nominee should ensure the effective management of BTEC programmes and actively encourage and promote good practice.

For external examination, the Quality Nominee will:

- be the initial point of contact for the Standards Verifier (EE)
- liaise with appropriate practitioners and internal verifiers, to ensure that the Standards Verifier (EE) is able to carry out their role

Programme leader

The programme leader is the person responsible for day-to-day management and delivery of the programme.

For external examination, the programme leader will:

- ensure that records of assessment and samples of student work are being retained for sampling by the Standards Verifier (EE). Plan to set aside examples of work that has been verified to different levels and grades, where applicable
- liaise with the Standards Verifier (EE) to ensure that appropriate sampling takes place

Assessors and internal verifiers

The programme team consists of the tutors who are responsible for the delivery, assessment and internal verification of the programmes.

All team members should:

- read and understand the specification
- understand the construction of the units
- identify opportunities for students to generate evidence
- create and agree a plan of assessment activities, with timescales
- ensure the assessment plan, assignments and assessment decisions are internally verified and appropriate action is taken by the team

The appropriate minimum size of the programme team will depend on the number of units and the number of students. As no one person can internally verify their own assessment decisions, where there is a single specialist practitioner delivering the programme, arrangement must be made for their assignments and assessment decisions to be internally verified by someone appropriately experienced. For most programmes at Level 4 and above we would expect that programme teams include appropriate staff for specialised units.

Internal verification is the quality assurance system you should use to monitor assessment practice and decisions, ensuring that:

- assessment is consistent across assessors
- assessment instruments are fit for purpose
- assessment decisions accurately match student work to the unit assessment criteria
- standardisation of assessors takes place

Full evidence of internal verification should be provided as part of the sample. Centre Guides to Assessment and Internal Verification can be found on the Key Documents page of the BTEC website: www.edexcel.com/quals/BTEC/quality/Pages/documents.aspx

Please see the chapter on **Roles & Responsibilities** for full details.

The external examination process

How does it work?

- Your Quality Nominee is automatically notified that Standards Verifier (EE)s have been allocated

- A Standards Verifier (EE) will be allocated to all programmes with active student registrations
 - If a programme is no longer running but still has active registrations, you must either claim certificates or withdraw the students
- The Standards Verifier (EE) will contact your Quality Nominee in the first instance. The Quality Nominee should contact the relevant programme leader
- An appropriate visit date is agreed for external examination and a visit plan is agreed. The Standards Verifier (EE) will submit a copy of this visit plan to you
- The Standards Verifier (EE) works collaboratively with you to consider and review the quality of the assessment planning, the validity of the assessment decisions and the consistency of the assessment and internal verification process
- A report on the effectiveness of processes and assessment decisions is produced by the Standards Verifier (EE). Where necessary certification may be blocked until appropriate remedial action is taken

When does it take place?

- Normally, external examination takes place through an annual visit. If appropriate, this may be timed to fit with your assessment board processes towards the end of the academic year, but this is not necessarily required
- You need to think about when students will be completing and when evidence can be made available. Visits should be completed by **30th June** for certification by the middle of August
- Your Standards Verifier (EE) will be allocated during the early part of 2012. Once they accept their contract, you are able to view their contact details via Edexcel Online. However, they should contact you as soon as possible after accepting the allocation

What does external examination look at?

You should provide the Standards Verifier (EE) with:

- the required samples of student work
- assessment records for the student work sampled
- assignment briefs for the units identified
- internal verification records for the assignment briefs
- internal verification records for student work

Plus, for **BTEC Level 3 and 4 Foundation Diploma in Art & Design (FAD)**:

- The Statement of Intent produced by the FAD students in the sample
- Details of those FAD students who have successfully achieved Units 1-9 (subject to the rules of combination for the level to be claimed). Only these students are eligible to progress to the Confirmatory Stage Unit 10
- Assessment records showing successful achievement of Units 1-9 for the students sampled
- There is no longer a requirement to provide the Standards Verifier (EE) with a FAD4 form detailing projected and proposed grades. You may continue to use it if you wish, but internally devised assessment records are acceptable, providing they meet our requirements

Management and delivery of higher level programmes

- At the visit, the Standards Verifier (EE) will make arrangements to meet the relevant people in your centre to discuss the management and delivery of the programmes and their understanding of the Academic Infrastructure with regard to higher level programmes
- The centre could provide minutes from the previous year's Academic Board or Quality Standards Board wherever appropriate
- All of the following topics will be included in the external examination report and, if required, Essential Actions and/or Recommendations may be identified
- Essential Actions or Recommendations here do not directly affect programme certification, but they will be formally monitored in the next external examination

Action points from last year's report

- If you had external examination during 2010-11, the Standards Verifier (EE) will normally have access to the report online
- They will look at progress made in relation to action points given in previous reports, indicating any that remain to be addressed

Management of academic standards

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at the presence of effective management procedures that are supported by appropriate systems and policies
- They will make specific reference to the management of any programmes run on a collaborative basis in other institutions

Effectiveness of assessment instruments

- For each programme, the Standards Verifier (EE) will look at whether the design and nature of the assessments permit the aims and learning objectives of the programme to be met and are of a standard appropriate to the qualification level

Maintenance and audit of records

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at whether the procedure for maintaining and auditing assessment records is secure and effective

Registration and certification claims

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at the process for ensuring that student registration and certification is accurate and monitored effectively

Student support and review

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will look at:
 - The assessment process and assessment feedback to students
 - The quality of teaching and the expertise and experience of staff
 - Physical resources and learning support for the programme

- Tutorial and pastoral support
- Opportunities for students to give feedback on their programme
- For HN programmes, the Standards Verifier (EE) should also meet with students, to discuss their views on the programme, including favourable comments and any concerns raised

Areas of good practice

- The Standards Verifier (EE) is encouraged to identify any areas of particularly good practice mentioned in other sections of this report

Sampling of student work

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will verify a sample of assessed student work
- If the assessment does not meet national standards for any of the students sampled, the Standards Verifier (EE) will identify Essential Action
- Existence of an Essential Action for assessment will block certification for the specific programme
- For each piece of student work sampled, the Standards Verifier (EE) will comment on the following:

Academic standards and student performance

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will judge whether sampling shows that the student has achieved the aims of the learning objectives and the targeted criteria at the appropriate level

Assessment process

- The Standards Verifier (EE) will comment on the internal assessment process, including:
 - the fairness and consistency of grading
 - suitability of schemes showing criteria for grading
 - the quality of feedback to students
 - validity and standardisation of assessments across assessors
 - evidence of internal verification of assignment briefs
 - evidence of internal verification of assessment decisions

Sample size

- Each programme within the sector should be sampled. Where programmes are “nested” (for example, an HNC nested within an HND with the same title and specification) students from both programmes should be sampled, but the sample size can reflect that they operate as one programme (i.e. a minimum of 8 students across both programmes, not 8 students from each programme)

- The size of the sample will depend on the:
 - number of units delivered
 - levels of units in the programmes
 - number of students
 - number of assessors
 - size of the programme team
- The Standards Verifier (EE) will always sample a minimum of:
 - one sixth of the units on the programme and not fewer than 3 units
 - all students across the sampled units if there are up to 8 students on programme
 - at least 8 students across the sampled units if there are up to 100 students on programme
 - at least 16 students across the sampled units if there are more than 100 students on programme
 - Please note, the minimum number of students to be sampled applies **across** the units, not for each unit individually (e.g. 8 students in total, not 8 students per unit sampled)
 - For the **Foundation Diploma in Art & Design**, the Standards Verifier (EE) must include samples from the Final Major Project Confirmatory Unit 10, plus student work from two further units
- There is no maximum size of sample and the Standards Verifier (EE) may continue to report samples, if initial sampling suggests that further investigation is required
- The Standards Verifier (EE) only needs to report in detail on samples which are pertinent to the decision and the advice given
- Additional visits are not permitted to increase the sample size without consent from Edexcel
- For the sampled units, there must be coverage of assessment instruments as follows:
 - Assignment briefs, paying particular attention to new units or units where the types of briefs used have been amended
 - Where units rely on students determining the brief, such as project units, the Standards Verifier (EE) may choose to review several briefs
 - Where examinations are used, the relationship between these and assignments
- Within the sample of units, the Standards Verifier (EE) must review the work of students:
 - for whole units
 - at different grades, where possible
 - for more than one student per unit/assessor, where possible

Accessing the external examination report

- Once the report has been submitted by the Standards Verifier (EE), your Quality Nominee will receive an automatic email alert and you can access your report through Edexcel Online
- If not already a user of Edexcel Online, please ask your Exams Officer to set you up with access

Outcomes of external examination

Successful outcome

- The Standards Verifier (EE) concludes that you are assessing securely to national standards and documenting assessment correctly
- The external examination report will then release certification programme by programme. You should look carefully at any actions recommended in the report as these should be addressed by the team

Immediate resampling

- Resampling is required if the Standards Verifier concludes that you are not assessing securely to national standards and/or not documenting assessment and internal verification correctly on one or more of the programmes in the sector
- The external examination report is able to release or block certification separately for each programme within a sector. Therefore, if one or more programmes are subject to a certification block, this does not automatically affect certification of the other programmes
- The Standards Verifier (EE) will give initial feedback on the day of the visit, so you should be prepared for the outcomes of the report
- The Standards Verifier (EE) will agree a timescale for a second sample to be provided and the nature of the sample required. Useful guidance on sending postal samples can be found in the **Standards Verification for BTEC Entry – Level 3** chapter
- The outcome of immediate resampling is either:
 - release of certification
 - further remedial action
- If the Standards Verifier reports a successful outcome after a second sample certification is released for the relevant programmes

Further remedial action

- If the second sample still does not meet national standards, the Standards Verifier (EE) will notify your Edexcel Regional Quality Manager, who will work with you to help resolve outstanding issues and work towards release of the programmes affected
- Once the Regional Quality Manager is satisfied that the issues have been addressed, they will complete an additional report releasing certification for the relevant programmes

Process map

