

Response to Pearson changes to BTEC grading criteria 2019

Students will receive their Level 1/2 BTEC awards on Wednesday this week. These are new versions of qualifications that are being awarded for the first time this year.

Pearson found during its awarding process that learners' outcomes were significantly higher, and grading was more generous across the cohort, than it had predicted on the basis of students' prior attainment. As a result, Pearson decided to make adjustments to most of its grading points.

Pearson made us aware of this situation and its response in early August. It is always challenging with new specifications to know precisely how the assessments will function and how students will perform on them. It is therefore regrettable that Pearson set out definitive grading points in its specification, and we have seen that changing these has led to understandable uncertainty and frustration.

Our priority is securing that appropriate standards are set, being fair to all students who have taken these qualifications this year, in previous years and in years to come. On the basis of the evidence we have seen, the action Pearson has taken to set standards has been appropriate at the overall, cohort level. However, the decision to publish grading points in their specification may have led some teachers and students to take different decisions than they might otherwise have done.

We understand that students, schools and colleges will be concerned about how these changes may impact them. If students or teachers have questions or concerns now, or after receiving their results, they should seek support from Pearson, which is providing information and advice.

There are significant lessons to be learned by all awarding organisations about the commitments they make in their specifications and associated materials, and how they communicate with schools and colleges when issues arise. We will be reflecting on these issues further after results are published.