

Pearson submission to the House of Lords Social Mobility Committee's inquiry into the transition from school to work

September 2015

1 About Pearson

- 1.1 Pearson is submitting evidence to the committee, in its capacity as an exam board and owner of the BTEC qualifications, but also as a FTSE 100, UK headquartered company with a real understanding of the need for highly skilled, well rounded employees.
- 1.2 Pearson recognises many of the challenges raised by the committee, as well as by other policy makers.
- 1.3 This submission seeks to address two of the committee's areas of interest in this inquiry:
 - i) "Who is in this group"
 - ii) "What can be improved to help them, and all young people, gain good quality employment"
- 1.4 In answer to these broader questions, with our unique perspective as the world's largest learning company, we have set out below what we believe to be the clearest analysis of the backgrounds of 'BTEC students' and also what they go on to achieve.
- 1.5 In addition we have set out some of the things that we are currently doing to keep our vocational qualifications current and ensure they offer an engaging and rigorous alternative to traditional qualifications.

2 Vocational qualifications – an observation

- 2.1 Before seeking to address the specific questions raised by this inquiry, we do think it important to add some context to some of the implicit assumptions within the summary of the committee's remit.
- 2.2 Whilst we do recognise, as set out below, that vocational qualifications like Pearson's BTEC are often studied by students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, we also feel it is important not to under-sell the value and popularity of these qualifications and indeed to celebrate the successes of thousands of young people who study BTEC every year.
- 2.3 BTECs are world-leading vocational qualifications, accessed by students from a whole range of backgrounds and in many countries. We feel that a key part of this debate is raising (through improving both standards and attitudes) the esteem in which vocational qualifications are held and positioning them as one of several potential progression routes, rather than an automatically less prestigious route to be compared with traditional A-levels.
- 2.4 With almost one-quarter of university entrants now starting higher education having taken a BTEC1 at Level 3 or above, and that number expected to rise, continuing to

¹ UCAS data on entry to HE – 2014 End of Cycle Report

elevate the status of high quality vocational qualifications will be key to changing the debate around progression routes.

3 About BTECS

- 3.1 BTECs are designed as specialist work-related qualifications and are available in a range of sectors, such as business, engineering and ICT. A number of BTECs are recognised as Technical Certificates and form part of the Apprenticeship Framework. Although they're often studied by full-time students, BTECs also provide career development opportunities for those already in work. Delivering the knowledge, skills and understanding students need to prepare for their chosen career, BTEC Nationals offer progression to higher or further education or into employment.
- 3.2 Some schools, colleges and training centres provide courses part-time. BTECs are available at different levels, from Entry Level Skills for Working Life, right through to professional qualifications at Level 7 (equivalent to postgraduate study). They also come in different sizes at each level ensuring students can choose a course that fits around work or other studies.

Who are 'BTEC Students'?

- 3.3 In recent years, a number of reports, as well as analysis of Pearson's own data as the provider of BTEC, have looked at the students who take BTECs, the communities and families they come from and what they go on to achieve.
- 3.4 Whilst drawing on different sources for and levels of data, these reports between them highlight a clear theme. BTECs disproportionately serve a cohort of pupils from the most deprived communities and allow many of those students to go on to higher education and the possibilities that lie beyond.
- 3.5 A few points from these reports are worth paying special attention to:

i) *The number of 'BTEC students' has increased hugely in recent years.*

In 2012, over 50,000 university entrants had studied a BTEC (including many who did so as well as A-levels rather instead of them). This is an increase from less than 34,000 students in 2008².

ii) *The overall proportion of university students who have taken a BTEC has also increased.*

Almost one quarter of HE students in 2014 got there having taken a BTEC³, compared with just 13.5% in 2008.

iii) *An increasing proportion of HE students enter having taken a mixture of traditional A-levels and BTECs.*

Between 2008 and 2012 the percentage of students taking a BTEC as well as a Pearson A-level increased ten-fold, from 1% to 11%⁴.

iv) *The demographic mix of 'BTEC students' has remained largely the same – with students twice as likely to come from the most disadvantaged communities when compared to students who only take A-levels.*

² HESA data on students by qualification type, analysed by Pearson

³ UCAS data on entry to HE – 2014 End of Cycle Report

⁴ Pearson analysis of internal data for BTEC and Pearson A-level students

When comparing the socio-economic backgrounds of students who took A-levels with those who took BTECs only, 20% of A-level learners came from lower social-economic backgrounds, whilst 40% of BTEC learners were in this group⁵.

v) 'BTEC students' go on to make good progress once they enter higher education

Almost 50% of 'BTEC students' go on to achieve a 1st or 2:16. Whilst the percentage is higher for A-level students (73%), this compares well given the very different cohort outlined above and the lower likelihood of family experience of higher education⁷. Almost 90% of BTEC students go on to receive a 1st or 2nd class degree, compared to 96% of A-level students⁸.

vi) 'BTEC students' who undertake degree level qualifications can thrive in employment

One study in 2013 claimed that BTEC students are slightly more likely to be employed post-graduation than A-level students (89.8% vs 88.1%)⁹. This report also showed that BTEC students were more likely to be 'Managers and senior officials'¹⁰.

4. Rigour alongside applied learning

- 4.1 Pearson has sought to address the feedback and priorities of a number of partners – in higher education, in schools, in industry, in government, among teachers, parents and learners – and strengthen the BTEC offer.
- 4.2 Working with our partners in higher education and industry, we are in the process of re-designing our BTEC qualifications to bring additional rigour and even higher standards and to ensure that these long-standing qualifications are fit for purpose.
- 4.3 Our main goals have been to:
- Refresh BTEC Nationals (our Level 3 qualifications, equivalent to A-levels) courses so learners can be confident they contain the most up-to-date content, and continue to remain effective in shaping current and future employment opportunities for BTEC Nationals students. This redevelopment has been based on research. Our new BTEC Nationals are underpinned by learning methods that are designed to enhance cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills.
 - Consult with employers, professional bodies and Higher Education to ensure they are actively collaborating on this redevelopment, so they are confident these new courses will prepare young people with the right balance of knowledge and skills for entry to the modern workplace either directly or via Higher Education.
 - Give students the opportunity to achieve their potential and progress to the next stage in their lives, whether that's into Higher Education or a good career.

⁵ Pearson analysis of internal data for BTEC students

⁶ Pearson analysis of internal data for BTEC and Pearson A-level students

⁷ Vocational Progression to Selecting Universities Comparisons & Trends 2010-2013

⁸ Pearson analysis of internal data for BTEC and Pearson A-level students who started a degree course in 2008/09 and completed in 2012

⁹ The outcomes associated with the BTEC route of degree level acquisition, London Economics 2013

¹⁰ The outcomes associated with the BTEC route of degree level acquisition, London Economics 2013

- Ensure post-16 students' achievements in colleges and schools in England are recognised in the new accountability measures. That's why we've made sure the new BTEC Nationals also meet the Department for Education's technical guidance.

4.4 Despite these changes and the continued, and increasing popularity of BTECs amongst learners, we recognise that there is still a challenge in ensuring that vocational and traditional academic qualifications are equally valued.

5 What is the challenge?

- 5.1 We believe that the BTEC pathway is valuable because it supports a career, not only a job. Even those who do A-levels could potentially benefit more from the vocational route. Understandably however those students won't choose a vocational route if the acceptability of its currency is not clear enough.
- 5.2 Through initiatives like our annual BTEC Awards, now in their 5th year, we have sought to celebrate the achievements of BTEC students and demonstrate the success of BTEC students. The pen portraits of this year's award winners included in the annex to this submission highlight both some of the more challenging backgrounds of some BTEC students and also the huge success they can achieve.
- 5.3 In the same spirit Pearson now publishes a national overview of BTEC results in the same way so that progress made by BTEC students is clearly demonstrated and celebrated.

6 What do employers want?

- 6.1 The recent Pearson/CBI Annual Skills Survey¹¹ identified that "2 in 3 businesses (68%) expect their need for staff with higher level skills to grow in the years ahead, but more than half of those surveyed (55%) fear that they will not be able to access enough workers with the required skills".
- 6.2 The majority of businesses either prefer recruits to hold a mix of both academic and vocational qualifications (37%), or value academic and vocational qualifications equally (37%).
- 6.3 The report also found that "demand for highly skilled workers is particularly strong in sectors critical to the rebalancing of the economy – engineering, science and hi-tech (74%), construction (73%) and manufacturing (69%)."
- 6.4 John Cridland, Director-General of the CBI spoke at this year's Festival of Education, where he commented:
- "In some places just a picket fence separates a college where you can take great BTEC nationals – but not A-levels – and a Sixth Form where you can take great A-levels – but not BTEC nationals.*
- "You know what? I'd love to kick down that fence and give all young people the chance to study vocational and academic qualifications. Instead of forcing them to give up their future because the "system says no". If that means radically changing how we fund schools and hold them accountable, so be it."*
- 6.5 In higher education too, there is recognition that the education landscape of the future will have a big place for BTECs. UCAS Chief Executive Mary Curnock Cook has

¹¹ Inspiring Growth: Pearson/CBI Skills Survey 2015

been reported as saying that vocational qualifications “support excellent outcomes in higher education”, saying universities needed to adjust “to this shift in the profile of secondary education” in the future.

Annex: National BTEC Awards 2015 - Winner Profiles

Outstanding BTEC Business Student of the Year 2015

Lily Mann, The Bromfords School and Sixth Form College

Lily Mann is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Business Student of the Year.

Lily is currently studying for a Level 3 BTEC Diploma in Business alongside a Level 3 BTEC National Subsidiary Diploma in ICT and an A level in Economics at The Bromfords School and Sixth Form College in Essex. She has been selected to join Tesco's Management Programme in September and plans to combine this with a degree in Business Management and Law at university.

Described by her tutors as an exemplary student who produces work that is thoughtful, well-researched and highly evaluative, Lily is on track to achieve Distinctions in all of her BTEC units and during her time at college, she has proved herself as an exceptional business student and a hard-working BTEC ambassador, winning several awards including the Institute of Directors Aspirations in Business Award for North/South Essex and the college's Entrepreneur of the Year award.

As well as being a highly committed student, Lily is gaining valuable experience through part-time employment and has also dedicated over 100 hours to promoting BTECs to younger students and their parents. Using the business skills and knowledge she has gained during her course, she mentors other students and has devised a host of charity events within her school and the local community.

The judges praised Lily's hard work, passion and determination and described her as an exceptional and worthy winner with a bright and successful future ahead of her.

Outstanding BTEC Child and Social Care Student of the Year 2015

Stephanie Trembath, Truro and Penwith College

Stephanie Trembath is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Child and Social Care Student of the Year.

Stephanie is currently studying for a Level 3 Diploma in Health and Social Care at Penwith College where she is on track to receive a triple-distinction. She is passionate about helping others and has a dedication to social care that marks her out as truly outstanding.

Stephanie supports herself financially with paid employment as a community carer alongside her BTEC. She juggles long working hours with her studies yet has still far exceeded the 100-hour work experience requirements of her course, completing a range of placements in hospital wards, care homes and day care centres. She has also participated in many local voluntary projects working with individuals in her community who are isolated and alone.

Described by her tutors as dedicated, mature and completely committed to her studies, Stephanie is a passionate and hard-working student who is making a real difference to people's lives. On finding an elderly person on the floor in their own home having had a stroke, Stephanie administered vital first aid and support until the ambulance arrived, applying the vast experience she has gained in a range of care settings to help save this individual's life.

The judges praised Stephanie's unquestionable commitment to her vocation and her outstanding achievements both in college and in her local community.

Outstanding BTEC Construction Student of the Year 2015

Kyle McKee, South Eastern Regional College (Bangor Campus), Northern Ireland

Kyle McKee is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Construction Student of the Year.

Kyle has a distinction-level BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Construction from South Eastern Regional College and was awarded the Institution of Civil Engineers Quest Scholarship in October 2014. He is currently studying for a BTEC Extended Diploma in Construction at the college for which he is expected to achieve a triple starred distinction and then plans to join Queen's University in Belfast to study Civil Engineering.

Kyle is an excellent student who excels in his academic and extracurricular work. During his Diploma he was chosen as one of an elite group of students to participate in an EU-funded two week work experience placement with the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure in Malta and has appeared in a video to promote the college's programme of activities to enhance students' employability skills and future career prospects.

In his spare time, Kyle is heavily involved in his community. He is a qualified dinghy sailing instructor and volunteers at a local sailing club, he is a Scout Troop Young Leader, a volunteer adult leader at his local Education Board Youth Club and he holds the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award.

The judges praised Kyle's considerable achievements, both in and out of college and described him as an extraordinarily committed BTEC student who is set to excel both in his chosen field and as an active and highly skilled volunteer in his local community.

Outstanding BTEC Creative Art and Design Student of the Year 2015

Zach Wrightson, Priestley College

Zach Wrightson is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Creative Art and Design Student of the Year.

Zach's educational journey is the epitome of a BTEC success story. Having left school with a single GCSE, Zach gained a BTEC Level 2 Diploma in Art and Design at Priestley College before progressing to a BTEC National Extended Diploma in Art and Design. He achieved a triple-starred distinction in his BTEC alongside GCSEs in English and Maths and is now studying Costume Design at Cleveland College of Art and Design.

During his time at college, Zach was a focused and determined student who was popular with his tutors and peers and proved himself as a talented and innovative designer. One of his biggest challenges was to develop and pitch a wallpaper design for Barclays Bank. His winning pitch, concept and design were described by his tutors and the Barclays team as exceptional and his wallpaper now adorns Barclays' Knutsford offices.

Zach also contributed significantly to wider college life during his time at Priestley, designing costumes for the college's catwalk shows and attending every college open event where he gave talks to visiting groups of students and encouraged them to follow the vocational route.

The judges described Zach is an outstanding and exemplary student whose BTEC journey has taken him from a school-leaver with poor GCSE grades to a highly capable, confident learner.

Outstanding BTEC Engineering Student of the Year 2015 Charlie Passey, Petroc College, Devon

Charlie Passey is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Engineering Student of the Year.

Charlie is currently studying for a BTEC Extended Diploma in Engineering at Petroc College in Devon and will progress to Swansea University in September to study for a degree in Electronic and Electrical Engineering.

Charlie left secondary school with little idea about what he wanted to do. He tried A levels then a Medical Science diploma but was never truly committed. After a brief spell working as a labourer, Charlie discovered that a BTEC in Engineering could not only provide a route back into education but would also match his style of learning. Being able to put into practice the theories he learns in class has helped him to fully understand the concepts being taught and he is now on track to achieve a triple-starred distinction.

Charlie has a very strong work ethic and is self-motivated and well-respected by his peers. Alongside his BTEC studies, he has independently learned the Python coding language and passed his amateur radio exams. As a member of RAYNET, the Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network, he has also been active in setting up radio communications for student-led orienteering races and charity fundraising events.

The judges praised Charlie's commitment, drive and ambition. Finding an educational route to suit his learning style has allowed him to develop a passion for engineering and he has an excellent future ahead of him.

Outstanding BTEC Hospitality, Travel and Tourism Student of the Year 2015 Kealy Aylwin, The Cheadle and Marple College Network

Kealy Aylwin is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Hospitality, Travel and Tourism Student of the Year.

Kealy achieved a triple-starred distinction BTEC Level 3 in Travel and Tourism at The Cheadle and Marple College Network in 2014 and now works as a Passenger Service Agent with Jet2 Ground Operations at Manchester Airport.

Kealy knew from a young age that she wanted to pursue a career in travel and chose the BTEC route as she felt it was more suited to her style of learning. During her time at college, Kealy faced several challenges, including being main carer to her mum, yet she approached her course with enthusiasm and a determination to succeed, completing a number of other airline and travel qualifications and certificates alongside her BTEC.

Her tutors describe her as a hard-working, committed and enthusiastic student who excelled in her work placement for Thomas Cook in Benidorm, supported and inspired her fellow students at Manchester Airport's Flying High Academy and is now gaining the experience she needs to join the cabin crew of a leading airline.

The judges were impressed by Kealy's genuine passion for the travel and tourism industry and her drive to achieve her career ambitions. They praised her high levels of commitment and motivation and the valuable work experience she gained during her BTEC, which has set her on the path to achieving her ultimate goals within travel industry.

Outstanding BTEC IT Student of the Year 2015 Labinot Krasniqi, Westminster Academy

Labinot Krasniqi is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC IT Student of the Year.

Labinot swapped from A levels to the BTEC Extended Diploma in ICT at Westminster Academy because he felt a BTEC better suited his learning style. He is on track to achieve a triple-starred distinction and has been accepted by King's College London to study Computer Science in September.

Labinot is a dedicated and hard-working student with a passion for computer programming and video game development. He was runner up in the BAFTA Young Games Creator Awards 2013, where he designed a game with two other students and presented it to gaming industry professionals, he has undertaken work experience at Rocksteady Studios and he has a level of understanding of his subject far beyond the taught content that often prompts his fellow students to seek his help.

Outside college, Labinot is teaching himself a number of computer languages in preparation for his degree and is working with a small team to develop further their BAFTA video game concept. He participates in Westminster's programme to help elderly people in his community to learn ICT skills and also tutors year 12 and 13 students who need extra support with IT.

The judges described Labinot as an outstanding IT student with a passion and dedication to his subject. His volunteering and tutoring work demonstrate his commitment to helping others develop essential computing skills.

Outstanding BTEC Land Based Student of the Year 2015 Megan Taylor, Nescot College

Megan Taylor is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Land Based Student of the Year.

Megan is a truly inspirational BTEC student. She achieved a triple-starred distinction in a BTEC Level 3 Extended Diploma in Animal Management from Nescot College in 2014 and is now continuing her studies at university despite having a heart condition which causes her to faint between 6-8 times each day.

Shortly before she began her BTEC, Megan fainted and fell, fracturing her skull in three places. As a result, she severely damaged her hearing, her balance is very poor and she suffers permanent dizziness. Yet despite these huge challenges, Megan excelled on her BTEC course and spends much of her spare time volunteering and raising money for animal charities and Help for Heroes.

Megan's commitment to animals is also evident in the array of work experience she has undertaken. During her BTEC, Megan volunteered at Chessington Zoo and The Wildlife Heritage Foundation Big Cat Sanctuary and alongside her studies worked at a children's farm, started a business selling survival tools, was a Cub Scout Leader, a Kindness Ambassador. She also volunteered with four charities including Pets as Therapy where she visited nursing homes, hospitals and special needs schools with her dog.

The judges praised Megan's tenacity, drive and attitude in achieving so much despite so many challenges.

Outstanding BTEC Media Student of the Year 2015

Adrian Bloomer, Walsall Studio School

Adrian Bloomer is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Media Student of the Year.

Adrian is on track to achieve a triple-starred distinction in his BTEC in Creative Media Production at Walsall Studio School. He is described by his tutor as a natural filmmaker of the highest calibre with a talent to match and he has secured a full-time job starting this summer with Freeview broadcaster Big Centre Television.

During his time at Walsall Studio School, Adrian has amassed an impressive array of practical experience, working on practical assignments as a camera operator and editor for live music events, broadcast features, documentaries and corporate videos for clients including the Arts Council of England, Emergenation and BCTV.

Adrian's BTEC has given him the opportunity to grow in confidence as a filmmaker and develop the skills he needs to become an in-demand, respected and dependable media professional. As well as being a very talented and innovative filmmaker, Adrian is a strong advocate for vocational education; he describes his BTEC as an excellent grounding for a career in media with a good mix of theory and practical work that has enabled him to gain new and important skills.

The judges praised Adrian's obvious aptitude for his BTEC, his professionalism and his tenacity in securing a full time job in the television industry even before his course finished.

Outstanding BTEC Performing Arts Student of the Year 2015

Nick Rawbin, Central Sussex College

Nick Rawbin is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Performing Arts Student of the Year.

Nick is studying for a Level 4 BTEC in Performing Arts at Central Sussex college and is on track to receive distinctions in all units. In September, he will take up a highly-prized place at Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts and plans to become an actor.

Nick's tutors describe him as a talented and selfless student who works hard in every aspect of his course. He is a young carer for his mum and grandfather and holds down three part-time jobs in order to support himself through college. Nick has an outstanding level of determination to succeed, despite his own personal challenges. He is well-respected by his fellow students and a highly valued member of the college's performing arts company.

Nick also volunteers at his local leisure centre and has worked on a voluntary project with Age UK East Grinstead to gather stories from the elderly people in his community that were developed into a show to raise awareness of older people and dementia.

The judges were impressed by Nick's commitment to a career in the performing arts. His achievement in earning a place at a top drama school, together with working to put himself through college whilst caring for two family members, make him an outstanding and inspiring BTEC student.

Outstanding BTEC Public Services Student of the Year 2015 Emma Horn, Blackpool Sixth Form College

Emma Horn is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Public Services Student of the Year.

Emma is studying for a BTEC in Public Services at Blackpool Sixth Form College and holds a Level 2 BTEC in Public Services and a BTEC in Aviation Studies.

Emma's commitment to a career as an RAF pilot is outstanding and inspirational. She is a Flight Sergeant in the RAF cadets, was awarded the Master Cadet teaching title and was nominated by her RAF squadron for the award for the best female cadet in the country.

However, Emma's achievements are not limited to her RAF role. She plays an active part in college life as a Public Services mentor and ambassador to her peer group and as chairperson of the Public Service Young People Committee, which raises money for course-related local charities.

Emma is also involved in the recruitment of new public service students and regularly speaks at college open evenings to year 11 students about her BTEC experience.

Emma is described by her tutors as a perfect role model and a pleasure to teach. In her spare time, she volunteers as an NCO on RAF camps to look after the wellbeing of other females and this summer will take on a volunteering role as a Camp America councillor in Interlaken.

The judges were hugely impressed by Emma's in-college and extra-curricular roles, her outstanding BTEC grades and her support for younger students.

Outstanding BTEC Science Student of the Year 2015 Roua Sami, Salford City College

Roua Sami is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Science Student of the Year.

Roua is on track to receive a triple-starred distinction in a Level 3 BTEC Extended Diploma in Applied Science from Salford City College and will join Durham University's Pharmacy degree course in September.

Roua arrived in the UK from Iraq in 2012, without a secondary education and only very basic English. Determined to overcome her lack of qualifications to pursue a career in science, Roua enrolled on Salford's BTEC Applied Science course so she could carry out the practical assignments and experiments that would improve her writing and lab skills. She also took GCSE English and Maths alongside her BTEC and evening classes in GCSE Physics and Chemistry to gain the qualifications she needed for university. She organised work experience placements at Specsavers to develop her communication skills and with Gatley Pharmacy to enhance her university application.

Roua managed this challenging workload whilst caring for her chronically-ill 19-month old sister and acting as a peer mentor for her fellow female Arabic and Muslim students and helping to register a multifold increase in the number of Arabic female students joining her BTEC course by speaking to prospective students at open evenings about the opportunities her BTEC has given her.

The judges describe Roua as an excellent ambassador for BTECs and for women in science. Her proactive approach to the educational barriers she faced and her dedication and hard work in securing her university place make her truly outstanding.

Outstanding BTEC Sport Student of the Year 2015 Hayley Simpson, Tameside College

Hayley Simpson is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Sport Student of the Year.

Hayley achieved a triple-starred distinction in her Level 3 BTEC in Sport at Tameside College and is now studying Sports Coaching at Leeds Beckett University.

Driven by her desire to become a Physical Education teacher, Hayley gained several other sports qualifications alongside her BTEC, including the FA Level 1 Coaching Football certificate, a Young Club Managers qualification and the ECB Young Leaders Award.

At college, Hayley was a student ambassador responsible for liaising with local schools to promote the college's sport department and became a Young Ambassador for her borough, attending national conferences and promoting sport at primary school level. She has recently returned to Tameside to support current students and talk to them about her university experiences.

During her BTEC, Hayley volunteered in her local secondary school PE department, at her local athletics club, as an event leader in the Greater Manchester School Games and as a marshal at the Manchester Marathon.

In addition to juggling these roles Hayley competed in National Athletic events representing East Cheshire Harriers in distance and cross-country running and was the 2013 U17 3000m Greater Manchester Schools Champion.

The judges describe Hayley as an outstanding BTEC student who combines her excellent grades with impressive sporting achievements. She is a role model to other students through her work as a volunteer and Young Ambassador.

Outstanding BTEC Adult Learner of the Year 2015 Nathan Headington, Leeds College of Building

Nathan Headington is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Adult Leader of the Year.

Nathan returned to education as a mature student with no academic qualifications. In the space of three years he has excelled academically, obtained full time employment, achieved a Level 6 NVQ, become Leeds College of Building's HE student representative and secured a place at university to study for a degree in Construction and Project Management.

Nathan began his journey back into education with a BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Civil Engineering at Leeds College of Building, gaining distinctions in all units before progressing onto an HND in Civil Engineering and a full time site management role which he structures around his HND.

Described by his tutors as truly inspirational, Nathan even finds time to support his fellow students by sharing his experiences of construction sites and organising work placements within his company.

He is a student member of the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE) and was recently nominated for the G4C Student of the Year Award. He plans to sit his professional review for Technician Membership of the ICE this summer and will be the first full time student from Leeds College of Building to do this. He is also a father of five.

The judges were unanimous in their praise for Nathan. Returning to education as a mature student takes dedication and commitment and Nathan has excelled in his roles as student, site manager, peer and student rep.

Outstanding BTEC International Student of the Year 2015 George Benson Lyimo, Braeside High School, Nairobi, Kenya

George Benson Lyimo is the 2015 BTEC International Student of the Year.

George left his home in Tanzania to pursue a BTEC Extended Diploma in Business at Braeside High School in Nairobi in 2012. He gained a triple-starred distinction and is now studying for a degree in Business and Computing at Huddersfield University.

During his time at college in Kenya, George excelled as a young, innovative and creative business leader. He launched his own social network (texeer.com), provided internet connectivity for his fellow students when the college provision failed and regularly helped out at college repairing and maintaining students' and teachers' computer equipment, despite no formal training. In addition, he organised annual charity events which raised vital funds which are now supporting young Kenyan children into education.

Alongside his BTEC, George taught himself HTML and CSS and volunteered as a computer technician in order to gain the knowledge and experience he needed for his degree course and to further develop his social networking site into a fully fledged and commercially viable, internationally-recognised product.

The judges praised George's dedication in moving country to pursue his studies and his clear aptitude and flair for business as evidenced in his excellent grades and acceptance onto a degree course in the UK.

Outstanding BTEC Apprentice (19+ years) of the Year 2015 Gareth Davies, Leeds College of Building

Gareth Davies is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Apprentice of the Year (19+ years).

Gareth is employed by Jagger Construction as a Project Manager having joined the company as an apprentice in 2010. He completed his BTEC Apprenticeship in Civil Engineering with Leeds College of Building and is now studying for a Higher Level Apprenticeship.

Gareth's commitment to his studies, the college, his employer and the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) is exemplary and his tutors describe him as a superb role model. He was one of the first students in the country to complete the ICE Advanced Technical Apprenticeship, he has passed the ICE Technician Professional Review and was awarded the Jean Venables Medal for enhancing the profession of civil engineering. He is also Leeds College of Building's Higher Level Apprentice of the Year by and he was shortlisted for Yorkshire's G4C Apprentice of the Year.

Gareth believes passionately in apprenticeships and works hard to inspire young people to pursue civil engineering. He is an elected member of ICE's Regional Committee, where he was instrumental in securing a visit to a local FE college by ICE's Director General and he volunteers as a STEMNET Ambassador. At college, he regularly coaches other students preparing for their Professional Reviews.

The judges praised Gareth's excellent track record of achievement and his passionate belief in apprenticeships. Encouraging other young people to take up a career in civil engineering, while excelling in his own career, makes him truly outstanding.

Outstanding BTEC Apprentice (16-18 years) of the Year 2015 Liam Flanagan, Employment and Skills Group

Liam Flanagan is the 2015 Outstanding BTEC Apprentice of the Year (16-18 years).

Liam joined Howells Solicitors Sheffield as an apprentice and holds a Level 3 BTEC Diploma in Business Administration. He is now employed full-time by the company and studying for a Level 3 BTEC Diploma in Customer Services in preparation for training with the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives.

Liam originally gained a Level 2 BTEC in Public Services as a Cadet Staff Sergeant Instructor in the Army Cadet Force, before deciding to pursue a career in law. After an NVQ in Business Administration, Liam chose a BTEC Apprenticeship with Howells LLP to gain first hand experience of working in a law firm and a business qualification that would enhance his career prospects.

He was the first apprentice Howells employed and his outstanding professional approach not only secured him full-time employment with the company but also encouraged the firm to take on four additional apprentices who Liam now mentors.

As well as his impressive commitment to his studies and employer, Liam still retains a position as an adult instructor in the Army Cadet Force.

The judges described Liam as a role model for all aspiring apprentices, who had a significant responsibility as his employer's first apprentice to prove the value of the qualification and route of learning. He opened the door through which others are now following and as such, is an excellent ambassador for BTEC Apprenticeships.