



BTEC Higher National qualifications in Public Services

Pearson-set Theme Release

1st September 2026 to 31st August 2027

Unit: 501 Research Project

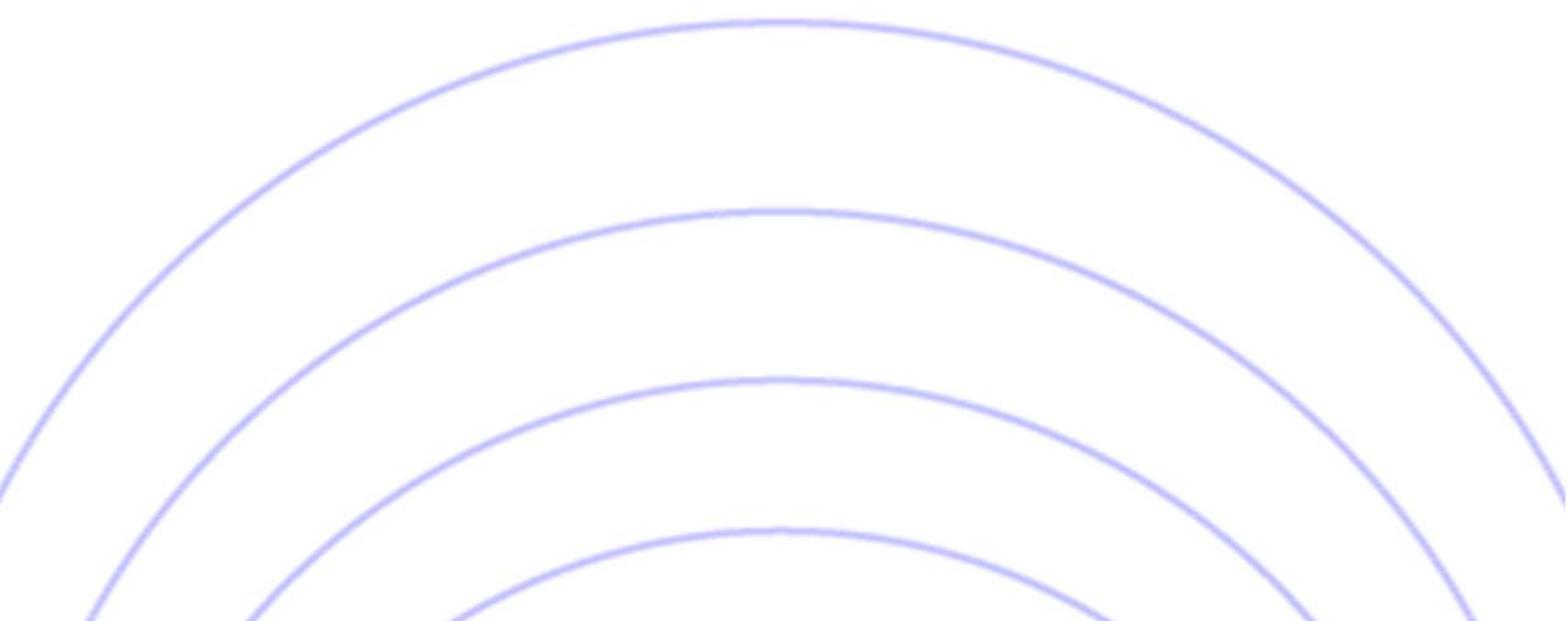
First Teaching from September 2025

First Certification from September 2026

For use with the following qualifications:

Pearson BTEC Level 5

Higher National Diploma in Public Services



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1. Introduction to theme

Pearson-set theme, for use with **Level 5, Unit 502: Research Project:**

The increase in the UK state pension age on the Public Services

The public sector has responsibility for all public services, including for example, education, emergency services, healthcare, defense. The demand for these complex services is increasing. Leaders across all public service sectors are required to manage demand, the services budget and an older workforce. This work may involve:

- Managing and supporting an older workforce to be able to offer effective delivery of public service provision.
- Managing the changes in the delivery of the public service and the impacts on service users and stakeholders.
- Financial planning to support older workers and management of the delivery of the public services.

Public services are responsible for managing and supporting its older employees. It must ensure that their policies and procedures adhere to changes in legislation and be ready to support their older workers and manage changes in a fast paced and complex environment. Public Services must recognise the limitations and adaptations to working practices. They must plan for the financial impacts in supporting older workers and be prepared for additional costs incurred whilst maintaining high levels of response to its service users.

This assessment will enable students to examine the increase in the UK pension age and the impacts on the management of the public services and on the society it serves.

Students can select a specific area of the public services on which to focus their research. The assessment will provide an opportunity for students to contextualise the impacts on services and provision. It will also enable students to explore the challenges and opportunities presented to leaders within public sector organisations and showcase innovative ideas to adapt and support an older workforce whilst meeting the rising demand on public services.

2. Choosing a research objective / question

Students are to choose their own research topic for this unit. Strong research projects are those with clear, well focused and defined objectives. A central skill in selecting a research objective is the ability to select a suitable and focused research objective. One of the best ways to do this is to put it in the form of a question.

Students should be encouraged by tutors to discuss a variety of topics related to the theme to generate ideas for a good research objective.

The range of topics discussed could cover the following:

Topics

1. The benefits and pitfalls of the new UK state pension age on the public service provisions, service users and its stakeholders.
2. Identifying innovative ways recruit, retain and support older workers in public services.
3. Maintaining an effective and proactive response of the delivery of the public services to meet the needs of public service older employees.
4. Identifying ways to improve and change the delivery of the working practices for older public service employees.
5. The financial implications to the public services to support an older workforce.
6. Use of critical analysis to compare the UK state pension age against similar provision overseas.
7. Managing the increased in the state pension age on the delivery of the public services to meet their targets and budgetary requirements.

The research objective should allow for students to broaden their understanding and widen their perspectives by being able to explore, argue, prove, and disprove a particular objective. They should be feasible, novel, ethical, relevant and ultimately of interest to the student. Guidance for tutors is available in the **Pearson-set Assignment Guidance document for Unit 502: Research Project** and templates are provided for both the research proposal and ethics form.

For those centres who have multiple start dates throughout the academic year, for example students beginning their studies on the Higher National Diploma between January and July, the same theme for both Level 4 and Level 5 Pearson-set units may apply (depending on delivery schedules and when students commence the Pearson-set units). If students are in a position of completing the same theme for both Level 4 and 5, centres must ensure that the theme for the Level 5 is addressed in a different context from the topic selected and applied at Level 4.

Please note that if reasonable adjustments are necessary to meet a specific individual student need you are able to adjust internal assessments to take this into account.

Any adjustments must be considered in relation to the centre's policies on equality & diversity and student support.

Further details on how to make adjustments for students with protected characteristics are given in the document 'Pearson Supplementary Guidance for Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration in Vocational Internally Assessed Units' available on our website (<http://qualifications.pearson.com>).

3. Project evidence / outcomes

It is important to recognise that project work is reliant on gathering information/data that can be analysed. The scale of the project means that there must be time for both primary and secondary research. An advised model would be to use secondary research to provide a context within which to conduct and interpret primary data collection. The project could then yield data/information which could be compared with the findings of secondary research.

In assessing the project, the assessor should be able to see a rationale for the project title, an identification of controversial aspects of the title and of the relevant literature/data sources. This will be based primarily on the student's research proposal. Student research should outline the literature/theories that supports the identified research objective/s and include critical evaluation of central arguments paying attention to whether or not the arguments are logically valid. Throughout their research students should be aware of the importance of clear and consistent use of language and the use of a consistent reference system. Engagement in reflective study of the research process should be evident, with students explaining how their ideas have developed, the significance of results and what they have learnt about the methodology of research. Well edited, focused writing and presentation, where the key decisions, developments, lines of argument and salient research are explained succinctly, is preferable to unstructured writing and presentation in which little attempt to select or edit material has been made.

It is important to recognise that there are many different presentation formats and it is important that students think carefully about the suitability of any presentations for their target audience, if this is a chosen format. Their presentations should be appropriate to the audience, both in terms of the nature and level of material they use and also in terms of length. Students should be guided to produce research which give a succinct account of the main arguments or developments from their project.

The question and answer session should address issues raised by the presentation, but also give students an opportunity to review their work.

Students are to submit as evidence for the unit in addition to their project findings, the **research proposal and ethics form**. The research proposal sets out the plan for how the students will achieve the intended research objective and shows whether the objective will be feasible, ethical and achievable in the time scale. It sets out how secondary research supports the research objective, how the research will be conducted, how the research will be evaluated. Students will need to gain ethical approval before commencing their research, this will be discussed with the tutor during the research proposal.

4. Employer engagement

It is advisable that centres look at the Pearson-set Assignment as an appropriate unit to embed employer engagement, although this is not a mandatory requirement.

Developing and establishing links with employers enhances the teaching and learning experience and improves students' employability. Where possible, identifying links with employers as part of the delivery of the Pearson-set Assignment could lead to enhancing and supporting student learning. Real-life projects provide students with the opportunity to develop and acquire appropriate skills, knowledge and expertise required by employers.

5. Sharing of good practice

An appointed External Examiner (EE) for the centre will ask to sample the Pearson-set assignment briefs for review as part of the remote sampling request. Although this is not a mandatory requirement for centres we strongly advise that centres seek guidance and support from their EE on the Pearson-set assignment. The EE may also include the Pearson-set units in the centre visit sample of student work.

The EE will review and identify exemplars in all aspects of good practice. Good practice will focus on themes including, but not limited to:

- Innovation
- Digital literacy
- Student employability and entrepreneurial skills
- Employer engagement
- Quality of assessment feedback

6. Resources and useful links

Suggested resources and links that centres may find useful are shown below. Centres should choose those resources that are relevant for localised use and complement these with additional resources to support independent research into the chosen topic. Resources should range from reports, website articles, theoretical and academic texts, journal articles.

Type of resource	Resource titles	Links
Website article	Future Issues for public service leaders	https://gov.uk
Website article	The fiscal impact of increases in the state pension age	https://obr.uk/box/the-fiscal-impact-of-increases-in-the-state-pension-age/
Website article	Lack of older people in employment costs UK £80bn a year	https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1744844/lack-older-people-employment-costs-uk-80bn-year
Website article	Older workers are the solution – not the cause – to the UK’s productivity problem	https://ageing-better.org.uk/blogs/older-workers-are-solution-not-cause-uks-productivity-problem
Website article	Retirement Age by Country 2026	https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/retirement-age-by-country
Website Article	GAD and the State Pension age review	https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gad-and-the-state-pension-age-review
Published report	Police Pensions – Retire and Return	https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/disclosure-logs/workforce-coordination-committee/2024/369-2024-npcc-retire-and-return---workforce-committee-8-march-2024.pdf
Website article	State pension age of 67 is coming – what to watch as it rolls out	https://ifs.org.uk/articles/state-pension-age-67-coming-what-watch-it-rolls-out

Website article	Army Welfare Pay and pensions	https://www.army.mod.uk/support-and-training/welfare/financial-and-legal-support/pay-and-pensions/
Website article	Here's a pension tweak for nudging civil servants to work past 60	https://ifs.org.uk/articles/heres-pension-tweak-nudging-civil-servants-work-past-60
Website article	Our fight for decent pensions	https://www.fbu.org.uk/magazine/april-may-2024/our-fight-decent-pensions
Website article	Denmark to raise retirement age to highest in Europe	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvq7lv533q6o
Website article	How can we make government more productive?	https://ifs.org.uk
Published report	Help and support for older workers	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-and-support-for-older-workers/help-and-support-for-older-workers
Published report	Employment Rights Act 2025 Economic Analysis January 2026	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/695d3ebfbd1c076f787e7399/employment-rights-act-2025-economic-analysis.pdf
Website article	UK strikingly unprepared for an ageing society, facing increasing costs and shrinking tax base	https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/175/economic-affairs-committee/news/211034/uk-strikingly-unprepared-for-an-ageing-society-facing-increasing-costs-and-shrinking-tax-base/
Website article	Fit for the future? Rethinking the public services workforce	https://committees.parliament.uk/
Website article	Policing in England and Wales Future Operating Environment 2040	https://assets.college.police.uk
Published report	Understanding older workers	https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/understanding-older-workers/

Website article	Recruiting, retaining and supporting older workers: tips on getting started	https://www.britsafe.org/safety-management/2023/recruiting-retaining-and-supporting-older-workers-tips-on-getting-started
Website article	Valuing older workers: Keeping healthy	www.ren.org.uk/active-academy
Website article	Retirement age in France in 2026	https://www.retraiteconseil.com/retirement-age-france-2024/
Website article	Fostering Innovation in the Public Sector	https://oecd.org
Website article	Social Security - America What is full retirement age?	https://www.ssa.gov/faqs/en/questions/KA-01885.html
Website article	What do people want, need and expect from public services?	https://ipsos.com
Website article	Rethinking resilience: Ten priorities for governments	https://mckinsey.com
Published report	Welfare to Work: Tackling the Barriers to the Employment of Older People	https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/welfare-to-work-tackling-the-barriers-to-the-employment-of-older-people/
Website article	Leading Change in a Complex Public Sector Environment	https://academic.oup.com
Website article	Why hiring older workers can benefit your business	https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/business-guidance/guidance-articles/staffing/why-hiring-older-workers-can-benefit-your-business

Additional materials

Pearson-set Report:

<https://hnglobal.highernationals.com>

Training Video for the RQF BTEC Higher Nationals Pearson-set Assignments:

https://youtu.be/FkQi_l78_tw

The Assignment Guidance for Unit 502: Research Project should be read in conjunction with the theme and topic release. It provides advice and guidance for both tutors and students.

For any further additional support or queries regarding this document, please email highernationals@pearson.com.



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