



# Annual Institutional Review Report 2020/21

Pearson Higher Education Qualifications  
Licensed Higher Nationals

# Introduction

Licensed Higher Nationals have been offered by Pearson since 2008 and despite the impact of Covid, we have seen an increased interest from our Higher Education Institution (HEI) partners to offer Higher Nationals under licence.

This Institutional Review Report (IRR) demonstrates both the successes and challenges faced by our HEI partners in delivering the licensed Higher National (HN) programmes. The accompanying External Examiner (EE) reports give a clear indication of continuing quality improvements and student support to enable a clearer understanding of the student journey and how HEIs are meeting student needs.

There are currently 36 universities based in England and Wales approved to offer HNs under licence.

The IRR was sent to all 36 universities and 29 HEIs submitted their IRR response\*. The other seven had no active provision for the academic year 2020/21.

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\* No identifiable information is included in this report

# Executive Summary

The annual IRR report allows us to share an overview of all the licensed Higher National partners, with the most significant data relating to student numbers, achievement, and progression.

The analysis of data in each section below shows a comparison between 2019/20 and 2020/21 and between students undertaking Higher Nationals (HNs) on campus versus doing so with a collaborative partner. The data included in this report is based on only what was reported in 2019/20 and 2020/21. Not all areas are fully reported by all universities, so it is difficult to draw year on year comparisons. Some IRRs were submitted after the IRR report was published but that data for 2019/20 has now been included to show precise comparisons.

It should be mentioned that one of the factors that may have impacted on the data in these two years remains to be COVID-19. However, the positive change in some areas gives us confidence and shows the commitment and dedication of our HEI centres towards licensed Higher Nationals, as demonstrated by the below comment from an External Examiner:

***"This year I have witnessed an incredible stepping up of staff team in terms of student support and regarding the quality of materials offered to students in terms of T & L. Students genuinely believe they have benefitted from the changes prompted by covid, and I have witnessed a year-on-year improvement in student outcomes."***

The infographics on the next page show some key highlights of the data, but full analysis can be seen in individual sections throughout the report.

# Licensed Higher Nationals 2020/21: Key data at a glance

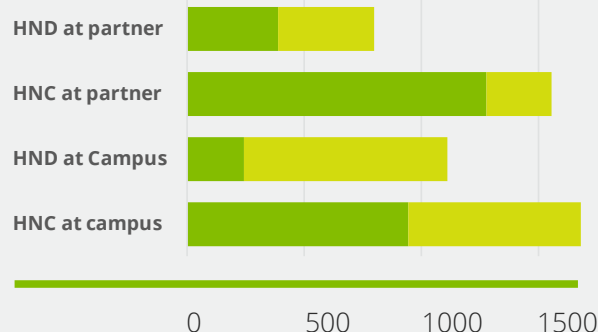
## Licensed completions and achievement

Overall completions declined by 19% but HND completions at campus increased by 264% and HND at partner by 5%.

Overall grade achievements for licensed HN remain varied between campus and partner sites.



2019 / 20 | 2020 / 21

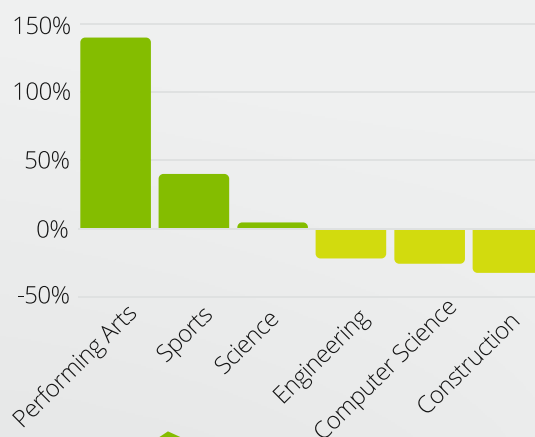


## Licensed Registrations

HND registrations both at campus and partner improved; at campus by 120% and at partner by 29%

## Subject areas

Subjects with practical modules declined mainly due to Covid-19



## Licensed HN progression

Although overall progression declined by 16% the HNC to HND at campus improved by 111%

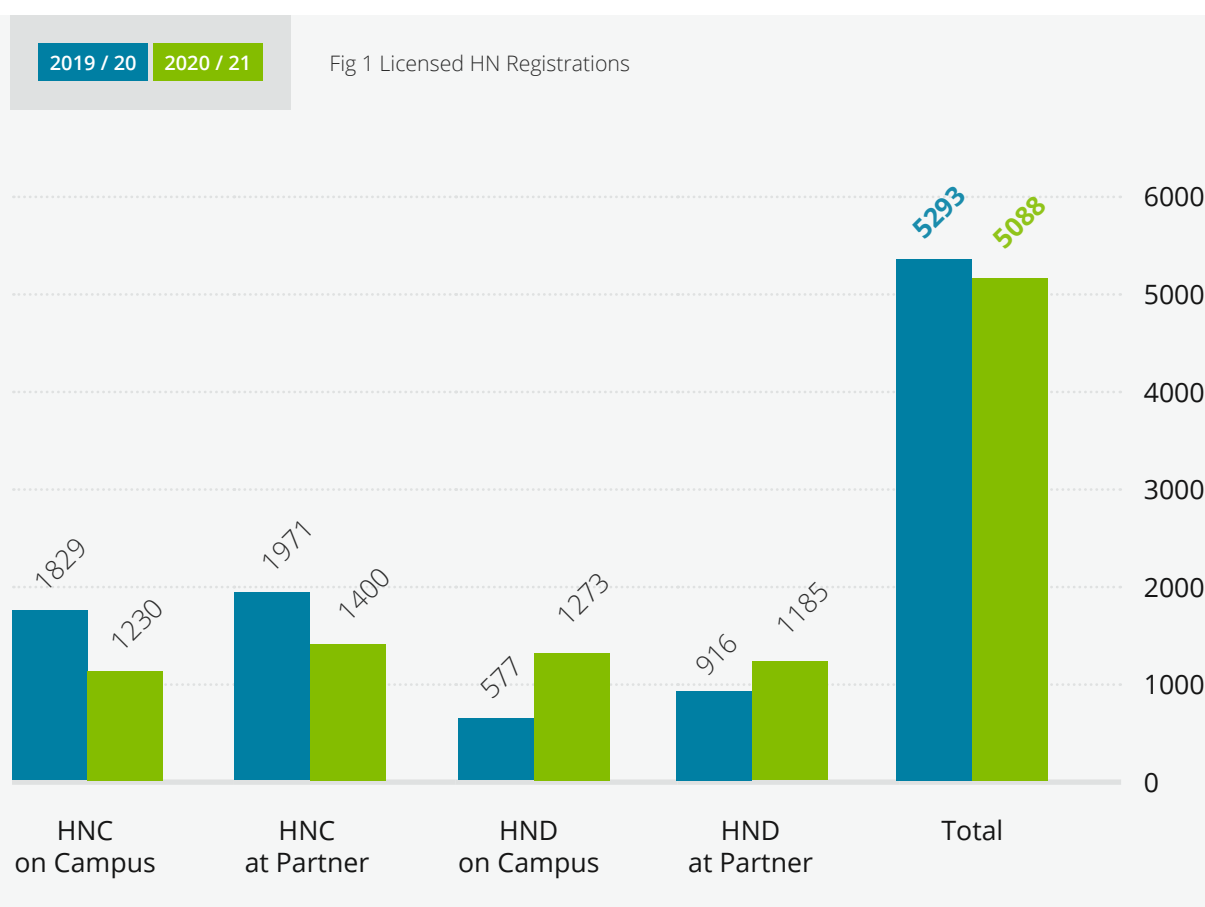


# Licensed HN Registrations

Last year we reported a slight decline in registrations, and the trend seems to have continued this year also for the Higher National Certificates (HNC) registrations. However, we are pleased to share that for 2020/21, there has been a 120% increase in Higher National Diploma (HND) registrations for programmes delivered on campus and 29% increase in HNDs delivered at partner sites. (Fig 1)

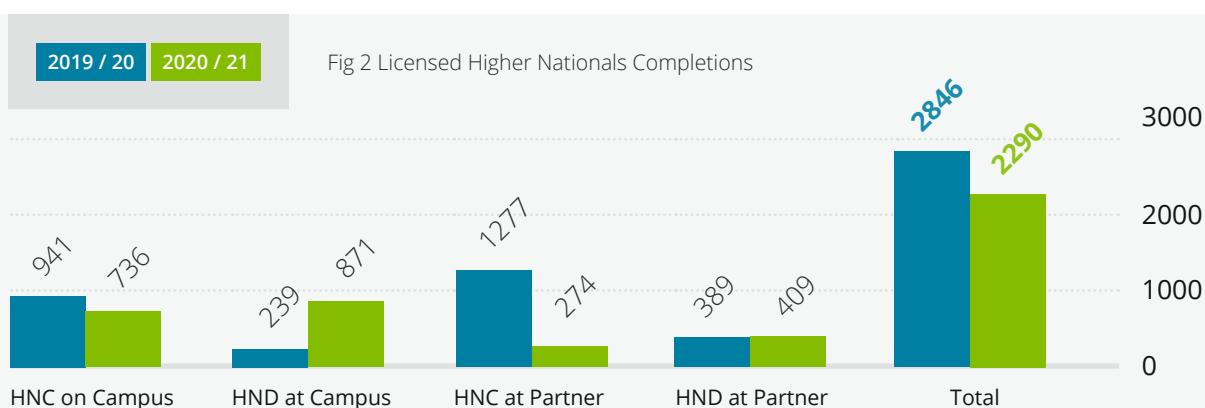
Covid continued to have a huge effect on students attending campus-based programmes, as well as partner institutions due to the restrictions put in place. This not only impacted on registrations, but also student achievements during the first year of the pandemic. However, the application of flexibilities and adaptations to assessment improved both registrations and achievement this year.

During the analysis of this data, we identified some discrepancies in the registration numbers submitted by HEIs in the IRR and those recorded on Pearson's Edexcel Online system for 2020/21. The difference between IRR and Edexcel Online data may be due to several reasons, such as enrolling multiple cohorts in a year. We will be doing a deeper dive into this and exploring the data with each university in the coming months as part of our ongoing work to strengthen our partnerships.

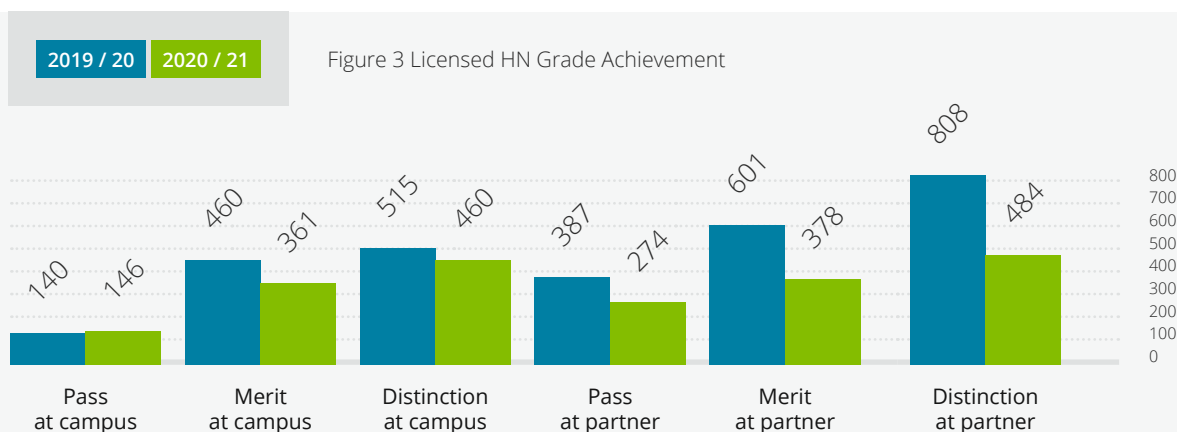


# Licensed HN Completions and Achievement

Completion and achievements rates cover both HNC and HND and as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, although the Higher National Diploma(HND) numbers are lower than the HNCs, the overall completions have still improved at partner institutions. HND completions at campus improved by 264% as compared to last year despite the overall completions for licensed HNs declining by 19%.



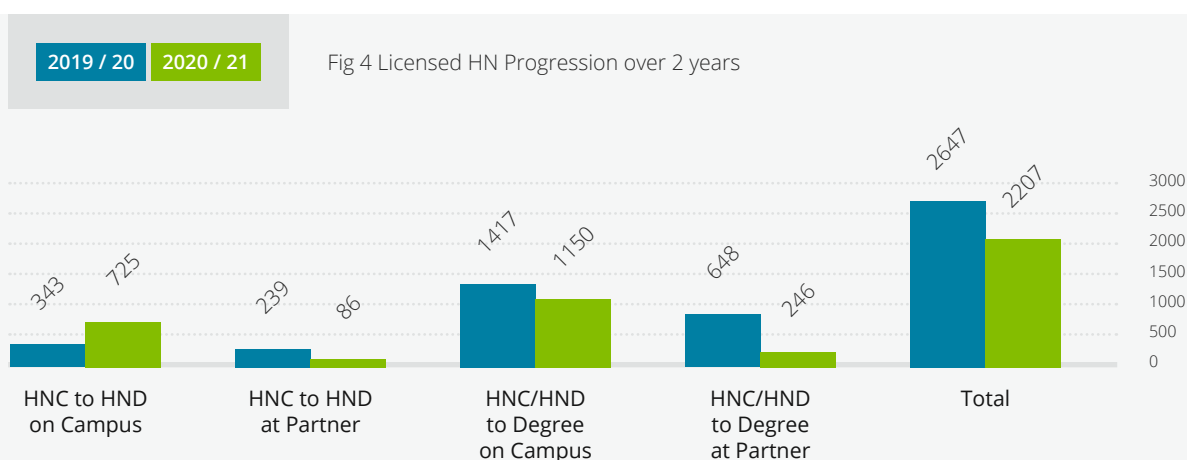
Despite the ongoing pandemic during 2020/21, it is rewarding to see that student grade achievements (Fig. 3) have been not impacted drastically. This needs to be recognised and the commitment of providing students with support during such challenging times needs to be commended. This also resonated across many EE reports, where External Examiners made positive comments specifically on universities' responses to the pandemic by going above and beyond to provide student support, including adaptations to their assessment and recognition of prior learning. Grade variations between campus and partner sites were also recognised by the External Examiners and recommendations are made to improve the sharing of grading criterion with learners and marking grids with tutors at partner sites, in addition to improving the internal moderation process.



# Licensed HN Progression

Progression refers to those students who successfully progressed onto the next level of study, either an HND following HNC, or a Level 6 award (such as a degree top-up) following the HND. In 2019/20 we reported a continuing decline in students progressing from HNC to HND and HND to a degree programme.

The tables below in Fig. 4 show that although the overall progression figures remain steady, there are variations between progression from HNC to HND and HNC/HND to degree. The progression from HNC to HND on campus increased by 111%, whereas the progression in all other areas has declined since 2019/20.



Progression trend is complex and may appear to be on a decline when we look at the two-year comparison in Fig. 4, but this could be due to a lot of partial credit achievements in 2020/21. 1296 learners achieved partial credits when doing licensed HN at campus and 1305 with collaborative partners. Partial achievements were not fully reported in 2019/20, so it has been difficult to draw comparisons between the two years or see a trend. Covid-19 has had some impact where students were unable to complete assessments in time for progression.

As reported in last year's IRR, the anecdotal evidence continues to suggest that having a **clear progression route** to degree programmes at campus or validated programmes at partner institutions encourages the students to apply for Higher Nationals.

Qualitative evidence from Licensed HEI IRR submissions also demonstrates that students' personal needs or a unique delivery and assessment, such as blended delivery, continue to be a deciding factor for students and how they choose to pursue their aspirations and balance work, social life, and study.

# Licensed HN Sector Areas

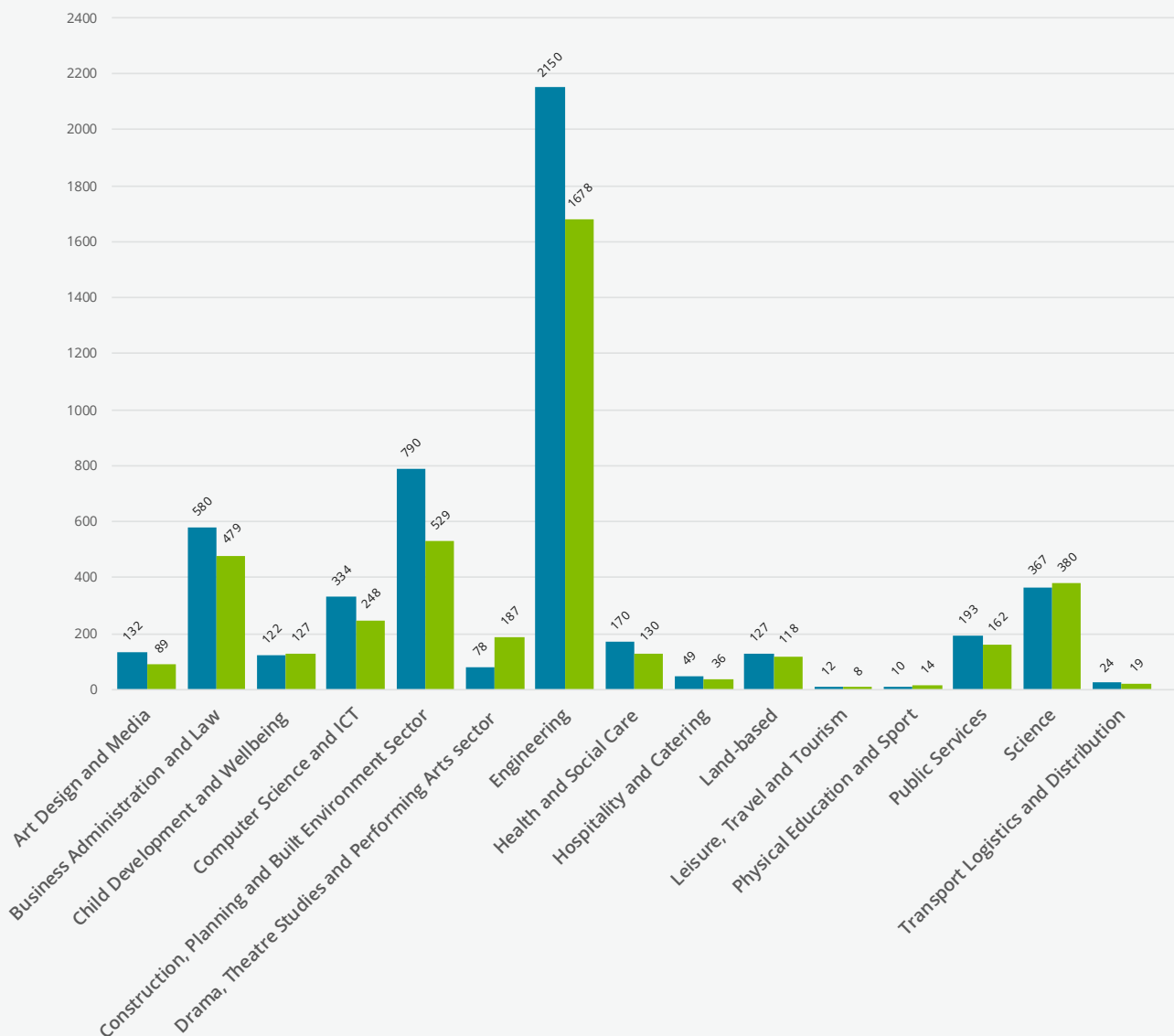
There has certainly been a change in the number of learners in all sectors in the last two years, with Covid-19 undoubtedly being the main contributing factor. However, it should be noted there has been no change in the *range* of sectors being offered under licensed HNs.

Some sectors did see slight growth, such as Child Development and Wellbeing, Science and Physical Education and Sports, but the standouts were Drama, Theatre Studies and Performing Arts producing an increase of over 100% (Fig 5)

As reported last year, our dominant sectors, Engineering and Construction, have continued to decline gradually; Engineering by 22% this year and Construction by 33%. The requirement of practical modules and access to work placements in some of the subject areas may have been the contributing factor of the decline.

2019 / 20      2020 / 21

Figure 5 Licensed HNs by sector





# Good Practice, Quality Assurance and Enhancements

All universities are autonomous in the way they deliver Licensed Higher Nationals, and the IRR report gives us an opportunity to share the areas of enhancements they have made or the good practice they have implemented. Some of these were applied as flexibilities for Covid-19 and some became permanent because of pandemic. Below outlines the key themes.

## Evidence of best practice

- ✓ Strengthening and increasing collaborative partnerships with local colleges
- ✓ Link Tutors visiting partner sites and providing support to local colleges
- ✓ Flexible delivery and allowing students to choose between delivery options
- ✓ Module marks not capped for students upon reassessments
- ✓ Streamlining assessments to reduce burden on students and allow holistic assessments
- ✓ Embedding employability skills into programmes to enhance career progression
- ✓ Student support, especially during the pandemic, has been recognised and commended by all EEs

## Evidence of adaptations to quality assurance process for licensed programmes

- ✓ Changing from annual monitoring to periodic review
- ✓ Risk-based annual review introduced to reduce the burden on academic workload
- ✓ Allowing for compensation, condonements and trailing credits to enable for progression to next stage
- ✓ Unit and Programme Boards were introduced, replacing the previous Preparatory and main Assessment Boards.
- ✓ External Examiners producing separate reports for licensed programmes with collaborative partners
- ✓ External Examiners invited to the separate Assessment Board to go through results from collaborative partners
- ✓ Introduction of electronic EE annual reporting process to enable all areas to access all reports to analyse and identify common themes and trends in both good practice, and areas where improvements may be required in similar modules and course.

## Commendations from External Examiners

*"I wish to praise the Group for the way in which it dealt with the unexpected challenges of the public health situation. The alternative assessment arrangements were well administered in a way which was fair to students. I saw no evidence of any unfairly affected students"*

*"I have been impressed with how well they have adapted. From adapting innovative teaching activities to maintaining academic standards, it is clear that the quality of learning opportunities provided to students, in particular on a practice-based subject, has not been detrimentally impacted."*

*"This year I have witnessed an incredible stepping up of staff team in terms of student support and regarding the quality of materials offered to students in terms of T & L. Students genuinely believe they have benefitted from the changes prompted by covid, and I have witnessed a year-on-year improvement in student outcomes."*

*"Students acknowledged that lecturers have gone above and beyond to ensure the quality and rigor of the academic quality standards"*

## Recommendations from EEs for further enhancements

- ✓ Developing an external reference group of employers and local alumni to seek feedback and support on future developments and delivery
- ✓ Sharing marking criteria with partner colleges for consistency
- ✓ Sharing grading criterion with students, showing how requirements of the brief relate to the rubric
- ✓ Improving guidance for students on planning and formulating their assignments including referencing, using different opportunities such as peer discussions
- ✓ Improving the detail and frequency of feedback given to students providing an overview of what they need to do better to improve future assignments to enhance learning and development
- ✓ Improving internal moderation processes to ensure a degree of internal consistency and evidencing where internal moderation or second check has been implemented.

# Current Trends, Future plans and Local Initiatives

The IRR gives us an opportunity to identify the good work universities are doing or planning to keep up with the changing landscape of education. This section explores such plans and initiatives. However, the majority of HEIs are continuing to focus on recovering from the pandemic and strengthening existing provisions and not planning to implement significant changes in the immediate future.

- ✓ Engineering and Construction licensed HNs remain the most popular, with Business Administration and Law and Computer Science and ICT sectors also gaining momentum.
- ✓ The changing landscape of HE provision has impacted some of the local partnerships but also led to diversification for many universities, including offering higher apprenticeships and higher technical and professional qualifications.
- ✓ Growth in the apprenticeship sectors with higher technical qualifications embedded within new apprenticeship standards provides an opportunity to grow the offer in some sectors such as Construction and Engineering
- ✓ Strengthening local partnership to build progression pathways from T-Levels and level 3 apprenticeships into Higher Nationals and then into Higher/ Degree Apprenticeships via mapping and accreditation or prior learning.
- ✓ Where possible, Level 4/5 students were offered Face-Face teaching during the pandemic.
- ✓ Delivering Higher Nationals online via VLE platform and monitoring disengaged students has improved continuation rates
- ✓ Plans to implement a marketing strategy in conjunction with working towards new collaborative arrangements and working with college partners.
- ✓ Continue nurturing activities with current students and increase outreach activities with local sixth forms and colleges to raise awareness.

# Conclusion

The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years, not just on our licensed HN centres, but on the entire education sector, has undoubtedly influenced many aspects of student outcomes.

All stakeholders in the Higher and Further Education sectors should be commended for responding to the challenges and adapting their approaches to minimise the negative impacts and supporting students to achieve their best. Blended delivery and learning have been one of the most progressive outcomes of the pandemic and online learning seemingly becoming a normalized experience.

Considering the ongoing disruption, any inferences and recommendations from this year's IRR analysis have also been inconclusive, however, there is evidence in the data that some positive trends from the previous year have continued. HEIs are continuing to develop strong partnerships with the local FE colleges, demonstrating the value of the licensed HNs for progression, **widening participation** and reducing the skills gap for the future.

According to the most recent labour market report, [Coronavirus: Impact on the labour market](#), "there has been slight fall in unemployment between December 2021 and February 2022 as compared to the previous quarter, but rising economic inactivity<sup>1</sup> was much greater. Workers aged 18-24 and 65+ have been most affected". This continues to have varying degrees of impact on the pipeline between education and employment and therefore also the recruitment in education. As a result of Covid-19, some aged 18-24 have also taken the opportunity to go back into education to further their chances of employment in the future.

HEIs looking to strengthen their partnerships with local colleges may be interested to read the FE News on the impact of Covid-19 on the further education sector and how its students show a 37% decline in completion of apprenticeships, 46% decline in starting new apprenticeships, 1% decline in course retention rates for students aged 19+, and not to forget the mental health impact on students in relation to the lack of opportunities for work placements and future careers ([FE News September 2021](#)). We take this decline to mean that it may then lead to a decreasing pipeline for recruitment to HE and also to employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Economic inactivity as defined by ONS means People not in employment, who have not been seeking work within the last 4 weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks.



Engineering, Construction and Business Administration and Law remain the most popular sector areas and continue to perform well, demonstrating their robust design and traditionally strong employer links. The popularity of these programmes may also be related to the skills-shortage vacancies (SSVs) and density (proportion of vacancies which are skills-shortage vacancies) as identified in the [Trend Deck 2021](#): Skills published in June 2021, showing 36% SSV density for Construction and Manufacturing and 27% for Business Services.

The agenda of reducing the skills shortage is also being addressed by the introduction of [Higher Technical Qualifications \(HTQs\)](#) and at Pearson we will be offering HTQs under licence to our partners, to support them with their goal of reducing the skills gap for the future.

This IRR report remains to be inconclusive in many ways due to limited data submission over the last two years. We have not made any assumptions here and to avoid us making any future assumptions it is really important that we receive full data from all universities to show the trends in licensed HN provision. We will be working with our partners and reviewing the IRR data collection this year to ensure that we are able to not only give a full conclusive report in the future, but also use that to ensure that we can publish a full and conclusive report, improve our provision and support to our licensed centres.

# 2022 Updates

## Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)

We are pleased to announce that **11** of our HTQs have now been approved and these can be offered by HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) under an IP (Intellectual Property) Licence. We have also submitted **one** further title for approval and we await the outcome.

HTQs approved by sector:

### Digital

HND in Computing for England

HND in Digital Technologies for England

### Health

Healthcare Professions Support

### Construction

HNC/D Construction Management

HNC/D Architectural Technology

HNC/D Modern Methods of Construction

HNC/D Quantity Surveying

Pearson is here to support you with offering HTQs approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) under IP licence only.

The HTQ approval transfer is not applicable for Trademark (TM) Licensed Higher Nationals, due to the difference in content between the Pearson HTQ and HEI specifications. As the Trademark for Higher Nationals is owned by Pearson, we will need to be informed in advance of a proposed submission of TM Licensed Higher Nationals by your institution to IfATE, so that we can review and approve the use of our Trademark.

If you would like to know more about HTQs please visit our web page [Higher Technical Qualifications](#) or contact the HN Licence team on [LicenseHN@pearson.com](mailto:LicenseHN@pearson.com)

# Useful Dates

Here is a reminder of some of the useful dates for Licensed HNs:

<b>September 15th 2022</b>	Please return your annual Licensed HN schedules. Schedule 1 should confirm programmes and expected registration numbers for Licensed HNs delivered on campus, and Schedule 2 should confirm programmes and expected registration number for Licensed HNs delivered at partner providers
<b>September 30th 2022</b>	Outcomes for those students who completed their Licensed HN programme in 2021/22 should be recorded on Edexcel Online
<b>October 25th 2022</b>	Institutional Review Report (IRR) (covering 2021/22 academic year) released for HEI partners to complete
<b>November 15th 2022</b>	New student registrations for 2021/22 to be completed and uploaded to Edexcel Online
<b>January 13th 2023</b>	IRR report covering 2021/22 academic year due