Pearson
BTEC

Annual Institutional Review Report 2021/22

Pearson Licensed Higher
National Qualifications

Introduction

Foundations of the Licensed Higher Nationals (HN) were laid following the introduction of The Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, which eliminated the divide between polytechnics and universities, where polytechnics acquired the university title and the power to award their own degrees, thus joining pre-1992 universities in a unified system.

Thanks to you, our Licensed Higher Nationals (HN) partners, this offer has been growing stronger year on year, and did you know that over 68K students have been on this journey with us? We have over 33 current partners in the UK with 3 new partners introduced in 2022, including 2 international partners. With the confidence from our partners in this unique offer from Pearson, we hope it becomes a preferred option for all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to expand their level 4 and 5 provision.

This Institutional Review Report (IRR) demonstrates the changes in trends, as well as good practices deployed by HEI partners to achieve the best outcome for students when delivering the licensed Higher National (HN) programmes, supporting student needs, and encouraging student progression within the academic year 2021-2022.

We would like to thank all our HEI partners for submitting your responses to IRR questionnaire enabling us to include all data* in this report.

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Executive Summary

Thank you all for accepting the novel approach to gathering information as part of our annual monitoring. The feedback was extremely positive, including the suggestions for improvement. Out of those who did provide feedback, 72% of you welcomed the new approach with further feedback received on streamlining the IRR questionnaire to make it even better for next year.

This IRR report includes quantitative data and trends relating to registrations, achievement, and progression, as well as qualitative data and evidence on why these changes are happening.

HEI partners have been open and honest in sharing good practices, local initiatives, and future plans to meet the needs of the local economy. Both existing and new partners have praised last year's report and how they found it useful to compare benchmarks and implement future plans. We are proud to share comments from our partners and hope this year's report would be received and valued by the partners in the same way.

The report has been instrumental in contributing to our business and curriculum planning. Very helpful, thank you.

Last year's report was very valuable to the university and our collaborative partner. In particular, the narrative related to trends and future plans. Provided assurance that we and our partners are thinking about issues and opportunities that are at the forefront of our institutional plans.

The report is very easy to read and suitably succinct and focused. The graphical presentation of data is very clear. Where these reports are presented to University committees for information, I can see that committee members would be happy to read a report of this size and format in full. The report overall provides a good indicator of our experience of delivering this provision in comparison to the whole sector.

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Licensed HN Highlights

Key Highlights 2021/22

Partners and programmes

Over 30 HEI partners

- ✔ **3** new partners onboarded since October 2022, including **2** international

- ✔ **1** in January 2023

- ✔ **89** partner sub-sites

- ✔ **591** approved programmes

- ✔ **529** programmes under TM Licence

- ✔ **62** programmes under IP Licence

Licensed HN Journey

68,104 students have been on a Licensed HN journey since 2005_06

- ✔ Licensed HNs were at their peak in 2018_19; **5492 students**

- ✔ Trademark Licence is more popular and IP gaining traction since 2019_20 especially now with HTQs

- ✔ Growth in offer with collaborative partners; HND up by 10% at partner sites in 2021_22
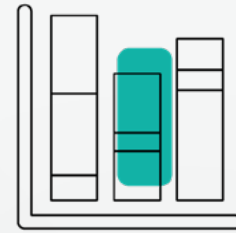
Intakes and Delivery

Intakes

- ✔ **86%** of HEIs offer one intake and **14%** offer more than one intake (per academic year)

Structure

- ✔ **39%** long and thin, **32%** short and fat, **14%** block teaching and **15%** other

Mode

- ✔ **86%** Face to Face, **10%** Blended and **4%** other

Licensed HN Highlights

20/21 IRR Data at a glance

Enrolments

HND at Campus up by **36%** and HND at partner up by **42%** as compared to 2019/20
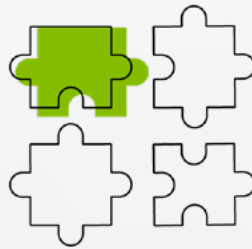
Sectors

31% growth in the Construction sector

Progression

HNC to HND progression at partner grew by **216%** and HND to Degree at partner grew by **73%** since 2020/21

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Licensed HN Registrations

Student numbers

Licensed HN enrolments may be declining overall (Fig 1) but the Higher National Diploma (HND) at partner sites grew by 10% as compared to 2020/21 and by 42% since 2019/20. The HND at campus also grew by 35% as compared to 2019/20 (Fig 2).

These findings are actually remarkably similar to the higher education enrolment as reported by HESA for 2021/22[1], where the number of students at level 4 and 5 reduced by 0.3% but the number of students at first degree increased by 1.9%.

Licensed HN registrations 2021/22

Legend: 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22

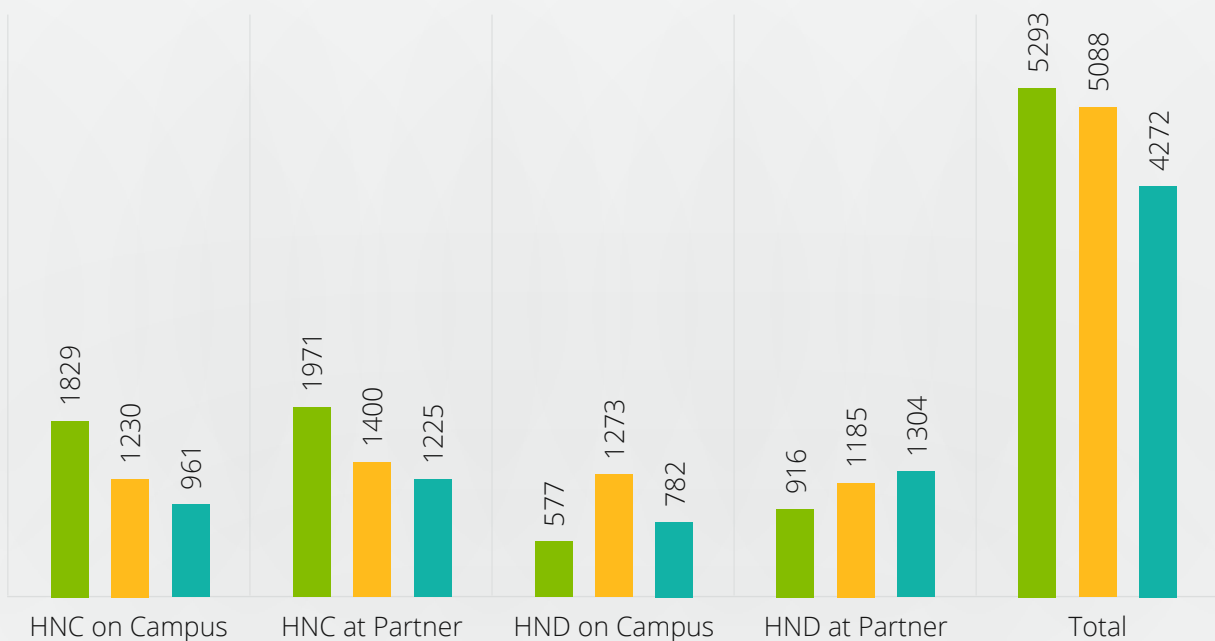|	HNC on Campus	HNC at Partner	HND on Campus	HND at Partner	Total
2019/20	1829	1971	577	916	5293
2020/21	1230	1400	1273	1185	5088
2021/22	961	1225	782	1304	4272

Fig 1: Licensed HN Registrations

[1] HESA Student statistics https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2023/sb265-higher-education-student-statistics/numbers

Licensed HN registrations 2021/22

■ % change as compared to 2020/21

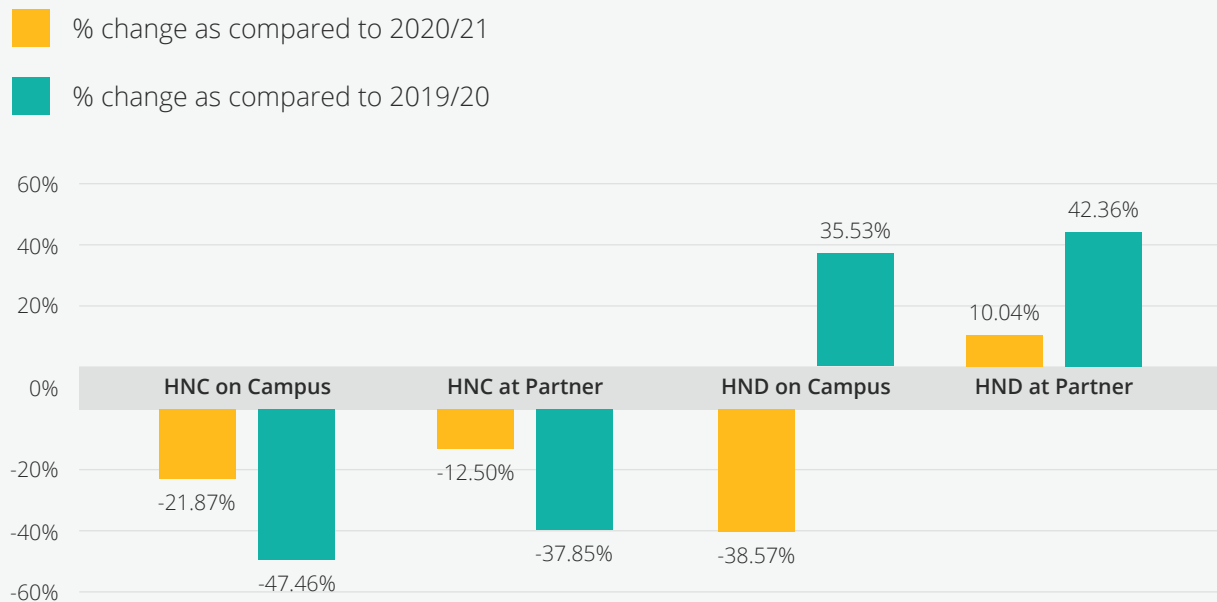■ % change as compared to 2019/20

Fig 2: Licensed HN Registrations Trend

Looking at the split of registration on our own systems, HNC trademark registrations are on top but that comes as no surprise, with 529 programmes out of 591 approved under TM Licence.

- HNC TM registrations - 2005

- HND TM registrations - 1496

- HNC IP registrations - 35

- HND IP registrations - 20

When partners were asked to identify the trend for licensed HNs, 41% said it was stable, 15% identified it to be increasing, but worryingly, 44% felt it is decreasing. However, there seems to be a **growing confidence** among our partners that things are likely to improve with the numbers in the coming year; with the new initiatives such as **Institutes of Technology (IOTs) being established**, introduction **of HTQs** and **degree apprenticeships** giving universities the opportunity to review and consolidate their offers, and add newly validated programmes with existing and new collaborative partners.

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Key reasons identified for the changing trends in student enrolments, by our HEI partners, are believed to be:

- Covid pandemic and the subsequent move towards pure online learning or blended learning continues to be a reason for the decline in numbers, especially for practice-based courses but slowly improving with a return to face-to-face teaching

- school leavers are increasingly achieving higher grades at A level, with increased options to progress to Apprenticeships and full degree awards but for those students who do not meet the entry requirements for degree, the HNC/HND still remains to be the best option to support their goal towards a degree award

- turbulence in FE colleges which has led to poorer student experience

- preference among young people to go straight to a three-year degree programme at university campus

- decentralization of some public sector departments, reduced training budgets and re-distribution of the funding and public sector move towards higher-level apprenticeships

- the growing burden of HE administration in funding, QA and reporting for small cohorts which makes the offer unsustainable

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Responses from HEIs for positive changes in trends included:

> *"We have been successful in an application for the Institute of Technology which will include delivery of a number of HN programmes".*

> *"Increased desire for L4 and L5 qualifications, introduction of Institute of Technology".*

> *"For our self-funding students, however it is still an ideal gateway into Higher Education".*

> *"From discussion with the Industry Advisory Board (IAB), it is thought that during the time of the pandemic employers were under increased external pressures and some recruitment and internal development was placed on hold. Given the length of time the HND has been offered by the University and support from the accrediting body, it is anticipated that the demand for this course will persist".*

Comparable to last year, we have continued to identify some discrepancies in the registration numbers submitted by HEIs in the IRR and those recorded on Pearson's Edexcel Online (EOL) system for 2021/22. The difference between IRR and Edexcel Online data may be due to several reasons, such as a difference in the dates from being enrolled to be registered on EOL due to HEIs taking multiple cohorts in a year. The other reason to take note is that a number of HEIs have registered their learners all under the main site (university) and not under each subsite, where the course is being delivered.

There has also been a turnover of staff, resulting in delays and sometimes an oversight in registrations. Throughout the last year we have been doing a doing a deeper dive into this and exploring the data with each university and offering support such as EOL training and access to resource articles and these have been positively received. This will ensure the data is accurate for both parties and will help to strengthen our partnership.

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Student Profile: Age

Fig. 3 shows that eleven HEI partners reported to have 60-80% or 80% and above number of students that are in the age group of 18-24. Nine HEI partners also reported to have 20-40% of their students that are adults above the age of 30. This corresponds with HESA student statistics[2] (Fig 4), 65% students under the age of 25 and 23% above 30.

Student profile by age

	18-24	25-30	30 and above
<20%*	2	16	10
20-40%*	5	9	9
40-60%*	8	1	1
60-80%*	7	0	0
>80%*	4	0	0
Don't know*	2	2	2
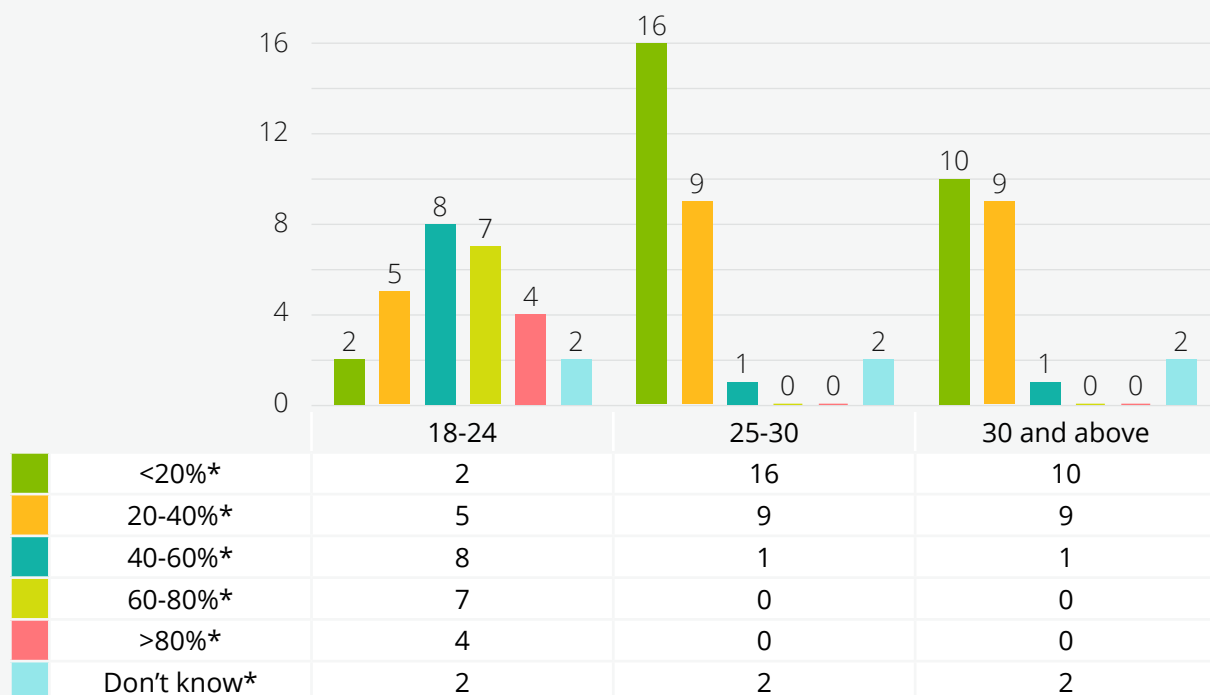
Fig 3: Licensed HN Student Profile: Age

HESA Student Statistics 2021/22

- 20 and under
- 21-24 years
- 25-29 years
- 30 years and over

Fig 4: HESA Student statistics by age

[2] HESA Student statistics https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2023/sb265-higher-education-student-statistics/numbers

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Student Profile: Employment status

There was a clear divide in the response to this question, as to how the employment was considered, as most students take some form of employment during their study. However, the divide was clear it was 50:50, fifty percent doing part time study and employment and other fifty percent doing full time studies and took some form of employment to sustain themselves (Fig 5).

This is based on our assumption that a good proportion of those in employment and studying part time may include the ones who are taking an apprenticeship programme.

Student Profile by employment

- Employed and part time study
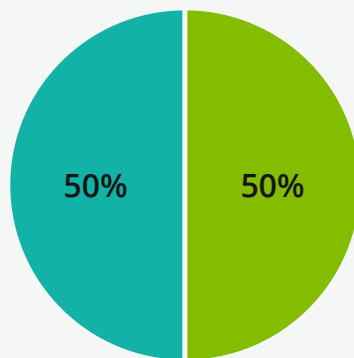- Full time study (including part time employment)

50%   50%

Fig 5: Licensed HN Student Profile: Employment

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Licensed HN Provision: Mode of study

It is a known fact that universities offer different modes of study that suit the needs of the student balanced against their own approach and resources. The response from our HEI partners was remarkably similar. They also offer mixed modes dependent on the programme. Majority of the universities offer either full time or part-time. The percentage of full-time vs part-time provision is varied, 8 HEI partners reporting > 80% (Fig 6) of the provision to be part time and 6 reporting as >80% to be full time.

24 (80%) of our partners said distance learning was not applicable to them, with 7 partners not offering any full time mode, while 5 partners did not offer part-time at all.

Licensed HN provision by mode of study

	Full Time	Part Time	Distance Learning
<20%*	5	3	3
20-40%*	2	4	0
40-60%*	5	6	0
60-80%*	3	1	1
>80%*	6	8	0
Not Applicable*	7	5	24

Fig 6: Licensed HN Provision: Mode of study

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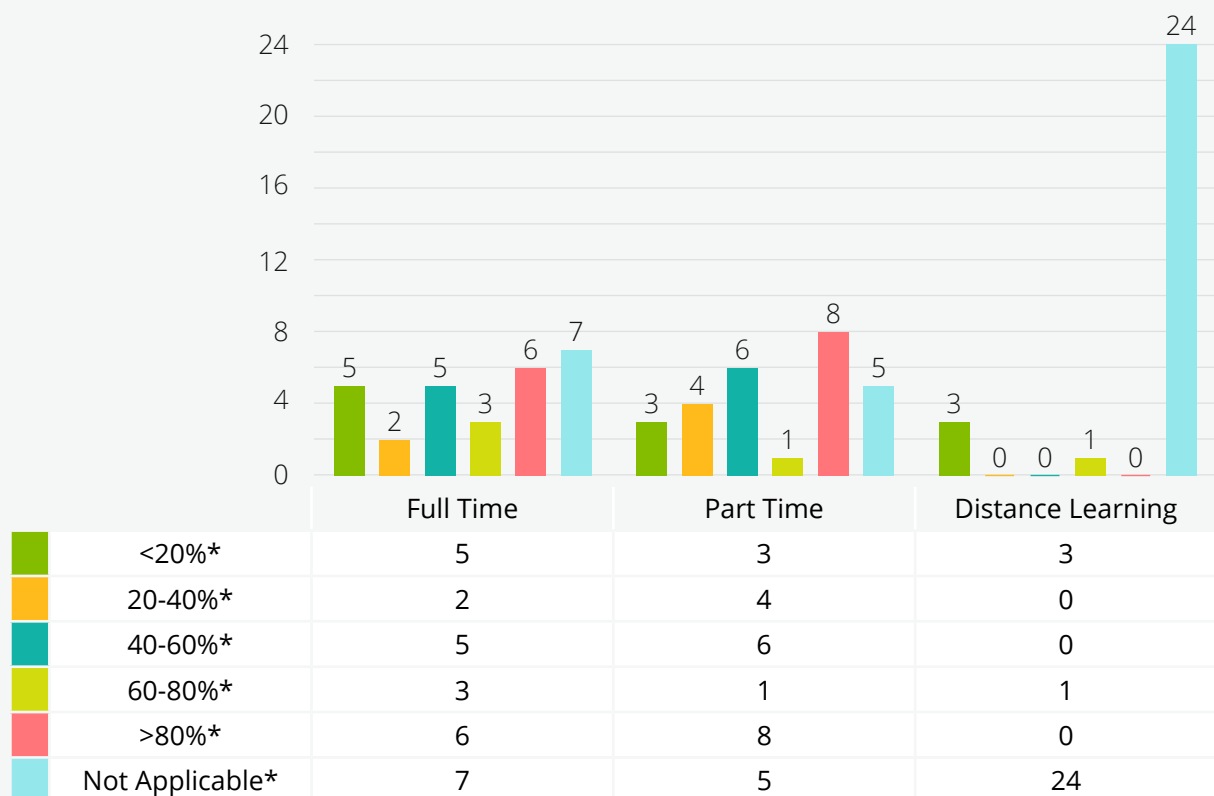
Licensed HN Programme Delivery

Mode and Structure

This should come as no surprise when we say that the majority of our HEI Partners (86%) continue to deliver face to face, while 11% through blended learning and only 4% virtually (Fig 7).

However, when it comes to delivery structure, it is slightly different, with 40% offering the traditional long and thin delivery approach, while not far behind is the short and fat structure (32%). Equally interesting to note is that 14% are also doing block teaching (Fig 8).

Mode of Delivery in 2021/22

- Face to Face (majority traditional classroom delivery)
- Online/Virtual (majority virtual including distance learning)
- Blended (roughly equal share of face to face and virtual)

3.6%
85.7%
10.7%
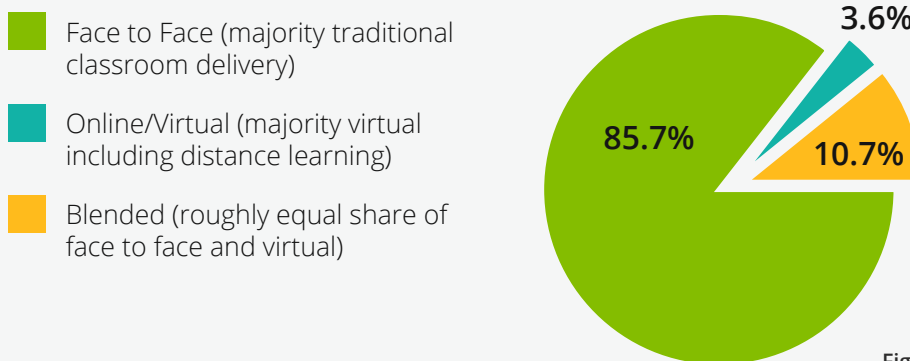
Fig 7: Licensed HN Mode of delivery

Delivery structure 2021/22

- Long and thin
- Short and fat
- Block teaching
- Other

14%
40%
14%
32%

Fig 8: Licensed HN Delivery Structure

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Each partner considers the delivery mode and structure carefully and takes a balanced approach to meet the needs of the students, employers and their own staff. The justifications shared by the partners on which they base their delivery mode and structure, include:
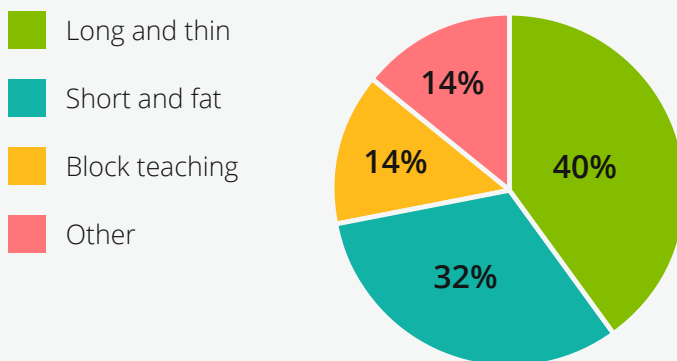
Face to face Delivery

- consistent performance, in terms of retention, achievement and access to support

- aids students' sense of belonging and community

- encourages far better engagement with the programme and leads to significantly better development of the wider skills

- student preference in terms of effectiveness, even though this may not necessarily be the most convenient method of engagement by students

- students value the contact and community derived from face-to-face academic and peer-peer support

- enables teachers to take account of individual learning requirements and build a supportive learning community, effectively scaffolding their learning

- need for the use of specialist resources, required for vocational courses, which tend to be based within physical environments

- leads to better interaction between the students and lecturer, particularly in tutorials

- highly specialised and technical courses demand face-to-face tuition, the history and trade-led nature of the courses means that people undertaking the course expect face-to-face contact

- students fall within the 'widening participation agenda' and as such welcome face to face interactive teaching.

Blended delivery

- works well with certain profiles of students

- allows students to be flexible and balance their other life commitments

- "Active Blended Learning (ABL)" combines face-to-face teaching with carefully designed digital experiences, allowing students to study at their own pace and in their own time.

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Long and Thin

- enables students to complete some modules per semester whilst also allowing time where students need to develop specific technical skills

- works well with day release for sponsored students as this allows three lessons per day and a good balance of assessment work throughout the year.

Short and Fat

- allows students to distribute the workload evenly, focus on fewer subjects at one time and facilitates knowledge growth across modules, as well as within them.

Block Teaching

- enables employers to release staff for specific periods rather than an amount of time per week

- supports industry requirements and aided higher recruitment offer than the full-time option

- an integral part of the curriculum model, allows for six intakes per year and greater flexibility for students

- enables students and staff to focus on one subject at a time, providing time and space for creative pedagogies that facilitate deep learning and the building of stronger student communities. Student feedback showed 93% claiming they enjoyed studying one module at a time and 90% of new students feeling they made the right choice.

Other

- employer demand for Higher Nationals has focused on a part-time, day-release approach to ensure that employers are not disadvantaged with staff away from the workplace for more than one day every week

- day-release combined with on-line evening sessions ensure that students demonstrate their commitment to both their employer and their programme of study by attending 'in their own time'

- courses such as Construction require face to face delivery combined with day-release because of the nature of the students attracted to this course, who are working full time and face to face day release mode enables them to return to education.

UK vs International Offer

Although the majority of our HEI partners offer only within the UK, 7% also offer internationally and some in more than one country, not just within the European Economic Area (EEA).

HEIs have always benefitted from international education, but the concept of transnational education is also not new. UK universities are growing their Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships around the world. In 2020–21, UK TNE[3] was reported in 228 countries and territories, with 510,835 students studying via UK TNE partnerships, a 12.7% increase from the previous year.

HEI Partners offering Licensed HN internationally

- Yes
- No

Yes - 7%

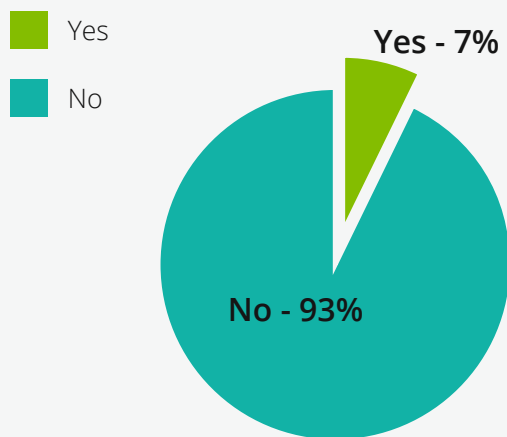No - 93%

Fig 9: Licensed HN offer UK vs international

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[3] The scale of UK higher education transnational education 2020–21

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Promotion of Licensed HNs

We all understand and appreciate the importance of promotion of products to allow our learners and our stakeholders to make informed choices and giving us an opportunity to engage with them. It should be noted that most partners are promoting the licensed HNs for progression as a ladder of learning or steppingstone towards degree awards, but some still do promote it as stand-alone programme, as well as exit awards.

Promotion of Licensed HNs

- Only on University website
- Both university and partner (if relevant) websites
- Not sure
- Not promoted on any website
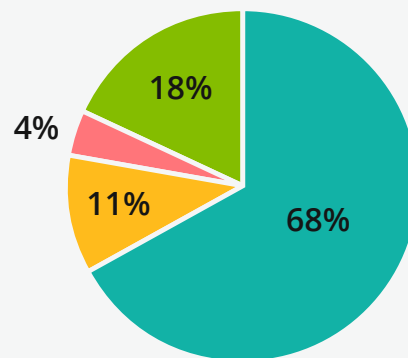
Fig 10: Promotion of Licensed Higher Nationals

But this is not necessarily the case with all our HEI partners. Although 67% do promote the programmes on their own website as well as on the partner's website too, a small minority (4%), do not promote the licensed HNs at all, while18% do so only on their own website and not on their partner's website. This may be because they only offer on campus and not with any collaborative partner at all.

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A Website is not the only platform that is being used for promotion, some of the other ways in which our HEI partners promote the Licensed HN programmes include:

- HE prospectus

- HE open days

- UCAS

- Social media campaigns

- Employability sections in the course specifications, which includes potential career paths and opportunities for further academic study

- direct communication with employers and employer networks, through e-flyers

- visit to schools, UCAS fayres, taster days

- via website on the dedicated university centre sections on the partner website

- faculty staff meeting student cohorts at partner colleges

- level 3 progression events and through the "Gold Applications" process for current level 3 learners on partner sites

- via specialist networks such as ELCAS Network for the Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence (MOD)

- various advertising campaigns including local billboards across the local towns

- activity on social media, particularly outreach and civic mission engagement

- courses specific to a trade are also promoted nationally and internationally through strong word-of mouthamongst the local trade and the alumni.

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Employer Engagement

It has been extremely encouraging to see so many exceptional approaches to employer engagement to support the vocational aspects of these programmes, giving students a wide experience to build and develop their attributes, employability skills and ready themselves for work.

Some activities that are common to employer engagement, such as Industry Advisory Boards (IABs), which may be titled differently across universities, share the same purpose of involving employers in curriculum design, creating assessment (including projects), building industry skills within the courses and to ensure content and skills required in contemporary workplaces are incorporated.

Most partners also have engagement with employers, inviting them as guest speakers to share the real work application of knowledge and to offer opportunities of work placements or industry placements for students. A number of our partners have work placement as core to the course, where students must engage with real life activities, solving real work problems and complete a work-based project. These projects or assessments are sometimes directly mapped to knowledge skills and behaviours of apprenticeship standards and require employer engagement and support. Where there is no requirement or reliance on work placements, teaching staff draw upon their up-to-date industrial experience to use in the delivery, building real-life case studies (linked to employer expectations), as part of assessment.

Several HEI partners have reported that quite a few students are on programmes as part of an apprenticeship and work in full time roles, allowing them to apply relevant learning to their workplace, while employer engagement happens as part of applied projects, visits from work-based assessors, who get firsthand feedback from employers. Teaching staff can also tap into the experience of apprentices and assessors experience and blend it with the academic teaching.

In addition to the common approaches used by most of our partners, there were some exceptional employer engagement examples shared with us and these include:

- field trips and site visits on an adhoc basis, such as animal science students visiting local wildlife parks

- partnerships with employers are being developed to provide direct industry input to the students on live projects in the Cyber Security field

- guest talks at lunch and learn sessions

- collaborating with local employers and local government agencies to enhance the curriculum linked to local initiatives

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- inviting employers to attend final project presentations, tied into live project competitions, which allow students to work on real commissions with local companies

- giving students opportunities to attend career fayres, general and industry specific or industrial engagement student conferences organised by the university itself, where professional bodies, contractors, consultancy agencies and sector skills councils are also invited

- development of new facilities in partnerships with IOTs and local employers where students have access to innovative technology and equipment to prepare for industry

- students given access to unique schemes created by the university, which enshrines the careers commitment, which includes access to guaranteed work experience opportunities, flexible and personalised career support tailored to their needs, including placement years which count towards their degree, unlimited access to digital tools, practice interviews, self-assessments, personalised CV feedback and Lifelong careers support after graduation. Students complete 12 months of sea service as trainees as part of HND in Nautical Science and Marine Engineering

- annual Expositions are organised, where students present relevant work. Local businesses attend and provide students with good developmental feedback

- following a recent employer forum, businesses are interested in working with students to develop live briefs for students.

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Licensed HN Completions and Achievements

Completion and achievement rates include HNC and HND, both on campus and at partner sites, as shown in Figure 11 and Figure 12.

Completions

Total completions in 2021/22 were up by 9% and majority of these were at partner sites, including HNC completions by 70% and HND by 41%. HEI partners have been working extremely hard to improve student outcomes and this is apparent from the improvements in the total achievement rates as compared to last year, which were down by 24% as compared to the year before.
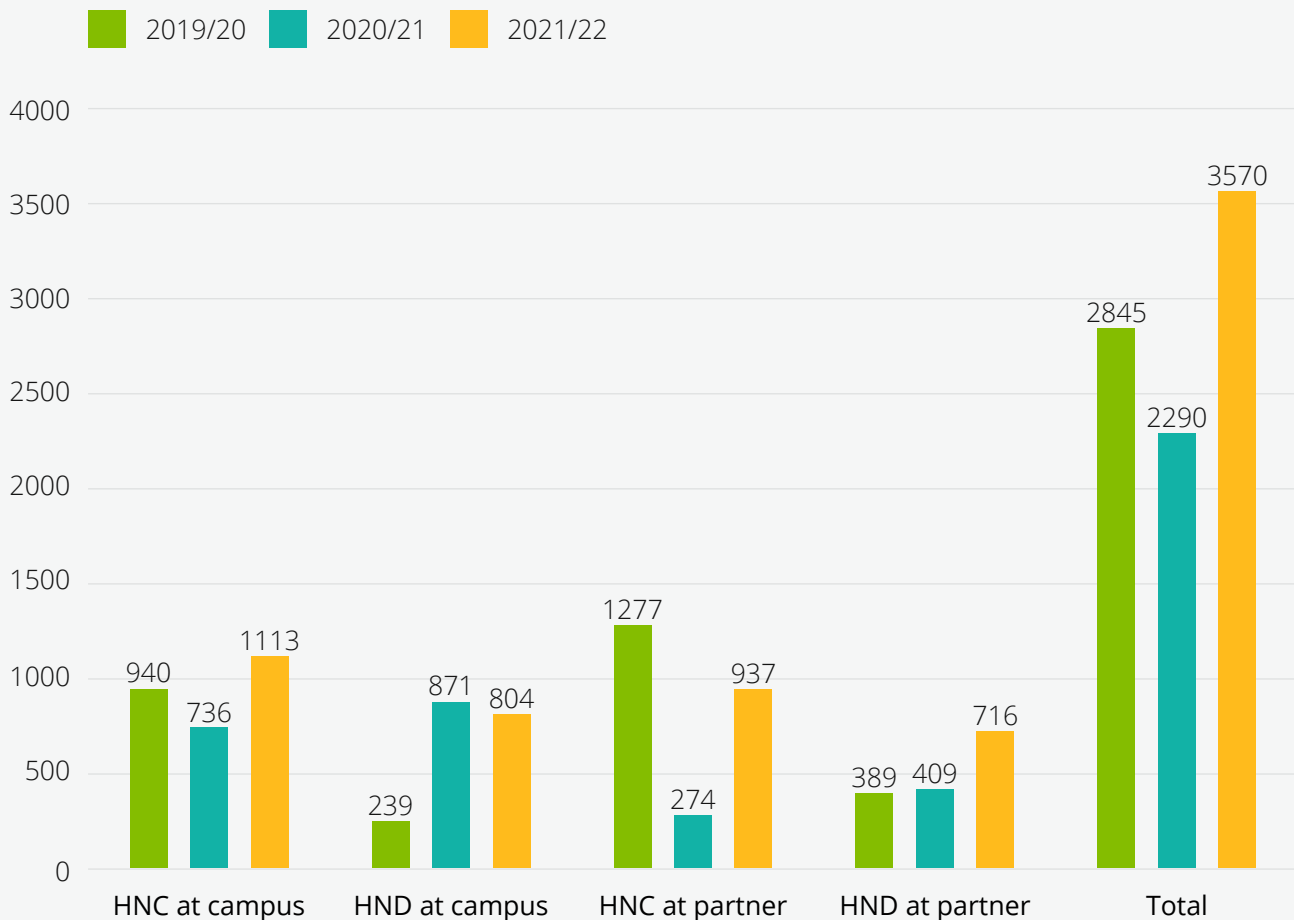
Licensed HN Achievements 2021_22

Fig 11: Licensed Higher Nationals Completions

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Achievements

The grade variation is much the same as last year, where pass at campus, both pass and merit grades at partner have almost remained stable but pass at partner sites slightly increased this year.

The reasons for these variations are also equally diverse, not all HEI partners grade students who progress to the next stage of their award, as reported by our partners. They are only awarded a grade at the exit point.

There are remnants of the impact of the pandemic still visible and have contributed to the grade distribution during 2021/22, however, the commitment of teachers and students still needs to be recognised and commended.
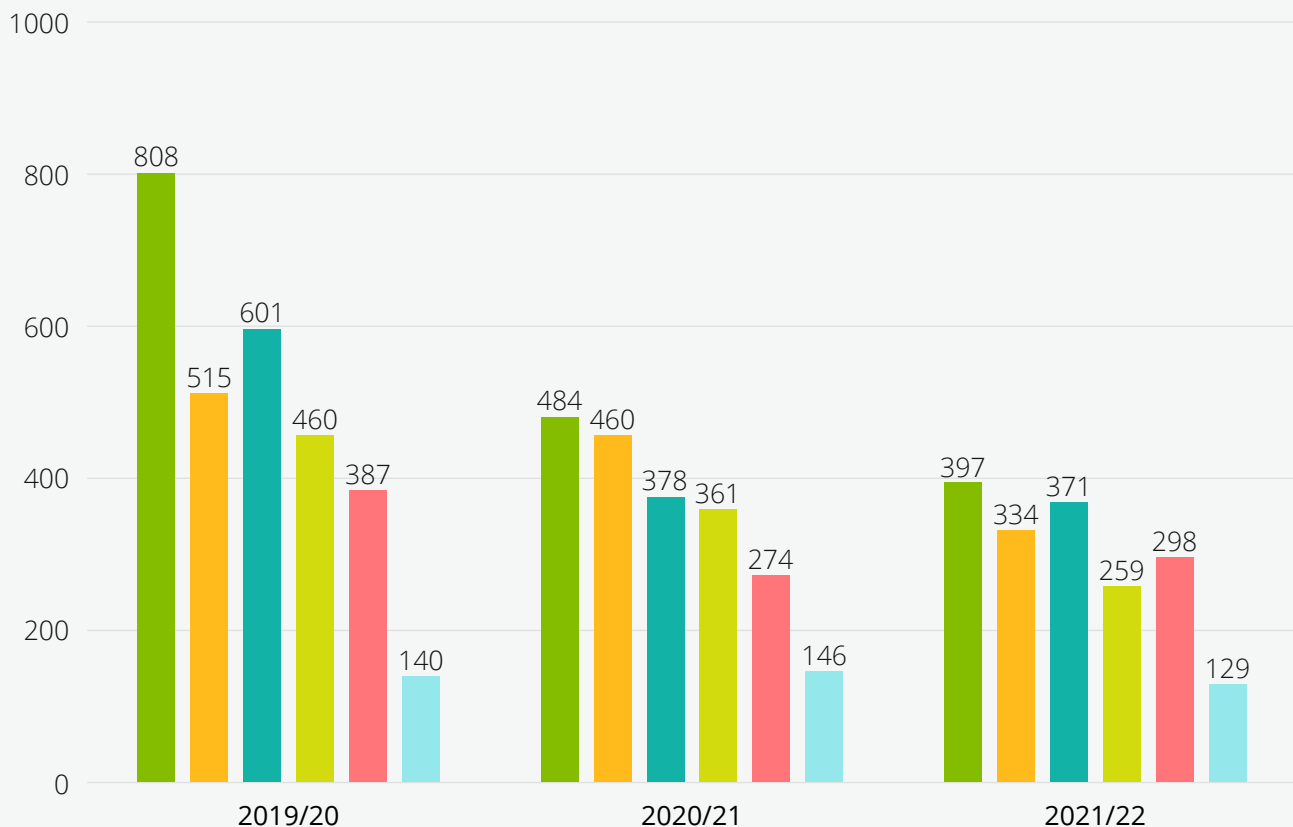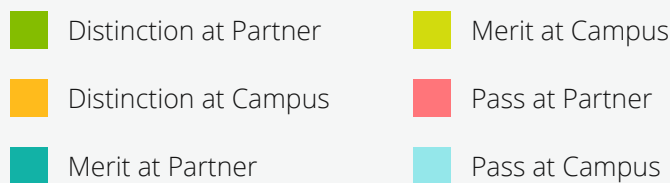
Licensed HN Completions 2021-22

Legend:
- Distinction at Partner
- Distinction at Campus
- Merit at Partner
- Merit at Campus
- Pass at Partner
- Pass at Campus

Fig 12: Licensed HN Grade Achievements

Licensed HN Progression

Progression refers to those students who **successfully progressed onto the next level of study**, either an HND following the HNC, or a Level 6 award (such as a degree top-up) following the HND. It should be noted that most partners are promoting the licensed HNs for progression as a ladder of learning or steppingstone towards degree awards, but some still do promote it as stand-alone programme as well as exit awards.

Last year we reported a continuing decline in students progressing from HNC to HND and HND to a degree programme, except at partner sites. The narrative is similar this year, if you were to compare from last year's, but there is some growth clearly visible in comparison to 2019/20 for progression from HNC to HND at Campus and at partner, and for HNC/HND to degree at partner in comparison to last year's figures, moving stealthily up-to the pre-pandemic progression there (Fig 13).
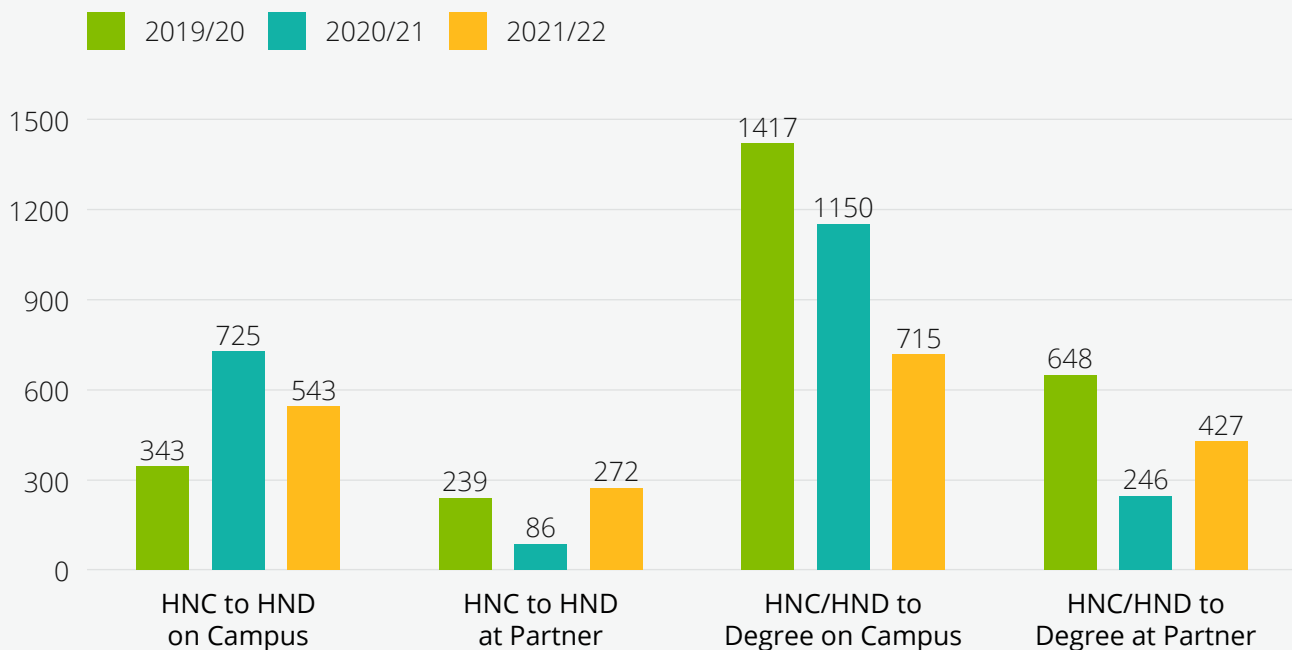
Licensed HN Progression over 3 years

- 2019/20
- 2020/21
- 2021/22

Fig 13: Licensed HN progressions since 2019/20

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Progression trend is complex and may appear to be on a decline when we look at the comparisons in Fig. 13, but this could be due to number of students achieving partial credit (average of 33% reported in 2021/22). Partial achievements were not fully reported in 2019/20 so it has been difficult to draw comparisons between the three years or see an accurate trend.

With the forever changing landscape in education and our own qualitative evidence, when speaking with our HEI partners, a ladder of learning approach is increasingly being promoted alongside apprenticeships. This helps support students' personal needs for learning and assessment and allows them to pursue their aspirations and balance work, social life, and study.

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Licensed HN Sector Areas

There has certainly been a change in the number of students in all sectors but more so in practice-based courses, such as Engineering. Engineering and Construction remain our top two performing sectors, with construction numbers growing by 30% (Fig 14). The enrolments in the Business and Administration sector have been stable over the last 2 years but certainly not reflecting the growth reported by HESA.

According to the HESA summary[4], Business and Management was the most popular subject among students, with 19% of all students enrolling in this subject, up from 17% in 2020/21 and 16% in 2019/20. First year enrolments in Business and Management increased by 12%. Combined and general studies saw the second largest percentage increase with 11%.

Despite the changes in the number of students in some sectors in the last three years, it should be noted there has been no change in the range of sectors being offered under licensed HNs.

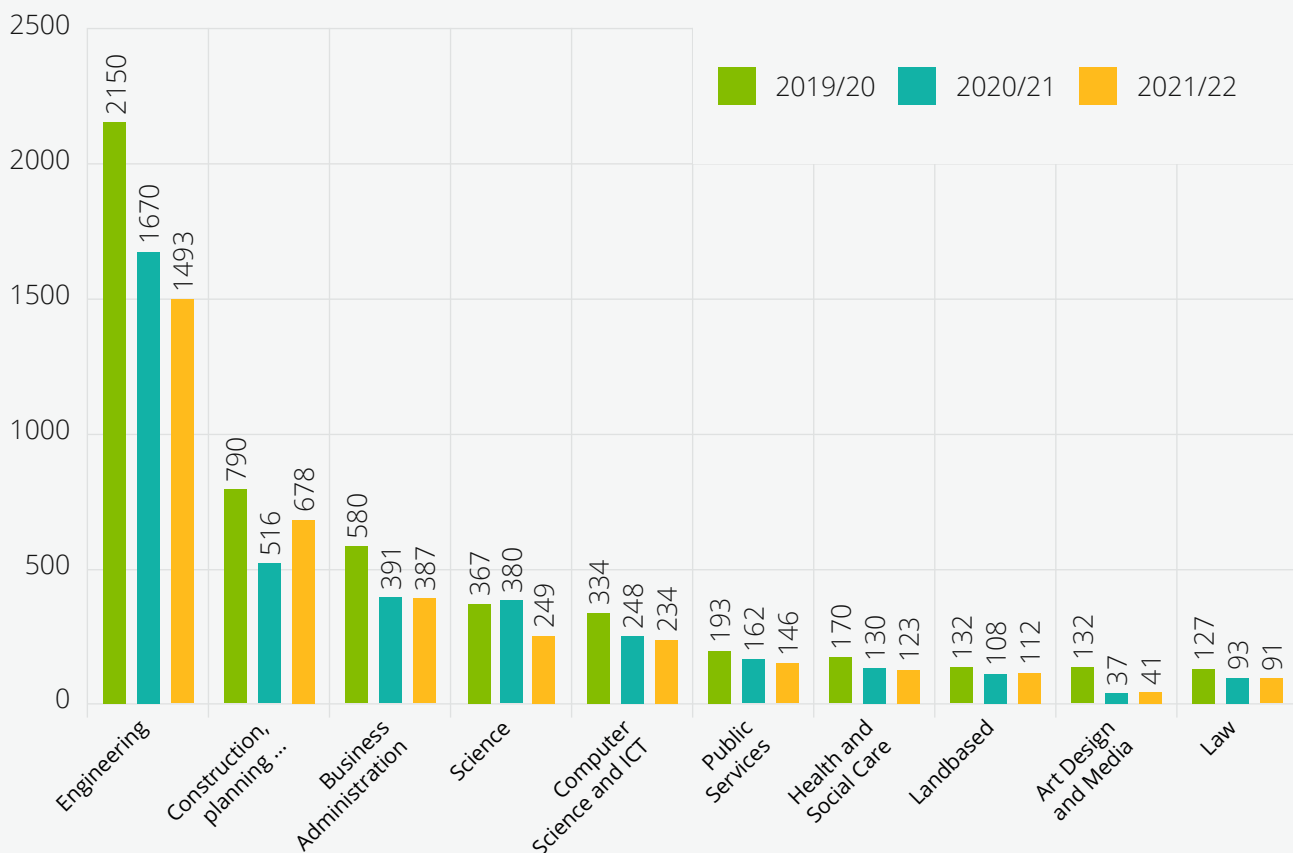## Licensed HN Progression over 3 years

Fig 14: Licensed HN Performance for top 10 sectors

[4] Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2021/22 - Subjects studied- https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2023/sb265-higher-education-student-statistics/subjects

Good Practice, Quality Assurance and Enhancements

Licensed HN partners are responsible for their own quality assurance (QA). However, as part of our QA, all partners submitted the IRR responses along with samples of External Examiner (EE) reports and shared the areas of best practices and feedback from EEs. This report gives us all an ideal opportunity to learn from shared experiences through these unique examples of best practice examples and EE feedback.

Evidence of best practice commended by External Examiners

- Changes made to assessments during Covid have been evaluated and where appropriate retained, where these have been shown to support learning and teaching outcomes

- Embedding work-based scenarios, based on live employers and circumstances in assessments and good range of appropriate assessment across the modules. This encourages engagement and enhance depth of student knowledge

- Examples of real work assessments and experience:

  - Redevelopment of a derelict and historic abattoir building as a live project, to provide additional space for BYC' activities, where students took full responsibility from initiation to completion of the project

  - Incorporating innovative artificial intelligence technology into delivery of the course by using AWS Deeplens to give learners hands on experience

  - Strategic management module allows students to work with local businesses as well as the Operations Management module which requires students to solve a real issue presented to them with the help of a local business

  - Gain skills around technology by creating digital portfolios

- Offering HNs as part of apprenticeships, which enable students to study while employed, supporting immediate application of knowledge in the workplace. Employers value the impact apprentices have on their workplaces, contributing well to the organisation and bringing a different and often innovative perspective, improving effectiveness and process

- Significant investment has been made in the provision of up-to-date and relevant resources. Lecture capture technology such as cameras which track movement of a lecturer and high-quality microphones allow for high quality recordings

- Drones and thermal imaging cameras have been purchased to assist the students in the development of skills such as site surveying

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- Collaboration of students with leading composites technicians to further their knowledge and experience in the field of carbon fiber as part of their project module

- Flexible delivery model, which involves each module being taught in a six-week block and only one module taught at a time. While this is intensive, it allows students to immerse themselves in the topic and focus on their learning and assessment

- Improving student support by assigning an academic coach who not only support students but are the first point of call for students

- Link Tutors visiting partner sites and providing support to local colleges

- Streamlining assessments and timelines to reduce load on students and allow holistic assessments

- Embedding employability skills and graduate attributes within programmes to enhance career progression in subject discipline context. This is likely to involve increased use of placements and engagement with local employers

- CPD sessions for both teachers and students are planned with external experts for the next academic year; topics covered will be salient to the sector and provide wider learning than the standard studio/classroom-based modules

- The programme prepares students to work competently and effectively in a range of clinical and professional work-based settings, employability skills are clearly embedded in the programme which enable students to develop and master graduate attributes necessary for academic and work success.

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Commendations from External Examiners

"I would like to commend the commitment and dedication shown by the Module Staff to the small number of students who remained on the programme. The staff made sure that the students were offered a quality provision despite the limited circumstances (small cohort etc)."

"I have evidenced more consistency in the following aspects, related to marking/grading assessments. 1. Published marking criteria for coursework elements 2. Provided contextual feedback against marks awarded 3. Clearly indicated marks awarded to each subsection, in agreement with the marking criteria."

"University staff dealt with all the challenges caused by COVID very well". In the delivery approval event for the HND, the External Panel Member praised the programme for its emphasis on employability, particularly with the opportunity to undertake a paid placement."

"Feedback and feedforward to students is exemplary, with clear guidance provided for students as to how to improve. Good practice in breaking down the grade boundaries and expectations. Providing an overview on what students can do better in future assignments to enhance learning and development."

"One of the qualities that was particularly evident from meeting with the staff team and course leader is the continuous process of review and reflection that informs and develops the curriculum, looking at how things might be improved or looked at differently. These qualities have helped develop a supportive response to the challenges of the covid pandemic that has been confirmed by students, and characterise a very positive culture and a shared concern for the continuing development of the curriculum and the student experience."

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Recommendations from EEs for further enhancements

External Examiners continue to be impressed with the efforts made by all the teams, but they also know that with even minor changes improved outcomes can be achieved for students, so they never shy away from making positive recommendations for enhancements. Here are some examples of such suggestions made in the EE reports we have sampled this year.

The **top five** recommendations we feel you may wish to consider, if not already implemented at your own HEI could be:

- The second marker should ideally **score independently** and average the score before coming to an agreeable score with the first marker. How the **grades are agreed needs to be made transparent**, this would ensure that the marking is transparent and equitable

- Improving communication with partner colleges for **organising structured moderation process**

- Feedback to students should be, **consistent** across all modules, **personalised and not generic**, applied at both campus and at partner college. **Detail feedback** would **enhance the student experience** to have more developed feedback feeding forward to future assessments

- **Range of assessment briefs** should be developed for new modules i.e., change exams, case studies and other assessments each year and not re use these as the set assignments for three years. This would enable tutors to **use previous assignments for group work** in class or post as examples and avoid the risk of students sharing answers to other cohorts

- **Statistical analysis of marks per module** should be collated to **draw comparisons**, identify any inconsistencies, and grade inflations.

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The following recommendations made by EEs are equally valuable and worth considering, too:

- The proximity of assessment submissions to be reconsidered specifically around April/ May assessment period. The students suggested that even a slight delay between assessments would be welcome to manage their workload

- The programme could potentially benefit from adding more (specialist) staff delivering the programme

- To consider conducting pre-exam boards to avoid dealing with issues of missed marks or borderline mark cases at the main exam board which will greatly reduce the duration of the boards

- I would make some observations regarding the documentation of their work for assessment: Students generally show good practice in the documentation of contextual or secondary research and the development of concepts. More evidence and documentation of their design process; compared to the relative sophistication of many students' analysis and conceptual thinking, the details of their specific design decisions over stylistic and structural considerations can seem relatively under-examined

- Providing general feedback to all students, compiled, and shared via teaching platforms

- Generic feedback can be useful for guiding students in learning from common mistakes and clarify examination outcomes

- Internal moderation is inconsistently applied. Recommendation to see more comments on the moderation and peer review paperwork if possible

- Module Conveners to review the comments made in the External Examiner's moderation sheets as these were often unaddressed; if there are specific arguments against these, it would be helpful if these were returned to the examiner to understand the rationale for this

- Succinct, and confined to comments on the script. In many modules, there are no model solutions to the assessments, and developing these would be welcome

- The Assessment Board being virtual and in mid-August is late. This inhibits communication and becomes process driven rather than quality enhancing

- It is important to see the Quality Improvement Plan completed and how HEI/college communicates with externals through the year sharing assessments and exams before being released to students to enable to respond to any feedback

- Communication from the course team to External Examiner should be timely to avoid any issues being identified late by the EE and further delay in resolving them

- The process of sharing student submissions and marks awarded in the university systems could be more standardised and somewhat streamlined for External Examiner access

- Allocation of part marks for student work should also be made available to the EE

- Application of an established online teaching and learning portal has been praised by EE and recommended to share across the organisation. It has been a successful initiative offering online learning to large group of students.

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Local Initiatives and Future Plans

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 growth and strengthening existing provisions as well as increasing the higher technical offer.

- Following feedback from employers and the Government's net zero initiative, investment was made in staff CPD to allow staff to ensure our programmes are kept up-to-date and current. Staff attended Passivhaus training to learn about a range of approaches to deliver net-zero-ready new and existing buildings optimised for a decarbonised grid and augmented for occupant health and wellbeing. Passivhaus buildings provide a high level of occupant comfort using very little energy for heating and cooling

- Curriculum linked to economic demands of the city, part of the Northern Powerhouse Initiative, boosting the local economy by investing in skills, innovation, transport, and culture

- Working closely with their local employers to develop HN provision that meets local needs. A suite of Sustainable Technology programmes being introduced as part of their contribution to the local Technology initiative

- Raising awareness of Higher National courses with Local Authorities in readiness for the 2023/24 Academic Year

- Implementing the institutional wide Education 2030 initiative, mirroring Level 6 delivery at Level 4 and Level 5, transitioning in 2023/24, and during 2022/23, working closely with the partner college to prepare for roll-out. To support this initiative, investments in specific new physical resources have been made, which include two new bespoke teaching spaces with high end PC and BYOD facilities, 2 IT collaboration desks and upgrades to the HE HUB used solely by under graduates

- In response to feedback from our employers, HEI is embedding issues that face industry such as EDI, mental health, and sustainability. This goes hand in hand with Learning Design Framework and Inclusive Real-World Curriculum as catalysts for achieving an inclusive working, social and learning environment that intentionally promotes a culture of equality of opportunity and fair treatment; acknowledges, values, respects and celebrates difference

- Specialised industries, such as shipping, require specialised initiatives, which is an inherently global business and will take students all over the globe. To initiate a real-life experience, close working with partners such as UK's largest cruise ship company and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary include Initiatives that stretch from joint recruitment activities to mental health initiatives and adapting the curriculum to meet specific skills

- An Entrepreneurial skills club is currently being developed, using students voice and the needs of local businesses as a guide.

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Future plans

We are not surprised to see that many of our HEI partners are exploring the options to offer **Higher Technical Qualifications** (HTQS) in 2023_24, as well as exploring the options to expand the higher apprenticeship provision to meet local needs.

This is in line with the government announcement on the major overhaul of higher technical education[5] in July 2020 by Education Secretary Gavin Williamson, to help plug skill gaps, level up opportunities, and support the UK's economic recovery. A report by Learning and Work Institute[6] highlights three emerging themes for what providers can do to excite employer demand and grow the market for higher technical education:

- strategic targeting of employers and a focus on supporting business growth rather than meeting short-term skills needs only

- availability of courses that develop specialist technical skills; course content to reflect changes in industry; delivery of short or modular provision; and learners' access to state-of-the-art equipment

- Development of the provider workforce through continuing professional development (CPD) for existing teaching staff; attracting new teaching staff; and CPD for staff who lead employer engagement activities.

It is clearly visible that the majority of our HEI partners have identified plans that are based on the above reports and include activities to enhance the offer linked to Higher Technical Education. Examples include:

- the programme portfolio is currently under review with the intention to ensure that HNC titles continue to provide for the technical and business-case priorities of our industrial employers, professional bodies, and sector-skills organisations

- exploring possibilities of incorporating HNC courses delivered at colleges into the University's Degree Apprenticeship structures

- short-term, the college will continue to engage with the HTQ process with regards to our licensed HNs. The college is also investigating a new programme route based around Mechatronics, a key area of focus for local, regional, and national employers. Long-term, we will be facilitating discussions with teams who currently deliver Foundation Degrees to see if a move to the model of HNC/HND is a more suitable alternative

- looking at several HTQ, HNC and HNDs. The HTQ process is quite intense for smaller institutions and so the HN route is attractive in providing curriculum already supported/developed/validated by employers

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[5] Major overhaul of higher technical education announced https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-overhaul-of-higher-technical-education-announced

[6] Making a market for the missing middle: Higher technical education https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/making-a-market-for-the-missing-middle-higher-technical-education/

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- have implemented new roles in each Faculty – Associate Dean Partnerships and Business Engagement and Head of Partnerships to work more closely with the partners particularly with a remit to increase the numbers studying HN provision and to work more closely with individual partners to ensure their range of courses reflect the most appropriate topics for their individual region

- to continue to provide HNs where there are good opportunities to progress to employment and further study

- to review the marketing of the HND programme and potential overlap between this programme and other programmes offered by us and our partner

- in 2021/22, we received funding from DfE for the development of HTQ provision at each campus. To date two courses have been approved and a third is in development. For 22/23, we have plans to grow that provision and will be bidding for further funding

- liaison will take place with faculty marketing departments to offer talks and visits to local colleges and schools. The number of applicant and discovery days are already on the increase. These events allow us to advertise the courses we run at the University and get school children thinking about career choices earlier, prior to college. We particularly highlight those of our courses which can result in Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) accreditation

- working with local Institute of Technology.

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Conclusion

The annual institutional review is part of our quality assurance process for Licensed Higher National partners. This gives us the confidence that our partners are delivering the Higher National programmes in line within both the academic regulations and the licence agreement. The trust that we have built with all valued partners gives us the faith that our trademark of 'Higher National' is protected in your hands.

The Level 4 and 5 provision has been going through a reform which is constantly evolving, and we see that our HEI partners value this opportunity to engage with Pearson to offer the Higher Nationals as part of their university programme or in collaboration with partners to support students, employers, and the local economy. These will continue to be offered as part of progression to Level 6 degrees or as part of higher apprenticeship programmes leading to degree apprenticeships.

This year the report is conclusive in that we received 100% of the returns from our partners. The report shows similar trends to the last three years, but clearly showing some signs of recovery towards the pre-pandemic position. With the introduction of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement, a recent report from Higher Education Policy Institute[7], Professor Edward Peck suggests that 'there is a wide range of evidence that adults want to pursue technical and vocational education at Levels 4 and 5, some of which relates directly to modular provision'. This is an opportunity for our partners to consider for adult learners. Another report from House of Commons[8] uses HESA data which demonstrate that 12% of first year undergraduate registrations are not for traditional three-year degrees.

The demand for level 4 and 5 education is not just in the UK, but also growing globally. Transnational Education (TNE) is on the rise as reported by Universities UK[9] where 162 UK universities have reported students studying through TNE, which is the highest to date. We have partners who are already delivering outside UK and consider this as a unique opportunity.

Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) remain at the forefront of Level 4 and 5 Education to meet the skills gap. At Pearson, we have a [wide range of HTQs](#) already approved and more in development to be approved and published soon. Licensed Higher National partners can offer these off the peg HTQs under IP Licence, either as stand-alone or as part of Higher Apprenticeships where applicable.

It must be said last year saw a decline in both starting new and completion of apprenticeships. This was due to the impact of Covid, however, the report on Apprenticeship Statistics for England[10] suggests that the number of starts increased in 2021/22 by 27,800, or 9%, from the number of starts in the previous academic year. Almost three quarters of apprenticeships started in 2021/22 were at advanced or higher level, with 43% of starts at advanced level and 30% at higher level. It is also interesting to note 47% of the apprenticeships started in 2021/22 were by people aged 25 and over.

Finally, we would also like to thank our HEI partners for taking the time and giving us valuable feedback for making improvements to our annual IRR.

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[7] [The Lifelong Loan Entitlement: a new way to meet demand for alternative modes of higher education](#)

[8] House of Commons Library, 2023, [Research Briefing; Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill](#), p.14

[9] [Another record-breaking year for UK transnational education as number of UK TNE providers continues to grow](#)

[10] [Apprenticeship statistics for England 2021/22](#)

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Feedback on 2020/21 Institutional Review Report and the new approach of data collection for 2021/22

Pearson takes pride in its values and two of these are strongly represented in our quest to improve the IRR. Firstly, **"We ask why"**, we challenge the status quo by challenging ourselves and secondly, **"We deliver quality"** by holding our customers and consumers in the highest regard.

We are grateful to all our partners for giving us valuable feedback on our report for 2020/21 and our new approach to collecting data for 2021/22. As a result of this feedback, we have been able to challenge ourselves and this report is based on the lessons learnt from your feedback and every effort will be made to consider all suggestions for improvement on the new approach and amendments will be made to next year's IRR questionnaire.

The feedback gave us some great insights and we can now share some of the key themes of the feedback and lessons learnt.

IRR Report feedback from partners

- The report has been instrumental in contributing to our business and curriculum planning

- The format of the report was very clear. It was useful to see that some of the trends in our student registrations are in line with those across the sector

- The report provides a useful insight into the sector and enables us to identify areas of good practice and trends across the various regions which is a useful benchmark

- The report is very easy to read and suitably succinct and focused. The graphical presentation of data is very clear. Where these reports are presented to university committees for information, I can see that committee members would be happy to read a report of this size and format in full. The report overall provides a good indicator of our experience of delivering this provision in comparison to the whole sector

- Last year's report was very valuable to the university and our collaborative partner, Leicester College. In particular, the narrative related to trends and future plans. Provided assurance that DMU and its partners are thinking about issues and opportunities that are at the forefront of our institutional plans.

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IRR Report suggestion

This suggestion has been shared with the responsible team for consideration.

- It would be helpful if the site enabled us to pull reports of data already entered into EOL for updates and cross-checking processes throughout the year.

IRR questionnaire feedback and suggestions for improvement

- All **_suggestions for improvement_** will be taken into consideration and where possible applied to the IRR questionnaire for 2022/23

- The online survey is clear and easy to complete. The new target submission date also fits more conveniently with our Registry Department and business cycle

- It was useful to be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft templates. It is also extremely useful to have the Word document of Part B to complete before having to complete the online form

- There were no difficulties with Part B. **_However, our student records data team felt that they had to make some assumptions regarding the data required for Part A, so clearer guidance would be helpful, particularly in relation to the parameters for the last column regarding numbers progressing from an HNC/HND to a degree_**

- At curriculum level we have not had to provide this information before to Pearson but there does not seem to be a problem in providing this information now or in the future

- The communication regarding the new format was useful in helping us to plan and gather contributions from colleagues prior to completing the online form. The extended deadline also helped with ensuring this information could be collated

- Some of the information regarding students' stats should already be available to Pearson by access to the information uploaded to EOL

- **_Why has section 3 (student recruitment and profile) in the qualitative section not been included in the quantitative part. As an Institution under licence in order to complete this part I need to go to another department of the University, and it would have been easier if this section was part of that form_**

- Confusing that had to do one part online and another through a form - much easier to do everything using form

- Not as simple as before but not too onerous and if it improves data collection across the sector this can only be a positive

- I like this new system - especially the opportunity to draft responses prior to entering them via MS Forms

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- The provision of the Word format in order to collect the information in advance of the upload is very helpful

- I welcome the widening of the scope of the questions

- I welcome the new format of the report (both the qualitative and quantitative sections) and find it to be more accessible than previous iterations

- ***Whilst the deadline of 13 Jan 23 was appreciated, it has been difficult obtaining the relevant data/information from different departments, especially over the Christmas period when the university shut down. Having a deadline before Christmas was more beneficial in that regard***

- Splitting qualitative and quantitative responses seems to be a sensible approach. ***Some of the questions in this questionnaire were difficult to answer with a very diverse range or courses and cohorts. Age, employment, and study modes can vary depending on an individual course and location. An online form is a welcome change but being able to save progress and a copy of the final responses would be helpful***

- Being provided with the questions in a Word document is invaluable in collating and preparing responses ready to submit online. ***I have noted, however that the numbering of questions does not map to the online form***

- The approach is positive. The process has been clear and easy to use

- The approach is sound, as it provides the opportunity to further reflect on the quality and outcomes of these collaborative programmes with the partner college

- ***For Part A – it could be helpful for institutions to include data on students who have withdrawn from the course or who have taken a break in learning, as well as students who had achieved partial credit***

- ***It would also be helpful to add comment sections in all question areas (for example, to account for different courses and different student profiles)***

- ***I think it would be easier to have everything in one document, rather than two separate ones***

- We very much welcome the new qualitative approach which provides our partner the chance to talk at greater length about practice on HN provision.

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Key dates for 2023

Dates	Notes
w/c 17th April 2023	Schedules for 2023/24 will be released for you to submit projected numbers for each programme. Please take this time to review your offer and complete relevant forms
End of April	Q2 newsletter
30th June 2023	2023/24 Schedules to be returned
27th July 2023	**Deadline** for New/Additional programme requests. You can submit the approval request any time but for us to ensure that programmes are approved for September 2023 delivery we **must** receive the approval form and all relevant evidence by this date.
End of July	Q3 newsletter
30th September 2023	**Deadline** for recording of learner outcomes in Edexcel online. Grades, achievements, and withdrawals for all learners expected to complete a programme/ward in the academic year 2022/23 must be completed by this date.
w/c 16th October 2023	Release of IRR questionnaire for 2022/23
End of October	Q4 newsletter
15th November 2023	Registration **deadline** for Academic intake 2023/24

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