



Pearson

Annual Institutional Review Report 2023/24

**Pearson Licensed Higher
National Qualifications**



Introduction

In the evolving landscape of Higher Education in the UK, Licensed Higher Nationals (HNs) stand out as a distinctive educational offering that has earned the appreciation of over 30 university partners in the UK.

What is Pearson's Licensed Higher Nationals Agreement?

The Pearson Licensed Higher Nationals Agreement offers a unique opportunity for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with Degree Awarding Powers (DAP) to provide Higher National Qualifications, while maintaining complete control over delivery, assessment, quality, awarding, and certification.

Partners can continue to offer Licensed HN programmes flexibly while upholding the integrity of the Higher National brand by providing the skills-based training needed by both students and employers, thereby benefiting the local and regional economy.

Since 2004, over **170,000 students** have embarked on this educational journey with Pearson under the licence agreement, with our 30+ university partners and 77 Further Education subsites. The origins of Licensed Higher Nationals can be traced back to the enactment of the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, which abolished the distinction between polytechnics and universities, granting polytechnics university status and the authority to award their own degrees, thus creating a unified higher education system.

With the support of our partners and stakeholders, we aspire for this unique Pearson offering to become the preferred solution for all HEIs seeking to enhance their level 4 and 5 programmes, broaden participation, provide flexible, skills-based study options for students, and meeting the skills gap.

What is the Annual Institutional Review Report?

The Annual Institutional Review Report (IRR) is a crucial component of our yearly quality assurance and governance process. It allows the (Pearson) Licensed HN Team to gather student and sector data provided

by our partners and gain valuable insights into the evolving trends, challenges, and opportunities in the higher education sector. All qualitative and quantitative data* is then anonymously incorporated into our annual report. Partners appreciate the IRR report as it aids them in developing or updating their strategies, identifying and implementing the most appropriate innovative practices, and creating efficiencies where needed.

The 2023/24 IRR integrates both qualitative and quantitative data from **29 partners with active registrations during the year**. The **quantitative data** includes student registrations, profiles, delivery, achievement, and progression, while the **qualitative data** provides insights into the reasons behind any changes. It also highlights how HEIs promote their programmes to drive student recruitment, engage with employers to enhance curricula and assessments, implement innovative practices, and maintain quality to achieve optimal student outcomes and foster progression. This comprehensive approach allows us to compare our findings with both our internal data and HESA's.

* No identifiable information is included in this report

Introduction	Executive Summary	2023/24 Highlights	Licensed HN Registrations, Completions, Achievements and Progression	Licensed HN Programme Delivery	Promotion of Licensed HN	Employer Engagement	Licensed HN Sector Areas	Good Practice, Quality Assurance, Enhancements and Future plans	Conclusion	Additional Findings	Feedback on IRR and data collection	Key dates for 2025	2			
--------------	-------------------	--------------------	--	--------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------	--------------------------	---	------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------	---	--	--	--



Executive Summary

We appreciate our partners' active participation and timely data submissions, achieving a **100%** response rate again this year despite minor changes to our request. These adjustments have improved data comparison and allowed us to share individual insights. This collaboration has resulted in a comprehensive report, highlighting key trends in the Licensed HN provision over the past year, and ensuring the protection of our 'Higher National' trademark.

The findings of this report clearly show the value our partners place on the opportunity to collaborate with Pearson and their local FE colleges. This partnership enables the integration of Higher Nationals into their diverse university programmes, benefiting students, employers, and the local economy. The Licensed HN programmes continue to serve as pathways to Level 6 degrees or as crucial components of higher apprenticeship schemes, leading to degree apprenticeships.

Licensed HNs are undoubtedly making an impact, with registrations increasing by **30%** in 2023/24, totalling **6,637**. Additionally, **48%** of our partners report stable recruitment for Level 4 and 5 Licensed HNs, both at universities and in collaboration with local colleges. It is reassuring to note that **97%** of External Examiners confirmed that student performance standards meet expectations, indicating strong alignment with educational standards and all unanimously

agree that the standards for each Licensed HN programme are appropriate, reflecting high confidence and compliance with professional body standards.

Licensed HEI partners are strategically navigating the evolving landscape by investing in digital technologies, forming local sector-wide collaborations to tackle shared challenges and foster innovation, and engaging with global partners to enhance research and educational opportunities through transnational education initiatives.

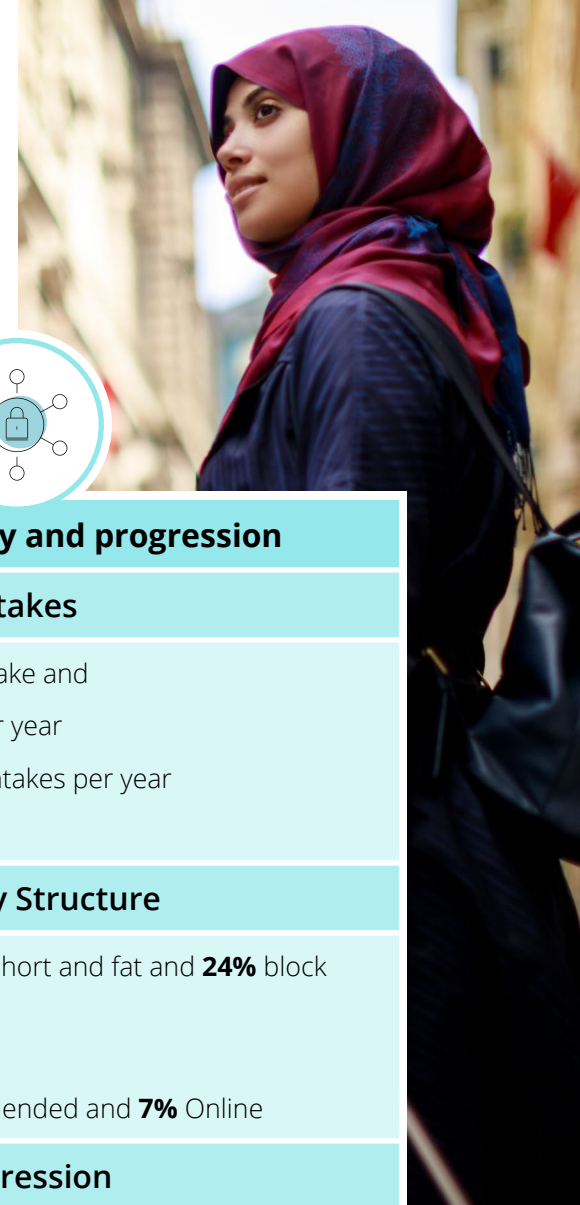
Most partners are conducting curriculum reviews, making adjustments to enhance progression opportunities, and adding new courses, including Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), to expand their offerings. They are also exploring new collaborative partnerships both within the UK and internationally.

Despite these challenges, they remain committed to growing their current portfolio, and we are dedicated to supporting each partner in finding solutions and navigating these turbulent times together. Partners have expressed their gratitude for the support and advice provided throughout the year, which has helped improve their provision. They appreciated the assistance in delivering the programmes and highlighted the positive impact of the support and visits.

One partner especially highlighted that *the visit by the Licensed HN team was extremely valuable, which facilitated valuable discussions and guidance on curriculum review and revalidation timelines. The overall process was described as smooth, with clear guidance and helpful reminders. The annual event in Manchester was noted as particularly beneficial, especially for new staff working with Pearson programme.*

Introduction	Executive Summary	2023/24 Highlights	Licensed HN Registrations, Completions, Achievements and Progression	Licensed HN Programme Delivery	Promotion of Licensed HNs	Employer Engagement	Licensed HN Sector Areas	Good Practice, Quality Assurance, Enhancements and Future plans	Conclusion	Additional Findings	Feedback on IRR and data collection	Key dates for 2025	3			
--------------	-------------------	--------------------	--	--------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	--------------------------	---	------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------	---	--	--	--

Licensed HN Highlights 2023/24



Partners, programmes and Registrations

Partners

- **Over 30** Active HEI partners
- **77** partner sub-sites

Programmes

- **544** approved programmes YTD
- **458** programmes under TM Licence
- **45** programmes under IP Licence
- **41** HTQ programmes approved

Registrations

- Total 5610 **up 29%**
- HNC on campus **up 0.45%**
- HNC at partner **down 2.59%**
- HND on campus **up 120%**
- HND at partner **down 30%**



Sector variance in registrations

Sector variance from 2022/23 to 2023/24

- Engineering **(-7%)**
- Business Administration Law **(+61%)**
- Construction and Planning **(-1%)**
- Science **(+3%)**
- Computer Science **(+58%)**
- Health and Social Care **(+61%)**
- Public services **(+26%)**
- Landbased **(-2%)**
- Education and Training **(+19%)**
- Sports and leisure **(+80%)**
- Travel and Tourism **(+50%)**
- Art Design and Media **(+76%)**
- Early Years **(-32%)**
- Hospitality and Catering **(+58%)**



Intakes, delivery and progression

Intakes

- **79%** of HEIs offer one intake and
- **24%** offer two intakes per year
- **7%** offer three or more intakes per year
- **3%** offer Roll on Roll off

Delivery Structure

- **55%** long and thin, **21%** short and fat and **24%** block teaching

Mode

- **76%** Face to Face, **17%** Blended and **7%** Online

Progression

- HNC to HND on campus **up 63%**
- HNC/D to Degree on campus **down 7%**
- HNC to HND at partner **down 2%**
- HNC/D to degree at partner **up 20%**

Table of contents

Introduction	2	Employer Engagement	20
Executive Summary	3	Licensed HN Sector Areas	22
2023/24 Highlights	4	Good Practice, Quality Assurance, Enhancements and Future plans	24
Licensed HN Registrations, Completions, Achievements and Progression	7	External Examiner Review	24
Student numbers	7	External examiners: Commendations and Recommendations further enhancements	25
Student Profile: Age	11	Future Plans	30
Student Profile: Employment status	12	Conclusion	32
Student Profile: Mode of delivery	13	Additional Findings	35
Licensed HN Completions and Achievements	14	Accessing Licensed HN Support and Resources	35
Completions	14	Feedback on IRR and data collection	36
Achievements	14	Feedback on 2022/23 Report	36
Licensed HN Progression	15	Suggestions for improvement on data collection in 2024/25:	36
Licensed HN Programme Delivery	17	Key dates for 2025	37
Mode and Structure	17		
Promotion of Licensed HNs	19		

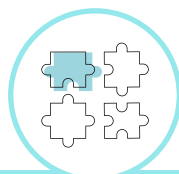


Impact of Licensed HN in 2023/24 as compared to 2022/23



Registrations

- ⬆ HND on campus **up by 120%**
- ⬆ HND at partner **down by 29%**



Completions

- ⬆ HNC on campus **up by 32%**
- ⬆ HND at partner **down by 13%**



Achievement Grades

- ⬆ Pass grade **up by 22%**
- ⬆ Merit grade **up by 1%**
- ⬆ Distinction grade **up by 7%**



Progression

- ⬆ HNC to HND on campus up by **63%** but down at partner by **2%**
- ⬆ HNC/D to degree on campus down by **7%** but up at partner by **20%**

Licensed HN Registrations, Completions, Achievements and Progression

Student numbers

Enrolments for licensed Higher National (HN) programmes experienced a period of recovery for both Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) on campus, with a particularly dramatic increase for HND on campus (Figure 1). Meanwhile, both HNC and HND on partners sites have declined further; nearly 3% for HNC and a significant 29% for HND.

These results closely align with the higher education enrolment data reported by HESA for 2022/23¹. The figures indicate a slight decline (2%) of overall students at Degree level, although the number of student enrolments at levels 4 and 5 remains stable.

According to the recent UCAS Report², the number of applications to Level 4 and 5 courses has decreased by 12%, from 46,725 in 2019 to 40,920 in 2023. The number of applicants placed into Level 4 and 5 courses has decreased by 25%, from 21,670 to 16,195, indicating that the decline in placements exceeds the decrease in applications.

Most of the Level 4 and 5 applications in 2023 were for Level 5 courses, with 29,520 applications representing 72% of the total at this level. Of these, 37% resulted in 10,935 placed applicants. During this period, the number of courses listed on UCAS also decreased by around 15%.

HESA data³ further shows that enrolments in Foundation Degrees or HNC/HND across the UK have decreased from 57,230 in 2018/19 to 45,200 in 2022/23.

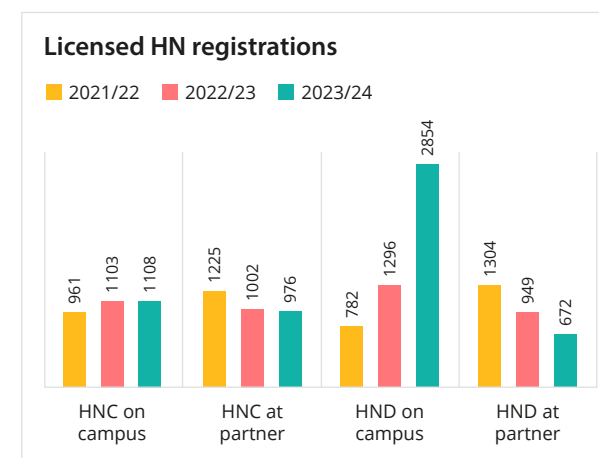


Figure 1: Licensed HN Registrations

¹ HESA Student statistics [Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2022/23](#) | HESA We were unable to draw comparisons for 23/24 HESA data as it is not published yet,

² [Where Next? Who applies to Level 4 and 5 qualifications?](#) ³ [Where Next? Who applies to Level 4 and 5 qualifications?](#)



Reviewing the distribution of registrations within our internal systems, HND trademark registrations are leading, which is not surprising. Out of 544 approved programmes, 468 fall under the TM Licence category, primarily because the TM licence agreement has been available since the inception of this offer. However, programmes under the IP licence are gaining traction, particularly with HTQs.

Programme	Registrations 2022/23	Registrations 2023/24
HNC TM Licence	2129	2019
HND TM Licence	2143	4414
HNC IP Licence	152	181
HND IP Licence	45	23

Table 1 Pearson registration trend by award

When asked about the future direction of Licensed HNs, including recruitment status, **48%** of partners reported **stability** compared to **31%** last year, **21%** noted an **increase** compared to **31%** last year, while a concerning **31%** indicated a decline in 2023/24, equaling 2022/23. Despite this, there is growing optimism among our partners about improving numbers in the coming year. Despite the current situation, our partners are increasingly optimistic about improving numbers in the coming year. This hopeful perspective is fueled by policy decisions that, while introducing some uncertainty, are also reshaping the Higher Education landscape. Although some view these changes as challenges, others see them as opportunities to expand their offerings and address the skills gap. This includes offering HTQs, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, and micro-credentials and credit accumulation.

Key reasons for changing enrolment trends as identified by partners:

Increased recruitment:

- support from the senior leader team and investment by the IoT enabled us (to) build extraordinary resources which were then used by the team as a recruitment tool, resulting in (an) increase in student numbers.
- an increasing number of Degree Apprenticeships across the local area and expansion of qualifications offered by the University.
- establishment of a new online subsidiary organisation focusing on consistent high-quality delivery of online courses and renewed emphasis on marketing and recruitment.
- targeted recruitment at specific international markets and the flexible model of delivery we offer in addition to multiple intakes later in the academic year.

Stable recruitment:

- consolidation in a dynamic market where some courses are declining while new subject areas are being introduced or are in a growth phase, resulting in an overall balance of stability.
- the programmes offering a clear pathway for existing professionals to formalise and advance their skills and qualifications.
- the programmes serving as a progression route for many who go on to complete full degrees and more. Some of our lecturing staff have followed this route and are happy to share their experiences with students and industry.

- the route also being chosen by those who need opportunities to progress if they lack the qualifications to apply for full degrees or are unsure of the discipline they wish to pursue.
- new partnerships being developed to increase numbers in 2024/25 by offering Level 4 and 5 courses.
- apprenticeships with HNCs, which have significantly increased and are expected to continue, replacing part-time attendance modes. Small provisions at collaborative partners may be reviewed for viability moving forward.
- extension of our licence to include IP, in addition to the existing TM. This, along with existing HTQs, are expected to be attractive with the approaching LLE.
- other HN usage aligns with the trends and needs observed by the institutions for which the University validates delivery. Partner colleges aim to become the learning destination of choice and are looking to change the delivery model of HE provisions, including developments in micro-credentials and short courses, and developing Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) in key areas to meet local workforce demands.
- most students sponsored by employers with whom we have long-standing relationships.

Decline in recruitment:

- programme withdrawals by partners.
- partly due to HEIs lowering tariff levels.
- uncertainty surrounding the apprenticeship levy.
- the introduction of several integrated foundation year programmes requiring fewer UCAS points and competitive universities accepting lower offers to fill their courses.
- students may prefer to pursue bachelor's degrees, given the entry requirements and funding options available.
- challenges in recruiting students in the FE and HE sectors, particularly international students, leading to some programmes not reaching viable intake numbers.
- the trend observed both nationally and locally across HE and FE provisions.
- the appeal of three-year university courses, interest in Higher Technical Qualifications and apprenticeships, and limitations in QA reporting for small cohorts.
- changing patterns in student applications to HE providers may also be a factor.

Discrepancies in Registrations

As in the previous year, we have noticed slight inconsistencies in the registration numbers reported by HEIs in this year’s IRR (Figure 2).

Total registrations in 2023/24 as on Edexcel Online (EOL) were 6637 as compared to 5610 reported in the IRR.

However, improvements in data collection by individual programmes this year made it easier to identify and share these discrepancies with our partners, which was well-received.

The disparities between IRR and Edexcel Online data will always be a challenge due to the tripartite relationship between us, HEI partners, and their franchise arrangements with local providers. Contributing factors include variations in enrolment dates, HEIs offering multiple intakes within a year, the implementation of nested programmes, and occasionally addressing HNC/HND registrations at a later stage.

Additionally, ongoing staff turnover continues to contribute to delays and discrepancies. To address these challenges, we continue to provide support to HEIs through regular catch-ups, EOL training, and the development of a comprehensive collection of resource articles designed to assist with Licensed Higher National (HN) administration. This proactive approach has been well received and ensures the provision of accurate data for both parties, strengthening our partnership.

We kindly ask our partners to keep reporting any inaccuracies in student registrations, and we will collaborate to reduce these imbalances or discrepancies.

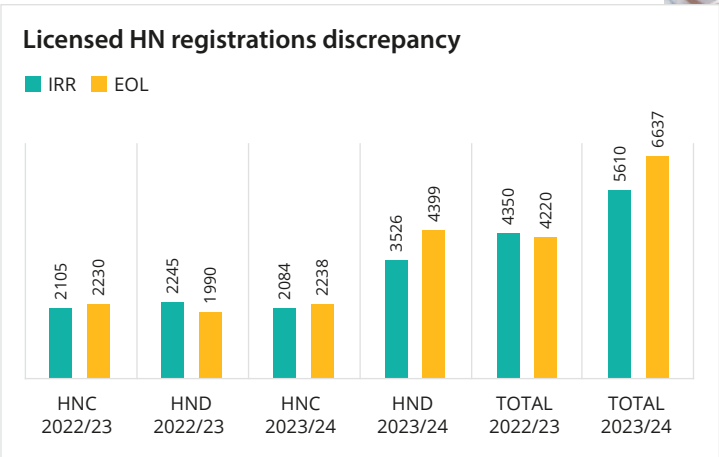


Figure 2: Licensed HN Registration discrepancies



Student Profile: Age

As illustrated in Figure 3, 61% of Licensed HN students are in the 18-24 age group, 16% are in the 25-29 age range, and despite a slight decline, 21% are over 30. The increase in the 18-24 age category compared to the previous year suggests that the flexible courses at levels 4 and 5, along with flexible delivery options introduced by our partners, are influencing student choices in this age group. This data aligns with HESA student statistics (Figure 4), which indicate that 60% of students are under the age of 20, and 20% are aged 30 and above.

However, it is interesting to note that as per the recent UCAS report⁴, mature applicants were more likely to apply for Level 4 or 5 courses compared to younger applicants.

The application rates are as follows:

- 4.4% for 18-year-olds,
- 6.2% for 19-year-olds,
- 7.1% for 20-year-olds,
- 6.6% for 21–24-year-olds,
- 7.6% for 25–29-year-olds,
- 8.3% for 30–34-year-olds, and
- 8.9% for those aged 35 and above.

Since 2019, the number of applicants for Level 4 and 5 courses has decreased across all age groups, except for 18-year-olds, where the numbers have remained stable due to an increasing population in this age group.

Applicants of all ages were more likely to apply independently to Level 4 and 5 courses, compared to Level 6+. Over a third (9,340) of applicants with Level 4 and 5 choices **apply independently** of a school or college, so do not have the support that teachers and advisers offer. Around a **quarter** of applicants to only Level 6+ apply independently.

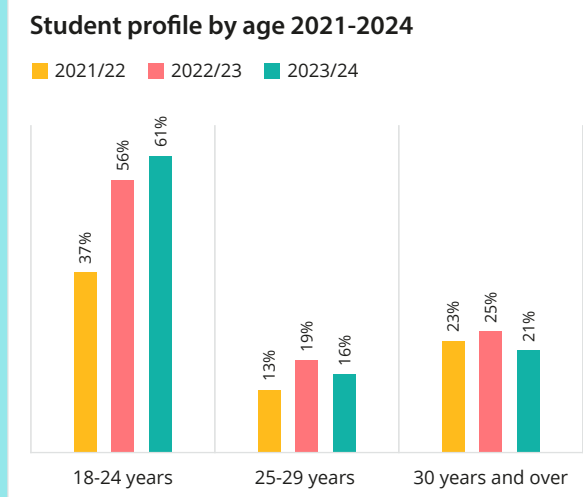


Figure 3: Licensed HN Student Profile by age

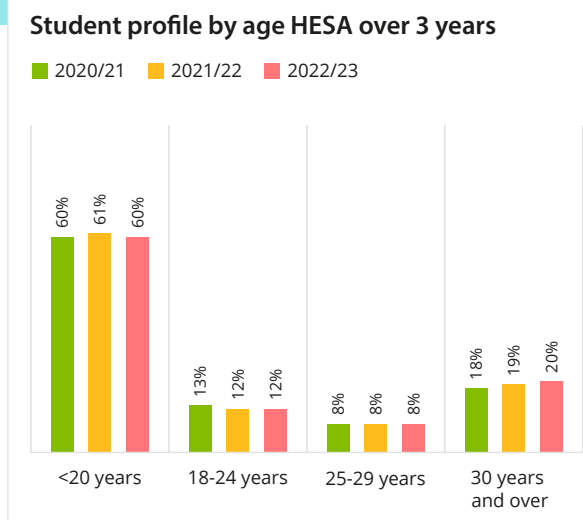


Figure 4: HESA Student statistics by age

⁴ Where Next? Who applies to Level 4 and 5 qualifications?

Student Profile: Employment status

Last year's responses to this question showed a clear variation in perspectives regarding employment, as many students typically work while pursuing their studies. Since not all HEIs could provide this data last year, we excluded this question this year.

Nonetheless, according to the recent UCAS report⁵, Level 4 and 5 applicants were likely to be employed part-time or arriving from full-time education (based on survey of 2024 applicants)

- 32% in part-time employment
- 31% in full-time education
- 18% currently unemployed
- 15% employed full-time
- 1% retired

The escalating cost-of-living crisis is forcing university students to increase their part-time work hours. The student academic experience survey⁶ indicates that 55% of students are now engaging in paid work to support their studies, up from 45% the previous year (Figure 5).

Research conducted by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) think tank and Advance HE⁷ in 2023 revealed that over three-quarters (76%) of university students believe the cost-of-living crisis has had a detrimental impact on their studies. The rise in the average number of hours spent in employment could potentially affect students' class attendance and study time.

Students in paid employment

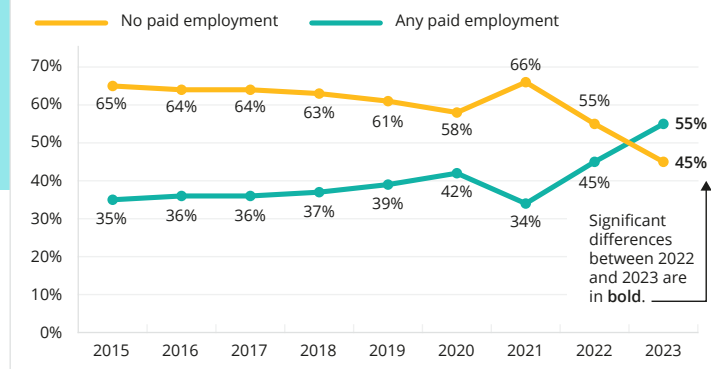


Figure 5: Students in paid employment

The impact of increases in the cost of living⁸ was further examined, revealing that certain student groups will be more severely affected than others. The research highlights:

- Only 68% of disadvantaged students feel confident about managing their finances over the next year, compared to 77% of more advantaged peers.
- International students, ineligible for government benefits and limited to working 20 hours per week, face extra challenges. Many are unaware of university financial support, resulting in increased use of food banks.

Universities are addressing the cost-of-living crisis by engaging with student unions and representatives to understand and monitor the issue, increasing hardship support funds and emergency loan access and addressing digital poverty and providing targeted support such as food vouchers, food bank access, and affordable eating schemes.

⁵ Where Next? Who applies to Level 4 and 5 qualifications? ⁶ Student Academic Experience Survey 2023.pdf (hepi.ac.uk). ⁷ Majority of university students juggling paid work and studying amid cost-of-living crisis, survey reveals | The Independent

⁸ Cost of living crisis: impact on university students

Student Profile: Mode of delivery

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital learning technologies, leading to a significant shift towards online and hybrid learning models. Universities are now known for offering a variety of study modes that cater to the learner demands and needs, in line with the cost-of-living crisis, based on the institution's approach and resources.

Most university programmes are pursued either full-time onsite (39%) or part-time onsite (37%). Additionally, a sizable portion (17%) of programmes in the last academic year were taken in a part-time onsite or online, often alongside employment or apprenticeships.

The State of Student Success & Engagement in Higher Education⁹ highlighted 6 key trends:

- Skills-based learning is becoming the most valued for its practical application in the workforce.
- Certificates and apprenticeship programmes are becoming highly valued by both students and employers for their demonstrable proof of workplace skills, and upskilling/ reskilling for lifelong learners.
- Institutions need to provide consistent guidelines and training around generative AI for educators and students or risk a growing divide in skill development.

Student Profile: Mode of study

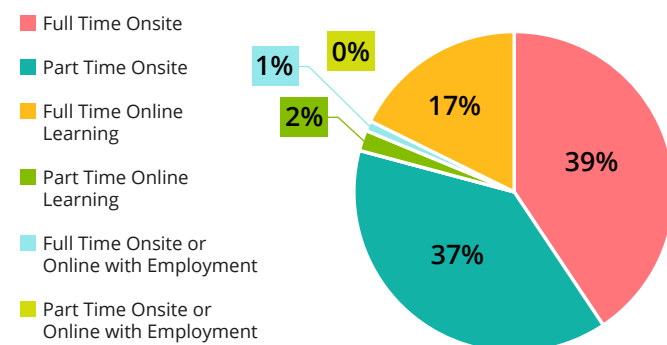


Figure 6: Student Profile: Mode of study

- Access to technology has the greatest impact on student success and engagement, but we have not solved the accessibility gap for many learners.
- Students and educators value mental health resources but really want time off.
- Educators feel most empowered when they are given autonomy, respect, and holistic support.

Feedback from our partners strongly supports this view, as they also provide a mix of study modes, diverse programme offers, tailored to meet the local skills gap and the need of the employers.

⁹ The State of Student Success & Engagement in Higher Education | Instructure

Licensed HN Completions and Achievements

Completion and achievement rates for both HNC and HND programmes, encompassing on-campus and partner site data, are illustrated in Figure 7 and Figure 8.

Licensed HN Completions Over last 3 years

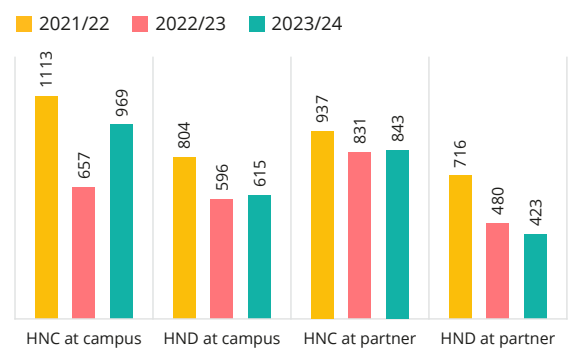


Figure 7: Licensed Higher Nationals Completions

Completions

The overall number of completions for the 2023/24 academic year has increased compared to the previous year, except for HND completions at partner institutions, which remain lower than the figures from 2021/22.

This decrease could be attributed to several reasons, one of which is the need for clearer criteria on what constitutes a completion.

The descriptions in the IRR were improved, but not all HEIs include students who were awarded at stage 1 and/or 2 and have progressed to a degree. It is equally important to emphasize that completing the first stage of an HND does not automatically count as finishing an HNC, unless the student was originally registered for that specific qualification and subsequently awarded.

Achievement Grades over 3 years

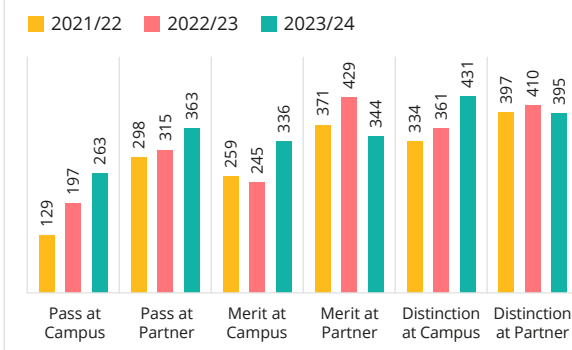


Figure 8: Licensed HN Grade Achievements

Achievements

On average, there was a 9% improvement in overall grades. The grade distribution is comparable to the previous year, with improvements across all grades except for merit and distinction at partner locations.

Pass grades at the campus increased by **25%**, while partner sites saw a modest **13%** rise this year.

Merit grades at the campus went up by **27%**, whereas at partner locations, there was a significant 25% decrease.

Distinction grades at the campus rose by **16%**, but at partner sites, they experienced a 4% decline.

Licensed HN Progression

It is important to highlight that most partners view Licensed Higher Nationals as a pathway for progression, serving either as a ladder of learning or as a stepping stone toward degree achievements. However, some still advocate for its autonomy, occasionally using it as an exit award.

Looking at the graph (Figure 9), last year saw a significant decline in students progressing from HNC to HND and from HNC/HND to degree programmes, both on campus and at partner sites. This year, however, overall progression has improved by 6%, except for HNC/D to Degree at Campus.

The narrative remains consistent when compared to the previous year's data. The trend shown in Figure 10 appears complex, indicating a potential decline, influenced by the proportion of students earning partial credit that year.

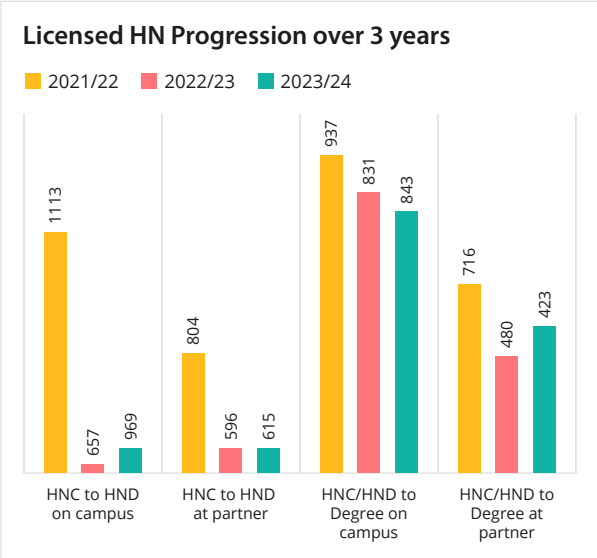


Figure 9: Licensed HN progressions over 3 years



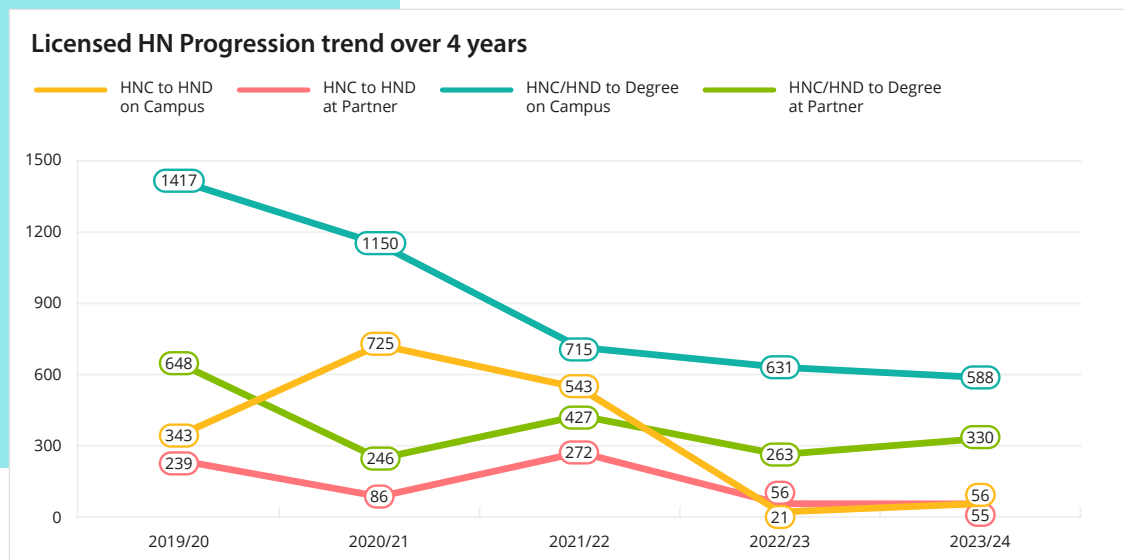


Figure 10: Licensed HN progressions trend over 4 years

The Lifelong Loan Entitlement: Impact Assessment¹⁰ revealed that not all graduates experience the expected benefits from higher education. Research by the Centre for Vocational Education Research (CVER)¹¹ indicates that, by age 30, women with a level 5 qualification earn, on average, about £2,700 more than women with a level 6 qualification. Similarly, men with a level 4 qualification earn approximately £5,100 more than men with a level 6 qualification.

This suggests that combining work and study or pursuing qualifications at levels 4 and 5 might offer better value for both taxpayers and learners if similar outcomes can be achieved at a lower cost.

A survey by Universities UK (UUK) found that 24% of the population had considered part-time higher education in the past decade but did not enrol, primarily due to financial concerns (tuition fees and living costs) and the challenge of fitting study into their personal and work lives. Similarly, Department for Education (DfE)¹² research found that 13% of the population had considered studying for a new qualification at levels 3-6 in the last five years but did not proceed, citing the complexity of the student finance system and difficulty in finding information, especially for mature-aged students. Of those considering study, 32% looked at levels 4 and 5, while 35% considered level 6.

¹⁰ Lifelong loan entitlement - impact assessment. ¹¹ Post-18 education – who is taking the different routes and how much do they earn? (lse.ac.uk). ¹² Post 18 Choice of Part-Time Study (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Licensed HN Programme Delivery Mode and Structure

The COVID-19 pandemic, cost-of-living crisis, and evolving student expectations for flexible delivery have driven higher education institutions to prioritise online and blended learning strategies.

Despite the challenges and limitations of these methods, blended teaching presents a promising future for higher education institutions. Students now anticipate substantial online content in their higher education, driven by the need for flexibility to manage their complex lives. This expectation has led to a shift towards blended and remote delivery models¹³, prompting a re-evaluation of traditional teaching methods and the incorporation of digital tools to enhance the learning experience. Consequently, universities have invested in digital infrastructure to support remote learning.

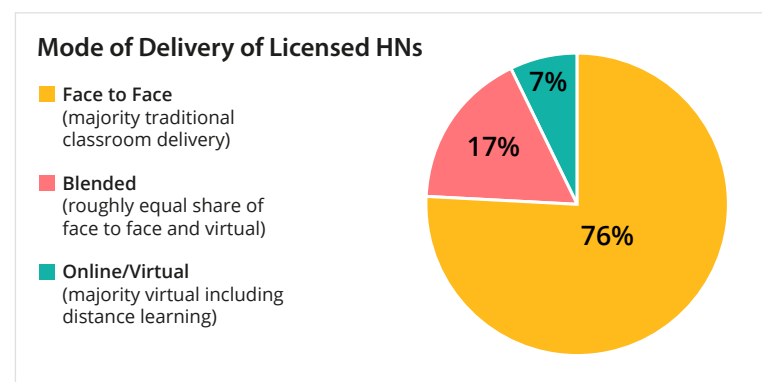


Figure 11: Licensed HN Mode of Delivery

However, it is not surprising that a considerable proportion of our partners (76%) still prefer traditional face-to-face classroom instruction, but there is a shift with 17% HEIs adopting a blended learning approach (Figure 11). Additionally, when examining the delivery structure, a slight difference is observed, with 55% utilising the traditional long and thin delivery method (Figure 12).

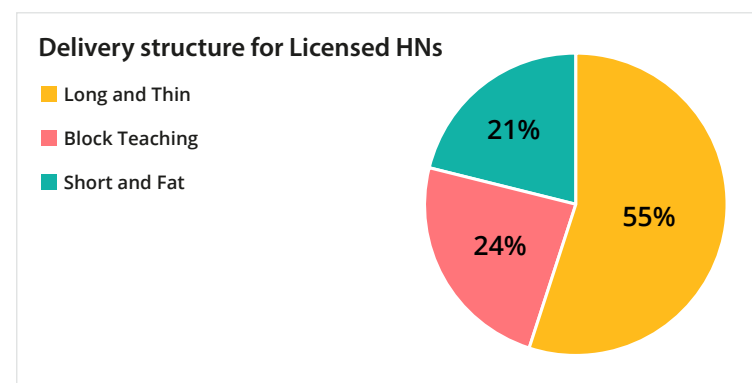


Figure 12: Licensed HN Delivery Structure

This year, the distribution between short and fat and block teaching remains debated, with short and fat decreasing from 24% last year to 21%, and block teaching increasing from 21% to 24% (Figure 12).

¹³ Distance and Remote Learning in UK Higher Education





One of the contributing factors for these modes of deliveries, particularly blended learning, is the number of intakes (Figure 13) for different programmes, both at our HEI partner and collaborative partner sites.

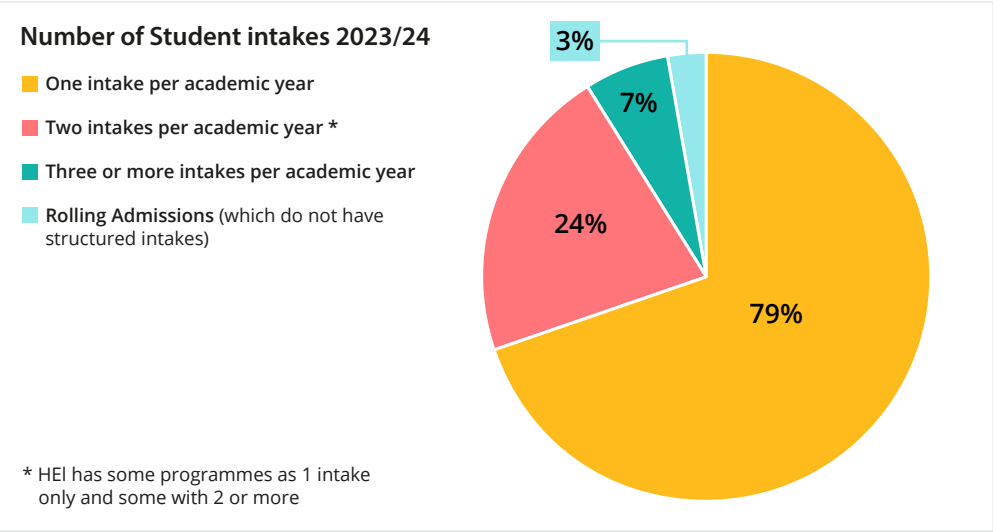


Figure 13: Licensed HN-Student Intakes

Different institutions have customised their delivery structures and modes to address the specific needs of their students:

- The delivery structures are designed to support student learning by providing ample time to absorb the content.
- Face-to-face delivery has been identified as the most effective method for these programmes.
- The structure accommodates full-time workers who study in the evenings.
- Students can progress at their own pace throughout the year, aligning well with the college timetable.
- A balanced approach includes face-to-face delivery, preferred for its effectiveness, engagement, and ability to provide consistent performance and a sense of belonging.
- The delivery mode supports students who often work part-time, offering a mix of theory and practice through various teaching methods such as lectures, tutorials, workshops, and practical classes. This approach is complemented by supportive handbooks, VLE tools like Moodle, and constructive feedback from lecturers.
- HNC programmes emphasise skill-based learning suitable for students with lower initial qualifications. Face-to-face contact is highly valued, especially for practical sessions, offering a focused learning environment.
- Block teaching has been implemented to enhance deep learning and community building.
- Institutions prioritise face-to-face teaching supplemented by online resources for enhanced accessibility.
- Many programmes focus on social mobility and employability, incorporating placements, collaborative learning, and personal tutorials. They also offer flexibility through online or blended modules.
- The preferred face-to-face delivery method fosters engagement, practical learning, and peer support, aligning with students' needs and industry requirements.

Promotion of Licensed HNs

We all acknowledge and appreciate the importance of promoting products to empower learners and stakeholders, enabling them to make informed choices and providing partners with an opportunity to engage with them. It is noteworthy that, while most partners emphasize promoting licensed Higher Nationals (HNs) as a pathway to degree awards, some still promote them as stand-alone programmes and exit awards.

However, this approach varies among our Higher Education Institution (HEI) partners (Figure 14). While 72% actively promote the programmes on both their own website and the partner's website, a small minority (7%) abstain from promoting licensed HNs altogether. Additionally, 21% exclusively promote them on their own website and not on the partner's website, potentially due to offering on-campus programmes only without any collaborative partners.

Licensed HN programmes are promoted as:

- A ladder of learning progressing to degree awards
- Standalone, Terminal Awards
- Components of Apprenticeship Standards delivery

Promotion of Licensed HN programmes extend beyond just their own websites, utilising various channels employed by our partners, including:

- University and partner websites, emphasising their potential to lead to degree qualifications.

- UCAS, college websites, and social media to help learners and stakeholders make informed choices.
- Promoting HN programmes as both a progression ladder and standalone programmes with relevant exit awards.
- College leaflets, HE brochures, and at events/ open days and career fairs. Conducting recruitment visits to schools.
- Promoting to regional employers via email flyers.
- Partner institutions promoting these programmes as progression routes from L3 qualifications and as a ladder towards a degree via a Top-Up year.
- Outreach initiatives and civic mission activities to raise awareness of the provision. Students enrolling in HNC and HND courses are invited to university campuses.
- Positioning HN programmes as a "stepping stone" towards a full degree, while also highlighting that the HND is an award following successful completion of Years 1 and 2.

Promotion of Licensed HNs

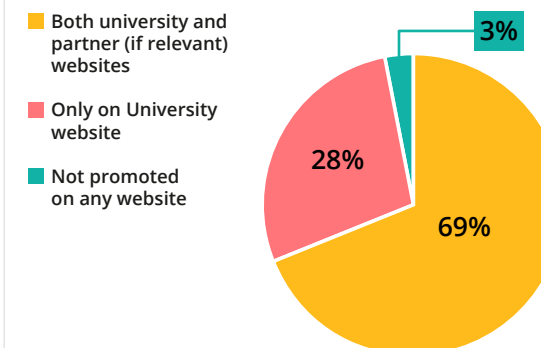


Figure 14: Promotion of Licensed Higher Nationals

- Attending education fairs and collaborating with local schools and career advisors and distributing video series to school learners.
- Providing detailed course information, including study content, career opportunities, entry requirements, fees, facilities, teaching methods, and application processes.
- Promoting to FE learners and working with employers to raise awareness of Higher Nationals for CPD and apprenticeships. Encouraging progression routes up to level 6/degree apprenticeships.
- Utilising online, print, national, and international channels for promotion, with strong word-of-mouth within local trades and among alumni.

Employer Engagement

It is inspiring to see the innovative ways employers support the vocational aspects of these programmes, providing students with diverse experiences that develop essential skills for the workforce.

Employer engagement is crucial across all our partners. Programmes are created with input from local employers and professional bodies to ensure quality and relevance. Employers often serve as guest speakers and offer work placements, enabling students to tackle real-world challenges and complete projects aligned with apprenticeship standards.

Even when work placements are not mandatory, teaching staff use their industry experience to deliver case studies that meet employer expectations. Many students in apprenticeships apply their learning directly to their jobs, with employer engagement integrated through projects, assessor visits, and real-world experiences in teaching.

These efforts ensure students receive an education aligned with industry requirements, enhancing their readiness for the workforce.



Approaches used for employer engagement include:

Real-World Experience

- Use of real-time case studies and site visits.
- Guest speakers from various industries.
- Students' own work experiences are integrated into learning.

Employer Feedback and Curriculum Development

- Regular feedback from employers to align curricula with industry needs.
- Industry Liaison Boards and Advisory Panels for ongoing review and updates.
- Collaboration with employers for curriculum design and validation.

Guest Lectures and Workshops

- Frequent guest lectures from industry professionals.
- Practical workshops and fieldwork to provide hands-on experience.

Employer-Sponsored Projects and Placements

- Opportunities for students to work on employer-sponsored projects.
- Industrial placements and work experience integrated into programmes.
- Apprenticeships and part-time employment opportunities.

Industry Events and Networking

- Employer engagement events such as learning breakfasts, conferences, and expos.
- Meet the Employer events and career fairs.

- Networking opportunities with local businesses and public sector employers.

Specialised Programmes and Initiatives

- Programmes tailored to meet specific industry needs (e.g., Engineering, Construction, Healthcare).
- Sector-specific advisory groups and employer federations.
- Customised pathways and professional practice development.
- Specialised programmes tailored to industry needs.
- Lifelong career support and development tools.

Support and Development

- Access to work experience coordinators and career advisors.
- Lifelong career support and digital tools for skill development.
- Employer mentorship and support for student projects and assessments.

Collaborative Projects and Competitions

- Live projects, competitions, and exhibitions to highlight student work.
- Collaboration with local employers for real-world problem-solving.

Community and Industry Links

- Strong community and industry links through regular employer engagement.
- Partnerships with local organizations and educational institutions.

Employer Advisory Boards

- Collaborative curriculum development.
- Regular feedback and advisory panels
- Regular meetings with employer advisory boards to ensure relevance and alignment with industry trends.
- Joint Industrial Advisory Boards for best practices and continuous improvement.

Professional Development

- Professional and Practice Weeks with industry experts.
- CPD opportunities for employers and employees.

The QAA also acknowledges the crucial role of employer engagement in designing and delivering the curriculum, which enhances student employability and addresses local skill demands. Our goal is to involve and empower employers, higher education students, and graduates in shaping the national employability agenda in higher education. To achieve this, we aim to foster understanding and collaboration between the higher education and business sectors¹⁴.

This strategic partnership can be further enhanced by sharing of data as reported by **AGCAS Employer Engagement Task Group (EETG)**¹⁵. Employers that share recruitment data benefit from more work-ready students and enhanced attraction campaigns. Data sharing also sparks and enhances strategic alliances.

¹⁴ [employer-engagement-report.pdf](#) ¹⁵ [Sharing recruitment data is driving strategic partnerships with universities | ISE Insights](#)

Licensed HN Sector Areas

There has unquestionably been a shift in the trajectory of various sectors in Licensed HN provision compared to recent years, where Engineering and Construction consistently demonstrated substantial growth. In the present year, there has been notable expansion in the Business and Science sectors (Figure 15). Despite this, Engineering and Construction are still advancing, albeit not at the same pace as Business Administration and Science.

While there have been fluctuations in student numbers across certain sectors over the past three years (Figure 16), it is important to highlight that there has been a consistent array of sectors offered under licensed Higher National qualifications (HNs).

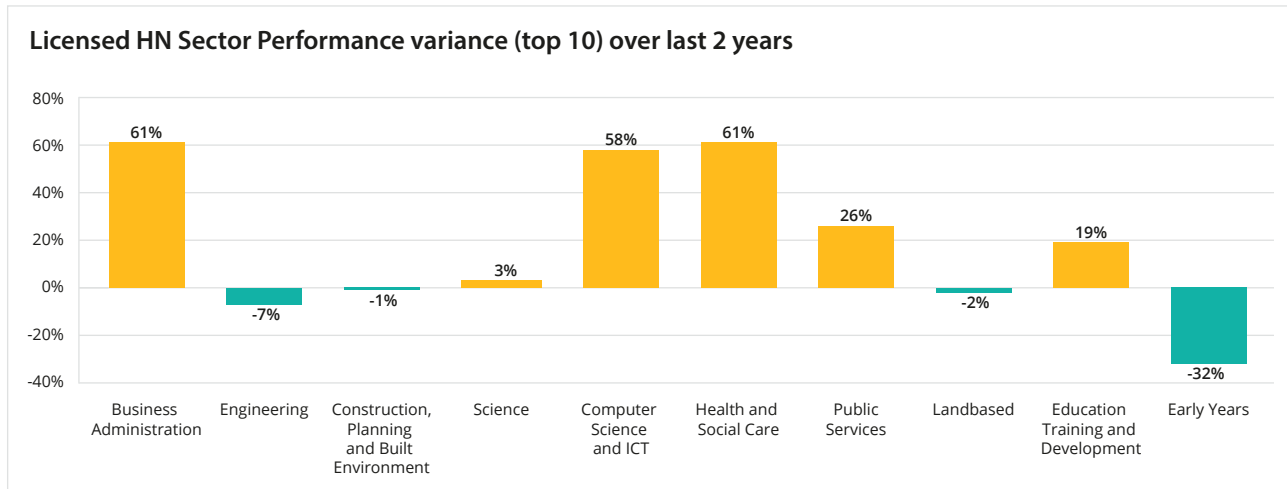


Figure 15: Licensed HN Sector Performance variance in last 2 years

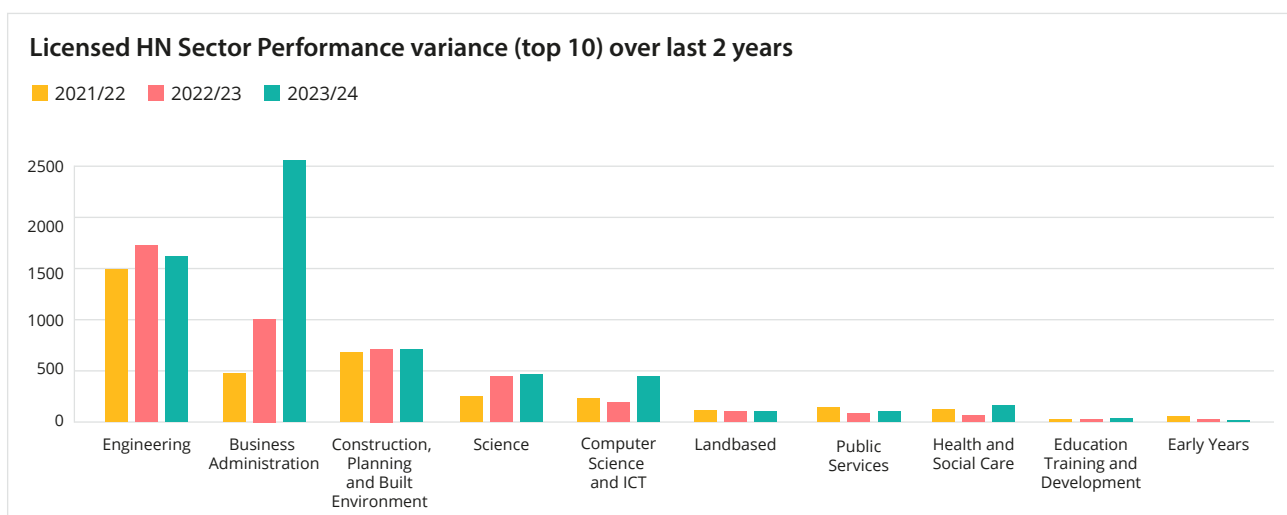
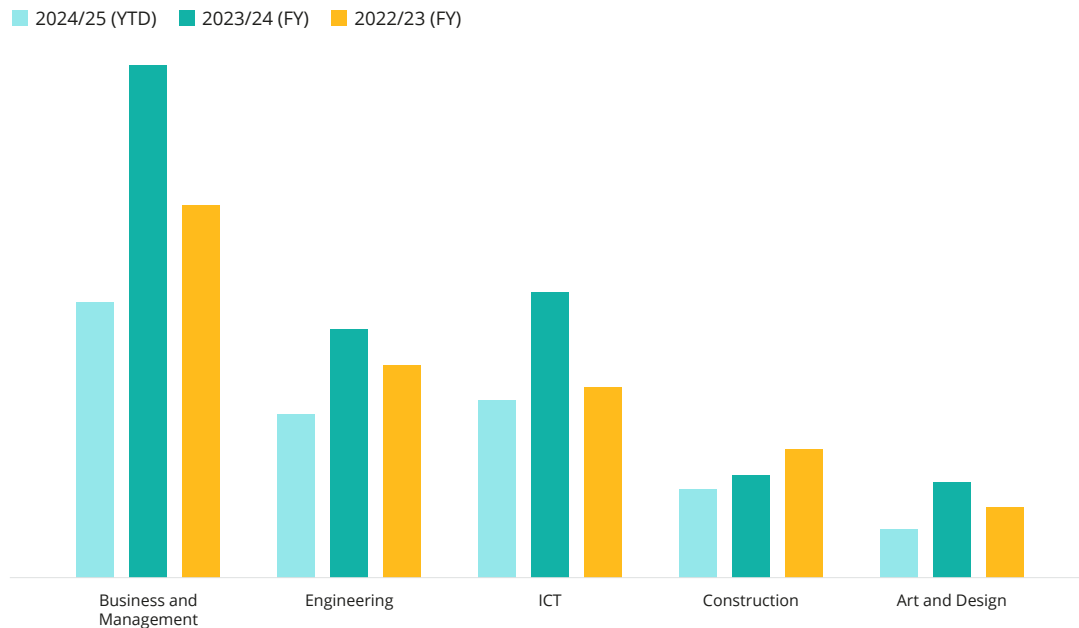


Figure 16: Licensed HN Performance: top 10 sectors

According to the HESA summary¹⁶, Business and Management was the most popular subject in 2022/23, accounting for 20% of all student enrolments, up from 19% in 2021/22 and 17% in 2020/21. Of the 56,580 additional students in this field, 46,650 were non-EU postgraduate (taught) enrolments.

Computing saw the largest proportional increase in new enrolments, rising by 23% from 2021/22 to 2022/23. Combined and General Studies and Business and Management followed, with enrolments increasing by 19% and 17%, respectively.

Top 5 sector areas as per Pearson volumes



* Please note the growth doesn't indicate absolute size, it is just a measure of.

Figure 17: Sector Performance for top 5 Pearson BTEC HNs

Pearson BTEC HNs data also reflect similar trends for the top 5 sectors as illustrated in Figure 17.

¹⁶ Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2022/23 - Subjects studied - Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2022/23 - Subjects studied | HESA



Good Practice, Quality Assurance, Enhancements and Future plans

Licensed Higher National partners are responsible for their own quality assurance (QA) processes. Each partner has submitted their Institutional Review Report and samples of External Examiner (EE) Reports. This collaborative effort allows for the sharing of best practices and integration of EE feedback, providing valuable insights and opportunities for mutual learning.

External Examiner Review

The analysis of the External Examiner Review (Figure 18) reveals key findings:

- 86% of respondents have an External Examiner (EE) Report for each Licensed Higher Nationals programme, showing widespread use of external assessments.
- 97% of respondents confirm that student performance standards meet expectations, indicating strong alignment with educational standards.
- All respondents unanimously agree that the standards for each Licensed HN programme are appropriate, reflecting high confidence and compliance with external standards.

External Examiner Review 2023/24

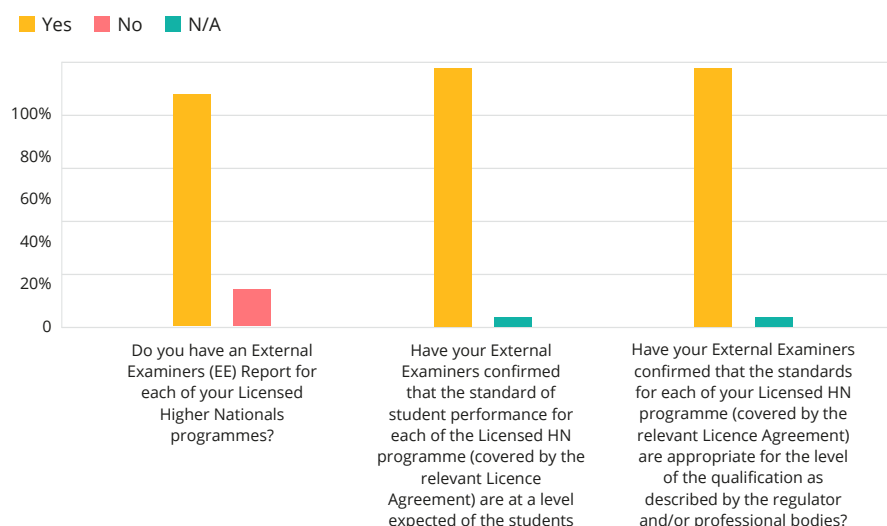


Figure 18: Licensed HN External Examiner Review

In summary, the data indicates widespread use of External Examiners' Reports, high confidence in student performance standards, and unanimous agreement on the appropriateness of standards for Licensed HN programmes. These findings collectively suggest a robust and effective system for maintaining and validating the quality and standards of Higher National programmes.

External examiners: Commendations and Recommendations further enhancements

External Examiners consistently commend the efforts of all teams. However, they recognise that even small adjustments could lead to improved student outcomes. As a result, they actively offer constructive recommendations for enhancements. Below is a list of positive suggestions and feedback extracted from the EE reports submitted by partners.



"I would encourage some discussion amongst the team on "levelness and expectation on acceptable feedback". This practice could allow a module / course team to set the bar and minimise deviation amongst modules/ markers and maintain consistency."

"The curriculum underpins theory and practice effectively. Perhaps the course would benefit from more focus on emerging technologies and looking at how the craft skills in media are changing, perhaps a module on immersive journalism would benefit the students to ensure that the course is relevant and current."

"The forward thinking approach of the college promotes a strong culture of innovation. It ensures students stay up-to-date, equipping them with the ability to sources credible information while exploring creative and innovative ways of solving problems."

"With a strong emphasis on clinical work-based learning, entrepreneurship, employability, digital skills, and essential higher education skills, the program equips students for continued education and career opportunities. This program has been thoughtfully designed and equipped with suitable teaching resources, engagement strategies, and clinical work-based learning opportunities."

"The team has diligently formed partnerships with local industry and translated into the teaching, giving more authenticity."

Introduction	Executive Summary	2023/24 Highlights	Licensed HN Registrations, Completions, Achievements and Progression	Licensed HN Programme Delivery	Promotion of Licensed HNs	Employer Engagement	Licensed HN Sector Areas	Good Practice, Quality Assurance, Enhancements and Future plans	Conclusion	Additional Findings	Feedback on IRR and data collection	Key dates for 2025	25			
--------------	-------------------	--------------------	--	--------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	--------------------------	---	------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------	----	--	--	--

Positive feedback and Commendations

Engagement and Support:

- Institutions have developed targeted interventions for students who are not fully engaged, ensuring they receive the necessary support to improve their participation.
- Programmes provide a respectful, supportive, and creative learning environment, encouraging students to develop their professional practice.
- The use of diverse assessment methods aligned with learning outcomes prepares students for real-world applications.

Innovative Teaching and Learning:

- The integration of advanced digital technologies, such as Cobots and simulation software, into the learning environment is commendable.
- The incorporation of interactive and practical engagement, integrating real-world problem-solving tasks, enhances critical thinking and application of knowledge.
- The proactive approach to incorporating AI into teaching and learning demonstrates forward-thinking and innovative practices.

Assessment and Feedback:

- The range and design of assessments are appropriate and reliable indicators of students' skills and competencies.
- The use of a robust and comprehensive system of cross-college moderation ensures consistency in marking and feedback across institutions.
- The provision of detailed and constructive feedback helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

Curriculum and Programme Design:

- Programmes are well-structured, with a balanced approach that includes face-to-face delivery, which is preferred for its effectiveness and engagement.
- The curriculum is designed to support student learning by providing ample time to absorb content and progress at their own pace.
- The inclusion of placements, collaborative learning, and personal tutorials enhances employability and social mobility.

Industry and Community Engagement:

- Strong partnerships with local industry and the integration of real industry experience into teaching provide authenticity and enhance employability.



Recommendations for enhancements

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

Digital Tools and Platforms:

- Expand the use of digital tools and platforms to create more engaging and flexible learning environments that cater to different learning styles.
- Consider adopting a digital format for assessments, allowing students to upload and submit documentation electronically and take exams on a computer.

Guest Speakers and Emerging Technologies:

- Incorporate more guest speakers, live briefs, and filming opportunities into the curriculum to provide valuable real-world insights and current industry trends.
- Add newer technology practices to the course, such as immersive journalism and emerging technologies, to ensure relevance and currency.

Feedback and Assessment:

- Enhance the specificity of feedback by using detailed, criterion-based language and providing actionable steps for improvement.
- Establish a regular schedule for feedback sessions shortly after each submission to help students integrate suggestions and improve continuously.
- Standardise feedback across modules through peer-review sessions and the implementation of a “feedback quality benchmark.”

Support Systems and Community Building:

- Enhance support systems for students, particularly newcomers, by providing resources such as orientation programmes, mentorship opportunities, and community-building activities.
- Increase the intake of students to diversify the cohort, enriching classroom discussions and collaborative projects with a wider range of perspectives.

Assessment Weighting and Consistency:

- Introduce clearer weighting for individual assessment components and update assessment briefs to explicitly indicate the marks assigned to each element.
- Review and adjust external examiner timelines to ensure feedback can be incorporated into the current academic year.

Academic Integrity and AI:

- Maintain an ongoing conversation about academic integrity, especially given the fast pace of change in Artificial Intelligence, to prevent students from bypassing the learning process.
- By implementing these recommendations, institutions can further enhance the effectiveness of their programmes, support student success, and maintain high academic standards.

Exceptional practices

The emphasis on clinical work-based learning, entrepreneurship, and digital skills equips students for continued education and career opportunities. HEI partners are always striving to offer students the best opportunities and looking for continuous improvements.

Adjustments to assessment strategies:

- Less emphasis on examinations and more on coursework, have been made to meet learning outcomes effectively.
- Digital Business and Innovation focusing on data capture and management systems.

Interactive Learning Activities:

- Small group sizes ensures excellent levels of support in and out of class.
- Inclusion of practical lessons and site visits for HNC Civil Engineering Studies and HNC Animal Behaviour and Wildlife Conservation give students the opportunity for practical/applied elements and skills development.
- Digital Resources offering personalised support through mentors and a variety of digital platforms like Nearpod for interactive learning.
- Development of Maritime Simulation Suite where students can access immersive learning environments outside scheduled teaching, with a virtual AI tutor for debriefing exercises.
- New Facilities and Industry Engagement provide innovative learning environments which led to Anniversary Prize for Excellence in Employer Engagement and curriculum design.
- Development of a Sustainable Construction Centre using retrofit techniques and technologies.

- Additional Development Workshops, introduction of voluntary development workshops in electronics and mechanical workshops.
- Distance Learning Enhancements; continuous evolution of distance learning HNC/D to better cater to students in employment.

University Integration:

- Research Skills Integration familiarizing students with the HE environment and supporting their research projects at L6.
- Partner College students participate in Fresher's week to experience university life and the HE setting.
- Curriculum Development to meet local regional needs and organizes an annual FE/HE Research Conference.
- Integration with big employer; combining HND Early Childhood Education Care with Level 5 Early Years Leadership Professional Apprenticeship standard.

Industry Liaison and Extra-Curricular Activities:

- Integration of industrial relevance into the curriculum with hands-on projects and industry placements.
- Real-World Project-Based Learning: HNC Construction team integrates industry engagement with real-world projects and on-site presentations.
- Field Trips and Employer Engagement for Animal Sciences and Visual Arts programmes.
- Enrichment activities and guest speakers to provide real-life experience.

Exceptional practices

Enhanced Career Mentoring and Pastoral Support

- Expanded mentoring support and employer networks to guide students in career pathways and sports development.
- Emphasis on small class sizes and dedicated pastoral leads in Engineering to offer tailored support.
- Structured Support Sessions to ensure students meet deadlines.

Employability and Professional Standards:

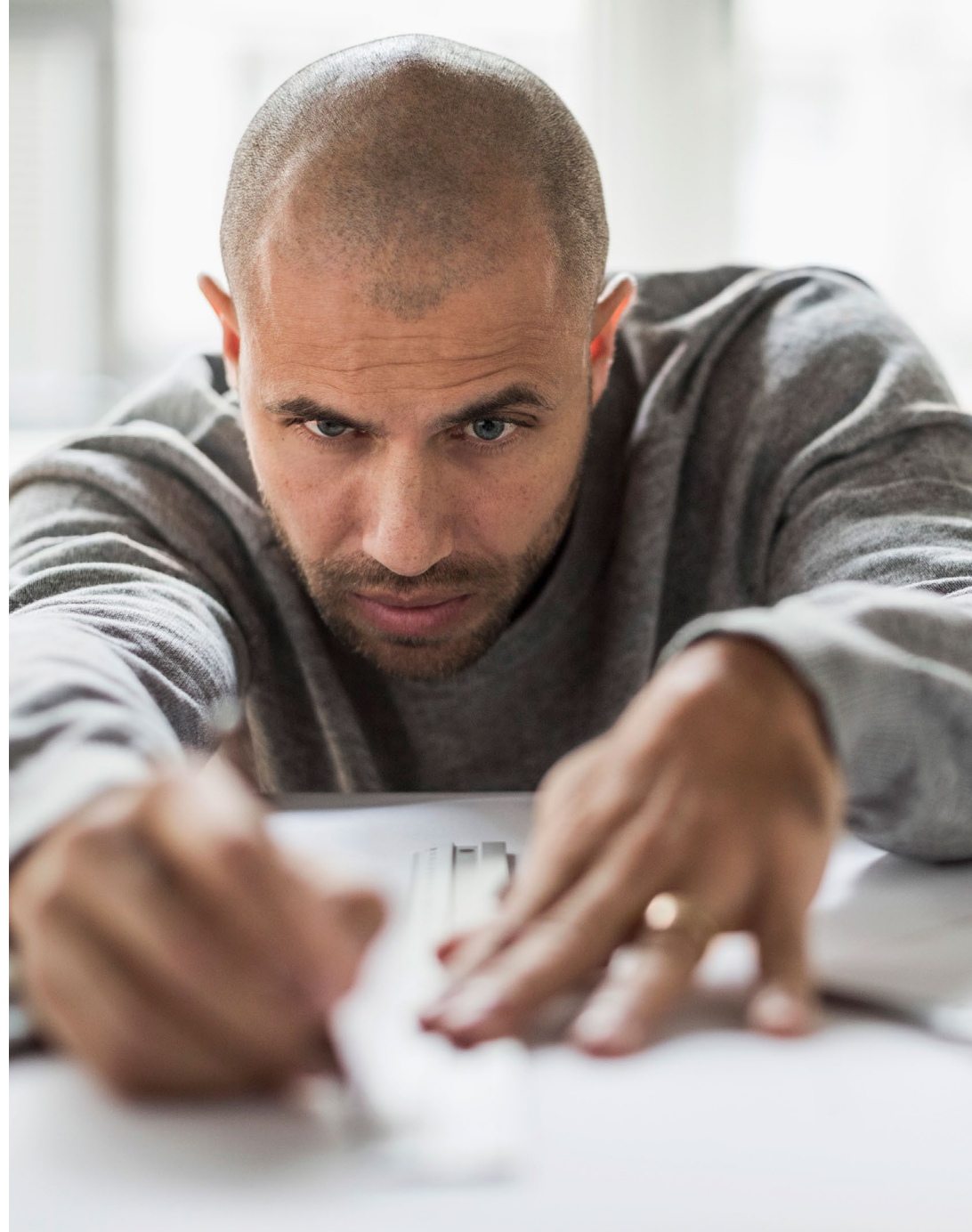
- Promotion of employability, careers, and progression pathways aligned with professional statutory bodies' values and codes of conduct.
- Engineering Council Re-Accreditation by the Engineering Council for five years.

Industrial Relevance in Assessments:

- Cross-Programme Collaboration linking assessments with another programme, providing real-life scenarios for students.
- Use of authentic and innovative assessments combining theoretical knowledge and key competencies with clear industrial relevance.

Critical Friend Day:

- Annual event for course teams to collaborate and improve learning, teaching, and assessment styles.



Future Plans

The IRR allows us to acknowledge the commendable efforts universities are making or planning in response to the evolving educational landscape. This section delves into these strategies and initiatives, with a predominant focus among our partners on expanding, strengthening existing offerings, and enhancing their Higher Technical portfolio.

Many of our partners have already begun or are actively considering offering HTQs for the 2025-26 academic year and they are exploring opportunities to expand their higher apprenticeship offerings to meet local needs.

We acknowledge the significant efforts being made to plan programmes that offer flexible learning, identify new collaborative partners and employers, and work with local authorities to address local skills gaps. Additionally, efforts are being enhanced to promote awareness of higher education and expand participation activities with schools and careers hubs to help young people reach their full potential.

Here, we have compiled examples of future plans submitted by our partners, which we believe you will find helpful. Commitment to current programmes remains strong, pending further clarity from the government on growth, skills levy, and apprenticeship funding.



Introduction	Executive Summary	2023/24 Highlights	Licensed HN Registrations, Completions, Achievements and Progression	Licensed HN Programme Delivery	Promotion of Licensed HNs	Employer Engagement	Licensed HN Sector Areas	Good Practice, Quality Assurance, Enhancements and Future plans	Conclusion	Additional Findings	Feedback on IRR and data collection	Key dates for 2025	30		
--------------	-------------------	--------------------	--	--------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	--------------------------	---	------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------	----	--	--

Future Plans include:

Strategic Reviews:

- Continuous review of HN programmes to meet industry needs.
- Exploration of HTQ provision and its impact on HNC/D programmes.
- Streamlining and centralizing course structures for consistency and efficiency.
- Awaiting government updates before formalizing further plans.

Portfolio Review

- Programme Adjustments.
- Discontinuations of non-viable courses.

New and Expanded Offerings:

- Development of new programmes, HNC/D in Cyber and Information Security for selected partners, with plans to expand into AI, Data Science, and Manufacturing and HND Creative Visual Arts.
- Development of HNC/D Leadership and Management (with HTQ Kitemark) for 2025.
- Expansion of HTQs/Higher Nationals across existing subject areas, with a new HTQ in Computing planned for September 2025.
- New courses validated in partnership with School of Arts at partner college, with discussions on new pathways.

Curriculum and Course Enhancements:

- Incorporation of feedback and industry trends into curriculum redevelopment.
- Minor structural changes and professional accreditation.
- Review of HNCs and degree programmes to ensure alignment and ease progression.
- Adjustments to the level 5 Design Project elective module to include structural analysis.

Marketing and Partnerships

- Increased marketing efforts by marketing team.
- Exploration of new partnerships and throughput to full bachelor's degrees after HNC completion.
- Renewal of collaborative partnership agreements.
- Engagement Events created to target employers to support recruitment.
- Co-delivery of programmes with local college allowing softer entry to university.
- Securing professional accreditation/s.

Commitment to Current Programmes

- Remain committed to growing its HN portfolio.
- Continuation of current provisions with some adjustments for specific modules. These plans aim to adapt to industry demands, enhance curriculum relevance, and expand educational offerings while maintaining strong partnerships and support systems.



Conclusion

The annual IRR continues to serve as a means for us to understand the status of HNC and HND provision with our university partners, alongside the challenges they face. Moreover, it provides reassurance that the Licensed HN offer does meet their need to provide what is being demanded by their learners and employers to meet the skills gap. This goes some way towards what Skills England¹⁷ is aiming to achieve, to better align the supply and demand for skills and create clearer pathways for learners in tertiary education by integrating further and higher education, apprenticeships, and adult learning.

Higher Apprenticeships are gaining pace in the UK, including those at our university partners, and this aligns with the data shared by Apprenticeship Statistics for England¹⁸. In 2023/24, the proportion of intermediate apprenticeships has decreased from 53% of apprenticeship starts in 2016/17 to 21% in 2023/24. Conversely, **higher apprenticeships** have risen from **7% in 2016/17 to 36% in 2023/24**. The proportion of advanced apprenticeships has remained stable. In 2023/24, 48.4% apprentices were aged 25 or older, which has remained similar since 2018/19.

HTQs remain essential for addressing the skills gap at Levels 4 and 5. However, there is a mixed level of awareness and understanding about HTQs, and some misconceptions still remain. 43% of respondents to UCAS report, 'Where Next? Who applies for Level 4 and 5 qualifications?'¹⁹ were most likely to think that HTQs could be HNDs and 39% thought they could be HNCs and 36% recognised as foundation degrees. Almost a third of respondents were not sure which types of courses could be approved as HTQs.



¹⁷ Skills England: driving growth and widening opportunities. ¹⁸ Apprenticeship statistics for England - House of Commons Library. ¹⁹ Where Next? Who applies to Level 4 and 5 qualifications?

The benefits of skills based HNs and HTQs are well known. In a recent survey conducted by our own marketing team at Pearson, current HN students clearly articulated these reasons for studying Higher Nationals:

- employment prospects (53%)
- practical nature of the course (33%)
- affordability (24%)
- positive experience (63%)

as compared to what the potential HN students articulated:

- awareness of HNs (85%)
- positive perceptions (58%), including employer recognition and career opportunities, practical aspects as examples
- neutral perceptions (37%), including lack of awareness and not being accepted by universities for progression

At Pearson, we offer a wide range of HTQs which partners could offer, either as standalone credentials or as part of Higher Apprenticeships where appropriate.

Although the introduction of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) has been delayed, the need for modular learning and credit accumulation has become even more pressing. The IRR already suggests innovative approaches ahead of its implementation, such as try-before-you-buy modules at Levels 4 and 5, aimed at introducing subjects not typically taught in schools. [HN Flex under Licence seeks](#) to address this gap by enabling our university partners to offer flexible bundles of HNC/HND programmes.

The challenges universities are facing are not a secret, the article by HEPI, titled “Adopting a Regional Tertiary Education, Research and Innovation System in England: Priorities, Principles and Practicalities,”²⁰ highlights mounting challenges indicating that post-18 education and training is failing to live up to its potential for learners, society, and the economy. Financial pressures on universities have become a major concern, with some institutions nearing bankruptcy or facing mergers and redundancies. Many further education colleges are in an even more precarious financial state²¹, exacerbated by frequent policy changes ²² in the sector.

- The Government’s mission to provide educational opportunities for all transpires into five key priorities for post-18 education and training within the tertiary education:
- increasing access to education,
- boosting economic growth and productivity,
- encouraging greater civic engagement and enriching local skills,
- improving institutional efficiency,
- enhancing students’ experiences.

UCAS has a similar vision: to ensure that the transformative opportunities offered by higher education (HE) are accessible to everyone, regardless of their background. The report ‘Where Next? Who applies for Level 4 and 5 qualifications?’²³ explores how Level 4 and 5 courses serve as a gateway to HE. UCAS research in collaboration with Gatsby shows that the number of applicants placed in Level 4 and 5 courses decreased by 25% between 2019 and 2023 and 79% of applicants to Level 4 and 5 courses also applied to a Level 6+ course in 2023. However, a third of applicants pick Level 4 or 5 courses over Level 6+ when given an offer for both and Level 4 and 5 applicants surveyed in the 2024 cycle were more likely to consider apprenticeships than the overall, HE population. Additionally, those applying for Level 4 and 5 courses in 2024 recognised the career benefits. Although, it is important to note, only 23% of 2024 Level 4 and 5 applicants were aware of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).

²⁰ [Adopting a regional tertiary education, research and innovation system in England: priorities, principles and practicalities - HEPI](#), ²¹ [Higher education is in crisis – but have we forgotten about further education? - Education Policy Institute](#)

²² [UK-Nations-post-16-Report-FINAL.pdf](#), ²³ [Where Next? Who applies to Level 4 and 5 qualifications?](#)

To increase the visibility of Level 4 and 5 courses, UCAS recommends that universities and colleges ensure Level 4 and 5 courses are prominently displayed on UCAS.com in line with best practice, include Level 4 and 5 opportunities within their marketing, recruitment, and outreach strategies, highlight courses designated as Higher Technical Qualifications (in England) and clearly outline available student finance options and work experience opportunities for clarity.

Despite the challenges faced, Licensed HN provision has expanded, marking a significant achievement for everyone involved. We are committed to fostering collaborative working relationships and strengthening our partnerships. By working together more closely, we can leverage our collective strengths, share resources, and achieve common goals more effectively. This collaborative approach not only enhances our ability to address challenges but also ensures that we can create more impactful and sustainable solutions for the communities we serve.



***“Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress;
working together is success.”***

Henry Ford

Additional Findings

Accessing Licensed HN Support and Resources

Pearson offers comprehensive surround support designed to enhance the educational experience for both partners and students. This support encompasses a wide range of services, including regular check-ins, access to HN Global resources, specialised training sessions, direct communication with subject leads and collaborative qualification development. These resources ensure that educators are well-equipped with the latest knowledge and tools to deliver high-quality education. This comprehensive approach to support fosters a collaborative environment, promotes continuous improvement, and contributes to the success and satisfaction of both educators and learners.

Examining the data on access levels (Figure 19) across various aspects of Licensed HN support and services shows a significant majority of respondents have utilized these resources. There has been a notable increase in all areas since last year. The regular check-in category stands out with an impressive 86% access rate, indicating consistent engagement with this practice. Similarly, access to HN Global, Training, and Calls with Subject Leads has also increased, reflecting a uniform understanding in these areas. However, it is noteworthy that access to Qualification Development has decreased, primarily due to external factors.

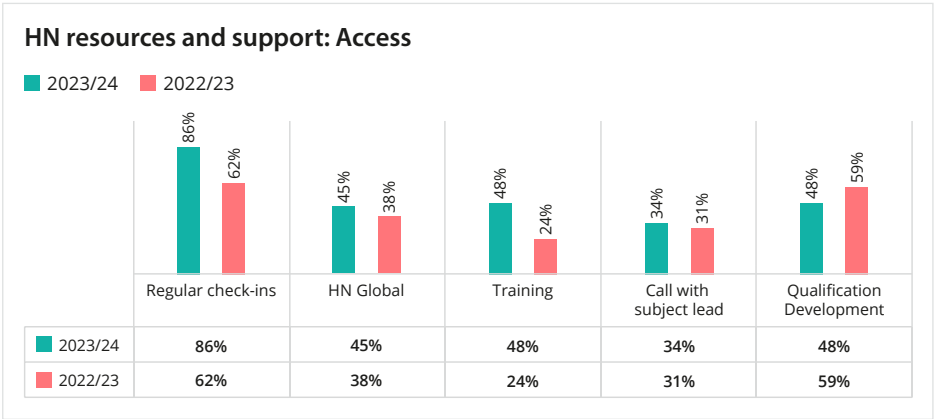


Figure 19: Accessing Licensed HN support and Resources

We will continue to share the knowledge of the surround support offered by Pearson during our regular check-ins and regular newsletters to improve this awareness and access in the future.

Feedback on IRR and data collection

We sincerely thank all our partners for their invaluable feedback on our 2022/23 report. Your contributions have been crucial in encouraging self-assessment, and we have integrated the lessons from your feedback into this report. We will strive to incorporate all suggestions for improvement in this year's report and will implement changes in next year's IRR questionnaire and report.

The insights gained from your feedback on data collection and last year's report have been extremely helpful, and we would like to highlight some key themes and lessons learned.

Feedback on 2022/23 Report

- The report is comprehensive and covers all required aspects.
- Last year's report was highly valuable to the university and collaborative partners, providing assurance on institutional plans, particularly in Higher Technical Education.
- The document is useful for benchmarking against the sector.
- Feedback from last year's IRR report was included in the overview report, which was appreciated.
- Differences in statistics and issues were noted, particularly regarding HTQs not being offered in Wales and the impact of degree apprenticeships on HN student numbers.
- The report is informative and helps understand sector practices.
- It is useful for understanding how the university's provision fits within a wider context.

Suggestions for improvement on data collection in 2024/25:

- There was an incorrect submission date year listed as 2023
- Request for clarity on the intended audience for specific questions:
 - Part A In 3.1 Student Profile (Age) the table counts 30-year-olds twice, it should be 18-24, 25-29, and 30
 - Part B, the guidance to be improved to state 'Please list the number of students who completed the award, achieving the relevant grade. It should not include all who left due to partial credit.

Thank you for the feedback and these will be considered for 2024/25.

Key dates for 2025



Month	Key Dates for 2025	Notes
April	1. w/c April 7th	1. Release of IRR report
May	2. May 2nd	2. Release of blank schedules for 2024/25
June	3. June 30th*	3. Deadline of submission of new/additional programme approval/ reapproval/extension application. You can submit the approval request any time but for us to ensure that programmes are approved for September 2025 delivery we must receive the approval form and all relevant evidence by this date.
July	4. July 25th*	4. Deadline for 2025/26 Schedule return
September	5. September 30th	5. Deadline for recording learner outcomes in EOL
October	6. October 16th	6. Release of IRR Questionnaire for the academic year 2024/25 with a submission deadline of 16th January 2026
November	7. November 15th	7. Deadline for registering students for academic intake 2025/26 on EOL
October/November	8. Date TBC	8. Annual Licensed HN Partner Event

*New dates from 2025 onwards



WFS A0896 | Version 1.0 | March 2025 | DCL1: Public

Introduction	Executive Summary	2023/24 Highlights	Licensed HN Registrations, Completions, Achievements and Progression	Licensed HN Programme Delivery	Promotion of Licensed HNs	Employer Engagement	Licensed HN Sector Areas	Good Practice, Quality Assurance, Enhancements and Future plans	Conclusion	Additional Findings	Feedback on IRR and data collection	Key dates for 2025	37
--------------	-------------------	--------------------	--	--------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------	--------------------------	---	------------	---------------------	-------------------------------------	--------------------	----