

Annual Institutional Review Report 2020/21

Pearson Higher
Education Qualifications
License Higher Nationals



Introduction

This report is based on the analysis of the information provided by institutions that are licensed to deliver Pearson approved Higher National (HN) qualifications. The information is submitted in the format of the Institutional Review Report (IRR) and the analysis presented summarises this information alongside accompanying External Examiner reports

There are currently 30 universities based in England and Wales offering HNs under licence.

The initial deadline for submission of 31st December 2020 was extended by a month. 29 HEIs submitted their IRR by this time, with one HEI submitting after that date due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions. Each IRR has been individually analysed and the comments and data from these have been incorporated into the final analysis; no individual institution's data is shown directly in the report. The format of the IRR has incorporated qualitative feedback from HEIs and External Examiners, as well as including the specific quantitative data to enable a clearer understanding of the student journey and how HEIs are meeting student needs.

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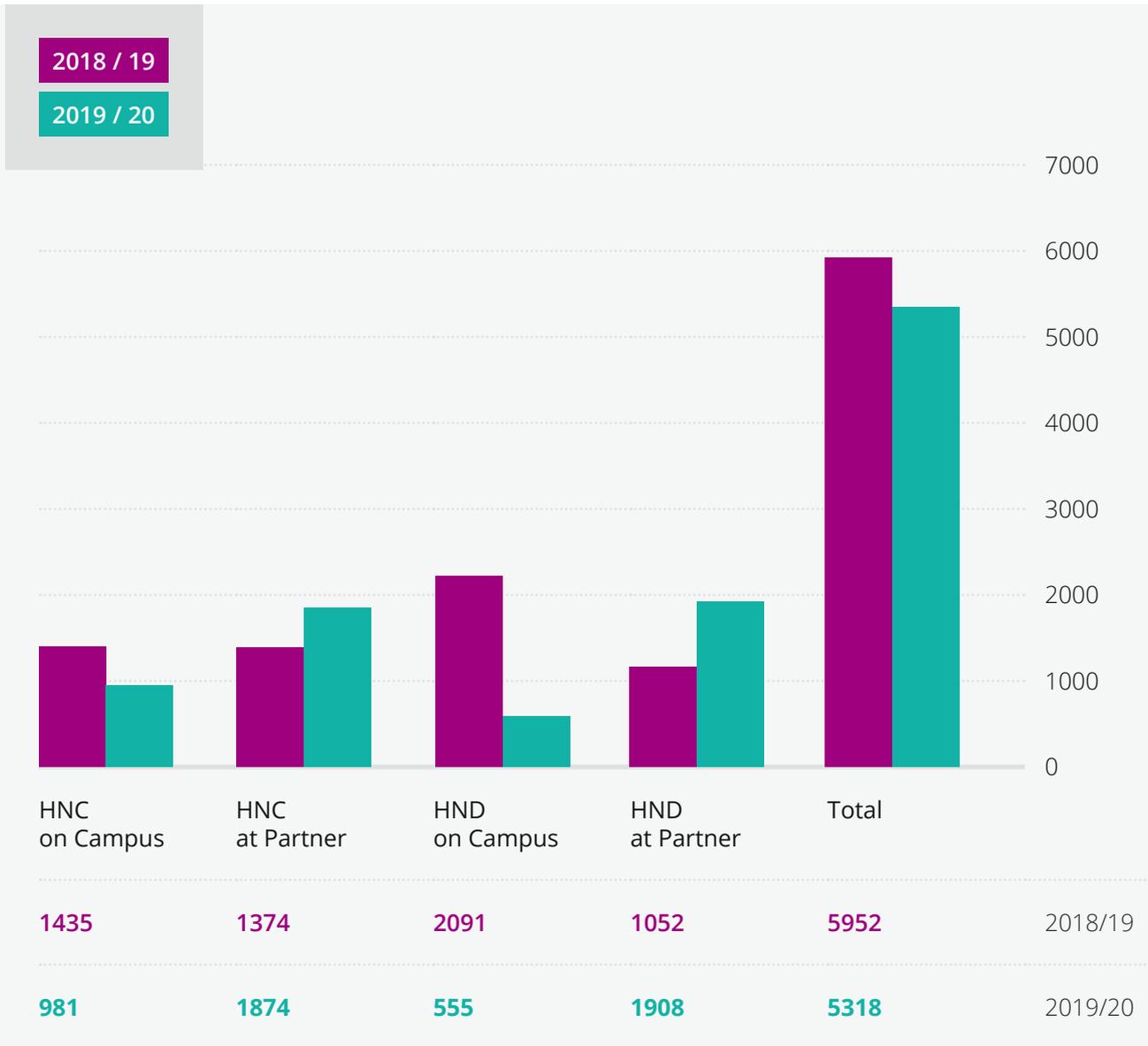
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Award Data

This section of the report provides the most significant statistical data relating to the programmes, both in terms of the type of programme, the number of students involved, their achievement and progression.

The charts below show statistical data from 2018/19 to 2019/20, with summary information below showing the trends relating to registrations, achievement, progression and subject areas. Where relevant, data has been split into those awards delivered directly at the HEI Campus and those delivered at HEI partner institutions.

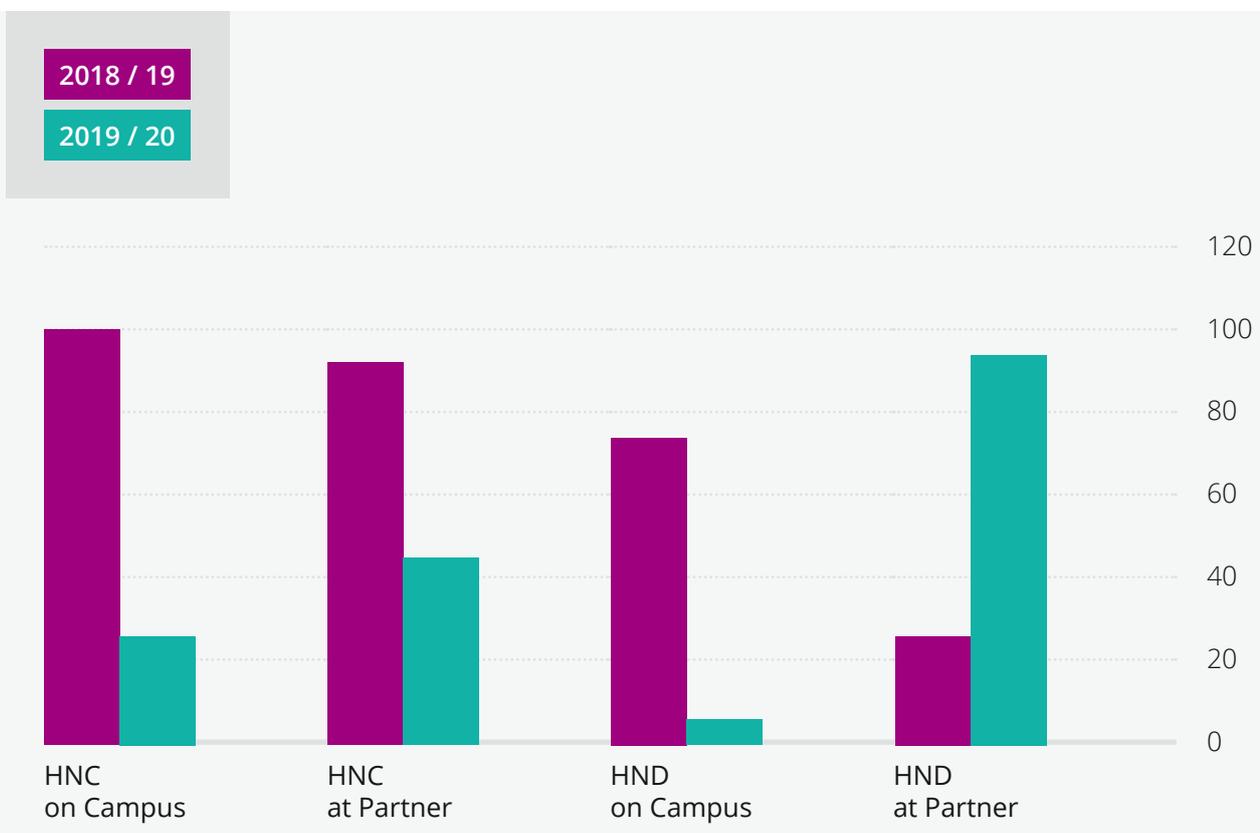


Registrations

Overall, licensed HN registrations declined over 10.6% between 2018/19 and 2019/20. The most significant decrease was in Higher National Diploma (HND) awards delivered on campus, which is interesting considering this was the highest in 2018/19. There were significant increases in registrations for Higher National Certificates (HNCs) at partner sites by nearly 40% and HNDs at partner sites of almost 50%.

Not surprisingly the pandemic has had a huge effect on students attending campus-based programmes and perhaps attending partner institutions too due to the restrictions. Overall, there was a sector-wide decline in registrations due to the repercussions on Covid-19, which also impacted student completions. However, the registration data shows that there is shift towards delivering HNs at partner sites.

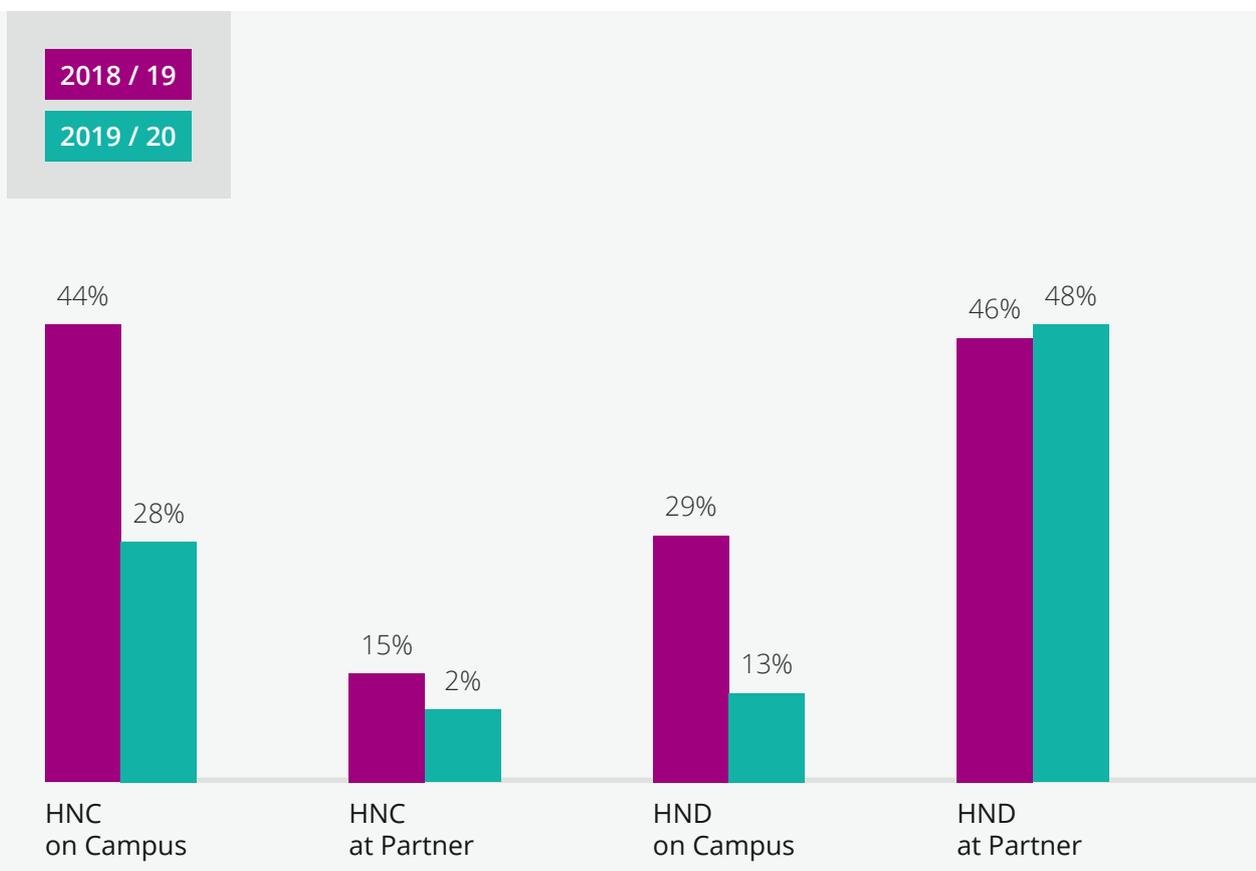
Registration numbers submitted by HEIs in the IRR were slightly higher than those recorded on Pearson's Edexcel Online system for both 2018/19 and 2019/20, with discrepancies of under 5%. The difference between IRR and Edexcel Online data maybe due to student withdrawals or non-continuation.



Licensed HN Achievement

This chart relates achievement data for those students that completed their qualifications in 2018/19 and 2019/20. Overall, there have been fewer students successfully completing and achieving their awards at both HEI campuses and partner institutions. Looking at the 2019/20 academic year only, partner institution achievements are greater compared those equivalent awards delivered directly at the HEI on campus. Reasons provided by universities for this include students choosing to study at colleges near to them or facing less disruption.

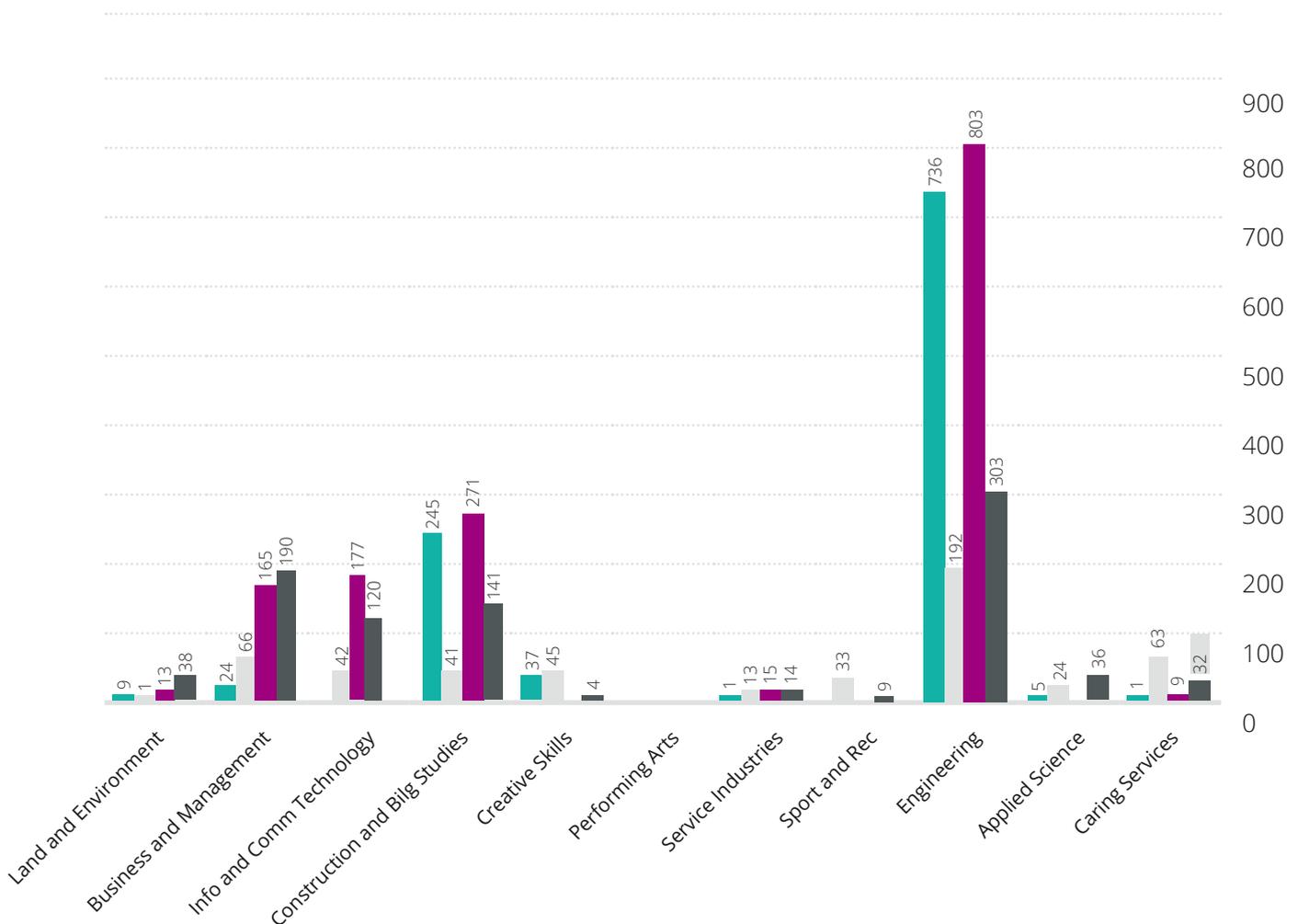
As expected, the pandemic has caused many issues and, in this case, an impact on the opportunity for students to complete and achieve their awards within that year. As can be seen in the chart, figures are low and the difference between 2018/19 & 2019/20 is significant, with the largest drop being HNC on Campus by 71%. On a positive note, it can be inferred that Licensed Higher Nationals delivered through partner institutions have enabled students to continue to achieve. External Examiner reports likewise highlight the learning support for students and in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Progression

Progression refers to those students who successfully progressed onto the next level of study, either an HND following HNC, or a Level 6 award (such as a degree top-up) following the HND. The above table indicates a continuing drop in progression from HNC on campus, whilst HNCs delivered at partners has dropped slightly but overall remained steady. As per last year, there is still a decline in HND students progressing on campus, whilst HND students studying at a partner has continued to lead to an increase by a further 10%. Overall progression from the HND delivered at a partner has improved and continues to be a running trend through our three illustrations.

Another trend that continues to underpin these figures is the Covid-19 pandemic. Where students were unable to complete their assessments, decisions to defer assessment may have impacted on achievement and therefore progression rates.



Subject Areas

A running theme of the pandemic has also impacted the subject areas. In general, there has been a slight drop across all subjects. Most concerning is the effect on the Arts subjects and the service industries. Although this is not surprising in this current climate and there is a roadmap set out for the return of the industries, the pandemic has had a huge impact on learning, and it will be interesting to see if there will be recovery in registrations in the next academic year. With the requirements of practical modules in the Arts and Sports, Covid –19 can also be considered as a reason for the decline across the board.

Special attention should be given to Engineering and Construction, as despite a very small decline, they continue to perform well and are the dominant subjects in Licensed HN registrations. Business and Management is not far behind with students' preference to undertake a HND at a partner site. Stakeholder engagement with HEIs has revealed that mapped progression routes for students to university or validated programmes at partner institutions has increased the proportion of students studying at partner sites. Overall, the graph demonstrates another ongoing trend in students choosing to study at partner institutions. Qualitative evidence from Licensed HEI IRR submissions demonstrates that students' local needs or a unique delivery continue to be a deciding factor for students and how they choose to pursue their aspirations.

External Examiner Reports

All HEIs had External Examiners (EEs) in place for the subjects they offered. They either attached reports, provided a link or indicated that reports were available on request.

The usual model employed by the HEIs is to appoint External Examiners for subjects across a range of courses. Consequently, HNs often formed a small part of EEs' portfolios.

In the IRR, HEIs were asked to identify any areas of best practice highlighted in their EE reports. Responses to this section were varied, with more depth provided by some institutions. Some HEIs also voluntarily submitted full EE reports, allowing greater coverage and analysis of best practice and areas of enhancement, **though there has been a decline of 20% in submitting EE reports from 2019/20.**

The summaries and comments below are thematically divided into: 1) Teaching, Learning and Assessment; 2) Student Support; and 3) Employer Involvement.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Overall, the comments from the External Examiners were positive. Many courses were commended on their adaptation to learning and application of teaching and assessment through the pandemic. They also highlighted areas of development that include grading practices as the pandemic continued into 2020/21.

A summary of the teaching, learning and assessment practices are:

- Good, solid framework and relevance of the assessments and programmes
- Adaption to virtual learning, whilst maintaining standards
- Continued high level engagement by teaching teams
- Transparency of grades practices

Commendations for teaching, learning and assessment include:

“Despite the difficulties encountered this year I believe from the work and assessment feedback I have sampled that the programme has continued to provide a programme of study which stimulates the development of its students in a supportive manner”

“It was pleasing to read the positive mid-term feedback from the students. They clearly enjoy the module.”

Student Support

Compared to 2018/19, there were a number of comments directed to the support and the enthusiasm to engage and help students – most notably because of the pandemic. Overall, the comments were very positive and demonstrated the care and support by staff to ensure students can achieve a good grade. However, areas like student feedback and the quality of sampling do appear to be an area for improvement across courses.

Recurring themes include:

- Flexibility and effort to support students
- Positive quality performance outcomes
- Development opportunities
- Further consistency and guided feedback through our formative and summative assessments

“Throughout my time as an external examiner for these programmes I have always been impressed by the way in which the staff have supported the students, bringing their expertise, passion and enthusiasm for the subject into the studio to invigorate the teaching and learning process.”

“Staff continue to be very supportive of the students, and make significant efforts to ensure all students have the maximum opportunity to achieve successful outcomes. This is clearly evident at the progression boards, where staff demonstrate excellent awareness of individual student issues”

Employer Engagement

Overall, the comments showed little about the employee engagement, potentially due to the impact of the pandemic. However, good assignment strategies were seen that allowed students to create their own scheduling, engage in activities and work at a pace that allowed them to manage life and study commitments. EE's also commented on good collaboration and effort with local industries and employers, to help develop skills and competence for students and their employability.

Themes demonstrated were:

- Flexible approach to learning by staff and students
- Employability opportunities
- Introduction to key sector workers

“Meeting key people working in the sector is an excellent way for them to hear about areas of teaching and research and engagement opportunities. It is a very effective method of recruiting on to our HNC pathway. More engagement with this Forum is planned for 2020/21.”

“I’ve enjoyed my time as the EE for the college. I like to think that the colleagues there have found my comments challenging but reasonable. I’m pleased to see that the provision looks viable and I wish them all the best. I’ll also add that I’ve appreciated the support from colleagues at the University.”

Overall, external examiner reports submitted with the IRR show that the qualification standards had been dealt with fantastically and external examiners felt the outcomes and results were very similar to the results which would have been obtained if normal services had continued. Furthermore, they mention that the material appears to be relevant to the students' needs and during the student meeting there were several comments stating that the courses were appropriate to their needs and the needs of their employers.

“Standards that are set out for the programmes/ performance of students are robust – students must earn their marks. They continue to state that the content in the programmes is relevant and that the course team is aware of current developments in their subjects.”

“that virtual boards were good and highlights areas of good practice and areas of development, which they were present in. The provision is worthy and reliable. I'd be hard pushed to say it was particularly innovative.”

“Overall, systems throughout are clear to navigate and the mechanisms for dealing with predicted and safety net graders were sufficient.”

“There has been significant efforts to further enhance the already good provision”

“The HND programme employs an effective balance of academic and practice based modules and prepares students well in terms of academic development and interpersonal skills. There is particularly effective use of group work.”

“Emergency procedures, in response to Covid-19 were clearly set out at the beginning of each Board, and I believe these were applied in a fair and consistent manner for students this year”

Quality Assurance

Despite the pandemic Quality Assurance processes were maintained to a good standard. One HEI used this pandemic as an opportunity to review and update their processes, policies and procedures. Most HEI's however, adapted and continued to maintain standards that are the same as the previous year.

In summary, HEI's adapted well to the pandemic and Quality Assurance Processes, procedures and qualification standards were maintained or adapted to reflect the effects of school curriculum.

Of the 30 HEIs, only three reported changes to their internal quality assurance processes. Due to the pandemic, some HEIs, used this as an opportunity to change their QA processes. These changes involved updates to policies and procedures around programme approvals and re-approvals, programme monitoring and enhancement and external examination.

Trends, Future Plans and Local Initiatives

22 universities identified new trends, future plans or local initiatives. These can be summarized as follows:

- HN's continue to be the most relevant and popular with Engineering and Construction disciplines whilst Digital and Electrical & Electronic Technology appear to be emerging across HEIs.
- Increase in registrations on HNC/HND programmes by over 80% in two HEI's. Others have generally maintained numbers or have had a decrease in registrations due to the current climate.
- Adaption and application to virtual learning across many sectors, although practical aspects of assessment remain challenging.
- Students applying themselves well to the new environment and in fact, learning new skills and professional practices,
- Financial constraints within HEIs have meant running programmes with smaller numbers. As a result, provision has decreased causing viability issues with smaller HE programmes.
- Consistent amount of HEIs have no significant changes or plans for the provision of HN qualifications currently or the near future.
- Future initiatives such as newly approved programmes have taken place to accommodate new partners
- Some students chose to postpone their study for a year due to difficulty adapting to online learning.
- Concerns over student recruitment due to Covid-19 & the UK leaving the EU.
- Localised studying. More students chose to study locally to avoid the commute. 3 HEIs have expressed this.

Conclusion

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic impacted the entire education sector, with unforeseen closures and delays impacting teaching, learning and assessment from March 2020 onwards. This has had an undoubtedly negative impact on student experience, and institutions in the Higher and Further education sectors should be commended for adapting their strategies to enable greater online learning where possible. Nonetheless, it is clear that the pandemic had significant impacts upon student recruitment, achievement and progression.

With pandemic lockdown conditions affecting industries, there was also a significant decline in employment opportunities, negatively impacting the pipeline between education and the job market. Apprenticeships involving vocational higher education were likewise affected, with a decline of up to 50% in the UK reported in 2020 (FE News, 29th September 2020)

In light of the disruption, definitive conclusions and recommendations from this year's IRR analysis are not possible, however there is evidence in the data that some trends from the previous year have continued. This includes the continued shift towards delivering Licensed Higher Nationals at partner institutions, with some HEI feedback demonstrating the value of the award for **widening participation**. It can also be inferred from registration data that the Licensed HN has increasing numbers of part-time students.

Subject-wise, Engineering and Construction subjects continue to perform well, demonstrating their robust design and traditionally strong employer links. The popularity of these programme may indicate that HEIs and partner institutions may turn further towards Engineering and Construction at the expense of underperforming programmes in the Arts and Sports, though this may be pandemic-related.

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Licensed Higher Nationals and Higher Technical Qualifications

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) are currently reviewing submissions for Digital subjects for approval for Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ) status, as a part of the government's drive to ensure greater recognition for Level 4 and 5 higher technical education. Pearson submitted the HN in Computing to IfATE for approval, and received confirmation that it has HTQ status in July 2021.

Pearson have been informed that when our Higher National specifications gain approval for HTQ status, that approval can be applied to any programmes being delivered under the Intellectual Property (IP) Licence at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). As such, any Higher National IP programmes will have the HTQ kitemark. We shall keep you informed and up to date of our progress as Higher Nationals attain the Higher Technical approval. If you are interested in delivering an HTQ approved Higher National through an IP Licence, please contact us to discuss.

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

If your institution is considering submitting a TM License Higher National for approval during the forthcoming Higher Technical Qualification approval windows for Construction, Healthcare, Science, Engineering or Digital subjects, please contact Pearson's University Principal Examiner for Licensed Higher Nationals at LicensedHN@pearson.com

Useful Dates

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

September 16th 2021	Please return your annual Licensed HN schedules. Schedule 1 should confirm programmes and expected registration numbers for Licensed HNs delivered on campus, and Schedule 2 should confirm programmes and expected registration number for Licensed HNs delivered at partner providers.
October 25th 2021	Institutional Review Report (IRR) 2021 (covering 2020/21 academic year) released for Licensed HN partners
October 28th 2021	Outcomes for those students who completed their Licensed HN programme in 2020/21 should be recorded on Edexcel Online
November 15th 2021	New student registrations for 2021/22 should be completed.
December 30th 2021	IRR report due.