

Office for  
Students



# Assessment for quality and standards initial conditions B7 and B8

King Stage Limited

**Provider legal name:** King Stage Limited

**Provider trading name:** King Stage

**UKPRN:** 10054436

**Assessment conducted:** 8 November 2024 to 13 February 2025

**Reference:** OfS 2026.13

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# Executive summary

<b>Type of assessment</b>	Initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards)
<b>For</b>	King Stage Limited
<b>Advice to the OfS on B7</b>	King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions B1, B2 and B4 from the date of registration.
<b>Advice to the OfS on B8</b>	The standards set for the courses King Stage Limited intends to provide, and the achievement of students on these courses, do not appropriately reflect sector-recognised standards.

1. This report is an independent assessment of King Stage Limited about its compliance with the Office for Students' (OfS's) initial conditions of registration for quality (condition B7) and standards (condition B8).
2. The report shows the findings of an independent assessment team. It does not represent a decision by the OfS about the provider's compliance with these conditions of registration.
3. The OfS's regulatory framework sets out that a higher education provider wishing to access the benefits of registration must register with the OfS.<sup>1</sup>
4. As part of the registration process, the OfS must assess whether a provider satisfies the initial conditions of registration, including initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards).
5. Concerning the OfS's initial condition of registration for quality (condition B7), the team found that King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that would allow it, if registered, to comply with the OfS's ongoing conditions of registration for academic experience (condition B1), resources, support and student engagement (condition B2), and assessment and awards (condition B4).
6. Concerning initial condition B8, the team found that the standards set and applied for any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course that King Stage Limited intends to provide if it is registered do not appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

## How we assess providers applying to register

For providers seeking registration with the OfS, the OfS will assess their application and relevant evidence to determine whether the provider satisfies the initial conditions of registration. For providers that applied for registration on or after 1 May 2022, this includes an assessment of whether the provider satisfies initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards) as set out in the regulatory framework (November 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> See OfS, [Regulatory framework for higher education in England](#).

For this assessment, the OfS appoints an assessment team that includes external academic experts. The assessment may include a visit to the provider by the team, after which it produces a report. The report does not consider matters that may have occurred after that period.

As part of the registration process the OfS also assesses risk against the related revised ongoing conditions of registration. These cover the following areas: academic experience (condition B1), resources, support and student engagement (condition B2), assessment and awards (condition B4) and sector-recognised standards (condition B5).

7. At the time of the assessment, through meetings, its website and documentation submitted to the assessment team, King Stage Limited stated that it delivers masters' programmes in international business and sustainability, strategic marketing and sustainability, and innovation and social entrepreneurship. These courses are described as being validated by NCC Education.<sup>2</sup>
8. In accordance with the guidance on registering with the OfS (Regulatory advice 3), the OfS decided that it was necessary to undertake an assessment visit to King Stage Limited to gather evidence and provide advice to inform the OfS's decision about whether the initial conditions B7 and B8 are satisfied.<sup>3</sup> The OfS decided that this assessment should be undertaken by assessors able to provide expert academic judgement.
9. The purpose of the assessment is to provide advice to enable the OfS to decide whether initial conditions B7 and B8 are satisfied and whether there is any regulatory risk. The evidence from the assessment informs the OfS's decisions about whether to register King Stage Limited and, if registered, whether any mitigation is necessary.
10. The OfS appointed an assessment team that consisted of two academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff. The team was asked to give its advice and judgement about King Stage Limited's compliance with initial conditions B7 and B8.
11. The team considered a range of information submitted by King Stage Limited as part of its application for registration.
12. The team visited King Stage Limited in February 2025, during which time it met with leaders, teaching staff and students, toured the premises, observed teaching and met with the validating partner.

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<sup>2</sup> Validation enables a provider to deliver higher education when it might not otherwise have the expertise and resources to create new courses itself, or have the powers to make the award.

<sup>3</sup> See OfS, [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS](#).

## Introduction and background

13. King Stage Limited took its first students in the academic year 2024-25 on the Level 7 international business and sustainability diploma validated by NCC.
14. It is based in Greenwich in a space shared with two other businesses. Some of the King Stage Limited staff also work for other businesses that use the same premises. All teaching takes place in the same building.
15. King Stage Limited offers three Level 7 masters' courses in its prospectus:
  - Level 7 in International Business and Sustainability
  - Level 7 in Strategic Marketing and Sustainability
  - Level 7 in Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship.
16. During 2024-25, King Stage Limited is only running one course. Five students are enrolled in the Level 7 international business and sustainability. King Stage Limited is projecting to increase student numbers to 55 by 2027-28.
17. The validating partnership with NCC is designed to provide assurance around the quality of what is being delivered. Students have to be registered by King Stage Limited with NCC Education to trigger the processes that NCC puts in place.
18. The senior leadership team is the academic authority within King Stage Limited and is responsible for overseeing the provider's academic management, including the curriculum and all aspects of quality and standards associated with King Stage Limited.
19. The academic quality standard team is responsible to the senior leadership team for assuring the effectiveness of the provider's arrangements for managing academic quality and standards.
20. King Stage Limited mainly employs central staff on a part-time basis. Lecturers are on short-term contracts to deliver their modules.

# Assessment process

## Initial condition B7: Quality

21. King Stage Limited submitted a quality plan and supporting evidence, as required by the OfS's guidance for providers applying for registration (Regulatory advice 3).<sup>4</sup>
22. The assessment team sought further written evidence from the provider on 6 December 2024 and 15 January 2025, and undertook an assessment visit on 12 and 13 February 2025. During the visit, the team met with the senior leadership team, teaching and administrative staff, students including student representatives, and the validating partner.
23. Access was granted to the provider's virtual learning environment (VLE) from 18 December 2024 onwards. The team also had access to data and information relating to the provider held by the OfS that was relevant to the assessment.
24. The team used this evidence to advise on whether the provider complied with the requirements set out in initial condition B7.

## Initial condition B8: Standards

25. King Stage Limited was asked to submit information relevant to the academic standards of the courses it intends to provide if registered, including course details, programme specifications and module outlines.<sup>5</sup>
26. The 'sector-recognised standards' that all registered providers are required to meet are set out in a document published by the OfS, and were used by the team for its assessment.<sup>6</sup>
27. The standards the OfS has identified as applicable are:
  - A.1: Qualifications at each level
  - A.2: Volumes of credit
  - A.3: Qualification descriptors, specifically:
  - A.3.4 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 7.
28. The team considered the evidence available to provide advice on whether King Stage Limited complied with the requirements set out in condition of registration B8.

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<sup>4</sup> See OfS, [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS](#).

<sup>5</sup> See Annex I, 'Guidance for providers on the assessment of initial condition B8 (standards)' at OfS, [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS](#).

<sup>6</sup> See Annex I, 'Guidance for providers on the assessment of initial condition B8 (standards)' at OfS, [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS](#).

# Part 1: Assessment of condition B7 – Quality

## Condition B1: Academic experience

### Criterion B1.2

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience? [B1.2]

29. The assessment team considered King Stage Limited's plans to ensure that students registered on each higher education course will receive a high quality academic experience. In doing so, the team first considered the factors set out below at B1.3, alongside any other information relevant to ensuring a high quality academic experience.

### Criterion B1.3.a

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up to date? [B1.3.a]

### Advice to the OfS

30. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up to date, because it does not have any clear processes in place to produce, monitor and review course content. In addition, King Stage Limited shows a lack of understanding of the qualification being delivered and is not currently following the processes required by its validating partner.

### Reasoning

31. King Stage Limited is currently validated by NCC for two Level 7 courses of 120 credits: international business and sustainability, and digital marketing ethical branding. However, documents submitted and the website list three courses. The course development process is currently unclear, because requests for detailed validation documents were not met. The team requested details twice on how curriculum materials were kept up to date and about how the relationship with the validating partner supports this process. No information about this was provided by King Stage Limited.
32. King Stage Limited is currently running one course in the academic year 2024-25, international business and sustainability. This course is new, with five students registered on the programme. Despite requests for further information, no additional materials about the two other Level 7 courses that were being advertised were provided to the team.
33. No validation documentation was provided relating to agreed content or module descriptors including credits and assessment type. Despite requests from the team, no detail was provided about how course materials would be reviewed and updated. There was no evidence of consultation activities with industry partners or confirmed partnerships for paid internship

opportunities, which are a key component of the course, as credits are awarded for this part of the course.

34. Despite requests, processes for validation were not shared with the team. Staff from King Stage Limited told the team that agreed processes of notifying the validating partner about the names of students and start dates of the current cohort have not been followed. This has a severe impact on students in relation to the qualification they believe they are studying for, as their diploma may not be validated by the validating partner. The view of the team is that King Stage Limited does not have sufficient systems in place to ensure that the course stays up to date by being appropriately informed by recent subject matter developments or research, industrial and professional developments. The validating partner's ability to keep the course materials up to date is undermined by it being unaware that students are already enrolled.
35. This course is validated as a qualification of 120 credits, in line with sector-recognised standards for a postgraduate diploma. This course is listed on the prospectus, website, UCAS entry, and course documentation as either a masters' or MSc programme. During the assessment visit senior staff, teaching staff and students referred to the course as a masters' or MSc programme. A masters' degree is a degree qualification at Level 7 and typically of 180 credits as set out in the sector-recognised standards.<sup>7</sup> 'Degree' is a protected term and a masters' degree can only be awarded by a provider registered with the OfS that has degree awarding powers. The validating partner, NCC, does not have degree awarding powers and is not registered with the OfS. This again has a severe impact on students, as they have paid for a qualification which they will not receive.
36. Many of the staff are on temporary contracts, including senior leadership team members. There is no clear strategy for maintaining currency of provision in either subject content or pedagogical innovation. While some teaching staff hold qualifications in higher education teaching and learning, there are no professional development provisions or plans in place to support other teaching staff to obtain qualifications in higher education teaching and learning, or to gain Advance HE Fellowship. With the lack of assurance around teaching qualifications and no professional development plans, staff will be unable to be appropriately informed by developments in teaching and learning.

## Criterion B1.3.b

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course provides educational challenge? [B1.3.b]

### Advice to the OfS

37. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans to ensure that its courses provide appropriate educational challenge because the current provision does not reflect sector-recognised standards for a Level 7 qualification.

### Reasoning

38. The team was only provided with details of the Level 7 course that is currently being run. The educational challenge provided by the course is less than the minimum level of rigour and

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<sup>7</sup> See OfS, [Sector-recognised standards](#).

difficulty reasonably expected, in terms of both the subject matter and level of the course. When the team viewed the teaching materials from a range of modules on the VLE, the lack of referencing and signposting to further resources was concerning for this level of study. There is no evidence that students are encouraged to critically evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline. This is further highlighted in multiple student submissions, which included no citations or references and yet were awarded a distinction grade. The programme specification and programme syllabus documentation provided to the team do not align with the sector-recognised standards qualification descriptors for Level 7. Many of the learning outcomes are listed as 'describe' or 'identify', and it is not clear how the content and assessment strategy is preparing students to develop the criticality, originality, independent thought and knowledge application required to provide educational challenge at Level 7.

### Criterion B1.3.c

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent? [B1.3.c]

#### Advice to the OfS

39. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent, because the programme specification provided for the current course was insufficient to demonstrate a coherent programme strategy.

#### Reasoning

40. The team was only provided with details of the Level 7 course that is currently being run. The Level 7 international business and sustainability course consists of six modules:
- international business
  - business environment and sustainability
  - global strategies
  - sustainable development
  - advanced research methods
  - international management.
41. Insufficient detail was provided to demonstrate how the modules have been designed to provide a coherent learning experience. No module descriptors with details of assessment type and credits were provided. The quality plan does not provide any detail to suggest that the course follows a clear developmental path. No evidence was provided to demonstrate that senior staff hold qualifications in higher education teaching and learning to enable them to devise and deliver a coherent Level 7 course.

## Criterion B1.3.d

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered? [B1.3.d]

### Advice to the OfS

42. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered, because it has not demonstrated sufficient plans for delivery, teaching and assessment, or the necessary resources to support them.

### Reasoning

43. The team was only provided with details of the Level 7 course that is currently being run, despite requests to see further details of the other courses listed on the website. King Stage Limited's international business and sustainability course is delivered in person, supported by the use of Microsoft Teams as a VLE interface. This software is not intended for use as a VLE and it is insufficient in providing a useful environment for students to navigate course materials. King Stage Limited stated it had plans for updating this in time for next year's intake. However, the team was not provided with any information about how this would be updated.
44. Assessment design and delivery were unclear, with inconsistencies in marking. These inconsistencies were found in the detail of feedback given, use of marking criteria and marks awarded. The team was told that the validating partner has offered support in developing consistent assessment strategies. However, no detail was provided on what this might involve. The team was told by staff that there are currently no internal or external moderation processes in place, which undermines the reliability of the assessment design and delivery.
45. The prospectus for the course includes a six-month paid internship. It is the responsibility of the student to secure this industry placement. There is no evidence of current industry partnerships to support this element of the course. The team did not meet any students who had successfully secured an internship, paid or unpaid. Staff told the team that they are working to develop alternative, unpaid options for students unable to secure a paid placement. The team saw no credible plans for an alternative assessment or for implementing this.
46. For the one course that is running, students are taught together in one group face-to-face, which is appropriate for the size of the group and nature of the course. However, the team was unable to gain assurance that there was an appropriate balance between delivery methods and between directed and independent study, because of the limited information available about the course.

## Criterion B1.3.e

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course, as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills? [B1.3.e]

### Advice to the OfS

47. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course, as appropriate to the subject matter, requires students to develop relevant skills. This is because the assessment strategy is unclear, and therefore it is not clear how the course is requiring students to develop and demonstrate both the intellectual skills and professional competencies appropriate to the subject matter and level of the course.

### Reasoning

48. Insufficient detail was provided to the assessors to demonstrate credible plans for how the course requires students to develop relevant skills. The programme specification and programme syllabus listed the assessments as 'written assignments in form of report' and 'an individual and a group presentation'. Module descriptors that included credits and assessment type were not provided. No assessment breakdown was included. It is therefore not clear how all modules are being assessed to ensure students are developing the relevant skills. When module descriptors were requested again, assessors were provided with documents in the form of a scheme of work. These included learning outcomes, and outlined week by week the topics to be covered. However, there was still no detail on how students would be assessed to ensure they are developing the relevant skills. The view of the team is that there is not sufficient evidence of credible plans for the students developing the relevant skills at an appropriate level.
49. In the module on business environment and sustainability, 20 per cent of the mark is allocated to participation in discussions and workshops, but no guidance was provided to students in the documents about what constitutes participation and how this is being graded. During meetings with the team, staff could not explain the reasoning behind this assessment choice or how it would be evaluated. Therefore, the team is unclear about how the students will develop their relevant skills.
50. Documentation given to the team shows a misconception around formative and summative assessment, as the terms are used interchangeably. This confusion was further demonstrated during meetings with academic staff, when the assessors sought to establish details of the assessment strategy. Senior staff told the assessors that quality procedures had not been followed in producing assessments for the current student cohort. This included both internal moderation and sign-off processes and processes required by the validating partner. There was no evidence of a clear structure with appropriate skills being matched to assessments. The lack of internal or external quality assurance was a serious concern for the team. The team's view is that assessments are not being designed to help students develop relevant skills.

## B1 conclusions

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B1 from the date of registration?

51. The assessment team's overall view is that King Stage Limited does not have credible plans to enable it to comply with condition B1 from the date of registration.
52. The provider is currently running a programme relevant to registration. However, there is currently no evidence that King Stage Limited meets the requirements to comply with condition B1 or that it has any credible plans to do so. No additional information about the other Level 7 courses was provided to the team.
53. The main concerns relate to a lack of any clear processes or plans to produce, monitor and review course content.
54. Staff demonstrated a lack of understanding of the qualification being delivered, which was having a severe impact on students who believed they were studying for a masters' degree. In addition, in the view of the team, the educational challenge provided by the modules being delivered did not align with sector-recognised standards for Level 7.
55. The provider does not have credible plans for effective delivery. This is evidenced in the lack of clear assessment documentation and serious inconsistencies in current assessment practices. The team also has serious concerns about King Stage Limited's plans to effectively deliver a six-month industry internship for all students as part of the course.

## Condition B2: Resources, support, and student engagement

### Criterion B2.2.a (resources)

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive resources which are sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education? [B2.2.a]

### Advice to the OfS

56. The assessment team noted some concerns in respect of King Stage Limited's staff, teaching space, learning resources and technical availability. These concerns are evident for the current cohort of students and would also inhibit King Stage Limited's ability to grow the provision in terms of future student numbers. The team's view overall is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans for the current cohort of students or to ensure that each cohort of students will receive resources that are sufficient to ensure a high quality academic experience at present and in the future.

57. Students believe they are studying for a masters' degree. They are actually studying for a Level 7 diploma. This undermines the students' ability to succeed in and beyond higher education.

## Reasoning

58. The physical spaces used by King Stage Limited are shared with another academic institution. The two rooms provided as teaching rooms are small and not easily accessible, but adequate for the size of the current cohort. The teaching rooms had adequate facilities for providing lectures and seminars, with overhead projectors and screens.
59. The accessibility of both teaching rooms would be problematic for students with mobility issues. No details were provided about how students with mobility issues would be catered for. There were no designated self-study areas and while there was a reasonably sized refectory area, it was observed to be very busy at the start of the day and during the midday break with the students from the shared institution. One student reported that the facilities were not ideal, as the soundproofing between classrooms was inadequate and they could hear the teaching going on in other classes, which was distracting.
60. The team was informed that the timetables for King Stage Limited and the shared institution were staggered to reduce congestion at peak times. King Stage Limited students typically have four days of taught sessions, with Friday being a self-study day. The King Stage Limited timetable was intensive, with three-hour teaching blocks twice a day on the four days present at the campus. Administrative spaces were composed of two rooms, one of which was multiple occupancy. There were no computer laboratories and students were expected to provide their own devices for accessing the digital resources.
61. On campus, WiFi was provided to the required standard and no issues of access were experienced by the team while on campus. If the expected uplift in student numbers and the extension of course provision as defined by King Stage Limited were realised, there would be serious pressure on the space available. Despite requests, no details were provided to the team about how King Stage Limited would manage the potential increase in student numbers.
62. While there was an expectation that students would provide their own digital resources, there were no laptops or PCs for students who were not in possession of their own devices. Facilities for students to print out hard copies were not observed by the team. Microsoft Teams was the designated platform for the VLE, although the documentation provided stated that Moodle was the VLE. There were concerns among the staff as to the usage of Teams for learning support. One staff member stated that there was a preferred option as a VLE, but that it was not possible due to funding constraints. The team was also told that academic honesty checking was not in place using software, because of a lack of funding.
63. King Stage Limited has a small staff team and the assessment team met in person with the director, the acting dean, the academic lead, the marketing manager, the partnerships officer and one member of the teaching staff. The team met with the human resources and compliance manager via video link. Only the director has a permanent contract and all other staff are part-time or contracted. The course that was running had a curriculum designed by the acting dean with the approach of being both academic and practical in the key areas of sustainability.
64. The CV of the senior leader that was shared with the team showed extensive experience in industry and academia, but the qualifications were not commensurate with the design and

delivery of academic programmes at Level 7, as there was no formal teaching qualification or masters' degree or equivalent.

65. The CV of the member of teaching staff that the assessment met did meet the requirements to teach at Level 7, with a recognised teaching qualification and extensive experience of teaching at other academic institutions. This member of staff would be classed as 'appropriately qualified'.
66. A request was made for a selection of staff CVs for the wider teaching team, but no other CVs for members of the course team were provided. It was therefore not possible to appraise the suitability of teaching qualifications and experience of the academic lead or other members of teaching staff and whether they could be termed 'appropriately qualified'. As the cohort size is small currently, the provision of academic staff was sufficient, but the team was only able to meet with one member of the delivery team other than the acting dean. Reliance on contract staff to provide the current level of teaching is sufficient currently, but this would be a constraint if student numbers grew as the institution planned. No details about future recruitment of staff were provided to the team.
67. The human resources manager stated that for permanent staff recruitment the process is undertaken in a structured way, with job specifications for the required roles created and advertised on recognised online recruitment sites. The submitted CVs were scrutinised and appropriate candidates were shortlisted and invited for an interview. For academic staff the interview process involved a 'micro-teach' exercise to appraise pedagogic skills with a panel of three people. Following the interviewing process, for successful candidates, references were sought and qualifications checked, and once this process was completed an offer letter was provided.
68. The interviewing and selection for temporary staff was undertaken by a consultancy or agency with a view to providing suitably qualified staff with a bachelors' degree in a relevant subject area and a teaching qualification such as a PGCE. It was stated that although a teaching qualification was required, if the interviewing panel approved of the teaching style the candidate would be employed. The team was unconvinced by the rigour of this recruitment process and its ability to recruit staff who are appropriately qualified and have the skills to deliver high quality teaching.
69. The team was provided with an outline of the induction process for new staff that was primarily undertaken in conjunction with the academic lead and the marketing manager. The documentation regarding the induction of new staff states that responsibility for an induction lies with the 'line manager' but during a meeting, senior leaders stated that the academic lead was the main provider of the induction process. The process is that the new employee is taken through an induction checklist and provided with a staff handbook. The checklist mentions a 'teacher handbook', which was made available on request during the visit and does provide an adequate overview of the expectations placed upon the teaching staff.
70. The staff handbook that was provided was out of date in terms of staff in the organisation chart. There was a role of 'Academic Operations Officer', and a named person who was not met by the assessment team. The address for the institution was stated as 'Unit 8 Greenwich Quay, Clarence Road' and also the 'Dreadnought Building at the University of Greenwich'. The team was informed that neither of these buildings were used now and that the institution operated from 142 Greenwich High Road. During the induction meeting, new staff would be provided with the teaching timetables and asked to produce a scheme of work and teaching materials that would then be deposited in a Dropbox folder for uploading to the Teams VLE.

The team considered that the induction process as stated was not sufficiently comprehensive to allow staff to be fully briefed on their roles and responsibilities, especially with regards to teaching and learning and the ensuing student experience.

71. The team was told that ongoing performance reviews of staff are not in place yet, and that the informal process of checking on progress was carried out through monthly meetings with the academic lead. Senior leaders stated that teaching observations were carried out by the academic lead or the acting dean, and this is supported by the 'Monitoring of teaching and learning quality' document that was provided. While the document makes clear the process for monitoring quality, no supporting evidence of the process was provided. The monthly discussions between staff and the academic take place in an informal way and attempt to provide continuous feedback to staff. Copies of the minutes of these meetings were provided on request during the visit. The meetings mainly involved discussion of administration rather than discussions about quality of teaching. The member of staff interviewed by the team stated that there was no formal appraisal system in place. Senior leaders told the team that staff were invited to provide feedback on their experience at King Stage Limited and that surveys had been circulated, but none of the staff had completed the surveys.
72. The team was informed that continuous professional development (CPD) was mainly down to the individual staff members themselves to undertake and to fund. This is especially the case with the contract staff, as they are not employees of King Stage Limited and it is down to the consultancy or agency to ensure that these staff are developing in terms of teaching practice and subject material expertise. There is no funding from King Stage Limited in the contracts as they stand to support CPD. Some peer development takes place, but this is done on an informal basis by the staff themselves and not facilitated by King Stage Limited. All staff have mandatory training in Prevent, but other areas such as equalities, cybersecurity and General Data Protection Regulations are not yet undertaken. The team was not provided with evidence, though it was requested, of procedures in place for King Stage Limited staff to be supported with personal and professional development for academic delivery. Such procedures would be expected to be in place to support the adoption of best practice to provide students with a high quality academic experience.
73. The team was provided with access to a stable internet connection available through WiFi. The access was not unique to King Stage Limited and was provided by the shared institution. The technical infrastructure and systems came under the jurisdiction of the marketing manager, who was employed by both King Stage Limited and the shared institution, and appeared to work seamlessly during the visit period by the team.

## Criterion B2.2.a (support)

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive support which is sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education? [B2.2.a]

## Advice to the OfS

74. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans that set out the steps it will take to ensure that each cohort of students will receive the necessary support to receive a high quality academic experience and to succeed in and beyond higher education.

## Reasoning

75. The team found no clear evidence of support for study skills for students, and no dedicated staff member was identified in the quality plan or during meetings as being responsible for this critical role. The academic staff member who was interviewed provided some examples of how they help the students to develop in terms of academic writing, referencing and researching, but there is no institutional policy setting out an approach or specific requirements for staff in terms of student support. There was no evidence on the VLE of specific study skills materials or links to external sources. In the absence of an appointed librarian and with no evidence of library facilities, the students would be disadvantaged in developing the study skills required for studying at Level 7.
76. The quality plan, under the section on supporting students' development, does mention IT support, significant investment in campus facilities and 'the best resourced academic online library. The plan also states that there are academic and wellbeing support services, but the team found little credible evidence to support these claims during the visit.
77. Academic publications were not directly provided by King Stage Limited, and there is no on-campus library and no books or journals are available. King Stage Limited does provide a paid subscription for the students to access an online library that contains significant numbers of recognised textbooks in the relevant subject area that are commensurate with studies at Level 7. There is no access to peer-reviewed journal articles via recognised academic databases. From discussions with the team, it was clear the students were not aware of the need to access academic journals, especially for Level 7 studies. There was a suggestion from a member of staff that the students could use the libraries of other institutions in London, but this was not substantiated by the students or any other evidence.
78. The module specifications varied in how they presented essential reading materials. The module being taught at the time of the visit has a scheme of work, but there is no specified reading list attached. The students stated that they were provided with some recommended reading during the module teaching sessions, but not on all modules.
79. The current student cohort reported that the staff were readily available for discussions both during scheduled teaching time and for non-academic issues. The main points of contact for academic matters were the director, the acting dean and the relevant tutors. For non-academic matters, the main points of contact were the director, the academic lead and the marketing manager. The student cohort stated that the staff were approachable and that the small number involved meant that ease of access was not an issue.
80. The student handbook is informative, providing sufficient detail about the location of the institution and amenities found close by, how to open bank accounts and transportation information. There is very little information about the academic content of the course in terms of programme or module specifications. The handbook was visually pleasing but contained less than one page about the requirements and time commitments for studying at Level 7, and hardly any details of how assessments would be undertaken. For a student handbook the expectation would be for more than one page on academic matters.

81. The handbook does provide a mission statement, and sets out a guarantee of quality that makes commitments to the provision of qualified lecturers, the provision of practical workshops and input from guest speakers. During the visit, no examples were provided of the practical workshops or guest speakers' sessions. The handbook stated that all masters' programmes are accredited by NCC Education Ltd and that they are recognised globally. This is an example of students being given incorrect information.
82. The student handbook did not mention academic misconduct and how it could be avoided. A separate document, 'Rules on academic misconduct', identified the rules for dealing with academic misconduct and appears to be directing staff on how to deal with instances of academic misconduct, but when asked by the team, students were unaware of these processes. The acting dean stated in a meeting that software to identify academic misconduct was not used, as the funds were not available to purchase the subscription. When asked, the staff were unclear about how they would identify academic misconduct. The lack of a systematic approach to identifying academic misconduct and the lack of support for study skills in this area suggest to the team that academic misconduct is not viewed as a priority and there are not sufficient mechanisms in place to avoid it.
83. The documentation provided by King Stage Limited refers to the career prospects of the award holders. The postgraduate prospectus states that students would enhance their career prospects by undertaking consultancy projects, having access to guest speakers and attending events and conferences. The prospectus states that on successful completion of the masters' in international business and sustainability there could be opportunities in a number of job openings on graduation. During the visit, the team was not able to determine whether the project and guest speakers were in place for the current cohort, as none of this information was provided even when details of the programme were requested. With such a small staff team, careers support that would include information, advice and guidance for students does not fall on any single staff member, and therefore there is no formalised way in which students may be suited to particular careers or enabled to make job applications for the roles as stated.
84. A key component of the programme of study was the work placement that students would undertake on completion of the taught elements of the programme of study in term 2, which runs from March to September. The terms 'placement' and 'internship' were used interchangeably and while there is a common understanding that a placement is paid work and an internship is unpaid, it was pointed out by King Stage Limited that there was an expectation that the students would be paid. For this reason, the term 'placement' will be used as the term in the following paragraphs.
85. The team undertook an in-depth discussion with the course team and the partnerships manager on the operation and assessment of the placement. As students had not reached this stage of the programme at the time of the visit, there was a level of ambiguity and confusion on the part of the staff and the students regarding how the placement would operate. Considering that the placement would be starting shortly after the visit by the team, this level of uncertainty was worrying, and one of the students interviewed stated that they were expected to find their own placements in the area where they want to work, if they can. The student stated that they had made 40 applications to placement organisations, and had received 40 rejections.
86. King Stage Limited stated that it would request a monthly report from the placement organisation about how the student was performing and progressing. An example of the form King Stage Limited intended to use for this report was provided, but was very basic and there

was no real indication of how it would be completed and how it would be processed. The team asked if there would be visits from King Stage Limited staff to appraise the placement organisation, but King Stage Limited stated this would not be viable because the potential locations of the placements are overseas and the staff team working at King Stage Limited is small. The quality plan stated that King Stage Limited would allocate project supervisors before the placement or project was due to start, but this was not observed to be in place during the visit even though the placements were scheduled to start in the following month.

87. The team asked how the placement would be used by the students to complete their courses, and whether there was a credit-bearing assessment for the placement. The documents provided were not clear because King Stage Limited presented to the team two programme syllabi that contained different information. The version provided in advance of the visit shows that the final project has a 15,000-word written report, but this does not state that it relates to a placement. The version of the syllabus provided during the visit makes no mention of a final project, and has six taught modules while the final project appears to be replaced with a module entitled 'international management'.
88. The issue is further confused by the fact that there are no credit ratings for the modules in either syllabus, although the quality plan states that they represent 15 credits at Level 7. There is no module specification for the project or any placement. The quality plan stated that the placement has a rating of 30 credits at Level 7. When asked about the assessment requirement for the placement, the director stated that the company would evaluate the students and that 40 per cent of the placement would be from the company report. It was not made clear how the other 60 per cent would be assessed.
89. The team asked what would happen to students who were not able to gain access to a placement in terms of equivalence of learning and assessment. King Stage Limited staff stated that alternatives would be made available, and one of these was a virtual placement, but overall, this would not be the same as a real placement. Staff stated that a third option might be to gain a placement with the institution with which King Stage Limited shared the campus, but this was a discussion in the early stages and it was not clear whether this would be possible or suitable. This arrangement had been communicated with the students but there was no assignment brief for the placement issued yet.
90. A significant section of the postgraduate prospectus that the team was given prior to the visit was devoted to a study trip to Shanghai. The team requested details of how such a trip would take place, and was told that it turned out to be very expensive and that students would have to fund this for themselves, and as a result the initiative had been cancelled. It was pointed out that the King Stage Limited website was still showing that a visit to Shanghai was available, and the director reported that it would be taken off. The students stated that the trip to Shanghai was attractive and that it would have been beneficial to have gone, but self-funding of around £3,000 was prohibitive. They only found out about the cancellation of the trip once they had enrolled on the course, and this did cause some disappointment. The students reported that there was discussion about a trip to somewhere in Europe instead, but this was dependent upon the cost and the numbers who would be interested in such a trip.

## Criterion B2.2.b

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans for how it would ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students which is sufficient for the purpose of ensuring:

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students; and
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education? [B2.2.b]

### Advice to the OfS

91. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans to ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students. These plans are not sufficient to ensure that these students receive a high quality academic experience and that they succeed in and beyond higher education.

### Reasoning

92. The quality plan identifies standards of governance and quality that operate at an institutional level, with the senior leadership team having overall responsibility for overseeing academic management and standards. There is mention of a quality committee and a learning and teaching committee that is responsible for curriculum, assessment, learning and teaching and student experience. The team found no evidence of any such committees or documentation to support their activities.
93. Given that King Stage Limited and its initial cohort are both small, it is to be expected that staff-student engagement is of a high level on a personal or informal level, and this was borne out in the team visit. The students reported that the interaction with the staff was not a concern, and that they knew who they could contact with issues of an academic or pastoral nature. In the observed teaching session, there was a high level of engagement between the lecturer and the student group, and it was obvious that there was a desire to discuss the relevant topic areas.
94. The team found from meeting with staff and studying the documentation that the personal or informal approaches to student engagement were not fully supported by more formal approaches. It is not made explicit in the quality plan or the quality assurance policy how formal processes for student engagement would be carried out.
95. The quality plan states that student feedback on the academic experience is sought, and reviewed three times a year in the monitoring process, but there was no evidence of this taking place although the first iteration of this process was to take place in February 2025. A student feedback policy was provided, and this made clear that feedback would be sought through module evaluations and student satisfaction surveys. No evidence of these module evaluations or the student satisfaction surveys was provided, either prior to the visit or during the visit by the team. In discussions with the students the cohort representatives identified that the student feedback process was informal and that King Stage Limited did respond to student concerns and put in place corrective actions.
96. One of the cohort representatives stated that communication with the administrative staff was an issue, but it is improving. No evidence of the communications between administrative staff and students was provided. The teacher handbook states that a student satisfaction survey

takes place throughout the programme to ensure satisfaction and that lecturers would be notified of the timings in advance and be provided with the appropriate procedure. The teacher handbook does include a feedback form, but the content appears to request feedback from the lecturer about the teaching approaches rather than from the students.

97. The cohort representatives and the academic lead told the team that student feedback on a particular lecturer's teaching style viewed it as unengaging, and that changes were made after consultation with the lecturer concerned.
98. Student progression was stated as being tracked with a progression form, which would identify how the students are achieving the learning stated in the module specifications and would include feedback from the lecturers. It was stated that the forms are completed at the beginning, middle and at the end of each module, then uploaded to the relevant module folder on the VLE. The staff meeting minutes reiterated this requirement. Despite requests, the team was not provided with any evidence of completed student progression forms.
99. King Stage Limited identified that formal processes for student engagement were in place and that students were encouraged to bring forward issues. The team was not able to identify a credible approach being taken for these formal approaches, and the process seems to be both informal and fluid.
100. There are cohort representatives identified for the programme, and they informed the team that they have contact with King Stage Limited, but there is no formal course committee with agendas. Meetings take place after classes on Wednesday, and the cohort representative stated that notes were kept to ensure actions were followed.
101. There was no evidence of an academic regulations document in place, and this raises a number of issues. Firstly, the senior team at King Stage Limited is not bound by a set of formal rules that must be adhered to in order to provide an engaging learning experience for students. Secondly, the teaching staff are not fully informed on how teaching, learning and assessment are carried out and the formal processes required to ensure student achievement. Finally, there is no formal procedure provided for student complaints and appeals to be lodged, and the informal processes employed are not sufficient to address this important aspect.

## B2 conclusions

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B2 from the date of registration?

102. King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B2 from the date of registration. It has insufficient resources, academic support and engagement processes to ensure that students will receive a high quality academic experience to succeed in and beyond higher education.
103. King Stage Limited does not have credible plans for resources at the point of registration. It does not have resources in place and, while plans were discussed for future development of resources, these were not documented such that they could be articulated or evidenced in a concrete way. These resources include facilities, staffing, study support materials, technical support and equipment. Sharing facilities with another institution means that King Stage

Limited would be constrained by any expansion plans on its part, and this would be detrimental to students in the future. An overreliance on facilities that are not owned by King Stage Limited causes concern and could impact the quality of the academic experience.

104. The lack of library and digital facilities beyond the subscribed textbook service is a distinct disadvantage to students studying at Level 7. Having limited formal study skills support means that students are not assisted in their development in terms of being able to research and write at this level. Academic honesty is not ensured, and without the relevant support to ensure an understanding of the need to produce original work, the students could be found to be wanting in the veracity of submitted assignments.
105. There were some examples of effective student engagement, though the lack of a structured approach means that there are no credible plans to ensure effective student engagement that would lead to a high quality academic experience.
106. CPD at King Stage Limited is left to the individual staff members to undertake, with only the mandatory requirement for Prevent training provided by the institution. While taking ownership for CPD is a recognised practice, institutional support should be provided where necessary in terms of time allocation and funding to support the CPD requirements. A recognised teaching qualification is stated as a requisite for working as an academic at King Stage Limited, but from the personal CVs supplied only one member of staff has this qualification, and it was not possible to verify whether other staff were in possession of it.
107. The team considers that there was insufficient support, particularly around the placement element of the course, to ensure a high quality academic experience and for these students to succeed in and beyond higher education. While there was some discussion of plans for the future development of King Stage Limited, these plans did not form a coherent approach such as a business plan or strategy document.

## Condition B4: Assessment and awards

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is assessed effectively? [B4.2.a]

### Advice to the OfS

108. The assessment team was only provided with details of the Level 7 course that is currently being run. The team's view is that King Stage Limited does **not** have credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that the students are assessed effectively, because the academic skills assessed are not relevant to the awards. The main issue is that the students are under the opinion that the course will lead to a masters' qualification and it is evident that this is not the case. The credit level attained on completion of the course would be 120 credits at Level 7, and the requirement for a masters' degree is 180 credits at Level 7. The credibility of the plans is also compromised because the awarding body, NCC Education Ltd, is not able to award masters' level qualifications. Furthermore, the assessments are not designed so that students reflect on their own learning, and there are no effective mechanisms to minimise the potential for academic misconduct.

## Reasoning

109. King Stage Limited has not developed a clear assessment strategy for the students, with the intention of providing stretch and rigour and to test their relevant knowledge. There is an assessment policy that identifies the steps to be taken in the assessment process. These are very generic in the terms used, and need to be more specific in the approaches used to ensure a consistent approach. While the quality plan identifies the presence of academic regulations that would state how assessments in general are undertaken, no such regulations were provided to the team, despite requests to enable cross-referencing of how the assessments were allocated. While the quality plan highlights the presence of an assessment panel that oversees the assessment process, there was no evidence from discussions with a range of leaders and teaching staff that such a panel exists. The process of assessment is unformalised, and it is left to the module lecturers to produce the assessments.
110. The quality plan generically identifies how the students would be assessed, with one assignment per 15-credit module, and states that the final project is similar to a dissertation with a rating of 30 credits. The individual module specifications do not reflect this strategy, and there is no mention of the module assessment in the module outlines that are termed 'schemes of work'. The ambiguity goes further, with some modules having a written assignment and a presentation, with mid-term and end-of-module assessments not clearly signposted as being all summative in nature or otherwise. The business environment and sustainability module adds further confusion by allocating 20 per cent of the module grade for participation in discussions and workshops, with no indication of how such participation could be evaluated.
111. The team views the assessment strategy as being very disjointed and difficult to follow. There was no clear process to develop or review assessments to ensure they provide stretch and rigour consistent with the level of the course and test relevant skills. Senior leaders stated that the assessment briefs were not looked at externally, and that NCC Education Ltd has no input with the assessments.
112. In discussions, NCC Education Ltd stated it was supposed to review assessment briefs before they are released to the students. It was during this discussion with NCC Education Ltd that it stated that it was unaware of any students in the current cohort and therefore had not approved any of the assessments. This undermines the credibility of the assessment process.
113. The team was not provided with the academic regulations of the awarding body, and therefore it was not possible to understand the arrangements for reassessment for referred students, what grade penalties were imposed or how late submissions were dealt with. Students and teaching staff were unclear over how academic misconduct was dealt with. NCC Education Ltd stated that this was the responsibility of King Stage Limited, and that it would expect King Stage Limited to contact it regarding any issues in this area.
114. The team spoke at length with the awarding body, which provided a comprehensive overview of how its assessment process operates. Assessment briefs are supposed to be reviewed by NCC Education Ltd prior to the release to the students. It stated that it was the responsibility of King Stage Limited to notify NCC Education Ltd of any changes that are made. The representatives in the meeting said that they had spoken to the director of King Stage Limited two months ago, and there was no mention of the current cohort or the assessments that were being undertaken, and that these had therefore not been approved by NCC Education Ltd.

115. When it was stated that the current offering was termed a masters' in international business and sustainability, NCC Education Ltd was unaware of this. It stated that it had approved a Level 7 diploma in business management and that if a masters' was the intention, that would need to be established with another institution that had awarding powers for masters' qualifications, since NCC Education Ltd does not have such powers. NCC Education Ltd was not made aware that King Stage Limited was offering the programme as a masters', and the representatives in the meeting stated that they should have been informed of this.
116. There was no differentiation of award for the course in question and, while grading feedback sheets indicate that over 70 per cent is a distinction grade, there is no formal documentation to show the differentiation or the grade boundaries. These would usually be identified in the academic regulations and through the adoption of rubrics commensurate with the threshold standards in the sector-recognised descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7. The team's view is that the assessments are not sufficiently challenging and comprehensive, given the lack of evidence in this area.
117. Across several meetings conducted by the team, the understanding was that the students were undertaking a masters' degree and that this would be the award given on completion of the programme of study. Members of the senior team stated that the students were studying for a masters' degree. In discussion with a member of the teaching staff it was stated that the students were studying for a masters' degree. In discussion with the students their understanding was that they were studying for a masters' degree. It was pointed out to the director that they had listed the programme on the UCAS website as a masters' programme, specifically an MSc. When questioned regarding this, the director stated that to progress from a Level 7 diploma to a masters' just required a further essay.
118. The team discussed the process of grading and moderation with King Stage Limited and, while there was indication in the documentation of how the process operated, there was a lack of understanding among teaching staff and leaders of the process in practice. Leaders and teaching staff told the team that some steps of the process were not undertaken. The quality plan states that first and second marking of assignments would take place, as would internal and external verification.
119. It also states that an assessment panel is provided, with a three-tier approach to verification and ratification of results, and the panel is managed through academic services. The three-tier process is a module review panel, and examination board and a qualifications classification panel. In reviewing the grading of the student work by the team, it was not evident that this three-tier system was in operation. Meetings with staff confirmed that the three-tier system was not in operation. The student work was graded by the lecturer, and the grade passed to the academic lead for entry into the grading spreadsheet. In discussion with the awarding body, since it was unaware of King Stage Limited running the course with the current cohort, it was also not aware of the assessment briefs or the grades being awarded, so the moderation processes of NCC Education Ltd were not put into place.
120. Since King Stage Limited is not using originality checking software, there were no guarantees provided that the work submitted was original. The submission process appears to take place via the VLE, and there was no cover sheet that required the students to confirm that the submitted work was original. King Stage Limited does not have credible plans to minimise opportunities for misconduct and facilitate its detection.

## Criterion B4.2.b

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course assessment is valid and reliable? [B4.2.b]

### Advice to the OfS

121. The assessment team was only provided with details of the Level 7 course that is currently being run. The team's view is that King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that enable it to ensure, if registered, that the programme of study is valid and reliable. The course did not have suitable assessment briefs across the programme and credible policies for marking and moderation, as well as credible external examination arrangements in conjunction with the awarding body. Assessment took place in a way that was not structured, was poorly defined and meant that students could not demonstrate the knowledge and skills required for a Level 7 programme in the stated subject area. There were significant concerns about consistency between King Stage Limited's documentation and the process as stated by the awarding body.

### Reasoning

122. The quality plan states that the module assessment will be a written report or project of around 3,000 to 4,000 words and that the work experience (placement) project would be 15,000 words. These approaches would be sufficient to assess the student achievement towards a relevant award. The syllabus provided does not indicate the assessment load for the students, and there is ambiguity in terms of the assessment for each module, with some assessed mid-term and some continuously. It was not made clear what continuous assessments constituted, and there was no assignment brief detailing what this was and how it would be graded, even though the assessment grading sheet indicated that such an assessment had taken place.
123. Presentations were used as a method for assessment, and this was the approach used for the advanced research methods mid-term assessment. The team was not provided with an assignment brief for the content of the presentation and how it was to be assessed. The grading outcomes document provided, which is filled in by markers, does not contain any marking criteria and only shows an overall grade per student, rather than a detailed breakdown of how marks are allocated for aspects of their achievement. The document was therefore lacking the level of detail that would be expected in assessment criteria.
124. It was not possible for the team to determine whether the assessments that have taken place have allowed the students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in the way intended by design of the assessment, because of the assignment briefs not indicating what learning outcomes were being covered.
125. The team found that the prescriptive nature of the assignment briefs, in terms of what the completed work would include, meant that the assessments were not valid and reliable, and did not allow scope for the students to demonstrate the higher level of learning outcomes as required at this level of study.
126. Based on the samples of work submitted, which included work from all of the five students on the course, the team did not see sufficient evidence that students showed originality in the application of knowledge, or were able to deal with complex issues both systematically and

creatively and to show originality in tackling and solving problems, as stated in the sector-recognised standards, as the tasks did not have the sufficient rigour.

127. The team did not see sufficient evidence to ensure that the differentiation of the grades achieved was appropriate and assessments were valid, because the provider did not have detailed marking criteria, detailed feedback, internal moderation, or second marking and external moderation.
128. The team found work was assessed more favourably than might be expected, with many marks at distinction grade of 70+ per cent and a significant number much higher than this grade boundary. In the absence of a clear marking rubric and internal and external moderation of the student work, the reasoning for such grades is difficult to determine.
129. King Stage Limited had submitted sample assessment briefs for modules that have run since the start of the 2024 term and those that are currently running. There was no credible evidence to suggest that the process as outlined in the quality plan had been adhered to, in terms of the production of the assignment briefs prior to the briefs being issued to the students. The awarding body did have policies for the setting of assessments, and in the opinion of the team these had not been followed. The awarding body was not aware that there were students enrolled on the programme or that they had attempted assessment and been given grades. A key role of the awarding body is to ensure assessments are valid and reliable. This function was not in operation. The team was therefore unable to determine whether the assessments were fair, reliable, useful or transparent. Copies of the academic regulations from the awarding body were not provided and there was no credible evidence available to ensure that academic standards had been maintained.
130. The assessment briefs provided had been written as information for the students about completing the assessment. There was no standard format in the production of the assessment briefs. There was no indication of what learning outcomes would be covered by the assessment, and this posed questions of whether the full range of outcomes was being tested. There was no grading rubric provided for written assignments, and transparency to the students in terms of what was required for the grade descriptors was not evident.

## Criterion B4.2.c

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course the academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible?  
[B4.2.c]

### Advice to the OfS

131. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that the academic regulations for the higher education course are designed to ensure that the relevant awards are credible. Despite requests, academic regulations were not provided to the team. Despite requests, no information was provided about how the academic regulations of NCC Education Ltd support the credibility of the relevant awards.

## Reasoning

132. The quality plan mentions the academic regulations for King Stage Limited, but the team was not given a full and detailed copy of the regulations governing the provider's higher education provision. Academic regulations would include the ways in which the assessment of students' work is undertaken, how student discipline relating to academic matters is dealt with, the requirements for the award of a Level 7 qualification, the method used to determine award classifications, and the methods used to calculate the classification of the award.
133. The award of the Level 7 course that is currently being run by King Stage Limited is validated by NCC Education Ltd, and thus the regulations covering the provision of the course would be covered by the academic regulations of NCC Education Ltd. Despite requests, these documents were not made available to the team.
134. The team was provided with an assessment grading spreadsheet that indicates the grades awarded to the students at the time of the visit. The grading methodology was not explicit, but leaders explained that the grades awarded were out of 20. Calculations made on this basis showed that the module grades were unusually high, and in the opinion of the team significantly inflated when compared with grades awarded at other institutions for submissions at Level 7.
135. The system used for student records, including the grades awarded, was basic, in the form of a spreadsheet with no version control such that, if grades were modified, no records existed of what changes were made, by whom or the rationale.
136. The team was not provided with evidence of when detailed academic regulations and assessment regulations would be made available, and there were no milestones set as to when evidence of these regulations would become available in relation to the courses being delivered, if King Stage Limited were to become registered.

## Criterion B4.2.d

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable higher education course? [B4.2.d]

## Advice to the OfS

137. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that the academic regulations for the higher education course are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner that appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable course.

## Reasoning

138. King Stage Limited states in the student enrolment and admission statement that the course is taught in the English language, and that an English language qualification such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) level 6.0 is required where students are not nationals of a majority English speaking country. King Stage Limited stated that it can

provide its own web-based English language level test to confirm the student's English proficiency. The team viewed the online test, and there was no person verification to determine the person completing the test.

139. The team found that the alternative English language level test provided was basic, with three possible multiple-choice answers to be entered into a sentence to make it read correctly. There was no requirement in the test for the listening skills, writing skills or speaking skills that are assessed in the IELTS test. The opinion of the team is that the alternative English test does not have the required equivalence. It was stated by King Stage Limited that an interview process was used that would allow for further evaluation of the student's English proficiency, but it was not clear how this was formally assessed against a marking criterion, or the outcomes documented.
140. With regards to general study support and specifically English language support, it was stated that there are no formal support mechanisms for students in terms of academic writing and referencing. Despite the requests from the team, no information was provided by King Stage Limited about how students would be assessed during the course for their technical proficiency in English. There was also no information provided about whether the technical proficiency required was appropriate for a Level 7 course.

## Criterion B4.2.e

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans to ensure that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously? [B4.2.e]

### Advice to the OfS

141. The assessment team's view is that King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and over time, because of the lack of processes in place to monitor this.

### Reasoning

142. The view of the team is that the awards granted by King Stage Limited in conjunction with NCC Education Ltd are not credible, based on a lack of implementation of academic regulations and assessment designs.
143. The team viewed assignments submitted by the students and found that the grade classifications awarded were inflated relative to the content of the work produced. It was not possible to judge the veracity of the grades awarded, based on the lack of marking criteria aligned with the sector-recognised standards. The team's view of the classification of the grade awarded therefore relied heavily on the subject material expertise of members of the team. This was that the grades were awarded in an abnormally high banding based on the content produced. For this reason, the view of the team is that the assessments are not sufficiently valid and reliable.
144. The view of the team is that the opacity of the assignment briefs that are issued to the students, which are lacking in defined learning outcomes and marking criteria, means that the

students produced work without clear insights into what was required. This is especially the case in terms of referencing published sources and in the area of academic honesty.

145. The view of the team is that the assessment strategy is not robust enough to ensure that the relevant knowledge and skills of the students are tested for a Level 7 qualification. There is a lack of clarity in terms how the modules would be assessed and the methods and weightings used. The schemes of work do not have concrete statements of the submissions required, whether assessed continuously or at specified timelines, or of the weightings of the elements of assessment. The view of the team is therefore that the assessments are not sufficiently credible.

## **B4 conclusions**

Does **King Stage Limited** have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B4 from the date of registration?

146. The assessment team considers that, overall, King Stage Limited does not have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with the conditions of B4 with reference to assessment and awards.
147. The team identified many serious concerns relevant to the structure of the programme, the relationship with the awarding body, the documentation regarding quality assurance, the assessment strategy, the lack of internal and external moderation and the student record systems.
148. Considering its findings at B4.2a, B4.2b, B4.2c, B4.2d and B4.2e above, and the reasoning contained therein, the team's view was that King Stage Limited does not have credible plans to ensure relevant awards are credible.

## Part 2: Assessment of condition B8 – Standards

### Requirement (standards)

Does **King Stage Limited** demonstrate in a credible manner that the standards set for the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards?

### Advice to the OfS

149. Based on the evidence provided, the assessment team judges that the standards set for the courses that King Stage Limited is delivering, if it is registered, do not reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

### Reasoning

#### A.1: Qualifications at each level

150. The team's judgement is that King Stage Limited has not demonstrated in a credible manner that, if registered, the course that it is delivering appropriately reflects the standards set out in part A.1 of the sector-recognised standards document. Despite requests, the team was only provided with details of the course currently being run.
151. The title that King Stage Limited has adopted for the programme of study does not convey appropriate information about the level of the qualification or the credit rating. The title of the programme, as stated in the documentation provided, is a masters' in international business and sustainability. Based on the programme specification and syllabus, the credit rating is 120 credits at Level 7. Part A2, Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards document states that a taught masters' degree (e.g. MA, MSc) has a typical credit value of 180 credits, with at least 150 at Level 7. Based on the documentation provided in terms of programme specifications, module outlines and syllabus, the programme being delivered by King Stage Limited is not 180 credits, and therefore the title of masters' is both incorrect and misleading.
152. Part A3.4 (Clause 34) of the sector-recognised standards document provides a detailed descriptor for a masters' qualification, and in the opinion of the team, these descriptors are not embedded in the curriculum that King Stage Limited is delivering.
153. The awarding body for the programme being delivered is NCC Education Ltd. NCC Education Ltd is accredited by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). It is registered to award qualifications up to 120 Level 7 credits as professional diplomas, vocational and technical qualifications. NCC Education Ltd does not have degree awarding powers for masters' level qualifications.
154. The qualifications that would be awarded for King Stage Limited's course were not located at the correct level of study, and the final exit award would not be a masters' degree but a Level 7 diploma. For this reason, the team's judgement is that the course King Stage Limited is providing, if it were to be registered, does not appropriately reflect part A.1 of the sector-recognised standards.

## **A.2: Typical volumes of credit for qualifications**

155. King Stage Limited has, based on the programme specification, adopted a credit system to define the volumes of learning expected of students on the course being delivered as 120 credits at Level 7. This equates to a postgraduate or professional diploma, as stated in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards. However, this does not reflect the volume of credit for the qualification of a masters', defined as typically 180 credits at Level 7.
156. There is no clear correlation in the programme specification and the syllabus that identifies the learning time required for a credit at Level 7. The sector-recognised standards identify that for each credit there is a notional time of ten hours spent studying. For 120 Level 7 credits, this gives an approximate learning time of 1,200 hours. There is a significant level of opacity in the credit frameworks in the programme specification and the individual schemes of work. The programme specification identifies 1,600 hours of study, but this does not translate easily into the individual modules and the final project.
157. The schemes of work, while providing a detailed insight into the makeup of the individual weekly sessions, lack detail of how much time is expected to be spent on each element of learning. There is also no indication of the credit rating for each module, so a correlation of learning time and credit rating is not possible.
158. The team's judgement is that the course that King Stage Limited is delivering does not appropriately reflect part A.2 of the sector-recognised standards.

## **A.3: Qualification descriptors**

159. The assessment team's judgement is that King Stage Limited has not demonstrated in a credible manner that, if registered, the course that it is delivering appropriately reflects the standards set out in part A.3.4 of the sector-recognised standards.
160. The team assessed King Stage Limited's alignment with the qualification descriptors by comparing the programme learning outcomes with those stated in A.3.4. The focus was on the alignment of the Level 7 standards, as the programme of study was stated as a masters'.
161. The Level 7 programme does not appropriately reflect the stated descriptors set out in A.3.4 Clause 31 of the sector-recognised standards. The learning outcomes stated are not commensurate with a Level 7 programme of study, and are located at the lower areas of Bloom's taxonomy of learning outcomes such as 'identification', 'understanding' and 'demonstrating'.
162. The programme learning outcomes for the course that King Stage Limited is running do not reflect the generic outcomes and attributes expected in the qualification descriptors, as set out in the sector-recognised standards. They state students will be able to:
- identify, search for and retrieve academic information relevant to international business and sustainability issues
  - demonstrate an ability to use effective and appropriate academic skills when exploring issues
  - understand and implement good academic practice and know how to avoid academic malpractice
  - review academic resources in the field of international business and sustainability and synthesise them to produce and present a literature review.

163. The team's judgement was that students would not be able to fully achieve to demonstrate the requirement of a 'systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice,' based upon the very narrow field of study that the modules covered.
164. A Level 7 international business and sustainability qualification would be expected to have a curriculum that would include key areas of substantial study in topics such as global finance and global marketing, for example. The scheme of work for the international business module has just one weekly session that looks at financial topics and this, in the opinion of the team, does not provide sufficient learning opportunities for students to develop a detailed appreciation of global finance. The scheme of work for international business does not provide any indication of teaching and learning in the area of global marketing, even though the overarching syllabus mentions marketing as an area of study. The internship project might be able to address some of these areas, but the module specification with learning outcomes for this element of the course was not made available.
165. With regards to the requirement of 'a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship,' the team judged that the teaching and learning in this area was not commensurate with the requirements of a Level 7 qualification. The scheme of work for advanced research methods and the assignment brief for a research proposal would not enable the students to conduct research at Level 7, and therefore not lead to the requirement of advanced scholarship on completion.
166. The provision of the ethics of research to accompany the advanced research project is, in the opinion of the team, lacking in breadth and depth to ensure that the students are able to adopt best practice in carrying out research. The scheme of work for the advanced research project has only a single session on the ethics of research and does not identify how ethical approval would be granted, what paperwork would be required to be submitted to King Stage Limited staff such that the students are able to carry out the research, or how the approval documentation would be retained. In the assignment brief for the advanced research project and the submission of the research proposal, there are mentions of 'ethical considerations' that allude to participant consent, but again there is no indication of how this would be formalised, or that engaging with respondents should not be undertaken until ethical approval has been granted. There is a lack of credible evidence of how ethical standards are being embedded in the programme of study, or that recognised standards of research ethics would be observed.
167. With regards to the requirement of 'originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline,' the team judged that the content in this area was not commensurate with the requirements of a Level 7 qualification. The scheme of work for advanced research methods and the assignment brief for a research proposal would not enable the students to conduct substantial research at Level 7.
168. The techniques of research and enquiry, as covered in the scheme of work session 1, would not allow students to be able to choose an appropriate approach for writing the research proposal with regards to the data gathering approaches – for example either quantitative or qualitative data collection methods, that might in some instances be combined in a mixed methods approach. While session 3 of the scheme of work indicates discussion of data collection techniques such as surveys or interviews, a single session on this topic would be

insufficient for potentially neophyte researchers. Session 3 introduces the use of complex analytical tools that would require usage instruction beyond part of a session. This is not sufficient to prepare students to produce a research paper to the standards expected at Level 7.

169. With regards to the conceptual understanding that would enable the student to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship within the discipline, to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses, it is the opinion of the team that the approach to the philosophy of research, the methodological debates of research and the practical approaches that are adopted are all superficial and not sufficient to enable the students to undertake credible research at Level 7.
170. With regards to the requirement to 'deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences,' the team judged that the students would not be able to undertake and develop these skills as the content is not at a level to allow this to occur. This can be evidenced by the paucity of detail contained in all the schemes of work provided and also in the assignment briefs for the modules. The samples of student work that were provided for the team, while addressing the requirements of the assignment briefs, do not communicate the conclusions in a manner that would be expected for study at Level 7.
171. With regards to the requirement to 'demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level,' the team judged that the students would not be able to undertake and develop these, as content is not at a level to allow this to occur. While the schemes of work for the sustainable development module, advanced research project, international business module and the business environment module do indicate that self-direction and solving problems are a component of the taught elements, the assignment briefs for these modules are prescriptive in their requirements and merely inform the students what models and frameworks that they should follow. Taking such an approach is not indicative of teaching, learning and assessment at Level 7.
172. With regards to the requirement to 'continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level', the team judged that the students would not be able to fully undertake and develop these skills, as the teaching and learning approach is not at a level to allow this to occur in a structured way. The flow of the process from teaching to assessment through to grading and feedback was not always possible for the assessment team to evaluate, and incomplete and missing documentation were evident when requested by the team. This meant that it was not always possible to verify the student performance. The level of feedback from King Stage Limited was very generic and lacking in detail, and there was little or no indication of how students could improve their performance or develop new skills in the future.
173. With regards to the requirement of the 'qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: – the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility – decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations – the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development,' the team judged that the students would not be able to fully undertake and develop these skills, as the teaching and learning approach is not at a level to allow this to occur in a structured way. While the students were tasked with making choices and taking responsibility with regards to their assignments, these were somewhat

limited by the prescriptive nature of the assignment briefs that were provided. Reflection of learning in action and on action did not form part of any assignment briefs that were provided by King Stage Limited, and this is a key requirement of study at Level 7 that is typically part of the assessment criteria. The schemes of work do not give any input on how students should reflect on their learning, and how this institutes change in them on both personal and professional levels.

174. With regards to the requirement of students 'having the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments,' the team judged that the students would not be able to fully undertake and develop these skills as the content is not at a level to allow this to occur in a structured way. The individual module contents are not designed such that the students would be able to push their personal boundaries and to develop the skills required for the world of work, in the rapidly expanding and emerging area of environment and sustainability where contemporary approaches are essential. The content, the delivery plans and the assessment strategies are, in the opinion of the team, not commensurate with the requirements of a Level 7 programme. King Stage Limited has provided a programme specification, but there are only schemes of work provided and not detailed module specifications, and therefore there is an absence of detailed assessment requirements, credit ratings, marking schemes and recommended reading lists.
175. The team has serious concerns over King Stage Limited's approach to ensuring that a Level 7 programme of study has appropriate approval by the awarding body. There is no formal assessment strategy, assignments are not verified to ensure currency and accuracy, and there is a lack of internal and external moderation. For these reasons, compliance with the requirements for the sector-recognised standards as set out in A.3.4 is significantly compromised.
176. If they went on to top up the 120 credits awarded on this programme at an institution that would be looking to provide teaching and learning for the additional 60 Level 7 credits, the students would potentially be significantly disadvantaged based on the non-adherence to the sector-recognised standards for a programme at Level 7, as they have not had learning experiences appropriate to Level 7.

## Requirement (achievement of students)

Does **King Stage Limited** demonstrate in a credible manner that the achievement of students on the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards?

### Advice to the OfS

177. Based on the evidence provided, the assessment team judges that the achievement of students on the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, does not appropriately reflect applicable sector-recognised standards.

## Reasoning

### A.1: Qualifications at each level

178. The team was provided with the quality plan and prospectus that showed the course currently delivered to students was a masters' in international business and sustainability. The team was not provided with information relating to any other award. As set out in paragraph 35, the team established that the course actually being delivered to the students was a Level 7 diploma, because neither King Stage Limited nor NCC Education Ltd has degree awarding powers, and the qualification has only 120 credits rather than the 180 credits typically allocated to a masters'. This led the team to conclude that the content and assessment of the course did not reflect the award title.

### A.2: Typical volumes of credit for qualifications

179. The Level 7 diploma qualification is made up six modules of 20 credits, adding up to 120 credits.

### A.3: Qualification descriptors

180. The achievement of students awarded, or not awarded, a Level 7 diploma does not appropriately reflect the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7, set out in paragraphs 30 to 34 in section A.3.3 of the sector-recognised standards.

181. In reaching this conclusion, the team considered the scheme of work document for the sustainable development module. The team found it has learning outcomes that are partially commensurate with a study at Level 7, with the use of 'analyse', 'apply' and 'implement'. There are learning outcomes that are not commensurate with Level 7, such as 'understand' and 'define'. In addition to the outcomes of 'analyse', 'apply' and 'implement', it would be expected to have some outcomes such as 'defend', 'judge', 'compare', 'contrast', 'justify' and 'evaluate'. The teaching outline does include relevant topic areas, but the lack of reference to sources that are both relevant and contemporary does not allow the team to determine the rigour and relevance that was built into the teaching and learning programme. It is expected at Level 7 that learning materials are identified to students such that the descriptors for a qualification at Level 7 can be achieved. This would involve essential and recommended reading lists and the signposting of relevant academic journals, peer-reviewed articles and sector-specific websites.

182. There is no indication in the scheme of work of how the mentioned module would be assessed, or of what components would be required and when. The submitted work suggests that it was a 'mid-term' assessment, but this was not made explicit in the documentation and the weighting for this component was not stated.

183. The team also considered the assignment brief for the sustainable development module, and found it does again provide alignment with Level 7 learning objectives, but the objectives are very prescriptive and merely inform the students of which theories and frameworks to use in the assignment. The team judged that the prescription of the stated theories would be difficult to achieve in a rigorous manner with a word count limit of 1,500 words. There were some recommended resources to use but these were very generic in nature. The assignment brief did not include mandatory statements such as the submission date and time, where to submit and a declaration that the work was original in nature. These criteria are a requirement of any higher education programme, and the team expressed concern that these were not included at Level 7.

184. Five assignments were appraised by the team for the sustainable development module. The writing style was appropriate and the use of English was in line with condition B4.2.d. The referencing was not commensurate with the requirement of Level 7, with one of the assignments having no references at all. The format of the submissions was variable, and one had no author's name, so cross-referencing with the grading sheets was difficult to achieve. The submissions were very descriptive in nature and the levels of critical analysis that would be expected, and are required within the descriptor, for a higher education qualification at Level 7 are minimal.
185. The judgement of the team was that the grading sheets for the sustainable development module assignments were inadequate. Only two gradings were provided, and while the sheets state that they were based on a rubric, no rubric was provided. The feedback provided from the marker was superficial, and the distinction-level grades awarded to both are inflated for student work of this nature at Level 7. There was no evidence of internal double marking or moderation. Originality does not appear to have been checked, and therefore the academic integrity of the submissions cannot be determined. This led the team to have concerns about whether the achievement of the students could reliably reflect the sector-recognised standards.
186. The scheme of work for the advanced research methods module has learning outcomes that are partially commensurate with study at Level 7, with the use of 'analyse', 'apply' and 'integrate'. There are learning outcomes that are not commensurate with Level 7, such as 'identify' and 'define'. The teaching outline does include relevant topic areas but the lack of reference to sources that are both relevant and contemporary does not allow the team to determine the rigour and relevance that was built into the teaching and learning programme. It is expected at Level 7 that learning materials are identified to students, such that the descriptors for a qualification at Level 7 can be achieved. This would involve essential and recommended reading lists, the signposting of relevant academic journals, peer-reviewed articles and sector-specific websites.
187. There is no indication in the scheme of work for the advanced research methods of how the module would be assessed, or of what components would be required and when. The submitted work suggests that it was a 'presentation' assessment element, but this was not made explicit in the documentation, and the weighting for this component was not stated.
188. The assignment brief for advanced research methods does not provide alignment with the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7, and the learning objectives are very prescriptive and merely inform the students of the chapter headings for the research proposal to be submitted. The assignment brief suggests that Harvard style referencing should be used, but there were no references provided in the brief in terms of recommended resources to use. To use the statement 'best of luck' in an assessment brief is not acceptable academic practice at any level in higher education, and especially not at Level 7. The assignment brief did not include mandatory statements, such as the submission date and time, where to submit and a declaration that the work was original in nature. These criteria are a requirement of any higher education programme, and the team expressed concern that these were not included at Level 7.
189. Three assignments were appraised by the team for the advanced research project module. The writing style was appropriate and the use of English was in line with condition B4.2.d. The referencing was not commensurate with the requirement of the descriptor for higher education at Level 7, with one of the assignments only providing in-text references with no reference list

at all. The team found this to be unacceptable for a proposal that would lead to a research project and had an element of a review of the literature. The format of the submissions was variable, and one had no author's name so cross-referencing with the grading sheets was difficult to achieve. The proposals were superficial, with one not providing any research questions or aims and objectives as would be expected at Level 7.

190. The judgement of the team was that the grading for the advanced research methods module was significantly inadequate. The grading spreadsheet indicates that grades for the written proposal had been awarded, but no grading sheets were provided to the team. The team was therefore unable to scrutinise the award of the grades for this component or, therefore, to ascertain how the grades had been arrived at and what marking criteria had been used. This meant the team was unable to gain any assurance that awards would reflect the classification descriptors in part B of the sector-recognised standards.
191. Also, without sight of the grading sheets it was not possible to view the tutor feedback, and there was uncertainty as to whether any double marking or internal moderation had taken place. The grades based on the entries in the grading spreadsheet and the calculation of the team reveal that the grades awarded are inflated for student work of this nature at Level 7. Originality does not appear to have been checked, and so the academic integrity of the submissions cannot be determined. King Stage Limited stated that it had considered the use of originality checking software, but the cost was prohibitive and it was therefore not used. The team was not provided with any originality reports for any of the samples of work provided.
192. Based on the entries in the grading spreadsheet and a marking feedback sheet, there is a presentation element in the advanced research methods module, although this is not made clear in the assignment brief or in the scheme of work. There was no indication of when the assessment was to take place, the time limit for the presentation, or whether questions would be posed orally by assessors. The team was not able to determine how the grades had been awarded, as no grading criteria had been provided. The feedback provided to the students was generic and would not assist the students in their future development of this key skill area, as identified in the sector-recognised standards condition A.3.4 clause 34. The team was not provided with copies of the presentation materials used by the students or recordings of the activities. There is no indication of a second marker or any internal moderation to determine whether the presentations made were at the required Level 7 standard. It was not possible to determine whether originality had been checked, so the academic integrity of the submissions cannot be determined.

## Conclusions

193. The assessment team's concluding advice is that the achievement of the students on the courses King Stage Limited intends to provide, if it is registered, does not appropriately reflect the sector-recognised standards. This view is formed on the basis of review of students' work and the related documentation and processes, and consideration of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7.

## **Annex A: Approach to sampling of evidence**

1. Because the provider is only delivering one course, it was deemed proportionate and representative to include all of the courses in information or samples of information to be requested from the provider. The provider did not submit details of the other courses.
2. As requested by the assessment team, the provider provided programme documentation for all the modules it delivers.
3. The team requested work that students had completed including the assignment briefs, student work and associated marking and feedback. As there are only five students currently registered, work was requested from all students.
4. The team considered the programme documentation and module outlines sample appropriate to enable it to advise on whether the standards set for the course appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.
5. The team considered the sample of student work appropriate to enable it to reach a judgement on whether the achievement of students on the course appropriately reflects applicable sector-recognised standards.



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