Quality assessment report

Business and Management at the University of Wolverhampton

October 2022 – March 2023

Contents

Summary

Each year, the Office for Students (OfS) selects a number of providers for investigation based on regulatory intelligence including, but not limited to, student outcomes and experience data and relevant notifications. As part of these investigations, the OfS may commission an assessment team, including external academic experts, to undertake an assessment of quality. The quality assessment focuses on areas of potential concern indicated by the data or other regulatory intelligence, or by information obtained by the assessment team as part of the assessment.

The assessment involves a visit to a provider, after which the assessment team produces a report. This report represents the conclusions of the team as a result of its consideration of information gathered during the course of the assessment to 23 March 2023. The report does not take into account matters which may have occurred subsequent to that period.

In line with the risk-based approach of the OfS, the assessment team does not undertake a comprehensive quality assessment in respect of every requirement in each condition of registration, and therefore this report should not be read as the team having undertaken such an assessment.

This report does not represent any decision of the OfS in respect of compliance with conditions of registration.

1. The OfS requires all registered higher education providers' courses to meet a minimum set of requirements or conditions that relate to quality and standards. The detailed requirements of these conditions can be found in the OfS's regulatory framework.[1] As a result of the OfS's general monitoring in October 2022 the OfS decided to open an investigation into the quality of business and management courses provided by the University of Wolverhampton.

2. The University of Wolverhampton offers business and management courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

3. The OfS appointed an assessment team on 19 October 2022 that consisted of three academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff. The team was asked to give their advice and judgements about the quality of the university's business and management courses.

4. The team considered a range of information. This included:

   - information already held by the OfS, such as data relating to student outcomes

   - information submitted to the OfS by the University of Wolverhampton, including about student attendance and achievement

   - specific modules on the university's virtual learning environment.

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[1] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/.

5. The team visited the University of Wolverhampton on three occasions in February 2023 and March 2023 during which time it met with staff and students.

6. During the assessment process, the team developed lines of enquiry. These focused on areas that potentially warranted further investigation and that were within the scope of ongoing conditions of registration:

   - B1: Academic experience

   - B2: Resources, support and student engagement

   - B4: Assessment and awards.

7. The lines of enquiry were developed and updated between the three visits and both versions were shared with the University of Wolverhampton. This process followed the OfS's risk-based approach.

8. This risk-based approach also led to a focus on three courses (on which students were registered and taught by the university, i.e. not taught by partner organisations). These were the BSc (Hons) International Business Management, BA (Hons) Business Management and BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance.

9. Through its activities, the team identified one area of concern that may relate to the University of Wolverhampton's compliance with the OfS's conditions of registration:

   - **Concern 1.** The assessment team found the September and January cohort of students on the revalidated BA (Hons) Business Management were permitted a different number of attempts at the same assessments, with no supporting pedagogic rationale. This concern relates to condition of registration B4 because the students registered on this course are not required to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a consistent manner. The team also found a lack of underlying pedagogic rationale for allowing up to six attempts to pass an assessment and considered that this brought into question the rigour of the assessment and the level of challenge provided.

10. The assessment team considered multiple sources of information that were relevant to condition B1: Academic experience and condition B2: Resources, support and student engagement. The assessment team did not identify any concerns relating to these conditions from reviewing this information.

Introduction and background

11. Each year, the OfS selects a number of higher education providers for investigation based on regulatory intelligence including, but not limited to, student outcome and experience data and relevant notifications. As part of these investigations, the OfS may commission an assessment team, including external academic experts, to undertake an assessment of quality. The quality assessment focuses on areas of potential concern indicated by the data or other regulatory intelligence, or by information obtained by the team as part of the assessment.

12. The assessment involves a visit to a provider, after which the assessment team produces a report. In line with the risk-based approach of the OfS, the team does not undertake a comprehensive quality assessment in respect of every requirement in each condition of registration, and therefore this report should not be read as the team having undertaken such an assessment.

13. This report does not represent any decision of the OfS in respect of compliance with conditions of registration.

14. The OfS appointed a team in October 2022 to assess the quality of the business and management courses provided by the University of Wolverhampton (i.e. those courses delivered by the University of Wolverhampton, excluding courses delivered by partner organisations and transnational education). The assessment included matters that fall within the scope of the OfS's conditions of registration that concern quality and standards (specifically, ongoing conditions B1, B2 and B4).[2] The scope of the assessment, the information considered, and the findings of the assessment team are summarised in this report.

15. This report represents the conclusions of the team as a result of its consideration of information gathered during the course of the assessment to 23 March 2023. It does not take into account matters that may have occurred subsequent to that period.

16. The OfS decided to open this investigation as part of its approach to general monitoring and in the context of its decision to focus on the quality of business and management courses. In opening the investigation, the OfS considered information it held about the University of Wolverhampton, including student outcomes data, numbers of students, and any notifications received.

Context

17. Business and management courses at the University of Wolverhampton are delivered through the University of Wolverhampton Business School (the Business School). The Business School is based at the Wolverhampton City Campus, one of the university's five campus locations (Wolverhampton City Campus, Walsall Campus, Telford Campus, Springfield Campus, and Wolverhampton Science Park).

18. The Business School offers students a diverse portfolio of courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, in addition to students undertaking modules as part of continuing

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[2] See www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/registration-with-the-ofs-a-guide/conditions-of-registration/.

professional development (CPD). In addition to business and management, it also offers courses including accounting and finance, business law, construction law, economics, event and venue management, fire and rescue, human resource management, leadership and management, oil and gas management, project management, sports and recreation, and tourism and marketing.

19. Teaching on the courses under consideration is predominantly in person, although some courses, such as the MBA and BSc (Hons) Business Management, have a distance learning option available. The majority of courses, such as the BA (Hons) Business Management, BA (Hons) International Hospitality Management and MSc Finance and Accounting, are offered on both a full-time and part-time basis, though the significant majority of students are registered on full-time course variants.

20. Student numbers remained relatively stable from 2017-18 to 2020-21. Business and management provision was the third largest subject of study at the university, with student numbers growing conservatively from 2017-18 to 2020-21, as set out below:[3]

Table 1: The number of students enrolled at the University of Wolverhampton and the number of students enrolled on business and management

Academic year	Number of students enrolled at the university	Number of students enrolled on business and management at the university
2017-18	17,680	1,980
2018-19	16,820	1,920
2019-20	17,490	2,380
2020-21	17,920	2,630

21. The total number of international students at the university has grown, with an increase since 2018-19 in 2019-20 and 2020-21. The domicile of international students has changed significantly. Students from the European Union and the Middle East declined which was balanced by significant growth in students from Asia and Africa.

Table 2: The domicile of students enrolled at the University of Wolverhampton

Academic year	Domicile		
	Home	EU	Other international
2017-18	16,690	280	710
2018-19	16,040	220	560
2019-20	16,000	220	1,270
2020-21	15,770	190	1,960

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[3] Source: OfS internal analysis of the student data used to construct the published size and shape of provision dashboard from September 2022, subset to students taught at the University of Wolverhampton. The 'all students' population is used and where it is used, the subject area 'business and management' is defined by the Common Aggregation Hierarchy Level 2 (CAH2).

22. The overall number of home students in the Business School declined by 12 per cent over the period 2017-18 to 2020-21 while the proportion of international students expanded significantly. The proportion of international (non-EU) students grew rapidly from 10 per cent of students in 2017-18 to 41 per cent of students in 2020-21.

Table 3: The domicile of students enrolled on the business and management courses at the university

	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
Home	1,720	87%	1,740	91%	1,640	68%	1,510	58%
EU	70	3%	40	2%	40	2%	30	1%
Other international	190	10%	140	7%	700	30%	1,090	41%

23. Senior staff informed the assessment team that there had been some variability in entry requirements and attributed this to changes in university senior leadership and consequent shifting strategic priorities. The standard entry requirement for an undergraduate degree in the business management subject area at the time of the review was 96 UCAS points, with the clearing tariff raised by 16 UCAS points for 2022-23. The standard entry requirement for foundation level courses had also been raised to 48 UCAS points. Staff explained that this was linked to the university's desire to recruit better-performing students while it continued to offer a number of contextual and supported offers as part of its access and participation plan.

24. Senior staff who spoke to the team described the university as being on a 'transformational' journey and that this involved a commitment to better student outcomes. Transformational changes impacted on all aspects of the operation of the university, but one key over-arching theme related to effective use of aggregate student data to improve the student experience and outcomes.

25. The assessment team was also advised that part of the transformation included recruiting a permanent vice-chancellor. The university had an interim vice-chancellor in place for 12 months and in February 2023 brought in a new interim vice-chancellor who was expected to hold the position for nine months before the recruitment of a permanent individual.

26. The assessment team was made aware that the Business School had recently revalidated its business and management provision with revised courses being in place for the September 2021 cohort. The revalidation exercise provided an opportunity for the school to review the strategic and academic fit of courses and ensure alignment with four key pillars that underpin all courses in the school: innovation and enterprise; sustainability; responsibility and professionalism and digitalisation. The revalidation exercise included updating of the curriculum and assessment and introduced a change in course structure moving from predominantly 20-credit to 30-credit modules.

Assessment process

Information gathering

27. The assessment team gathered a range of information to determine whether there were possible concerns relating to requirements set out in conditions of registration B1, B2 and/or B4. The team gathered information through an initial request for data from the university (21 October 2023) and three site visits on 3 February 2023, 3 March 2023 and 23 March 2023.

28. During these visits it undertook:

- interviews with groups of staff members comprising academic and professional service staff from the Business School, faculty, and other units and services within the university

- a panel group interview with a diverse selection of students studying at Levels 4, 5, and 6, including both home and international students

- an online alumni panel interview with recently graduated students representing various courses.

29. The team was also granted access to Canvas, the university's virtual learning environment (VLE) from 9 December 2022 to 23 March 2023. It made further requests for information and data based on discussions with staff and students during both the initial site visit and subsequent visits, and its analysis of information already provided. The university fulfilled all requests in a timely fashion and provided the additional information and data requested on 9 November 2022, 9 December 2022, 1 March 2023 and 23 March 2023. The university also chose to submit an additional briefing note for the team on 9 November 2022 and 3 February 2023.

30. The team first reviewed general monitoring intelligence, including student outcomes data held by the OfS, and initial information provided by the university. From this it identified broad areas for further analysis, within the scope of conditions B1, B2 and/or B4, which in the team's view of the initial information, raised questions or potential issues that the team determined to focus on. These areas were then communicated to the university and updated, where relevant, as the assessment progressed to ensure transparency with the University of Wolverhampton.

Assessment of matters relating to quality under ongoing conditions of registration B1, B2 and B4

Condition B1: Academic experience

31. The assessment team reviewed a range of evidence relevant to condition B1 (see Annex A for the full text of the condition) in seeking to understand whether students on the university's business and management courses received a 'high quality academic experience', including that the relevant courses are 'up-to-date' (B1.3.a), provide 'educational challenge' (B1.3.b), are 'coherent' (B1.3.c), are 'effectively delivered' (B1.3.d) and require 'students to develop relevant skills' (B1.3.e).

32. The initial information provided by the university, and reviewed by the assessment team, included:

    - the organisational structures through which the business and management courses were provided

    - timetables for the delivery of business and management courses

    - module attainment data for Level 4 modules on the relevant courses (for the academic year 2021-22)

    - any student complaints and their outcomes (during the academic year 2021-22).

33. Alongside the initial information provided by the university, the assessment team reviewed National Student Survey (NSS) information for 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22, both quantitative and qualitative, and student outcomes data, including measures on completion, continuation and progression.

34. This initial information was relevant to the courses under consideration being 'up-to-date', providing 'educational challenge', being 'coherent' and requiring 'students to develop relevant skills'.

35. During on-site visits and online meetings, the assessment team met with students studying business and management courses across Levels 4 to 6, academic staff teaching on business and management courses, members of the leadership team for the Business School and professional services staff. These meetings included discussion of topics relevant to courses being 'up-to-date', providing 'educational challenge', being 'coherent', being 'effectively delivered' and requiring 'students to develop relevant skills'.

36. The assessment team requested additional information from the university about the courses being considered, as detailed under 'information gathering' above (all data noted below was supplied by the university.) This included:

    - the revalidation report from the university's 2020-21 revalidation activity

    - an overview of teaching observations undertaken in 2021-22

- an example of summaries of student module evaluations for 2022-23

- role descriptors for key staff roles.

37. The information above is relevant to all aspects of condition B1.3, that students receive a 'high quality academic experience'.

38. The assessment team reviewed module VLE sites, including samples of teaching resources, guidance to students, and organisation of the sites themselves. This information is particularly relevant to courses being 'up-do-date' (B1.3a), 'coherent' (B1.3.c) and 'effectively delivered' (B1.3.d).

39. The assessment team's assessment drew on multiple sources of information, as identified above, that are relevant to condition B1. Following a risk-based approach, the assessment team considered a number of areas set out below.

Level of educational challenge and coherence of courses

40. The team explored the level of educational challenge posed by business and management courses and the degree to which they aligned with reasonable expectations of students, practice in the sector and wider disciplinary norms. A level of challenge that was either too high or too low, could have led to high rates of failure for students as they may not have been able to develop sufficient skills and knowledge at each level of study which could impact levels of continuation.

41. The assessment team focused its attention on a range of factors that might have impacted continuation rates. Initially the team wanted to explore the reasons why students were failing modules in relatively high numbers and the cumulative effect that this was having on the student experience.

42. Much of the team's initial engagement with the provider focused on a revalidation exercise undertaken by the university in 2020-21. This specifically sought to ensure courses offered greater flexibility, efficiency and focus on business practice, embedded opportunities for applied skills and enterprise, and put blended learning 'at the heart of the Business School pedagogy'.

43. The revalidation process covered all courses taught within the Business School and required module leaders to review provision, consider the effectiveness of assessment and move the majority of modules from 20 to 30 credits within a 360-credit undergraduate degree framework. The revalidation process was initiated by a newly appointed senior member of staff in response to general concerns over the student experience, consistency and quality, and specific concerns around student attainment. The review and associated change processes were extensive and included updates to course structures and module materials.

44. The team was told that revalidation introduced four thematic pillars common to all courses: digital, sustainability, professional responsibility, and enterprise and innovation. The team found evidence for these themes in specific modules, but its systematic review of module material suggested that the themes were not widely embedded. The team understood, however, that the university was, at the time of the assessment, in an early stage of the implementation cycle.

45. During meetings with staff responsible for module design and delivery, the revalidation processes were widely referenced as extensive and useful in aligning provision and providing greater consistency across courses. Staff described the approach to revalidation as 'big bang' rather than a gradual phasing out of the old structure alongside the introduction of the new (though the assessment team noted students had the option to remain on the original structure). Staff justified the approach as being appropriate given the 'step change' in educational outcomes that the provider was attempting to achieve.

46. Existing students were given the option to transfer to the new course structure from September 2021, with the majority of students choosing to do so. At the time of the assessment, the university was still running 20-credit modules concurrently with the new 30-credit modules for those students who remained on the old structure. The team was also told by staff that students were engaged in the revalidation process via focus-group activity.

47. The team's review of the undergraduate module, assessment and course material on Canvas found course offerings to be comparable to other universities in terms of their currency, design and demands placed on students. Overall, the assessment team was satisfied that the approach to the revalidation process had appeared to have resulted in courses that were up-to-date and had appropriate educational challenge.

48. The team explored the coherence of business and management courses and the degree to which learning was configured at appropriate levels of breadth and depth. A lack of coherence in course design could have impacted rates of continuation where students struggled to see connections between learning on various modules. This would have meant that they did not achieve the stage and course outcomes they needed to progress.

49. After a thorough review of the curriculum, via Canvas, at both module and course levels, the assessment team was satisfied that the business and management courses reviewed displayed internal coherence, offered appropriate breadth and depth of content, and demonstrated the timely introduction of relevant skills and opportunities for student development. These aspects were suitable for the degrees that students were registered for and were valued beyond higher education. It was evident to the assessment team that courses had benefited from revalidation in terms of 'updating' course content and were broadly comparable to other universities in terms of their coherence and level.

50. A review of module content via Canvas provided evidence of sequential progression in terms of disciplinary knowledge and understanding. It was noted by the team however that learning outcomes were often defined in rather generic ways and frequently specified that students should either 'demonstrate', 'present' or 'understand' with little variation between levels. Higher order learning objectives like 'evaluate', 'synthesise' or 'analyse' were present but the basic expected pedagogical progression in these tasks between Levels 4, 5 and 6 was not always evident.

51. The assessment team also noted that opportunities for sequential development within levels was restricted. As the university operated several intakes per year, the delivery pattern of modules demanded that students took specific modules at different points in their academic year (i.e. a module scheduled to run in semester two would come towards the end of an academic year for a student that started in September, and towards to beginning of an academic year for a student that started in January). Academic staff were aware and appeared

to consider this in the design and delivery of the modules. While this structure facilitated multiple intakes and offered greater choice for students it restricted opportunities for progressive learning within an academic year and may have had an impact on the sense of a learning journey.

52. The approach to managing quality in business and management and across the school, faculty and university was multi-faceted and supported by faculty-level quality officers and central services. The team noted approaches to the management of quality included internal and external scrutiny through mechanisms such as external examiners, employers and accreditation via professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

53. Despite the level of external input, the team noted a tendency to think that internal university-level scrutiny was sufficient to ensure quality and enhancement. Review of external examiners' reports revealed that engagement was light touch and in discussion module leaders and course directors found it difficult to identify particular quality improvements resulting from examiner's comments or suggestions. It was unclear to the team precisely what role an appointed external reviewer had played in the revalidation. Moreover, the degree to which internal processes offered a robust and critical assessment of provision was also open to question, for example the team were told about instances where the business school courses had negotiated an exemption to the overarching university academic regulations. The team's view is that the positive benefits of agile course approval requires consistency in approach to quality assurance and that a more thorough examination of programme change might support schools in highlighting potential issues and concerns.

54. The team notes that scrutiny mechanisms for business and management courses were generally effective but questions the reliance on internal reviews and light-touch external ones. It also questions the efficacy of internal processes in critically assessing provision.

55. The team notes that the university was developing its approach to systematic course review, by extending the current system of academic quality review to include a more 'data-driven approach'. Staff explained that the aim of this was to incorporate insights from student recruitment and student outcomes. The university adopted a clear and transparent approach to the annual monitoring and review of courses, employing a 'risk-based' approach linked to the overall performance of modules. The team thought that this should ensure that potential issues with the quality of the business and management courses are recognised and resolved in a timelier fashion.

56. On balance, the assessment team were satisfied that the evidence reviewed demonstrated that the level of educational challenge was appropriate and courses reviewed as part of the assessment were coherent. The team was also confident that the university had appropriate systems in place to ensure that courses retained the appropriate level of educational challenge and coherence in the future.

Delivery of courses including teaching practice

57. The team explored the extent to which the courses reviewed were effectively delivered, including a specific focus on teaching practice. The team felt that areas of weakness in any, or a combination of, these areas could have impacted rates of continuation.

58. The team also explored the effectiveness of delivery as well as any steps that had been taken to try and improve continuation rates.

59. The university had a robust and effective system to ensure academic staff have the knowledge and skills they need to design and deliver courses effectively. It offered significant resources and support for its academic staff in terms of setting out expectations around course design and delivery and supporting their development as academic practitioners. The support offered was anchored to the UK Professional Standards Framework (a framework developed by Advance HE to support and recognise staff development and teaching and learning in higher education) and staff were required to undertake 'essentials' and 'enhanced' training and development in academic practice as part of their employment contract and probation conditions.

60. This programme gave the team a basic understanding of the provider's approach to teaching and learning and offered guidance on practical aspects of classroom delivery. Staff were also required to complete a Post-Graduate Certificate, which provided an in-depth understanding of the theory and practice of teaching in higher education, covering aspects of advanced course design and assessment. The team was provided with many examples of ongoing continuing professional development, relevant in-house training and support for staff, including the sharing of good practice and sessions designed to challenge staff. Academic staff were also subjected to developmental peer review and observation of teaching practice. Academic staff spoke of welcoming this and saw it as an opportunity to improve.

61. Staff training and development was a university-wide priority although there were significant workstreams at faculty, school and disciplinary level, meaning training and support offered examples of excellent teaching practice while also tackling specific disciplinary challenges. The assessment team, as part of the visit, met with leaders of this support and were impressed by their commitment to inclusive education and staff development. Newly appointed staff and early career academics said that development opportunities were an excellent feature of employment at the university and something that staff were keen to take advantage of. Academic staff were provided with time and space to develop their practice while being trusted to develop mastery of their learning and teaching practice and to innovate for the benefit of their students.

62. Most students who the assessment team spoke to were overall positive about their learning experience. It was notable that students had made specific and sustained connections with individual members of staff and were thankful for the help and support they had received. Students also felt that other students were likely to be highly engaged with their learning as evidenced by attendance in class, and this enhanced the overall learning experience. Students did point to some examples of poor student behaviour in classes resulting in problems for other students but generally these seemed to be resolved quickly with module leaders offering clear expectations around appropriate behaviour. Students at the university benefited from relatively small classes with limits being set at around 40.

63. Academic staff articulated the importance of student engagement in learning wider than simply attending class. Staff had benefited from university-wide initiatives focused on developing learning analytics and metrics around 'log ins' and related measures like 'days since last engagement'. This allowed staff to actively identify trends around non-engagement and to develop personalised interventions.

64. Students were largely positive about their ability to contact academic staff and the quality of guidance and support received. While they noted variations between individuals, most students praised the support and commitment offered by academic and professional service staff. While students noted some variability in terms of teaching styles and approaches, they were generally keen to acknowledge that staff at the university were known for 'going above and beyond' and students spoke at length about a sense of 'personal commitment' to the success of students. The variety of examples of support gave the assessment team the sense that this praise was authentic. This was further supported by NSS 2022 data that indicated positive responses for staff explaining things (90 per cent) and challenging students to achieve their best work (89 per cent), although some students made clear that they felt they were not challenged enough and were capable of more.

65. Some students spoke about the effectiveness of assessment briefs, especially in relation to setting expectations around assessment. The assessment team considered this to be particularly important as staff indicated that the significant number of students that join with BTEC qualifications were at a comparative disadvantage when taking assessment like exams. Students also pointed to wider support structures like 24-hour chat support from the library, library services being embedded within the faculty, and pop-up library support at key times in the academic year within the Business School building.

66. University staff at every level were keen to emphasise that business and management, similar to the rest of the university, actively recruited students from local schools and colleges. A fundamental objective of the university was to promote widening participation, demonstrating a strong commitment to serving the local community and supporting the recruitment and success of first-generation students. Business and management provision was offered with a strong sense of place. It had a focus on providing educational opportunities that emerge out of the area's industrial and manufacturing heritage yet orientated toward innovative growth areas like high tech automotive, aerospace, finance, and creative industries.

67. Staff were acutely aware of the social and economic disparities within the area and the impact of high unemployment, poverty, and deprivation on educational experiences and outcomes. University staff showed great awareness of the specific needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and described this as 'students facing tensions between for example managing study and wider responsibilities while being financially challenged'. Three specific examples of challenges faced by the university's students included:

- students who are the first in their family to attend university

- students with caring responsibilities

- students who work part-time to fund their studies.

68. For all three groups the school had practices designed to overcome potential barriers to participation and success, which included measures such as tutors being flexible with their time management to support those students that needed it – they had, for example, arranged ad hoc support sessions when required. The assessment team were concerned that this approach could have not been sustainable. However staff responded positively to queries around the balance in their workload.

69. Staff also acknowledged that many students balanced study with part-time work, furthering the need for adaptive and responsive approaches to support. Consideration of the nature of the business and management cohort had clearly informed timetable design which, where possible, tried to concentrate in-person sessions into longer blocks focused on specific days rather than shorter sessions distributed throughout the week. Data showed that around 50 per cent of home students studying business and management at the university come from residential postcodes that are classified as index of multiple deprivation quintile 1 (most deprived), the assessment team considered that these measures were an important contributor to the potential success of the cohort.[4]

70. Overall, the assessment team was confident that the evidence demonstrated that courses were effectively delivered.

Impact of revalidation

71. In many ways the revalidation exercise undertaken by the university addressed the areas the assessment team had decided to explore and provided a level of confidence that expectations and demands that were made of students were broadly aligned with sector norms, while delivery is effective. The team were reassured to see its concerns around continuation were also held by the provider; while it was too early to tell the extent to which revalidation was an effective response, the extent of this project, together with wider university buy-in, suggested that the university was keen to see real improvement in this area and resource improvement in terms of increasing the number of staff.

72. Some measures, like the shift from 20 to 30 credit modules, however, were radical and the assessment team considered that they could have posed a risk to continuation rates. While the reduction of overall assessment burden offered by 30-credit modules could have been a helpful strategy, it also provided less opportunity for students to receive effective feedback on their learning progress. This dilemma was understood by course directors at the university who had confidence in their approach to providing formative assessment to students within eight weeks of starting a module. The assessment team saw a great commitment to the transition to 30-credit modules but little or no consideration of potential negative consequences nor possible mitigations.

73. In the team's view the validation exercise had been a focus for sustained work on quality and improvement in education, which was starting to improve the academic experience for students. Improvements were clearly evidenced by staff while student surveys like NSS and student responses to the team's questions showed a sustained level of overall satisfaction. The team's assessment was that the overall provision was broadly comparable with other providers and that the challenge offered to students was set at an appropriate level.

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[4] Source: OfS internal analysis of the student data used to construct the published size and shape of provision dashboard from September 2022, subset to students taught at the University of Wolverhampton. The 'all students' population is used and where it is used, the subject area 'business and management' is defined by the Common Aggregation Hierarchy Level 2 (CAH2). The data used here considers academic years 2017-18 to 2020-21, and percentages are calculated based on the percentage of English domiciled students that are from areas classified in quintile 1 of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019.

B1 conclusions

74. The assessment team's investigation drew on multiple sources of information, as identified above, that were relevant to condition B1. Following a risk-based approach, it did not identify any concerns relating to condition B1 from reviewing this information.

75. This had in part been achieved via the corrective action of revalidation and the proposed approach to systemic review may yet improve things further. However, while the revalidation gave the assessment team confidence in the university's approach to matters relating to condition B1, the team remained concerned that the exercise was not in itself sufficient to improve continuation rates. The university should take further steps to address this.

76. The assessment team also considered that the mode of operation it observed, for example where tutors arranged ad hoc support sessions, may not have been sustainable.

77. Finally, the team considered that internal and external approaches to quality improvement should be carefully considered to ensure they are robust and consistent. The need for this was considered even more pressing given the multiple intake structure.

Condition B2: Resources, support and student engagement

78. The assessment team reviewed a range of evidence relevant to condition B2 (see Annex A for the full text of the condition) in seeking to understand whether the University of Wolverhampton has taken all reasonable steps to ensure that each cohort of students registered on the relevant courses is receiving 'resources and support' (B2.2.a). These resources and support should be sufficient for the purpose of ensuring a high quality academic experience for those students, and enabling those students to succeed in and beyond higher education. In addition, the assessment team sought to understand whether the University of Wolverhampton has taken all reasonable steps to ensure 'effective engagement' (B2.2.b) with each cohort of students registered on the relevant courses. This should be sufficient for the purpose of ensuring a high quality academic experience for those students, and enabling those students to succeed in and beyond higher education.

79. The initial information provided by the university, and reviewed by the assessment team, included:

- course guides for business and management courses

- module outlines relating to the business and management courses

- module attainment data for Level 4 modules on the relevant courses (for the academic year 2021-22)

- any student complaints and their outcomes (during the academic year 2021-22).

80. Alongside the initial information provided by the university, the assessment team reviewed National Student Survey (NSS) information for 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22, both quantitative and qualitative, and student outcomes data, including measures on completion, continuation and progression.

81. This initial information is relevant to the university taking all reasonable steps to ensure that students on relevant courses are receiving sufficient 'resources and support', and to ensure 'effective engagement' with these students.

82. During on-site visits and online meetings, the assessment team met with students studying business and management courses across Levels 4 to 6, academic staff teaching on business and management courses, members of the leadership team for the Business School and professional services staff. These meetings included discussion of whether students on relevant courses are receiving sufficient 'resources and support', and whether the University of Wolverhampton has taken all reasonable steps to ensure 'effective engagement' with these students.

83. The assessment team requested additional information from the university about the courses being considered, as detailed under 'information gathering' above (all data noted below was supplied by the university.) This included:

- the revalidation report from the university's 2020-21 revalidation activity and other associated revalidation documents

- the university's data showing continuation rates for students from Level 5 to Level 6 from 2019-20 to 2021-22

- an example of summaries of student module evaluations for 2022-23

- anonymised data from the university's Individual Learner Platform (ILP) which is used to identity support needs for students.

84. The team's assessment drew on multiple sources of information, as identified above, that are relevant to condition B2. Following a risk-based approach, the assessment team considered a number of areas set out below.

Support for employment

85. Before the visits, the team were concerned that lower levels of progression to professional or managerial employment, further study, or other positive outcomes, could have suggested that the attainment of a degree level qualification in business and management from the university was not meeting students' reasonable aspirations in terms of enabling them to succeed beyond higher education offering subsequent pathways into professional or managerial employment, further study, or other positive outcomes.

86. The assessment team focused its attention on a range of factors that might have accounted for lower rates of progression from business and management courses at the university. Initially the team wanted to explore the reasons why students were finding it difficult to transition into positive outcomes such as professional or managerial careers, or finding it difficult to secure a place on higher education courses.

87. The team explored the extent to which students received resources and support to enable them to identify appropriate post-degree opportunities and the support that was on offer to help students transition to employment or further study. It also considered the degree to which courses embedded relevant and timely support for securing professional or managerial employment, further study, or other positive outcomes. In seeking to understand whether the

level of support for students in relation to developing their employability was sufficient, the assessment team sought to understand the context of the undergraduate student cohort admitted to business and management courses, approaches to course management and improvement, and academic and professional service support for students.

88. Employability support was centralised at the university and formed part of the Careers, Enterprise, and the Workplace Unit. This service was open to all students and students could engage as soon as they started university life. The service placed an emphasis on 'starting early' and recognised that students have different needs. It offered basic support in terms of the careers options that were open to students, where to look for employment, and how to write a good CV and application form. Individual careers consultants were available and offered bookable appointments for students. Staff also informed the team they run workshops for students; in one example the team were told a workshop was attended by about 1,500 students. The university also offered regular 'careers fair' events.

89. The team were informed that the university's 'Challenge Academy' provided student-led projects aimed at supporting local businesses while giving students the chance to serve as business consultants. Under the guidance of academic mentors, this initiative offered students the opportunity to actively participate in real-world business challenges, applying their academic knowledge in a practical setting.

90. The assessment team were informed by staff of a wide variety of extracurricular activities intended to enhance students' employability. The team understood from staff that activities were supplementary to academic courses and not integral. This provision offered particular strengths in building digital capacity (often delivered in partnership with third-party providers or accreditors – some offered pathways to Certificate in Marketing qualifications, for example). The team noted substantial support for entrepreneurship such as business start-ups was available, although this appeared to be embedded in only one specific course, despite the school-wide commitment to entrepreneurship and innovation. The university provided entrepreneurial mindset workshops, business idea feasibility studies, understanding finance for start-up sessions, and guidance on HMRC registration and website design, among others.

91. Students could also take advantage of a university-wide 'business incubation centre' which, along with providing a physical space with hot-desking facilities for example, also gave students access to business advisers offering face-to-face and online support. The success of this support was evident in the establishment of 223 new businesses, 44 of which originated from the Business School. Awareness of entrepreneurship as a viable career option was promoted through modules at Level 4 and Level 6. Staff cited this as crucial considering the local area's business community and concentration of SMEs.

92. The assessment team met with several recent business and management graduates who had made successful transitions to professional or managerial work. The former students were keen to acknowledge the specific support and assistance that bolstered their confidence and proficiency in applying for graduate schemes, including support with CV writing and interview preparation.

93. During a group discussion with current students, one student pointed out that while the careers support provided was helpful, in their experience the guidance tended to be generic and did not consider their specific degree course or the potential career paths it could lead to. This student

also made the suggestion that all courses should provide information about the destinations of recent graduates, along with profiles of relevant sectors and roles. Another student expressed feeling pressure to secure employment due to economic circumstances but noted that the focus on employability seemed to prioritise finding any job rather than something aligned with their degree and career aspirations.

94. The faculty and school leadership said that employability at module level was the responsibility of module leaders. In addition, accreditation, especially for the BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance course required workplace skills as part of wider PSRB requirements. The Business School had dedicated role holders as Employability Leads which further enhanced employability capacity.

95. Module leaders, lecturers and support staff were keen to express the degree to which they recognised the challenges that the intake could have faced in terms of securing professional and graduate level employment. In addition to support set out in paragraphs 88 to 91 above, specific interventions to overcome challenges included mentoring and working closely with an advisory board supported by the Institute of Directors and senior business leaders. Mentoring has been running for approximately 15 years and staff estimated around 550 students had directly benefited.

96. Staff explained that they encouraged students to identify opportunities to secure appropriate paid placements and support for this was offered via a dedicated placement adviser. Student feedback in the team's meetings with students suggested that students who were successful in securing placements had largely done so on their own efforts and that placements in some areas (for example auditing) were exceptionally difficult to source. There was also little evidence of support for placements outside the local area.

97. The enthusiasm and passion to ensure that students were equipped with skills to support transition to work was clear in discussion, but staff were unsure how they could evaluate measures and interventions in terms of their efficacy and degree of student uptake.

98. Staff at the university were clearly aware that progression rates were on the lower side and had strong ambitions for students' success. Despite evidence of clear and dedicated provision to support students' employment transition, the team was somewhat surprised to hear comments from staff that suggested that some students were not necessarily ambitious to achieve graduate-level jobs, nor move from the area in search of employment. Though the team noted that when they met with a small sample size of students, all expressed a desire to progress from their degree courses into jobs and careers and many intended to move from the area.

99. Staff pointed out that some corporate recruiters were asking for qualifications which many students at the university did not have. Therefore, careers staff purposefully did not advise students to apply.

100. Staff also pointed to the number of students who sought to start their own business and the transition of graduates to sole traders, family firms and SMEs in the region which might have not shown in OfS progression data as graduate or professional level employment. However, the assessment team noted that in the OfS measure of progression, students who reported working in self-employment, voluntary or unpaid roles or running their own business are

included in the data in the same way as those in paid employment if they identified their job or employer names and duties as managerial or professional.

101. Recent NSS 2022 free text comments from students on the business and management courses provided further evidence to suggest that the university could have improved the careers support available to students. Student comments included requests for 'More information about what jobs, careers, postgraduate courses for 3rd year', 'Career fairs for chosen course e.g., marketing.', 'It would be advantageous for the university if the employees from the careers office had more connections with businesses to help students in job opportunities either for summer placements in graduated schemes.' These recommendations would not only promote graduate-level aspirations but also provide students with at least a partial roadmap of how to achieve their goals.

102. The assessment team noted that the university's employability support and initiatives appeared to be generally positive and appreciated the individual commitment and passion of careers and academic staff to do their best for students. However, the team did consider that there may have been room for improvement in integrating employability opportunities and support with the course structure and further support provided for students in finding placements.

B2 Conclusions

103. The assessment team's investigation drew on multiple sources of information, as identified above, that were relevant to condition B2. Following a risk-based approach, on balance, it did not identify any concerns relating to condition B2 from reviewing this information.

104. The team considered that the university had made efforts to enhance employability at the module level, with extracurricular activities and entrepreneurship support supplementing academic courses. Nonetheless, the team considered that these opportunities were not integral to the course structure, potentially excluding the students who could benefit the most.

105. Mentoring and advisory support were identified as key resources aiding students' transition to employment or further studies. However, there was some feedback from students suggesting that they often found placements through their own efforts, with minimal support from the university. An underlying issue of dependence on students' self-initiative for securing placements suggested that the institutional support in this area should be considered further.

Condition B4: Assessment and awards

106. The assessment team reviewed a range of evidence relevant to condition B4 (see the full text in Annex A) in seeking to understand whether students on the relevant courses considered were 'assessed effectively' (B4.2.a), whether each assessment was 'valid and reliable' (B4.2.b), whether academic regulations 'are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible' (B4.2.c) and whether 'relevant awards granted to students are credible' (B4.2.e).

107. In the assessment team's view there were concerns that may relate to compliance with some of the requirements set out in condition B4.2, as follows:

'B4.2 Without prejudice to the principles and requirements provided for by any other condition of registration and the scope of B4.1, the provider must ensure that:

a. students are assessed effectively

b. each assessment is valid and reliable

108. The assessment team also particularly noted the following definitions listed under B1.4:

'c. "assessed effectively" means assessed in a challenging and appropriately comprehensive way, by reference to the subject matter of the higher education course, and includes but is not limited to:

i. providing stretch and rigour consistent with the level of the course;

ii. testing relevant skills; and

iii. assessments being designed in a way that minimises the opportunities for academic misconduct and facilitates the detection of such misconduct where it does occur.

d. "assessment" means any component of a course used to assess student achievement towards a relevant award, including an examination and a test.

e. "credible" means in the reasonable opinion of the OfS, relevant awards reflect students' knowledge and skills, and for this purpose the OfS may take into account factors which include, but are not limited to:

i. the number of relevant awards granted, and the classifications attached to them, and the way in which this number and/or the classifications change over time and compare with other providers;

ii. whether students are assessed effectively and whether assessments are valid and reliable;

iii. any actions the provider has taken that would result in an increased number of relevant awards, and/or changes in the classifications attached to them, whether or not the achievement of students has increased, for example, changes to assessment practices or academic regulations; and

iv. the provider's explanation and evidence in support of the reasons for any changes in the classifications over time or differences with other providers.

g. "relevant award" means:

i. a research award;

ii. a taught award; and/or

iii. any other type of award or qualification in respect of a higher education course, including an award of credit granted in respect of a module that may form part of a larger higher education course, whether or not granted pursuant to an authorisation given by or under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, another Act of Parliament or Royal Charter.

i. "reliable" means that an assessment, in practice, requires students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a manner which is consistent as between the students registered on a higher education course and over time, as appropriate in the context of developments in the content and delivery of the higher education course.

j. "research award" and "taught award" have the meanings given in section 42(3) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

k. "valid" means that an assessment in fact takes place in a way that results in students demonstrating knowledge and skills in the way intended by design of the assessment.'

109. The assessment team considered a range of information related to assessment and awards as relevant to business and management courses at the University of Wolverhampton, including a review of a sample of assessment briefs and marking rubrics, a sample of marked student coursework with feedback and module attainment data for Level 4 modules. Based on the information reviewed in the scope of this quality assessment, the team did not identify any concerns:

- academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible (B4.2.c)

- or, in respect of each higher education course, that academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable higher education course (B4.2.d)

- relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously (B4.2.e)

Concern 1 (condition B4.2): Inconsistency of assessment practice

113. The assessment team reviewed module outlines, assessment briefs and student assessment submissions. They found a good mix of assessment types and noted care had been taken to ensure assessments deadlines were not bunched together. The team also noted an increasing emphasis on authentic assessment, providing students with the opportunity to apply knowledge and learning to 'real world' problems. Module leaders were also encouraged to think about alternative assessment arrangements for inclusive learning and assessment and an example of a video journal in place of a traditional written submission was given.

114. The team noted an inconsistency from discussions with staff and students in how different academic members of staff might have applied policies for providing feedback to students on formative assessment drafts. Staff informed the assessment team that they allowed students

to submit one early draft of formative assessment for feedback before final submission. However, the team understood from meetings with students that, on some occasions, staff reviewed multiple drafts. The team did not consider this issue to be widespread because it was not reported by all students and staff the assessment team spoke to were clear that the agreed approach was that only one draft would be reviewed. However, the team consider that an inconsistent approach has the potential to impact the academic rigour of assessment. The university should be careful to ensure that policy is applied consistently across all courses so that assessment is effective, valid and reliable.

115. Following a review of data submitted by the university, the team noted some students appeared to have up to six attempts to pass an assessment (this is discussed further in paragraph 123 below). The pass mark for assessment at undergraduate level was 40 per cent. The team considered the academic regulations for 2022-23 (in force at the time of the assessment) to understand the university's approach to assessment attempts. These stated that students who fail an assessment have a second opportunity to resit and therefore are allowed up to two attempts at passing an assessment. However, they may be offered a third resit attempt 'for Semester 1 modules within the same academic year where scheduling permits'. The team was concerned about this approach because it might have resulted in students being treated inconsistently and therefore be relevant to the reliability of assessment, which requires students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a manner which is consistent.

116. Staff told the assessment team that the number of allowed attempts to pass an assessment depended on the scheduling of the relevant module. Modules that ran in semester one allowed students three attempts to pass an assessment because there was room in the academic calendar to do so. Whereas modules that ran in semester two allowed students two attempts to pass an assessment. Data provided by the university showed that on the BA (Hons) Accounting and Finance course, for example, all semester one modules allowed three assessment attempts. Whereas all semester two modules allowed two assessment attempts.

117. The assessment team thought the discrepancy in the allowed number of attempts to pass an assessment was concerning because the approach taken by the university was based on timetabling and the resulting space available in the academic calendar, with no basis in teaching practice.

118. When the team reviewed data provided by the university it noted that students on the same course but in different cohorts (i.e. cohorts with a start date of either January or September) were allowed a different number of attempts at assessment on the same module. This issue was particularly relevant to the revalidated BA (Hons) Business Management course which had moved to 30 credit modules. Students who started in September on this course were allowed up to three attempts at semester one assessment. Whereas students starting in January were allowed up to two attempts at the same assessment. Conversely, students starting in September were allowed up to two attempts at semester two assessment; whereas students who started in January were allowed up to three attempts at the same assessment.

119. The assessment team was concerned about this because students would have received inconsistent opportunities to resit assessment on the same course, depending on when they

started. The team considered that this meant students were treated unequally because it gave some students an additional opportunity to pass an assessment, ultimately making it easier for them to pass the module.

120. Arguably, the university assessed the January and September cohorts of students on the BA (Hons) Business Management consistently. Each cohort overall completed six modules which allowed three attempts at an assessment, and six modules that allowed two attempts at an assessment, over their course of study. However, because the underlying approach was based solely on the space available in the academic calendar, with no basis in teaching practice, the assessment team was not convinced that staff had considered the inequality this presented to students, who might have strengths or weaknesses in different assessment approaches or understanding of module content. The inconsistency in approach was particularly relevant to the professional project module in Level 6, described as a 'capstone module'. This was an independent study module designed to draw together the skills and knowledge acquired throughout the course, culminating in an 8,000-word written reflection piece. Comparatively, the word limit for assessment on other modules on the course varied from 1,500 to a maximum of 3,000. Students in the January cohort were allowed three attempts to pass the professional project module assessment, whereas students in the September cohort are allowed two. The team considered that students on these cohorts were not experiencing a consistent approach in assessment and that assessment therefore could not be considered reliable.

121. The team noted that the academic regulations in force at the time of the assessment stated that students who failed a module could repeat it. This meant students may have been provided with up to six attempts in total to complete an assessment. Data submitted by the university showed that this regulation was in action. Exam board notes recorded that some students studying business and management courses had been provided with up to six attempts at assessment. The team understands from the data that the number of students in this category was a small minority. The exam board notes reflected that approximately 2 per cent of Level 4 students across business and management courses in 2021-22 were permitted either five or six attempts at assessment.

122. While the team focused its consideration of the academic regulations on the context of business and management courses, it notes that its findings have broader relevance since the policy is adopted across the university. The team note that the policy applies to all levels of an undergraduate course. The team would question whether allowing up to six attempts was delivering the rigour expected with the level of the course and whether the challenge provided by the assessment can be considered appropriate, and therefore whether assessment is effective.

123. The team did not identify concerns with the stretch and level of challenge within assessment briefs. However, the team was concerned how helpful allowing up to six attempts at assessment ultimately was for those students who were apparently struggling to grasp enough of the academic concepts of these modules to reach a 40 per cent pass mark despite repeated opportunities to do so.

124. With no basis in teaching practice for the approach to the number of allowed assessment attempts, the team's view is that this number of repeated attempts may undermine the rigour

of the assessment and diluted the challenge provided that was relevant to the level of the course.

B4 Conclusions

125. The assessment team's view is that the university's inconsistent approach to assessment was of concern. This is because:

   a. The inconsistent approach to assessment attempts identified on the revalidated BA (Hons) Business Management meant that assessment did not require students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a manner that was consistent as between those students registered on the same higher education course. Therefore, assessment could not have been considered reliable as required under condition B4.2.b.

   b. Allowing up to six attempts to pass an assessment (for those students that resit a module) without a clear underpinning pedagogic rationale, brought into question the rigour of the assessment and diluted the challenge provided that was relevant to the level of the course. The team considered that because those students were permitted to attempt an assessment that was lacking in rigour and challenge, it meant that those students were not assessed effectively as required under condition B4.2.a.

Annex 1: Ongoing conditions of registration

Condition B1: Academic experience

Scope
B1.1 This condition applies to the quality of higher education provided in any manner or form by, or on behalf of, a Provider (including, but not limited to, circumstances where a Provider is responsible only for granting awards for students registered with another Provider).

Requirement
B1.2 Without prejudice to the principles and requirements provided for by any other condition of registration and the scope of B1.1, the Provider must ensure that the students registered on each **higher education course** receive a high quality academic experience.

B1.3 For the purposes of this condition, a high quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring all of the following:
> a. each **higher education course** is **up-to-date**;
> b. each **higher education course** provides **educational challenge**;
> c. each **higher education course** is **coherent**;
> d. each **higher education course** is **effectively delivered**; and
> e. each **higher education course**, as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop **relevant skills**.

B1.4 Insofar as **relevant skills** includes technical proficiency in the English language, the Provider is not required to comply with B1.3.e to the extent that it is able to demonstrate to the OfS, on the balance of probabilities, that its English language proficiency requirements, or failure to have English language proficiency requirements, for one or more students, are strictly necessary as a matter of law because compliance with B1.3.e in respect of that student, or those students:
> i. would amount to a form of discrimination for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010; and
> ii. cannot be objectively justified for the purposes of relevant provisions of that Act; and
> iii. does not fall within an exception or exclusion provided for under or by virtue of that Act, including but not limited to provisions of the Act that relate to competence standards.

Definitions
B1.5 For the purposes of this condition B1:
> a. "**appropriately informed**" will be assessed by reference to:
>> i. the time period within which any of the developments described in the definition of **up-to-date** have been in existence;
>> ii. the importance of any of the developments described in the definition of **up-to-date** to the subject matter of the **higher education course**; and
>> iii. the time period by which it is planned that such developments described in the definition of **up-to-date** will be brought into the **higher education course** content.

> b. "**coherent**" means a **higher education course** which ensures:
>> i. there is an appropriate balance between breadth and depth of content;
>> ii. subjects and skills are taught in an appropriate order and, where necessary, build on

each other throughout the course; and
iii. key concepts are introduced at the appropriate point in the course content.

c. "**educational challenge**" means a challenge that is no less than the minimum level of rigour and difficulty reasonably expected of the **higher education course**, in the context of the subject matter and level of the course.

d. "**effectively delivered**", in relation to a **higher education course**, means the manner in which it is taught, supervised and assessed (both in person and remotely) including, but not limited to, ensuring:
  i. an appropriate balance between delivery methods, for example lectures, seminars,
  group work or practical study, as relevant to the content of the course; and
  ii. an appropriate balance between directed and independent study or research, as relevant to the level of the course.

e. "**higher education course**" is to be interpreted:
  i. in accordance with the Higher Education and Research Act 2017; and
  ii. so as to include, for the avoidance of doubt:
    A. a course of study;
    B. a programme of research;
    C. any further education course that forms an integrated part of a higher education course; and
    D. any module that forms part of a higher education course, whether or not that module is delivered as an integrated part of the course.

f. "**relevant skills**" means:
  i. knowledge and understanding relevant to the subject matter and level of the **higher education course**; and
  ii. other skills relevant to the subject matter and level of the **higher education course** including, but not limited to, cognitive skills, practical skills, transferable skills and professional competences.

g. "**up-to-date**" means representative of current thinking and practices in the subject matter to which the **higher education course** relates, including being **appropriately informed** by recent:
  i. subject matter developments;
  ii. research, industrial and professional developments; and
  iii. developments in teaching and learning, including learning resources

Condition B2: Resources, support and student engagement

Scope
B2.1 This condition applies to the quality of higher education provided in any manner or form by, or on behalf of, a Provider (including, but not limited to, circumstances where a Provider is responsible only for granting awards for students registered with another Provider).

Requirement
B2.2 Without prejudice to the principles and requirements provided for by any other condition of registration and the scope of B2.1, the Provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure:

a. each **cohort of students** registered on each **higher education course** receives **resources** and **support** which are 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; and

b. 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.

B2.3 For the purposes of this condition, "all reasonable steps" is to be interpreted in a manner which (without prejudice to other relevant considerations):

a. focuses and places significant weight on:
   i. the particular academic needs of each **cohort of students** based on prior academic attainment and capability; and
   ii. the principle that the greater the academic needs of the **cohort of students**, the number and nature of the steps needed to be taken are likely to be more significant;

b. places less weight, as compared to the factor described in B2.3a., on the Provider's financial constraints; and

c. disregards case law relating to the interpretation of contractual obligations.

Definitions
B2.4 For the purposes of this condition B2:

a. "**academic misconduct**" means any action or attempted action that may result in a student obtaining an unfair academic advantage in relation to an **assessment**, including but not limited to plagiarism, unauthorised collaboration and the possession of unauthorised materials during an **assessment**.

b. "**appropriately qualified**" means staff have and maintain:
   i. expert knowledge of the subject they design and/or deliver;
   ii. teaching qualifications or training, and teaching experience, appropriate for the content and level of the relevant **higher education course**; and
   iii. the required knowledge and skills as to the effective delivery of their **higher education course**.

c. "**assessment**" means any component of a course used to assess student achievement towards a **relevant award**, including an examination and a test.

d. "**cohort of students**" means the group of students registered on to the **higher education course** in question and is to be interpreted by reference to the particular academic needs of those students based on prior academic attainment and capability.

e. "**engagement**" means routine provision of opportunities for students to contribute to the development of their academic experience and their **higher education course**, in a way that maintains the academic rigour of that course, including, but not limited to, through membership of the Provider's committees, opportunities to provide survey responses, and participation in activities to develop the course and the way it is delivered.

f. "**higher education course**" is to be interpreted:
    i. in accordance with the Higher Education and Research Act 2017; and
    ii. so as to include, for the avoidance of doubt:
        A. a course of study;
        B. a programme of research;
        C. any further education course that forms an integrated part of a higher education course; and
        D. any module that forms part of a higher education course, whether or not that module is delivered as an integrated part of the course.

g. "**physical and digital learning resources**" includes, as appropriate to the content and delivery of the **higher education course**, but is not limited to:
    i. physical locations, for example teaching rooms, libraries, studios and laboratories;
    ii. physical and digital learning resources, for example books, computers and software;
    iii. the resources needed for digital learning and teaching, for example, hardware and
    software, and technical infrastructure; and
    iv. other specialist resources, for example specialist equipment, software and research tools.

h. "**relevant award**" means:
    i. a **research award**;
    ii. a **taught award**; and/or
    iii. any other type of award or qualification in respect of a **higher education course**, including an award of credit granted in respect of a module that may form part of a larger **higher education course**,
    whether or not granted pursuant to an authorisation given by or under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, another Act of Parliament or Royal Charter.

i. "**research award**" and "**taught award**" have the meanings given in section 42(3) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

j. "**resources**" includes but is not limited to:
    i. the staff team that designs and delivers a **higher education course** being collectively **sufficient in number**, **appropriately qualified** and deployed effectively to deliver in practice; and
    ii. **physical and digital learning resources** that are adequate and deployed

effectively to meet the needs of the **cohort of students**.

k. "**sufficient in number**" will be assessed by reference to the principle that the larger the cohort size of students, the greater the number of staff and amount of staff time should be available to students, and means, in the context of the staff team:

    i. there is sufficient financial resource to recruit and retain sufficient staff;

    ii. the Provider allocates appropriate financial resource to ensuring staff are equipped to teach courses;

    iii. **higher education courses** have an adequate number of staff, and amount of staff

    time; and

    iv. the impact on students of changes in staffing is minimal.

l. "**support**" means the effective deployment of assistance, as appropriate to the content of the **higher education course** and the **cohort of students**, including but not limited to:

    i. academic support relating to the content of the **higher education course**;

    ii. support needed to underpin successful physical and digital learning and teaching;

    iii. support relating to understanding, avoiding and reporting **academic misconduct**;

    and

    iv. careers support,

    but for the avoidance of doubt, does not include other categories of non-academic support.

Condition B4: Assessment and awards

Scope

B4.1 This condition applies to the quality of higher education provided in any manner or form by, or on behalf of, a Provider (including, but not limited to, circumstances where a Provider is responsible only for granting awards for students registered with another Provider).

Requirement

B4.2 Without prejudice to the principles and requirements provided for by any other condition of registration and the scope of B4.1, the Provider must ensure that:

    a. students are **assessed effectively**;
    b. each **assessment** is **valid** and **reliable**;
    c. **academic regulations** are designed to ensure that **relevant awards** are **credible**;
    d. subject to paragraph B4.3, in respect of each **higher education course**, **academic regulations** are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable **higher education course**; and
    e. **relevant awards** granted to students are **credible** at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

B4.3 The Provider is not required to comply with B4.2d to the extent that:
    a.   a **higher education course** is assessing a language that is not English; or

    b. the Provider is able to demonstrate to the OfS, on the balance of probabilities, that its **academic regulations**, or failure to have any **academic regulations**, for assessing technical proficiency in the English language for one or more students are strictly necessary as a matter of law because compliance with B4.2d in respect of that student, or those students:
        i. would amount to a form of discrimination for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010; and
        ii. cannot be objectively justified for the purposes of relevant provisions of that Act; and
        iii. does not fall within an exception or exclusion provided for under or by virtue of that Act, including but not limited to provisions of the Act that relate to competence standards.

Definitions

B4.4 For the purposes of this condition B4:

    a. "**academic misconduct**" means any action or attempted action that may result in a student obtaining an unfair academic advantage in relation to an **assessment**, including but not limited to plagiarism, unauthorised collaboration and the possession of unauthorised materials during an **assessment**.
    b. "**academic regulations**" means regulations adopted by the Provider, which govern its **higher education courses**, including but not limited to:
        i. the assessment of students' work;
        ii. student discipline relating to academic matters;
        iii. the requirements for **relevant awards**; and
        iv. the method used to determine classifications, including but not limited to:
            A. the requirements for an award; and

B. the algorithms used to calculate the classification of awards.

c. "**assessed effectively**" means assessed in a challenging and appropriately comprehensive way, by reference to the subject matter of the **higher education course**, and includes but is not limited to:
 i. providing stretch and rigour consistent with the level of the course;
 ii. testing **relevant skills**; and
 iii. **assessments** being designed in a way that minimises the opportunities for **academic misconduct** and facilitates the detection of such misconduct where it does occur.

d. "**assessment**" means any component of a course used to assess student achievement towards a **relevant award**, including an examination and a test.

e. "**credible**" means that, in the reasonable opinion of the OfS, **relevant awards** reflect students' knowledge and skills, and for this purpose the OfS may take into account factors which include, but are not limited to:
 i. the number of **relevant awards** granted, and the classifications attached to them, and the way in which this number and/or the classifications change over time and compare with other Providers;
 ii. whether students are **assessed effectively** and whether **assessments** are **valid** and **reliable**;
 iii. any actions the Provider has taken that would result in an increased number of **relevant awards**, and/or changes in the classifications attached to them, whether or not the achievement of students has increased, for example, changes to assessment practices or **academic regulations**; and
 iv. the Provider's explanation and evidence in support of the reasons for any changes in the classifications over time or differences with other Providers.

f. "**higher education course**" is to be interpreted:
 i. in accordance with the Higher Education and Research Act 2017; and
 ii. so as to include, for the avoidance of doubt:
  A. a course of study;
  B. a programme of research;
  C. any further education course that forms an integrated part of a higher education course; and
  D. any module that forms part of a higher education course, whether or not that
  module is delivered as an integrated part of the course.

g. "**relevant award**" means:
 i. a **research award**;
 ii. a **taught award**; and/or
 iii. any other type of award or qualification in respect of a **higher education course**, including an award of credit granted in respect of a module that may form part of a larger **higher education course**, whether or not granted pursuant to an authorisation given by or under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, another Act of Parliament or Royal Charter.

h. "**relevant skills**" means:
 i. knowledge and understanding relevant to the subject matter and level of the **higher education course**; and
 ii. other skills relevant to the subject matter and level of the **higher education**

course including, but not limited to, cognitive skills, practical skills, transferable skills and professional competences.

i. "**reliable**" means that an **assessment**, in practice, requires students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a manner which is consistent as between the students registered on a **higher education course** and over time, as appropriate in the context of developments in the content and delivery of the **higher education course**.

j. "**research award**" and "**taught award**" have the meanings given in section 42(3) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

k. "**valid**" means that an **assessment** in fact takes place in a way that results in students demonstrating knowledge and skills in the way intended by design of the assessment.