Quality assessment report

Business and management at Buckinghamshire New University

October 2022 – May 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 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 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 2 May 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 Office for Students (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 May 2022 the OfS decided to open an investigation into the quality of business and management courses provided by Buckinghamshire New University.

2. Buckinghamshire New University 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 by Buckinghamshire New University at the request of the assessment team, including information about student attendance and achievement.

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

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

5. It visited Buckinghamshire New University on two occasions in November 2022 and February 2023 during which time it had a tour of facilities and 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 two visits and both versions were shared with the university. 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 BA (Hons) Business Management (and associated pathways), BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance (and associated pathways) and BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management (and associated pathways).

9. Through its activities, the team identified five areas of concern in relation to business and management that may relate to Buckinghamshire New University's compliance with the OfS's conditions of registration:

   - **Concern 1**. The assessment team found that the university was not consistently providing a high quality academic experience because:

     a. The teaching and learning resources used to teach disciplinary knowledge were not consistently up-to-date.

     b. The manner of teaching delivery meant that courses were not consistently effectively delivered.

     c. Delivered content was not consistently informed by up-to-date, discipline-specific academic theory and research. This meant that courses did not consistently require students to develop relevant skills.

     This concern relates to condition of registration B1 because this condition requires that students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience.

   - **Concern 2**. The assessment team found that a lack of adequate educational leadership and academic governance was affecting the overall academic experience of students. This concern relates to condition of registration B1 because the educational leadership and academic governance did not ensure that students registered on each higher education course received a high quality academic experience.

- **Concern 3**. The assessment team found that the cohort of students recruited by the university required high quality resources to support their independent learning. However, the quality of the virtual learning environment (VLE) was not consistent, with some modules having inadequate learning materials to facilitate the cohort of students' learning. This concern relates to condition of registration B2 because the assessment team considered that students were not consistently receiving resources sufficient for them to succeed in and beyond higher education.

- **Concern 4**. The assessment team found that student academic support needs were not consistently identified, limiting the opportunity for senior and academic staff to enhance the quality of poor-performing modules and improve the academic experience of students. This concern relates to condition of registration B2 because the assessment team considered that the university was missing opportunities that could have been taken to ensure students had sufficient academic support to succeed in and beyond higher education.

- **Concern 5**. The assessment team found that there was considerable variability between the pedagogical and teaching skills of different academic staff across business and management courses. This concern relates to condition of registration B2 because the assessment team considered that appropriately qualified and pedagogically experienced staff were not sufficient in number nor consistently deployed effectively to ensure a high quality academic experience for students.

10. The assessment team considered multiple sources of information that were relevant to condition B4: Assessment and awards. The assessment team did not identify any concerns relating to this condition from reviewing this information.

Introduction and background

11. Each year, the Office for Students (OfS) selects a number of 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 assessment 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 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.

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

14. The OfS appointed an assessment team (October 2022) to assess the quality of the business and management courses provided by Buckinghamshire New University (i.e. those courses delivered by Buckinghamshire New University, 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 2 May 2023. The report does not take into account matters which 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 had regard to information it held relating to Buckinghamshire New University, including student outcomes data, numbers of students, and any notifications received.

Context

17. Business and management courses at Buckinghamshire New University are delivered across the School of Creative and Digital Industries, the School of Human and Social Sciences, the School of Aviation and Security and the School of Business and Law. Most business and management content, studied by the significant majority of business and management students, is delivered through the School of Business and Law and the School of Aviation and Security.

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

18. The university has five campus locations (High Wycombe, Uxbridge, Aylesbury, Missenden Abbey and BNU based at Pinewood Studios). Business and management courses are largely taught in person at the university's High Wycombe campus, although some courses, including the BSc Air Transport Management with Airline Pilot Training, were taught via distance learning.

19. The undergraduate business and management provision was offered on a full-time basis, with the exception of the BA (Hons) Business Management (Top up), which had a part-time option available. As of October 2022, including the various pathway options, the data submitted by the university showed that there were 47 undergraduate pathways with at least one student registered at the time of the assessment. Five of the undergraduate pathways each had more than 100 students, with an average of 23 students on each of the remaining 42 pathways.

20. The majority of business and management postgraduate provision was offered on a full-time basis, although part-time options were available for courses such as the International MBA and MA Human Resource Management. As of October 2022, the data submitted by the university showed that there were 21 postgraduate pathways with at least one student registered at the time of the assessment. Two of these pathways each had more than 200 students registered (the International MBA and the International MBA (Top Up)). The remaining 19 pathways had an average of 16 students.

21. Student Learning and Achievement support available at the university includes personal tutors, the support that was available centrally from the library, the learning and academic development advice centre and career success team.

22. Student numbers have grown steadily across the university,[3] and have increased overall within the subject of business and management.[4] Excluding partnership provision, business and management was the largest subject of study at the university in 2021-22.

Table 1: Number of students taught at Buckinghamshire New University and the number of those students taught business and management (at CAH level 2).

Academic year	Number of students taught at the university	Number of students taught business and management at the university
2019-20	5,940	1,600
2020-21	6,200	1,460
2021-22	7,560	2,240

23. The assessment team was told by the senior leadership team that the university intended to increase the number of students studying on business and management courses. However, it

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[3] Source: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/ as published on 12 April 2023.

[4] Source: OfS internal analysis of the student data used to construct the published size and shape of provision dashboard from April 2023, subset to students taught at Buckinghamshire New University within the business and management CAH2 subject area.

was clarified that there were no plans to increase student numbers by a set target within the School of Business and Law.

24. The university has a diverse student cohort in terms of its demographic mix, socio-economic background and prior educational attainment levels. Approximately 42 per cent of the student cohort in business and management undergraduate degree awards was recorded as being from minority ethnic groups in the academic year 2020-21. In 2020-21, 29 per cent of the total cohort was from areas categorised as deprived in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).[5] In meetings with staff, the assessment team was informed that students typically had additional responsibilities, such as caring, childcare or employment.

25. The senior leadership team advised that there had been significant investment in professional services and teaching staffing over the last few years. This investment had included appointing a number of associate lecturers as full-time staff. At the time of the visit held on 28 November 2022, recruitment was ongoing, with 12 teaching post vacancies in the School of Business and Law.

26. In addition to changes in teaching staff, the assessment team was made aware of changes in leadership in the School of Business and Law. The vice-chancellor advised the assessment team that the School of Business and Law had been through a period of instability, with challenges in the recruitment of senior leaders at the school that had been ongoing for what was described as a number of years. The vice-chancellor considered leadership to now be in a stable position, with the most recent post, the head of school, having been in place since October 2022.

Recent initiatives introduced by the university

27. During the period of assessment, the university was working towards the introduction of Curriculum 23 (C23) for September 2023. C23 was a project to revise curriculum delivery that included the redesign of the core curriculum and increased access to optional modules across Levels 5, 6 and 7. The revised approach also included the introduction of 10 credit interdisciplinary 'opportunity' modules. A document titled 'C23 Blueprint' stated 'opportunity modules are the core of the BNU curriculum', allowing students to personalise their curriculum and 'develop outside the traditional boundaries of their curriculum'. Students were required to choose 20 credits of opportunity modules at both Level 4 and Level 5 and these were available in a wide range of areas, such as community engagement, digital skills or entrepreneurship.

28. Under C23, placements were described as 'integral' to all courses, with a range of placement modules ranging in length and credit value available to students.

29. Staff described C23 as having a 'carousel' approach to recruitment, with the revised model allowing up to four intakes across the academic year (September, January, March and June). Teaching would be delivered over three 10-week teaching terms.

30. It was intended that all new students starting from September 2023 would study on the revised C23 offering. In meetings with staff, the assessment team was advised that the curriculum currently available to existing students would be taught out. This meant that those students in

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[5] Source: OfS internal analysis of the student data used to construct the published size and shape of provision dashboard from September 2022, subset of students taught at Buckinghamshire New University within the business and management CAH2 subject area.

Level 5 or Level 6 from September 2023 would remain on the former curriculum structure until they complete their course of study.

31. The assessment team considered C23 as part of its assessment and this is discussed further in paragraphs 112 to 114 and paragraph 167 below.

32. An additional initiative recently introduced by the university was the 'Engagement and Retention Team' ('the team'), a dedicated team of staff led by the Student Engagement and Retention Lead. The team was introduced for the 2022-23 academic year by the university with a goal to improve engagement, attendance and retention of students. The challenge of student engagement with their learning and retention of students had been identified as a concern within the university and is discussed further in paragraphs 94 to 98, and paragraphs 109 to 110 below.

Specific international cohort

33. The university advised that, in the 2021-22 academic year, 1,259 international (including EU and other overseas) students were recruited to business and management courses. A substantial number of these international students were recruited from a single country. Throughout the report, we refer to the recruitment of the large cohort from a single country as 'the specific international cohort' to separate them from international students more generally.

34. The specific international cohort presented significant challenges for the university. Most registered on the BA (Hons) Business Management with International Foundation Year in January 2022, and BA (Hons) Business Management with Foundation year and International Master of Business Administration in February 2022.

35. The university provided the assessment team with:

- a timeline that set out all points at which staff raised concerns about the engagement of these students with their learning or the ability of the specific international cohort to succeed in higher education

- actions taken by the university in relation to that cohort.

36. Concerns about the specific international cohort were first raised for those registered on the BA (Hons) Business Management with International Foundation Year on 28 January 2022 in an 'Edskill wash up meeting'. The concerns identified by staff included that:

- the cohort would need additional English language support

- the need to monitor student progress

- the requirement for sufficient professional services staff to meet student numbers.

37. The university set actions to address the concerns identified. These actions included:

- enhancing the students' union and the central support service 'Student Success'

- the Edskill project manager following up on those students not in attendance

- reviewing the attendance monitoring system to ensure it was able to monitor attendance 'at the level required'.

38. The timeline provided by the university states that on 1 March 2022 the University Executive Team agreed an additional 2.5 FTE professional services posts for the School of Business and Law.

39. The timeline also states that on 8 March 2022, it was identified in an Edskills Operations Group meeting that 78 per cent of the specific international cohort studying on the BA (Hons) Business Management with International Foundation Year (those that started in January 2022) had failed their first assessment. The group noted in particular 'we need to be very aware of the ability of the students – non-submission, poor English, and academic practice'.

40. Actions identified in the timeline by the university included additional English language support, 'greater clarity around academic integrity, clearer feedback and support provided through formative assessments' and the ability for students to immediately resubmit. At this time the university had already received the second intake of students from the specific international cohort in February 2022 and was expecting a third by June 2022 (this cohort was later cancelled).

41. On 6 July 2022 there was a Business and Law progression board. Membership of the progression board usually includes course leaders, teaching staff, an academic quality representative and external examiners (though no external examiners were recorded as present for this particular meeting). The purpose of the progression board is to consider the students' results and make decisions on their eligibility to continue with the course.

42. The progression board considered the students' results for a number of business and management courses, including the BA (Hons) Business Management with Foundation Year. The BA (Hons) Business Management with International Foundation Year and International MBA courses were not included in this report. The Assessment Board Record (a document that forms the official record of the progression board) notes that:

'[c]oncerns were raised over the number of students presenting at the board with non submissions across the board. Students who were not attending and engaging with their work should be withdrawn through our attendance and engagement process… the Course team raised concerns regarding the reporting mechanism of the Attendance Monitoring System which does not enable academic staff to see 5 consecutive missed sessions easily. It is also difficult for academic staff with large cohorts to keep a track of students' attendance and process emails sent out and responses.'

43. Further to assessment team discussions with the senior leadership team, the assessment team understands this comment relates at least in part to the specific international cohort.

44. According to data provided by the university and reviewed by the assessment team, 470 students were withdrawn from business and management courses in 2021-22. Of these, 284 students (60 per cent) were from the specific international cohort. Of the specific international cohort, 142 students were withdrawn between November 2021 and September 2022 (104 of those started study in either January or February 2022). In the same cohort, 142 students were withdrawn in October and November 2022 (all 142 started study in February 2022).

45. Of the 284 students withdrawn in 2021-22, the reason for leaving was recorded by the university as 'written off after lapse of time' for 126 students, 'academic failure/left in bad standing/not permitted to progress' for 108 students and 'other' for 38 students. The remaining 12 students had a reason for leaving recorded as 'financial reasons' or 'family reasons' among others.

46. The assessment team was keen to understand why such a large number of students from the specific international cohort had been withdrawn and what support had been put in place for them. In a meeting with the vice-chancellor, the assessment team was informed that as some admissions processing had been managed by a third party, the specific international cohort did not have entry requirements applied as strictly as would usually be expected. The university has since taken action to prevent this occurring again. This meant those students had started study at the university without the usual process of academic admissions checks, such as the provider's standard English language requirements. The timeline provided by the university noted that support put in place for these students included timetabled English language support sessions, greater clarity around academic integrity and 'clearer feedback and support provided through formative assessments'.

Assessment process

Information gathering

47. The assessment team gathered a range of information to determine whether there were possible concerns relating to requirements as set out in conditions of registration B1, B2 and/or B4. The team gathered information through an initial request for data from the university (19 October 2022) and two site visits on 28 November 2022 and 6 to 7 February 2023.

48. During these visits it undertook:

    • a range of staff interviews (with academic and central university professional service staff)

    • a range of student panel interviews (including students studying at Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7)

    • a physical and digital facilities tour and review of records and documents

    • a range of teaching observations.

49. The team was also granted access to the virtual learning environment (VLE) from 1 December 2022 to 17 February 2023. It made further requests for information and data based on discussions with staff and students during both the initial site visit and subsequent two-day site visit, as well as arising from its analysis of information already provided. The university predominantly fulfilled requests in a timely fashion and provided the additional information and data on 19 October 2022, 23 November 2022, 27 January 2023, 1 February 2023, 6 February 2023, 14 February 2023 and 2 May 2023.

50. The assessment team first reviewed general monitoring intelligence, including student outcomes data held by the OfS, and initial data provided by the university. From this it initially decided to focus on undergraduate provision and the International MBA. This was because the substantial number of business and management students were registered on either the undergraduate provision or the International MBA. Therefore, in the assessment team's view, this was in line with taking a risk-based approach. For example, in data provided by the university on 19 October 2022 for the 2022-23 academic year, 1,989 students were registered on undergraduate degrees. Comparatively, 773 students were registered on postgraduate courses, with 548 of those on pathways connected to the International MBA.

51. Similarly, following a risk-based approach, the assessment team then focused on the specific undergraduate courses below:

    • BA (Hons) Business Management

    • BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management

    • BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance.

52. Evidence gathering relating to these courses was prioritised due to a combination of factors including cohort size and matters of specific concern arising from the data reviewed, such as low attainment and withdrawal data. Additionally, the assessment team noted that the courses set out in paragraph 51 shared modules with a number of other courses. This was applicable to

pathways available within each course set out in paragraph 51. Additionally, these courses shared modules with a number of other courses in similar areas of business and management.

53. For example, Level 4 to 6 of the BA (Hons) Business Management modules were the same as Levels 4 to 6 of the BA (Hons) Business Management with Foundation Year and BA (Hons) Business Management with International Foundation Year, and Level 6 of the BA (Hons) Business Management (Top-Up) course. However, every module from the BA (Hons) Business Management was also shared with at least one other course, for example the BA (Hons) Marketing, BA (Hons) Business and Human Resource Management and BA (Hons) Sport Business Management. Similarly, the BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management modules were the same as Levels 4 to 6 of the BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management with Foundation Year and the BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management with International Foundation Year. The BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management shared approximately half of its modules with the BA (Hons) International Tourism Management with Air Travel. And finally, the BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance modules were the same as Levels 4 to 6 of the BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance with Foundation Year. The BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance course shared a small number of modules with other courses. This included the BA (Hons) Marketing, BA (Hons) Business and Human Resource Management and BA (Hons) Sport Business Management.

54. Where the assessment team has drawn conclusions that relate to the specific undergraduate courses set out in paragraph 51 above, it considers that these conclusions were also relevant to the pathways available within each course. For example, findings relevant to the BA (Hons) Business Management were also relevant to Levels 4 to 6 of the BA (Hons) Business Management with Foundation Year and BA (Hons) Business Management with International Foundation Year, and Level 6 of the BA (Hons) Business Management (Top-Up). The assessment team has not drawn conclusions on other courses that are not identified in paragraph 51 above, however it does note that due to the shared content of the courses it reviewed, conclusions may have broader implications.

55. The team established specific lines of enquiry based on all the information it gathered. These were broad areas of focus within the scope of conditions B1, B2 and/or B4. To be transparent, the team communicated these lines of enquiry to the university and kept it informed, where relevant, as the assessment progressed.

56. Following the assessment, the team agreed that it had potential concerns about the higher education courses it had considered. These concerns were within the scope of ongoing condition of registration B1 (Academic experience) and B2 (Resources, support and student engagement). Each concern is explained in more detail below. In reviewing initial information provided by the university the assessment team did not identify any concerns that would relate to condition B4.

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

Condition B1: Academic experience

57. The assessment team reviewed a range of information relevant to condition B1 (see Annex 1 for the full text), which is detailed through the discussion below.

Relevant parts of the condition

58. In the assessment team's view there were concerns that may relate to compliance with some of the requirements set out in condition B1.2, as follows:

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;

d. each higher education course is effectively delivered;

e. each higher education course, as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills.

59. The assessment team also particularly noted the following definitions listed under B1.5:

'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.'; and;

'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' and;

'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.'

60. The assessment team considered a range of information related to the academic experience of students on the business and management courses, including a review of the VLE content, teaching observations, meetings with students and staff, National Student Survey (NSS) comments and information provided about C23. Based on the information reviewed in the scope of this quality assessment, the assessment team did not identify any concerns in relation to the educational challenge of the relevant courses (condition B1.3.b).

Concern 1 (condition B1.2): Quality of the academic experience

Courses were not consistently up-to-date

61. The assessment team conducted teaching observations across nine lectures or seminars from eight modules during the investigation visits. The modules were relevant to the BA (Hons) Business Management, BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance and BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management. Observations included at least one member of the assessment team attending part of the taught session.

62. Three of the teaching observations raised concerns around the currency of teaching and learning provision. The team was concerned that learning resources and materials used in teaching delivery were not up-to-date in content and were not informed by up-to-date understandings of pedagogy.

63. For example, in one teaching observation, the team considered that the materials used to teach disciplinary knowledge were not robust because they did not contain any academic references. This meant that the students would not have known where to follow up for further reading to support understanding or reinforce learning. In the group activity observed by the assessment team, the lecturer chose a practice-based case study from around 2014 as a focus. The purpose of choosing this particular dated case study was not made evident by the lecturer. This could have been replaced with a more up-to-date example to improve relevance. This would have indicated that materials being delivered were being regularly reviewed and re-worked in light of developments in both the discipline and pedagogical practice. In another teaching observation, whilst the lecturer did cite sources on the PowerPoint slides for some of the material delivered, the sources used were not from academic theory nor research informed, but instead were references to popular books. Whilst popular books might be additionally referred to in a learning context, in the view of the assessment team it would be expected that lecturers primarily use academic references appropriate for the specific higher education level of the discipline being taught.

64. In another teaching observation the team was concerned about the currency of learning resources where there were minimal academic references on the PowerPoint slides. For example, a definition was provided, but without any reference to indicate where it was taken from. This meant that it was difficult to ascertain if it was up-to-date or current and would have limited the students' ability to undertake further reading to deepen their learning outside of the taught session.

65. Review of the learning resources provided to support independent learning on the VLE reinforced these concerns. The assessment team noted that content across approximately half of the over 50 modules it reviewed lacked engagement with up-to-date academic theoretical or research-informed sources. While the assessment team noted reference to practice-based sources within learning resources on the VLE, it is their view that the academic content was not appropriately informed by academic developments in the disciplinary field in a way that would adequately represent current practices. Many of the learning resources appeared to be informed just by core foundation text books and had few expansions from those, resulting in a lack of evidence of engagement with subject matter developments or up-to-date sector thinking.

66. Concerns over the currency of teaching and learning provided through the VLE were expressed by students at Levels 4, 5 and 6 across a range of business and management undergraduate degree courses during meetings with the assessment team. For example, students stated that the materials presented on the VLE did not always match up with the lectures. Additionally, several students stated that old materials were still present on the VLE from past iterations of the modules delivered by previous staff members.

67. The assessment team considered the university's response to external examiner reports to determine whether these issues had been raised previously. External examiners did not raise this concern frequently in the 26 reports made available to the assessment team. It is worth noting, however, that one external examiner report in 2020-21 specifically raised the need to increase the incidence of research-informed teaching. The school's response noted that this would be considered. However, the assessment team could find little evidence of actions developed or implemented to indicate that this took place. The assessment team did not see research-informed teaching showcasing up-to-date contributions in the relevant subject disciplines taking place across business and management undergraduate degree courses in teaching observations that took place during their visit to the university or in their review of the VLE.

Courses were not consistently effectively delivered

68. A senior member of staff noted a change in students recruited more recently as having more external obligations such as caring responsibilities and full-time employment. Meetings with academic staff echoed this. The team was informed that a lot of students were in employment, that many students have full-time jobs on top of part-time jobs, and that there had been a rise in students who have caring responsibilities. The assessment team was also informed that in 2021-22 the School of Business and Law had recruited a larger than usual international cohort of students. This international cohort is discussed in further detail in paragraphs 33 to 46 above.

69. During a meeting with the assessment team, the course delivery team stated that the diversity of the student cohort presents challenges for them to ensure that they provide a high quality academic experience for all students. Given prior educational attainment varied significantly

between students according to their background and the differing entry tariffs found in some courses of study, it was explained that students had very divergent academic skills.

70. The delivery pattern in business and management undergraduate degree courses was centred on in-person delivery in typically three-hour, lecture or seminar sessions. This more traditional full-time student delivery model relies on synchronous learning. It requires student attendance during standard teaching hours with limited flexibility to support asynchronous learning. It also relies on didactic delivery and heavy use of extensive PowerPoint slides that, in the instances the team observed, lack the rigour of relevant, up-to-date academic sources.

71. The team reviewed NSS comments (2019-20 to 2021-22) from business and management students. They noted that there were some positive comments related to effective delivery such as: '[t]he style of teaching is rather useful as it engages students well' and '…efficient and interesting lectures…' However, the team noted that the majority of comments related to delivery highlighted concerns. For example:

   'Some lectures can be very long exceeding normal class time and are continued in seminars. Some modules have PowerPoint lectures which are over 50 slides with limited information as most of the slides are pictured-based, interaction is also limited in some modules due to the excessive number of slides as a result causing boredom'; 'The style of teaching is very tiring, and draining does not make it interesting' and ' … some of the lectures were just covered from PowerPoint…'.

72. The assessment team held three meetings with students studying on business and management courses at the university. It received reports from students at Levels 4, 5, and 6 that the structure of teaching delivery contact time, including the timetabling of three-hour sessions, acted as a barrier to their learning. These students felt that it was very difficult for them to stay engaged with and learn most constructively from the three-hour sessions taking place often several times within a week. Students stated that the style of the teaching was 'talking at them', and 'lecturers just read off the presentation slides'. Students reported that some students faced difficulty in attending timetabled contact time, and those who needed to combine study with paid employment were particularly affected by these difficulties. One student stated that 'those that did fail were working and did not attend sessions'.

73. Some Level 5 students noted the limitations of the in-person delivery style. They said that not all students can learn through lengthy slide-focused lectures and that it can make it hard for some students to develop their knowledge and understanding of a subject. It was the view of the assessment team that this approach to teaching delivery reflects a less inclusive educational model.

74. The assessment team also heard from some Level 6 students that they felt demotivated to attend because of the approach to delivery. For example, one student said that 'activities to help with learning do take place in class, but if you are not there or can't do it in time, you just have to get on with it by yourself.'

75. Teaching observations conducted by the assessment team reinforced the concerns that the delivery of business and management courses were not consistently effective or inclusive. Teaching delivery in the parts of the sessions observed followed a traditional instructor-led, didactic model. Some activities were incorporated into the observed seminar sessions to try to

support interactivity, but the tendency to rely on lengthy PowerPoint slide decks was still the dominant approach.

76. For example, in one particular teaching session, dense teaching materials were presented in extensive PowerPoint slide decks, with little expansion of points within the taught session. The PowerPoint slides were not structured in a pedagogically appropriate way and as a result were hard to follow.

77. In another teaching observation, the mode of providing key disciplinary knowledge to students appeared again hard for students to follow. Teaching delivery involved the lecturer scrolling through a projection of a lengthy word document that contained important factual information. The lecturer then set an in-class activity but provided very little framing guidance in their directions. The details of the in-class activity were on a separate hard copy handout, which was not provided in the materials on the VLE. Students who were not attending on that occasion would have had limited opportunity to undertake the activity or follow up outside of class on what they had missed.

78. The assessment team members that reviewed the teaching session observed that the lecturer had very limited interaction with the students; they were sitting at the teaching station for the duration of the session. When the students were discussing the question set, as they had been instructed, the lecturer told the class to 'keep it down', which had a negative impact on discussions. The assessment team members observed students appearing confused and many appearing disengaged. The academic staff member did not provide challenging or clarifying facilitation in the limited discussion that followed the task. It was the view of the observing assessors that the approach to teaching would not have adequately supported the learning of the students attending the class.

79. A further example was observed in a different teaching session where there was an evident lack of engagement from many students in attendance. The assessment team observed one student who had their head on the table and appeared asleep. Two others were on phones. While the tutor tried to engage the students in the activity, only certain core students repeatedly answered. Others seemed to struggle to engage with the task. The lecturer moved on from the activity before some students had finished.

80. In another observation of a different teaching session, the academic staff member interacted with students, but did not include interactive in-class tasks that would have encouraged active learning. This appeared to make it challenging for students to feel engaged or supported given the technical nature of the subject.

81. The assessment team also noted some examples of good teaching practice. For example, in one observation, the lecturer engaged the students in sharing ideas and then summarised the discussions so that the main learning points were clear. The lecturer also aligned the topic to prior learning so as to construct a helpful knowledge reminder for students. This aided a sense of coherence. It was evident to the assessment team that there was a good rapport between the students and lecturer, with students asking questions and contributing to class discussions.

82. In a separate example, the lecturer provided students with engaging in-class activities so that they could explore the topic in more detail and achieve their learning objectives. The assessment team also noted another example of good practice in which the lecturer provided

appropriate academic explanation for the subject, demonstrated good interpersonal rapport and actively worked to engage all students in class discussions.

83. The assessment team recognises that the quality of teaching delivery it observed was mixed. It is their view, however, that less effective teaching delivery was a concern and had contributed to low levels of student engagement and attainment. This view was supported by evidence in the data.

84. For example, data provided by the university for the courses of focus set out under paragraph 51 shows evidence of low levels of student attainment across modules, courses and levels of study. Pass rates and average marks were low in a number of modules on business and management courses. Data ascertained from a summary within the 2021-22 individual Module Board Reports shows that, across the BA (Hons) Business Management course, eight out of 20 core modules were recorded as having an average module mark below 55 per cent. Within BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance, 15 out of 22 core modules were recorded as having an average mark below 55 per cent. The pass mark for undergraduate business and management degrees was 40 per cent.

85. Following the teaching observations that raised concerns about effective teaching delivery as set out in paragraphs 75 to 83 above, the assessment team looked at the specific attainment data provided by the university for 2021-22 on those modules. It reviewed 2021-22 individual Module Board Reports. From 14 students registered on a specific Level 5 module where concerns were noted by the team, nine achieved a module mark of 49 or below. Comparatively, for a specific Level 5 module (where effective teaching delivery was observed in a session by the assessment team) of 28 students registered on the module, all students achieved a module mark of 50 per cent or above.

86. The assessment team also identified high numbers of students not submitting their assignments. For example, when it reviewed 2021-22 individual Module Board Reports, it identified that a Level 4 module taught on both BA (Hons) Business and Management and BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance had 58 students submit the first attempt of both set pieces of assessment. This was out of a total cohort of 89 students registered on the module, meaning that 34 per cent of students did not submit at least one assessment on the first attempt. A second example, ascertained from the Module Board Reports for each individual module, comes from a different Level 4 module (taught on the same courses). In this case, 54 students submitted a first attempt of both set pieces of assessment out of a total cohort of 93 registered on the module. This means that 42 per cent of students did not submit at least one assessment on the first attempt.

87. The assessment team is aware the specific international cohort referred to in paragraphs 33 to 46 above mean data for Level 4 for the academic year 2021-22 might have been atypical. High rates of non-submission were, however, also evident in data pertaining to Level 4 and 5 modules in 2020-21, which were not affected by the specific international cohort. For example, a tab titled 'Module Board Summary Report – 20/21' stated that for a Level 5 module (taught on both BA (Hons) Business and Management and BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance), 61 students submitted their assignment out of a total of 77, meaning approximately 20 per cent did not submit. Similarly, for a Level 4 module (taught on the same courses), 31 students out of a total of 44 submitted their assignment, meaning that approximately 29 per cent did not submit.

88. The assessment team identified that, for academic reasons, the university was withdrawing increasing numbers of students from their course over time. For example, data provided by the university and reviewed by the assessment team indicates that the number of students withdrawn from undergraduate business and management courses with a reason code of 'academic failure/left in bad standing/not permitted to progress' has steadily increased:

- 41 students in 2019-20

- 46 students in 2020-21

- 184 students in 2021-22.

89. The assessment team note that 2021-22 data was atypical due to the specific international cohort. Even if this cohort was excluded, it still leaves 72 undergraduate students withdrawn in 2021-22 with a reason code of 'academic failure/left in bad standing/not permitted to progress'. This was approximately three per cent of the total student cohort in 2021-22 as set out in Table 1 earlier in this report.

90. In reviewing the data, team noted that courses with higher withdrawals with a reason code of 'academic failure/left in bad standing/not permitted to progress' included the BA (Hons) Business Management and BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance.

91. On the basis of the information the assessment team reviewed, as described above, it is their view that the lack of effective delivery was negatively affecting levels of students' engagement with their learning. In turn, this was likely to have been contributing to low levels of attainment, high levels of non-submission of assignments and increasing numbers of students being withdrawn from their courses for academic reasons.

92. Evidence that course staff were concerned that low student engagement was affecting student attainment was reflected across the '2021-22 Module Board Summary Business Management' reports for undergraduate business and management courses. The assessment team noted a high number of comments on this matter, including:

- 'student engagement is not good which is reflected in the results'

- 'this academic year a significant number of students have failed and have not engaged with the programme'

- 'There are a number of no shows. Concerns about non-engagement which is affecting the stats'

- 'Engagement issues. Students who have engaged have generally achieved good grades'

- 'Very good results at the top end of the module but there were students who did not engage and the results reflect this.'

93. The assessment team noted attempts by course leaders and module teams to respond to these concerns at module and course level. During meetings with staff, the assessment team was informed that several modules have been subject to Module Review and Action Plans (MRAPs). A MRAP is a plan that requires module leaders to review performance on their module and identify areas for improvement and associated actions. The requirement for a

MRAP is identified when the module board report records a pass rate below 85 per cent, an average mark below 45 per cent, or an average mark above 65 per cent.

94. The university provided the assessment team with 12 MRAPS from the courses of focus as set out under paragraph 51. The team noted that most identified and recorded student engagement as an issue. The action for improving engagement across the MRAPs was directed to the Engagement and Retention Team ('the team').

95. As noted in paragraph 32, the team was a recent initiative introduced by the university with the goal to improve engagement, attendance and retention of students. The assessment team was informed that it tracks the engagement of every student using a range of 'touch points' (such as VLE usage, card swipes and attainment) to identify those students who were not engaging in their learning. A student was 'flagged' once five consecutive absences had been recorded, prompting initial contact from the team via email or occasionally via phone.

96. The aim of the contact from the team was to understand why the student was not engaging and to identify if they have any support needs. Where the team identified support needs, it sent the student website links directing them towards university services, such as academic writing support, financial advice, or health and wellbeing services. Course leaders were kept updated by the team, so they were aware of the challenges the student was facing. If attendance or engagement did not improve, the team contacted the student a second time. If they continued not to engage or respond to other interventions (such as contact from personal tutors or course leaders), they were referred to Registry and were ultimately (if necessary) withdrawn from the course.

97. The team records the date and nature of contact with the student, the category of the barrier to student engagement for each individual student (for example, personal, academic or financial), and the outcome of the contact (for example, 'engaged', 'escalated to registry' or 'withdrawn'). At the time of the second assessment visit on 6 and 7 February 2023, the assessment team asked relevant staff to provide detail about any impact of the team on the engagement and retention of students compared with previous years. The assessment team was told that the team were unable to report comparative impact, as they were currently looking at how data from the previous academic year could be tracked and compared with the current academic year.

98. It is the view of the assessment team that the reviewed MRAPs placed too much emphasis on the role of the team as the means to improve students' engagement in their learning. For example, the MRAPs did not additionally note the impact that approaches to teaching delivery, the academic quality of the course materials, or the discipline-specific academic support needs of the students might have on poor student engagement and attainment or suggest associated teaching and learning improvements.

99. The assessment team raised its experience of teaching observations with the senior leadership team. It noted specifically some observed sessions that, in its view, were not of sufficient academic quality and queried how the university was addressing lower quality teaching and learning delivery. The assessment team was told that the university had provided recent enhancement activities designed to upskill staff. Senior staff stated that they were aware that some academic colleagues needed further support. The senior leadership team said they were supplying bespoke support for those colleagues who required it.

100. It is the view of the assessment team that academic staffing issues have contributed to the concern that teaching was not consistently effectively delivered. This, as a result, was having a negative impact on student engagement, student experience, attainment levels and continuation.

Courses did not consistently support students to develop relevant academic skills

101. The assessment team undertook a review of the VLE to further interrogate the academic quality of courses.

102. The strategic aims of the School of Business and Law include a focus on practice-orientated teaching and learning, as noted in the 2021-2022 School Report, 'The school prides itself on its work-based approach to teaching and learning'. The assessment team was encouraged by the evidence of practice-orientated material on the VLE. This prepares students for employment in modules with a specific focus on practice and in certain more subject-focused modules.

103. However, the assessment team's review of over 50 modules on the VLE identified that some modules were lacking what they considered to be core disciplinary content for a module of its type at its particular higher education level and necessary to deliver expected learning outcomes. For example, the assessment team reviewed the VLE content for a particular module where a lecture was stated to cover two specified subjects. The content reviewed by the team only covered one of these subjects, with no evidence of presentation of the remaining subject matter.

104. The review of the VLE also provided evidence that, in many of the modules, the PowerPoint slide decks lacked the expected academic and theoretical focus for teaching at the relevant academic level. Instead, they were primarily practice-orientated. In the academic judgement of the assessment team, the content of the materials on the VLE did not consistently evidence the necessary subject depth and breadth required to provide the expected academic subject relevance and coherence.

105. The assessment team noted that materials provided for many module sessions lacked what they deemed to be adequate engagement with appropriate academic literature. For example, in a Level 4 module, while there was a large quantity of material presented in the PowerPoint slides for each taught session on the module space of the VLE, there was an absence of academic sources referenced on slides. This deficit would have made it difficult for students to engage in necessary further independent study to reinforce their learning and also to prepare for assignments. A lack of academic references would also limit the opportunity for students to develop either discipline-specific skills or the academic practice skills of independent study expected at the relevant higher education Level. Some PowerPoint slides on the VLE had a reference slide at the end of the slide deck (e.g. a specific Level 6 module). However, it was the view of the assessment team that overall levels of up-to-date academic referencing were not sufficient to help students to develop discipline-specific academic skills or academic practice skills at the relevant higher education level.

106. The concerns that courses were not consistently effectively delivered and did not consistently support students to develop relevant academic skills were, in part, driven by the aforementioned strategic focus on practice-orientated content. A focus on practice-orientated

content is potentially commendable, but in this case it was regrettably at the cost of including the required academic conceptual and theoretical underpinning.

107. It is the view of the assessment team that some staff were not sufficiently up-to-date in discipline-specific pedagogical skills or did not have adequate relevant academic experience. This has contributed to the concern that students were not consistently supported to develop the relevant discipline-specific or academic practice skills necessary for the specific higher education level in which they were studying. This is discussed further in concern 5.

Plans relevant to academic quality

108. During meetings with staff, the assessment team was informed of several initiatives designed to improve the academic experience available to students. Some had been introduced the prior academic year (2021-22) and some were new for the academic year 2022-23.

109. For example, as set out earlier in paragraph 32 and in paragraphs 94 to 98, the university introduced a new system for attendance monitoring in the academic year 2021-22. Along with the introduction of the central Engagement and Retention Team in the academic year 2022-23, this was intended to improve the engagement and retention of students. The assessment team had the opportunity to meet with the Engagement and Retention Team leader and other relevant staff during their visits. While it saw the Engagement and Retention Team as a positive initiative, the assessment team remained concerned about the relationship between poor engagement of students with their learning and academic quality explored in paragraphs 91 to 98, and the ways that the university manages education quality and oversight (explored further in concern 2).

110. The meeting with the senior leadership team reinforced this concern. In response to the team's questions about how the impact of the Engagement and Retention Team would be tracked, the leadership replied that this was not something that was happening at the time of the assessment visits. However they stated that they were considering how to improve their tracking of comparative data to better guide improvement actions.. The team was not assured that improvement initiatives had been developed in a way that would ensure the effectiveness of their implementation or the usefulness of the data produced so that they could adequately inform academic oversight and improve the academic experience.

111. Furthermore, many of the initiatives designed to improve the quality of academic experience had already been in place at least for one academic year. Despite this, the data was still indicating significant challenges with poor student engagement and outcomes. For these reasons the assessment team was not assured of the appropriateness, sustainability and impact of some of the plans.

112. The assessment team asked the senior leadership team about the educational strategy in place for the improvement of the quality of business and management courses. They were informed that there were plans to revise the academic approach to business and management degree courses as part of the Curriculum 23 (C23) strategy (C23 is discussed further in paragraphs 27 to 30 above). C23 was to be introduced for the Level 4 intake in the academic year 2023-24. Levels 5 and 6 students would be 'taught out', that is they would continue with the curricula framework and approach to teaching and learning reviewed by the assessment team.

113. The team reviewed a document submitted by the university titled 'A Blueprint for Education at BNU; The Curriculum Framework and Design Model'. It stated that the development of C23 was intended to support enhancements in the academic experience including the 'redesign the university's core curriculum' with priorities including 'genuine choice in curriculum and in the pace and place of learning, enhanced through digitally enabled delivery'. Developments included a more targeted suite of modules and the inclusion of current debates and agendas (e.g., sustainability). It also aimed to increase the flexibility of entry points to study and awards being offered. At a meeting with staff, there was reference to the intention to give core academic and/or theoretical underpinnings more consideration in some of the planned course content for new courses starting in the academic year 2023-24. However, the key focus of C23 (reflected in the documents received from the university and additional discussions with staff) appeared to be improving student experience through simplified structures, clearer cohort identities, more flexibility in access and increased 'opportunity' modules.

114. Based on the information obtained from meetings with relevant stakeholders and the documentation provided to the assessment team about C23, it was unclear to the team how far the introduction of C23 would be able to improve the quality of the academic experience for those Level 4 students entering in 2023-24. The materials provided focused on the strengths of C23 in enhancing student experience through clarity of the course pathways and flexibility of delivery and not on the concerns identified by the assessment team as set out in paragraphs 61 to 107. Furthermore, it is the assessment team's view that plans to support and address the identified concerns (with academic experience for existing students who would be studying at Levels 5 and 6 in 2023-24) were not sufficient to reassure that these cohorts of students would receive a sufficiently high quality academic experience.

Concern 2 (condition B1.2): Educational leadership and academic governance did not ensure that students received a high quality academic experience

115. It is the assessment team's view that approaches to educational leadership and academic governance did not ensure that students consistently received a high quality academic experience.

116. The assessment team acknowledges that the approaches to educational leadership and academic governance discussed here may have been part of wider strategic structures and operations at the university. However, the concerns set out in this report focus specifically on the effect of leadership and governance for students taught on the business and management courses identified in paragraph 51.

117. In identifying a concern in this area, the assessment team carefully interrogated data from across extensive and diverse sources, including:

- analysis of documentation provided by the university

- student outcome data

- a review of the VLE carried out by the assessment team

- student feedback received through meetings with Level 4, 5 and 6 students from relevant courses of study and NSS comments 2019-20 to 2021-22

- meetings with academic staff from the subject of business and management, the senior leadership team, professional services colleagues and a meeting with the vice-chancellor and the chair of council.

118. Throughout this report, in sections detailing the concerns of the assessment team, it is the assessment team's view that failings in educational leadership and academic governance, including poor oversight and management of quality, could be identified as key contributing factors to the inadequate academic experiences of some students. This section will draw on what is elaborated in other sections of the report to provide a summarised overview of this critical concern.

119. It was evident to the assessment team that important lines of responsibility for academic oversight of teaching and learning delivery (synchronous and asynchronous) were attributed to the fractional (0.8 FTE at the time of the assessment) role of the School Director of Education. Staff repeatedly referred to the importance of this role throughout meetings, with senior leaders stating that they were 'reliant' on the School Director of Education role. The role's intended purpose was stated within the internal review as 'strengthening the overall quality and governance of assessment and awards' and was increased from 0.2 FTE when established in September 2021 to 0.8 FTE in August 2022. This was in recognition of its importance in ensuring the necessary academic oversight. Responsibilities that lie under the role included oversight of teaching and learning delivery including on the VLE, student experience, and academic quality processes such as managing the MRAPs (referenced in paragraph 93 above).

120. The role was inconsistently filled from September 2022 to April 2023. It is the assessment team's view that the observed inconsistencies in approaches to curricula content, teaching delivery and VLE usage result in part from the reduced academic oversight caused by this role having been inconsistently filled. For example, in the course team meeting a course leader acknowledged the difficulty of this role not being able to effectively assure the quality aspects of teaching and learning on business and management courses.

121. The assessment team could see no adequate plan that had been put in place to ensure that the critical academic oversight tasks attributed to the School Director of Education role within the school were still undertaken when the role could not be filled. This was despite the essential nature of this role, accounts received from academic and senior staff about the impact of this deficit, and the observations made in the internal quality review undertaken in June 2022 that there were deficiencies in oversight processes related to improving teaching and learning which presented a risk to academic quality. The assessment team asked staff how these operational gaps had been filled and was not provided with convincing evidence of staff stepping into the space that was left. The team also was not provided with convincing evidence of adequate alternative delegation put in place to assure oversight of academic quality could still take place as necessary within the school.

122. The university was apparently aware of challenges around leadership. It informed the assessment team that there had been challenges in the retention of senior leaders at the school that had been ongoing for a number of years. It was also noted, in meetings with the

assessment team, that an internal review of quality and compliance for business management (the 'internal review') had shown a major priority was looking for some leadership to address fundamentals including quality governance. The purpose of the internal review, conducted in June 2022, was to 'assess the academic standing of provision in this subject area aligned to the OfS conditions of B1, B2, B4.'

123. The assessment team reviewed the internal review report and noted deficiencies in oversight were referenced throughout the report, for example '[o]versight of quality and mentoring of ALs [associate lecturers] is not always clear and this will be strengthened…' and 'the management of the assessment scrutiny process requires strengthening'. The report notes the need for increased academic oversight of the use of the VLE and stated that 'the SDoE [School Director of Education] should play a prominent role in implementing this'. This reinforces the assessment team's view (noted above in paragraph 121) that deficits in fulfilling the academic quality oversight responsibilities held by the School Director of Education role have contributed to inconsistent quality of academic experience for students across the cohort.

124. The assessment team asked the senior leadership team to provide a brief summary of progress against actions arising from the internal review (the 'update'). However, the assessment team was not sufficiently reassured by the update setting out how academic quality had been addressed following the internal review report. Within the summary provided, the assessment team was unclear about how the outcomes presented were coherently aligned with the earlier identified issues in the internal review report.

125. For example, the update stated that 'School Leadership Teams audit and provide ongoing robust oversight of fundamental quality processes.' However, in what ways and how this was done was not specified against identified issues in the internal review report and therefore the assessment team was unclear about how far recommendations had been addressed. Likewise, the update stated that the internal review report '…noted that the subject of business and management displayed effective senior leadership across schools.' However, the assessment team could not see reference to this statement within the internal review report and indeed this statement felt contradictory to elements within the report. While the assessment team acknowledge it requested a 'brief summary', it viewed a lack of alignment between the internal review report and the update as contributing to their concerns around educational leadership and academic governance.

126. Similarly, in relation to effective delivery, the internal review report states: 'In some areas, teaching delivery methods might benefit more from greater evidence of varied learning approaches and less reliance on lectures in larger groups. However, timetables do suggest that workshops occur to achieve balance to complement the main lecture.' In response to identified concerns with effective delivery, the written update simply notes:

'The internal review highlighted the need for greater consistency of effective delivery to enhance the student experience. Examples of actions achieved include:

- no changes to published timetables unless there is an exceptional case

- regular peer observation and staff development

- consistency of presentation of module documentation on VLE

- Any new academic staff without a recognised teaching accreditation/qualification are required to enrol on the next cohort of the PG Certificate in Academic Practice. All Associate Lecturers are expected to join appropriate training ('Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education programme at BNU').'

127. The update makes no reference to actions focused on increasing varied learning approaches or actions to address reliance on lectures in larger groups which the internal review report identified as necessary. Again, it is the assessment team's view that the lack of alignment between the issues identified in the internal review report and the actions set out as having been achieved or in progress in the summary update suggests that there were concerns with educational leadership and academic governance.

128. While the assessment team was able to identify some completed actions within the update that correlate to actions required in the internal review report, they observed that many challenges identified in it were still present during their visit. This did not give the team confidence that the report's recommendations were adequate to drive necessary improvements in academic quality. During meetings, statements made by the senior leadership team about progress were not consistently adequately qualified or evidenced. This additionally left the assessment team concerned as to whether the university had the ability to robustly identify and respond to its educational leadership and academic governance challenges.

129. During discussion with the senior leadership team about the scale and potential contributing reasons for the high levels of withdrawals referred to in paragraphs 44 to 46 and paragraphs 88 to 90, the assessment team observed a lack of adequate engagement with and understanding of the data from the senior leadership team. This added to the assessment team's concerns about the robustness of educational leadership and academic oversight.

130. The university had found that poor performance comes, in part at least, disproportionately from international students. It is noted, for example, the School Evaluation Report 2021-22 (where the term 'progression' is used to mean 'continuation') states that:

'Asian students and Asian males displayed very low progression at level 4 compared with 66% of white students and 58% of black students. Asian males had just 28% progression. Analysis shows that this is largely due to low international progression'.

131. The assessment team acknowledges the impact of the specific international cohort on the 2021-22 data. However, the 'BNU Student Achievement Report 2021-22' (an internal report that reflects on continuation of students from Foundation year through to Level 5 and classification of awards achieved at Level 6) noted that while international students had significantly lower continuation rates in 2021-22, 'by removing international students, Business and Law… still have the lowest L4 [continuation] [within the university]'. The report notes that the School of Business and Law had a 31 per cent continuation rate. The report also states that variation in continuation by domicile for Foundation level students was 'limited'. In particular, it notes that the large international cohort that started in January 2022 had not been included in the analysis.

132. Despite the university's own data and analysis in the 'BNU Student Achievement Report 2021-22', a member of the senior leadership team stated that increased withdrawals (which

would impact the continuation rate) were 'all' due to international learners. Another senior member of staff in turn stated that the engagement and withdrawal data was 'almost entirely skewed' by international students and the data did not show large discrepancies in home student withdrawals.

133. The assessment team's view is that this apparent missing grasp of the engagement and withdrawal data at senior leadership level was further evidence that educational leadership and academic governance was a concern and was not adequately ensuring that students receive a high quality academic experience.

134. Wider issues in data monitoring and oversight have also added to the assessment team's concern around educational leadership and academic governance. For example, the section of this report pertaining to concern 1 in paragraphs 84 to 94 discusses how data and observations recorded in individual module board summary reports and the school report clearly document areas of concern around attainment, engagement, withdrawals and other key student measures. Despite the clear recording of these issues by course-level staff in the documents reviewed, the assessment team was not confident that senior leaders were engaged in the necessary oversight that would have enabled them to interrogate this data to be able to take robust actions to improve the academic experience for students.

135. For example, the internal review report refers to the key issue of engagement only briefly, despite the data and documentation indicating the seriousness of this issue. The internal review report simply states as follows:

'Staff report that level of attendance and student engagement is low on some programmes with larger numbers of international students. Specific interventions are in place to monitor engagement and outcomes.'

136. Given the noted impact of student attendance and engagement, and the data evidencing this, the assessment team would have expected a stronger appraisal of the issue by the senior leadership team and correlated actions in place.

137. It is the assessment team's view that the senior leadership team had been aware of challenges with the monitoring of data. In the assessment team's view, senior leadership had had concerns for some time that the ways in which quality data were gathered and disseminated were not adequately enabling the effective governance of academic quality oversight. This oversight was necessary to inform educational enhancement within the School of Business and Law.

138. The assessment team also considered concerns with educational leadership and academic governance to be contributing factors to concern 4 (missed opportunities to identify academic support needs for the cohort of students). For example, lack of engagement with learning and its impact on attainment was evident throughout documents reviewed by the assessment team. However, as set out in paragraph 171, a decision had apparently recently been made to exclude those students who did not submit from module board reports. This led to missed opportunities to meaningfully identify support needs for students and specific opportunities to improve the academic experience challenges set out in concern 1. The assessment team was informed that these students would no longer be excluded from module board reports in the next academic year.

139. It is the assessment team's view that this concern ultimately underpins all the others presented in this report, and that the senior leadership team's intentions to make improvements in this area were not adequate to assure the assessment team at the time of the assessment. On the basis of the information the assessment team has seen, it does not feel confident that without addressing concerns around educational leadership and academic governance, approaches to improving the academic experience for students will be effectively implemented with adequate monitoring and academic oversight.

B1 Conclusions

140. The assessment team's view is that, on balance, the university had not ensured that students taught on the business and management courses identified in paragraph 51 were consistently receiving a high quality academic experience as required under ongoing condition B1.2.

141. In coming to this conclusion in relation to concern 1, the assessment team considered the introduction of C23 and plans to upskill staff as key initiatives the university had introduced and the extent to which these would address the concerns identified. While it was possible that these plans may have gone some way to improving the academic experience, the assessment team's view is that it was unclear how far they would address the underpinning concerns that have been identified. This was because the focus (as identified in meetings and supporting C23 documents) was less on refreshing the discipline-specific academic content of the courses and the pedagogical approach to teaching delivery, and more on increasing flexibility and the options available to students.

142. The assessment team remains concerned that, other than intentions to continue efforts to enhance the teaching skills of current academic staff through training activities and plans to fill vacant posts, there did not appear to be an existing credible plan to improve the academic experience for existing Level 5 and 6 students. These continued enhancement approaches have been ongoing yet it is the view of the assessment team that they have not been sufficient to adequately address the concerns with the quality of the academic experience.

143. Additional actions that could have been taken include, but are not limited to:

   a. More intensive specific training for academic staff on sector best-practice approaches to teaching delivery.

   b. Design and implementation of new enhanced regular monitoring processes for teaching delivery, including the use of the VLE.

   c. Critical course review events involving panel members who were external to the school, including expert panel members from other institutions and students, ensuring recommendations were actioned and subject to monitoring.

   d. Actions to revalidate the courses.

   e. Relevant academic skill development opportunities for academic staff, for example, inclusive curricula development, using research to inform teaching, discipline-specific threshold knowledge.

144. In conclusion, based on the existing position at the time of the assessment, the team found the university was not consistently providing a high quality academic experience for those students on courses identified in paragraph 51 because:

- **Courses were not consistently up-to-date** (discussed in paragraphs 61 to 67). The assessment team's view is that observations of teaching and the comprehensive review of the material across the VLE showed that the teaching and learning resources used to inform teaching were not consistently up-to-date and this was impacting on the academic experiences of students.

- **Courses were not consistently effectively delivered** (discussed in paragraphs 68 to 100). The assessment team's view is that observations of teaching, the comprehensive review of material across the VLE and student feedback indicate that the traditional didactic in-person delivery approach of lengthy teaching sessions was affecting the academic experience of students and was likely to have contributed to the low attainment of students in some modules on the course. These teaching sessions were over-reliant on PowerPoint and lacking engaging knowledge-aligned teaching activities, combined with a lack of appropriate supporting VLE resources (as discussed in concern 3).

- **Courses did not consistently teach relevant skills** (discussed in paragraphs 101 to 107). The assessment team's view is that observations of teaching and the extensive review of the material on the VLE show that courses were not consistently providing what would be considered expected academic content for some modules and this had affected the academic experience of students. The content provided was not consistently presented with the expected up-to-date, discipline-specific theoretical underpinnings and academic sources, which was limiting students' opportunities for necessary independent study and academic skill development.

145. In relation to concern 2, the assessment team has considerable concerns regarding educational leadership and academic governance. It was clear that a number of concerns arising from the investigation (as summarised in paragraph 138) either have links to, or were based in, a lack of adequate educational leadership and academic governance and that this was affecting the overall academic experience of the students. Based on the information considered and meetings with staff, the assessment team was not confident that the senior leadership team could candidly identify its challenges and respond to these in a robust and evidence-based way.

146. While the assessment team focused on those courses set out under paragraph 51, it considered that the findings under concern 2 may have broader implications. This is because the impact of challenges identified with the School Director of Education role were likely to have been relevant across the School. Additionally, evidence considered by the team such as the internal review report, the BNU Student Achievement Report 2021-22 and the School Evaluation Report drew on information from across the School of Business and Law.

147. In conclusion, the assessment team's view is that the university was not consistently providing a high quality academic experience for its students.

Condition B2: Resources, support and student engagement

148. Condition B2 is set out in full in Annex 1.

Relevant parts of the condition

149. In the assessment team's view, there were concerns that may relate to compliance with some of the requirements set out in condition B2.2 as follows:

'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'

150. The assessment team also particularly noted the clarification of B2.2 contained within requirement B2.3:

'B2.3 For the purposes of this condition [B2.2], "all reasonable steps" is to be interpreted in a manner which (without prejudice to the other relevant conditions):

a. Focuses and place 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'

151. Based on the information reviewed within the described scope of this quality assessment, the assessment team did not identify areas of concern with reference to condition B2.2 b.

Concern 3 (condition B2.a.i and ii): The learning resources provided on the VLE were not consistently ensuring a high quality academic experience and/or supporting the success of all students

152. As discussed earlier in paragraph 70, the university's approach to teaching delivery was based on a model that relies on student attendance at three-hour teaching sessions during standard teaching hours, with limited flexibility. However, the assessment team was told by a

senior member of staff that they had noted a change in students recruited having more external obligations such as caring responsibilities and full-time employment. This was corroborated by other academic staff in meetings. The assessment team undertook an analysis of the most recent attendance data from the university for 2022-23 . This data reveals low levels of student attendance on some courses for the period of September 2022 to January 2023. For example, the average attendance rates were:

- 46 per cent for BA (Hons) Business Management (including Foundation Year and International Foundation Year variants)

- 57 per cent for BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance (including Foundation Year)

- 44 per cent for BA (Hons) Airline and Airport Management.

153. The assessment team's view is that the university has the autonomy to decide what resources it will provide on the VLE in order to best support its students. However, if the university choses to recruit students who were likely to find attendance challenging, the assessment team considers that these students were likely to need robust and inclusive supporting resources. This is to ensure they have a high quality academic experience and the opportunity to succeed in and beyond the course. The assessment team's review of the 2022-23 VLE, however, led to concerns that the VLE was not consistently providing this.

154. The assessment team observed that students who consistently engaged with their course through in-person attendance generally have access to a strong level of academic support available at the university. This included the support that was available centrally from the library, the Department for Student Success and the career success team. This was reflected in meeting feedback received from students across Levels 4, 5 and 6 of the BA (Hons) Business Management and the BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance. Students who the assessment team spoke to also said that they appreciated the academic support from specific course academics during taught sessions. They stated that if a student requested individual meetings for additional support, these course academics would provide it.

155. However, students explained that the academic support provided in person was not in itself consistently sufficient to enable them to understand the subjects taught and achieve adequate levels of attainment. For example, one student stated that 'a lot of independent learning is expected of the student to be able to make up gaps and understand the subject.' Likewise, another student noted that '…activities to help with learning do take place in class but if you are not there or can't do it in time, you just have to get on with it by yourself.' It is the assessment team's view that the VLE would be expected to provide up-to-date materials. These should help students reinforce their topic-specific learning further to attendance in classroom sessions and to enable the development of necessary independent academic study skills.

156. Students outlined to the assessment team that they had concerns about students in their cohort who did not consistently attend sessions in person because there were limited academic resources provided on the VLE to enable them to catch up on missed learning. One student informed the assessment team that they had a WhatsApp group and the cohort had agreed between themselves they would share pictures of class activities for those that could not attend to try to help fill the gaps in materials provided on the VLE. As quoted

previously in paragraph 72, another student stated that the students who were failing were those who were not attending sessions. These accounts support the data that evidenced that those students in the cohort with poor in-person attendance have particularly low attainment and high levels of withdrawal for academic reasons (see paragraphs 84 to 87 for earlier discussion of this data).

157. Comments in the NSS 2019-20 to 2021-22 data regarding the VLE tended to reflect the concerns reported by students in the meetings with the assessment team and reported potential difficulties faced in engagement with the VLE and its content: 'The overall design of where all the resources are [located] can be a little confusing, however that could be more of a Blackboard issue.' Students additionally noted difficulties with the online resources present on the VLE: 'Access to online resources (Journals, eBooks etc.) are not as readily available as I would like, particularly newer resources', and 'Some of the presentations uploaded to Blackboard for our review following seminars are either missing or seem to be of a different version than those presented to us in person.'

158. The university uses the Blackboard online education platform to house its VLE. This was intended to provide students with the asynchronous learning resources needed to support their academic experience and enable the independent learning necessary for academic skill development and successful outcomes.

159. Overall, the assessment team's review of the VLE identified that the way in which module spaces were used was highly inconsistent. While some module spaces on the VLE contained asynchronous materials that would provide some appropriate support for students' learning, other module spaces demonstrated very little evidence of adequate learning materials to facilitate the cohort of students' online learning. The assessment team notes that most of the VLE module spaces they reviewed did have a minimum level of key content, that is, PowerPoint slide decks and a module outline.

160. However the assessment team's review of the VLE found a lack of audio or video recordings of lectures or seminars, no summaries of discussions that had taken place during seminars, and a lack of asynchronous activities and/or reading lists for many modules which would have helped support the learning of those students who were not in attendance. Some key module spaces lacked any scaffolding or signposting of the learning materials on the VLE that would have enabled students to either undertake the in-class aligned activities if they did not attend in person or provided support for those students who wished to revisit the materials. There was little evidence of interactive activities on the VLE module spaces that took place in class sessions. While it may be that interactive activities did take place in class, those students who did not attend in person would not have been able to identify this post session, and they would have had no activities to augment the PowerPoint slide deck and support their learning. Likewise students who did attend in person but could not complete the activities as described in paragraph 77 could not engage in the necessary independent study to understand the academic material.

161. Across many module spaces on the VLE, the only resources evident were the PowerPoint slide decks that had been provided in the lectures. No additional scaffolding or commentary was available to support the understanding of those students who had not attended the session in person and those who had attended the session, yet required additional reinforcement of topics through undertaking independent study to aid their understanding. As

discussed in paragraph 63, the PowerPoint slide decks were not consistently up-to-date or, as discussed in paragraphs 72, 75 and 153, inclusive in their presentation across modules. It is the assessment team's view that these being the only materials provided on the VLE makes engagement and learning challenging for some students in the cohort, limiting outcomes.

162. The School NSS Action plan from 2020-21 corroborates the assessment team's view that academic use of the VLE as a learning resource requires improvement, as there was a stated action to 'organise formal Blackboard Collaborate Training to support staff development in effective use of the VLE'. Although the assessment team was informed that some training had taken place, it was concerned that it still saw considerable variation in the module teaching materials on the 2022-23 VLE.

163. Paragraphs 122 to 128 discuss the internal review report which had been conducted in 2022 and this included a review of the VLE. The internal review report identified the need to use critical friends and peer review to enhance academic engagement with the VLE. The report action update stated there had been 'greater consistency in the presentation and use of the VLE'. However, in the assessment team's view, the VLE still showed considerable inconsistency in its presentation at the time of its review.

164. In meetings with staff, it was reported that some monitoring of the VLE falls under the responsibility of the School Director of Education, and this was also reflected in the internal review report which stated that 'The SDoE should play a prominent role in implementing [an action connected to Blackboard].' However, as discussed in paragraph 120, it was acknowledged that there had been difficulties in resourcing this part-time role over the previous two academic years and as a result there had been a lack of academic governance that had not been adequately resolved. In the absence of the School Director of Education, the assessment team was informed by course leaders that this task fell to them. However it is the assessment team's view that they neither had the specialist expertise nor adequate allocated time alongside their many responsibilities to take on this expectation. As a result, the students were not consistently receiving the necessary resources on the VLE to enable a high quality academic experience and/or their academic success. This was evident in student accounts and attainment outcomes.

165. The assessment team was informed by the senior leadership team that work was being done to improve the VLE; for example, creating a template to improve consistency in the presentation of modules, and a series of 'lunch and learn' sessions for colleagues to share good practice that reflected current sector practice. The VLE also showed some evidence of attempts to provide consistency through the standardisation of content and structure of module spaces. There were generic prompts for content evident in 'staff action' messages, which identify requirements in certain sections. This indicated action to provide staff with support and ensure certain minimum requirements were met in the use of the VLE. However, the inconsistency on the VLE showed that despite these prompts, a lack of satisfactory oversight meant that consistency was not ensured. Concern 2 discusses further how the deficits in educational leadership and academic oversight were not adequately ensuring academic quality.

166. Another senior member of staff also carried out a review of the VLE following their appointment in October 2022, which again acknowledged a lack of consistency in its use by

academic staff. The review attributed this to staff prioritising providing academic support through in-person contact with students, rather than developing VLE resources. The member of staff outlined that they have been working with a 'blended learning group' to develop a template and guidance for staff to better support the use of Blackboard as a VLE and this was intended to be implemented by September 2023.

167. Documents describing plans for C23 stated the intention for the VLE to act as a 'document repository' for students engaged in the in-person delivery mode. However, this was contradicted when queried with the senior leadership team, with a member of staff responding that they did not 'agree with the rhetoric about blackboard as a repository'. The C23 document also stated that the VLE would be used in 'interactive course content' in blended and online delivery. Nonetheless the reference to the VLE as a document 'repository' alongside the findings from the 2022-23 review of the VLE undertaken by the assessment team raised significant concerns about the appropriateness of the learning resources on the VLE to support the particular needs of the cohort of students referred to in paragraph 68 to 69 above. In particular the assessment team was concerned about the appropriateness of the materials on the VLE to adequately support the academic experience and outcomes for those students who did not attend all teaching opportunities in person, both at the time of the assessment and in terms of future plans already developed.

168. The concerns identified with the learning resources provided on the VLE have a potentially significant impact for those students registered on the business and management courses identified in paragraph 51. The quality of the VLE acted to limit student engagement outside of direct in-person contact time. The assessor-observed inconsistent quality of the VLE, alongside noted challenges faced including low attendance, will render it challenging for students with lower levels of attendance to remain engaged on their course of study. This raised further questions over the inclusivity of opportunities for learning success and the wider educational experience.

169. Based on these observations and the analysis of the data from the provider, the assessment team has concluded that the learning resources provided on the VLE were not consistently providing a high quality academic experience for those students taught on the business and management courses identified in paragraph 51 and were not consistently sufficient to meet the needs of the cohort of those students to support their academic success.

Concern 4 (condition B2.a.i and ii): Missed opportunities to identify academic support needs for the cohort of students

170. Concern 2 sets out the ways in which educational leadership and academic governance has not adequately ensured that students receive a high quality academic experience. It is the view of the assessment team that there have been a number of significant missed opportunities as a result. The particular academic support needs for the cohort of business and management students could have been identified and enhanced academic support put in place to better facilitate good student outcomes. These opportunities could also have enabled meaningful evidence-based action plans to be developed, implemented and monitored to enhance overall academic quality concerns and support academic staff development (the need for staff development is discussed in concern 5, paragraph 191).

171. For example, one such missed opportunity to identify student academic support needs comes from the way in which low academic attainment was reported and acted on. As noted in paragraph 171, in their review of documentation and data, the assessment team observed that key documents excluded the significant numbers of students who were later withdrawn as a result of non-submission of assignments and evidence of low engagement. For example, a Module Board Summary Report for 2021-22 reported the percentage of students who passed the module based solely on the number of students that submitted their assignment (excluding those who did not submit). This partial reporting of student attainment in 2021-22 appeared to be a recent change from the way in which this was done in the previous academic year. In 2020-21, the Module Board Summary Report was seen to include both the percentage of total students who passed the module (out of a total of all students, regardless of whether they had submitted), and the percentage of students who passed (out of the total of those who submitted). It is unclear why there was a change in the way module attainment data was reported.

172. The assessment team's view is that partial reporting of student attainment data within Module Board Summary Reports is particularly concerning for academic quality, because these reports were used to identify the need for a MRAP (discussed earlier in paragraph 93). The criteria for the need for a MRAP is based on the percentage pass rate and average marks. As well as being misleading, excluding those students in the cohort who did not submit assignments from the percentage that passed the module overall meant that the school leadership and course academics were missing the opportunity to ensure appropriate levels of academic support were put in place to better facilitate the success of the particular cohort of students. This also limited the opportunity for academic staff to develop and implement evidence-based plans to enhance the quality of poor-performing modules and improve the student academic experience.

173. When asked about this issue by the assessment team, senior leadership staff acknowledged that reporting did 'predominantly look at those that submitted' and noted that 'it's not where we want it to be... it is wrong to only look at percentage pass rate of those that submitted, but not the cohort.' A staff member stated that they had recently taken steps to correct this with the intention that percentage pass rates would include all students registered on the module.. They also acknowledged that academic staff had not yet been informed of any planned data reporting change and hence full recording of attainment data had not yet been implemented at the time of the visit.

174. Another example of a missed opportunity to identify academic support needs for students is through the cessation of end-of-module student surveys, which collect anonymous student feedback on individual modules. This had led to the loss of data that could be used to identify educational issues for the business and management students. A member of staff reported that monthly meetings with student representatives had been put in place instead to try to gather student feedback. However, the assessment team's view is that the loss of such a method of gathering anonymous module-specific student data may also limit opportunities to identify and develop students' academic support needs.

175. Paragraphs 129 to 133 discuss the assessment team's concerns about the senior leadership team's apparent lack of accurate knowledge about withdrawal data. This also resulted in a missed opportunity to ensure student academic support needs were promptly identified and priority plans developed and implemented to improve outcomes.

176. The senior leadership team stated that staff across business and management courses did not always interrogate data to make sense of student attainment and use such data to inform meaningful improvement plans. They further outlined that they felt it was also a challenge that outcome reporting occurred at school level, rather than at course level. A senior staff member stated 'we recognised that course leaders need more support around data.'

177. The assessment team asked the senior leadership team to clarify educational governance structures, and where and how different data sources were scrutinised. It was the view of the assessment team that information provided as to which educational governance committee scrutinised which specific set of data, and how reporting between committees then took place was not clear. The senior leadership team agreed that working with the student attainment data was necessary so that every member of staff, at each level of seniority, could be accountable for academic quality.

178. Senior staff stated that they were in the process of planning a system to better track education data and monitor key performance indicators (KPIs). They also outlined that a university-wide Quality Enhancement Committee had been set up 18 months prior to the assessment team visit because the existing education committee was not providing adequate quality oversight.

179. It is the view of the assessment team that educational leadership and academic governance contributed to missed opportunities to identify academic quality concerns, as set out above and indeed throughout this report. The assessment team is not assured therefore that all reasonable steps were being taken to ensure the cohort of business and management students on those courses identified in paragraph 51 were receiving the necessary academic support for the purpose of ensuring a high quality academic experience, and that those students were supported to succeed in and beyond higher education. The assessment team considered that this had implications across the subject of business and management as set out in paragraph 200 below.

Concern 5 (condition B2.a.i and ii): Staff were not consistently appropriately qualified or deployed to best support students' academic success

180. The assessment team identified that there was considerable variability between the pedagogical and teaching skills of different academic staff across business and management courses identified in paragraph 51. This was evident in all data sources, including in the teaching observations undertaken, the review analysis of the 2022-23 VLE undertaken by the assessment team and in responses given during meetings with students, senior staff and other relevant stakeholders.

181. This variability was reflected in the NSS comments (2019-20 to 2021-22) reviewed by the assessment team. The team was pleased to note a number of positive comments such as 'The lecturers I had were excellent.', 'Lecturers are knowledgeable and eager to help every student', and 'The majority of my lecturers throughout the entire course have been fantastic educators'. However, students' concerns about staffing were also clearly evident. For example:

'We had bad communication when staff left the university and some of the lectures were just covered from PowerPoint not knowing what is going on'; 'some lecturers should not be allowed to teach certain modules due to lack of knowledge and experience, especially when they are for upcoming exams. I've spoken to some lecturers that have only been aware they are running a module from the day it was due to begin'; 'Poor staff retention, which students suffer for. Some members of staff are knowledgeable but not good at teaching.' and 'Course has felt quite disrupted at times due to lecturer changes, some of which were not well communicated or left too late. Some lecturers didn't stay for more than a few classes so weren't helpful, and lacked knowledge on assignments leading to students having to teach ourselves.'

182. It was evident to the assessment team across meetings with staff and students that there had been an over-reliance on associate lecturers, and this had contributed to a number of issues within the school. During the meeting with the course team, it reported that staffing resourcing problems were due to a combination of high staff turnover and unfilled vacancies leading to reliance on associate lecturers as a result. The course team observed that modules with poorer outcomes had been linked to associate lecturers who generally had good applied industry experience, but lacked the pedagogic knowledge necessary to deliver teaching and learning effectively to the cohort of students in a way that would support their academic success.

183. During meetings with the course team and senior leadership team meetings, it was acknowledged that there had been considerable challenge in managing staff resourcing that had in some instances affected the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. In order to address this, senior leaders confirmed that there had recently been a focus on increasing permanent teaching staff, which had included the conversion of associate lecturers to permanent contracts following recruitment processes. The senior leadership team noted that there was a desire to build research-active staff because they acknowledged that Research Informed Teaching (RIT) is fundamental in business and management education.

184. During three meetings held by the assessment team with a range of students from across Levels 4, 5 and 6 from BA (Hons) Business and Management and BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance, students reported the quality, consistency and competency of academic staff resourcing had a significant impact on their experience and learning. Indeed, the feedback given to the assessment team from students in these meetings echoed that provided via the NSS (2019-20 to 2021-22) and presented in paragraph 181 above.

185. For example, students reported inconsistency of access to academic support from academic staff, noting that this was particularly difficult because of the high number of associate lecturers. One student stated that 'When we have associate lecturers who are only in for our lecture, it is very difficult to contact them. It is understandable they have separate jobs but either not receiving a reply or having to wait a week or so can be frustrating.'

186. The students also talked about having had experiences of frequent changes in academic staffing on their courses, often at short notice and at key points in their learning journeys. They described how this was very disruptive to their academic experience. They gave specific examples where lecturers left or were changed just before assessment periods, with 'temporary lecturers' being provided to offer academic support that did not align with what had been covered in the module.

187. Students also shared concerns about how there was variability in assessment practices as a result of the high staff turnover and diversity of pedagogical competency, particularly among associate lecturers. For example, students reported some occasions where academic staff provided only numerical marks on assessments without any feedback comments. They described how difficult it was to not receive any development points or feedback that they could use to inform the development of future assessment submissions. The assessment team observed assessments that had been submitted and marked for some modules during their review of the VLE, and noted variability in the usefulness of feedback provided. This was consistent with the students' accounts.

188. A senior staff member stated that during the internal review undertaken in June 2022 it was evident that the School of Business and Law's challenges with academic quality and student experience were a result of staffing issues and the number of associate lecturers being used, and that the extent of these challenges had not been adequately flagged with the senior leadership team by school management at the time. The internal review noted that there was a recognition that the recruitment of additional permanent academic staff was necessary to create a stronger culture of academic quality and governance.

189. While converting associate lecturers to permanent contracts was clearly intended to positively support the filling of vacancies and would likely improve staff availability, the assessment team is not convinced that this approach would address the significant concerns about teaching delivery and academic quality on business and management courses identified in paragraph 51. The assessment team is not assured that the lack of pedagogical experience of some of these staff members would be adequately addressed through the current approaches to the oversight of academic quality. The team is not confident that current educational leadership and academic governance processes would be adequate to consistently address issues of pedagogical competency in associate lecturers taking on substantive posts, given that the teaching and learning skill levels in this group of staff had been identified as a concern.

190. In addition to the impact of an over-reliance on associate lecturers, it is the assessment team's view that discussions with the course teams indicated a limited understanding of pedagogical theory from some key permanent academic staff. For example, during one meeting the assessment team asked several questions to better understand the pedagogical principles shaping the teaching and learning on a course. The answers provided by some permanent academic staff did not demonstrate that pedagogy was informing their design and delivery of courses, nor did they show a robust understanding of how the curriculum was intended to develop student learning and graduate outcomes.

191. A senior staff member acknowledged that further academic staff development within the school needed to take place and that existing course leaders required more support. This view was shared by another senior member of staff who reported that there were permanent academic staff members who needed more support in terms of developing teaching and learning competency. This staff member reported that meeting academic standards around quality of education was challenging for some colleagues and that 'getting consistency is a journey.' A senior member of staff also noted that they were introducing a new process of peer review of aspects of teaching and learning practice, including review of teaching materials.

192. While the senior leadership team stated that strategies to counteract the challenges were taking place, or planned imminently, the assessment team was concerned by the extent of the difficulties in this area that were still evidenced during their visits. The senior leadership team did not provide adequate detail about specific intended actions to address this concern and this left the assessment team unconvinced as to the likely effectiveness of plans.

193. It is the assessment team's view that not all academic staff on the courses identified in paragraph 51 were pedagogically up-to-date and appropriately deployed for their skill set. It is the assessment team's view that this has contributed to low student engagement and low attainment outcomes as detailed in concern 1. Additionally, this is significantly impacting the learning experience for students within the relevant cohort. In particular, the assessment team was concerned that some academic staff either did not have or did not maintain expert knowledge of the course subject they design and/or deliver; teaching experience appropriate for the content and level of the relevant higher education course; and/or the required knowledge and skills as to the effective delivery of their higher education course.

194. However, it was the assessment team's view that these concerns were not simply down to the high numbers of associate lecturers and inadequate oversight of their pedagogical competency and engagement.

195. The assessment team established from meetings with staff that there had been a deficit in key staffing roles, in particular posts with responsibility for academic oversight of teaching and learning and the business and management provision more broadly. For example, as noted under in paragraph 120, the School Director of Education role had been inconsistently filled. This role was signposted as important, providing academic governance. It was repeatedly referred to in meetings as holding responsibility for assuring academic quality in the School of Business and Law. As discussed under concern 2, it is the assessment team's view that resulting gaps in the oversight of academic quality and insufficient action taken by senior leadership to adequately address this oversight deficit, had affected the quality of the academic experiences of students.

B2 Conclusions

196. The assessment team's view is that on balance, the university had not currently taken all reasonable steps to ensure that each cohort of students taught on the business and management courses identified in paragraph 51 consistently received sufficient resources and academic support for the purpose of ensuring they receive a high quality academic experience, and that those students succeed in higher education and beyond, as required under ongoing condition B2.2.a.i and ii. The team however do highlight the positive support for students that individual academic staff often provided, which was clearly evident during the course of this assessment.

197. In relation to concern 3, it is the view of the assessment team that plans to improve content, quality and consistency of the use of the VLE that the university was implementing had the potential to partly address some of the issues identified. However, concerns around the oversight of academic quality as detailed above in paragraphs 119 to 129 have not assured the assessment team that the actions planned would have the intended impact.

198. Based on the existing position at the time of the assessment, the assessment team found that the learning resources provided on the VLE for those students taught on the business and management courses identified in paragraph 51 were not consistently ensuring a high quality academic experience and/or supporting the success of the cohort of students. The assessment team's view was that there was a low level of in-person attendance on the relevant business and management courses. Those students who were not attending needed adequate resources to ensure that they had access to a high quality academic experience and the opportunity to succeed on and beyond their course. However, the quality of the resources available on the VLE was inconsistent, with some modules having inadequate materials to facilitate the cohort of students' learning. For example, there was a lack of audio or video recordings of lectures and seminars, no summaries of discussions in seminars and a lack of asynchronous activities and up-to-date reading lists. This would have helped support students who were unable to attend. This acted to limit the learning resources available to students outside of direct in-person contact time. Many of the resources available also did not support students who did attend in-person to later reinforce their understanding through independent study.

199. In relation to concern 4, it was the view of the assessment team that existing plans the university was implementing would go some way to improving opportunities to identify student support needs so as to better support student academic experience and attainment. However, based on the existing position at the time of the assessment, the assessment team found that deficits around data recording, educational leadership and academic governance, and the lack of specific plans to adequately address these issues, lead them to remain concerned.

200. The assessment team found missed opportunities to identify academic support needs. The assessment team's view was that student academic support needs were not consistently adequately identified. While the assessment team focused on those courses set out under paragraph 51, it considered that the findings under concern 4 may have broader implications. This is because evidence considered by the team such as the partial reporting of data and removal of end of semester module student surveys was applicable across the subject of business and management.

201. For example, reporting on academic attainment excluded the numbers of students who were later withdrawn as a result of the non-submission of assignments. Partial reporting of student attainment data is misleading: excluding those students in the cohort who did not submit assignments from the percentage that passed the module overall meant that the school leadership and course academics were missing the opportunity to ensure appropriate levels of academic support were put in place to better facilitate the success of the particular cohort of students. This also limited the opportunity for academic staff to develop and implement evidence-based plans to enhance the quality of poor performing modules and improve students' academic experiences. The assessment team note that there was an intention to change this practice. End-of-module student surveys that collected anonymous student feedback on individual modules have also been discontinued.

202. In relation to concern 5, it is the view of the assessment team that existing actions taken by the university to increase the number of staff and the qualifications of staff had the potential to partly address the concerns identified. However, based on the position at the time of the

assessment, the team found that: staff were not consistently appropriately qualified or deployed to best support students' academic success.

203. The assessment team's view is that there was considerable variability between the pedagogical and teaching skills of different academic staff across business and management courses identified in paragraph 51. Modules with poorer outcomes had been linked to associate lecturers who generally had relevant applied industry experience, but seemingly lacked the pedagogic knowledge necessary to deliver teaching and learning effectively to the cohort of students in a way that would support their academic success. There was a focus on increasing permanent teaching staff, which has included the conversion of associate lecturers to permanent contracts following a recruitment process and would likely improve staff availability for students. However, the assessment team was not convinced that this approach would sufficiently address the significant concerns it identified about poor teaching delivery and academic quality on business and management courses.

204. The assessment team was not assured that the lack of pedagogical experience of some of these staff members would be adequately addressed through the approaches to the oversight of academic quality in place at the time of the assessment. The assessment team's view is that there was also evidence of a limited understanding of pedagogical theory from some key permanent academic staff. It is the view of the assessment team that this was contributing to the considerable concerns with academic quality as set out in paragraphs 61 to 107 earlier in this report.

205. Considering the information above, the assessment team's view is that the university could have taken further steps to ensure that the students on the courses in question received support sufficient to succeed in and beyond higher education. Additional steps that could have been taken include, but are not limited to:

   a. New monitoring systems developed and implemented to ensure academic staff compliance with baseline expectations about use of the VLE.

   b. Consistent and comprehensive recording of student attainment data to provide an evidence base to underpin action planning and enhancement activities.

   c. Temporary reduction in the size of new student intakes to ensure that there were sufficient appropriately teaching-experienced and pedagogically up-to-date academic staff to provide the necessary academic support for the particular cohort of students.

   d. Development of more robust processes for teaching observations (including critical review of curriculum and resources) for all academic staff who deliver teaching and learning provision. There should be observations and reviews carried out by senior academic staff who have appropriate discipline and pedagogy expertise. This process systematically feeds into HR processes such as probation periods, performance reviews and promotions.

   e. Senior academic leadership staff provide the necessary additional input to ensure the education oversight responsibilities of the School Director of Education were adequately fulfilled.

Condition B4: Assessment and awards

206. In the course of its investigation 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 higher education courses above (paragraph 51) were 'assessed effectively' (B4.2.a), that each assessment was 'valid and reliable' (B4.2.b), that academic regulations were 'designed to ensure that relevant awards [were] credible' (B4.2.c) and that 'relevant awards granted to students [were] credible' (B4.2.e).

207. In reviewing initial information provided by the university the assessment team did not identify any concerns that would relate to condition B4. This included reviewing assessment methods as detailed in course and module specifications, assessment submissions on the VLE (with associated feedback), attainment data for Levels 4 to 6 and any student complaints (during the academic year 2021-22). This information is relevant to students on the courses under consideration being 'assessed effectively' (B4.2.a) and assessments being 'reliable' (B4.2.b). The assessment team reviewed university academic regulations and did not identify any concerns to suggest that relevant awards were not credible in line with (B4.2.c). The assessment team also reviewed NSS data for 2019-20 and 2021-22, and did not identify particular concerns relating to condition B4.

208. During on-site visits, the assessment team met with students currently studying the courses under consideration, across Levels 4 to 7, and with academic staff teaching on these courses. These meetings included discussion of topics relevant to assessments being 'effective' (B4.2.a) and 'valid' (B4.2.b) (i.e. that assessments 'in fact take place in a way that results in students demonstrating knowledge and skills in the way intended by the design of the assessment'). The assessment team did not identify any specific concerns relating to condition B4 during the course of its on-site visits.

209. As the assessment team's investigation progressed, it drew on multiple sources of information, as identified above, that were relevant to condition B4. Following a risk-based approach the assessment team did not identify any concerns relating to condition B4 from reviewing this information.

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.