

Office for  
Students



# Assessment for quality and standards initial conditions B7 and B8

**Sysco Business Skills Academy**

**Provider legal name:** Sysco Business Skills Academy

**Provider trading name:** Sysco Business Skills Academy Ltd

**UKPRN:** 10013122

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**Reference** OfS 2025.10

**Enquiries to** [regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk)

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# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Executive summary</b>                                 | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Introduction and background</b>                       | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Assessment process</b>                                | <b>7</b>  |
| Initial condition B7: quality                            | 7         |
| Initial condition B8: standards                          | 7         |
| <b>Part 1: Assessment of condition B7: Quality</b>       | <b>9</b>  |
| Condition B1: Academic experience                        | 9         |
| Condition B2: Resources, support, and student engagement | 23        |
| Condition B4: Assessment and awards                      | 32        |
| <b>Part 2: Assessment of condition B8: Standards</b>     | <b>39</b> |
| <b>Annex A: Approach to sampling of evidence</b>         | <b>44</b> |

# Executive summary

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| <b>Type of assessment</b>      | Initial conditions B7 (quality) and B8 (standards)   |
| <b>For</b>                     | Sysco Business Skills Academy  |
| <b>Advice to the OfS on B7</b> | The Academy <b>has</b> credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions B1, B2 and B4 from the date of registration.                            |
| <b>Advice to the OfS on B8</b> | The standards set for the courses the Academy intends to provide, and the achievement of students on these courses <b>appropriately reflect</b> sector-recognised standards. |

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

## How we assess providers applying to register

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

<sup>1</sup> See [Regulatory framework for higher education in England - Office for Students](#).

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

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

7. The Academy provides apprenticeships, adult education and commercial training across a range of areas including leadership, management, housing, business administration, health and social care, customer service, warehousing, health and safety, and information technology.
8. As part of its higher education provision, the Academy offers Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) performing arts courses in partnership with The City of Liverpool College (CoLC) and Pearson. The Academy additionally offers a Bachelor of Arts (BA) (Hons) top up in performing arts, validated by the University of West London (UWL). From the 2025-26 academic year, the Academy plans to deliver HNC and HND courses in sport.
9. In accordance with the guidance on registering with the OfS (Regulatory advice 3),<sup>2</sup> the OfS decided that it was appropriate to undertake an assessment visit to the Academy to gather and provide advice to inform the OfS's decision about whether the initial conditions B7 and B8 are satisfied. The OfS decided that this assessment should be undertaken by assessors able to provide expert academic judgement.
10. The purpose of the assessment is to provide advice to the OfS to enable the OfS to decide whether initial conditions B7 and B8 are satisfied and whether there is any regulatory risk.
11. The evidence from the assessments informs the OfS's decisions about whether to register the Academy and, if registered, whether any mitigation is necessary.
12. The OfS appointed an assessment team that consisted of two academic expert assessors and a member of OfS staff. The team was asked to give its advice and judgement about the Academy's compliance with initial conditions B7 and B8.
13. The team considered a range of information submitted by the Academy as part of its application for registration.
14. The assessment team visited the Academy on 7 and 8 October 2024, during which time it met with senior management, teaching staff, support staff, and students. Additionally, the assessment team observed teaching sessions and toured the Academy's premises.

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<sup>2</sup> See [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS](#).

## Introduction and background

15. The Academy began as a business consultancy in 1989, providing services across Merseyside. The Academy's vision is 'To enable individuals to maximise their employability opportunities or workplace capabilities through the provision of outstanding quality training, and by so doing, increase the profitability and competitiveness of the local community, hence contributing to the social and financial development of our economy'.
16. The Academy is a wholly owned subsidiary of Evolve Business Services Ltd. Its sister company, Brighter Futures, offers further education courses for students aged 16 to 19.
17. As part of its higher education provision, the Academy offers a HNC and HND in performing arts. The HNC course began running in 2019, and the HND course commenced in 2020. The awarding body for these courses is Pearson, and the courses are run in partnership with the CoLC. Students have access to library facilities at CoLC.
18. The Academy offers a one-year BA (Hons) top up in performing arts, which commenced in September 2024. This course is validated by the UWL. Students on this course have access to library resources from UWL. The Academy expects that students enrolled on the HNC and HND performing arts courses are likely to progress onto the BA (Hons) top up.
19. The Academy has a rental agreement with Jelli Studios, an external theatre arts studio for use of the full studios, which includes five studio spaces, three classrooms, study areas and six changing rooms. The studios are approximately two miles from the Academy's main campus and well connected by public transport.
20. From the 2025-26 academic year, the Academy intends to offer a HNC and HND in sport. The awarding body for these courses will be Pearson. The Academy plans to run the sports courses at campuses where its sister company, Brighter Futures, currently runs Level 3 BTEC sport programmes. The campuses under consideration are based in Fylde, Macclesfield and Nottinghamshire.
21. In the 2023-24 academic year, the Academy offered the following apprenticeship courses for which the awarding body was the Chartered Management Institute:
  - a. Senior housing and property management (Level 4)
  - b. Coaching professional (Level 5)
  - c. Operations or departmental manager (Level 5).
22. In addition, the Academy offered a senior leader (Level 7) apprenticeship, for which the awarding body was the Chartered Institute of Housing.
23. In November 2022, the Academy's board of directors decided to cease recruitment for their apprenticeship courses due to financial pressures. Upon the achievement of existing apprenticeship cohorts, it will discontinue these courses after the 2023-24 academic year.

24. The Academy additionally offers the following courses in management and housing, which are run on a commercial basis, at the request of clients, and do not form part of the Academy's core higher education provision:
  - a. Diploma in strategic management and leadership (Level 7)
  - b. Diploma in management and leadership (Level 5)
  - c. Management coaching and mentoring (Level 5)
  - d. Certificate in housing (Level 4).
25. The Academy is overseen by the board of directors, which is composed of a chair, shareholder representatives and a senior independent director. The board's remit includes articulating the Academy's mission, supporting the senior management team, ensuring effective financial management, promoting continuous quality improvement and overseeing the implementation of the teaching and learning policy. The Academy's corporate governance code of practice, states that the board of directors meets ten times per year.
26. The academic board is responsible for the academic integrity of the Academy, including the standards of teaching and examination, student experience and the management of departments. The academic board is composed of the managing director, operations manager, learning and teaching manager, higher education manager, human resource manager and head of student administration and fees.
27. The academic board appoints an assessment board, which is held at the conclusion of each academic year. The academic board reviews and validates assessment qualification decisions. The board is chaired by the director of academic studies and higher education.
28. The Academy conducts board-of-studies meetings every term. These are attended by elected student representatives who provide feedback on the student experience. The remit of the board of studies includes reviewing course content and overseeing curriculum development.
29. The Academy has a learning and teaching committee, which is responsible for the academic affairs of the organisation. The committee is accountable to the academic board, alongside curriculum leads who provide academic, managerial and strategic leadership.
30. For the 2024-25 academic year, the Academy has 21 students enrolled in the HNC performing arts course, 17 students on the HND performing arts course, and 14 students enrolled on the BA (Hons) top up.
31. For the 2025-26 academic year, the Academy forecasts 25 students will enrol in the first year of delivery of the HNC sport course. The Academy does not foresee significant change to the number of performing arts students, and as such the total number of students is forecast across these courses is 75.

32. For the 2026-27 academic year, the Academy forecasts 150 students enrolled across its higher education courses. The Academy does not intend its student numbers on the performing arts courses to exceed 60, and therefore the increase will reflect the growth of the sports programmes, including the commencement of the HND sports course.

# Assessment process

## Initial condition B7: quality

33. The Academy submitted a quality plan and supporting evidence, as required by the OfS's guidance for providers applying for registration (Regulatory advice 3).<sup>3</sup>
34. The assessment team sought further evidence which was received on 19 July 2024, 29 August 2024, 27 September 2024 and 9 October 2024. The team undertook a visit to the Academy's premises in Liverpool on 7 and 8 October 2024, where it met with:
  - a. management staff, including the senior leadership team
  - b. administrative staff, including student support and safeguarding staff
  - c. academic staff
  - d. a range of students across Level 4, Level 5 and Level 6 of the performing arts courses.
35. During the assessment visit, the assessment team additionally assessed the teaching resources and learning spaces at the Academy's main premises, and its external studio spaces. Additionally, the assessment team observed teaching of a Level 6 research project session and a Level 4/5 acting skills workshop.
36. The assessment team had access to the Academy's virtual learning environment (VLE) from 4 September 2024. During the visit, the team additionally received a demonstration of the VLE.
37. The evidence enabled the team to assess whether the Academy complies with the requirements set out in initial condition B7 which requires that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions of registration B1, B2 and B4, and requires it to have the capacity and resources to deliver these plans.

## Initial condition B8: standards

38. The Academy submitted information relevant to the academic standards of a proportionate and representative sample of the courses it intends to provide if registered, including course documentation, programme specifications and module outlines.<sup>4</sup>
39. The Academy submitted evidence of student achievement in assessed work and associated records of this achievement from a proportionate and representative sample of the courses it intends to provide if registered (see Annex A for the approach to sampling).

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

<sup>4</sup> See Annex I, 'Guidance for providers on the assessment of initial condition B8 (standards)' at [Regulatory advice 3: Registration of English higher education providers with the OfS - Office for Students](#).



40. The 'sector-recognised standards' are set out in a document published by the OfS.<sup>5</sup> These set out the standards that all registered providers are required to meet and were used by the assessment team for its assessment.
41. The standards the OfS has identified as applicable are:
- A.1: Qualifications at each level
  - A.2: Volumes of credit
  - A.3: Qualification descriptors, specifically:
    - A.3.1 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 4
    - A.3.2 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 5
    - A.3.3 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 6
    - A.3.4 Descriptor for a qualification at Level 7
  - B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees.
42. The assessment team considered the evidence available to provide advice on whether the Academy complies with the requirements set out in condition of registration B8. Those requirements are that the Academy demonstrates, in a credible manner, that any standards it sets appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards. This covers standards set and/or applied for any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the Academy, whether or not the Academy is the awarding body.

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<sup>5</sup> See [Sector-recognised standards - Office for Students](#).

# Part 1: Assessment of condition B7: Quality

43. This section sets out advice on whether Sysco Business Skills Academy has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with conditions B1, B2 and B4 from the date of registration.

## Condition B1: Academic experience

### Criterion B1.2

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience? (B1.2)**

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

### Criterion B1.3.a

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up-to-date? (B1.3.a)**

## Advice to the OfS

45. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is up-to-date. This advice is based on reviewing strategic documents, improvement processes, and curriculum design that aligns with industry standards. The team reviewed a range of evidence, both before and during a visit to the Academy's head office and performing arts delivery site, to confirm the Academy's courses are representative of current thinking and practices and are therefore up-to-date.

## Reasoning

46. The assessment team reviewed the programme specifications for the HNC and HND in performing arts that outline the intended learning outcomes. These outcomes include equipping students with the knowledge and awareness of the performing arts industry, globally. In addition, the teaching, learning and assessment strategies include approaches such as reflective commentaries of learning in the workplace, and case study research projects. The design of the Academy's courses ensures that the curriculum aligns with the industry and reflects current thinking. For example, the assessment team noted that the Academy's HNC programme included a module exploring the performing arts industry, with topics that encourage students to engage with contemporary theory and practice, such as marketing and developing a performing arts career.

47. The assessment team reviewed the course development plan for the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts, which outlines the Academy's market research, and rationale, behind the design of the course. This indicated that the development and design of the course was cognisant of advancements in the subject matter and current trends within the industry. In addition, the assessment team spoke to students and the performing arts academic staff. Their knowledge of the current landscape of the industry, indicated a strong awareness of current thinking, and pedagogy, in performing arts. This evidence gave the assessment team confidence that the course content is up-to-date regarding both subject matter developments and advancements in teaching and learning. From an evaluation of course design and learning outcomes, and the range of teaching approaches, the assessment team found that the Academy's courses are up-to-date.
48. The assessment team learned from academic staff, the senior leadership team and staff development records that key academic delivery staff are actively engaged in recent professional practice activities. These include adjudicating at national dance festivals, directing stage shows, and choreographing external events. Many of the fractional tutors are also business owners who provide specialised classes and masterclasses. For example, one tutor is the owner and choreographer of a dance company, while others are involved in high-profile projects, such as:
- the 'Greatest Days UK Tour'
  - 'Matilda' at a youth academy (as creative director)
  - Unity's 'Britain's Got Talent' performance (as choreographer)
  - a studio provider's 'Move It' main stage performances (as creative director and co-choreographer).
49. Teaching staff are therefore appropriately informed of developments in the profession and wider industry.
50. The assessment team met with the sport programme leader, and reviewed their CV, which outlined an extensive experience in course design and development. The Academy had consulted with employers locally to identify current needs in the industry. In addition, the assessment team considered the proposed programme specification for the HNC and HND sport course, which included core modules in exploring the landscape of the sports industry. The sport programme lead highlighted how students will research contemporary issues within sport, such as the use of performance analysis, as part of their dissertation project. The assessment team was satisfied that the content of the course will be up-to-date by ensuring that the content will address local employment needs and reflect the latest professional or industry standards in sport.
51. The assessment team was told by the senior leadership team, supported by evidence from minutes from the board of studies, that students are consulted at various stages of the course review process, allowing the Academy to identify trends and patterns in student feedback. The senior leadership team and academic staff clearly articulated how these consultations have influenced course development, such as amending the musical theatre module pathway in direct response to student input. Regular consultations at the board of studies inform the rationale behind curriculum development. Meetings with the senior leadership team,

academic staff and students confirmed that the focus of the Academy is to produce versatile performers with enhanced employability skills which are relevant to contemporary performing arts industries. This evidence satisfied the assessment team that the Academy has a range of effective and rigorous processes in place to ensure that it has credible plans such that the courses, and learning materials remain up-to-date.

52. The team found that staff regularly engage with students about opportunities, auditions and career transitions while also considering sustainability in careers in the industry. For example, the senior leadership team referenced the students' use of a universal destinations platform which provides guidance to students on making choices for higher education. The platform also provides students, and the Academy, with valuable information on preferred degree programmes and career destinations. Additionally, it offers the Academy up-to-date market information and has the potential to help the Academy with the design of its curriculum and courses, and align with current industry trends. As such, this information has the potential to help the Academy to keep its performing arts courses up-to-date.
53. Discussions with the academic team indicated how the Academy's programmes and unit selections are regularly updated. The team is supported by a part-time tutor who is also a member of the writing team at Pearson which offers the units for delivery on the HNC and HND. The Academy's selection of Pearson units enables it to ensure its curriculum remains current and aligned with industry standards. With the awarding body supporting a curriculum that is both academically robust and relevant to today's workforce, this arrangement allows the Academy to select and deliver a contemporary, high quality educational experience that equips students with the skills needed for successful careers.
54. Minutes from the Academy's board of studies over the past academic year outline discussions between academic delivery staff about the currency of learning material and assessment methods, including for example, plans to have regular guest speakers from the industry to speak to students. At the site visit, the assessment team was informed that regular reviews are conducted on the units within the existing HNC and HND performing arts courses, and will be undertaken for modules on the recently validated BA (Hons) top up in performing arts, to assess their relevance to the higher education provision offered by the Academy. This is done through internal review by unit and/or module leaders and quality managers, and external review through the external examiner report. A review of programme modules and handbooks by the assessment team further demonstrated that curriculum design and teaching methods are regularly evaluated.
55. In discussion with the higher education lead and quality team, the assessment team heard that teaching observations, quality checks and deep dives of teaching are used to identify any gaps in knowledge and experience for staff training purposes. The assessment team noted that the UWL validated the BA (Hons) performing arts top up without condition in September 2024. This validation process involves review by UWL, ensuring that the curriculum aligns with the latest advancements in the field and up-to-date pedagogical practices. Validation without condition further provides evidence that the course is considered to have been designed to provide relevant, contemporary education, preparing students effectively for professional roles in the performing arts.
56. The assessment of the Academy's plans for staff recruitment and delivery indicate that the teaching staff possess relevant academic and industry-focused knowledge and experience,

as reflected in staff qualifications, job descriptions and CVs. This expertise is effectively integrated into the courses, ensuring the curriculum remains relevant to both the performance and sports industries. For example, through their professional contacts with the cruise line industry, staff are aware that such employers now often seek acrobatic talents in addition to traditional dance skills, and in response the Academy is adapting its curriculum to meet these evolving demands. Tutors are highly credible and passionate, fostering strong relationships with students, as communicated in the student meetings. The Academy told the assessment team that it requires tutors for Level 4 and Level 5 to hold relevant degrees or professional experience, while Level 6 tutors are required to have a masters' degree or equivalent, ensuring both academic rigour and vocational relevance. Additionally, students are taught regularly by a part-time tutor who has their own talent recruitment agency, and most tutors hold qualifications with a dance board. All staff have some external and contemporary work in the industry, coupled with academic experience as outlined in the delivery staff document and confirmed at the visit. The Academy's commitment to ongoing staff development, teaching and learning approaches ensures that the curriculum reflects current industry standards and meets the evolving needs of its students.

57. The Academy has mechanisms in place, such as regular focus groups with students, professional collaborations and feedback processes, to ensure that the curriculum evolves with emerging industry trends and technologies. Student representatives are invited to attend termly board-of-studies meetings to give feedback on their academic experience. The students who spoke to the assessment team outlined that they felt listened to by staff and that the use of a student representative to gather feedback was effective. For example, in response to asking staff for more guidance on preparing for audition, an audition workshop was added to students' timetables. Through processes that the Academy has in place for collecting and responding to feedback, the assessment team is confident that experience will be sustained for Level 6 students who have just commenced their programme of study on the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts.
58. The Academy's commitment to up-to-date teaching methods is reflected in the success of its graduates. The assessment board paperwork shows no fails, few passes and a majority of merits and distinctions. Programme leaders also outlined that many previous graduates have successfully secured employment. At the time of the assessment, 40 of them were 'at sea' – successfully employed on cruise ships.
59. The Academy positions itself as an alternative to traditional university pathways, offering a smaller, more personalised learning environment with strong connections to industry experts. Practical application of learning is central to the Academy's approach across both the proposed sports and current performing arts programmes. The assessment team heard that students participate in industry-led projects and work placements, ensuring they can bridge the gap between academic theory and a real-world professional. For example, students are engaged in television work, such as dancing for 'The Greatest Dancer', 'The X Factor', or involved in professional pantomimes, and large commercial events. A highlight for the Academy is 'Move It', a large dance and performing arts festival, which takes place over three days annually in London. The whole Level 4, 5 and 6 cohorts are involved in representing the Academy at this event, whether as performers or supporting activities off stage.
60. This approach benefits students by providing them with direct access to real-world experiences and industry professionals, ensuring they are well prepared for careers beyond

the classroom. By engaging in projects such as dancing for high-profile shows, participating in television and commercial events, and representing the Academy at exhibitions, students gain valuable, up-to-date insights and skills that are directly relevant to current industry standards. This immersive, hands-on learning ensures the course stays aligned with professional demands and evolving industry trends.

61. The assessment team concluded that, within their current design, the higher education courses at the Academy are up-to-date due to the Academy's strategic approach to curriculum design, and use of industry partnerships to ensure alignments with contemporary trends in the industry. The Academy's strong track record of student success and graduate employability further reinforces its capability to provide up-to-date higher education. Furthermore, the Academy has credible plans to ensure its higher education courses remain up-to-date, meeting condition B1.3.a. This conclusion follows a thorough review of strategic documents, curriculum design and continuous improvement processes, all aligned with industry standards. The Academy's commitment to staff development, industry partnerships and validation from its validating partner demonstrates its ability to deliver high quality, relevant programmes. Regular feedback from students and staff, along with curriculum reviews, ensure that the courses stay aligned with current industry trends.

### **Criterion B1.3.b**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course provides educational challenge? (B1.3.b)**

### **Advice to the OfS**

62. The assessment team believes that the Academy has credible plans to ensure its higher education courses provide educational challenge. This advice is based on the team's view that the Academy's courses demonstrate clear progression in complexity, and the rigour and difficulty expected of its higher education courses.

### **Reasoning**

63. For performing arts, the Academy's higher education courses are designed to offer sufficient educational challenge, which is evidenced through well-structured curriculum design documents, such as course specifications, Pearson unit specifications, rigorous assessment practices and supportive learning environments. The course design shows clear progression in complexity, meeting minimum undergraduate-level standards and ensuring that if the courses are delivered in the way intended, students are consistently challenged as they move through their programmes.
64. For sport, the Academy believes that the proposed delivery of HNC and HND sport courses offers a natural progression from the Level 3 provision offered by its sister company 'Brighter Futures' (currently running across 22 sites with 800 students across the North West, the Midlands and Yorkshire). Evidence demonstrating the Academy's commitment to providing challenging experiences includes the proposed programme specification for the HNC and HND in sport from 2025 which outlined clear and progressively complex learning outcomes. The senior leadership team and the programme leader explained in detail why the selected

units amount to educational challenge. As an example, at Level 4 for the HNC in sport, students are required to meet learning outcomes that 'identify key policy stages' (unit 2) or 'demonstrate effective application of safety procedures' (unit 4); whereas at Level 5 for the HND in sport, there is a clear development in the educational challenge as students are required to meet more demanding learning outcomes that 'examine appropriate research methodologies' and 'analyse research' (unit 23).

65. The courses offered by the Academy clearly outline the subject matter and academic level of each course. Validation documents, course specifications, and a sample of relevant Pearson-accredited units demonstrate that the courses have appropriate rigour and challenge at each level because they show gradual progression in the educational challenge through the achievement of more complex learning outcomes. This provided the assessment team with confidence that the educational structure of the courses, if implemented effectively, ensures students are consistently challenged throughout their academic journey,
66. The assessment team reviewed a sample of student work and feedback sheets for the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts. The assessment team also spoke to students and observed teaching, including a Level 4 and Level 5 mixed-abilities session on acting skills development and a Level 6 student-led research session aimed at supporting their dissertation research. These activities demonstrated the required level of intellectual engagement as students were challenged to think critically, apply theoretical knowledge to practical scenarios, and engage deeply with their coursework in a progressively more demanding way at each level. The observed sessions reflected an appropriate balance between practice and research, ensuring that students develop both their technical skills and academic rigour, ultimately preparing them for professional success in their respective fields. The Academy uses a range of current teaching and assessment methods, including written assignments, presentations, vlogs and professional performances. These methods effectively challenge students both academically and professionally and are delivered at the appropriate point in the students' academic journey.
67. As the Academy's BA top up was only recently validated in July 2024, the Academy is in the early stages of this partnership. Currently, 14 students are enrolled in the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts. The assessment team thoroughly reviewed the course specification, module descriptors assessment rubrics and grading criteria, and student feedback, for Level 6. The assessment team advised that the Level 6 modules meet the appropriate teaching and learning challenges of similar creative and practice-based programmes. As the Academy currently does not plan to run Level 4 or Level 5 of the whole degree course, no delivery materials, including rubrics and assessment briefs, were yet available to assess.
68. The assessment team evaluated the Level 6 assessment rubric and grading criteria to assess how standards are set. During the visit, students indicated that the Academy held several sessions to explain the transition from the HND course to BA (Hons) top up, and that additional resources were available on the VLE for further clarification. The Level 6 students felt well prepared for the shift from Level 5 pass, merit and distinction boundaries to the numerical and grade-based assessment system at Level 6. Furthermore, students felt they had clear guidance on achieving high marks.
69. The assessment team assessed staff qualifications through a review of records of expertise, job descriptions and CVs. Professional development activities aimed at enhancing

challenging teaching practices were also examined. In addition, academic support services, such as tutoring and mentoring, were analysed, along with current statistics on uptake and participation, to evaluate their effectiveness in helping students meet academic challenges. The assessment team advised that the Academy offers academically challenging courses, supported by a well-qualified staff with documented expertise. In-house and external professional development activities aimed at strengthening teaching practices are effective in promoting good practice. Additionally, the team was reassured by the comprehensive academic support services, such as tutoring and mentoring, which demonstrated strong student engagement and participation, further enabling students to meet and excel in academic challenges.

70. External examiner reports indicate that external examiners believe that the courses meet challenging standards, by consistently assessing standards appropriately and providing the necessary resources and guidance.
71. Based on the observations above, the assessment team advised that the Academy ensures that its higher education courses challenge students educationally, preparing them for advanced professional roles and further academic pursuits.

### **Criterion B1.3.c**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent? (B1.3.c)**

### **Advice to the OfS**

72. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is coherent. The evidence available to the assessment team demonstrated an appropriate balance between the breadth and depth of content. Course content is taught in an appropriate order, and concepts are introduced at appropriate points.

### **Reasoning**

73. The Academy's course programmes for the BA (Hons) performing arts and the proposed HNC and HND in sport offer a balanced and comprehensive education in their relevant disciplines. The courses offer a well-rounded curriculum with core essential subjects appropriate for their industry. A review of the programme specifications confirm that the content of the courses aligns with the appropriate credit value, ensuring that students are neither overwhelmed nor under-challenged. For instance, in all the Academy's programmes, 20 credit units cover material in sufficient depth, while 40 credit units offer opportunities for a more extensive exploration of core topics over two semesters. This balance is key to maintaining academic rigour, bringing academic coherence to the course and ensuring that students achieve the expected depth of understanding.
74. The curriculum structure of all the Academy's courses further reinforces coherence by ensuring foundational concepts are covered before students move onto more advanced topics. For example, at Level 4, students engage in a unit exploring employability in the performing arts industry, which is designed to equip students with an awareness of the range of roles across the industry. The Level 5 module, transitioning into the performing arts



industry, builds upon this learning and focuses on identifying students' individual career goals and designing a marketing strategy to support their employment. The programme specification outlines progressively complex learning outcomes, ensuring that students are continually challenged. This sequential approach helps to build a strong knowledge base, allowing students to approach more difficult material with confidence. The assessment team considered the Academy's course design and development report for the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts, which documents the market research and engagement with stakeholders that informed the design and development of the course. The report showed the design of the course ensured that learning progresses in complexity, aligns with undergraduate expectations and promotes consistent academic growth.

75. Practical components are logically sequenced alongside theoretical and professional classes to ensure coherence in the course delivery. For example, studio sessions are scheduled to complement relevant theory and professional skills classes, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts. The assessment team observed this in the HNC and HND Level 4 and Level 5 mixed-ability acting skills class, where the tutor made explicit references to the theory behind the practice, explaining the purpose of specific exercises and their relevance to professional practice. During the session, the tutor emphasised the importance of foundational techniques, such as stretching and guided breathing exercises. The tutor outlined how the learning linked to module content in the HNC/HND skills audit and development plan units (unit 2, and unit 33), which include practical skills like vocal intonation and audition preparation. Students were guided through exercises to warm up their vocal cords, with the tutor explaining the significance of these exercises for professional auditions.
76. The class was structured to differentiate between the needs of the HNC students and the more advanced HND students, ensuring that each group received instruction tailored to their level, enhancing the relevance and coherence of the learning experience for both groups. While there could have been more opportunities to ask students questions to check their understanding, the session was generally well-structured and engaging. The disciplined and energetic environment maintained high student engagement, contributing to the coherence of the course by integrating practical, theoretical and professional elements in a clear and meaningful way. The alignment between theory, practice and professionalism enhances the learning experience and helps students consolidate their knowledge.
77. The Academy's assessment methods were examined against the relevant assessment briefs, to ensure they align with the learning outcomes and contribute to a coherent educational experience. The assessment team reviewed Level 6 assessment rubrics and examples of student work and feedback which confirmed that that students are evaluated in a way that supports their academic progression. The assessment team found that feedback mechanisms are effective, and provided students with guidance to help them improve as they progress through the course.
78. During the visit, students expressed that they found the curriculum coherent, particularly across different levels, and that course progression supported their learning. Students at Level 4 and Level 5 expressed that, while they aim to have a career in the performing arts, they recognise the importance of balancing theory and practice. They understand the relevance of theoretical modules within their programme and saw the value in developing their academic skills alongside their practice-based performance skills. As discussed at paragraph 137, the assessment team found that students are supported to explore a range of

future employment opportunities, such as teaching, if they decide to pursue career outside of performing.

79. Level 6 students highlighted that their current experience on the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts is more self-led in comparison with the HND from which they progressed. Students described how assignments such as essays in the research module encourage more creative thinking and allow them to explore their own ideas. This was evident in a student-led research session that the team observed. Although this session was timetabled, it was not specifically scheduled as a contact session. The HNC and HND programme lead was present to aid if students required help or feedback. During the initial sessions, students received clear guidance, including briefs, learning objectives and guidance on research methodology. This structured support in the early stages, helped students feel well prepared, and that they had the relevant skills, for research elements later in their courses. This structure contributes to a coherent and meaningful learning experience across all levels.
80. Regarding the proposed sport provision, the courses demonstrate coherence within their plans for the HNC and HND curriculum, where key concepts are introduced at Level 4 before being explored in more depth and applied at Level 5. For example, the work exposure unit at Level 4 acts as a precursor in terms of learning outcomes and unit content prior to the study of the work experience unit at Level 5. Similarly, the outcomes and student development during the project management unit at Level 4 are subsequently built upon when students then study the research project unit at Level 5. This structured progression ensures that students build on their knowledge and skills as they advance, reinforcing the coherence and continuity of the curriculum across the HNC and HND sports course.
81. The team believes that these elements ensure all students receive a structured and coherent educational experience that aligns with academic standards and industry expectations in both performing arts and sport. The team advised that each higher education course is coherent because the careful design of the curriculum, the balance of the modules, core content, and the alignment of theoretical and practical components, provide a solid foundation for coherent learning.

### **Criterion B1.3.d**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered? (B1.3.d)**

### **Advice to the OfS**

82. Based on its assessment, the team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is effectively delivered. The Academy provides a well-structured curriculum that effectively balances theoretical and practical elements across all modules, ensuring that students are supported in their learning and development.

### **Reasoning**

83. During the assessment visit, the assessment team toured the external dance studios used by the Academy to deliver its performing arts courses. The site is in an old army barracks with access to a nearby park, which students use during the summer and for ad hoc wellbeing sessions. It is well connected to public transport, making it easy for students to commute to

their practice sessions. The team saw several dance studios, each hosting energetic and well-attended classes. The team observed both practical and theory-based classes across a variety of performing arts disciplines, including acting sessions, dissertation proposal workshops, jazz technique and choreography. These observations showed the effective integration of practical and theoretical elements within the curriculum. The Academy's partnership with the studio provider and UWL further demonstrates its commitment to delivering high quality, professionally focused, practice-based education in performing arts. The arrangements with its studio provider highlight the Academy's dedication to providing industry-relevant education in a professional environment.

84. Programme specifications, along with narrative from the Academy, provide a clear structure for the performing arts programme, which is primarily practice-based. The VLE complements the in-person, practice-based studio and sports settings by providing structured resources and relevant information to support students. This combination supports independent, self-directed study through scheduled tutorials, seminars and resources available on the VLE. During the visit, the assessment team observed sessions that demonstrated the high quality of teaching, blending interactive, group-based learning with individual instruction. This balance reinforced the coherence between theory and practice. Additionally, the availability of library services and flexible access to the studios for independent practice further supports students in their academic and practical work.
85. The assessment team observed a variety of teaching activities that demonstrates the effective integration of theory and practice across the Academy's courses. The combination of observed sessions, from practical, hands-on classes in acting and choreography to academic sessions focused on dissertation preparation and research, showed that the Academy's courses are structured to balance core theoretical concepts with practical application. In addition, accessible resources such as visible timetables, and student access to learning materials, further reinforced the structured, supportive learning environment, contributing to the overall effective delivery of the Academy's programmes.
86. Students have access to the facilities between Monday and Thursday (0820 to 2030) and on weekends. This allows them dedicated time for independent study and rehearsals and supports an effective balance between directed and self-directed learning. This extended access enables students to refine both practical and academic skills outside of formal instruction. Moreover, the proximity of student accommodation to the studio space enhances their ability to regularly access the staff and resources to practice both the practical and academic elements. Evening skill sessions are available, and while these are public facing, they are run by many of the Academy staff team members, thus providing opportunities for students who need additional support or catch-up opportunities. For example, in situations where students are recovering from injuries, the Academy's consistent and adaptable approach to course delivery is effective in preventing students falling behind.
87. The Academy's variety of teaching methods, including tutor-led, practice-based and theory sessions, group work, reflective practice and independent study, ensure that courses are delivered effectively and align with sector standards. Feedback from students, external examiner reports and monitoring reports, by both the Academy and its validating partner, further supports the view that the Academy courses are effectively delivered.

88. The HNC and HND sport courses will consist of a series of selected units delivered by the Academy's sports teaching team. Documentation reviewed by the assessment team confirmed that the course integrates both academic and practical elements and uses a variety of teaching approaches. These methods ensure that students develop the skills needed for the evolving sports industry. The course structure emphasises a balance between guided theory and practice-based skills development, aligning with the Academy's mission to produce well-rounded graduates in both the performing arts and sports sectors.
89. The Academy's teaching methods are tailored to the specific needs of each discipline, ensuring a balance between independent study and structured, supervised learning. Teaching observations conducted during the site visit, along with student feedback and staff input, confirmed the effective integration of theory and practice across the HNC, HND and BA programmes. For example, the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts blends academic theory with professional practice, while the proposed sports HNC and HND courses combine classroom instruction with practical sports applications. Each student is assigned a personal tutor, with dedicated tutors for BA and HND students, offering personalised support throughout their studies. Although the current system works well for the smaller student cohorts, the Academy has recognised the need for potential adjustments as enrolment numbers grow to ensure the continued effective delivery of its programmes.
90. A review of the assignment briefs and assessment methods demonstrate that they are well aligned with the expected learning outcomes, as clearly outlined in the course and student handbooks. Students are informed of these outcomes through both in-person sessions and via the VLE. After speaking with students and teaching staff, it was noted that the Academy has recently changed its VLE platform. It has retained the former platform which serves as a central hub for resources, assignments and feedback. The assessment team received a brief demonstration of the VLE and were provided with access prior to the visit. The team concluded that the use of the VLE ensures a coherent and accessible learning experience for students and that it supports the effective delivery of courses.
91. The evidence gathered demonstrates that the Academy has well-developed and credible plans to ensure the effective delivery of its courses, which are tailored to both the subject matter and the academic level of each programme. The plans are credible because the Academy has a track record of effective course delivery. The curriculum structure, diverse delivery methods and comprehensive support systems are in place to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their respective fields. This approach ensures that students receive a high quality academic experience that is both relevant and rigorous.

### **Criterion B1.3.e**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course, as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills? (B1.3.e)**

### **Advice to the OfS**

92. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans in place to ensure that its higher education courses, as appropriate to the subject matter, require students to develop

relevant skills (B1.3.e). The Academy's courses and proposed courses help students acquire practical, cognitive, and transferable skills that are directly aligned with professional industry standards in both the performing arts and sports sectors.

93. The Academy's skills development plans are robust, credible and well aligned with industry expectations. The combination of a structured curriculum, industry-experienced staff, practical and theoretical assessments, and strong external collaborations ensures that students acquire the necessary skills to succeed in their chosen careers. As the Academy continues to gather student feedback and expand its sports provision, these plans will only grow stronger, further reinforcing the Academy's commitment to providing high quality, skill-based education. This comprehensive approach ensures that students across both performing arts and sports programmes are developing industry-relevant skills that enhance their employability.

## Reasoning

94. The Academy's programme specifications and the validated module and unit descriptors are contemporary, well structured and appropriately sequenced. They have been carefully designed to ensure that students develop a broad range of skills, making them highly employable and not limited to a single niche. The performing arts curriculum includes pathways for various careers, such as cruise ship performers, scriptwriters and choreographers, providing students with a diverse skill set. Similarly, the sports courses include a range of roles within the sports industry, such as fitness managers, sports development officers and physical activity managers, reinforcing a diverse range of skill development.
95. The Academy delivers a comprehensive skill set across its courses, ensuring students acquire the relevant, industry-aligned competencies for either the performing arts or sports. Practical skills include acting, singing, dancing, scriptwriting, choreography, audition preparation and performance, equipping students with essential tools for their chosen fields. Cognitive skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, research, critical analysis and self-reflection, are integrated into the curriculum to foster intellectual growth and adaptability. Transferable skills like teamwork, independent learning, decision-making, autonomy and career planning are also emphasised, preparing students for a range of professional scenarios. For performing arts students, industry-specific skills are developed through portfolio creation, professional presentation, networking and exposure to current industry trends via workshops and collaborations with associate lecturers, external engagements and 'live' competitions. Sports students in the HNC and HND programmes will gain expertise in practical sports techniques, fitness management and coaching, along with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Employability skills are reinforced through the creation of professional-standard portfolios, headshots, real-world performance showcases and industry networking, ensuring students are well prepared for success in diverse professional roles.
96. The Academy's curriculum is designed to progressively develop students' skills across all levels. At Level 4, students are introduced to fundamental skills through a blend of theory and practice. The teaching and assessments at this stage provide a solid foundation in both areas. Collaborative projects help students analyse industry practices while developing critical thinking and teamwork. The curriculum emphasises building core competencies that form the foundation for further skill development. When students' progress to Level 5, they are

encouraged to take on more responsibility for their personal and academic growth.

Assessments focus on refining practical skills, fostering independent learning and deepening industry knowledge. The curriculum supports the development of autonomy and decision-making skills, preparing students for professional roles and more advanced work in their final year.

97. On the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts, students are encouraged to take ownership of their career development and artistic practice. Their final year consolidates previous learning, with assessments such as portfolio development and industry showcases aimed at real-world preparedness. Students create professional portfolios, conduct skills audits, and produce showreels and self-tapes, ensuring they have a body of work ready for job applications. This is also encouraged at Level 5 if a student does not choose to progress to the Level 6 programme. Students also critically reflect on their work, demonstrating both technical proficiency and self-awareness, which equips them for professional success in the performing arts industry. The Academy's curriculum effectively develops relevant skills at each stage, guiding students from foundational abilities at Level 4 to advanced, independent work at Level 6. This progression ensures students are equipped with foundational skills, independent learning capacity and industry-specific competencies required for success in their chosen field.
98. The mixed-ability acting skills workshop observed at the Academy exemplified how additional sessions support students' skill development beyond the core curriculum. By aligning the session with specific learning objectives, such as the skills audit and development plan within both the HNC (unit 2) and HND (unit 33) in performing arts, students can identify areas for personal growth and follow a structured plan to achieve their goals. The tailored teaching instruction provided to both HNC and HND students that the assessment team observed ensured that learning was differentiated according to their abilities, further enhancing their practical skills. Overall, the session was well structured and engaging, contributing effectively to the student's skill-building efforts and maintaining high levels of student engagement and discipline throughout.
99. The Academy offers study skills and report-writing support through one of the programme leaders who runs sessions on academic referencing and critical analysis. This support is supplemented with general study sessions available to all higher education learners.
100. Assessment at the Academy is integral to developing both practical and theoretical skills across all levels of study. At Level 4, assessments focus on building a strong foundation by evaluating students' technical abilities, knowledge of industry practices and teamwork skills, setting the groundwork for future progression. As students advance to Level 5, the assessment framework shifts towards encouraging more independent learning, critical thinking and personal accountability, helping students take greater ownership of their academic journey. By Level 6, the emphasis is on preparing students for professional success through assessments such as independent projects, live performances and critical self-reflection, all of which aim to strengthen their ability to work autonomously and apply their skills in real-world contexts. This cohesive assessment strategy ensures that graduates are not only technically proficient but also equipped with essential employability skills and the confidence to transition smoothly into their professional careers.

101. The teaching team at the Academy includes both full-time, fractional and associate lecturers who are professionals and many still actively engaged in the performing arts and sports industries. Associate lecturers bring industry-specific expertise and practical knowledge to the classroom, ensuring that students are exposed to current trends and expectations within their fields. To align their teaching with the Academy's curriculum and strategic goals, associate lecturers participate in curriculum planning sessions and receive ongoing professional development. This ensures consistency in teaching approaches and learning outcomes across the institution. The Academy also implements regular feedback mechanisms, including student evaluations, peer review and staff reviews, to ensure that associate lecturers contribute effectively to the overall development of student skills.
102. The Academy are very proud of their external connections, and external collaboration plays a crucial role in ensuring that their students develop relevant skills aligned with industry standards in both the performing arts and sports sectors. These partnerships contribute significantly to the development of relevant skills. For example, the Academy has established strong relationships with key industry players. The partnerships offer students unique opportunities to perform, audition, and network with professionals, providing direct pathways into the industry. Alumni success stories, such as securing roles with cruise lines, major productions and national TV entertainment shows, further demonstrate the effectiveness of the Academy's programmes in preparing students for the professional world and beyond. The sports programmes also have connections with a variety of football clubs and universities, which the Academy plans to use in the development of the HNC and HND sports courses.
103. The assessment team found evidence that the Academy's programmes lead to positive graduate outcomes, with alumni consistently transitioning into successful careers in the performing arts and sports sectors. Although most of this is anecdotal, the teaching team and students corroborated the success of the alumni, and current students were excited to follow suit. The Academy maintains connections with its graduates and invites them back to provide career advice for its current cohort. These outcomes confirm that the Academy's courses are effectively aligned with industry standards and prepare students to enter the professional workforce with relevant and employable skills.

## **B1 conclusions**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B1 from the date of registration?**

104. The assessment team's view is that the Academy overall has credible plans to ensure that, if it is registered, its students on the higher education programmes would receive a high quality academic experience.
105. Through a thorough review of course and module documentation, teaching materials, and both campus-based and virtual resources, the assessment team confirmed that the Academy's courses are and will remain up-to-date. Discussions with staff and students, alongside observed teaching delivery, provided evidence that the courses offer educational challenge, coherence and are effectively delivered. Additionally, the team established that students acquire relevant skills that align with the requirements of both the performing arts and sports industries. The assessment team assessed evidence across the various



subcriteria of condition B1 (B1.3.a to B1.3.e) and found that the information provided was sufficient to make a comprehensive judgement. Based on these findings and observations, the team advised that the Academy has credible plans to deliver a high quality academic experience that supports both skill development and professional readiness for students.

106. The advice is grounded in the evidence reviewed, which demonstrates that the Academy's courses remain current, up-to-date and academically challenging. The evaluation highlights that the Academy's teaching, learning and assessment methods align with current academic and industry practices, ensuring students acquire skills relevant to their programme level and fields of study. Based on the evidence reviewed, the assessment team advised that it believes that the Academy meets criterion B1.3.a, with well-developed plans to maintain up-to-date higher education courses. These plans effectively integrate theoretical knowledge with practical industry skills, ensuring a relevant and challenging curriculum for students.
107. The Academy has demonstrated that it has credible plans in place to ensure that its courses are coherent and effectively structured. The curriculum is thoughtfully designed to balance core subjects while maintaining an appropriate scope of content. Foundational topics are sequenced logically to support student progression. Practical components are integrated cohesively within the curriculum, providing essential skills at the appropriate time to support both theoretical understanding and real-world application. Based on the evidence reviewed the assessment team concludes that the Academy's courses are coherent and delivered effectively.
108. The Academy has credible plans to ensure its courses are coherent and effectively delivered. The curriculum is thoughtfully designed with a balanced approach to teaching, practice, and assessment, ensuring that students in both the performing arts and sports programmes receive a comprehensive educational experience. The integration of practical sessions with theoretical learning, combined with well-organised assessments, ensures that students can apply their knowledge in real-world contexts. Additionally, the Academy's use of industry-experienced staff and modern teaching methods further enhances the effective delivery of its programmes, ensuring that students are well prepared for professional success.
109. In conclusion, the Academy's courses effectively equip students with a wide range of relevant skills essential for success in their chosen fields. Through a combination of practical exercises, theoretical study and industry-aligned assessments, students acquire both technical proficiency and critical thinking abilities. The curriculum is designed to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary cognitive, practical, and transferable skills, preparing them not only for academic success but also for professional careers. By the end of the current courses, students are well prepared to apply their skills in real-world contexts, ensuring their readiness for the demands of their relevant industry.

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

### **Criterion B2.2.a**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive resources which are sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:**

**i. a high quality academic experience for those students**



## ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education? (B2.2.a)

### Advice to the OfS

110. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each cohort of students will receive resources sufficient to deliver a high quality academic experience and for those students to succeed in and beyond higher education.
111. While the assessment team is satisfied with the resources provided by the Academy for the performing arts course, it had concerns that the Academy is still reviewing resources and facilities for the sports programme and has not decided on the final delivery sites.

### Reasoning

112. For the performing arts students, delivery takes place at in studio space provided by a third party, where students can access a variety of well-equipped studio spaces. The tour of facilities and additional photos confirmed that these include large studios with full height mirrors for acrobatics and aerial sessions, smaller studios for dance, and classrooms with individual desks for theory-based learning. The studios are supported by multiple changing rooms to meet student needs. Students have the use of the library facilities at CoLC which is a short distance from the studio. The proximity of this library to the teaching space ensures easy access to learning materials, supporting students in both practical and theoretical aspects of their education. The timetable runs from Monday to Thursday, 0820 to 2030, and on weekends from 0930 to 1600, allowing students plenty of time for independent study and rehearsal, with staff support available throughout.
113. During the tour of the Academy's physical spaces, including its head office and external performance facilities, the assessment team observed that the Academy has the necessary capacity and resources to support its current performing arts student cohort, as well as anticipated growth. The Academy maintains a small, specialised focus, capping its student numbers at around 20 for HNC and HND performing arts courses to ensure individualised attention. This cap helps ensure a personalised and high quality academic experience for each student.
114. For the sports students, the Academy plans that the higher education sports programme would be based at a selected site currently used for delivering Level 3 courses, with five potential sites under consideration. Photos provided to the assessment team confirm that the sites under consideration are well equipped to provide resources that match the needs of higher education sports students, and include astro-turf pitches, fitness suites and other outdoor field areas. While this evidence is potentially limited – in that it only refers to a small number of selected sites from which the Academy might deliver this provision – the assessment team considered the evidence indicative of the typical resource that the Academy provides at other sites, thus ensuring access to quality training and educational facilities.
115. For the sports programmes, the team reviewed photographic evidence of the facilities under consideration, which are currently used to deliver its extensive further education provision. The Academy's senior leadership team confirmed the Academy's plans to launch its HNC and HND sports courses by September 2025, with a target of 25 students spread across one or two sites, ensuring viable cohorts of 10 to 12 students at each location. This plan ensures that

resources will be tailored to meet the needs of students in both performing arts and sports programmes.

116. The assessment team was told of the flexibility in the Academy's agreements with external partners which allow it to accommodate a moderate increase in student numbers if needed. Although there is a potential risk posed if its third-party studio provider were to close or go out of business, the senior leadership team told the assessment team that it is aware of the financial health of this provider on an annual basis and is confident that alternative sites would be available to mitigate any disruption. Overall, the Academy's resource allocation is sufficient to provide students with both a high quality academic experience and the necessary support for success in and beyond higher education.
117. The Academy's IT infrastructure is sufficient for the size of their current cohort. The recent introduction of 5G routers, a new VLE platform and access to software tools ensures that students have secure access to digital learning resources. The VLE contains course information, module handbooks and digital reading lists, supporting student learning. Students also receive individual email accounts, access to laptops and tablets for coursework, and use of audio and visual equipment in studios. During the tour of the facilities, the assessment team saw additional computer suite facilities at the head office, which could be made available for students if needed. However, given the use of the studio spaces, and its proximity to most of the student accommodation, the team felt this may not be an ideal option.
118. The team heard from the senior leadership team that validating and awarding partners had signed off the Academy's resources, confirming that appropriate resources are in place for delivering Level 4 to Level 6 programmes. Current provision ensures that all students, including those with accessibility needs, are supported. For example, there is alternative step-free access to the building, should students require, and the main studio spaces are at ground level.
119. The team was told by the senior leadership team that, for Level 6 students on the BA (Hons) top up, the Academy's library resources will transition to UWL's library system, providing students with access to a wide range of materials. Additionally, the assessment team heard that the Academy plans to transition from the CoLC library facility and implement a commonly used digital library system next year for broader learning support, enhancing the digital resources available to students.
120. For the sports programmes, although formal plans are in the initial stages, the Academy has identified several sites with the infrastructure to support sports programmes. The cluster model used for further education courses can also accommodate HNC and HND cohorts across multiple locations, ensuring that resources are spread effectively.
121. The Academy's staffing resources are well managed, with strategic recruitment and academic training plans ensuring that staff qualifications and professional development align with student needs. This was further evidenced in the staff delivery document and narrative received and in meetings with the senior leadership team, academic staff, human resources and quality representatives. The assessment team reviewed the qualifications of teaching staff and found that the majority are appropriately qualified to deliver the current courses. Most of the teaching staff are practising professionals, which provides students with relevant,

practical industry training. Where there are gaps, the senior leadership team has assured the assessment team that staff are supported in requests for advanced learning opportunities. For example, the programme lead for HND is embarking on a part-time masters' in vocal pedagogy for the academic year 2024-25. On successful completion, they will join the Level 6 teaching team.

122. The Academy has demonstrated its ability to recruit additional staff as needed and supports new hires through its induction and 'buddy' training programmes. New to teaching tutors are well supported, with comprehensive induction processes, such as teaching observations, ensuring they contribute effectively to the student experience and the identification of any training needs. Full-time staff are supported in their requests for research, opportunities and further training. Additionally, there is a research allowance set out in the recruitment contracts of permanent staff. As student numbers grow, however, the Academy will need to ensure that staff-to-student ratios remain appropriate and consider recruiting additional staff with formal teaching qualifications. The programme leads show good understanding of key quality assurance processes, including internal verification of assessment briefs, sample calibration meetings and moderation. These practices contribute to the delivery of a consistent, high quality learning experience, ensuring that students receive clear information and guidance, fair assessment and strong academic support throughout their studies.
123. Student feedback gathered during the visit, along with course monitoring documents and module surveys, confirmed that students felt well supported by the available resources. However, as student numbers grow and new courses, particularly in sports, are introduced, consideration will need to be given to expanding resources such as space and facilities.
124. The assessment team concluded that, based on the evidence discussed, the Academy has credible plans to deliver sufficient resources to ensure a high quality academic experience for their students, and that their students succeed in and beyond higher education.

### **Criterion B2.2.b**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans for how each cohort of students would receive support which is sufficient for the purposes of ensuring:**

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students**
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education? (B2.2.b)**

### **Advice to the OfS**

125. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each cohort of students will receive support sufficient for the purposes of delivering a high quality academic experience and for those students to succeed in and beyond higher education.

### **Reasoning**

126. Due to the Academy's size, small cohorts, and its specialist focus on performing arts and sports education, it can provide well managed and timely support to its students. Discussions with the Academy's senior leadership team indicate that it is well resourced, institutionally experienced with its current education provision, and as such deeply committed to student

wellbeing. The assessment team believes that the planned growth in student numbers is moderate, with performing arts projected to increase to 75 in 2024-25, 150 in 2025-26, and 205 in 2026-27, and HNC and HND sports targeting 25 students. This growth is not expected to pose a risk to maintaining a high quality academic experience.

127. The assessment team confirmed that students benefit from the close relationships with the staff at the studios which ensures smooth coordination of their academic activities. There is no requirement for students to travel between the Academy head office and the studios during the day which minimises students' logistical concerns and allows them to focus on their studies in a consistent and familiar environment.
128. The assessment team's view was that the Academy's resource planning can flexibly accommodate specific student needs. This includes dedicated changing rooms and split classes based on skill level, outlined during the visit and observed during a tour of the facilities.
129. Students at the Academy benefit from comprehensive academic support through well-organised course, module and unit handbooks, which provide essential information on learning outcomes, course outlines, staff contacts and assessment criteria. The handbooks also include information on key learning support resources, covering policies and procedures for academic misconduct, assignment submissions, and the handling of extenuating circumstances or complaints. The assessment team reviewed these key policies and the Academy's academic regulations and, through conversations at the site visit, were satisfied that there is good understanding and implementation of these by the course delivery team. Each student is assigned a personal tutor (the Academy has two higher education tutors, one for Levels 4 and 5 and another for Level 6), with whom they meet regularly in studio or classroom settings to discuss their academic progress. Additionally, module or unit tutors offer further academic support during classes and through one-on-one tutorials. Due to the relatively small cohort size, there are strong interpersonal connections between staff and students, allowing students to receive personalised guidance whenever needed. Although the current small cohort sizes allow for more informal, flexible support, discussions are underway to implement a more structured approach. As part of this, the assessment team was told that the Academy plans to implement three formal personal tutor meetings per year.
130. During the visit, students highlighted their interaction with course and module handbooks, alongside VLE resources, that enhance the support they receive from staff. They consistently praised teaching staff for their availability, responsiveness and approachability, whether in-person or via email. While students are primarily engaged in practice-based activities, when they do work on more theory-based assignments, they know where to find the information needed. The assessment team's evaluation of the VLE and online learning materials confirmed that students receive thorough inductions on using the VLE, with continued support provided by both academic and support staff to ensure effective use of digital learning.
131. Students at the Academy are advised on accurate academic referencing with guidance on proper citation practices. Additionally, the consequences of academic misconduct are outlined in student inductions, the academic misconduct procedure, and reinforced throughout their learning journey. Students also have access to a commonly used plagiarism detection software and the Academy's tutors provide instruction on how to use it appropriately, from the start of the course, helping students to understand its value in improving their work and

avoiding plagiarism. This proactive approach promotes academic integrity and mitigates the risk of unintentional mistakes. The Academy is considering the use of artificial intelligence, which is a topic included in teaching, with some students currently looking at dissertations around use of artificial intelligence in the industry. This helps to ensure students are well versed in current technologies and ethical considerations.

132. The Academy faces a risk due to its small permanent staff team and its reliance on fractional staff. Any change to their working situation could lead to single points of failure, especially if these key staff members become unavailable. Without adequate cover, such absences could disrupt both the delivery of education and other essential services. In mitigation, the key senior leadership team members maintain a visible presence within the studios, enabling them to step in if teaching staff are unexpectedly absent. This visibility ensures that students are familiar with senior staff, providing a sense of continuity and support during short-term absences. However, the assessment team noted that no formal plan was in place for covering longer-term absences, which could present a risk to sustained course delivery and continuity and might impact the quality of support available to students.
133. Additionally, timetables are currently built around the availability of fractional staff, many of whom have portfolios of external activities alongside their work at the Academy. This arrangement may present a risk of conflicting demands on their time, which could impact course delivery and support. However, the assessment team was told that when positions within the Academy are needed, new posts will become available, for which the assessment team reviewed a sample of job descriptions. The assessment team was also informed that the course leader for the BA (Hons) top up is moving from three to four days per week and the Academy will extend their contract further if more students enrol. Evidence of the Academy's plans for additional investment in staffing are further reinforced by the Academy's future organisation chart indicating provision for staffing growth in these areas. While current staff are skilled, experienced, professional performers, and well qualified in their fields, few hold formal teaching qualifications which could potentially affect the quality of education. The assessment team noted that the Academy is actively enhancing staff development by inviting teaching staff to professional development training events at its validating partner and providing in-house training sessions for new tutors.
134. There is a small risk that if student numbers grow and the Academy does not recruit more staff, it will not maintain the quality of its programmes. However, as indicated in paragraph 122, the assessment team is satisfied that the Academy has credible plans for future staffing through its plans to increase the contracted hours from its existing staff and recruit additional staff to deliver on student growth in both its performing arts and sport subject areas, as evidenced within the Academy's future organisational chart. Additionally, through strategic recruitment and academic training plans, along with an induction and buddy system, the assessment team is satisfied that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that staffing resources can adapt to meet the evolving needs of its expanding student body. This approach strengthens the Academy's commitment to delivering a high quality learning experience for its students, ensuring they benefit from effective teaching, fair assessments and robust academic support.
135. The career support at the Academy provides students with valuable guidance both during their studies and after graduation. Feedback from students, as well as reviews of staff

qualifications and experience and student career outcomes, confirm that the Academy is well-equipped to support students to succeed in and progress from higher education.

136. Programme leaders expressed their keenness to design higher education courses to maximise employability by offering a broad range of skills. They noted that employers, such as cruise lines, now often seek acrobatic talents in addition to traditional dance skills, and the Academy is adapting its curriculum to meet these evolving demands.
137. Students expressed enthusiasm for the opportunities available through the Academy, particularly in relation to careers on cruise ships. Students appreciate the wide variety of potential career paths the Academy exposes them to, helping them explore their strengths and interests while broadening their understanding of what jobs are possible in the performing arts industry. Students explained that they have abundant audition opportunities, and they value the chance to secure roles in high-profile productions without the same level of competition they would be experiencing if they were to study in London. Students highly appreciate the opportunity to gain the International Dance Teachers' Association Level 4 dance qualification while at the Academy, which provides students with a formal qualification in dance instruction and opens doors to additional career possibilities, such as teaching.
138. Many students express pride in the opportunity to earn a degree, following the introduction of the BA (Hons) top up, and are aware of the potential to continue their studies to obtain a teacher training qualification, which could lead to further teaching opportunities. Overall, the students recognise the diverse career options within the industry, and seem eager to be part of a community that allows them to pursue their passion for dance full-time while receiving strong support for their career development.
139. The Academy has credible plans to support its students effectively, ensuring both academic success and career readiness. With its small cohorts, specialist focus and well-established resources, the Academy provides timely and personalised support. Student access to detailed course materials, personal tutors and academic guidance is well structured, and plans for more formalised support systems will accommodate growth. The proactive approach to academic integrity and strong industry connections further ensures that students are well prepared for both their studies and future careers. Overall, the Academy demonstrates a strong commitment to student wellbeing and success.

### **Criterion B2.2.c**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans for how it would ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students which is sufficient for the purpose of ensuring:**

- i. a high quality academic experience for those students**
- ii. those students succeed in and beyond higher education? (B2.2.c)**

### **Advice to the OfS**

140. The assessment team believes that the Academy has credible plans in place to ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students. The credibility of these plans means it is

likely students will receive a high quality academic experience, while also being well supported to achieve success both during their studies and beyond higher education

## Reasoning

141. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure effective engagement with each cohort of students, ensuring they receive a high quality academic experience. Student engagement with the Academy is strong, given the Academy's size and the close-knit nature of the cohorts. In addition, many of their students have been with the third-party studio provider for several years, through its further education provision, weekend classes and evening workshops. This means that strong interpersonal relationships have been developed between staff and students, promoting positive engagement and a high quality academic experience. It was clear that the staff and students are very familiar with each other, which in turn contributes to fostering strong connections that facilitate informal, personalised engagement. During the assessment visit, students praised the close relationships they had with their tutors and the supportive environment at the studios. In addition, it was clear that creating this environment was important to the staff and was visible in an observation of a Level 6 research session. These personal connections provide a solid foundation for effective student engagement, particularly as the Academy grows.
142. The Academy has robust feedback mechanisms to continuously assess student perceptions of their academic experience and ensure effective engagement. The Academy conducts regular student surveys at the end of each semester, and students told the assessment team that they feel comfortable in asking for changes. Additionally, student representatives are invited to termly board-of-studies meetings where they are able to feed back on their academic experience. Programme monitoring reports outline how student feedback is used to improve courses in alignment with the Academy's philosophy of continuous improvement. For example, in response to asking staff for more guidance on preparing for audition, an audition workshop was added to students' timetables. Additionally, students are informed of how to engage with programme leaders, or personal tutors, and familiarise themselves with academic regulations and policies to submit complaints or appeals through the appropriate channels. This ensures that if students encounter issues, they have multiple avenues for addressing their concerns.
143. The assessment team is confident that the Academy has credible plans for effective student engagement, because it provides regular opportunities for students to contribute to the development of their courses. With its small size and close-knit cohorts, many students have progressed through the Academy's wider course portfolio, fostering strong relationships with staff, as highlighted by students during the assessment visit. In addition to informal engagement, the Academy's formal feedback processes, such as student participation at board-of-studies meetings, and unit evaluation surveys, allow students to effectively voice concerns and contribute to improvements.
144. By combining personal relationships, formal engagement structures and continuous feedback processes, the Academy has credible plans to ensure that each student cohort receives a high quality academic experience and can succeed in and beyond higher education.

## B2 conclusions

### **Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B2 from the date of registration?**

145. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B2 from the date of registration. The Academy has sufficient physical, human and digital resources, academic support and engagement to ensure that students will receive a high quality academic experience to succeed in and beyond higher education.
146. In the assessment, the Academy demonstrated it has sufficient physical, human and digital resources to ensure students receive a high quality academic experience. This was further triangulated with a review of the VLE and digital resources, and a comprehensive review of course documentation. Furthermore, the Academy's provision of academic support, pastoral care, mental health guidance and career advice demonstrates that students are well supported throughout their studies. The assessment team noted that the opportunities for students to gain both formal and informal student feedback strengthens student engagement, enhancing the overall quality of the academic experience at the Academy.
147. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans for ensuring sufficient resources at the point of registration, as it either already has the necessary resources in place or has planned for them. These resources include staffing, study support materials and technical equipment to meet the needs of students. The Academy's current delivery of its HNC and HND courses demonstrates its ability to manage resources effectively, with teaching and support systems already operational at these levels. Additionally, the validation arrangements with the validating partner provide evidence that other parties believe that the Academy has the capacity to maintain the quality of higher education courses. However, as student numbers grow, there are potential risks to the availability and quality of these resources, which will require careful management to ensure the continued delivery of a high quality academic experience.
148. The assessment team advises that the Academy has sufficient support for students to ensure a high quality academic experience and to help students succeed during and beyond higher education. The Academy has outlined extensive plans for student support and engagement. There are intentions to increase academic staffing, along with expanding resources where appropriate as student numbers grow, or new courses come on stream in areas such as sport.
149. The senior leadership team has proposed that current staff could temporarily cover any teaching gaps should they arise, which would likely suffice as a short-term solution. However, in the long term, it will be essential for the Academy to expand its resources proportionally to accommodate the needs of its student body and ensure sustained course delivery and continuity of the Academy's growing student numbers.
150. The assessment team concluded that the Academy has credible plans in place to comply with condition B2 from the date of registration, ensuring sufficient resources, academic support and student engagement for a high quality academic experience. Through meetings and a



thorough review of the Academy's facilities, staff and resources, the team was confident that the Academy is well positioned to provide the necessary support for students to succeed during and beyond higher education. The Academy has effectively managed its current delivery of its HNC, and HND programmes, which provides evidence of its capacity to deliver high quality higher education. Additionally, the Academy's intention to expand resources as student numbers grow, including academic staffing, will ensure it can continue to meet the evolving needs of its student body.

## Condition B4: Assessment and awards

### Criterion B4.2.a

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that each higher education course is assessed effectively? (B4.2.a)**

### Advice to the OfS

151. It is the view of the assessment team that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that students are assessed effectively because:
- a. The skills that the Academy assesses are relevant to the awards provided.
  - b. The rigour and stretch of the assessments are appropriate to the level of the courses delivered by the Academy and the intellectual challenge for students builds as students progress through each course.
  - c. The assessments are designed to minimise the potential for students to engage in academic misconduct and often require students to reflect on their own learning or performances.

### Reasoning

152. In assessing condition B4.2.a, the assessment team reviewed a range of evidence submitted by the Academy prior to the visit, including assessment briefs for the HNC and HND courses in performing arts, as well as its Level 7 provision. The assessment information contained within these documents provides students with clear information relating to the requirements for the assessment, grading criteria and rubrics, and submission deadlines. This was triangulated through a review of a range of Level 6 assessment briefs which are currently 'live' and available to students through the VLE. Furthermore, programme tutors confirmed that there are several processes in place to ensure clear information is provided to students relating to the requirements for their assessments. For example, the grading criteria and rubrics are outlined clearly in assessment briefs, and submission deadlines are contained within the assessment plans. Students confirmed that they consider the Academy is effective in communicating information and guidance about assessments.
153. The assessment team noted that the Academy's design of assessments is suitable because it minimises opportunities for students to engage in academic misconduct. For example, assessments often require students to perform skills in front of a live audience, and assessors (e.g. in singing, acting and dance units) which, by design, minimises opportunities for academic misconduct (including plagiarism, collusion, use of artificial intelligence). In addition,

the Academy uses plagiarism detection software to discourage and detect academic misconduct, and tutors encourage students to use this as a formative tool prior to assessment submissions. Furthermore, assessments also encourage students to regularly engage in personal reflection. For example, students undertake a skills audit and development plan within both the HNC (unit 2) and HND (unit 33) performing arts courses which necessitate a reflection of their current abilities across several skills. Students can then create and implement a personal development plan in response, which again helps to promote academic integrity within these assessments.

154. The Academy's policy on assessment submission, marking and feedback confirms that the provider uses formative assessments on all units across the performing arts provision. During the visit, the assessment team was told that the Academy intends to replicate this practice for its proposed HNC and HND in sport. The provider uses a broad range of assessment methods, with a predominant focus on the practical and applied methods commensurate with the requirements of a performing arts discipline. In some units (for example, unit 3 jazz dance 1 and unit 9 choreography 1), students can choose essays or presentations for their assessment. Students appreciate this flexibility and are actively supported by their tutors to guide their choices to ensure they develop a full range of skills.
155. The validated module and unit descriptors reviewed for the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts, and HNC and HND in sport, outline the structure of the programmes, with appropriate credit values and a mix of theoretical and practical components. The assessment team identified a potential risk around the self-selection of assessment methods in units 3 and unit 9, where students can choose between essays or presentations. While this flexibility supports student choice, there is a potential risk that students may avoid one type of assessment, which could impact the development of their skills overall. However, the Academy reassured the assessment team that this approach has been validated by the validating partner and is deemed appropriate for the programme.
156. To assess whether the Academy's assessment processes ensure a sufficient level of stretch and rigour, the assessment team reviewed a sample of assignment briefs, external examiner reports, assessment board minutes and assessment policies. The assessment team concluded that the range of assessment methods employed were appropriate to the level of study, and that the requirements of the assessments tested relevant skills and knowledge, to ensure that students are assessed effectively. As an example, the assessment brief for the acting 1 unit at Level 4 on the HNC in performing arts clearly demonstrates that students are assessed on their ability to 'apply' and 'perform' key acting principles. Students' knowledge and skills in these areas are then stretched further within the acting 2 unit at Level 5 on the HND in performing arts as the assessment brief clearly articulates that students need to 'explore techniques relevant to their chosen acting style'. Further stretch and rigour are then demonstrated at Level 6 within the research project module, where students are assessed on their ability to develop a 'rigorous research methodology' and 'critically evaluate relevant literature'. Based on the reasoning above, the assessment team advises that the Academy's current delivery of higher education provides sufficient evidence of credible plans to ensure that students on current courses are assessed effectively.
157. For the delivery of the HNC and HND sports courses, the Academy intends to apply the same approach to assessment. The assessment team is satisfied that there is credible evidence

that these processes are effective for its current provision and therefore has no concerns that these would not be credible for its future sport courses.

## Criterion B4.2.b

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course assessment is valid and reliable? (B4.2.b)**

### Advice to the OfS

158. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course the assessment is both valid and reliable. This is because the assessment processes (including assessment, marking, moderation and external examining) are robust and credible on the current HNC, HND and BA (Hons) top up. As such, assessments take place in a manner which is consistent between students and in a way that results in students demonstrating knowledge and skills as intended by the design of each assessment.

### Reasoning

159. The Academy's assessment policies, combined with information gathered from the assessment team's meetings with academic tutors and senior managers, led it to conclude that the assessment processes adopted by the Academy have validity – students demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills in the way intended by the design of the assessment.
160. Through meetings with the Academy's quality managers, the assessment team heard that all assessment briefs are internally verified prior to publication to ensure that they are of high quality and consistent across units. Additionally, the assessment team's review of a sample of assessment briefs noted that the assessment was designed and sufficiently clear to enable students to meet the learning outcomes it is intended to assess. The Academy conducts internal moderation on all summative assessments and allocates lead moderators to conduct standardisation of marking, grades and feedback. This happens across all the Academy's provision as part of the Academy's panel moderation sessions. For its BA (Hons) top up, the Academy intends to undertake first marking for all modules and second marking for the creative research project module, given the larger weighting of this module. This aligns with the quality assurance processes of its validating partner. Internal moderators are classified as 'green; amber; red' according to their experience of moderating and the Academy collaborates with external organisations to deliver training where gaps in skills and experience are identified. The arrangement with one of the collaborative partners allows monitoring of student attainment through an external examiner process, with external examiners' findings reported at assessment boards and through external examiner reports.
161. The assessment team found that the Academy has a clear appeals policy and procedure in place if any student is not satisfied with aspects of the assessment process. The assessment team was satisfied that it is a credible process. For example, the mark or grade awarded to an assessment is regarded by the Academy as a matter of academic judgement and, as such, as long as the work has been marked in accordance with the academic regulations and all the assessment procedures have been adhered to (for example, assessment verification;

internal and external moderation; confirmation at assessment boards) then it shall not be appealable. Grounds for appeal include:

- when the assessment and examination procedures have not been conducted in accordance with approved regulations
- insufficient weight given to the student's extenuating circumstances
- in cases where the examiner(s)/assessor(s) or the assessment board has been unaware of extenuating circumstances which might have adversely affected the student's performance.

162. Appeals must be submitted to the Academy's higher education quality team within 15 days of a student being notified of a decision of which they wish to appeal. An appeals board (comprising the operations manager, higher education manager and an independent programme manager) is then convened to consider documentation and evidence relating to the appeal, with all members being impartial to the original decision that led to the appeal. The outcomes of the appeals board may be to either uphold or dismiss the appeal, in which case the student can request an internal review where a member of the Academy's strategic or executive leadership team will consider the appeal. If a student remains dissatisfied with the outcome, the policy also outlines a third and final stage of appeal whereby students on the HNC and HND programmes in performing arts, and sport, can appeal to the awarding body or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

163. Because of the depth and rigour of this policy, and the clarity of the procedural process outlined within it, the assessment team was satisfied that it is a credible process for managing such cases. Furthermore, this information is readily accessible to students through the Academy's digital communications platform and VLE. As such, the assessment team was confident that students would have good awareness of its existence.

164. As such, the assessment team concluded that the current delivery of higher education by the Academy provides evidence of credible plans to ensure that, for each current higher education course, assessment is both valid and reliable. For the delivery of the HNC and HND sports courses, the Academy intends to apply the same approach to internal verification, moderation and external examination. The assessment team was satisfied that there is sufficient evidence that these processes are effective for its current provision and therefore the Academy has credible plans to ensure assessments are valid and reliable for the HNC and HND in sport.

### **Criterion B4.2.c**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that for each higher education course the academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible? (B4.2.c)**

### **Advice to the OfS**

165. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that for each higher education course the academic regulations are

designed to ensure that the relevant awards are credible. The Academy uses appropriate regulations for all its courses that are appropriate and has suitable mechanisms for monitoring both the number and classifications of its courses over time to ensure that they remain credible.

## Reasoning

166. The academic regulations governing the higher education courses delivered by the Academy derive from two separate sources. For its HNC and HND provision, the Academy uses the regulations from the awarding body alongside the procedures and policies from its collaborative partner. The academic regulations for the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts are informed by those of its validating partner. The Academy is subject to its validating partner's procedures and regulations in respect of the assessment of students' work, the requirements for relevant awards, and how it determines classifications.
167. Furthermore, the Academy has various mechanisms in place to ensure that it regularly monitors and reviews classifications of its awards to ensure that they are comparable to those of other providers. For example, the assessment team viewed external examiner reports and minutes from a variety of assessment boards where external examiners commented that they were satisfied that the classifications of awards by the Academy were consistent with those of other providers. Additionally, the assessment team reviewed annual monitoring reports from the awarding body for its HNC and HND provision and internal programme monitoring reports which demonstrated review of classifications to ensure that they remained credible.
168. The assessment team's judgement is that these regulations are sufficiently robust to ensure that relevant awards are credible because these regulations clearly set out an effective and consistent approach to the assessment and grading of students' work (including academic misconduct processes); the requirements for awards in terms of credit; and the methods used to determine classifications of those awards.

## Criterion B4.2.d

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that, for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the applicable higher education course? (B4.2.d)**

## Advice to the OfS

169. The assessment team's view is that the Academy has credible plans to ensure that, for each higher education course, the academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the higher education courses it currently provides, and intends to provide in the future.

## Reasoning

170. The academic regulations of the Academy's validating partner and the Academy's programme specifications include English language as part of its standard language of study

and assessment requirements. The assessment team noted that English language proficiency as an entry requirement is advertised by the Academy as part of its BA (Hons) top up performing arts provision and its proposed HNC and HND in sport, but not that of its current HNC and HND in performing arts. When asked about this discrepancy, the Academy staff explained that this was likely because the Academy does not (and has not previously) recruited any international students. The majority of its HNC and HND performing arts students are recruited from within the Academy's existing Level 3 pathway, and thus the Academy is aware of their English language proficiency. This means the existing proficiency (or lack of) in English for most students would likely be known at enrolment, with any individual support needs being provided by the Academy's specialist English and Maths support tutors.

171. The Academy currently employs a team of eight specialist English and Maths tutors who service all its existing further and higher education provision. Students access these support tutors via referral from the academic tutors, who use formative and summative assessments to identify when individual students may benefit from additional support. While the assessment team advised that this resource is sufficient for the Academy's current needs, the Academy acknowledged that any future rise in admissions to its courses from international students (particularly at Level 6) would likely place more demand upon these services which, to date, the Academy has not yet encountered.
172. The assessment team verified the technical proficiency in the English language of the Academy's students at all levels in oral and written form by sampling summative assessments, meeting students during the visit and during two classroom observations. In all instances, the assessment team noted the technical proficiency demonstrated by students to be of a level appropriate to the level and content of their academic studies.
173. The assessment team noted that the Academy's academic regulations do not technically regulate for proficiency in the English language – other than specifying that English is the standard language of study and assessment requirements. However, in practice, the assessment team was satisfied that proficiency in English is well managed by the Academy and, as such, there is very low risk of non-compliance with this condition. This is because the Academy's current delivery of higher education provides credible plans to ensure good proficiency in English, as outlined in paragraph 171 and 172. The assessment team concluded that the Academy's assessments 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.

#### **Criterion B4.2.e**

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans to ensure that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously? (B4.2.e)**

#### **Advice to the OfS**

174. The assessment team's view is that Academy has credible plans that would enable it to ensure, if registered, that relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and would remain so. This view is largely underpinned by the Academy's

assessment board processes and external examining procedures which allow it to ensure that its awards are credible and can be compared to those it has granted previously.

## Reasoning

175. The assessment team reviewed documentation from the Academy's assessment boards and external examiner reports, where it was clear that the academic regulations governing the assessment of units and modules are credible and consistently applied. Furthermore, this evidence was triangulated with conversations at the visit where the assessment team heard that the Academy and its validating partner are keeping under review the credibility of the awards being granted over time. For example, the quality manager and quality assurance leader outlined the various monitoring processes, and internal moderation and standardisation meetings, that are implemented to ensure that awards remain credible and comparable over time. These processes include regular meetings with a representative from the awarding body for its HNC and HND provision, accompanied by an annual monitoring report and the Academy's internal programme monitoring reports. The team found that these processes include regular review of classifications over time to ensure that awards remain credible and comparable to previous cohorts. There is evidence of the ongoing process of programme monitoring and enhancement reports by both the Academy and its validating partner, alongside discussions during assessment boards, and the Academy's engagement with its external examiners.
176. While the Academy does not grant awards for its BA (Hons) top up, it has a range of processes in place through its validating partner that are similar to those outlined above. Thus, the assessment team advised that the Academy would continue to ensure relevant awards granted to students (for its future Level 6 provision) are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

## B4 conclusions

**Does Sysco Business Skills Academy have credible plans that would enable it, if registered, to comply with condition B4 from the date of registration?**

177. The assessment team considered that the Academy has credible plans to ensure, if registered, that it would comply with all the requirements of condition B4 with reference to assessment and awards.
178. Through its review of conditions B4.2.a, B4.2.b, B4.2.c, B4.2.d and B4.2.e, the assessment team found that the Academy has credible plans to ensure students will receive a high quality academic experience. This was demonstrated by the Academy's programme documentation, regulatory processes (derived from its collaborative partnership agreements with awarding and validating partners), robust assessment, marking, moderation procedures and exam board processes.
179. The assessment team identified no broader concerns relevant to assessment and awards to report to the OfS.



## Part 2: Assessment of condition B8: Standards

### Requirement

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

### Advice to the OfS

180. The assessment team's view is that the Academy demonstrates in a credible manner that the standards set for the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect the sector-recognised standards. The assessment team's view is that the Academy meets these standards for all its current awards and those which it intends to award in future.

### Reasoning

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

181. The assessment team viewed the Academy's current programme specifications and those of its intended provision in the future. The titles of qualifications delivered by the Academy, and those that it intends to provide in future, accurately reflect the level of students' achievement, and the typical volume, level and field of study undertaken.

182. The assessment team's view is that the qualification titles of the HNCs, HNDs, and BA (Hons) top up in performing arts accurately reflect the level of students' achievement for each award and appropriately reflect the levels at which these qualifications are expected in the sector-recognised standards. The final exit award of the BA (Hons) top up is awarded on completion of a programme of study at Level 6, with the HND at Level 5, and the HNC at Level 4, as evidenced by programme specifications and evidence of course delivery. Likewise, the programme specification for the proposed qualifications of HNC and HND in sport from 2025 demonstrate the Academy's plans to align with the sector-recognised standards for the courses that it intends to provide in the future.

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

183. The assessment team's view is that the volumes of credit required for the awards that the Academy delivers, and those it intends to provide in future, are aligned to sector-recognised standards. The assessment team reviewed programme specifications across its current and proposed higher education provision, and course delivery documents. The team advised that the volume of credits for each course and level aligns with the sector-recognised standards. The volumes of credit are clearly articulated as the minimum achievement required for a student to be awarded each qualification.

184. The volume of credits at the Academy for the achievement of qualification of a HNC (120 credits), HND (240 credits), and (BA) Hons top up (120 credits) in performing arts accurately reflects those which students must achieve for each award, as evidenced by the Academy within its current programme specifications. Likewise, the programme specification provided for the proposed qualifications of a HNC (120 credits) and HND (240 credits) in sport from



2025, also accurately reflects the volume of credit that students must typically achieve for these awards, as set out in the sector-recognised standards.

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

185. The assessment team's view is that the qualification descriptors for all qualifications delivered by the Academy (and those that it intends to deliver in future) align to sector-recognised standards, specifically A.3.1 to A.3.3 of the sector-recognised standards. The assessment team reviewed the Academy's programme specifications and was of the view that the learning, teaching and assessment strategies, alongside the course learning outcomes, are commensurate with the expected threshold standards for Levels 4, 5 and 6 respectively, in both performing arts and sport.
186. The assessment team found that the programme specifications for the HNC in both performing arts and sport accurately reflect the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 4 as outlined in A.3.1 of the sector-recognised standards. For example, the learning outcomes within both the performing arts and sport programme specifications clearly articulate that students will demonstrate 'knowledge and understanding of key concepts necessary to perform at a high level' in performing arts or the global sport environment. This is reinforced within specific unit assessments for the HNC in performing arts. These make direct reference to assessing a range of learning outcomes that enable students to 'present, evaluate, explore and communicate' their learning. Such outcomes are commensurate with the qualification outcomes outlined within the sector-recognised standards for a Level 4 qualification. Similar examples of alignment with the sector-recognised standards for Level 4 awards are also evident with the proposed HNC sport provision. For example, unit 1 requires students to 'examine the role of physical activity' and 'illustrate the impact of lifestyle factors', while unit 3 has learning outcomes associated with 'presenting the project and communicating recommendations'.
187. Furthermore, the Academy's HND performing arts, and its proposed HND in sport, also appropriately reflect the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 5 as outlined in A.3.2 of the sector-recognised standards. The learning outcomes within the programme specifications for both subject areas clearly refer to students needing to demonstrate understanding and application of underlying concepts in an employment context. For example, one of the learning outcomes for the HND in performing arts states that students should 'understand the local, regional and global context of performing arts and.... aspire to international career pathways'. This is reinforced within specific unit assessments for the HND in performing arts which require students to achieve learning outcomes demonstrating critical 'analysis' and 'review'. These outcomes are commensurate with the qualification outcomes for a Level 5 award within the sector-recognised standards. Similar examples of alignment with the sector-recognised standards for Level 5 awards are also evident with the proposed HND sport provision. For example, unit 23 requires students to 'reflect on the application of research methodologies and concepts', while unit 33 has learning outcomes associated with 'analysis of constituent parts of physical literacy'.
188. The BA (Hons) top up in performing arts course appropriately reflects the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 6, set out in section A.3.3 of the sector-recognised standards. This is because the course learning outcomes outlined within the programme specification require students to 'consolidate and apply advanced knowledge' and 'critique

contemporary trends' in the performing arts industry, as well as 'applying independent research skills and advanced critical thinking to explore theoretical perspectives in performance practice'. These learning outcomes align with descriptors outlined in paragraphs 25-28 of the sector-recognised standards for a Level 6 higher education qualification. Furthermore, the assessment team reviewed the module descriptors of the BA (Hons) top up in performing arts and noted specific module learning outcomes requiring students to 'critically appraise their own performance' and demonstrate 'adaptability' and 'advanced awareness of professional development'. These further reinforce the assessment team's view that the standards of the Academy's courses align with those of the sector-recognised standards for Level 6 qualifications.

## **B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees**

189. The classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees awarded by the Academy's validated partner are appropriately aligned to sector-recognised standards. The assessment team reviewed Level 6 assessment briefs and grade rubrics, alongside programme specification. The assessment team's view is that the classification descriptors set out the outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a bachelors' degree within a particular classification because they articulate what students must demonstrate to achieve a certain classification.
190. For example, the rubric for the Level 6 research project module aligns with the sector-recognised standards for classifications as outlined within Table 3 of the sector-recognised standards. The rubric describes how, in order to achieve a pass grade, students must produce a final research project which 'meets the demands of industry...demonstrates critical thinking...and uses underpinning research/theory to support enquiry'. Whereas for a first-class grade, students must demonstrate 'sophisticated understanding of industry demands', and show 'outstanding critical thinking supported by intelligent analysis' and demonstrate 'outstanding depth and application of theoretical research, without the need for extension, that consistently illuminates debate and is appropriate for a professional platform'.
191. The documentation also accurately describes when a student has not met the expected standards for this award as there is 'inadequate evidence of critical thinking', 'limited understanding of industry demands', and a lack of demonstration of sufficient knowledge and understanding, all of which are further evidence of the Academy's alignment with sector-recognised standards for classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' qualifications.

## **Requirement**

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

## **Advice to the OfS**

192. The assessment team's view is that the Academy demonstrates in a credible manner that the achievement of students on the courses it intends to provide, if it is registered, appropriately reflect the sector-recognised standards. The assessment team assessed a range of evidence, primarily deriving from the courses that the Academy has delivered for several

years (HNC and HND in performing arts), which it triangulated at the visit. In the assessment team's view, student achievement reflects sector-recognised standards for all its current awards. The Academy's current approaches to ensuring student achievement appropriately reflects sector-recognised standards are therefore effective. The assessment team advised that it is likely that this will remain the case for those courses which the Academy intends to deliver in the future.

## **Reasoning**

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

193. The assessment team's view is that the awards made to students for each qualification appropriately reflect the titles set out in the programme specification for each course. The documentation from the assessment boards confirms the following award titles for its current provision: HNC performing arts (general); HND performing arts (musical theatre); HND musical theatre (Sysco); HND musical theatre top up (Sysco).
194. The assessment team's examination of students' assessed work, and feedback, provided direct evidence of the level of work assessed, recent external examiners' reports (capturing the view of subject specialists), and the assessment board reports. This showed that the content and assessment of the modules within these programmes appropriately reflect the award titles.
195. While the Academy does not yet have any evidence of student achievement at Level 6 (as the Level 6 course is currently in its first year of delivery), the assessment team advised that, based upon its track record of delivering appropriately titled awards at lower levels, the Academy would likely effectively recognise student achievement appropriately for its future BA (Hons) top up provision.

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

196. The assessment team advised that the Academy appropriately delivers courses that result in awards to students who accumulate the volume of credit necessary for an award, as set out in the relevant programme specifications and in Table 2 of the sector-recognised standards. This is evidenced by the assessment team's review of the Academy's assessment board paperwork which shows, for example, that students who complete 120 credits are awarded an HNC, and students who complete 240 credits are awarded an HND.

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

197. The assessment team's view is that the achievement of students awarded both HNCs and HNDs in performing arts appropriately reflects all parts of the relevant descriptors for higher education qualifications at Level 4 (HNC) as set out in paragraphs 13-17 in Section A.3.1 of the sector-recognised standards, and at Level 5 (HND) as set out in paragraphs 18-23 in Section A.3.2. The assessment team reviewed students' assessed work and feedback provided to students and found direct evidence that assessed student work is at the appropriate threshold level, and found that, based on a sample, students consistently met the relevant Level 4 or Level 5 descriptors for each award. For example, the team reviewed assessment submissions and videos of performances from students being awarded Level 4 HNC awards in performing arts which demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of key concepts within the subject area. The assessment team noted that students are able to

explore or communicate their understanding in a structured and coherent way, both of which directly align with the qualification descriptors of the sector-recognised standards for a Level 4 qualification. Additionally, the assessment team reviewed assessed work and videos of performances for students awarded Level 5 HND awards in performing arts and similarly found that students clearly demonstrated skills and knowledge aligned to the sector-recognised standards for Level 5 qualifications. This was because assessed student work showed that students could demonstrate a wide application and critical understanding of performing arts concepts within an industry or employment context, and there was evidence of critical self-reflection and personal development.

198. While the assessment team was unable to review any student work for the Level 6 performing arts, or HNC and HND sport courses, the assessment team advised that the achievement of students on the courses that the Academy intends to provide, if it is registered, would appropriately reflect the sector-recognised standards set out in all parts A.3 of the sector-recognised standards. This is because a review of the Academy's current delivery, evidence within its programme specifications and triangulated by conversations with the course delivery team and senior leadership team, demonstrated the Academy's diligent practice within its existing Level 4 and Level 5 assessment. This leads the assessment team to conclude that the Academy's plans to assess its Level 6 performing arts, and HNC and HND sport awards, are credible.

#### **B: Classification descriptors for Level 6 bachelors' degrees**

199. On the basis of the Academy's previous track record of appropriate classification descriptors for its provision at Level 4 and Level 5, in combination with the Academy's evidence of proposed Level 6 assessment briefs and grade rubrics and programme specifications, it is the assessment team's view that the achievement of students awarded Level 6 top up delivered by the Academy from 2024-25 would be appropriately classified in alignment with sector-recognised standards.
200. The assessment team noted how the provider currently uses classifications for its existing awards and found that it appropriately awards higher classifications (for example, distinction versus pass) on its current HNC and HND in performing arts courses to students who demonstrate higher-level knowledge and understanding, skill performance, application of theory and/or critical analysis and thinking. This is evidenced through clear assessment rubrics and unit assessment briefs which inform students, before they submit work, of what they need to demonstrate to achieve each classification. Clear use of these rubrics by the programme delivery team during the marking and feedback process provides further evidence. Furthermore, the evidence of internal moderation, and its external examination processes provides additional evidence of the Academy's current use of classifications for the courses it delivers.
201. While the assessment team was unable to view any assessed Level 6 work, it considered assessment rubrics for Level 6 modules which provided evidence of clear criteria upon which the Academy plans to use grade classifications. These, alongside the Academy's existing diligent practice of using classifications for its existing awards, led the assessment team to advise that the Academy has credible plans to classify awards for its BA (Hons) top up in line with the sector-recognised standards.

# Annex A: Approach to sampling of evidence

1. For the 2024-25 academic year, the Academy offers a HNC and HND in performing arts. In addition, the Academy intends to offer a BA (Hons) in performing arts top up. For the 2025-26 academic year, the Academy intends to offer a HNC and HND in sport. Due to the small number of HNC and HND courses, it was deemed proportionate and representative to request all programme specifications and all module outlines and handbooks for these courses.
2. In addition, the Academy offers four courses in management and housing which are run based on requests from commercial clients. Programme specifications and module outlines and handbooks were requested and received for three modules from the Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership, the Diploma in Management and Leadership, and the Certificate in Housing because these courses reflect a range of levels offered (Levels 7, 5 and 4 respectively).
3. The Academy is looking to exit the apprenticeship market upon the completion of its existing apprenticeship cohorts. As such, the assessment team did not include the apprenticeship programmes in the sample.
4. The assessment team considered this an appropriate sample of programme specifications and module outlines and handbooks to enable it to advise on whether the standards set for the courses provided by the Academy, if it is registered, appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards. It covered a range of levels and disciplines and took account of changes to the Academy's portfolio.
5. The Academy provided student-assessed work and evidence of student achievement. For each piece of student work, the Academy provided the relevant assessment brief, assessment mark and the feedback given to the student. The assessment team considered the following random sample of student work a proportionate and representative sample to enable it to reach a view on whether the achievement of students on the courses provided by the Academy, if it is registered, appropriately reflect the applicable sector-recognised standards.
6. For the HNC and HND performing arts courses:
  - a. Exam board paperwork for the most recent two years covering awards for this course.
  - b. All assessed student work for one student who was awarded the diploma.
  - c. All assessed student work for one student who failed or was not awarded the diploma.
7. For the courses in management and housing:
  - a. Exam board paperwork for the most recent year covering awards for the course.
  - b. All assessed student work for one student who was awarded the qualification.
  - c. All assessed student work for one student who failed or was not awarded the qualification.

8. The Academy advised it had only one example of a student who failed across their higher education provision. As such, assessed student work for one student who did not receive a qualification was shared with the assessment team.
9. The assessment team received two years' worth of exam board paperwork for the HNC and HND performing arts courses. It used this to assess whether only the students with the required number of credits continue and complete the courses, and whether the awards reflect the titles in the programme specification and the qualification descriptors. For the courses in management and housing (which the Academy indicated it only offers on an ad hoc basis), one year's worth of exam board paperwork was received.
10. The assessment team did not include the apprenticeship programmes in the sample of assessed student work. The Academy is discontinuing these courses and the provider's records in the assessment of student work is gathered by including the HNC and HND programmes, and the management and housing courses in the sample.
11. The assessment team considers this an appropriate sample of student-assessed work and exam board paperwork to enable it to advise on whether the achievement of students on the courses provided by the Academy, if it is registered, appropriately reflect the applicable sector-recognised standards.



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