

# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): Key Findings 2016–17



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# Introduction

This report summarises the findings of 54 reviews of alternative providers (APs) conducted by QAA in the academic year 2016–17<sup>1</sup>.

In 2016–17, APs were defined as providers of higher education courses which did not directly receive funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (or its equivalent bodies in the devolved administrations), did not receive direct annual public funding and were not further education colleges. Recent reforms to higher education in England have changed the way all providers are funded and regulated.

APs have been reviewed by QAA since 2013 to satisfy two requirements:

- to have their higher education courses designated by the Department for Education for public (student loans) funding
- to acquire or retain permission from the Home Office to recruit international students from outside Europe.

The 54 reviews covered by this report were conducted using the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) method. This review method is for APs running courses leading to UK higher education qualifications. It is carried out by peer reviewers – staff and students from other providers. The reviewers are guided by a set of UK Expectations about the provision of higher education contained in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The results of the reviews we conduct for other kinds of APs, such as providers running courses leading to non-UK awards, are not considered in this report.

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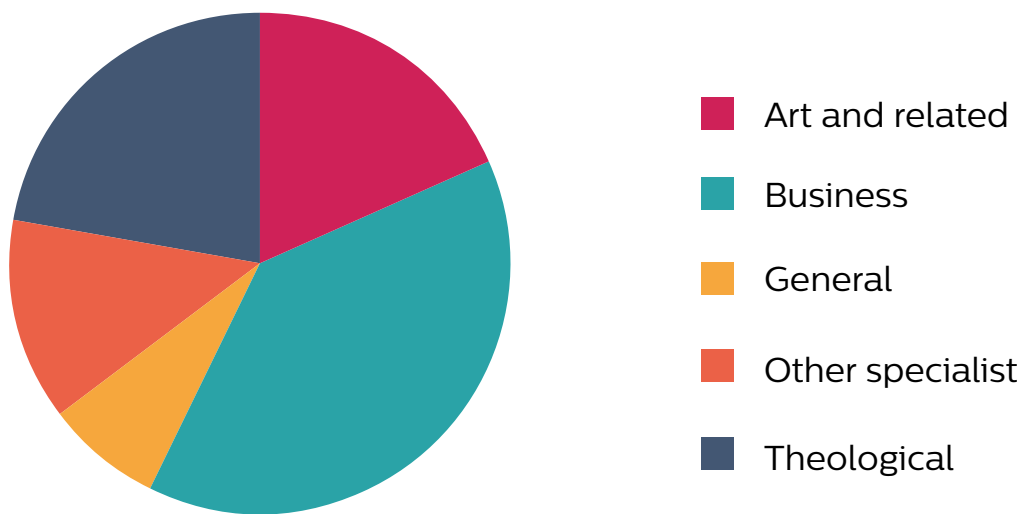
<sup>1</sup> This report covers reviews conducted in the academic year 2016–17 and published between October 2016 and November 2017. All the reviews are from 2016–17, apart from Cliff College and London Churchill College which were conducted the previous year but published after the deadline for the 2015–16 report.

# Types of provider

The 54 reviews encompass a variety of different course awards including Higher National Diplomas, diplomas and degrees. Curricula has been more diverse than that covered by providers in the previous findings report, however, the vast majority of APs reviewed are specialist providers. Specialist providers are focused in a single discipline or small number of discipline areas.

Just under 40 per cent of providers considered in this report (21) predominantly offer business courses, just under a fifth (10) deliver courses in performance art, film or related to the creative industries, and just over a fifth (12) offer some form of religious education. The remaining providers' curricula cover areas including counselling, law, teaching and health.

**Chart 1: Coverage of providers**



The providers reviewed range from recently established providers such as UK Business College (set up in 2012), to providers who were originally founded in the nineteenth century: City and Guilds of London Art School, Cliff College, ESCP Europe-Business School and Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

Fifty of the 54 providers are based in England. Providers tend to be clustered around London with 70 per cent within a 15-mile radius of the centre. Two providers are situated in Northern Ireland (Belfast Bible College Ltd and Union Theological College, Belfast), the Union Foundation is based in Wales and the Free Church of Scotland College is located in Scotland.



**Figure 1: Geographical location of providers in London**

# What has worked well

Of the 54 providers reviewed, 46 (85 per cent) received positive judgements in all areas. Four providers received commendations: London Studio Centre and The London Film School both received commendations for quality of learning opportunities, the Free Church of Scotland College received a commendation for quality of information, and Regent's University London received a commendation for enhancement.

London Studio Centre Ltd (LSC) is an independent conservatoire dance and music theatre higher education provider located in North Finchley. The Centre excelled in its approach to student engagement with activities noted including its detailed personal tutoring policy, the embedding of professional practice throughout the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and the extent and accessibility of student support. The London Film School was also applauded for proactive engagement with students that has enabled them to engender a strong sense of community supporting development of their academic, personal and professional potential.

The Free Church of Scotland College received its commendation for the comprehensive and detailed information provided to staff and students exemplified by the Staff and Course Handbooks.

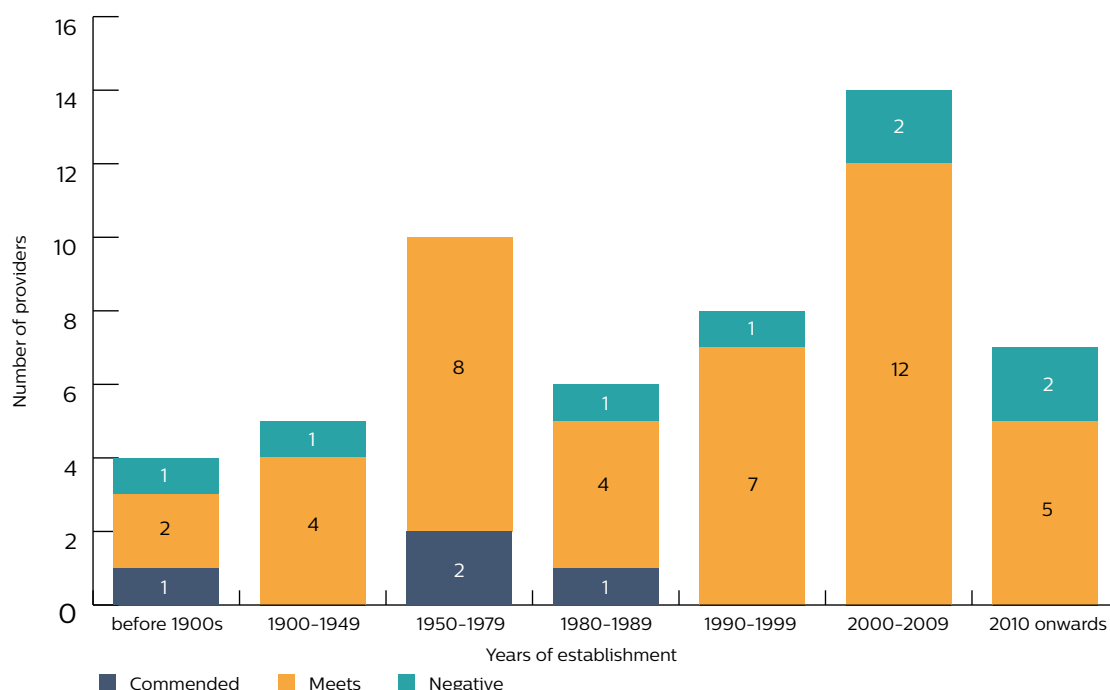
Regent's University London received its commendation for its personal tutor system, its first year Global Perspectives module, and its strategic approach to both the professional development of student facing staff and student employability skills.

In the previous AP findings report a number of factors were found to be associated with high performing APs: universities as awarding bodies, a sustainable volume of higher education provision, longevity, and having a distinct mission and purpose.

The 2016-17 data reveals that longevity and student numbers continue to play a role, however, caution should be applied given the small sample size.

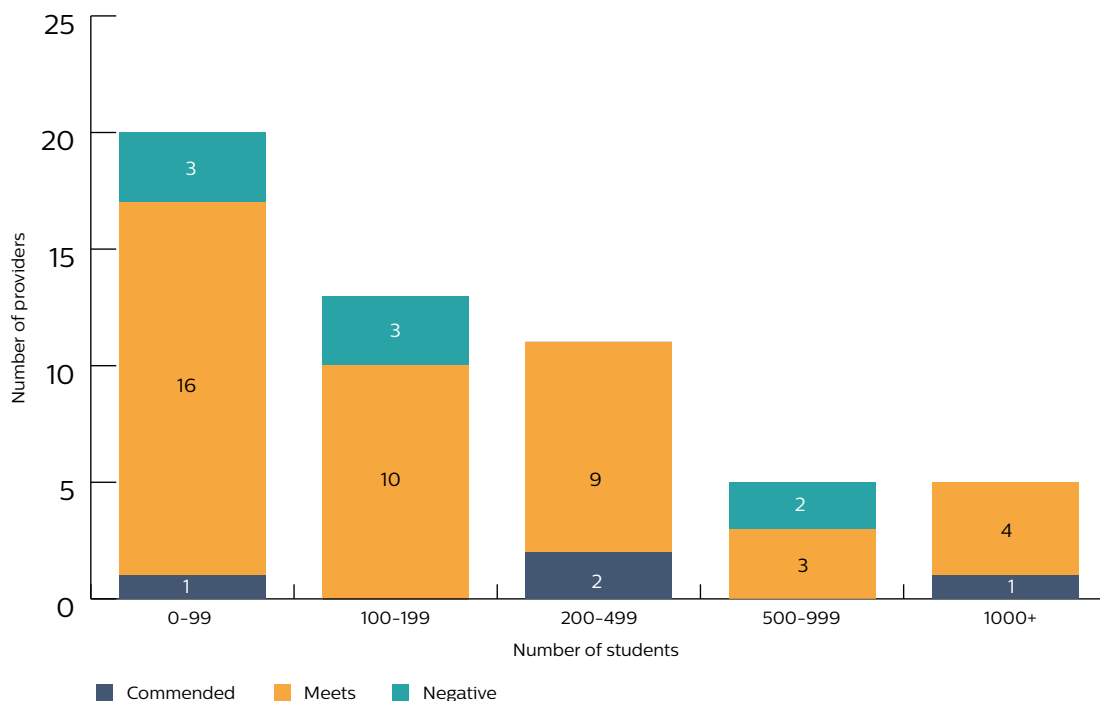
## Chart 2: Review outcomes by year of establishment.

Both commended and meets are positive outcomes. Commended outcomes are where one or more of the judgement areas was a commended outcome and all other judgements were 'meets UK expectations'. Meets outcomes are where the provider has received 'meets UK expectations' in all judgements. Negative outcomes are where the provider has received one or more of either 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' or 'does not meet UK expectations' in one or more judgement.



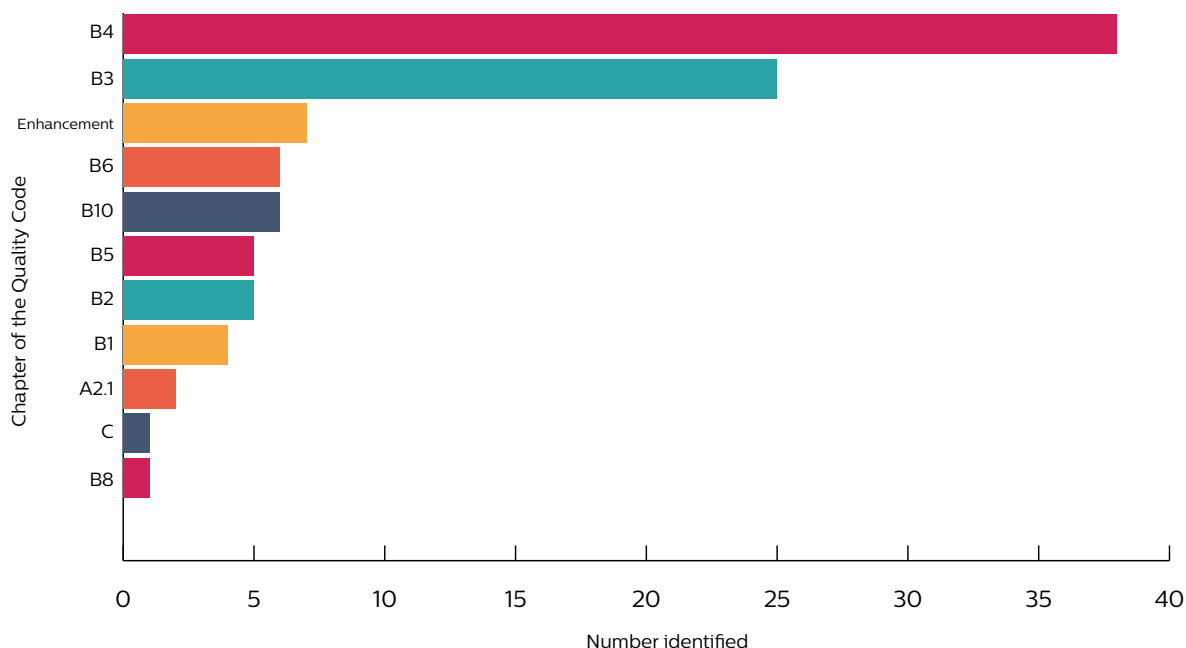
**Chart 3: Review outcomes by number of students.**

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Review teams most frequently identified features of good practice relating to the following chapters of the Quality Code: *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement* (38 features of good practice), and *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching* (25 features of good practice).

**Chart 4: Features of good practice**



# What could be improved

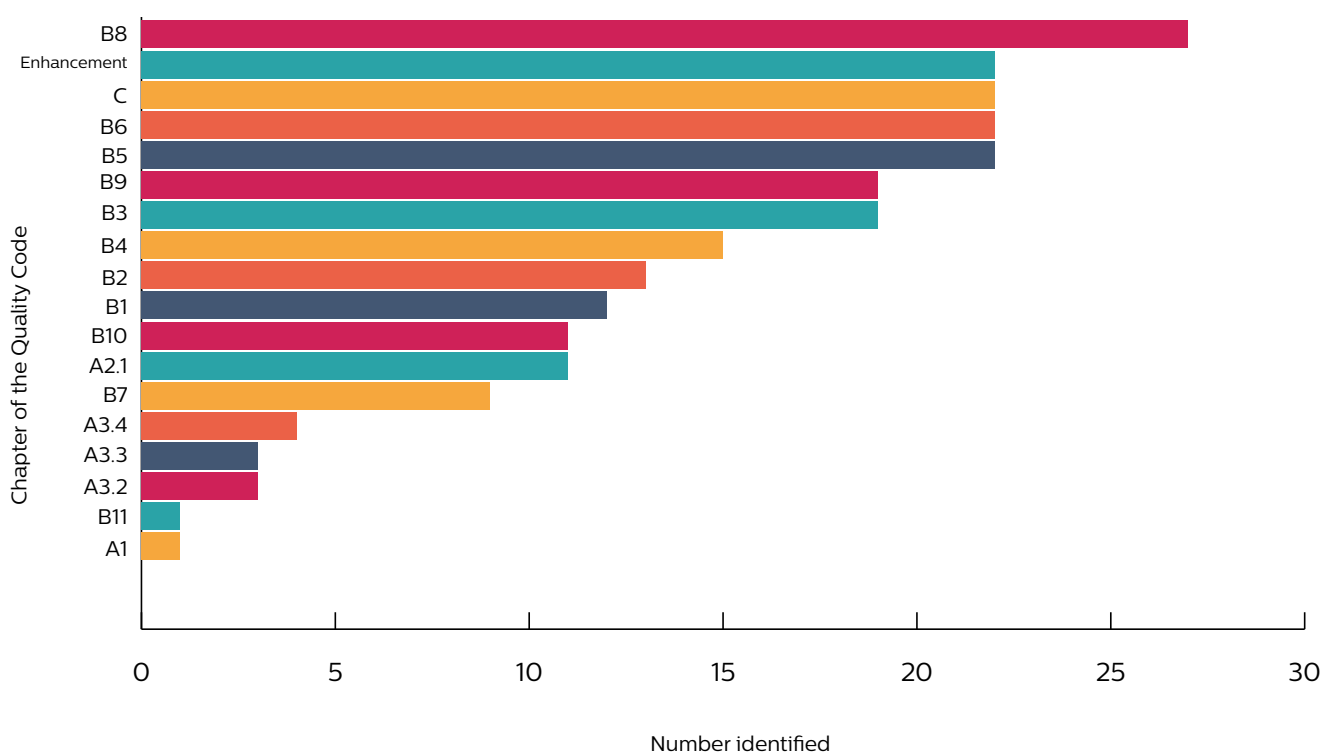
Eight providers received unsatisfactory judgements (15 per cent), a lower proportion than in the previous three years. These providers were: Cliff College, ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd, London Churchill College, Millennium Performing Arts, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Portsmouth International College Ltd, Union Foundation, and Waltham International College Ltd. Where these providers have requested a subsequent re-review all completed re-reviews have resulted in the provider receiving a positive outcome.

There is little these eight providers have in common. They vary in subject coverage, location, validating body and year of establishment. However, most of the providers have a relatively small number of students (six of the eight providers have under 125 students).

Two providers (Union Foundation and Portsmouth International College Ltd) received two or more unsatisfactory judgements. At Union Foundation the issues were widespread covering the design, development and approval of programmes, admissions policy, complaints procedures and public information about its provision. Portsmouth International College Ltd had problems with their handling of academic appeals, student engagement and ensuring the calibre of appointed staff members.

Recommendations were more widely spread than features of good practice but most were received in respect of the following areas of the Quality Code: *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* (27 recommendations); *Enhancement* (22 recommendations); *Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision* (22 recommendations); *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning* (22 recommendations); and *Chapter B5: Student Engagement* (22 recommendations).

**Chart 5: Recommendations**



# Conclusions

Alternative providers are an important part of the higher education landscape, contributing to the diversity, choice and opportunities available. Although collectively referred to as ‘alternative providers’, QAA’s reports have consistently shown that this is a highly diverse group in terms of mission, size, specialism, reputation and track record.

Government policy actively supports new, high quality providers in entering the sector, while safeguarding quality and standards. As this report illustrates, the APs reviewed in 2016–17 performed better than previous cohorts: although these are relatively small numbers, around 85 per cent of the 54 Higher Education Review (AP) reviews had positive outcomes.

**Table 1: Higher Education Review (APs) results from findings reports**

Year covered by HER AP report	Positive	Negative	Total reviews	Commendations
2013–15	19 (70%)	8 (30%)	27	2 (7%) Royal School of Needlework and London School of Business and Management Ltd
2015–16	31 (82%)	7 (18%)	38	4 (11%) SAE Education Ltd, BIMM, Edge Hotel School, London School of Business and Management
2016–17	46 (85%)	8 (15%)	54	4 (7%) London Studio Centre, London Film School, Free Church of Scotland College, and Regent’s University London

# Appendix 1: Alternative providers reviewed 2016–17

Provider	Date of review/monitoring
All Nations Christian College	October 2016
Amity University in London	November 2016
Ashridge	February 2017
Belfast Bible College Ltd	October 2016
Central Film School London Ltd	November 2016
Centre For Advanced Studies Ltd	July 2017
City and Guilds of London Art School	January 2017
Cliff College	June 2016
David Game College	November 2016
Empire College London Ltd (London Campus)	June 2017
ESCP Europe-Business School	November 2016
Free Church of Scotland College t/a Edinburgh Theological Seminary	September 2016
Global Banking School Ltd	November 2016
HY Education Ltd t/a Apex College London	April 2017
ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd	July 2017
International Business College Manchester Limited	October 2016
Kensington Education Foundation Ltd t/a Kensington College of Business	October 2016
Leo Baeck College	November 2016
London Bridge Business Academy Ltd	November 2016
London Churchill College	May 2016
London College of Business Sciences Ltd	February 2017
London College of Business Studies Ltd (formerly AA Hamilton College Ltd)	July 2017
London College of Creative Media Ltd t/a LCCM	November 2016
London Film Academy Ltd	November 2016
London School of Academics Ltd	September 2016
London School of Commerce	October 2016
London School of Commerce and IT Ltd	November 2016
London Studio Centre Ltd	May 2017
Luther King House Educational Trust	May 2017
Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd	June 2017
Millennium Performing Arts	May 2017
Newbold College	February 2017
OLC (Europe) Ltd t/a Organisational Learning Centre	November 2016
Oxford Centre for Mission Studies	October 2016
Point Blank Ltd	June 2017
Portsmouth International College Ltd	August 2016
QAHE (Ulst) Limited	September 2016

Regent's University London	October 2016
Royal Academy of Dance	June 2017
RTC Education trading as Regent College	September 2016
School of Economics and Law	February 2017
Schumacher College (Dartington Hall Trust)	November 2016
Sherwood Counselling and Psychotherapy Ltd	June 2017
The Cambridge Theological Federation	May 2017
The London International Film School Ltd t/a London Film School	October 2016
The Minster Centre	February 2017
The Prince's School of Traditional Arts	October 2016
UK Business College Ltd	March 2017
UK College of Business and Computing Ltd	May 2017
Union Foundation	April 2017
Union Theological College, Belfast	October 2016
University College of Estate Management	September 2016
Waltham International College Limited	November 2016
West London College	October 2016

## Appendix 2: Review outcomes

Judgement	Outcome	Percentage	Number
Academic Standards	meets UK expectations	100%	54
	requires improvement to meet UK expectations		
	does not meet UK expectations		
	Higher National provision does not meet UK expectations; all other provision does		
Learning opportunities	are commended	3.5%	2
	meets UK expectations	87%	47
	requires improvement to meet UK expectations	6%	3
	does not meet UK expectations	3.5%	2
Information	is commended	2%	1
	meets UK expectations	94%	51
	requires improvement to meet UK expectations	2%	1
	does not meet UK expectations	2%	1
Enhancement	is commended	2%	1
	meets UK expectations	90%	49
	requires improvement to meet UK expectations	6%	3
	does not meet UK expectations	2%	1

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