

UN Global Compact Communication on Progress

June 2022

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Letter of support for the UN Global Compact



Manchester, June 2022

The Global Compact is the largest and most important worldwide alliance for responsible business management. The commitment to conduct business responsibly in alignment with the ten principles is of great significance in progressing the enactment of human rights, the realisation of international workers' standards, environmental protection and the prevention of corruption.

AlphaPlus signed up to the Global Compact in November 2018 and has continued to actively engage with it.

Our business involves contact with many national and international customers and suppliers. Our core team has more than doubled in size since the beginning of lockdown, and we therefore find the commitments to labour particularly meaningful. The environment is also a key concern for our employees and the Board, and we actively promote initiatives in this area. We have tried to communicate the principles of the Global Compact and our responses not only to our employees but also to our partners in all areas of work.

The adoption of the principles also aligns with sustainable business practices. As a company, we take a holistic view of the success of the company. An enterprise can only be profitable in the long term when it considers social and environmental factors alongside those of profit.

In January 2022 AlphaPlus was acquired by AQA. AQA is the UK's biggest exam board, setting and marking around half the GCSEs and A-levels taken in England each year. This acquisition allows AlphaPlus to pass on the benefits of AQA's considerable assessment, research and technological capabilities to our clients while operating as a standalone subsidiary of AQA.

In the last year we have moved from working from home in response to the pandemic, to a hybrid mode with most staff being in the office two days a week. As a company we have worked to support all our staff in this transition, taking into account attitudes to risk and the need to shield in some circumstances. Consideration will be given to such factors as we move into a new era.

We set out in this report our ongoing commitment to the principles of the Global Compact progress and how this is reflected in our daily business practice. We will then aim to continue to build on this in future years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Romy Short'. The signature is stylized with a large, looped 'R' and a cursive 'Short'.

Romy Short

Chair of the Board

AlphaPlus' profile

AlphaPlus is an education consultancy that specialises in the design, development and deployment of qualifications and their underpinning assessment, and in the evaluation of their performance and impact.

AlphaPlus helps organisations make their educational assessments better. Many organisations use assessments – academic examinations, portfolio assessments of skills, observational workplace assessments for professionals. In all cases, good assessments make sure that people get the outcome they deserve: the right people pass and fail; the grades awarded are fair; the results are honest, reliable and defensible, and reflect the attributes that stakeholders value.

We work with our customers across many types of education (school, college, vocational and professional education) both in the UK and internationally. Sometimes our work starts with helping people to write better tests and questions. At other times it involves undertaking statistical analysis of assessments to check they are fair, or reviewing the way assessments are run to check that they are consistent. We've all done exams where we felt we didn't get a fair chance to shine – at AlphaPlus we work with the people who run these assessments to help give everyone a fair chance.

Assessment theory (the academic discipline that explores how assessments work) is a highly technical area, which a small number of universities around the world specialise in. Our approach is relatively unusual in that we combine the best that academic theory has to offer with the outcomes-focused approach that modern assessment businesses need – taking account of the practical requirements in everyday life that can make academic theory difficult to apply in an unmodified form.

AlphaPlus is a well-established, substantial and trusted consultancy organisation providing research, design, development and delivery services for qualifications, certification, assessment and related educational matters to customers in the UK and overseas.

AlphaPlus is responsive to customer need, adaptable and profitable, combining the best of commercial and educational sectors. We have a deserved reputation for high levels of educational expertise and for conducting our work with ethics and integrity. AlphaPlus uses progressive working methods: we are collaborative and innovative; bringing useful solutions to our customers. We bring best-in-class teams together and compete on quality rather than cost.

Our processes are well-founded, robust and resilient. Our team is stable and sustainable, including through changes in key personnel.

Our potential and current customers trust us on national and international high-stakes delivery projects. We are careful about what we commit to and then we work hard to keep our promises. Our customers depend on our high-quality delivery.

AlphaPlus has recently been acquired by AQA, the UK's biggest exam board, which sets and marks around half the GCSEs and A-levels taken in England each year. It is a world leader in assessment, with a cutting-edge research department focusing on advancing assessment and a joint venture with Oxford University Press – OxfordAQA – offering qualifications internationally.

This acquisition allows AlphaPlus to pass on the benefits of AQA's considerable assessment, research and technological capabilities to our clients while operating as a standalone subsidiary of AQA. AQA's goal of advancing education by helping teachers and students realise their potential is strongly aligned with AlphaPlus' values, and we welcome this exciting opportunity to develop our work both in the UK and internationally.

Results and Measures

The following measures and results are those which are currently carried out as a part of our wider company policies and ethos. These align with the ten principles of the Global Compact and we will seek to further expand these particularly in the areas of Labour and Environment.

Human Rights



The company has policies that are regularly reviewed at Board level which cover all areas of working including an anti slavery statement. In general, we work only with clients and suppliers where we have a personal relationship and are confident in their business practices.



The board considers every new contract both at home and, particularly, abroad in the light of human rights or ethical issues that may arise during the fulfilment of any such work. They reserve the right not to proceed should any concerns or conflicts become apparent.



We work with a range of associates. Our onboarding processes include the taking up of references and the review of CVs so that we ensure that they are committed to the ethos and principles of our business.

Labour



Women are represented at all levels of the business, including board and senior management levels. They make up 40% of AlphaPlus' workforce at current levels (2021: 37%). We now voluntarily report on Gender Pay Equality at AlphaPlus.



The company maternity and adoption pay policies have been enhanced in response to staff feedback, and are now well above legal minimums. Provision is made in the office for nursing mothers.



The company has recently increased its sick pay policy to cover up to 13 weeks. After this, an insurance policy covers 75% of salary for up to 2 years. This policy also provides a range of benefits including GP access.



We practise equal opportunities recruitment, including the guaranteed interview scheme for people with disabilities. Recruitment is based solely on applicant skills and suitability for the job description.



Appraisals are carried out annually. These are constructive in nature and aim to develop all staff, professionally, educationally and emotionally.



A forum for line managers now provides support to all line managers to develop best practice and to share ways of working.



Training needs are identified as part of the annual appraisal. All requests are considered and a budget is put in place to support training requirements. These are tailored to the professional needs of the staff.



The company has supported eight apprentices, in Business Administration and IT. One has just graduated with First Class Honours from university, where they have been supported part time by the company over six years. Another is currently studying for a

part time apprenticeship degree. Several have gone on to more senior roles within the company.



As part of development, the company encourages internal promotion. In 2022, three staff have been promoted to Deputy Director, following investment in training. The company recognises greater responsibilities and enhanced duties.



Flexible working is available to all staff with a range of start times between 7.30am and 9am. Working hours can be adjusted through the week at the employee's discretion to enable personal or family commitments to be fulfilled. Pre and post pandemic, staff can also arrange to work from home if necessary. This ability to juggle family commitments, whether they relate to children, parents or other needs leads to improved mental health and lower stress levels as well as low levels of absenteeism within the workplace.



There is a strong company ethos that encourages the use of vacation time. Overtime is monitored monthly and, in general, should be taken as time off in lieu (TOIL) rather than being paid out. Workload is also monitored monthly and mechanisms are in place to support staff where workload builds up.



The company holds regular seminars for all staff where different areas of the business are explained in a way that is accessible for all. This also includes administrative areas. This promotes inclusivity and a feeling of ownership of the business amongst all staff.



Ergonomics: staff physical wellbeing is supported through ergonomic working practices. This has been particularly important with all employees working from home on a part time basis. Several reviews have been carried out and all necessary equipment purchased by the company, including desks, chairs and monitors.



The company appointed a part time HR manager in March 2022 in recognition of the importance of staff relations and welfare.

Covid



Staff are encouraged to work from home if showing mild symptoms, whether of Covid or other illness, as long as they feel well enough. Policy is for them not to come into the office in these cases to prevent the spread of any virus or illness.



Line managers have been encouraged to keep in closer contact with their line reports, particularly junior staff members who may require more support.



A Christmas party for all staff was held in December 2021 and a summer event is planned for July 2022, both in line with current advice and regulations. These have helped boost morale while prioritising the safety of staff.



All necessary ergonomic equipment for working from home has been purchased by the company, including desks, chairs and monitors.



Most staff are currently working two days a week in the office, and are generally in on the same days as the other members of their team to encourage collaboration and cooperation. Space has been made available for staff to work from the office for more days if they prefer.

Environment



Company policy is based on the principles of reduce/ reuse/ recycle. There is a deliberate decision on whether to use resources. Once that is taken, reusable resources are used where possible, for example, all crockery in the office is non-disposable. All non-reusable items are recycled where possible.



The office is deliberately based in an area of Manchester with links to a wide range of public transport hubs and networks. There are cycle racks outside the front door. The toilet facilities also include a shower so that staff can shower if they run or cycle to work. Staff are encouraged to use rail travel rather than their cars for business purposes wherever possible.



There is an extensive range of recycling initiatives in the office, including paper, batteries, printer cartridges and plastic. Suggestions are welcomed from staff for further initiatives and, where possible, these are acted on.



The lights in the office are controlled by a master switch by the front door. This means that the last person to leave can easily turn off every light in the building without risk of forgetting one.



Kitchen and dining facilities are provided for staff, including a fridge where food brought from home can be stored. Fresh, filtered drinking water is always available as well as tea, coffee and milk.

Anti-corruption



The ethos of the company is one of openness and disclosure. The company has policies on anti-corruption and bribery, which are communicated to staff. Registers of connected parties and interests are kept and are reviewed monthly at each board meeting.



Board meetings are summarised by a non-board member of staff and reported back to the wider team to encourage transparency about how the company is led. Finance and HR updates are presented at the whole team fortnightly meetings.



All staff receive training on company ethics and values (most recently in June 2021). This is repeated for new starters on a regular basis.



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