

Degree Outcomes Statement 2019/20

Buckinghamshire New University
UKPRN: 10000975

1. Background

This Degree Outcome Statement has been prepared in accordance with sector Guidance and was approved by the University's Senate on 10 June 2020 and its Governing Body on 6 July 2020.

2. Institutional degree classification profile

Our educational aim is to provide highly accessible university learning that will transform lives and nurture abilities in all our graduates to enable them to succeed and ultimately change their world. Over the last five years we have seen a gradual increase in students achieving 'Good Honours', i.e. First and Upper Second Class degrees, from 58% in 2014/15 to 64% in 2018/19, across an increasing number of students overall. We consider that this reflects both greater student attainment and improvements in learning and teaching which in turn support students' higher achievement, both at Bucks and with our educational partners where we have also seen an improved performance.

Academic Year	First & Upper Second Class (‘Good Honours’)	Lower Second & Third Class	Number of Students
2014-15	58%	42%	1,422
2015-16	59%	41%	1,536
2016-17	59%	41%	1,676
2017-18	60%	40%	1,624
2018-19	64%	36%	1,705

When considering awards by specific student characteristics the data is reflective of the University's mission as a widening participation institution. The following trends are of note:

- Female students outperform male students by higher than the sector average of 5% although this fluctuates. This is attributed to the strong performance by nursing students at the University, our largest programme, where the cohort is predominantly female
- No discernible difference in performance by disability (generally within 1%) versus a 3% gap sector wide. This attests to the levels of support in place for students with disabilities
- The performance of young / mature graduates identifies a gap in achievement of Good Honours of approximately 7-10% where mature students tend to underperform; this is still less than the sector gap of 12%
- A notable gap in Good Honours achievement between White and BAME students (reflective of the national picture), with BAME male students particularly underachieving, which the University is working hard to address via its Access and Participation Plan. This gap is accentuated by lower BAME achievement at partner institutions. For students studying at Bucks itself the gap is lower.

3. Assessment and marking practices

The University is assured that assessment criteria meet sector reference points via application of the following processes:

- The appointment of external reviewers to programmes during their design and development to confirm that they meet agreed sector reference points, including the UK [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (FHEQ), relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#), and applicable Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Body (PSRB) standards

- Support for internal and partner staff to participate in our range of academic staff development programmes (below) to enhance their understanding of assessment and marking practices
- The use of marking guidance and assessment criteria, as well as moderation, blind and/or anonymous marking practices for all student work to ensure transparency of assessment
- The employment of external examiners for all programmes to confirm that programmes continue to meet the sector reference points. Examiners provide assurance that:
 - assessment tasks have taken into account published benchmark statements and other recognised national or academic standards as appropriate
 - assessment criteria support the consistency and transparency of marking
 - the marking process is applied consistently in line with the University's [Assessment and Feedback policy](#)
 - marks awarded are consistent and aligned to sector standards
 - programmes provide students with the opportunity to achieve standards comparable with those achieved in other UK providers

Via their attendance at Boards of Examiners, and recorded in their Annual Report, external examiners can confirm that students with mitigating or exceptional circumstances are treated fairly and consistently and in accordance with the University's [policy](#). Processes, such as appeals and mitigating circumstances, apply equally to all students, whether they are based at the University itself, or at one of its partner institutions. External examiner reports are overwhelmingly positive, generally identifying student feedback as being comprehensive, supportive and focused clearly on learning outcomes.

External examiners and independent external reviewers are appointed on the basis of their expertise, including knowledge and experience of the discipline in question and of the applicable UK higher education reference points. They are expected to hold appropriate qualifications and to be familiar with the standard expected of students at the relevant academic level to ensure that advice and guidance is suitably informed. Full criteria are in the [External Examining policy](#). The University will increasingly look to appoint nominees who have undertaken the externally accredited AdvanceHE Professional development course for external examiners as a further assurance mechanism.

4. Academic governance

Our Governing Body (Council) is responsible for the University's educational character and mission. Council has oversight of the University's activities and receives assurance that academic standards are appropriate and being maintained through regular reports from Senate (our Academic Board) covering: academic awards and their regulations, assessment and examination of the academic performance of students, and the standards of awards and quality of provision.

The University's Annual Monitoring process evaluates data sources including student assessment and achievement data, external examiner reports and student feedback, comparing this over time and against sector benchmarks. The resulting report and enhancement action plans for all University provision, including that delivered through partnership arrangements, is considered fully by the Education Committee which reports to Senate.

Education Committee is responsible to Senate for maintaining a framework of academic quality assurance and standards for all programmes taught at the University and with its partners. This includes the development and maintenance of regulations, policies and processes. Annual Monitoring provides assurance that these processes - and therefore the awards and the achievement of students - is comparable with preceding years and aligns with sector best practice and benchmarks.

5. Classification algorithms

Degree classification algorithms determine a student's final classification. The University uses two algorithms as set out in the [Academic Assessment Regulations](#) and explained to students on our [academic advice pages](#):

Undergraduate Level (Year of Study)	Credits	Weighting (Algorithm 1)	Weighting (Algorithm 2)
Level 4 (Year 1)	120	0%	0%
Level 5 (Year 2)	120	33%	0%
Level 6 (Year 3)	120	67%	100%

- Algorithm 1 is widely used across the sector. It allows students to use Level 4 as a transition into higher education, with only the module credits (and not the marks) being taken into account. The weighting enables students to develop through Level 5 and become independent learners by Level 6. In this way the weighting given to the final marks reflects the standard the student is performing at as they complete their degree.
- Algorithm 2 is used for “top-up” degrees where students transfer credits from learning gained at Level 4 and Level 5 and study Level 6 modules only for the award. It is also used for those disciplines (particularly those with many practical assessments) where it is recognised that Level 4 and Level 5 work is developmental, building towards final independent work at Level 6, a concept known as “exit velocity”.

Programme Specifications published on individual course webpages confirm the algorithm that applies.

Students are given a first attempt at every assessment. This is followed by reassessment if they do not reach the module pass mark of 40%, and in some instances students can repeat the whole year. Reassessment is generally capped at the pass mark, but may be ‘uncapped’ if a student has had exceptional or mitigating circumstances accepted. The University may also apply ‘compensation’ for a failing module mark that is within 5% of the normal pass mark. Restrictions apply to the volume and use of credit for compensation, especially where PSRB regulations have precedence, and are specified within Programme Specifications or appended to our Academic Assessment Regulations.

The final classification of an undergraduate Honours degree is determined using either of the algorithms above. Thresholds for each classification are based on sector norms as follows:

Classification	Lower threshold	Upper threshold
First Class Honours	69.5%	100%
Second Class Honours (Upper Division)	59.5%	69.49%
Second Class Honours (Lower Division)	49.5%	59.49%
Third Class Honours	39.5%	49.49%
Ordinary Degree (Unclassified)	N/A – Based on 300 Credits achieved	
Fail	0%	39.49%

University regulations allow ‘borderline’ students to be considered for a higher classification where the overall mark achieved is within 2% of the next classification band. A decision will be based on the volume of credits in each classification. Students who do not pass their registered award will normally be eligible for an intermediate award based on credit accumulated.

The University is currently reviewing its algorithms to promote further consistency across programmes.

6. Teaching practices and learning resources

The enrichments outlined below reflect the ongoing enhancements to teaching practice at Bucks which are designed to maintain output standards while ensuring all our students, regardless of background, have the opportunity to succeed.

The mechanisms for enhancements to teaching practices linked to degree outcomes have emphasised internal and external moderation with policy and process focusing on marking and moderation workshops and staff development. More formal staff development is offered through the Academic Professional Apprenticeship, Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice and Teaching and Supporting Learning in HE. The University remains above sector benchmark for Fellowship of the HEA. We operate a [peer observation](#) process guided by the policy and an induction buddy system for new academic staff.

Project work since 2018 has seen removal of examinations at level 4 and an assessment loading tool used at validation. A University assignment brief template and guidance has been developed, and attached to this is the student 'fit to submit' checklist, which is part of the Practical Recipes for Student Success (PReSS) initiative to help tackle the BAME and other attainment gaps. Institutional assessment criteria aligned to the new (October 2019) QAA outcome classification guidance have recently been developed. Learning resources as part of the PReSS initiative include 'assessment: how to succeed' and 'skills for success'. At a practical level a student laptop loan scheme operates at all campuses and this year the University has increased online subscription to e-journals allowing greater access.

7. Identifying good practice, and actions

External examiners in their reports have commended both the comprehensive feedback on assessments to students and the careful and consistent consideration of student performance at Assessment Boards.

A key action for this academic year is finalising the development of the recently revised grading criteria and marking descriptors (that align with the QAA outcome classification guidance released on October 2019).

8. Risks and challenges

A current risk to the University is the ongoing coronavirus pandemic which may impact the progression and achievement of students, particularly on courses with a placement element. For the remainder of 2019/20 and into 2020/21, the University has agreed a *No Detriment Policy* to ensure that under these exceptional circumstances no student is disadvantaged while ensuring that academic quality and standards are maintained.