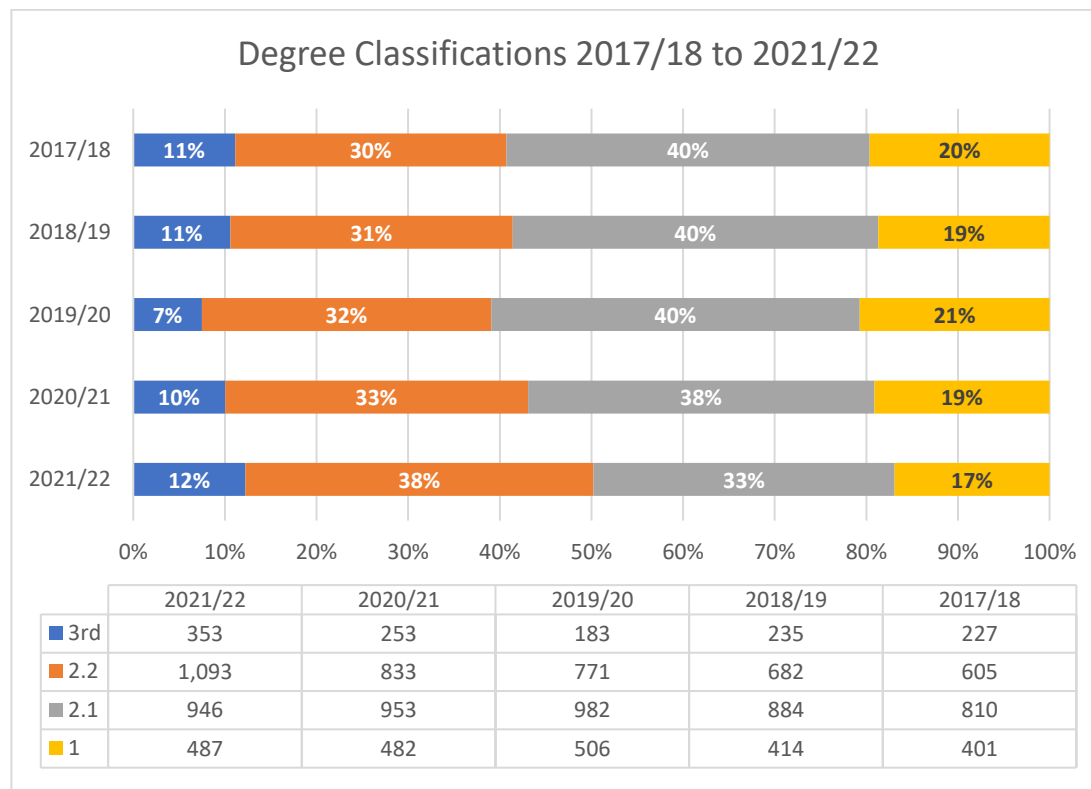# Degree Outcomes Statement 2022/23

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 7 June 2023 and its Governing Body on 18 July 2023.

2.   Institutional degree classification profile

This section presents an overview of the classifications of degrees awarded by Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) to its students between 2017/18 and 2021/22. This includes students studying both directly at the University and at its range of partners. The data is shown as a percentage of the overall number of honours degrees awarded for each year while the student numbers are noted in the table below.

Degree Classifications 2017/18 to 2021/22

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
3rd	353	253	183	235	227
2.2	1,093	833	771	682	605
2.1	946	953	982	884	810
1	487	482	506	414	401

The University saw a decline during 2021/22 in the number of students achieving good honours (first and upper second class honours) with a corresponding rise in the percentage of lower second class honours being awarded. This is explained by an increase in the total number of degrees awarded over the period (from 2,043 in 2017/18 to 2,879 in 2021/22) following an expansion of students studying under a partnership arrangement

– where performance has not been as strong and where fewer students have achieved Good Honours. The University's attainment action plan identifies targeted actions focused on increasing student achievement.

3.   Trends in Degree Classification by Demographic Group

The University is committed to ensuring that all students, regardless of their ethnicity, sex, background or disability are supported to achieve their best possible outcomes during their studies. We are strongly focused on eliminating awarding gaps, This section compares 'good honours' rates awarded by BNU to its students between 2017/18 and 2021/22 broken down by demographic. BNU maintains a highly diverse student intake and is above the sector average for the number of mature and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) population of students. This reflects our widening participation mission to reach out to under-represented groups in higher education.[1]

Demographic	Breakdown	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Age Group	Mature	52%	51%	53%	49%	43%
	Young	66%	65%	73%	72%	65%
	Gap	*14%*	*14%*	*21%*	*23%*	*22%*
Disability	Known Disability	64%	60%	75%	76%	67%
	No Known Disability	59%	59%	59%	55%	48%
	Gap	*-5%*	*-1%*	*-15%*	*-21%*	*-19%*
Ethnicity	BAME	45%	44%	48%	47%	35%
	White	69%	68%	74%	67%	68%
	Gap	*25%*	*23%*	*26%*	*20%*	*33%*
Gender	Female	62%	65%	64%	59%	54%
	Male	56%	52%	58%	55%	45%
	Gap	*-6%*	*-13%*	*-6%*	*-4%*	*-9%*
IMD	1 - Most deprived	47%	51%	53%	51%	49%
	5 - Least deprived	74%	67%	82%	76%	73%
	Gap	*27%*	*16%*	*28%*	*25%*	*25%*

Analysis of the data indicates a need for the University to continue to address gaps in achievement, particularly ethnicity – where the gap has widened this year – and deprivation where the gap remains significant. This is particularly notable for our partners who recruit students from some of the most deprived areas of the country (IMD1 and IMD2). The University's attainment action plan identifies targeted actions focused on increasing student achievement.

To help address these gaps the University has increased the financial support package available for the most deprived learners with some direct funding support received from the OfS. Funding has been prioritised for student bursaries and hardship funds and is distributed between BNU and partner students. Analysis has shown a correlation between those who have received financial support and improved progression rates. These and other measures will inform our new Access and Participation Plan.

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[1] For this year's statement we have adopted the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) to report on the performance by students from areas with the highest levels of deprivation.

4.   Assessment and marking practices

The University receives assurance about the standards of its assessment and marking practices through scrutiny of assessments. This includes the use of assessment briefs to clarify expectations around the submission of work, the agreement of generic assessment criteria to enable marking and feedback to be consistent, anonymous marking practices (where practical), and internal and external moderation.

The University is a signatory to the QAA Academic Integrity Charter for Higher Education to promote and maintain academic integrity and take action against academic misconduct. As part of this commitment, the University relaunched a new *Academic Integrity Policy*. This is now in its second year of operation and includes a number of activities focused on improving understanding in this area.

External examiners are key to our assessment processes. External examiners are independent and are appointed based on a series of nationally agreed criteria. For programmes which are externally regulated by a professional body – such as the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) or the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) – external examiners will also be a registered member of the profession. External examiners act as a 'critical friend' to the programme team commenting on the comparability of tasks and the benchmarking of practices with other providers. External examiners complete an annual report for their assigned programme. commenting on standards. A summary of these reports identifying any common themes is considered by the University Education Committee.

External examiners attend the relevant Board of Examiners where decisions on individual students' progression and achievement (including the classification of degrees) are determined. Boards are chaired by a senior member of the University. Boards will exercise discretion for students with exceptional circumstances seeking to avoid any disadvantage. Students can appeal a Board decision if they consider that a procedural error has occurred but are not allowed to challenge academic or professional judgement. The number of appeals is generally low.

5.   Academic governance

Buckinghamshire New University is a Higher Education Corporation created by an Instrument of Government issued by the Privy Council. We maintain and exercise our powers to award taught degrees and are registered with the Office for Students (OfS) and adhere to the OfS' Conditions of Registration. Our regulations, policies, processes and courses are developed in accordance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and relevant subject benchmark statements.

Council (our governing body) is responsible for our educational character and mission and receives assurance that academic standards are appropriate and being maintained through regular reports via Senate (our Academic Board). These cover: academic awards and their regulations; assessment and examination of the academic performance of students; the standards of awards; and overall quality of provision. Senate is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and includes representatives of the academic and student body.

Education Committee (a sub-committee of Senate) is responsible for maintaining a framework of quality assurance and standards for all programmes taught at the University and by its partners. The Committee is chaired by the Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Digital) with membership including Directors of Education from each School, the Head of Quality and Standards, and teaching and student representatives.

Our *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 those delivered through partnership arrangements, is considered fully by the Education Committee with a report submitted to Senate and Council. A revised *Programme Monitoring and Subject Review Process* comes into force in September 2023 more closely to track the 'Quality' Conditions of Registration.

6.   Classification algorithms

Degree classification algorithms determine a student's overall weighted average which determines the degree classification (below). The University's algorithm is set out in the *Academic Assessment Regulations* and explained to students on our academic advice pages. This has been reviewed and for 2022-23 is incorporating a discounting mechanism as follows:

Undergraduate Level (Year of Study)	Credits required by level	Credits included in the algorithm	Weighting applied by level
Level 4 (Year 1)	120	0	N/A
Level 5 (Year 2)	120	Best 100	33%
Level 6 (Year 3)	120	Best 100	67%

The algorithm allows students to use Level 4 as a transition into higher education. Weighting at Levels 5 and 6 enable students to develop through Level 5 and become independent learners by Level 6. The higher weighting at Level 6 better reflects the standard the student is performing at as they complete their degree.

A small number of programmes use a secondary algorithm which only measures the Best 100 credits at Level 6 (100% weighting). This algorithm also applies to 'top-up' degrees where students are admitted with advanced standing directly into Level 6.

Thresholds for each degree classification are as follows:

Classification	Lower threshold (rounded)	Upper threshold (rounded)
First Class Honours	70%	100%
Second Class Honours (Upper Division)	60%	69%
Second Class Honours (Lower Division)	50%	59%
Third Class Honours	40%	49%
Ordinary Degree (Unclassified)	N/A – Based on 300 Credits achieved	
Fail	0%	39%

'Borderline' students (whose overall average is within 2% of the next classification) will be awarded a higher classification where 50% of the available credit is in a higher band. Students who do not pass their registered award will be considered for an intermediate award.

Students are given a first attempt at every assessment. This is followed by reassessment in failed modules, or a requirement to repeat the year. Reassessment is 'capped' at the pass mark but may be 'uncapped' if a student's exceptional circumstances have been accepted. 'Compensation' – where failed modules are awarded credit – may also be applied for a module that is within the 'marginal fail' band. Restrictions apply to the volume and eligibility of credit for compensation and reassessment.

7.   Teaching practices and learning resources

Our educational aim is to provide highly accessible university learning that will transform lives. The University is proud of its high-quality, high-intensity approach to teaching, which focuses on real-world, practical learning and produces very high levels of student engagement.

Teaching practices

Our teaching approach encourages innovation and active learning, enabling students to develop skills and confidence, and challenge concepts. Class sizes are generally small (averaging 22 students in 2020/21), while our staff-student ratio of 15.4 helps promote immersive and highly interactive teaching, which is focused on

practical and employment-related learning. Strong staff-student relations ensure that teaching and learning tasks can be tailored to individual need enabling all learners to be successful.

We place significant value on ensuring that staff are appropriately qualified to teach. 81% of permanent academic staff hold a relevant teaching qualification, while 54% of associate (visiting) lecturing staff are also qualified. To date, 63% of academic staff have some form of AdvanceHE Fellowship (including 43% at Fellowship and 12% at Senior Fellowship level).

Our annual Staff Development Conference provides opportunities for all staff to learn from and share innovative practice.

Learning resources

We have invested over £11m capital investment in teaching, including clinical simulation suites, specialist workshops, lab facilities, a cyber resilience centre, a flight simulator, and a VR-equipped engineering design suite. We have a rolling programme at all our campuses to refresh classroom equipment, while to combat digital poverty we provide loan laptops for student use.

Teaching is supported by a range of digital tools, including lecture capture, our virtual learning environment, and BucksAppsAnywhere (which provides free access for students t specialist software applications).

Our one main library is based in High Wycombe, with facilities at our Aylesbury and Uxbridge campuses. Libraries also provide collaborative learning spaces, bookable small group study rooms, and open access computers. Library provision is increasingly online through investment in e-journals and e-books.

8. Identifying good practice, and actions

External examiners continue to commend both the comprehensive feedback on assessments to students and the careful and consistent consideration of student performance at Assessment Boards. Following external examiner feedback – in its programme regulations to support the new curriculum launching in September 2023 – the University has revised its approach to reassessment better to manage student expectations around the likelihood of progression and reduce the regulatory burden.

Within its new curriculum, the University has embedded 5 Hallmarks. These include greater use of authentic assessment practices – using tasks that mirror those used by employers – and providing students with opportunities to develop those graduate attributes and skills also valued by employers. It also supports initiatives to address sector-wide concerns around academic integrity by reducing the opportunities for students to commit misconduct through good assessment design.

9. Risks and challenges

Two risks / challenges are identified:

- The rapid uptake of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, which has been detected in some assessed work. Principles for the responsible use of AI tools have been developed and will continue to be reviewed.

- The ongoing challenge of achievement rates, particularly by UK partner students, many of whom are from the highest areas of deprivation. Our work on attainment raising seeks to address this.