University of Sussex - Degree Outcomes Statement 2020

Institutional degree classification profile

1.   The University undertakes a detailed annual analysis of degree outcome performance that considers a range of student characteristics and subject mix over time. The headline figures from this analysis are shown below.

Academic year	1st class	Upper second class	Lower second class	Third class & Pass
2014/15	22.0%	57.0%	17.6%	3.3%
2015/16	23.0%	55.5%	18.5%	3.0%
2016/17	24.6%	51.3%	20.7%	3.4%
2017/18	25.6%	49.9%	21.6%	2.8%
2018/19	26.0%	49.2%	21.4%	3.4%

University of Sussex - Degree outcome performance 2014-15 to 2018-19

2.   From the detailed analysis the University observes that the percentage of combined first and upper second-class degrees (Good Degrees) awarded has continued to reduce over the 5-year period. At a more granular level there has been an increase in the number of first-class degrees and a decrease in the upper second-class awards.

3.   Further commentary on degree outcome by demographic profile can be found at **Appendix 1**.

Assessment and Marking Practices

4.   The University assures itself that assessment criteria meet sector reference points through the following key routes:

- The rigorous design, development and validation of courses
- The accreditation/recognition of courses by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)
- Boards of Study produce marking criteria on an annual basis and these are kept under review by School Education Committees
- The anonymous marking of assessments (wherever practicable to do so)
- Moderation processes (internal and external) to ensure consistency and rigour
- Rigorous external examiner appointment process, in line with the UK Quality Code
- Validation, revalidation and periodic review panels with built-in external peer review to provide additional scrutiny
- Academic Appeals process independent of course and module teams to ensure fairness and rigour.
- Continuing and Professional Development Activities for academic and academic-related staff

5.   See **Appendix 2** for further detailed information.

Academic Governance

6.   The University Regulations articulate the academic governance of the University. Under Regulation 8 Senate is responsible for academic standards and the direction and regulation of academic matters. Senate provides annual assurance to Council (the Governing Body) on the academic standards of awards and related quality of learning opportunities. Council has consistently accepted this assurance.

7.   The University Education Committee (UEC) is a committee of Senate and has delegated responsibility to oversee the value, academic standards and quality of the University's awards through established processes for validation and revalidation, annual course monitoring and periodic review. UEC also maintains oversight of the external examiner system on behalf of Senate and receives annual reports that consistently provide assurance of undergraduate awards.

8.   On behalf of UEC, the Examination and Assessment Regulations Sub-Committee (EAR) oversees the development and implementation of the University's Examination and Assessment Regulations and associated policies for taught awards. EAR continues to monitor the workings of the University's assessment regulations, making reference, where appropriate, to practice elsewhere in the sector. The underlying principles for this are a commitment to ensuring fairness in assessment and ensuring that the regulations support student retention, progression and achievement. Any recommendations for regulatory or associated procedural changes are referred to UEC for formal approval.

9.   The standards of the awards of the University are set and maintained within frameworks set out in:

•   Charter, Statutes and Regulations of the University
•   Organisation of the University Handbook
•   Examination and Assessment Regulations Handbook
•   Quality Assurance processes

10.   External requirements including those in the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education are enshrined within these documents. These frameworks are approved through Senate and its sub-committees and are revised regularly to reflect changing demands and to improve efficiency.

11.   The University's processes relating to collaborative provision are mapped to the UK Quality Code and articulated in the Partner Handbook.   Partner organisations delivering Sussex-validated provision are subject to additional quality assurance mechanisms over and above those applied to on-campus provision. These include:

•   Institutional Recognition (which takes place every 3-5 years);
•   course re-validation (every 3-5 years)
•   a detailed annual monitoring process.

12.   All processes report to the University Education Committee. Each Partner organisation has its own set of academic regulations which are audited to ensure alignment with the principles underpinning Sussex's regulations. Any changes to these regulations or any policies relating to academic matters are required to be approved by the Chair of UEC.

        See **Appendix 3** for further information.

Classification algorithms

13.   The University uses three algorithms to calculate final awards. Details of how each algorithm is applied is included in the University's regulations for Examinations and Assessment, which are available to all students on the University's website. Further information on how the algorithms are applied can be found at **Appendix 4**.

14.   The University operates a borderline zone at each classification boundary. An Assessment Board will automatically award the higher classification where a student has met the following criteria:

•   a grand mean mark of up to 1% below the higher classification boundary, and

- • 50% or more of the credit that contributes to the award is in the higher classification band.

15. The University's regulations permit the consideration of a classification where less than 50% of the credit that contributes to the award is in the higher class. In these cases, the Assessment Board has the discretion to reclassify based on the individual student profile for all stages of study contributing to the award.

16. Exceptional circumstances do not provide grounds for reclassification of an award.

17. Students are allowed a first attempt at every assessment followed by a capped resit should they fail to reach the minimum pass mark. Assessment Boards have the discretion to offer a second and final capped resit for one or more modules, provided 60 credits have been achieved at the same level. Students with approved exceptional circumstances are permitted a first sit or uncapped second sit. This is in line with sector norms.

18. Prior to 2012/13 the University applied the borderline zone within 2% of the classification boundary. Following an internal review, which was informed by practice elsewhere in the sector, the current regulations were introduced.

Teaching practices and learning resources

19. The following three key enhancements illustrate improvements to teaching practices and learning resources:

   - • The **launch of Canvas** in 2018/19 as the new Virtual Learning Environment has been pivotal to the University's ambitions to provide students with a digitally advanced education enabling significant enhancement to the digital teaching and learning space for students and staff. Canvas is cloud-based to enable work to take place anytime, anywhere and is able to handle high usage volumes all year and addresses student feedback on the importance of reliable study resources.

   - • An **ongoing commitment to the professional development** of staff to develop and enhance their education practice. This includes supporting staff to gain Fellowships of the HEA at the level appropriate to their experience and role, with all staff engaged in the activity of teaching and supporting learning encouraged to gain HEA- accredited qualifications.

   - • The launch of a new **Education Leadership Pathway to Promotion** for all staff who wish to progress on the basis of their contribution to education excellence and leadership. The pathway follows the traditional academic career structure from Lecturer to Professor based on evidence of the excellence of contribution to education provision within and beyond the University.

Identifying good practice and actions

20. Annual External Examiner Reports identify and commend practice from across the University in areas such as quality of feedback to students; thoughtful and positive alignment between learning outcomes, teaching and assessment tasks; the range of assessment styles that cater to different learning styles; the quality of project supervision; well-crafted marking criteria that offer support to students; and marking and feedback that is designed to develop student confidence. This feedback is shared at UEC feeds into updated guidance and briefing materials.

21. In March 2018 Council approved the University's Strategic Framework to 2025. The Learn to Transform (Education and Students) Strategy includes key aims, actions and performance indicators

that underpin the delivery of the highest possible experience for all students. It includes the following key elements that specifically seek to improve the quality of the student experience and outcomes:

- A fundamental review of assessment and feedback to ensure inclusive practice, effective learning experiences and achievement of fair outcomes;
- Identify gaps in BAME student achievement, the causes of gaps and the development of strategies to improve outcomes;
- The effective us of learning analytics/BI to provide data in real time to inform practices and to allow for targeted interventions;
- Establishment of Education Networks for staff and students to share best practice and innovation.

The Learn to Transform Strategy will be fully realised by 2025.

Appendix 1: Institutional degree classification by demographic profile

- The proportion of lower second-class degrees has stabilised over the last 3 years.

- Home and EU students (86% of our students) achieved higher overall outcomes than our international students (14% of our students).

- Throughout this period, white students have continued to achieve a higher proportion of first class or upper second degrees than students identifying as black and minority ethnic (BAME).

- For UK domiciled students, there has been a rise in the proportion of 1sts, and a decrease in 2:1s, for non-UK domiciled students the proportion of 1sts and 2:1s have fallen over the period. The proportion of 1sts for non-UK domiciled students has risen slightly since 2016/17.

- The data shows that for both UK and non-UK domiciled students, women have better good degree outcomes than men.

- In most years, regardless of domicile, young students have better good degree outcomes than mature students. The proportion of non-UK mature students achieving a good degree outcome has fallen by the greatest amount over a 5-year period.

- Good degree outcomes for UK students with a disability are below those with no known disability in every year. For non-UK domiciled students, since 2014/15 those with a disability have better good degree outcomes than those with no known disability.

- Good degree outcomes have improved for students in the lower attainment groups but fallen slightly for students from the highest tariff on entry.

- Good degree outcomes by postcode-based widening participation measures show a small increase in good degree outcomes for students from either POLAR4 and TUNDRA Q1 over the 5 years.

Appendix 2: Assessment and Marking Practices

The University assures itself that assessment criteria meet sector reference points through the following key routes:

- The rigorous design and development of courses, which culminates in consideration by a validation panel with requisite expertise, including internal and external representation. Course design and the panel's considerations are referenced against the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), Subject Benchmark Statements and all the necessary requirements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Learning outcomes are aligned to the relevant level of the FHEQ and assessments are designed to test these learning outcomes.

- The accreditation and or recognition of courses by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), demonstrating that specific standards or requirements are, and continue to be met.

- Marking criteria which set out the characteristics of assessed work that attract different ranges of marks from the marking scale, appropriate to the discipline, are produced annually by Boards of Study, and are kept under review by School Education Committees.

- The anonymous marking of all assessment, where this is practical, to ensure that there is no bias in the marking process.

- Assessments that contribute to progression or award are internally moderated and considered by external examiners to ensure consistency of marking.

- The operation of a rigorous external examiner appointment process, in line with UK Quality Code, which includes University led induction. Examiners are appointed to:
  - advise the University on whether the academic standards of its awards are consistent with the standards defined by the University, the standards of similar awards elsewhere and the standards maintained by professional bodies and accrediting agencies
  - provide an external evaluation of the extent to which processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are consistently and fairly applied.

- External Examiners are required to:
  - approve heavily weighted assessment tasks
  - review a sample of student work for the modules to which they are appointed,
  - participate in Assessment Boards where marks and awards are considered and confirmed
  - complete an annual report which provides their views on the assessment process. These reports are centrally screened so that issues related to assessment practice can be addressed.

- External peers are appointed to the validation, revalidation and periodic review panels to provide external scrutiny.

- An Academic Appeals procedure is available to students and is independent from course and module teams to ensure fairness and rigour throughout the scheme.

- The professional development of academic staff through a range of activities including acting as external examiners, undertaking research and scholarship and engaging in professional development including that leading to fellowship at all levels from Advance HE in recognition and development of their teaching practice.

Appendix 3: Academic Governance

- The University Regulations articulate the academic governance of the University. Under Regulation 8 Senate is responsible for academic standards and the direction and regulation of academic matters. Senate provides annual assurance to Council (the Governing Body) that it continues to manage and oversee the academic standards of awards and related quality of learning opportunities. Council has consistently accepted this assurance.

- The University Education Committee (UEC) is a committee of Senate and has delegated responsibility to oversee the value, academic standards and quality of the University's awards through established processes for validation and revalidation, annual course monitoring and periodic review. UEC also maintains oversight of the external examiner system on behalf of Senate and receives annual reports that consistently provide assurance of undergraduate awards.

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- The standards of the awards of the University are set and maintained within frameworks set out in:

  - Charter, Statues and Regulations of the University
  - Organisation of the University Handbook
  - Examination and Assessment Regulations Handbook
  - Quality assurance processes

- External requirements including those in the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education are enshrined within these documents. These frameworks are approved through Senate and its sub-committees and are revised regularly to reflect changing demands and to improve efficiency.

- The University's processes relating to collaborative provision are mapped to the UK Quality Code and articulated in the Partner Handbook. Partner organisations delivering Sussex-validated provision are subject to additional quality assurance mechanisms over and above those applied to on-campus provision. These include:

  - Institutional Recognition (which takes place every 3-5 years);
  - course re-validation (every 3-5 years)
  - a detailed annual monitoring process

- All processes report to the University Education Committee. Each Partner organisation has its own set of academic regulations which are audited to ensure alignment with the principles underpinning Sussex's regulations. Any changes to these regulations or any policies relating to academic matters are required to be approved by the Chair of UEC.

Appendix 4: Classification algorithms

The University uses three algorithms to calculate final awards. Details of how each algorithm is applied is included in the University's Regulations for Examinations and Assessment, which is available to all students on the University's website. Further information on how the algorithms are applied are outlined below:

1.   Three Year Bachelor's Degree

A student who is registered on a 3 year Bachelors degree with Honours will be considered for the award where they have achieved not less than 360 credits at the prescribed level and a capped stage mean of 40% in the final year. Classification will be calculated using the following algorithm to achieve an overall grand mean:
*   Level 5 mean based on all 120 credits with a weighting of 40%
*   Level 6 mean based on all 120 credits from the final year with a weighting of 60%

2.   Four-year Bachelor's degree including an integrated study abroad or a placement year

A student who is registered on a 4 year Bachelors degree with Honours, that includes an integrated study abroad or a placement year, will be considered for the award where they have achieved not less than 480 credits at the prescribed level and a capped stage mean of 40% in the final year.   Classification will be calculated using the following algorithm to achieve an overall grand mean; will include the marks achieved on the study abroad/placement year:

*   Year 2/Level 5 mean based on all 120 credits with a weighting of 32%
*   Year 3 - Study Abroad/Placement Year mean based on all 120 credits with a weighting of 20%
*   Year 4/Level 6 mean based on all 120 credits with a weighting of 48%

3.   Four-year Integrated master's degrees

A student who is registered on a 4-year Integrated Master's degree will be considered for the award where they have achieved not less than 480 credits at the prescribed level and a capped stage mean of 50% in the final stage.   Classification will be calculated using the following algorithm to achieve an overall grand mean:

*   Year 2/Level 5 mean based on all 120 credits with a weighting of 40%
*   Year 3/Level 6 mean based on all 120 credits with a weighting of 60%
*   Year 3/Level 7 mean based on all 120 credits at a ratio with a weighting of 65%

The marks achieved on a voluntary study abroad/placement year do not contribute to classification. Classification will be calculated using the same algorithm applied to 3-year bachelor's degrees (see 1) or an Integrated Master's Degree (see 3).

Classification

The final classification of a student's undergraduate award is determined using the following overall framework, which is in line with common practice for English higher education providers:

An overall grand mean of 70 – 100%	First class honours
An overall grand mean of 60 – 69%	Upper second class honours
An overall grand mean of 60 – 69%	Lower second class honours
An overall grand mean of 40 – 49%	Third class honours

In all calculations (module, stage and grand mean) the University rounds marks into a whole number.
Marks equal to or greater than 0.45 are rounded up, those equal to or less than 0.44 are rounded down.

Approved University Education Committee	20 May 2020
Approved Council	3 July 2020