Institutional degree classification profile

1. The University’s degree classification profile is shown below. It sets out the percentage of degree classes awarded at the institutional level over the last five years for our level 6 degree programmes and our combined level 6 and 7 undergraduate degree programmes. The reasons for presenting the data in these forms are:
   - Both sets of data are provided because the combined degree classification profile for all our undergraduate honours programmes better reflects the portfolio of programmes that we offer, where around one fifth of first degree graduates in 2019/20 graduated from integrated masters programmes;
   - The profile is provided at the institution level because data is otherwise aligned to our organisational structure, which is not meaningful to an external audience.

2. This Statement includes degree outcomes from the 2019/20 academic year, which was notably subject to disruption as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The section Issues and Challenges provides further detail on the mitigations and resulting assurance for degree classifications.

Table 1: Degree classification profile for level 6 degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2015/16 – 2019/20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Award</th>
<th>Total Awards</th>
<th>First Class</th>
<th>Upper Second Class</th>
<th>Lower Second Class</th>
<th>Third Class</th>
<th>First and Upper Second Classes Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>3139</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>86.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>3471</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>89.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>3549</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>3672</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>3986</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>90.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Information on how this data is derived is provided in a note at the end of the document.
Table 2: Degree classification profile for level 6 and 7 degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2015/16 – 2019/20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Award</th>
<th>Total Awards</th>
<th>First Class</th>
<th>Upper Second Class</th>
<th>Lower Second Class</th>
<th>Third Class</th>
<th>First and Upper Second Classes Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>3771</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>4125</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>59.4%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>4282</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>4379</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>4900</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>91.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Our classification ratio has been relatively stable over the five year period, with a small upward trend in the earlier year followed by a plateau throughout the period 2016/17 to 2018/19. This earlier gradual increase in our classification profile can be broadly attributed to improvements in student performance and the increased professionalism in our teaching and learning approaches and practices at that time.

4. In the graduating class of 2019/20, the proportion of First Class outcomes increased by 5.2 percentage points over and above 2018/19 figures (level 6 and 7 combined), with corresponding reductions in the proportion of Upper Second Class and Lower Second Class outcomes.

5. Our degree classification algorithm has remained unchanged throughout this period. A more detailed analysis of the changes to the 2019/20 profile can be found under Issues and Challenges.

6. Our increases in the highest classifications are smaller than those observed in sector-wide data\(^2\), this is true both of the 5-year trends and the accelerated movement in 2019/20. The sector’s overall increase in Firsts (+7 percentage points) is stronger than that seen at Bristol.

\(^2\) [https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes](https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes) (first degrees data includes level 6 and integrated masters at level 7)
Degree Outcomes Statement

7. The University underlines its commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion by undertaking routine analysis of degree attainment and monitoring of attainment gaps for a range of student characteristics. The table below shows the attainment in First and Upper Second Class degrees for a number of demographic characteristics, for example, students with disabilities are shown with the difference in outcomes when compared to students without disabilities.

Table 3: Attainment by Demographic Characteristic (level 6 and level 7 combined)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>28.7% (-3.6)</td>
<td>35.6% (-1.8)</td>
<td>62.7% (+4.7)</td>
<td>54.5% (-0.2)</td>
<td>91.4% (+1.1)</td>
<td>90.1% (-1.9)</td>
<td>81.4% (-12.3)</td>
<td>85.1% (-9.3)</td>
<td>92.3% (+4.0)</td>
<td>93.8% (+4.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (BAME)</td>
<td>1387</td>
<td>24.2% (-10.6)</td>
<td>28.8% (-11.7)</td>
<td>57.3% (-1.7)</td>
<td>53.9% (+2.5)</td>
<td>81.4% (-12.3)</td>
<td>85.1% (-9.3)</td>
<td>81.4% (-12.3)</td>
<td>85.1% (-9.3)</td>
<td>81.4% (-12.3)</td>
<td>85.1% (-9.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female)</td>
<td>2620</td>
<td>32.5% (+1.2)</td>
<td>38.1% (+2.0)</td>
<td>59.8% (+2.8)</td>
<td>55.7% (+2.3)</td>
<td>92.3% (+4.0)</td>
<td>93.8% (+4.3)</td>
<td>92.3% (+4.0)</td>
<td>93.8% (+4.3)</td>
<td>92.3% (+4.0)</td>
<td>93.8% (+4.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature (21y+ at entry)</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>24.0% (-8.3)</td>
<td>30.6% (-6.9)</td>
<td>53.0% (-5.8)</td>
<td>55.9% (+1.4)</td>
<td>77.0% (-14.1)</td>
<td>86.5% (-5.5)</td>
<td>77.0% (-14.1)</td>
<td>86.5% (-5.5)</td>
<td>77.0% (-14.1)</td>
<td>86.5% (-5.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLAR (Quintiles 1 and 2)</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>28.9% (-5.6)</td>
<td>38.3% (-1.1)</td>
<td>60.3% (+1.5)</td>
<td>52.2% (-2.6)</td>
<td>89.3% (-4.0)</td>
<td>90.5% (-3.7)</td>
<td>89.3% (-4.0)</td>
<td>90.5% (-3.7)</td>
<td>89.3% (-4.0)</td>
<td>90.5% (-3.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(positive difference means demographic group achieves that outcome more frequently than their comparator)

8. In our Access and Participation Plan, which was agreed with the Office for Students, the University has prioritised action to close the Black, Asian and minority ethnicity attainment gap. Further information can be found in the [APP statement](https://www.bristol.ac.uk/). The University continues to monitor degree attainment gaps across the student body within key demographic characteristics.

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3 Please note, the figures cited in the APP refer to ‘Home’ (UK-domiciled) students.
Assessment and marking practices

Assessment practices

9. We have in place a set of principles that governs our approach to assessment at the University such that both staff and students share common expectations and are aware of their responsibilities.

10. One such principle is that assessment tasks are designed to be appropriate to disciplinary and professional contexts, taking into account the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory bodies (PSRB) as well as the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement.

11. When designing assessment, specific assessment criteria are devised as a means to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are attained. The methods of assessment are published alongside the programme intended learning outcomes in a programme specification held in our Programme Catalogue.

12. The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption to normal operations for 2019/20 summer assessments. The University issued central guidance to inform how assessments should be adapted given the circumstances. This guidance was produced in consultation with senior colleagues from across the University, with an awareness of the decisions taken by peer institutions, to uphold our standards. Final year assessments were devised by unit leads and final year leads, exercising academic judgement to ensure assessments were deliverable and proportionate in the circumstances. Plans were then approved by programme directors and authorised by Faculty teams.
Marking practices

13. Marking criteria are designed to help students know what is expected of them. The University has common university-level marking criteria with descriptors that provide comparability of standards across all taught programmes. The University criteria are used as a basis for subject-specific criteria that are relevant to the discipline and the forms of assessment used and these are shared with the students.

Assurance

14. We assure the quality of our marking through a robust internal and external process of checking and verification. The University has introduced a new policy on internal moderation in 2020/21, to strengthen and ensure continued consistency across the University.

15. The assurance of assessment and marking practices within a programme is primarily overseen by a Programme Director (or equivalent role-holder) in consultation with the external examiner who offers expert, independent and comparative views of academic standards, of assessment processes and programme structures, and of good practice and innovation.

16. In their annual report on the quality and standards of programmes, external examiners are asked to check and comment upon the standards of the qualification and whether student performance is comparable with national frameworks and with the standards of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions.

17. In addition, the assessment strategy for a programme is reviewed by internal and external assessors at the point of development and then on an ongoing basis. Specific assessment tasks and criteria are reviewed and checked to ensure they are appropriate, normally by the external examiner for the programme, prior to them being used.

18. External assessors are also employed as a key member of the University’s periodic programme revalidation process that reviews and advises upon the academic standards of education provision, and enhancements to curricula and the student academic experience.

19. Recruitment, training and supporting practices ensure that external experts are able to discharge their responsibilities in line with QAA's guidance on External Expertise.

20. The University-level Taught Degrees Exam Board acts as a backstop providing assurance to Faculty Exam Boards, for escalation or advice on particularly challenging or complex cases.
Academic governance

21. The University’s Board of Trustees has responsibility for assuring the value of awards over time, including those delivered in partnership with others. To do this it receives an annual report on the outcome of the University’s quality review activities, which is subsequently submitted to the Office for Students to show how we are continuing to meet our conditions of registration. The 19/20 Quality Assurance Report to the Board of Trustees included a specific chapter that provides an analysis of and provide assurance as to the impact of the mitigations (outlined in para. 30) upon degree outcomes in 2019/20.

22. The University Academic Quality and Standards Committee (UAQSC), a sub-committee of University Education Committee (UEC), oversees the operational implementation of the quality assurance framework. It is chaired by the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for academic quality and standards and routinely receives summary reports on all our quality activities.

23. A quality review framework works to assure the quality and standards of education provision and student academic experience for all programmes across all levels of study. The framework comprises two streams, the University Quality Team (UQT) process undertakes yearly reviews, and the more in-depth Periodic Programme Revalidation (PPR) is planned and delivered where appropriate, for example where there is any concern regarding the quality, validity and viability of academic provision. Both review streams consider classification data as a key input. Both streams also consider any matters raised by students or external examiners, including any that relate to the value of the qualification, and report to UAQSC.

24. Indeed, any issues identified or brought to our attention by an external examiner, through internal quality processes (e.g. annual quality reviews) or by student voice and representation mechanisms, are investigated and actions agreed to remedy them, with monitoring employed through the UAQSC.

Classification algorithms

25. The University has a common classification algorithm for its honours degree programmes – a description and rationale is provided here. The common degree classification algorithm has been in place since 2011/12.

26. A different classification method is in place for the level 7 non-modular programmes in Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Sciences based upon the final programme mark in relation to the overall performance of the cohort, as required by the relevant accrediting bodies. Details of this is provided in our regulations.

27. The University has undertaken a review of its own degree classification algorithm to ensure alignment with the UKSCQA Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design. Actions arising from this review have been reported to and overseen by the University Learning and Teaching Committee. We are confident that our common classification algorithm is in line with sector practice, as set out in the UKSCQA document and the UUK/GuildHE report on the configuration of degree algorithms⁴.

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⁴ 'Understanding degree algorithms', UUK/GuildHE, October 2017.
Teaching practices and learning resources

28. We want all our students to succeed and so have introduced and implemented a series of initiatives to ensure they have a positive outcome – both academically and personally – cemented within the University Education Strategy. Whilst it is difficult to establish a causal link between such initiatives and degree classification, we believe that the following enhancements, inter alia, at Bristol are likely to have had an effect in improving student performance and outcomes:

- A Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching (BILT) to inspire innovation and excellence in teaching;
- A continuing professional development scheme for academic staff: CREATE (Cultivating Research-rich Education and Teaching Excellence);
- Curriculum enhancement work draws on our Curriculum Framework and its six connected dimensions which together form a touchstone for curriculum design and enhancement;
- Capital investment in teaching facilities, including increased study space;
- Lecture capture, in particular its use as a tool to rehearse and consolidate material and prepare for assessment;
- A Student Wellbeing Service for our students, including placing Student Wellbeing Advisers in each academic area.

29. The University has a route to recognise and promote academic staff in teaching focussed roles to the professorial level.

Issues and Challenges

30. The University implemented a suite of appropriate mitigations in response to the complex challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This included (but was not limited to): redesign of assessments; moving to online examinations; retaining a limited number of more traditional format (non-online) assessments where appropriate; changes to policy and procedure surrounding Extenuating Circumstances claims; and the introduction of a ‘Safety Net’ policy to ensure that students’ academic outcomes were not detrimentally affected by the impact of the pandemic.

31. During the development and implementation of the pandemic mitigations, potential impacts on degree outcomes were anticipated. It was acknowledged that some mitigations would likely increase the proportion of higher classifications, in particular the introduction of a safety net policy meant that the student’s overall mark was held at at least the same as that achieved prior to the pandemic. Removing the risk that assessments completed during the period of upheaval could lower a student’s year-average marks would naturally result in an upward shift across the cohort. This being understood, the main impetus was to deliver fairness for students, therefore the potential consequences were seen as acceptable given the circumstances.

32. Having now undertaken a detailed analysis of the resulting effects, we are assured that at least 4.0 of the 5.2 percentage point increase in students achieving First Class outcomes (levels 6 and 7 combined) is directly attributable to the safety net as part of the mitigations implemented in response to the pandemic. The remaining increase is likely to consist of natural year-on-year variation, plus other effects of the unprecedented circumstances that the analysis was not able to quantify.
Actions

33. The following actions from the 2020 Degree Outcomes Statement have now been completed:
   a. Introduction of a new University policy on internal moderation to strengthen and ensure continued consistency across the University;
   b. Undertaken a review of the University’s degree algorithm in comparison to UKSCQA Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design. The review concluded that there is broad alignment, with a small number of recommendations presented to the University Learning and Teaching Committee for consideration.

34. The following actions from the 2020 Degree Outcomes Statement are still in progress:
   a. Continue to work towards establishing the recently published outcome classification descriptors for level 6 degree programmes as a base on which to guide marking criteria for attainment across the University;
   b. Introduce new University guidance on anonymity in marking, mark calibration and benchmarking for markers;
   c. Increasingly involve our students in conversations about degree classification.

35. We have identified the following additional actions:
   a. Enact the recommendations agreed by University Learning and Teaching Committee in response to the UKSCQA Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design, as 33b above.
Notes on the degree classification profile data

- This data is derived at a Student Programme Route (SPR) level: SPR is the relationship between a student and a Programme, and credits towards an award are accumulated at this level.

- For each SPR record that any students have had, we return the award that:
  - Is awarded and available to the student
  - Is the highest ranked award for that Programme. If multiple equally ranked awards were available, then the one with the latest award date is returned.

- Only awards with classification of “HONS I”, “HONS II.1”, “HONS II.2” and “HONS III” have been included.

- Students who receive awards with any other classification, or who do not receive an award at all, are not included.

- The year of the award is taken from the award record and may not match the year of the final enrolment record of the student.

- The route of an award is taken from the award record and may not match the route of the final enrolment record of the student.

- Historical years may vary slightly to previous Degree Outcomes Statement due to retrospective changes (e.g. rescinded award due to appeal, etc.)

- Only awards for standard UG routes have been included.

- Non-standard routes have been excluded.

- Rounding of figures may mean some tables do not appear to add up to 100%. Also, in the cases of small numbers rounding to zero, this does not indicate the outcome was truly zero – such cases are indicated by the use of a greater than (>) symbol.

- Figures cited in the Degree Outcomes Statement include all fee status students (UK, EU and Overseas) with the exception of POLAR data in Table 3, which is only available for Home (UK-domiciled) students.

- If reading in conjunction with the Access and Participation Plan or the Transparency Return, please note that these publications cover Home (UK-domiciled) students only; additionally, small reporting differences exist due some awards made close to the start of the academic year and the HESA submission date; therefore differences in some figures should be expected.