University of Bristol
Degree Outcomes Statement

July 2020
Institutional degree classification profile

1. The University’s degree classification profile is provided over the page. 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. This is provided on the basis of the following:

- 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;
- 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;
- Differentials in degree class by student characteristic are not provided since we are currently investigating outcomes and employing measures to support specific student groups – we aim to provide this analysis in future when we have a better understanding of the issues and data and can evaluate the impact of those measures upon student outcomes (e.g. through our access and participation plan).

2. This Statement was prepared prior to the Coronavirus pandemic and so this version does not include reference to the impact that it may present on future degree outcomes.

3. Our classification ratio has seen a small upward trend across the five-year period, although relatively gradual when compared to the sector. The classification profile has plateaued over the last three academic years with no change in the actual percentage of students who were awarded a higher classification (i.e. first and upper second class) in our level 6 degree programmes, and an increase of one percentage point across our level 6 and 7 undergraduate degree programmes.

4. In this time, our degree classification algorithm has remained unchanged.

5. We believe that the gradual increase in our classification profile can be broadly accounted for by improvements in student performance and the increased professionalism in our teaching and learning approaches and practices (see the section on ‘teaching practices and learning resources’ for further information).

¹ Information on how this data is derived is provided in a note at the end of the document.

² Analysis of degree classifications over time, The Office for Students (July 2019): The proportion of graduates in the sector attaining a higher classification of degree in 2017-18 is 3.7 percentage points higher than in 2014-15 (pg 14, table 2 of report); for Bristol this figure is 0.9 (as Annex A) based on their analysis.
Table 1: Degree classification profile for level 6 honours degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2014/15 – 2018/19

<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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>2994</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>3139</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>3471</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>3549</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>3673</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Degree classification profile for level 6 and 7 honours degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2014/15 – 2018/19

<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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>3657</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>3771</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>4125</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>4282</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>4830</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classifications over time (Level 6)

Classifications over time (Level 6 & 7)
Assessment and marking practices

Assessment practices

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. 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.

Marking practices

9. 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.
10. We assure the quality of our marking through a robust internal and external process of checking and verification.

11. 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.

12. 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 of student performance is comparable with national frameworks and with the standards of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions.

13. 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.

14. 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. This process is employed on a cyclical basis for subjects.

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

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. A cyclical Periodic Programme Revalidation (PPR) process revalidates all our taught programmes, subject to any recommendations in the report being satisfactorily addressed. A PPR may be instigated for a subject where there is any concern regarding the quality, validity and viability of academic provision (across taught programmes) and the educational experience, supported by the University.

19. In parallel to PPR, the University Quality Team undertakes annual reviews of the quality and standards of education provision and the student academic experience for all its programmes across all levels of study. As part of the review process it considers classification data and any matters raised by students or external examiners, including any that relate to the value of the qualification, and reports to UAQSC.

20. 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

21. The University has a common classification algorithm for its honours degree programmes – a description and rationale is provided here [URL to be added]. It is in line with sector practice, as set out in UUK/GuildHE report on the configuration of degree algorithms³. The common degree classification algorithm has been in place since 2011/12.

22. 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.

Teaching practices and learning resources

23. 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 as individuals – cemented within a 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 and Teaching Excellence)
• 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 school
• Students can routinely access their own exam scripts as a means for them to reflect on their own performance and to consider how they might improve their preparation for future assessments

24. In many areas of the University the numbers of academic staff in teaching focussed roles has increased and the University has a route to recognise and promote these staff to the professorial level.

³ 'Understanding degree algorithms', UUK/GuildHE, October 2017.
Actions

25. We have identified the following actions from an internal review to:

a. 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 policy on internal moderation to strengthen and ensure continued consistency across the University.

c. Introduce new University guidance on mark calibration and benchmarking for markers.

d. Reflect upon the conclusions of an upcoming sector report from UKSCQA on degree algorithms and increasingly involve our students in conversations about degree classification.

Notes on the degree classification data profile

- 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.
  - Only awards for standard UG routes have been included.
  - Non-standard routes have been excluded.