University of BRISTOL

## Degree Outcomes Statement: 2024

Institutional degree classification profile

1. The University's undergraduate degree classification profile is shown below[1]. 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 nearly one fifth of first degree graduates in 2022/23 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 2022/23 academic year, which is the second year on our journey back to pre-pandemic norms following an earlier period of disruption as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Any continuing effect of the mitigations packages from 2019/20 and 2020/21 was very minimal, with a vanishingly small number of students graduating in 22/23 being eligible for mitigation under the 2019/20 and 2020/21 provisions (see paragraph 9).

3. Our classification ratio had been relatively stable prior to the pandemic period, plateauing throughout the period 2016/17 to 2018/19. The proportion of First Class outcomes increased in 2019/20 and 2020/21 following actions to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic; covered in greater detail in the previous years' Degree Outcomes Statements.

4. In the graduating class of 2022/23, the proportion of First Class outcomes decreased by 4.4 percentage points when compared to 2021/22 figures (level 6 and 7 combined). Correspondingly, the proportion of graduates achieving Good Honours decreased by 2.6 percentage points in the same period.

5. Our degree classification algorithm remained unchanged throughout the pandemic period, although was temporarily qualified in 2019/20 and 2020/21 to account for the impact of the pandemic, and in 2022/23 to support the response to the Marking and Assessment Boycott (see paragraph 30).

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

Table 1: Degree classification profile for level 6 degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2018/19 – 2022/23
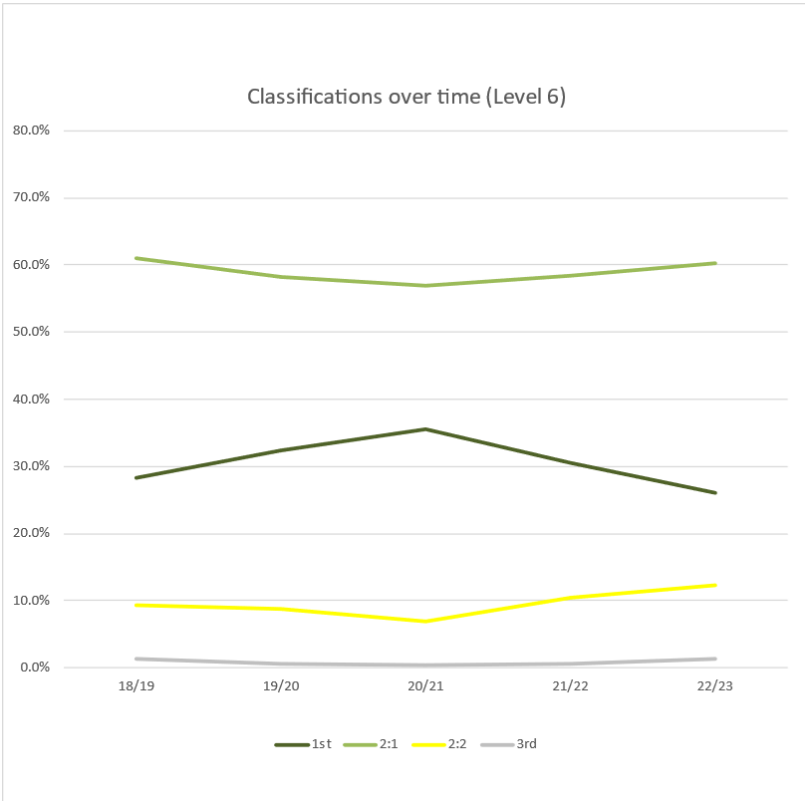
Year of award	Total awards	First Class	Upper Second Class	Lower Second Class	Third Class	First and Upper Second Classes Combined
18/19	3672	28.3%	61.1%	9.4%	1.3%	89.3%
19/20	3983	32.3%	58.3%	8.8%	0.6%	90.6%
20/21	4049	35.6%	56.9%	7.0%	0.4%	92.5%
21/22	4315	30.6%	58.4%	10.4%	0.6%	89.0%
22/23	4477	26.2%	60.2%	12.3%	1.4%	86.4%

Table 2: Degree classification profile for level 6 and 7 degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2018/19 – 2022/23
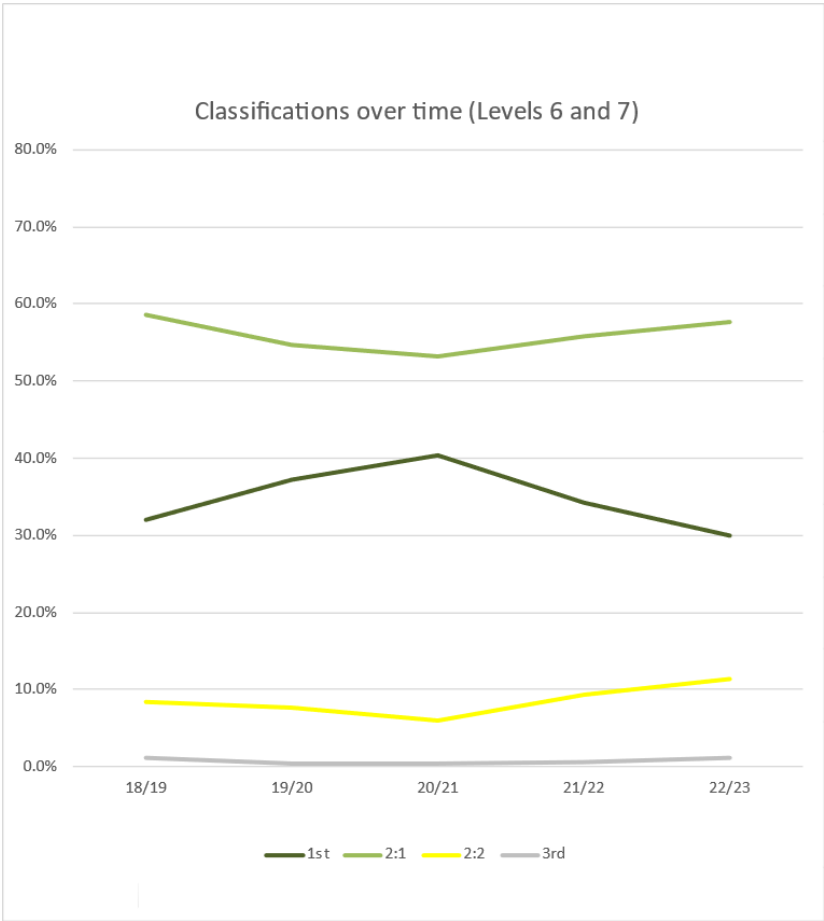
Year of award	Total awards	First Class	Upper Second Class	Lower Second Class	Third Class	First and Upper Second Classes Combined
18/19	4379	31.9%	58.5%	8.4%	1.1%	90.5%
19/20	4893	37.2%	54.6%	7.7%	0.5%	91.8%
20/21	4896	40.4%	53.1%	6.1%	0.4%	93.5%
21/22	5188	34.3%	55.8%	9.3%	0.5%	90.1%
22/23	5378	29.9%	57.6%	11.3%	1.2%	87.5%

Degree outcomes return to pre-pandemic levels

6. In July 2022 Universities UK, along with their members in England, committed to a number of actions in respect of undergraduate degree outcomes. Our Degree Outcomes Statement of 2023 outlined how we were meeting each of these commitments. For 2024, this Degree Outcomes Statement will highlight how we continue to meet key commitment 'd.' (returning the proportion of top classifications to 'pre-pandemic' levels by 2022/23, where 'pre-pandemic' is defined as 2018/19).

7. Last year, we reported that we had made strong progress in returning our degree outcome profiles towards the pre-pandemic 2018/19 baseline. Our 2021/22 outcomes were already in line with pre-pandemic (2018/19) figures when comparing the First and Upper Second Class combined measure, and for Firsts alone, we had a small margin yet to go.   This year we can

now report that our 2022/23 outcomes have continued to reverse the grade inflation of the pandemic period, and are now aligned closely with historical awarding patterns. The proportions of Firsts and Good Honours in 2022/23 are slightly lower than those seen in 2018/19, and in terms of historical comparison, are now more closely aligned with rates last seen in 2015/16.

8. We may surmise that the removal of pandemic mitigations has restored us to pre-pandemic awarding patterns, although the additional scale of the reduction warrants further exploration – something that is delayed by the current lack of sector comparison data (discussed in paragraph 12).

Factors affecting Degree Outcomes in 2022/23

9. 2022/23 degree outcomes were subject to the **tail end of ongoing commitments from pandemic mitigation schemes** that were implemented in 2020 and 2021 (discussed in detail in previous Degree Outcome Statements). In 2023 this was applicable only for those students who had been on their programme for four or more years, such as an integrated masters programme or where a student on a three-year programme took a supplementary year. As such, this resulted in very small numbers of students benefitting from an increased classification due to these mitigation schemes. 27 undergraduate students benefitted from an increased classification in this way, 8 from the Safety Net scheme implemented in 2020 and 19 from the Cohort Comparison Unit Exclusion mitigations in 2021. All these students received a classification only one grade higher than they would have done without the mitigation scheme. These changes make negligible difference (no more than 0.3 points) to the proportions of outcomes stated in table 2.

10. In our Degree Outcomes Statement of 2023, we outlined how modelling suggested that a **planned change to integer marks** could introduce a very small inflationary effect. Modelling in advance of the implementation showed that this change would result in slightly different outcomes for a small number of students who sit on the borderline between classifications. As this change would happen for many students at a mid-point in their studies, the University made a commitment that no student would be disadvantaged by the new policy when it was implemented in 2022/23. Monitoring during implementation identified five students who were thus affected and whose classifications were amended accordingly, and the actual impact on our 2022/23 degree classification profile was negligible.

11. As part of the Industrial Action that affected many universities during the 22/23 academic year, Bristol was subject to a **Marking and Assessment Boycott (MAB)** that commenced on 20 April 2023 and ended on 6 September 2023. A number of final year undergraduate students were impacted due to having missing marks at the time of their final award board. Temporary regulations were implemented that defined our approach to degree outcomes in the case of missing marks. The temporary regulations protected any student who, following the completion of any missing marking, would have received a lower classification than they had been awarded; such students were protected at the higher classification. 864 undergraduates received a classification but had missing marks, and of those, 59 students subsequently received a higher classification when their result classifications were checked again following the completion of missing marking. Again, monitoring showed that these changes had negligible impact on our degree classification profile.

12. Close monitoring of degree classification outcomes identified the above factors as being capable of introducing small grade inflationary effects, but careful analysis has shown that any impacts are minimal, localised, and proportionate, thus ensuring the aim of delivering fairness for the students involved.

13. Whilst important to note that the reduction in the proportion of the highest classifications is greater than expected, our ability to draw clear conclusions in respect of this is hampered by the late publication of national statistics from HESA (usually published around February, this year publication has been delayed and is now expected in July, due to the Data Futures implementation nationally); specifically whether the downturn is a local or national phenomenon. We are cognisant that the graduating class of 22/23 is the first cohort of undergraduates who commenced their university studies in the midst of the major pandemic disruption in 2020, and who experienced repeated periods of disruption throughout their first two years. The availability of timely sector data will help us understand these patterns.

Degree Classifications and Student Characteristics

14. The University underlines its commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion by undertaking routine analysis of degree attainment and monitoring of awarding 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. Following feedback in 2023, ethnicity gaps are no longer reported using the BAME aggregation, and the unpacking of this measure has highlighted significant variance in the more granular ethnicity data (the gap for each ethnicity is measured in comparison to White).

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

Demographic Group	Headcount 2022/23	First Class		Upper Second Class		First and Upper Second Classes	
		2021/22 (diff.)	2022/23 (diff.)	2021/22 (diff.)	2022/23 (diff.)	2021/22 (diff.)	2022/23 (diff.)
Disability	1192	30.1% (-4.9)	28.6% (-1.5)	59.7% (+4.6)	58.3% (+0.7)	89.8% (-0.3)	86.9% (-0.9)
Ethnicity (Asian)	757	21.7% (-17.4)	21.9% (-10.8)	57.9% (+3.3)	55.9% (-3.4)	79.6% (-14.1)	77.8% (-14.3)
Ethnicity (Black)	116	16.2% (-22.9)	13.8% (-19.0)	70.3% (+15.7)	63.8% (+4.5)	86.5% (-7.2)	77.6% (-14.5)
Ethnicity (Mixed or Multiple)	343	35.4% (-3.7)	31.5% (-1.3)	53.7% (-0.9)	54.8% (-4.5)	89.1% (-4.6)	86.3% (-5.8)
Ethnicity (Other)	99	12.9% (-26.2)	27.3% (-5.5)	67.1% (+12.5)	51.5% (-7.8)	80.0% (-13.7)	78.8% (-13.3)
Fee Status (Overseas)	843	18.7% (-18.5)	18.3% (-13.8)	58.9% (+3.7)	52.6% (-6.0)	77.6% (-14.8)	70.8% (-19.8)
Gender (Female)	2931	35.1% (+1.7)	30.2% (+0.6)	57.4% (+3.5)	59.5% (+4.0)	92.6% (+5.1)	89.6% (+4.6)
Mature (over 21y at entry)	227	35.2% (+0.9)	35.2% (+5.6)	50.9% (-5.2)	46.7% (-11.4)	86.1% (-4.2)	81.9% (-5.8)
POLAR (Quintiles 1 and 2)	642	29.8% (-9.1)	26.0% (-7.1)	58.1% (+3.5)	60.0% (+1.4)	87.9% (-5.6)	86.0% (-5.8)

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

15. Given the significance of some of these gaps, our University Education Committee is closely monitoring the data and working with colleagues from Inclusion to further our understanding and progress towards closing these gaps.

16. 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 awarding gap. Further information can be found in the APP statement[2]. The University continues to monitor degree awarding gaps across the student body within key demographic characteristics.

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[2] Please note, the figures cited in the APP refer to 'Home' (UK-domiciled) students.

Assessment and marking practices

Assessment practices

17. 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. In 2022 we launched our [Assessment and Feedback Strategy](#) to 2030, setting out our priorities for assessment to be integrated, designed for all, and authentic.

18. 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.

19. 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

20. 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

21. We assure the quality of our marking through a robust internal and external process of checking and verification. The University has a policy on [internal moderation](#), to strengthen and ensure continued consistency across the University.

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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

26. 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 the Board receives an annual report on the outcome of the University's quality review activities. The 2022/23 Quality Assurance Report to the Board of Trustees included a specific chapter that provides an analysis of degree outcomes and factors affecting 2022/23's awards.

27. 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.

28. 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 University Quality Team (UQT) process undertakes reviews, and considers classification data as a key input along with any matters raised by students or external examiners, including any that relate to the value of the qualification, and reports to UAQSC.

29. 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

30. The University has a common classification algorithm for its undergraduate degree programmes. The common degree classification algorithm has been in place since 2011/12. The temporary amendments to University regulation for classification that were introduced during the pandemic have now ended. As noted in paragraph 11, temporary regulations were implemented in Summer 2023 that defined our approach to degree outcomes in the case of missing marks due to the Marking and Assessment Boycott. Crucially the standards required for the award of a degree or other qualification remained unchanged throughout the period.

31. 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 are provided in our regulations.

32. The University is in alignment with the UKSCQA *Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design*. 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 algorithms[3].

Teaching practices and learning resources

33. 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's strategy pillar for education. 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

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

- Capital investment in teaching facilities, including increased study space.
- A [Student Wellbeing Service](#) for our students, including placing Student Wellbeing Advisers in each academic area.
- An [Assessment and Feedback Strategy](#), setting out our priorities for assessment to be integrated, designed for all, and authentic.

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

Actions

35. In each DOS we review our progress against actions from the previous year's Statement.
36. The following action from the 2023 Degree Outcomes Statement have now been completed:
    a. In last year's Degree Outcomes Statement, we committed to undertake additional analysis and work to understand the reopening of some awarding gaps in the most recent years' data. This has been completed with the delivery of new, more in-depth reporting to Academic Quality and Standards Committee and University Education Committee, using more granular data to enhance our understanding of awarding gaps. This exists as part of our wider ambitions around closing attainment gaps and something that we acknowledge will be a long-term journey. Building on the understanding already gained, we seek to rephrase the next phase of work and develop our practice over time. In respect of this, 38b outlines the next steps in our plan.
37. The following actions from the 2023 Degree Outcomes Statement are still in progress:
    a. Continue to develop additional centrally-supported tools and guidance to support Unit Directors and Programme Directors to review mark distributions. Progress on this action was delayed by the Marking and Assessment Boycott, with developer resources being redirected to support development of tools and processing capabilities that enabled us to graduate students with the minimum delay and disruption during the boycott. Work has now been re-initiated following the delay.
38. We have identified the following additional actions:
    a. To explore possible effects of subject choice and distribution (in terms of student population) on award gaps for various student characteristics.
    b. To undertake sector comparisons when the relevant HESA data becomes available (see paragraph 13). This will inform our understanding about whether the downturn in the proportions of the highest classifications is local or national. Should it be determined that it is a local phenomenon, then additional work would be indicated to deepen our understanding of the factors contributing to this change.
    c. The University is in the process of updating its Access and Participation Plan in conjunction with the Office for Students. Future actions in respect of award gaps will be aligned with agreed actions in the APP. We recognise the APP is focused on Home Undergraduate students only, however, actions for this group of students are likely to inform our approach to award gaps affecting Overseas students.

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, retrospective changes in EDI identity data, 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.