



Quality Assurance Report to Board of Trustees: 2023/24 Academic Year

Introduction:

1. Ongoing conditions for registration with the Office for Students (OfS) require us to assure the quality of our education, the reliability of our standards and positive outcomes for all students (described in the [B conditions for registration by the OfS](#)). As a member of the Russell Group and one of the UK's top higher education institutions our commitment to students goes beyond baseline compliance, and our quality framework embeds significant elements of enhancement to drive improvement.
2. The 23/24 academic year was a period of preparation for significant educational change across the Institution in relation to the introduction of the new Structure of the Academic Year (SAY) in September 2024. To shift to a new year structure required programme simplification, including the removal of 10 credit point units and ensuring teaching blocks had a balanced of credit points. Significantly, to accommodate the move of the winter assessment period to before Christmas, assessments for TB1 units needed review and, in some cases, significant change. This was linked with embedding of the assessment strategy which encouraged programmes to look across all assessments to ensure they were integrated, authentic and designed for all. In addition, over the year work continued to establish the new Faculty structures and implementation of US2030.
3. This report sets out how the Board of Trustees can be assured that education provision during the 2023/24 academic year met the OfS B conditions for ongoing registration and that our quality assurance plans for 2024/25 can give the Board ongoing confidence in our education provision.

Summary of our Internal Quality Assurance Arrangements for 2023/24:

4. Following stakeholder evaluation and feedback on the 2022/23 quality framework, arrangements for the 2023/24 academic year were agreed by University Academic Quality and Standards Committee (UAQSC). Changes to both policy and operation are detailed in the UAQSC paper (AQSC 2324 04) and a key change was moving University Quality Team (UQT) reviews to a cyclical process, allowing more time within an academic year for the quality team to follow-up with specific Schools, as necessary. This further refines our risk-based approach to quality assurance and its balance with enhancement and these follow-up conversations have been well received by the School Education Directors and viewed as supportive. The use of University Quality Team (UQT) reviews to interrogate School education action planning continues to be the backbone of our framework. The central themes agreed for discussion at taught programme UQT visits in 23/24 were: implementation of SAY, programme simplification and the assessment strategy together with student experience on part time and foundation year programmes to reflect B3 metric variation.
5. Whilst Periodic Programme Revalidation continued to be part of the Quality Assurance Framework for 2023/24 no events were planned due to the significant work schools were undertaking for programme simplification and implementation of both the SAY and the assessment strategy (AQSC 2324 04). It was agreed that should a significant quality and standards issue be identified an appropriate intervention would be instigated.

Evidence of Quality Assurance of our Education Provision in 2023/24:

The points below provide evidence to assure the Board of Trustees of compliance with the OfS B conditions for ongoing registration:

6. **Quality review of education provision:** 25 University Quality Team (UQT) reviews were undertaken in 2023/24 (23 taught and 2 research) with no external regulatory compliance concerns identified. Reviews occurred as scheduled in the Faculty of Arts, Law and Social Sciences and our risk-based approach suggested additional support may be useful in the Schools of Geographical Sciences and Computer Science (AQSC 2425 03). Each UQT review resulted in actions for the Department, School, Faculty or a central division, many of which supported enhancement of provision and the student experience.
7. **Hearing and responding to the student voice** is an important element of both quality assurance and enhancement. Formal opportunities for student feedback are via internal and external surveys (as set out below) and Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and these data sources feed into UQT reviews together with input from our trained Student Quality Reviewers (SQRs) who meet with student representatives as part of the UQT review process to obtain 'live' feedback.
 - a. January 2024 saw the launch of the **Student Academic Representation Network (SARN)** and the **Student Academic Voices Group (SAVG)**. These two groups were designed to work together to focus on how we listen to, engage with, act on and feedback on student voices in all taught programmes, and make informed decisions on how we can evolve and work better in this key area. External metrics and frameworks are key strategic drivers for this work. Simultaneously, it is motivated by the conviction that if our students feel heard across their taught academic experiences, in relation to areas including assessment and feedback, community, and inclusion, then they feel valued and the impacts of this work will resonate more widely. Work of this nature is rooted in organisational cultures, and while some activities and outcomes can be delivered within a shorter timeframe, ongoing focus, work and support is foundational to its success. Partnership working between the University and Bristol Students' Union is at the core of this activity. Both groups have equal representation from academic student representatives, professional services, academic and Bristol SU staff, are co-chaired by a University Education Director (Quality) and a full-time elected Students' Union Education Officer and managed by AQPO and Bristol SU staff. During the 23/24 academic year two SARN meetings occurred, with attendance of over 100 at each. These two-hour meetings included conversation and sharing of practices and experiences, workshop activities, presentations and updates on key information from the SU and teams around the University working in this area. Student and staff feedback has been very positive, and the Network has deepened and strengthened the working relationship between the Bristol SU Representation team and University staff. The SAVG operates at a more strategic level and work focussed on planning activities in 23/24 that would help us explore Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) models and mechanisms around feedback back to students.
 - b. UAQSC received regular update reports through the year together with annual review on the use of **Bristol Live Unit Evaluation (Blue)** and overall usage statistics (AQSC 2425 02). Data from Blue is available to specific staff in schools and faculties based on their role, via static reports and a dashboard and is routinely reviewed to inform UQT visit discussions. In the 2023/24 academic year, 2273 units were evaluated using Blue end of unit surveys, with a student response rate of 22% (increased by 4 percentage points on 2022/23) and 58% of unit directors adding a response to this student feedback within Blue (increased by 4 percentage points on 2022/23). In 2024/25 we are encouraging Schools to experiment with alternative forms of mid-unit feedback to consider whether overuse of Blue is contributing to low response rates in end of unit surveys and continuing to encourage engagement with Blue by students and staff. We have produced Blue Insight Reports to help Heads of School and School Education Directors gain oversight of the student voice data in Blue.

- c. Analysis of the **National Student Survey (NSS)** for 2024 showed that, compared to last year's scores we improved on five themes (Learning Opportunities, Academic Support, Organisation & Management, Learning Resources and Student Voice); stayed the same on one (Teaching) and decreased on one theme (Assessment & Feedback) (AQSC 2425 01). However, our competitors also improved and the University of Cambridge reached the threshold for being included in the NSS results, resulting in a drop in our Russell Group ranking for six out of seven themes. An improved data dashboard and centrally produced School level NSS Insight Reports mapped to TEF gradings (AQSC 2425 01) are supporting Schools in identifying areas of focus for improvement in 2024/25, together with NSS Quick Wins (NSS Quick Wins paper for HoS.doc) agreed through a newly established TEF Oversight Board (see paragraph 24).
 - d. We continued our institution wide engagement with the **Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)** in 2023/24. Whilst there was an improvement in response rates (18% compared to 11.9% in 2022/23) we do still have some way to go to reach rates comparable to other institutions (24.7% in the sector). Our results across all nine question sets were an improvement on last year with overall satisfaction rising to 85% (+10% on last year). When looking across the three years of PTES participation, the 2024 results are the highest we have achieved in 36 of the 44 questions. PTES sector average data illustrates that we have performed well in comparison to both the sector and Russell Group. Compared to the sector, the University is in the second quartile for eight of the ten question sets (engagement, teaching, assessment, community, organisation, resources, support and overall). We do less well in skills development and dissertation, where results are in the third or lowest quartile against the sector and Russell Group. In 2025, we will trial the use of school level survey participation incentives in this survey to continue our focus on building response rates to increase confidence in the messages this survey is relaying.
 - e. The **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)** ran in 2022/23 and as we engage with this external survey every other year new data on the experience of our PGR community is not available for the 23/24 academic year.
8. **Scrutiny of new programmes and programme changes:** During 2023/24, 23 new programmes (10 undergraduate; 10 postgraduate-taught and 3 postgraduate-research) and 16 significant changes to existing programmes (low-risk new programmes or pathways) (2 undergraduate, 10 postgraduate-taught and 4 postgraduate-research) were approved. These changes are considered by AQSC with two University Education Directors providing detailed scrutiny of high-risk proposals to ensure they comply with our strategy, regulations and external expectations. This level of academic scrutiny occurs once the business case has been approved by New Programmes Board. In addition, AQSC considered and approved 40 programmes for withdrawal, 19 of which were being directly replaced by a pathway or programme under a new title. Of these withdrawals, 14 were undergraduate (8 closed, 6 replaced); 13 postgraduate-taught (5 closed, 8 replaced) and 13 were postgraduate-research (8 closed, 5 replaced). The Committee also considered 6 programmes for suspension (1 undergraduate, 4 postgraduate-taught and 1 postgraduate-research) during this year. Similar levels of portfolio change were seen in 2022/23 (15 new, 25 withdrawn and 7 suspended).
9. **The delivery of education in collaboration with external partners** provides access to particular resources and specialist, or clinical, teaching services for both our post-graduate research and taught student population. Proposals for educational partnerships arise from staff in schools and faculties in response to specific needs, networks and funding opportunities. The success of the University in UKRI CDT Funding Calls, particularly in the EPSRC and NERC spheres, was a major piece of work involving cross divisional working during the academic year. The annual review of the Educational Partnership Register was undertaken at the end of the academic year and presented to UAQSC for oversight of the overall educational partnership portfolio. Table 1 (see Appendix) shows the types of educational partnership that were approved in the

2023/24 cycle and those which had been previously approved and were concluded in 2023/24 with an executed partnership agreement in place.

10. **External examiners:** All of our taught programmes engage external examiners to help assure the quality and standards of our educational provision. External examiner reports and school responses to them are reviewed during the UQT process and reviewed centrally, with an overview report discussed at UAQSC to ensure common themes are identified and actioned where necessary. Most reports are positive and often comment on well-designed course content, knowledgeable, expert and caring staff, and well-run processes for exam boards and administrative matters. Where external examiners make recommendations in their reports, programmes and schools discuss and agree actions in the Annual Programme Reviews and are asked to record this in the school's Education Action Plan. No special reports, highlighting specific concerns, were received relating to the 23/24 academic year as normality returns after the ongoing effects of the pandemic and industrial action of previous years. The Quality Assurance Agency published a revised set of External Examining Principles in 2022 and during 23/24 a benchmarking exercise was undertaken to align our policy, procedures and administrative processes with these updated principles.

External examiners are involved in the examination of all research students, which is important for maintaining standards of these awards. 670 research degree dissertations were examined in 2023/34, an increase on the 656 considered in 2022/23. The research degree examination board approved 651 awards, an increase on the 637 awards in 2022/23. Outcomes for research degree examinations have continued in a similar pattern in recent years, reflecting disciplinary and cultural practices, rather than any weaknesses (AQSC 2425 14).

11. **Professional accreditation:** During 2023/24, 41 Professional Regulatory and Statutory Bodies (PSRBs) acted to accredit 185 programmes at the university. 137 of these were UG; 47 PGT; and 1 PGR. This amounts to a significant number of our students who are on externally accredited degree programmes: 52.8% of UG students are on an accredited degree, and 26.9% of PGT students are on an accredited degree. There were ten accreditation events during 23/24. Seven of these were periodic re-accreditation and three were for new professional bodies who are now acting to provide accreditation to programmes at UoB (Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC); Chartered Institute of Linguists (CioL); and Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs (IOEE)). For some programmes this external scrutiny is essential (e.g. medicine) whilst elsewhere it is optional. In all cases it provides additional confidence in the quality of the education provided.
12. **Academic misconduct:** The Academic Integrity Network met four times in 23/24 to respond to in year queries and discuss relevant processes and policies. Academic Integrity Officers at school and faculty level work to promote good practice, handle misconduct cases and help schools embed the university wide academic integrity training within programmes of study. The network also advised on the new Academic Integrity Awareness Course, which will be taken by 1st year undergraduate students with a first misconduct offence as an alternative to attending a misconduct panel. This is aimed at supporting students to understand academic integrity and also reducing time spent in panels. A review of all the academic misconduct cases across the University for 23/24 showed a small increase in the number of cases reported but a small drop in the number of cases resulting in a penalty, compared to the previous academic year (Fig 1, in Appendix). As cases run throughout the year the numbers are only ever a snapshot but by requesting at the same point each year the overall trend should be reliable. Although the overall numbers have changed very little there has been a notable shift from cases classified as plagiarism to cases classified as contract cheating. At Bristol cases of misuse of Artificial Intelligence are classified as contract cheating. Contract cheating numbers have increased by about a factor of three this year to account for 46% of all cases of alleged misconduct (AQSC 2425 24).
13. **Appeals and complaints:** UAQSC annually discusses the granularity of appeals and complaints to enhance our approach in this area. The Board of Trustees receives these reports as a separate item for discussion and hence they are not linked to here.

Degrees Outcomes in 2023/24

14. In terms of context, prior to the Covid 19 pandemic there was a sector-wide trend of long-term grade inflation in relation to degree outcomes. The proportion of the highest degree outcomes peaked in 2020 and 2021 because of the mitigations put in place in those year. Remove of these mitigations resulted in a reversal of this inflation with a sector wide decrease in the proportion of the highest degree outcomes that was beyond that which we knew was attributable to the pandemic mitigations.
15. Bristol's degree outcome data for 23/24 shows a continued reduction in the highest outcomes for undergraduate programmes, but we now see a slight increase in the proportion of top outcomes for postgraduate taught programmes (Fig 2, in appendix).
16. The proportion of undergraduate students receiving a first-class honours outcome has reduced from 29.9% in 22/23 to 28.6% in 23.24. This reduces the Good Honours rate in 23/24 to 86.1%, which goes hand in hand with an increase in the rate of 2:2s and 3rds. This pattern of degree outcomes is mirrored across all Faculties, although there is some interesting nuance in the detailed data analysis (AQSC 2425 29). Once sector data is available it will be compared to our institutional outcomes data.
17. In terms of degree outcomes for postgraduate taught (PGT) students (and noting that the awarding year for PGT programmes shifts one year later than for UG programmes due to timing of dissertation submissions) the proportion of PGT masters students receiving a distinction outcome has remained static for the last two years at 21.3% in both 23/24 and 24/25. However, when considering the top two PGT classifications combined, the rate of Merit-or-Distinction has increased from 67.5% in 23/24 to 69.6% in 24/25.
18. These recent institutional degree awarding outcomes are generally in alignment with the historical patterns from the years 13/14 to 16/17 and therefore we continue to meet the 2022 Universities UK commitments.
19. More detailed analysis of our degree outcomes in 23/24 has been performed in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. This analysis shows a stark picture in relation to degree outcomes by ethnicity with Black home fee paying students showing the greatest award gap compared to White students and other ethnicities. Those of Mixed and Unknown/undeclared ethnicities tend to experience smaller award gaps compared to White students; Asian and Other Ethnic Background students tend to sit somewhere in the middle (AQSC 2425 40). The demographics of our population of undergraduate overseas fee payers and postgraduate taught students is more mixed in terms of ethnicity, yet award gaps in relation to ethnicity are still present and significant (see AQSC 2425 40 for detailed analysis).
20. In relation to disabilities collectively, for home undergraduates the award gap is 1-2ppt below their non-disabled peers for Good Honours, and around 3-4ppt for Firsts. However, at the more granular level the rates of Firsts and Good Honours for students with some types of disabilities are higher than for non-disabled students. Overseas students with disabilities attain top outcomes at very similar rates to Overseas students without disabilities, however it is important to note that there are lower proportions of overseas students with disabilities when compared to Home (see AQSC 2425 40 for detailed analysis).
21. There remains a persistent award gap for POLAR quartile 1 and 2 students, which despite reducing during the pandemic mitigation years, has now reopened. In 23/24 the gap stands at 10.4ppts for Firsts and 5.4ppts for Good Honours.
22. This degree outcome analysis continues to be considered annually by University Education Committee to consider strategies to address award gaps. Work embedding inclusive assessment more extensively across the Institution is likely to help in this regard, but the challenge is complex and multi-factorial.

Future Perspectives

23. Levels of change across the institution will continue to be high for several years to come. As outlined above, the 23/24 year required significant work from Schools to complete programme simplification and assessment changes to prepare for the new Structure of the Academic Year (SAY). Work to streamline processes around student outcomes (e.g. exam boards, external examining and exceptional circumstances) is ongoing in 24/25 and necessary to maximise the benefits of the new SAY. As part of US2030, new Faculty

academic leadership roles for education will be agreed during 24/25 and in place for the start of the 25/26 academic year. Whilst this change should bring positive benefits in the long run, the short-term pain of such change is not insignificant in terms of staff morale and change fatigue which brings potential impacts on education delivery. It is important to highlight the volatile external environment we are facing. Changes in student recruitment across the sector are evident and Bristol is not immune to such impacts which is resulting in rapid changes to programme sizes in some areas. Such change will impact the experience of both students and staff and may be reflected in student outcome and voice data.

24. NSS results from 23/24 will form the second year of data in the four-year cycle for the next Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF27). Whilst our 2024 NSS results showed a slight drop when compared to the Russell Group the picture when they are considered against benchmarks is more positive. The table on the right below illustrates our previous TEF data with the shading illustrating NSS question themes that were bronze (assessment & feedback and academic support) and those that were silver (teaching, learning resources and student voice). When the 2023 and 2024 NSS data, as per TEF2027, are combined and compared to benchmarks (table on the left below) only assessment and feedback remains at a bronze ranking. However, it is important to highlight that whilst our position may have moved to a more secure silver position, no NSS themes are currently ranking as gold when compared to benchmark. However, a caveat about this modelling is that we are assuming TEF2027 will mirror TEF2023 in terms of its NSS use. It is possible that new NSS questions may be added, or some questions may be removed, and this could significantly affect our prediction. An oversight board to drive preparations for the next TEF exercise has been established and will meet regularly through the 2024/25 academic year (TOB 2425 01).

	NSS 2023 and NSS 2024 combined (first 2 years of TEF 2027)			Previous TEF 2023 (NSS 2019 to 2022 inclusive)		
	2-year combined		Diff.	Indicator*	Benchmark*	Diff.
	Positivity measure	Benchmark				
Teaching	85.6%	86.3%	-0.7	83.1	84.0	-0.9
Ass'mnt & feedback	69.3%	74.5%	-5.2	62.6	67.9	-5.3
Academic support	84.0%	85.9%	-1.8	73.3	76.3	-3.0
Learning resources	86.1%	87.3%	-1.1	80.3	82.7	-2.4
Student voice	70.8%	72.1%	-1.3	67.6	69.7	-2.1

**TEF 2023 used old NSS scoring - Indicators and Benchmarks are not comparable to those in the new NSS, but the difference columns are comparable.*

25. On a more positive note, innovation and new practices are still very much evident across the Institution. The Quality team has led on producing NSS Insight Reports which help schools to access, understand and use their data. Following positive feedback, we have expanded this approach to include Blue data (circulated to Schools in December 2024) and are exploring using a similar approach to raise awareness of the OfS B3 metrics. A second area of positive change is the partnership working with students and the Bristol SU exemplified by the SARN and SAVG. This illustrates the trust and value we place in our students and can only improve our approach to education.

Appendix

Approval	Completion
CVS Equine Ltd clinical placement services for Bristol Vet School	Prostock Vets Ltd clinical placement services for Bristol Vet School
NERC CDT for Resilient Flood Futures led by Southampton in partnership with the Universities of Loughborough, Bristol, and Newcastle with the National Oceanography Centre, the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and the British Geological Survey	Ashmolean Museum Collaborative PhD for a PGR student in Classics and Ancient History.
Split -site PhD with PETRONAS for a single student in the School of Earth Sciences.	Dual Award PhD (Cotutelle) with Université Bourgogne-Franche-Comté for a single PhD student in the School of Physics.
Renewal of the University of Cape Town Dual Award PhD Institutional Framework Agreement.	MRC GW4 Biomed DTP led by Cardiff with the universities of Bristol, Bath and Exeter.
Renewal of the collaboration agreement with the Society of Clinical Perfusion Scientists of GB & Ireland (SCPS) to deliver accredited programmes in Perfusion Science in the Bristol Medical School.	Robotics MSc Joint Degree Programme with UWE
Practice Plus Group Hospitals, Emerson's green clinical placement services for Bristol dental School.	Split site PhD with Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron (DESY) for a single student in the School of Physics.
ISAE-SUPAERO (University of Toulouse) Dual Award PhD for a single PhD student in the School of Civil, Aerospace and Design Engineering.	Dual Award PhD (Cotutelle) with the University of Kent for a single student in the School of Physiology, Pharmacology and Neuroscience.
TU Dresden Dual Award PhD Institutional Framework Agreement.	Gloucestershire Initial Teacher Education Partnership (GITEP) which offers School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) in secondary schools with the School of Education.
Pirbright Institute Distance Learning PhD Agreement for a student in the School of Cellular and Molecular Medicine.	Co-supervision Agreement with the University of Sheffield for a single PhD student in the School of Engineering Mathematics and Technology.
Dental implant Clinic, Bath clinical placement services for Bristol Dental School	
Split site PhD Agreement for a single student in the Bristol Medical School with the Australian National university (ANU)	
EPSRC Innovation for Sustainable Composites Engineering CDT in collaboration with the University of Nottingham.	
CVS Ltd small animal clinical placement services for Bristol Vet School	
Split site PhD with the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) for a single student in the School of Geographical Sciences.	

Jean Jaures (University of Toulouse) Dual Award PhD for a single PhD student in the School of Humanities.	
Renewal of RWA Teaching Services Partnership for Arts Curatorial Units in the School of Humanities (History of Art).	
EPSRC Superconductivity CDT in collaboration with the universities of Cambridge and Oxford.	

Table 1: Types of educational partnership that were approved in the 2023/24 cycle and those which had been previously started and concluded with an executed partnership agreement in place.

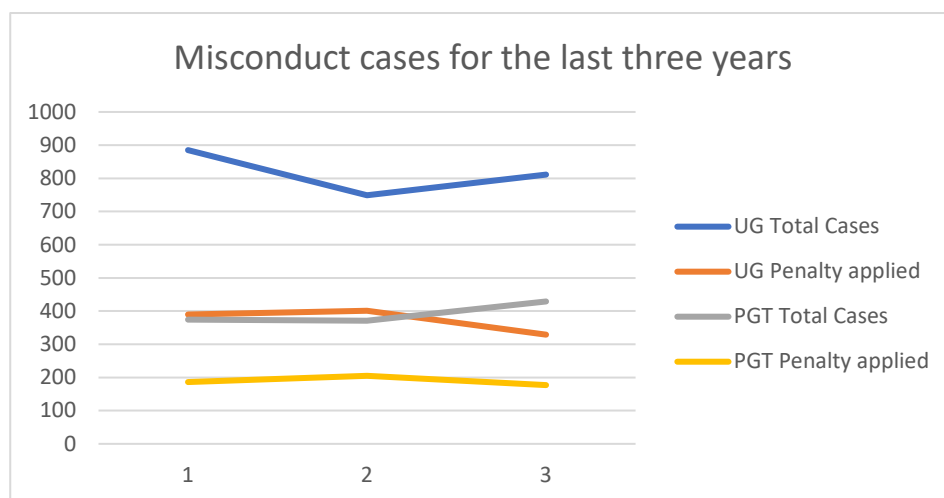


Fig 1: The total number of cases of alleged academic misconduct reported for the last three years broken down into UG and PGT and the number of these cases that resulted in a penalty.

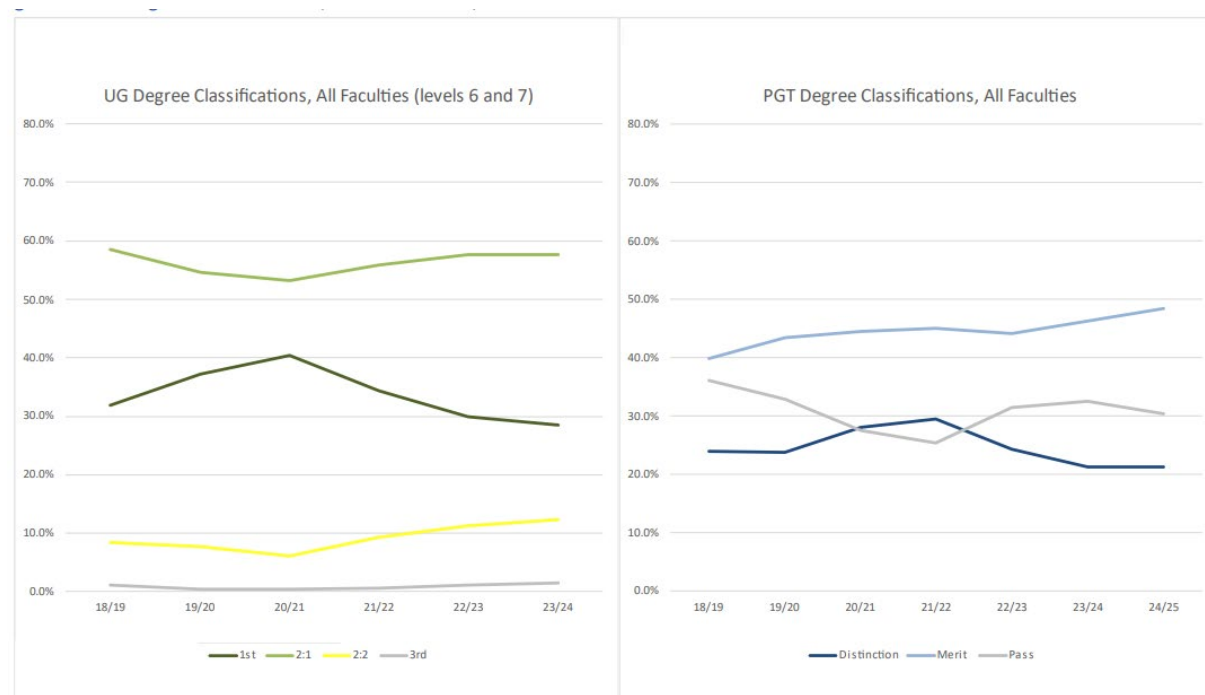


Fig 2: Degree outcomes for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students across the institution in 23/24.