University of Exeter

Degree Outcomes Statement

2022

1. Purpose of the Statement

The University of Exeter is an autonomous Higher Education provider holding university title and degree awarding powers under the <u>Higher Education and Research Act 2017</u>. This autonomy means that the University is responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards and quality of its undergraduate degrees and other qualifications. It does this within the context of the academic policies and ordinances of its <u>Council</u>, and in accordance with the procedures, frameworks, codes of good practice and guidance set out within its <u>Teaching Quality Assurance Manual</u> (TQA).

The purpose of this statement is, therefore, to present prospective and current undergraduate students, academic partners, stakeholders and other interested parties with information, and thus assurance, on how the University monitors and manages the academic standards of its undergraduate awards at Levels 4-6 of the <u>Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies</u>, now incorporated into the <u>Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England</u>.

The statement also aims to meet the expectations of the <u>UK Standing Committee on Quality Assessment</u> (UKSCQA) to ensure transparency, reliability and fairness in relation to degree outcomes for all University of Exeter students, whatever their background or journey to, and through, Higher Education. It, therefore, highlights both degree awarding trends and degree awarding gaps between different demographic groups of students, and the University's respective responses.

> Please note that this statement is based on data up to and including the 2020/21 academic year. It does, therefore, include data that may have been impacted by measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the implementation of the University's <u>No Disadvantage Guarantee</u>.

2. Institutional Degree Classification Profile

2.1 Trends in Undergraduate Degree Classifications

This section presents trends in the classifications of degrees awarded by the University to all its undergraduate students between 2016/17 and 2020/21. This includes UK-domiciled and international students. The data is presented as the percentage, or proportion, of different degree classifications awarded (1st, 2:1, 2:2 and 3rd).

The data also includes Integrated Masters Degrees, which are four-year, Level 7 FHEQ programmes, predominantly in engineering, mathematics and sciences, which incorporate an honours degree. The results for students on the Bachelors of Medicine and Surgery (BMBS), who are not awarded traditional degree classifications, have been excluded from the data.

Figure 1: University of Exeter Trends in Undergraduate Degree Classification
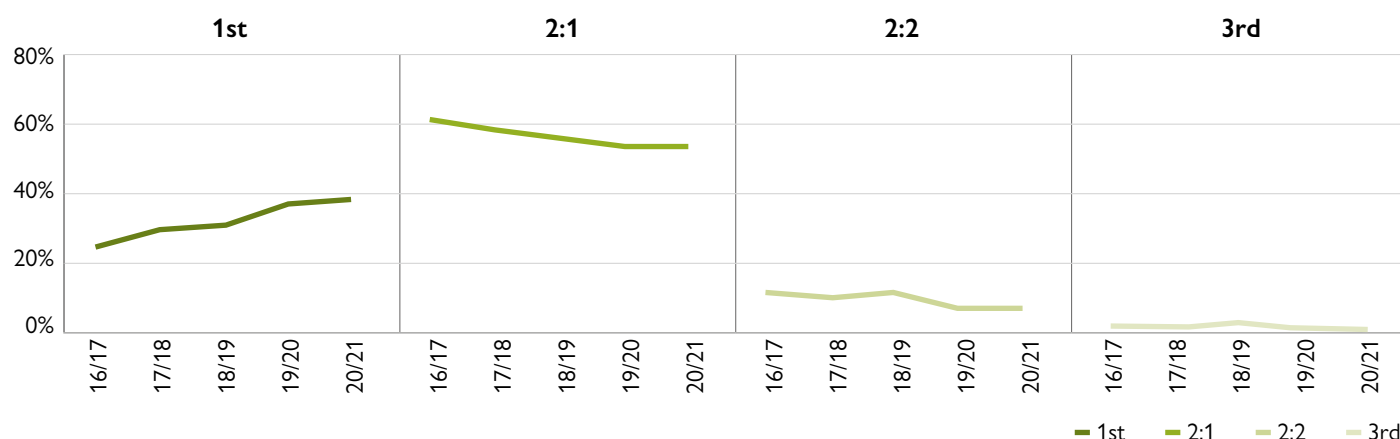
Over the past five years, there has been an upward trend in the number of 1st and 2:1s (together referred to as 'good honours degrees') awarded by the University and an associated decline in the award of 2:2 and 3rd class degrees. Most noticeable has been the increase in 1st class degrees, as a sub-set of 'good honours degrees', from 26% in 2016/17 to 39% in 2020/21. Reference to 'good honours degrees' alone can mask 1st class awarding trends and awarding gaps and so this version of the Statement reports on both.

Please refer to Section 2.5 below for analysis of how the implementation of the University's No Disadvantage Guarantee may have influenced degree outcomes for 2020/21.

2.2 Comparison with Sector Trends in Undergraduate Degree Classification

This section presents the trends illustrated in Section 2 above, in comparison with the same trends for the following groups within the Higher Education sector:

- **The Sector** – all undergraduate degree awarding institutions;
- **The Russell Group** – a group of research-intensive Universities, of which the University of Exeter is part; and
- **The Competitor Group** – a self-selected group of similar institutions within the sector.

The data is drawn from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Outcomes Data Set for the five academic years up to and including 2020/21 as collated and supplied by Jisc (formally the Joint Information Systems Committee, now a not-for-profit member organisation) and is used for benchmarking purposes.

Figure 2: Comparison of University of Exeter Trends in Degree Classification with the Higher Education Sector

Key:
Exeter · Sector · Russell Group · Competitor Group
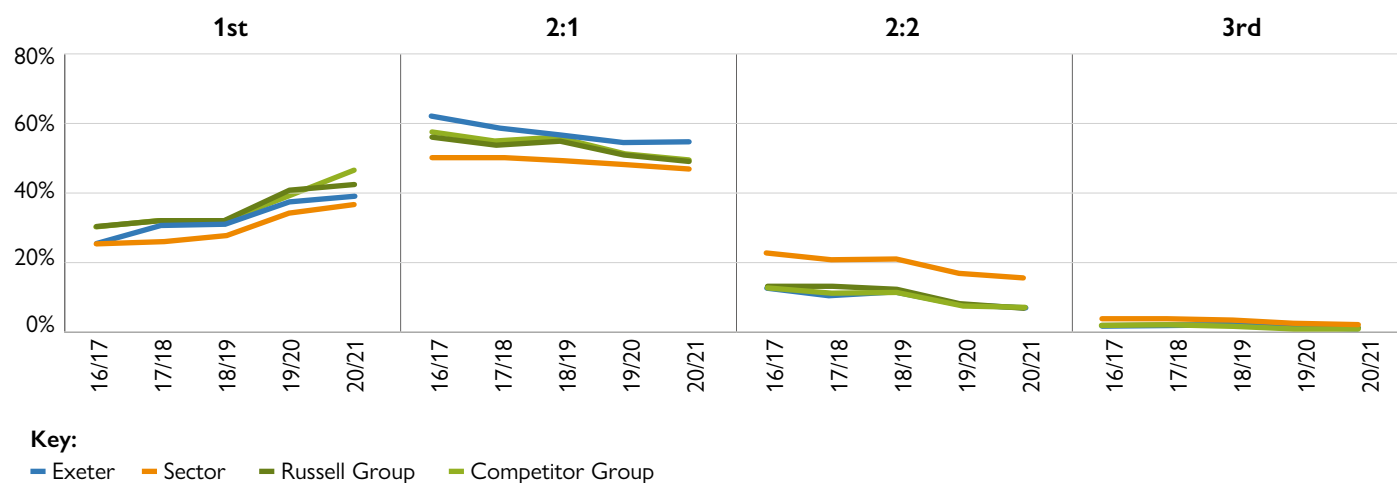
Over the past five years, the University's trends have been well aligned with those found across the Russell Group and its Competitor Group, particularly in respect of the award of 2:2 and 3rd class degrees. The two areas of difference are in respect of the award of 'good honours degrees' and, within this group, 1st class degrees and are as follows:

- The University's award of 1st class degrees has been lower than the Russell Group and its Competitor Group (at 38% compared to 42% in 2020/21) and more in line with the Higher Education Sector as a whole; and
- The University's award of 2:1 degrees has been higher than all three comparator groups over the past five years, although the differential has fluctuated and more recently widened (in 2020/21 it was 54% compared to 46%, 48% and 46% respectively).

The University's overall trend of an increase in the award of 'good honours degrees' is mirrored across all comparator groups. However, it should be noted that in all cases it is the growth in 1st class degrees that is primarily driving this change.

Please refer to Section 2.5 below for analysis of how the implementation of the University's No Disadvantage Guarantee may have influenced degree outcomes for 2020/21.

2.3 Trends in Degree Classifications by Demographic Groups

This section presents data on the 'good honours degrees' and 1st class degrees, as a sub-set of the former, awarded by the University to its undergraduate students between 2016/17 and 2020/21, differentiated by selected demographic groups.

Table 1: University of Exeter Award of Good Honours Degrees and 1st Class Degrees by Demographic

		Proportion Awarded of Good Honours (and 1st Class)				
		2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Domicile	International	77% (19%)	75% (19%)	76% (20%)	82% (24%)	87% (29%)
	UK	89% (27%)	92% (33%)	90% (34%)	94% (41%)	94% (41%)
Age Group	Mature	82% (20%)	79% (20%)	78% (24%)	88% (28%)	88% (36%)
	Young	87% (26%)	89% (31%)	88% (32%)	92% (38%)	93% (39%)
Disability	Disclosed Disability	86% (24%)	88% (29%)	88% (32%)	92% (34%)	93% (35%)
	No Known Disability	87% (26%)	89% (30%)	87% (31%)	92% (38%)	92% (39%)
Gender	Female	91% (26%)	92% (31%)	90% (32%)	94% (37%)	95% (42%)
	Male	82% (24%)	84% (29%)	83% (29%)	89% (37%)	90% (35%)
Participation in HE	LPN	89% (27%)	90% (33%)	78% (31%)	93% (35%)	91% (36%)
	Non-LPN	90% (28%)	92% (34%)	91% (36%)	95% (43%)	96% (43%)
School Type	Independent	88% (23%)	91% (27%)	92% (32%)	95% (38%)	95% (40%)
	State	87% (28%)	88% (34%)	87% (35%)	91% (39%)	93% (41%)

Key: **Mature –** Students who are 21 years or over when they enter Higher Education

LPN – Students from Low Participation [in HE] Neighbourhoods

Table 2: University of Exeter Award of Good Honours Degrees and 1st Class Degrees by Ethnicity

	Proportion Awarded of Good Honours (and 1st Class)				
	2016/17	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
Asian	73% (16%)	71% (15%)	71% (19%)	78% (22%)	84% (28%)
Black	59% (8%)	71% (20%)	77% (15%)	85% (24%)	83% (24%)
Mixed	91% (20%)	85% (31%)	91% (29%)	90% (34%)	92% (39%)
Other	77% (10%)	66% (8%)	64% (13%)	84% (30%)	90% (28%)
White	90% (28%)	92% (33%)	91% (34%)	95% (41%)	95% (42%)

Key: Asian – Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi; Asian or Asian British – Indian; Asian or Asian British – Pakistani; Chinese; Other Asian background.

Black – Black or Black British – African; Black or Black British – Caribbean; Other Black background.

Mixed – Mixed – White and Asian; Mixed – White and Black African; Mixed – White and Black Caribbean; Other Mixed background.

Other – Arab; Other Ethnic background.

White – White; White British; White Scottish; White Irish; Irish Traveller; Gypsy or Traveller; Other white background.

The data demonstrates that there are a number of awarding gaps between and within different demographic groups of students in relation to the award of 'good honours degrees' and 1st class degrees. Some of these gaps have fluctuated more notably over time due to smaller cohort sizes. Furthermore, in some cases awarding gaps have reduced over time. However, a different picture can emerge when considering either 'good honours degrees' or 1st class degrees.

For example, in relation to 'good honours degrees', the gap between students disclosing a disability and students with no known disability had both closed and then become negative (students with disclosed disabilities had marginally better degree outcomes) by 1 percentage point (ppt) in 2020/21. However, when considering the 1st class degrees, the gap had opened up over the same period to 4ppt, indicating that gains had been achieved largely through the award of more 2:1 degrees to students disclosing a disability.

Further data and analysis will, therefore, be required to establish whether or not the closure of the 'good honours degree' awarding gap is a longer-term trend and if further positive interventions will be required to ensure that this gap does not re-emerge. The increase in the 1st class awarding gap also requires further investigation to identify contributory factors.

Please refer to Section 2.5 below for analysis of how the implementation of the University's No Disadvantage Guarantee may have influenced degree outcomes for 2020/21.

2.4 Commentary on Trends in Degree Classifications

Contributions to the improvement in student performance and awards between 2016/17 and 2020/21 include: (i) sustained improvements over time in the entry standards of students; (ii) the development of new educational facilities and resources; and (iii) the pan-institutional focus on enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment practices. As the impact of (ii) and (iii) has not been isolated, there may be an element of what the Office for Students (OfS) define as unexplained change, that is: '…change over a time period that cannot be accounted for by change in the characteristics of the graduating cohort'[1].

1. Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010/11 to 2020/21, OfS, 2022. Available at
www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/cd778d76-5810-488b-b1e6-6e57797fe755/ofs-202222.pdf

The University is confident that its commitment to excellence in teaching and learning, alongside investment in educational facilities, resources and support services has had a positive impact on academic outcomes for its students. However, there is a need for more definitive evidence to establish a clear relationship between such factors and the increase in 'good honours degrees' and 1st class degrees awarded. The University will, therefore, be undertaking further research and analysis to better understand the multiple contributions to the improvements in awards.

Additional data held by the University indicates that there are differences in the degree awarding profiles of individual Colleges and between Disciplines within those Colleges. During the 2021/22 academic year, the University has further reviewed its College and Discipline level degree outcomes for the period 2016/17 to 2020/21 and compared them with more granular data from the HESA Student Outcomes Data Set for 2020/21. This has enabled Disciplines to be benchmarked with related disciplines at Russell Group, Competitor Group and Sector level. This data will be used by the Disciplines, their Assessment Progression and Awarding Committees (APACs) (see Section 3 below) and their External Examiners (see Section 3 below) to provide further assurance of degree standards (see Section 7).

The University recognises that awarding gaps exist between some of its demographic groups of students and it is committed to driving down and eliminating such gaps. These are defined by the OfS as '… identified gaps in degree outcomes for underrepresented groups when compared with their peers'[2]. It should be noted that the data above relates to all undergraduate students at the University, including international students. There may, therefore, be some differences in the gaps shown above and those identified in the University's Access and Participation Plan 2020/21-2024/25. This plan utilises data from the OfS's Access and Participation Data Dashboard, which covers UK-Domiciled students only.

Additional data held by the University indicates that there are also differences in the scale of awarding gaps shown between individual Colleges and between Disciplines within those Colleges. The University is undertaking further analysis to support consideration and actions at a finer-grained level of detail (see Section 7). There have been some improvements since 2016/17, with awarding gaps reduced or closed. However, addressing such disparities remains a top priority for the University, in particular, reducing both the 'good honours degree' and 1st class degree awarding gaps between students from Asian, Black, Mixed and Other (ABMO) ethnicities and white students. This is, therefore, an area in which the University is committed to, and engaged in, further research, analysis and action at both strategic and operational levels (see Section 7 for further information).

Please refer to Section 2.5 below for analysis of how the implementation of the University's No Disadvantage Guarantee may have influenced degree outcomes for 2020/21.

2.5 The No Disadvantage Guarantee

In February 2021, the University introduced its No Disadvantage Guarantee (NDG) for the 2020/21 academic year in response to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, a further campus closure and the return to on-line teaching, learning and assessment. As with the No Detriment Policy (NDP) of 2019/20, the aim of the NDG was to ensure the fairness and integrity of the Exeter award, as well as to support students through a difficult situation in a way that allowed them to progress or be awarded. It was not possible to continue with the NDP, under which a 'safety net' was provided for each student by the calculation of a benchmark based on the outcomes of their exams and assessments completed pre-COVID-19. The NDG was instead made up of two levels of 'safety nets', as follows:

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2. Office for Students Access and Participation Glossary. Available at **officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/access-and-participation-glossary**

1. At **cohort level** – each Programme/Discipline Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee (APAC) took a consistent approach and compared average marks, and the distribution of marks, achieved by each year group during 2020/21 with the equivalent marks from previous non-COVID-19 impacted years. They then applied appropriate adjustments to correct any significant downward deviation.

2. At **individual level** – measures included:
   - The continuation of the option to apply for mitigation, enabling students to gain extensions or defer assessments, without the need to provide evidence;
   - The revision of policies on appeals to reduce the burden of evidence required;
   - The expansion of the borderline zone for the application of preponderance rules by 1%; and
   - Further empowering APACs to take decisions and make adjustments - where justified - to account for the circumstances of individual students, informed by an evidence-based Exceptional Circumstances application process.

The key institutional level observations for the 2021/22 academic year, during which the NDG was in place, are:

- Following an increase in the award of 'good honours degrees' by 4ppt in 2019/20 to 91%, a further 2ppt increase to 93% was seen in 2020/21; and
- Following an increase in the award of 1st class degrees by 6ppt in 2019/20 to 37%, a further 2ppt increase to 39% occurred over the same period, accounting for all of the increase in 'good honours degrees', as the award of 2:1 degrees remained stable at 54%.

Analysis of the impact of the 2019/20 NDP on degree outcomes was undertaken by the University's Professor Nicky King *et al* and published as a Report into the 2019/20 No Detriment Policy implemented at the University of Exeter in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The report concluded that, although the NDP had provided an important 'safety net' for a small number of students who were unable to perform at a level consistent with their previous attainment:

> *It is more likely that other changes to the type and mode of assessment had a greater impact on student attainment and thus their degree classification. In addition, students reported anecdotally lower levels of stress as examinations moved to open book and there was a reduction in time-limited assessments. A policy introduced in extremis has, therefore, shed important light on the potential to create more equitable approaches to the examination and assessment of academic attainment.*

Assessment methods remained largely the same during the 2020/21 academic year. However, work undertaken under the auspices of the University's Project Enhance to further develop on-line teaching, learning, assessment and examinations, together with final year students having gained experience of the new types and modes of assessment during their second year, may have contributed to further growth in the award of 1st class degrees and thus 'good honours degrees'.

Although not substantiated, there are also indications that the move to on-line teaching and learning and the introduction of different types of assessments and examinations, such as open-book assessments, may have enabled, for example, more students with both disclosed and non-disclosed disabilities to access the curriculum and fulfil their potential. The now negative 'good honours degree' awarding gap (albeit a 1st class awarding gap remains) suggests that the continuation of such forms of assessment and examination throughout the 2020/21 academic year may have further reduced barriers to learning and enhanced accessibility.

Unlike with the 2019/20 NDP, where one primary 'safety net' was in place and, therefore, data analysis was possible, it has been much more difficult to evaluate the specific impact of each of the component parts of the NDG on degree outcomes. The interplay between the different areas of academic and pastoral support introduces numerous variables that may or may not have affected the outcomes for individual students. The University has, however, undertaken analysis of the potential impact of the expansion of the borderline zone for the application of preponderance, as this represented a temporary change in the University's algorithm for the classification of its degrees.

Table 3: University of Exeter Awards Raised by Preponderance

	Proportion of Awards Raised by Preponderance				
	2016/17	**2017/18**	**2018/19**	**2019/20**	**2020/21**
Raised by preponderance	7%	8%	7%	5%	8%
Raised for other reasons (e.g. under Exceptional Years Policies)	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Not raised by preponderance	93%	92%	93%	95%	92%

This revealed there was no notable change to the proportion of students having their degree classification raised on preponderance during 2020/21, when compared to the preceding non-COVID-19 impacted academic years of 2016/17 to 2018/19. The observed 'dip' in 2019/20 has been attributed to a combination of the 'safety net' already provided by the NDP benchmark and the number of students deferring completion of their final assessments and examinations until the 2020/21 academic year. These factors resulted in both a reduction in the number of awards made and the number of classifications raised under normal preponderance rules.

Although there was an increase in the number of students who were awarded in 2020/21 and whose final credit-weighted stage mean fell within the expanded borderline zone, not all of those students' classifications were raised once the normal preponderance rules had been applied. Nevertheless, the temporary change in the University's degree algorithm fulfilled its purpose in that it provided an additional individual 'safety net' for those students who were very close to a classification boundary, but who may not have been able to perform to the best of their abilities in all modules, due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic conditions.

One of the recommendations to APACs arising from the evidence-based Exceptional Circumstances process, which also formed part of the NDG, was that consideration should be given to adjusting the degree classification of eligible students. Any such decisions would have been based on all available evidence of the individual student's prior level of performance and the academic judgement of the APAC. However, in 2020/21, only four undergraduate students, less than 1% of the graduating cohort, had their degree classification raised for reasons other than preponderance, in this case, the detrimental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Assessment and Marking Practices

The regulation of standards is set out in the University's Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes' Handbook. The University has a robust and rigorous approach to assuring the standardisation of assessment, marking and decision-making on the award of its degrees, confirmed through prior Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Institutional Review and Institutional Audit. These have not changed significantly during the period covered by this statement. Consistency of marking is ensured through best practice quality and standards assurance measures, such as Anonymity (wherever possible) and the use of Moderation and Sampling. External Examiners are appointed to oversee the standards of assessment on all taught programmes, producing annual reports, which feed into the University's quality review processes.

The University operates a three-tier system of Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APACs). Tier One is the Discipline APAC, whose primary responsibility is to safeguard academic standards. Tier Two is the College APAC, whose primary responsibility is to ensure that academic regulations are applied consistently and equitably across Disciplines within a College. Tier Three is the University APAC, whose primary responsibility is to identify areas where policy clarifications or enhancements are required, consider patterns of degree outcomes and academic standards and make associated strategic recommendations.

To ensure that Assessment Criteria meet sector reference points, the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and other Sector Standards are considered during the approval of programmes, together with the competency requirements of a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) where appropriate. External Assessors are also appointed during the approval process to ensure that academic standards and the quality of the student academic experience are assured from the outset. The University also supports opportunities for academics to work as External Examiners and Advisors to enhance standardisation within the Higher Education sector.

The procedures governing student academic appeals against assessment, progression or awarding decisions are detailed in the University's Student Cases Handbook. Students may also apply for Mitigation, the procedures for which are set out in Chapter 10 of the University's Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook. This provides a 'safety net' in the event that a student is ill or affected by personal circumstances that potentially preclude them from undertaking an examination or submitting an assignment on time.

4. Academic Governance

The Statutes and Ordinances of the University of Exeter are the fundamental rules and principles that govern how the University undertakes its learning and teaching. Detailed Regulations cover the operation of teaching, examinations and other matters relating to students. The Council is the University's governing body, with responsibility for institutional policies and finances, estates and legal matters. Academic governance is provided by Senate, which is responsible for teaching and learning, examinations and research. The high-level work of Council and Senate is supported through various key Committees and the Dual Assurance structure, which focuses on particular areas of the University's activity.

The University has a well-established process of annual internal institutional review of its degree classification data, with the Business Intelligence Team of its Planning, Policy and Business Intelligence Directorate preparing a detailed and extensive report on degree classifications over time, up to and including the preceding academic year. The report is presented to Senate, as the senior forum for academic staff to shape academic strategy and scrutinise plans and raise issues of major strategic importance to the University, as well as to Council.

It is an expectation of the UKSCQA that governing bodies or academic senates should incorporate external assurance into the preparation of their Degree Outcomes Statements. The University has, therefore, made an appointment to the role of University Principal External Examiner from the 2020/21 academic year onwards (see Section 7 for further details).

Arrangements for teaching, learning and assessment delivered through partnership arrangements are outlined in the University's Academic Partnerships Handbook and the Validated and Accredited Awards that may be delivered in partnership are listed in its Regulations.

5. Classification Algorithms

Degree classification algorithms are the rules by which degree awarding bodies consistently determine the degree classification for individual final year undergraduate students. Algorithms may vary slightly from one university to another but are typically based on the weightings attributed to each stage or year of study and the final credit weighted mean mark achieved.

The University of Exeter's approach to determining undergraduate degree classifications may be found in Chapter 9 of its Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook. More specifically, the Rules for the Classification of Bachelors and Integrated Masters Degrees are set out in Section 9.4. The degree algorithms are applied rigorously and consistently by Discipline APACs and verified by College APACs. Any exceptions, such as Aegrotat Awards made under Ordinance 16 of the University's Regulations, must be approved by the Academic Dean for Students / Dean of the Faculty of Taught Programmes at the University APAC.

As noted in Section 2.5 above, a change was made to the University's degree algorithm for the 2020/21 academic year, as part of its No Disadvantage Guarantee. This change involved a 1% expansion of the borderline zone for the application of preponderance rules. For example, for undergraduate degrees, a student would be considered for a 1st class degree classification if their final credit-weighted stage mean mark fell between 67% and 69.49% (above 69.5% a student would automatically be awarded a 1st class degree). Students falling into this borderline zone would be considered for the next level of degree classification provided that least 50% of their stage weighted credits have module marks greater than or equal to 70% for a 1st class degree. Similar rules apply to the lower classifications of degrees.

To ensure that academic standards are upheld, there are consequences for failure in individual assessments and modules, and whilst referrals and repeat study are permitted within strict limits, the maximum grades that may be achieved are capped at the pass mark of 40%. Students may, however, apply for Mitigation, which if approved would permit them additional time or an additional opportunity to complete an assessment without penalty. Further information on the consequences of failure in assessment is available in Chapter 11 of the above Handbook.

6. Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

The University prides itself on its commitment to excellence in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment and consistently strives to enhance the quality of its teaching and learning. The cross-University work of the Teaching Quality Assurance and Enhancement Department, which provides a range of professional services to both staff and students to support the development of high-quality teaching and learning, gives a good example of this and includes the:

*   Programme Development Team;
*   Technology Enhanced Learning Team;
*   Quality and Standards Team;
*   Academic Development Team (supporting teaching staff); and
*   Academic Skills and Student Engagement Team – Education and Student Experience – University of Exeter (supporting students).

The University's Quality Review and Enhancement Framework sets out the process for the annual Quality Review and Enhancement of Taught Programmes. This is a multi-layered process starting with the Annual Review of Modules and culminating with the Annual Review of Colleges by the University. There are two elements within this, which focus specifically on teaching excellence and standards:

*   **Teaching Excellence Action Plans (TEAPs)** have been designed to reflect the strategic importance of teaching excellence, respond to emerging issues and record completed actions, as part of a cyclical process of quality assurance and enhancement; and

*   **Teaching Excellence Monitoring Meetings (TEMs)** are the annual University scrutiny meeting with each Discipline within the Colleges, which ensure that its expectations in relation to teaching and learning are being upheld and that best practice is highlighted and shared.

The University continues to develop its facilities and services to support its educational priorities, its teaching and learning and the academic experience of its students. Projects overseen by its Estate Services include the refurbishment of existing, and the provision of new, learning and study places and spaces. There is also considerable ongoing investment in Library Resources and Services, both physical and online, and in the Exeter Learning Environment (ELE), the University's virtual learning environment, which enables students to access programme materials and interact online.

The University adopts an evidenced-based approach to the enhancement of its teaching, learning and assessment practices ensuring that they are designed from the outset to have a positive impact on academic outcomes for students. Monitoring and evaluation is also built into every stage of development and many improvements are co-created with, and reviewed by students through a well-established system of Academic Representation and close partnership with the University of Exeter Students' Guild (Exeter campuses) and the Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union (Cornwall campuses).

7. Identifying Good Practice and Actions

7.1 Commitment to Success for All

The University's <u>Education Strategy 2019-25</u> makes a commitment to '…delivering an education and student experience of the highest international quality, and to supporting all of its students to realise their potential'. This is also captured in its <u>Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 - 2024/25</u> for UK-domiciled students and in the University's recently published <u>Strategy 2030</u>.

One of the Education Strategy's priorities is to, 'enhance our undergraduate offer in: the quality of learning, teaching, student support and student outcomes'. The strategy also defines as a characteristic of excellence in education, 'Success for all our students', underpinned by a pledge to:

- Strive to eliminate gaps in access, awarding and progression to employment seen between groups defined by socio-economic (dis)advantage, ethnicity, age, disability, gender and nationality.

The University has augmented its leadership and governance arrangements to deliver on this pledge by creating an enhanced <u>Success for All Strategy Group</u>, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). The Strategy Group is supported by a series of working groups, each addressing a different aspect of the student lifecycle, including:

- Access;
- Transition and Induction;
- Success and Inclusive Education; and
- Progression.

Additional thematic working groups focus in on areas requiring specific actions and interventions. The most recent addition in 2021/22 has been the International Student Experience Working Group, which was established in order to:

- Understand the international student experience utilising data, research and evidence from the perspective of these students;
- Address themes, gaps and persistent challenges, which mean that international students are not able to reach their full potential; and
- Enable an inclusive university culture.

Within the framework provided by the Success for All Governance Structure, the University of Exeter has adopted a three-strand approach to addressing awarding gaps between students from different demographic groups, which recognises the evidence-informed value of inclusive, education, successful transitions and targeted interventions.

1. Systemic developments to promote and embed inclusive education practice

- Developing a <u>Transformative Education Framework</u> with inclusive education, racial and social justice and sustainability as core strands.
- Developing an on-line Education Toolkit providing a wealth of information, tools and resources for academic staff to help them adopt inclusive approaches within their teaching and assessment practices.
- Using the Discipline-level TEAPs and TEMs, which form part of the <u>Quality Review and Enhancement Framework</u>, in tandem with College Success for All Groups, to provide a framework for addressing awarding gaps at discipline level.

2. Development of best practice approaches to induction and transition

- Establishing best practice principles for a structured transition process starting pre-arrival, moving through the initial induction period and extending throughout students' first term and beyond.

- Creating Transition and Induction Coordinator roles in each College to support and share structured and consistent approaches to effective induction and transition across the University.

- Design and delivery of a new suite of online, College-level pre-arrival courses. These provide students with an opportunity to introduce themselves and connect with their peers.

- Designing an Enhanced Induction Programme to provide extra support, signposting and access to peer networks to under-represented students to ensure they have the best possible start to their university studies.

3. Enhanced and targeted support for students, particularly those within groups most likely to experience gaps in outcomes

- Appointing a dedicated Associate Academic Dean for Students (Racial Equality and Inclusion) and Racial Equality and Inclusion Academic Leads at College-level to provide support for students who may experience racism or discrimination during the course of their studies.

- Expanding the Peer Mentoring Scheme and using peer engagement to specifically support students from widening participation backgrounds, such as those disclosing physical or hidden disabilities, thereby providing personalised support.

- Prioritising the support provided Study Zone, which was created to provide individualised academic skills development, for students from widening participation backgrounds and those groups most likely to experience degree awarding gaps.

Across the University, students, researchers, academics and professional services staff are also continuing to work collaboratively to create an inclusive learning environment, within which all can thrive and succeed. This includes that undertaken by the Centre for Social Mobility, the Education Incubator and the Provost's Commission for Innovation in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

7.2 Commitment to Maintaining the Integrity of Exeter Degrees

As outlined in Sections 3, 4 and 5 of this Statement, the University has adopted a robust and rigorous approach to assuring the standardisation of its awards over time as set out in its Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook. For the 2021/22 academic year onwards, a new section on the Review and Publication of Degree Outcomes has been added to the handbook, which provides a formal structure for both the internal review process and the external publication of this statement.

In 2021/22 the University also appointed its first Principal External Examiner to provide externality to its overarching degree outcomes work, including being fully engaged in the review of degree classifications and signing off the Degree Outcomes Statement, prior to publication. With a background and expertise in Social Mobility, Justice and Inequalities in Higher Education, they will fulfil a dual role in reviewing degree outcomes from the perspective of degree standards and 'Success for All'.

Data and information is critical to the understanding and maintenance of degree standards, as well as action to close degree awarding gaps. With specific reference to the former, the University's Business Intelligence Team have worked in collaboration with the Quality and Standards Team and other internal stakeholders to develop a number of reports and dashboards in recent years, which the aim of informing decision-making and action on degree standards at operational and strategic levels from Module Convenors to the Council of the University.

Examples of what are now annual reports include the following:

- **Module Results Reports:**
  - These present historic module data to support decision-making at Discipline-level APACs. Academic staff and External Examiners will consider whether scaling of marks should be undertaken if students' performance is exceptionally low or high when compared to previous academic years. Data is considered alongside other contextual factors.

- **Degree Classification Summary Reports:**
  - These present Institutional, College and Discipline data across five academic years highlighting trends in both degree awarding patterns and awarding gaps between different groups of students. The reports support institutional decision-making on strategic actions and priorities and evaluation of the impact of policy change.

- **Degree Outcomes Benchmarking Report**
  - This utilises HESA degree classifications data collated by Jisc to present comparisons of the University degree classifications with the Russell Group, the University's self-selected Competitor Group and the sector as a whole. The reports primarily support Discipline-level decision-making to assure academic standards and the integrity of Exeter degrees.

The latter report, which was developed in 2021/22, actions a commitment made in previous versions of this Statement to undertake further research and analysis to understand and address differential awarding patterns across Colleges and Disciplines and ensure that they are aligned with the wider Higher Education sector. The report will enable the University to test the presumption that differences in awarding patterns for different Colleges and Disciplines reflect those of the sector as a whole and to respond accordingly where this may not be the case.

Academic colleagues across the Colleges and Disciplines are asked to access and consider the data and information provided in the Benchmarking Report. This will help to inform dialogues about academic standards at programme, Discipline and College level and feed into reviews of assessment design, marking practices and moderation. Opportunities for marking calibration activity between Disciplines within the same and different Colleges, or between related Disciplines at different institutions will also be explored.

In addition, the Discipline-specific data and information provided by the Benchmarking Report will be shared with External Examiners to assist them in undertaking their roles and responsibilities. It should enable them to determine whether or not the University's degree outcomes are comparable to similar Disciplines elsewhere in the sector, beyond their own institution or others they have experienced in an External Examining capacity.

7.3 Commitment to Further Research and Analysis

Throughout this Statement, the University has identified areas in which further research and analysis is required to better understand the factors giving rise to the institutional degree classification profile identified. The University's Degree Outcomes Steering Group continues to play an important role in maintaining progress on this commitment by facilitating a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach to the collation, presentation, analysis and monitoring of degree outcomes data, through the dual lenses of supporting 'Success for All' and ensuring the integrity of Exeter degrees.

Established in 2020/21 and chaired by the Academic Dean for Students / Dean of the Faculty of Taught Programmes, the Steering Group supports the annual internal review of the University's degree classifications and the preparation of the external Degree Outcomes Statement. It also commissions, disseminates and enhances accessibility and understanding of new degree outcomes data and analyses, highlighting areas for action by Governance Bodies and Stakeholders across the Institution. Drawing on both academic and professional services and engaging with student representatives, this enables a more holistic and collaborative approach to be adopted.

An example of such an approach, from the 2021/22 academic year, is a collaborative project involving student researchers and academics from the College of Engineering, Mathematics and Physical Sciences (CEMPS), working with data provided by Business Intelligence. The project aim was to develop a methodology for analysing undergraduate awarding gaps, for both 'good honours degrees' and first class degrees, between different demographic groups of students, looking for the origin of these gaps, whether as 'entry tariff gaps' or 'transitions gaps', and whether they widened or narrowed during the undergraduate student journey.

Research and evaluation funding allocated under the Access and Participation Plan has enabled the methodology developed by the project to now be applied to data for all Colleges and Disciplines, with the outcomes to be disseminated for the start of the 2022/23 academic year and updated annually thereafter. It is intended that the outcomes be used to enable Disciplines to better track and evaluate the impact of access and participation interventions, in particular, those aimed at supporting the successful transition and first year attainment of key demographic groups of students.

As in previous years, the conclusions and recommendations of research and analysis activity in relation to degree outcomes will be reflected in future versions of this Statement. The University is, by its nature, a learning institution, in which research and education are inextricably linked and teaching, learning and assessment is consistently and constantly informed by internal and external research and best practice.