

University of Sheffield Degree Outcomes Statement

Purpose of the statement

The University of Sheffield is an autonomous Higher Education provider holding university title and degree awarding powers under the UK's Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The University is responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards and quality of its degrees and other qualifications. The purpose of this statement is to present information on how the University monitors and manages the academic standards of undergraduate awards at Levels 4-6 of the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-awarding bodies (FHEQ). The statement aims to meet the expectations of the UK Standing Committee on Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) to ensure transparency, reliability and fairness in relation to the outcomes for University of Sheffield students.

1. Institutional degree classification profile

The institutional degree classification profile for FHEQ Level 6 is provided below. It sets out the percentage of degree classes awarded at the institutional level over the last 5 years.

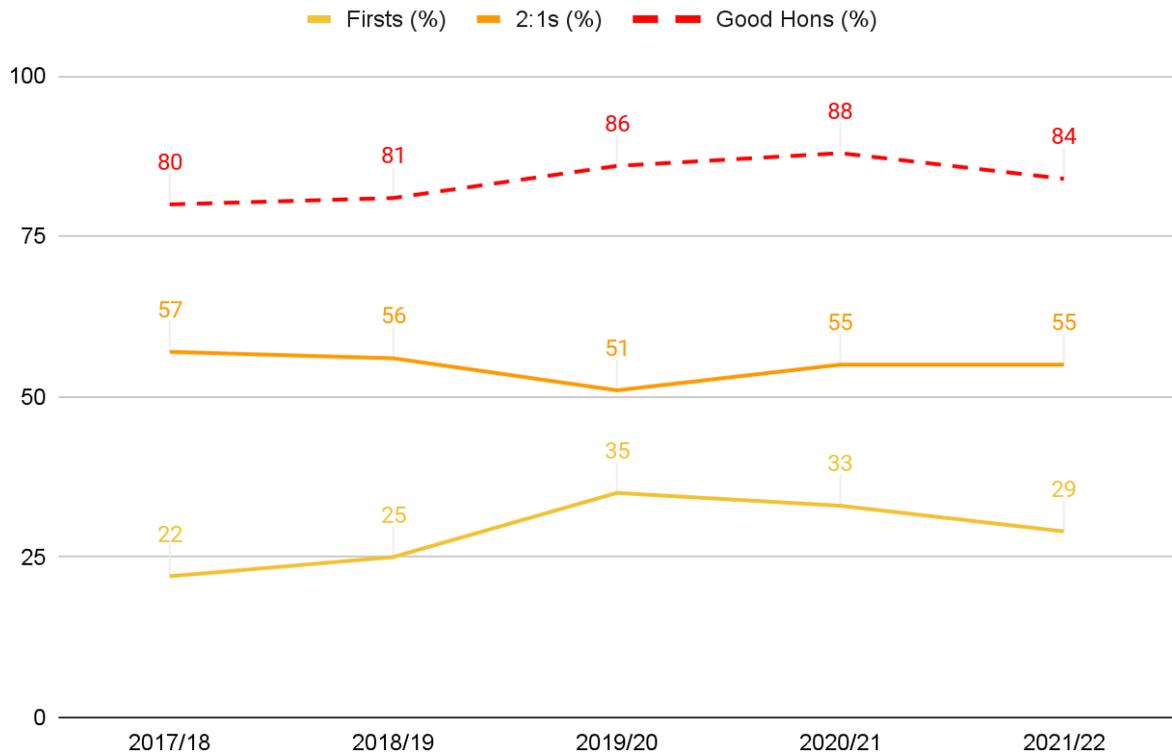
Over this period the data show a 4% increase in good honours degrees awarded with a 7% increase in first class degrees awarded. Analysis by entry qualifications (tariff band) show a trend towards improvement across all bands, with a greater improvement for lower entry qualifications (AAB-). Although the overall good honours rate for students with higher entry qualification has only increased slightly, the rate of firsts for those students has increased markedly with a corresponding fall in the rate of 2:1s.¹

The University has analysed its degree awarding behaviours as compared to the rest of the sector. It is maintaining a relatively stable position when compared to Russell Group institutions.

Year	Number of Awards	Good Honours	1st	2:1	2:2	3rd/Pass
2017/18	3907	79.5%	22.2%	57.3%	17.1%	3.4%
2018/19	4048	80.5%	25.1%	55.4%	16.6%	2.9%
2019/20	3710	85.9%	35.1%	50.8%	11.6%	2.5%
2020/21	3509	87.6%	32.7%	54.9%	10.5%	1.9%
2021/22	3197	83.6%	29.0%	54.6%	13.8%	2.5%

¹ Covid mitigations in 2019/20 increased the trend of good honours awarded. The University refined the suite of appropriate mitigations in 2020/21 including the commitment made to continuing students from 2019/20's 'Safety Net' policy (ensuring that student's academic outcomes from 2019/20 were not detrimental affected by the impact of the pandemic).

Good Honours, FHEQ L6 Qualifications



The University routinely analyses degree attainment gaps for a range of student characteristics. As set out in the University's [Access and Participation Plan 2020-25](#) (and agreed with the Office for Students) the analysis of attainment rates (percentage of full time, first degree students achieving 1st or 2:1s) has identified:

- no statistical significance in the attainment gap for full time, first degree students from POLAR4 Q1 and IMD Q1 however there is a general trend towards improvement in attainment.
- a sustained attainment gap between White and BAME students. The gap is particularly pronounced amongst Asian and Black students, 5% and 10% respectively. The gap is closing (from 27% in 2016/17 to 10% in 2020/21) for Black students and for Asian students the gap is down to 5% from 22% in 2016/17.
- Students from Mixed backgrounds are now close to having parity in attainment outcomes.
- A recent improvement in attainment rates amongst mature students (from 21% in 2016/17 to 3% in 2020/21).
- no statistical significance in the 2 percentage point attainment gap between students with a disability and those without, however there has been a downward trend over the past three years.

The Access and Participation Plan sets out the targets and strategic measures that the University is taking to ensure that these attainment gaps are reduced and will be monitored by the Office for Students.

2. Assessment and marking practices

The University makes active use of sector reference points including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and the QAA Code of Practice in developing its programmes, its assessment and associated regulations and its policies and guidance. External examiners are appointed for every taught programme of study and provide an annual report in which they specifically confirm whether the programmes and assessment meet these sector reference points and the University regulatory framework.

The University uses an institution-wide set of outcomes criteria for FHEQ Levels 4-7. This forms the framework within which departments publish and use both level and task specific assessment criteria for each major assessment type and the descriptors for degree classifications. This has been reviewed and updated (February 2020) following publication of the QAA Annex D outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6.

University policies, procedures and guidance are in place to ensure that the marking process is fair and reliable. These include policies and guidance on anonymous marking, graduate teaching assistants, moderation and exam boards.

In addition to policies and guidance, there is comprehensive support and training on assessment and marking practices for academic staff.

The University appoints appropriately qualified external examiners to ensure that the methods of assessment used are credible, rigorous, equitable and are fairly and consistently conducted within relevant University regulations and policies; and that student performance and degrees awarded are of an appropriate standard nationally and are comparable to those delivered by other institutions in the UK. The role of the external examiner includes reviewing primary evidence e.g. samples of marked work that have contributed to the assessment of students and confirms whether internal examiners have applied standards consistently and appropriately.

The University takes an equitable and consistent approach to maintain academic integrity and fairness to other students when dealing with requests for extenuating circumstances to be taken into consideration for matters relating to examinations and assessments (e.g. extensions to deadlines or progression and award decisions made by Examination Boards). Clear information is made available to students on how to report extenuating circumstances that have impacted assessment and how the University considers these.

3. Academic governance

Council, as the University's governing body, has oversight of the degree classifications awarded and trends through reports from Senate (via the Senate Education Committee). Senate has responsibility for the academic governance of the University and is supported by a number of committees including the Education Committee. Via this route the institutional overview of degree classifications and any trends are considered and policies, guidance and procedures relating to learning, teaching and assessment are developed and approved.

External examiners' reports provide key assurances that marking practices are being followed and standards upheld. In addition to Faculty review and use of the reports in routine quality processes such as Annual Reflection, an overview report is produced annually for Quality and Scrutiny Committee (a sub-committee of the Senate Education Committee) which brings together the findings from the reports and identifies any issues for consideration at an institutional level.

For those FHEQ Level 6 awards where learning and assessment is delivered through partnership arrangements the University appoints the external examiners, the forms of assessment are subject to University approval and there is involvement in the exam board where award recommendations are made.

4. Classification algorithms

The University has used a unified institution-wide algorithm for degree classifications since 2006-07, following work to enhance consistency in response to QAA institutional audit recommendations. The institution-wide algorithm ensures that all students are treated equitably. In summary:

- the grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5 and 6 count towards the degree calculation, with grades awarded at FHEQ Level 6 having twice the weight of grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5;
- The student must have been awarded sufficient credit at FHEQ Level 5 and above to be eligible for a classified degree.
- Two calculations are used: the weighted mean grade and the distribution of weighted mean grades.
- Where the *weighted mean grade* and the *distribution of weighted grades* both indicate the same class of degree, this is the class of degree awarded. Where one of these calculations indicates a particular class of degree, but the other places the student in the borderline range to that class, they will be awarded the higher class. However, should one calculation indicate a particular class of degree but the other indicates the class below, the student will become a borderline candidate to the higher class. Or if both calculations place the student in the borderline range to a higher class they will also become a borderline candidate to the higher class. In both borderline situations the class of degree awarded will be decided by the Examination Board with reference to the weighted mean grade of the modules studied during the final year.

The University General Regulations for First Degrees set out the approach in full. The method used is available on the University student-facing web pages, and is also explained to students in course handbooks and materials provided by their academic department.

At FHEQ Level 4 a student may resit a failed module on up to two further attempts and the result is capped at the pass mark (40). At FHEQ Level 5 or 6 a student may resit a failed module once and the result is capped at the pass mark.

The University has reviewed its degree classification algorithm in line with the guiding principles laid out in the UKSCQA Principles for effective degree algorithm design and has committed to introduce changes from 2023/24 (see section 7).

5. Teaching practices and learning resources

The University continues to enhance the quality of teaching, resources and academic practice to provide our students with opportunities to reach their potential. Examples of developments that have contributed to a positive impact on our student outcomes include:

- The University is continuing to invest in its physical estate and in February 2020 the new [Engineering Heartspace](#) was completed. This building has transformed space between the Grade II listed Sir Frederick Mappin Building and Central Wing. With a full return to campus this space can now provide the vibrancy of teaching and learning that it was designed for, but was interrupted by the pandemic restrictions.
- 301 Academic Skills Centre provides an extensive programme of workshops, 1:1 appointments and online resources for all students at all levels of study. This includes

support for exam revision, exam technique and other forms of assessment. 301 has recently developed a new programme of [Level Up Your Academic Skills](#) resources. This is a series of web-based courses, each aimed at a specific level of study and presented in a week by week format which matches the skills students are likely to need as they transition into and progress through the semester and into exams and other forms of assessment.

- Elevate provides guidance and development opportunities for all staff who teach and support learning. Through the enhancement of teaching practice at individual and programme level, Elevate contributes to a high quality learning experience for all students. The Elevate programme includes 'Getting Started' resources, bespoke curriculum design workshops, Digital Tools guidance, Sheffield Teaching Assistant workshops for graduate teaching assistants, the Post Graduate Certificate in Learning for Teaching in Higher Education for early career academics and the Learning and Teaching Professional Recognition Scheme which supports staff at all levels to gain Advance HE recognition for their teaching practice.
- The Virtual Learning Environment provides access to online course materials whenever students need them and is heavily used for coursework and to work online with others. There is also a suite of digital learning tools that are accessible to all students that are embedded into teaching practice, including tools to support online assessment and feedback.
- The University's Library provides high quality services to students and was voted No.1 for Library Services by our students in the 2017 Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey.
- The University continues to develop mechanisms for student feedback through systems like TELL US, the modular feedback system, and are embedding the insight it gives into the annual reflection process and using it to help understanding of how well a range of initiatives are working.

6. Identifying good practice and actions

The Education Pillar of the University's Vision (2020-2025) makes a commitment to deliver research-led degree programmes that will inspire, enthuse and challenge a diverse community of outstanding students. This is underpinned by 3 priority areas: portfolio, employability and digital experience.

- The portfolio element focuses on the continued review of the University's degree portfolio to ensure that it meets student, employer and research needs. It builds upon the successful programme level approach that has put the student perspective at the forefront of programme design and using a holistic rather than modular approach so that students get the most out of their learning.
- The development of Sheffield Graduate Attributes and the implementation of MySkills is supporting students at the University to reflect on the skills they are gaining and their personal development in a way that is unique to the sector. This continues to enhance the degree outcomes in addition to degree classification awarded providing students with the skills, attributes and abilities to secure the outcomes they seek and manage their onward careers with confidence.
- a new digital system to enhance the sharing of Learning Support Plans for students who are supported by our Disability and Dyslexia Support Service has been introduced. All University areas should have access to the service in 2023. This system has improved the experience of our disabled students by ensuring that all staff members who support a student's teaching and learning are aware of and implementing the support recommendations and adjustments they need to perform their best.

Every year the University invests approximately £15 million into its digital learning environment that is backed by a new technology enabled strategic framework. The

framework is there to make sure the transformational change of our digital capabilities are aligned with the University vision. This ensures the provision of a multifaceted and inclusive digital teaching and learning environment. There has also been a review and redesign of on-campus study spaces in collaboration with students.

7. Risks and challenges

The University has reviewed its degree classification algorithm in line with the guiding principles laid out in the UKSCQA Principles for effective degree algorithm design and has committed to introduce changes from 2023/24. The changes will include moving from two calculations to a single calculation.

The implementation of the changes to the University's degree classification algorithm will be delivered with careful consideration of the impact on students, the classification profile and maintaining the value of our awards over time.

Approved by Council on 24 April 2023