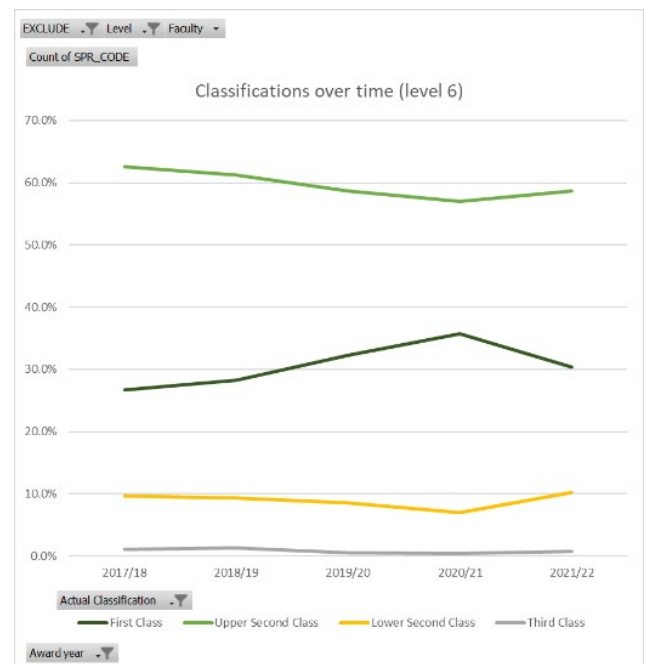University of
BRISTOL

Degree Outcomes Statement: 2023

Institutional degree classification profile

1. The University's 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 around one fifth of first degree graduates in 2021/22 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 2021/22 academic year, which followed two years that were significantly disrupted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst there was no package of mitigations for assessments that took place in 2021/22, many students who graduated in that year had been eligible for mitigation under the 2019/20 and 2020/21 provisions which were applicable to marks earned in their intermediate years of study. The section *Issues and Challenges* provides further detail on the impact of this.

Table 1: Degree classification profile for level 6 degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2017/18 – 2021/22

Year of award	Total awards	First Class	Upper Second Class	Lower Second Class	Third Class	First and Upper Second Classes Combined
2017/18	3485	26.7%	62.6%	9.6%	1.1%	89.3%
2018/19	3602	28.2%	61.2%	9.3%	1.3%	89.4%
2019/20	3894	32.3%	58.7%	8.5%	0.6%	90.9%
2020/21	3937	35.7%	56.9%	6.9%	0.4%	92.6%
2021/22	4176	30.4%	58.7%	10.2%	0.7%	89.1%

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

Table 2: Degree classification profile for level 6 and 7 degree programmes at the University of Bristol, 2017/18 – 2021/22

Year of award	Total awards	First Class	Upper Second Class	Lower Second Class	Third Class	First and Upper Second Classes Combined
2017/18	4282	31.8%	58.4%	8.9%	0.9%	90.2%
2018/19	4379	31.9%	58.5%	8.4%	1.1%	90.5%
2019/20	4893	37.2%	54.6%	7.7%	0.5%	91.8%
2020/21	4894	40.4%	53.1%	6.1%	0.4%	93.5%
2021/22	5190	34.3%	55.8%	9.4%	0.6%	90.0%
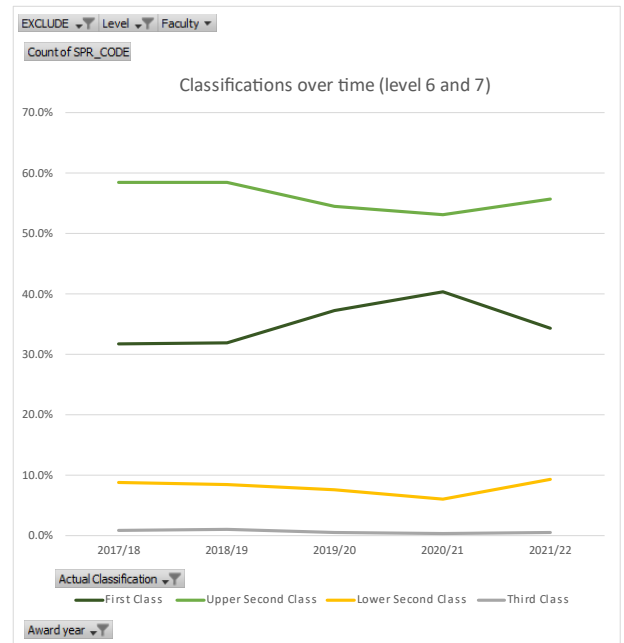
3. Our classification ratio had been relatively stable prior to the pandemic period, plateauing throughout the period 2016/17 to 2018/19. The proportion of First Class outcomes increased in 2019/20 and 2020/21 following actions to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic; covered in greater detail in the previous years' Degree Outcomes Statements.

4. In the graduating class of 2021/21, the proportion of First Class outcomes decreased by 6.1 percentage points when compared to 2020/21 figures (level 6 and 7 combined). This corresponds to the removal of the large-scale pandemic mitigations, and reflects a return to more normal patterns of degree awarding.

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 (see paragraph 27). A more detailed analysis of the changes to the 2021/22 profile can be found under *Issues and Challenges*.

Commitment to return degree outcomes to pre-pandemic levels

6. In July 2022 Universities UK, along with their members in England, committed to the following with respect to undergraduate degree outcomes:

    a. Review progress against actions in DOS of 2020 and 2021;
    b. Restart any outstanding actions paused during the pandemic;
    c. Assess pandemic related changes and their impact on classifications;
    d. Outline how they will return to 'pre-pandemic' levels by 2022/23 (where 'pre-pandemic' is defined as 2018/19);
    e. Commit to further actions to address any unexplained grade inflation;
    f. Explain how sector-supported principles on degree algorithms and external examiners are being followed.

7. Various sections of this document describe how we are meeting the commitments outlined above.

8. In accordance with the key commitment (d., above) we have made strong progress in returning our degree outcome profiles towards the pre-pandemic 2018/19 baseline. Our 2021/22 outcomes are already in line with pre-pandemic figures when comparing the First and Upper Second Class combined measure. For Firsts alone, we have a small margin yet to go, but our trajectory shows that the previous growth trends are now reversing. Our analysis shows that the continuing margin is related to the ongoing commitments of our pandemic mitigations schemes, for which some students who graduated in 2021/22 continued to be eligible. Our analysis indicates that had it not been for the continued commitment of pandemic mitigations, we would already have returned to 2018/19 patterns (see paragraph 35).

Degree Classifications and Student Characteristics

9. 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.

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

Demographic Group	Headcount	First Class		Upper Second Class		First and Upper Second Classes Combined	
	2021/22	2020/21 (diff.)	2021/22 (diff.)	2020/21 (diff.)	2021/22 (diff.)	2020/21 (diff.)	2021/22 (diff.)
Disability	820	39.5% (-1.0)	29.6% (-5.5)	54.0% (+1.0)	60.1% (-5.1)	93.5% (-0.1)	89.8% (-0.4)
Ethnicity (BAME)	1175	33.7% (-9.9)	23.7% (-15.5)	55.3% (+3.7)	59.0% (+4.4)	89.1% (-6.2)	82.6% (-11.0)
Gender(Female)	2717	41.7% (+2.7)	35.1% (+1.7)	53.6% (+0.9)	57.4% (+3.4)	95.2% (+3.6)	92.5% (+5.1)
Mature (21y+ at entry)	234	36.5% (-4.0)	31.6% (-2.8)	48.1% (-5.2)	51.7% (-4.2)	84.7% (-9.2)	83.3% (-7.0)
POLAR (Quintiles 1 and 2)	637	37.1% (-6.5)	29.2% (-9.6)	55.4% (+3.6)	58.7% (+4.1)	92.4% (-2.9)	87.9% (+5.6)

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

10. We are disappointed to observe that following the removal of large-scale mitigations for the pandemic, some of the awarding gaps that had reduced in the last two years have reopened in 2021/22's results. However, this was in line with our forecasts following analysis to understand how much of the gap closure had been driven by degree classification mitigation, and how much was due to other pandemic-related changes to assessment practices.

11. 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.

Assessment and marking practices

Assessment practices

12. 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.

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

13. 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.

14. 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

15. 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. Also, please see paragraph 38 regarding our new generic marking criteria that will be implemented through 2023/24 as an action arising from the previous Degree Outcomes Statement.

Assurance

16. 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.

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. External assessors are also employed as a key member of the University's periodic programme revalidation process that reviews and advises upon the academic standards of education provision, and enhancements to curricula and the student academic experience.

21. 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

22. 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 2021/22 Quality Assurance Report to the Board of Trustees included a specific chapter that provides an analysis of and assurance as to the minimal continued impact of pandemic mitigations upon degree outcomes in 2021/22.

23. 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.

24. 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 framework comprises two streams, the University Quality Team (UQT) process undertakes yearly reviews, and the more in-depth Periodic Programme Revalidation (PPR) is planned and delivered where appropriate, for example where there is any concern regarding the quality, validity and viability of academic provision. Both review streams consider classification data as a key input. Any matters raised by students or external examiners, including any that relate to the value of the qualification, and reports to UAQSC.

25. 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

26. The University has a common classification algorithm for its 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. Crucially the standards required for the award of a degree or other qualification remained unchanged throughout the period.

27. A different classification method is in place for the level 7 non-modular programmes in Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Sciences based upon the final programme mark in relation to the overall performance of the cohort, as required by the relevant accrediting bodies. Details of this is provided in our regulations.

28. 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

29. 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
- Capital investment in teaching facilities, including increased study space.

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

- A [Student Wellbeing Service](#) for our students, including Student Wellbeing Advisers available across all academic areas.

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

Issues and Challenges

31. In 2019/20 and 2021/22 the University deployed a suite of appropriate mitigations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included 2019/20's 'Safety Net' policy (ensuring that students' academic outcomes from 2019/20 were not detrimentally affected by the impact of the pandemic), and 2020/21's 'Cohort Comparison Unit Exclusion' (CCUE) which compared unit-level results with historical comparators, and excluded from classification any units that were found to have significantly under-performed.

32. Students in the graduating class of 2021/22 who had undertaken longer-duration programmes (e.g. 4 years or 5 years in length) were in the position where marks from their intermediate years of study came from units taken in 2019/20 and/or 2020/21. Students in such circumstances were therefore eligible for mitigation to be applied to their 2019/20 and 2020/21 marks. This means that in the graduating class of 2021/22, some students' classifications were still affected by the historical pandemic mitigations.

33. As Bristol offers a large range of integrated Masters level 7 undergraduate programmes, and other longer-duration courses, a significant proportion of 2021/22 graduates were eligible for consideration under these mitigations. However, for the vast majority of these students this consideration made no difference to their final classification, i.e. with or without the mitigation, their degree outcome would have delivered the same classification. For 112 students (2.2% of the graduating class), the mitigations resulted in a higher degree classification.

34. With no mitigations in place, the 2021/22 proportion of First Class honours outcomes would have been 31.7% (levels 6 and 7 degree programmes combined), whereas following the mitigations scheme the actual proportion of Firsts awarded was 34.3% (see table 2). This compares very closely with our pre-pandemic (2018/19) figure of 31.9% Firsts. The number of students who will be eligible for consideration under these ongoing commitments will be greatly reduced again in 2022/23, by which point we believe the impact on our degree classifications will be negligible.

35. In 2022/23 the University begins to transition to the use of integer marks, replacing the previous use of decimal marks in some University systems. This change is being made to align practice across all University systems and to improve clarity for students. Modelling has shown 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 will happen for many students at a mid-point in their studies, the University has made a commitment that no student would be disadvantaged by the new policy when it is implemented in 2022/23. We therefore expect to see a fractional increase in our higher degree classifications in next year's outcomes as a result of this change.

Actions

36. We have continued to deliver on our degree outcome assurance and continual improvement activities over the pandemic, and in each DOS we review our progress against actions from the previous year's Statement.

37. The following actions from the 2022 Degree Outcomes Statement have now been completed:

    a. A Task and Finish Group was convened to deliver our institutional integration of the QAA's outcome classification descriptors. In response to this, the Group established a new set of generic marking criteria, by level of study, as a base on which to guide marking criteria for attainment across the University. The new criteria have been approved by University Teaching and Learning Committee *[and others –TBD- will be confirmed by time of publication]*. The new criteria will be implemented throughout 2023/24 and will become formal University policy from 2024/25.

38. The following action from the 2022 Degree Outcomes Statement is still in progress:

    a. Continue to develop additional centrally-supported tools and guidance to support Unit Directors and Programme Directors to review mark distributions. Intermediate developments already delivered include the release of central tools to support Programme Directors to review their undergraduate degree outcomes. The consideration of undergraduate degree classifications was a theme for University Quality Team reviews in 2022/23, and following the completion of this cycle we will review outcomes to inform how we continue to support school colleagues to review their marks.

39. We have identified the following additional action:

    a. To undertake additional analysis and work to understand the impacts of removing pandemic mitigations on the reopening of awarding gaps, in order to deliver upon our aim of enabling high standards of academic achievement for all our 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.