

University of Birmingham Degree Outcomes Statement

The University of Birmingham was established by Royal Charter and granted degree awarding powers in 1900. The University has enjoyed a high-level of autonomy for over a century allowing us to challenge and develop great minds, push forward the boundaries of knowledge, and make an impact on regional and global communities. The University is characterised by a tradition of innovative academic research and is recognised globally as an institution of outstanding education. Our degrees carry global currency, as reflected in one of the largest international student communities in the UK with students coming from more than 150 countries.

Section 1: Institutional degree classification profile

The proportion of Good Honours (1st and 2:1) degrees awarded by the University of Birmingham in the last five academic years is presented in Table 1. Each year, we monitor and critically review our degree outcomes data as part of our ongoing quality assurance work. At the same time, we make continuous enhancements to all aspects of our teaching and learning support to ensure students can achieve their potential. We are proud of our students' degree outcomes, and we attribute these to each student's individual efforts supported by the University's collective and continuous endeavours to enhance their academic experience.

This statement replaces the University's previous Degree Outcome Statement that was published in 2021 and provides the undergraduate classification profile relating to the years 2017/18 to 2021/22.

Table 1 shows the proportion of Good Honours and First-Class awards for the past five years. During the period 2016/17-2018/19, the proportion of Good Honours degrees awarded was broadly consistent. Under the University's 'no detriment' policy ('Emergency Framework for Assessment and Progression'), 2019/20 saw an increase in the proportion of Good Honours and First-Class awards. A package of existing and new measures to mitigate against the continuing impact of the pandemic was put in place for 2020/21 ('Policy for Fair Assessment and Fair Outcomes'), following which the proportion of Good Honours awarded remained the same, but there was an increase in the proportion of First-Class awards. An 'Assessment Framework' for 2021/22 was developed to continue some of the changes made during the previous year where they had benefited student learning, which saw a reduction in both the proportion of Good Honours and First-Class awards, with the proportion of Good Honours returning to pre-pandemic levels, although First-Class awards remain slightly higher.

It is important to note that under both 'no detriment' policies from 2019/20 and 2020/21, in order to ensure that academic standards were maintained, all students were required to demonstrate sufficient evidence of achievement at the degree classification level they were finally awarded, including meeting emergency minimum credit requirements, satisfying any professional body requirements, and meeting the learning outcomes for their programme.

There is variation in Good Honours awards across subject areas and between different student groups, and this is subject to ongoing critical review by senior University Committees (see Section 3) and targeted actions.

Table 1: Good Honours attainment over 5-year period (UK, EU, and Non-EU students).

Year	Good Honours	1st	2:1	2:2	3 rd	Pass
2017/18	87.0%	32.6%	54.3%	11.1%	1.3%	0.6%
2018/19	86.4%	31.2%	55.1%	11.8%	1.2%	0.7%
2019/20	92.3%	38.5%	53.8%	7.3%	0.4%	0.0%
2020/21	92.3%	45.6%	46.6%	6.8%	0.6%	0.4%
2021/22	86.7%	36.3%	50.4%	11.8%	1.3%	0.3%

Section 2: Assessment and marking guidance

The University of Birmingham has clear and robust processes and policies in place to safeguard academic standards; there are a range of internal and external mechanisms for ensuring that assessments are effective, valid, and reliable, and that awards are credible. Students' marks, progression and awards are confirmed by Boards of Examiners, who have formal authority to do so on behalf of Senate. External Examiners are members of all Boards of Examiners.

A range of assessment-related legislation and guidance is available to support academic units with developing assessment, marking and moderation practices and the operation of Boards of Examiners. This includes the Code of Practice on Taught Programmes and Module Assessment and Feedback, Assessment Load Guidance, Guidance on Moderation, the Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision), as well as professional development for staff who teach and support student learning, provided by our Higher Education Futures institute (HEFi). Marking criteria are determined at School/Programme level, using sector-wide Degree Classification Descriptors as a reference point, to ensure that the most appropriate criteria are in place for specific programmes in order to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are attained.

The External Examiner system is the primary external mechanism for assuring the quality and standards of our degrees. External examiners are appointed from other high-quality institutions to each programme to assure the University of the equivalence in standards and rigour of our education provision within the sector. External examiners are also encouraged to participate in Advanced HE's external examiner professional development programme. External examiners review our approach to assessments (i.e., the suitability and standard of examination questions), including marking criteria, and then review samples of assessed student work to ensure the marks awarded meet sector standards. This calibration of standards provides assurance and informs the ongoing development of our modules, programmes, and assessments.

All External Examiners complete an annual report on their findings. The report asks for comment on the rigour and appropriateness of assessment; marking and moderation processes; maintenance of academic standards; and that the standard of student work and outcomes are comparable and in line with sector benchmarks. External Examiner reports are scrutinised by senior academic staff and any themes and issues that arise are considered by relevant committees, including University Quality Assurance Committee and Senate, as well as the University's External Advisors on Academic Standards (see below). Issues arising are addressed as part of the School Annual Review Plans, which are considered by both College Quality Assurance and Approval Committees and University Quality Assurance Committee. Actions are SMART to ensure they can be achieved and changes to practice made, where necessary, and evaluated.

As recommended by the QAA UK Quality Code and associated Advice and Guidance on Course Design and Development and External Expertise, the following are in place at the University of Birmingham:

- External experts are engaged to provide impartial and independent scrutiny on programme development and approval; in addition, we have an extensive periodic comprehensive review process for all academic units (the Vice Chancellor's Integrated Review);
- External reference points such as QAA subject benchmark statements, QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications and PSRB requirements or guidelines are considered as part of the Programme Development and Approval process.

In addition to the above, the University of Birmingham has appointed two External Advisors on Academic Standards (one for undergraduate and one for postgraduate taught provision). The External Advisors contribute to the University's regular review and analysis of student outcomes data, and associated policy and practice, providing an external perspective

informed by significant senior experience of academic quality and standards within the HE sector. The External Advisor for Academic Standards for undergraduate provision reviews the Degree Outcomes Statement annually as part of their main duties.

Section 3: Academic Governance

In accordance with the University Charter, Statutes and Ordinances, matters relating to education, academic quality and standards remain the responsibility of Senate. In common with other leading universities, Senate is supported in this task by a series of sub-committees that scrutinise new programme development activity, quality assurance processes and outcomes, collaborative provision, academic policy and legislation, academic standards, and degree classifications and outcomes, including reports from external examiners (see section 2). This process is overseen by the University Education Committee (UEC), which reports regularly to Senate on the business of each meeting, and a report on each Senate meeting is submitted to Council.

Council, as the University’s governing body, has oversight of the degree classifications awarded and trends via an annual report from Senate. University Executive Board (UEB) considers and takes decisions on University strategy, operations and management relating to education and teaching. Academic members of UEB are also members of Senate and, where relevant, its sub-committees, providing an effective link between strategic and academic governance. UEB and Senate regularly consider reports on degree outcomes and student success. Each College has a College Board chaired by the Head of College/Pro-Vice-Chancellor, who is also a member of UEB. College Boards consider a variety of matters in the operation of the College, including those related to education, and they feed into UEB, Senate and its sub-committees.

Access, participation, and outreach activity is overseen by Council, Senate, and its sub-committees, and by UEB. The University’s latest Access and Participation Plan (APP) (approved by the OfS in 2019) covers 2020/21 to 2024/25, and reiterates our ambitions regarding access, progress, and success for all students with the potential to succeed at the University of Birmingham. The APP is underpinned by our Birmingham Scholar framework. This is a lifecycle framework that provides targeted, personalised interventions to support specific groups (including those targeted within the APP) of applicants, students and recent graduates who are likely to face additional challenges throughout their student journey.

Section 4: Classification algorithms

The degree algorithm that is used at the University of Birmingham is described, in detail, in [Regulation 7](#) (section 7.3). There is only one algorithm in use across the University to ensure consistency and fairness, with variations in calculations depending on whether the degree is a 3-year bachelor’s programme, a year abroad programme, or an undergraduate master’s programme. A bachelors programme will be used as an example; for details of the variations for 4 year programmes please see [Regulation 7](#) (section 7.3) and the [Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment and Feedback](#) (section 7.7). It should be noted that implementation of the Emergency Framework for Assessment and Progression (2019/20) and the Policy for Fair Assessment and Fair Outcomes (2020/21 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic) required changes to the classification and progression algorithms for 2019/20 and 2020/21. Under the Assessment Frameworks (2021/22), most progression rules returned closer to normal.

A classified bachelor’s degree with honours (360 credit programme) is normally awarded to students who pass at least 320 credits, to include:

Level/Stage/Year	Credits
Level C (Certificate) / Year 1	At least 100 credits
Level I (Intermediate) / Year 2	At least 200 credits (with at least 100 credits at level H)
Level H (Honours) / Year 3	

A student is required to pass 100 credits in each year to progress to the next year. For any modules that are failed (the pass mark is 40%), students in year 1 or 2 are provided with one opportunity to retake the assessment or repeat the module. Prior to the 2021/22 cohort, students in year 3 could not retake an assessment or repeat a module unless they had extenuating circumstances (for example, if they were unwell). From the 2021/22 cohort onwards, students are permitted an opportunity to retrieve failure in Year 3.

Year 3 modules contribute more towards final degree classification than the modules in year 2 (25% in year 2 and 75% in year 3 for most programmes of study). Although specific degree algorithms vary across the sector, there is often an emphasis on achievement in the final year(s) of study because this recognises that a student's performance may improve over time. The zero weighting in year 1 allows for students to make the transition into university, although it is a requirement to pass at least 100 credits in order to progress to the year 2.

A student's average mark will determine their degree classification, based on the criteria below:

Classification	Average Mark
1 st	70% or above
2:1	60-69%
2:2	50-59%
3 rd	40-49%

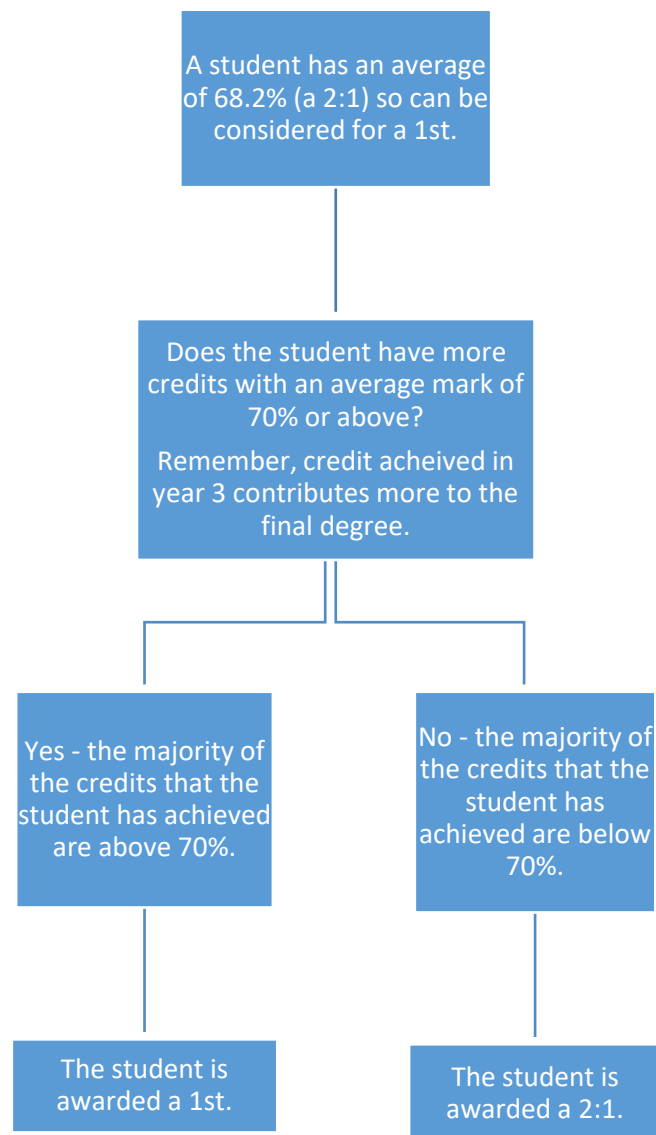
The process for the consideration of 'borderline' cases is described, in detail, in the [Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment and Feedback](#) (section 7.7). There is only one process in use across the University. This is considered to be the fairest and most transparent way to process 'borderline' cases.

The average mark (described above) is always the first method used to calculate degree classifications. In the event that a student's average mark falls in one of the pre-determined borderline areas then they can be considered for a higher award. The boundaries for consideration are¹:

Classification	Boundaries
for consideration for a 1st	≥ 68.0 - < 69.5%
for consideration for a 2:1	≥ 58.0 - < 59.5%
for consideration for a 2:2	≥ 48.0 - < 49.5%
for consideration for a 3rd	≥ 38.0 - < 39.5%

Below are examples of how a student's final degree classification may be calculated if they fall into a borderline boundary:

¹ For 2020-21 only the zone of discretion for degree classification boundary was extended as part of the [Policy on Fair Assessment and Fair Outcomes](#) designed to ensure the 2020-21 graduating cohort was not disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic.



Section 5: Teaching practices and learning resources

Enhancements made to practice over recent years that have had a discernible effect on degree classifications include the following initiatives:

- Guidance for Boards of Examiners was amended in summer 2019 to extend their role in confirming that assessment and marking processes have been conducted appropriately, leading to a set of marks and awards that are agreed to be an accurate and appropriate reflection of student performance;
- At School level, data on the degree classifications awarded are reviewed alongside external examiners' comments, with monitoring and accountability resting with Heads of School. Actions taken by individual Schools include; increased scrutiny of marks before Boards of Examiners consideration; introduction of shorter marking scales; introduction of more detailed grade descriptors; restructuring of exam papers; and work with external examiners to identify and drive actions;
- A strengthened Personal Academic Tutoring System, providing an e-portfolio for all students containing reflective tutorial preparation and information on all student support services (academic and wellbeing) and an online student support and development 'hub,' linking all our student support services to the academic tutorial system. During the pandemic, weekly online group tutorials were added to the personal

tutoring model, to provide students with a regular point of contact during the turbulent Covid period and beyond;

- Capital investment in learning and teaching spaces;
- More authentic assessment and support for staff from the University's Higher Education Futures Institute (HEFi) with the approach to hybrid learning through the pandemic.

Section 6: Identifying good practice and actions

Recent institution-level actions, and identified good practice, relating to degree classifications include:

- The introduction of Grade Point Average (GPA) certificates, to make more granular outcomes available, help address some employer concerns regarding the current classification system, and make the degree outcomes of our students clearer in an international context;
- Increases to the average weighted mean mark boundary required to be considered for a 1st or 2:1 degree for undergraduate students commencing their studies in 2017/18 and thereafter²;
- As noted in section 3, University Executive Board and Senate monitors and reviews student performance data on an ongoing basis and evaluates the impact of local and central initiatives on degree outcomes;
- As noted in section 2, the External Advisor for Academic Standards for undergraduate provision reviews the Degree Outcomes Statement annually as part of their main duties. The External Advisor for Academic Standards will, as part of their review, recommend any significant amendments as appropriate to the Degree Outcomes Statement for consideration by University Executive Board and Council;
- As recommended by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment, the common descriptions of degree outcome classifications, developed by the QAA, are being referenced in the University's guidance materials for marking and moderation processes, Board of Examiners meetings, and external examiners;
- The impact of the introduction of a resit opportunity for final year students for the 2021/22 cohort onwards in order to reduce pressure on students and to bring the University in line with most of the sector will be analysed and monitored;
- Further analysis of modelling data will be undertaken to review the impact of possible changes to the University's degree algorithm and the proportion of good honours awarded, including the impact upon awarding gaps for different groups of students.

² Please note the extended zone of discretion for each degree classification in 2020-21 only as part of the [Policy on Fair Assessment and Fair Outcomes](#).