Degree Outcomes Statement October 2022

Introduction

Leeds Beckett University's Degree Outcomes Statement draws on the findings of a wide-ranging review of our institutional degree classification profile and assessment practices for the five-year period: **2016/17** to **2020/21**.

We are confident in our strategies for enabling and safeguarding academic standards and the value of our awards, and we continue to evaluate these. Over what has been a challenging period, we have made significant progress in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, and in the provision of an inclusive learning environment for our students. We welcome the manifest impact of this progress on our students' outcomes and this work continues with full regard for the maintenance of academic standards.

Institutional Degree Classification Profile

Table 1 – Leeds Beckett University's five-year Degree Classification HESA profile 2016/17 – 2020/21
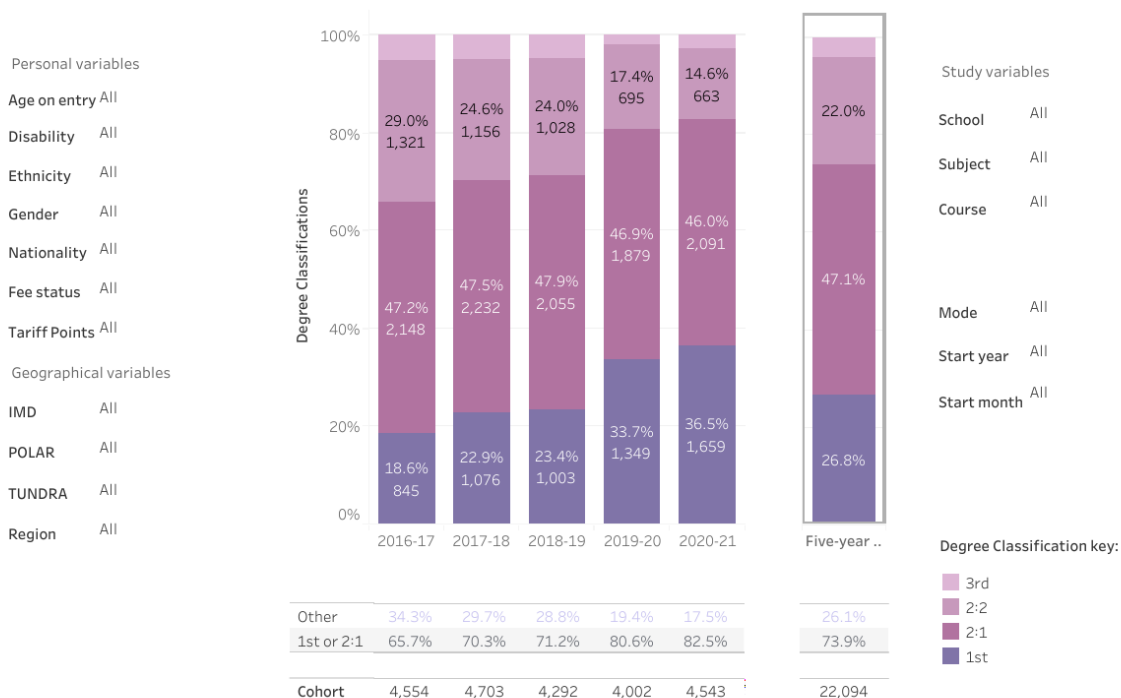
As seen in Table 1, our institutional degree classification outcomes profile demonstrates an upward trend in the attainment of first class honours degrees, our attainment rates for first class degrees have been below the sector average throughout the OfS review period. The sector average for first class degree attainment was 29.5% in the most recent sector comparison year (2018/19). We must wait to see if our recent 10pp. increase between 2018/19 and 2019/20 will move us above the sector average or whether this trend was reflected across the sector. Achievement of upper second class honours has remained static at the University throughout the five-year period.

Based on the last year of verified data (2020/21) 36.5% of our students achieved first class honours and 46.0% achieved an upper second: this equates to a good honours outcome for 82.5% of our students.

Cohort Analysis

We consider the following aspects of cohort analysis to be influential in helping to understand increases in good degree attainment *(N.B.: percentage attainment figures are rounded to 1dp):*

Entry Tariffs

There has been a change in the entry tariffs of the eligible population of qualifiers over the period, the eligible population does not include those with no known entry tariff.

The percentage of qualifiers with low tariff points on entry (those with less than 96pts) increased between 2016/17 and 2020/21, however we would expect this trend to reverse over the next few years as a result of increased entry requirements.

The change in attainment of 'low', 'medium' and 'high' tariff qualifiers over the period is as follows;

- Low tariff (less than 96 pts) up 18.3pp. to 77.9%
- Medium tariff (96 – 143 pts) up 17.3pp. to 86.9%
- High tariff (144+ pts) up 11.2pp. to 80.4%

Gender

There has been a significant and enduring differential between the attainment of male students and female students across the review period. However, this gap has closed significantly from circa 10 – 12pp. over a three-year period between 2016/17 and 2018/19, closing to a gap of 4.3pp. in 2020/21.

- 80.2% of male students are currently attaining good honours outcomes against an average of 82.5% for all students in 2020/21, compared with 84.5% of female students.

- There has been a change in the proportion of male/female students qualifying from the University since 2016/17. The proportion of qualifiers who are female has increased from 50.6% in 2016/17 to 55.2% in 2020/21, as a result only 44.8% of our qualifiers in 2020/21 were male.

Ethnicity

The differential attainment of first and upper seconds has been and remains an area of priority action for our University in our access and participation plans. Over this period, attainment by BAME students shows an increasing trend overall (+20.0pp.) compared to a University wide increasing trend of (+16.8pp.) over the period of 2016/17 to 2020/21. The trends for specific groups are as follows:

- Asian: up 21.0pp. for the period to 68.0%
- Black: up 24.7pp. for the period to 64.2%
- Mixed Race: up 18.0pp. for the period to 76.2%
- Other: up 3.7pp. for the period to 68.6%
- White: up 15.7pp. for the period to 85.9%

Whilst three of the four major BAME groups have seen an improvement in attainment that exceeds the improvement seen by White students over the same period, there is still a gap in attainment between BAME and White qualifiers which means we must continue to focus on this moving forward.

The eligible population of students is predominantly white and has remained static at between 79% - 80% of the population.

Disability

The University's ongoing commitment to inclusivity has supported significant improvements in disabled students' performance.

- The level of good honours attainment for disabled students in 2020/21 was 86.4%, up from 64.9% in 2016/17 and above the University average for good honours attainment for the third consecutive year. Disabled students now make up an increasing proportion of the overall degree award population and their achievements contribute significantly to overall improvements in attainment.

Subject Analysis

Following structural changes undertaken at the University during the period of this review, cognate subjects are now aligned to 9 Academic Schools and a Department of Languages. The student populations within the Schools are disparate and the degree attainment profile of the larger Schools significantly influences the wider institutional position. The detail of degree classification profile by School is held in **Appendix 1** to this statement.

Assessment and Marking Practices

We have clear academic regulations aligned with the Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration along with UK Quality Code Expectations and core practices which set the institutional requirements for effective assessment and marking practices. Our arrangements were considered robust by the QAA HE Review in 2014 and the subsequent registration with the OfS. Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) silver was awarded in 2017 and our regulatory frameworks continue to be rigorously implemented.

Course, level, and module outcomes are set in the design and validation of the course. Validation, involving external expert scrutiny, considers the appropriateness of these outcomes and their alignment with the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and relevant qualifications statements, standards and subject benchmarks in addition to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's) requirements where applicable.

The setting of assessments aligned with these sector reference points is subject to scrutiny and external examiner oversight annually. The standards for assessed work are confirmed via a review of samples of work by independent, institutionally appointed external examiners.

The University has actively supported successive cohorts of academic staff to gain HEA Fellowships and our own 'Developing Excellent Academic Practice' (DEAP) professional development programme, supported by an extensive online repository of resources and guidance, provides further support and direction for robust assessment practice.

External examiners' reports require specific responses to questions which affirm academic standards, comparability of student achievement and the appropriate conduct of processes. They consistently indicate that external examiners are assured and that standards are upheld:

Table 2: Percentage Assurance from External Examiners Relating to Academic Standards, Comparability of Performance and Conduct of Processes 2016/17 to 2021/22

Year	Appropriate Academic Standards	Comparability of Student Performance with Sector	Conduct of Processes
21/22	100%	100%	100%
20/21	99.8%	100%	100%
19/20	100%	99.7%	100%
1819	100%	100%	100%
1718	100%	100%	99.9%
1617	100%	99.8%	99.8%

We have engaged with the FHEQ degree classification descriptors and used these to review and restate institutional marking conventions, alongside the FHEQ threshold expectations. Revised degree marking conventions have been implemented from 2020/21 and embedded within our practice.

Academic Governance

The University's governance arrangements: our deliberative committee structures, our Framework for Academic Assurance and Enhancement, the Academic Regulations and in-year annual reporting through Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Academic Board and to the Board of Governors; provides effective oversight of academic standards, qualification outcomes, external examiner reporting, course monitoring and review, courses' continued academic good standing and associated action planning. Deans provide assurance of effective School level processes with institutional oversight and evidence of assurance conducted via committee reporting structures.

Our Academic Board and our Board of Governors have reviewed and approved this statement.

As part of our wider degree standards review, we have undertaken a survey and will be undertaking further follow up work with Schools to reflect on assessment practices and how we provide further support for consistent practice across our University, whilst reflecting the distinctive subject contexts.

Our Academic Board has approved strengthened regulations concerned with assessment protocols from 2020/21. As appropriate, we will deploy our continuous/annual audit processes to ensure that clear expectations for the setting, marking and moderation of assessment, as articulated within new annexes to the Academic Regulations (3a and 3b), are being consistently and rigorously applied. We will reflect on further staff development or guidance requirements in support of these clear expectations.

Collaborative provision delivered in partnership is subject to similar scrutiny and requirements. Schools oversee the assessment and marking practices of partners and will scrutinize, sample and moderate assessed work prior to the assiduous application of external examining. A separate collaborative provision annual report is received and discussed via our committees for ongoing oversight.

Classification Algorithms

The Bachelor's Degree with Honours is awarded for the attainment of a minimum of 120 credit points at Level 4, 120 credit points at Level 5, and 120 credit points at Level 6. The University awards these credit points where a student has:

- achieved the requirements for level progression from Level 4 to Level 5, and from Level 5 to Level 6, or has been admitted with advanced standing to level 5 or 6;
- pursued a course of study of 120 credit points at Level 6 or;
- submitted in all specified components of assessment;
- achieved the overall learning outcomes for the award;
- achieved an average of 40% or more in modules equivalent to 100 credit points at Level 6 or above;
- achieved an average of 30% or more in each module studied;
- achieved an overall average of 40% or more across all modules studied at this level.

Algorithm One - Honours Degree Classification:

In determining the class of Bachelor's Degree with Honours to be recommended, a Progression & Award Board should take account of the weighted average of the best 100 credits at levels 5 (weighted at 25%) and 6 (weighted at 75%)

Algorithm Two -Treatment of Borderline Performance:

If the final weighted average for an award is within 2% points of the next classification boundary then the award will be upgraded to that classification, provided that 50% or more of the credit achieved at level 6 is in the higher classification band.

Algorithm Exceptions

Students who are direct entrants to L6 awards (top up degrees) have an algorithm applied which defines an average of performance at L6 only.

We have a small number of awards in creative practice disciplines which apply an algorithm which considers the performance of L6 and a less than standard number of credits at L5. It is established practice within creative disciplines to allow students to explore the parameters of their practice in level 5 without fear of failure or concerns about the impact of experimentation on final grades. The consensus position is that this approach ultimately strengthens the final level portfolio/ exhibition/ presentation of practice. The approach is commonly used in the sector for such subjects.

Integrated Masters

The profile of achievement for an Integrated masters award is as follows for the student who has achieved the requirements for level progression from Level 4 to Level 5, from Level 5 to Level 6, from Level 6 to Level 7 or has been admitted directly beyond the first level of the course;

- pursued a course of study of 120 credit points at Level 7 or above;
- submitted in all specified components of assessment;
- achieved the overall learning outcomes for the award;
- achieved an average of 50% or more in modules equivalent to 100 credit points at Level 7 or above;
- achieved an average of 40% or more in each module studied;
- achieved an overall average of 50% or more across all modules studied at level 7.
- classification is determined by a weighted average of the best 100 credits at levels 5 (10%), 6 (20%) and 7 (70%) in relation to the marking conventions above.
- The upgrade rule will apply, and the above regulation applies to students commencing Level 4 on these awards from Sept 22 onwards

Reassessment and Repeat Provision

- Students may be reassessed in up to 100% of the modules within a level

- All reassessment is undertaken at component level (i.e. those summative assessments which contribute to the module grade)
- All reassessed work is capped at 40% (with Level 7 Integrated Masters re-assessment capped at 50%)
- Students are offered a repeat part level or repeat level opportunity at the discretion of the Progression and Award Board.
- Generally, failure in more than 50% of the modules within a level following reassessment will elicit a repeat level opportunity.
- Generally, failure in less than 50% of the modules within a level following reassessment will elicit a repeat part-level opportunity.
- If a repeat is offered at the final level, all prior passed module marks are retained

Institutionally we have reflected upon our present approaches to algorithms and treatment of the borderline. We concluded that to effectively reflect exit velocity and the need for students to develop over this period, particularly given our access and participation student we would retain the above algorithm. This provides time for students to develop their potential and recognizes the time needed for some students to develop this added value.

Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

The focus of the next stage of our Strategic Planning Cycle 2022-2027 is on the quality of our education; the impact we can have on both the lives and careers of our students and improving the education environment within which we work.

We will ensure that we can support our students to achieve their ambitions within a vibrant academic community, engaged at the forefront of education and research and respecting the value of both in the work of students and staff. Our students will be internationally recognised for their excellence and we will ensure that barriers to success are removed, through coherent course design and the development of an educational environment that both supports independent development and boosts confidence. Our courses will enable our graduates to become self-critical, self-aware and alive to the contexts within which they learn: global, sustainable and inclusive.

This aim is supported by the following objectives, which are discussed in greater detail below:

- To create a flexible learning environment which supports all learners to enter highly-skilled employment.
- To develop teaching and learning alongside research and innovation, ensuring that we present a coherent academic environment with each aspect of our work supporting the other.
- To maintain a stimulating academic portfolio which attracts students of the highest calibre and maintains market share.
- To provide all of this within a supportive and collegiate academic culture, which builds confidence and trust between educators and students.

The Learning Pathway and Student Support Framework remain as central features of academic planning and delivery, during the next phase of our strategic development, sitting alongside the **Employability Implementation Framework**, to support learners throughout their time at Leeds Beckett, and beyond.

The **Learning Pathway** helps us in:

- Course design, supporting a clarity of approach towards the whole course.
- Understanding of the different aspects of the curriculum and their interrelationship, placing academic and professional content alongside contextualisation within global environment which recognises and respects diversity, inclusivity and sustainability.
- Focusing on the transitions that learners undergo when moving between levels of study.
- Expanding this approach to include those transitional stages before and after university will help us better

understand, and support, all our students, whatever their prior educational experiences (or future career goals).

The **Student Support Framework** has also developed to accommodate:

- Different ways of experiencing and engaging with university,
- The impact of the flexibility we have brought, and will continue to bring, to our academic environment.
- Consideration of, and appropriate action to mitigate, the potential pressures of isolation on students learning at a distance,
- The opportunities on-line communication brings to the range of support services we can offer students, wherever they are.

The **Employability Implementation Framework**, strengthens our core support for student employability, recognising the extended timescales within which we now support students during their studies and beyond. This includes:

- Developing a culture which supports university wide adoption of career development learning
- Using data and dashboards to inform impactful career development initiatives
- Establishing an infrastructure which supports the growth of sector leading and pan- university best practice
- Developing a clear and comprehensive employability offer for all our key stakeholders and communicating this with confidence.
- Aligning our careers education with the student and graduate labour market.

In tandem, our Strategic Plan has focused on delivering an excellent education and experience for all our students and has driven improvements in student satisfaction, measured through NSS KPIs, which clearly evidence students' own perceptions of enhanced teaching, learning and assessment practices.

The development of embedded and connected support from a reconfigured employability and business engagement team, has driven increases in both work based and work related learning and assessment, developing confidence and competence in students' engagement with new assessment strategies which target improvements in progression to highly skilled employment destinations.

Identification of Good Practice and Actions

Our survey into assessment practice undertaken across our academic structures has provided assurance that colleagues are routinely using external reference points (professional body guidance/ subject benchmark statements/ the FHEQ) when defining assessment tasks for a given H.E. level and credit volume.

Clear assessment briefs and marking criteria are shared with students and externality is applied at the point the assessment is set and marked. Second marking, standardization and moderation practices are routinely applied, and Module Boards maintain robust oversight of module performance across each level of study to identify outlying outcomes or other assessment concerns.

Planned Actions Academic Standards

a) Keep under review the application of regulations relating to Education and Assessment, including reviewing opportunities for academic input into Progression and Award Board discussions relating to management and effectiveness of assessment

b) Review allocation of external examiners and update guidance and briefings for external examiners – *ongoing*

Assessment and marking practice:

a) Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) to lead (through our Heads of Subject network) a university - wide collaborative project to support Schools with practical ideas for informing curricular change, decolonisation, inclusive assessment and inclusive practice.
b) Reflect further on staff development and external examiner development activities
c) Review opportunities for further subject-based calibration of outcomes and mentoring for new/ part time staff members

Further Analysis and Review

a) Our major review of the Inclusive Course Design Tool with flagged questions which specifically relate to the award gap will be launched next calendar year. This aligns to work being undertaken as part of the Equality Diversity Inclusivity (EDI) agenda and also is a vehicle to support our student outcomes around continuation and progression.
b) CLT lead our Developing Excellent Academic Practice (DEAP) community in offering best practice sharing through our events and educational development programme which support EDI. This year we intend to prioritise, through our three pan university Fora, the different factors contributing to the award gap including inclusive assessment, wellbeing and research into practice.

Grade Inflation

Appendix 2 is our Institutional report outlining the methodology and findings of a project undertaken by CLT reflecting upon recognition of 1st class degrees and excellence. Acting as a starting point the report sought to:

- Analyse and compare university data relating to the number of first-class degrees awarded across Schools within our University.
- Discuss Leeds Beckett staff perceptions of grade inflation and its context, with a focus on exploring the practices involved in recognising first-class work, awarding first-class marks, and the processes which allow us to identify equivalence across subject disciplines in order to ensure a consistent standard within Leeds Beckett, which aligns to the wider sector.

The following actions were identified in conclusion to this report:

a) Refine the first-class grade descriptors to include consideration of very high marks.
b) Consider common practice relating to internal and external moderation and first class marks.
c) Review practices around dissertation and large project marking to promote consistency in work that is heavily weighted at level 6.

Risks and Challenges

We have identified some variation of degree outcomes between subjects when compared to sector subject averages. Whilst this can vary dependent on student intake or characteristics, we propose to undertake further follow up work to understand the higher proportions of firsts and upper seconds within these subject areas. We will also take into consideration at School and course level of the impact of Dissertation/Major Independent Study/Project calibration and marking processes on final grading. We will be working with BEEC initially to support them in using external dissertation assessors.

Better shared understanding of all the higher grade (70%+) first class bandings with more delineated definitions. CLT will be developing a project with academic staff focusing on first class bandings with an outcome relating to a clearer, more delineated grid.

One of the Education Plan's key components relate to building **course identity and integrity.** CLT have resources to support our Academic Schools with this initiative, and in collaboration with other professional Services this will be piloted with our School of Sport during the 2022-23 academic year. It is hoped that the project's outcomes may form a model for other Schools to use.