

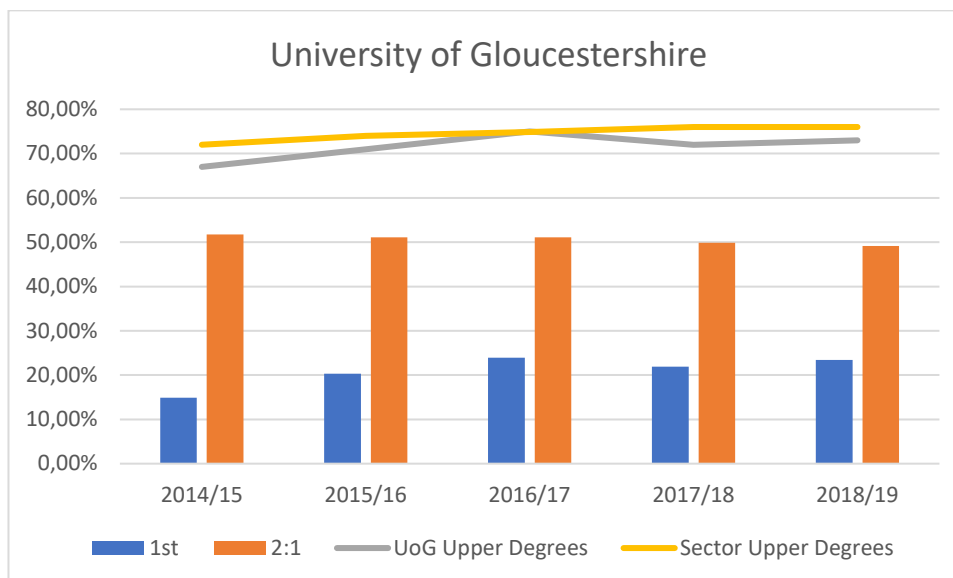
Degree Outcomes Statement 2019/20

UKPRN 10007145

The aim of this statement is to describe how, strategically, the University of Gloucestershire (UoG) is protecting the value of qualifications over time. It covers final classifications for graduates at Level 6 and also includes awards delivered through collaborative partnership arrangements.

1) Institutional degree classification profile

- 1.1 The table below shows the percentage of University of Gloucestershire students achieving a classification of 1st and 2:1 across the past five years with a comparison of 'upper' degrees (ie 1st and 2:1) achieved across the sector.



- 1.2 Although there was a steady rise in upper degrees awarded between 2014–2016, the University remained below sector outputs during this period and the trajectory has steadied markedly during the last two years. The University has taken action to ensure consistent understanding of student achievement and how it is calibrated and benchmarked incorporating discussions regarding sector-wide data comparisons at exam boards, the development of reports to analyse student achievement at module level and specifically amending the External Examiner report to focus on student achievement and the proportion of upper degrees.
- 1.3 A breakdown of upper degrees by student characteristics across the last five years can be found at Appendix 1 (pg 7). It can be seen that white students are consistently awarded a higher proportion of upper degrees at the University, when compared to all minority ethnic groups. This gap is large and has widened noticeably across the past two years. The University does not have significant or consistent gaps in degree attainment for students with declared disabilities. A gap in upper degree attainment exists between young and mature students at the University, with young students obtaining a higher proportion of upper degrees than their older peers. This gap has been significant in three of the five years but closed markedly in 2018/19. Sector-wide data suggests that the University's attainment gap for male students is mirrored across the broader sector.

- 1.4 The University's strategic aim is to reduce and remove barriers, challenge perceptions and provide continual support to all students and the action that is to be taken to close attainment gaps is outlined in its [Access and Participation Plan](#), especially in relation to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, male students and mature students.

2) Assessment and marking practices

- 2.1 The University's Quality Framework has been aligned with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) [UK Quality Code](#). At the core of this framework is the concept of externality and the role of External Examiners is central to this. Amongst other things, External Examiners ensure that standards and comparability (both internally and externally) are maintained and that students have fulfilled the objectives of the module and reached the required standards of the award. The University has appointed approximately 200 External Examiners according to strict criteria for appointment, in line with the QAA's *Advice and Guidance: External Expertise*, which ensures that external participants are not only suitably qualified in terms of subject and quality expertise but are genuinely able to bring an independent perspective to the University's work. The involvement of External Examiners is fundamental throughout the end-to-end process of assessment, from the scrutiny of assessments to the conferment of awards.
- 2.2 During 2017/18 the University elected to become an early adopter of '*Professional Development for External Examiners*', a HEFCE-initiated course, now supported by the Office for Students, led by Advance HE which was developed following the national review of quality assessment in 2016 and the resulting development of the 'Degree Standards Project'. The main aim of the course is to improve consistency of academic judgements across the sector. A number of University staff have been trained by Advance HE to become facilitators of the course. This means that we deliver the course not only in support of the professional development of our External Examiners but also to our own staff in order to ensure that, across the institution, awareness is raised of the nature and related challenges of academic standards and potential innovations that are currently being considered across the sector.
- 2.3 In order for a new course to be validated, it must be evidenced that it meets the University's range of validation criteria which crucially include giving due regard to external requirements (ie the mapping to [the Framework for HE Qualifications](#), relevant [QAA Subject Benchmarks](#) and specific requirements defined by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies) to ensure that awards of the University achieve the appropriate level and subject content as assessed through learning outcomes. Any subsequent modifications that are made at course or module level, including the amendment of learning outcomes, are subject to a process that includes scrutiny and approval by the External Examiner.
- 2.4 The University's *Assessment Guidelines* were last updated for 2019/20 and are regularly reviewed. These guidelines, which sit within the wider regulatory framework of the Academic Regulations for Taught Provision (ARTP), define the end-to-end process of assessment and clearly detail the University's expectations from assessment design (including assessment criteria) through to the marking of assessments including first marking, double and/or second and, when required, third marking, and moderation. External Examiners moderate every component of assessment at every level in order to ensure that marking standards are consistent and appropriate and that students have reached the required standard. Through this process the University takes confidence that the marks awarded are not only accurate but are comparable with the sector. Courses delivered through the University's collaborative provision are also subject to the same regulatory framework, assessment guidelines and involvement of External Examiners.
- 2.5 Other assessment-related policies and regulations that directly impact the outcome of awards, such as Extenuating Circumstances, Appeals and Complaints, and Academic Misconduct, are managed through central University teams therefore ensuring consistency of approach and application across the institution.

- 2.6 In 2016 the University embarked upon a Review of Assessment, a three-year institution-wide programme, which has positively impacted not only staff and students but also the maintenance of standards. The review was widespread and included a major reshaping of academic regulations, assessment guidance, the assessment calendar, the assessment scrutiny process and mitigating circumstances. During this programme, a further major development came in the form of the requirement for each course to have an approved Course Assessment Strategy (CAS) which has not only led to increased oversight and a shared understanding of assessment across the course team and students but also ensures consistency of assessment within and across levels whilst ensuring careful consideration and action in relation to assessment load. This requirement includes courses delivered through partnerships.

3) Academic Governance

- 3.1 Academic Board is responsible for the conferment of the University's awards and delegates this authority to Boards of Examiners (BoE). Membership of the BoEs include External Examiners who have particular responsibility for ensuring that standards and comparability are maintained and for judging whether students have fulfilled the objectives of the module and reached the required standard. The University operates a two-tier system of BoEs to agree assessment outcomes. The first tier, or Module Board of Examiners (MBEs), confirms marks and awards credit at module level for all students studying the modules in its subject area. The second tier, the Award Board of Examiners (ABEs), uses those confirmed marks to make decisions on the progression of students and the classification of awards. In addition, the ABE also maintains oversight of the whole assessment cycle to ensure that a consistent approach is used to arrive at outcomes for all students and monitors outcomes to ensure that they are in line with national benchmarks therefore remaining vigilant for unexplained grade inflation.
- 3.2 An annual assurance statement is produced for Council by Academic Board ensuring a 'deep dive' approach to analysing the effectiveness of quality measures across the University's provision, including courses delivered through partnership arrangements. The report focusses on various core quality mechanisms including the external examining system and continuous course improvement and a specific section analyses student achievement, comparing outcomes of the University with those across the sector. A subsequent action plan is monitored by Academic Board throughout the year. Both Council and Academic Board consider a detailed analysis and breakdown of degree classes awarded each year by School, level and over time. Academic Board commissions further detailed investigations as necessary, where awards look out of line in some respect, to ensure that apparent anomalies are examined and explained.
- 3.3 Courses that are delivered through collaborative partnerships are subject to the same quality assurance and governance mechanisms as the University's 'home' provision. In addition, they are subject to close scrutiny by the Annual Business Review (ABR) of Collaborative Partners which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. A RAG-rated approach ensures that focus is targeted at any areas of concern and resulting actions are reviewed by Academic Board and any specific issues are followed up by a mid-year Interim ABR.

4) Classification Algorithms

- 4.1 The university reviews the ARTP annually and, as such, there have been significant changes made across recent years and these are detailed below. The University is confident that, taken in combination, these changes have significantly reinforced the robustness of our awarding practice.
- 4.2 A full set of 'progression' regulations was introduced at the beginning of 2016/17 for all students entering in that year. These regulations ensured that each student was actively progressed from level to level in their studies.
- 4.3 As part of the Review of Assessment (as outlined at 2.6), the University focused on 'standards' matters and undertook a major review of the ARTP, these new regulations took effect at the beginning of 2017/18 for all students entering in that year. Each element of the ARTP was considered and carefully

modelled to ensure that it was not contributing to any potential for grade inflation and, as such, the following significant changes were made:

- The degree algorithm – prior to 2017/18 the degree classification was calculated using only the ‘best’ 90 credits at levels 5 and/or 6. Following the review, all 120 credits are now included within the calculation.
- Prior to 2017/18 students that achieved within one mark of a classification border were ‘upgraded’ to the higher classification. This facility has now been removed.
- The facility to condone failed modules was removed.

4.4 As yet, it is too early to fully measure the impact of the regulatory changes as students that entered under these regulations will not graduate until 2019/20.

Current Academic Regulations:

4.5 The University does not include level 4 within the calculation of the degree classification as this initial year of degree study is seen as an invaluable opportunity for students to *learn to learn* within the higher education environment.

4.6 The university has two methods of calculating degree classifications, one based on only Level 6 credit (which is an important facility for Level 6 awards) and the second one is based on credit achieved at both Levels 5 (weighted at 20% of the calculation) and 6 (weighted at 80% of the calculation), the weighting therefore clearly prioritising the achievements at the level of the award whilst ensuring that all achievement is included across both levels. We believe that this approach leads to an accurate and transparent classification which is fully representative of students’ achievement.

4.7 The two methods of classification, as seen below, are set out in the ARTP. Students are provided with additional guidance to the calculation of classification within the ‘MyGlos’ app.

1. **Method 1** is based on the average of the best grades at the level of the award amounting to 120 CATS, rounded to the nearest whole number.
2. **Method 2** is based on the average (not rounded) of the best grades at the level one below that of the award amounting to 120 CATS, weighted at 20%, plus the average (not rounded) of the best grades at the level of the award amounting to 120 CATS, weighted at 80%, rounded to the nearest whole number.

The method giving the higher result is used to determine the classification.

4.8 Other characteristics of the ARTP include:

- *Module attempts*: students are permitted two full module attempts with each attempt being made up of an initial assessment opportunity and a reassessment opportunity (capped at 40%) and we believe that this is broadly in line with the approach taken across much of the sector.

5) Teaching practices and learning resources

5.1 The Academic Development Unit (ADU) is responsible for developing and coordinating the University’s strategic approach to the enhancement of academic quality and standards, ensuring that enhancement is informed by external perspectives, sector trends, recognised best practice and innovative approaches. As the central department for the support and development of academic practice, the ADU leads academic development projects and activities related to curriculum design, higher education pedagogies, assessment and evaluation of impact in order to facilitate and promote an institutional culture of ongoing innovation and enhancement which attracts and retains outstanding staff who inspire students to achieve their full potential.

- 5.2 The University's *Technology to Enhance Learning* programme, supported by the ADU's dedicated Learning Technology Support team, has developed the University's technology environment considerably, with major advances in how the virtual learning environment (Moodle) is implemented along with the seamless integration of supporting systems (e.g. Big Blue Button for synchronous learning, Tallis for reading lists, Planet eStream for media content and self-generated resources, Turnitin for text-matching, and lecture capture technology). We have also directly integrated Moodle with the student records system, and developed a whole-system delivering a fully integrated and sector-leading electronic management of assessment environment, providing excellent student and tutor functionality. This has enabled us to embed learning analytics within our tutor portal including critical leading indicators of student engagement for physical attendance and engagement with Moodle. Dedicated learning technologists work closely with tutors to ensure they optimise the use of the new environment in order to provide an excellent and engaging learning environment for all of our students.

6) Identifying good practice and actions

- 6.1 During the past three years in particular, the University has attributed significant focus to student achievement with assessment being at the heart of the student experience and, as such, the following are identified as areas of good practice:
- a) The delivery of Advance HE's 'Professional Development for External Examiners' training course, not only to support the professional development of the University's External Examiners but more widely to develop University staff;
 - b) The major review of academic regulations, in 2017/18, to remove any potential for artificial grade inflation characteristics;
 - c) The measures that have been established across recent years to raise awareness across the institution of the potential and therefore avoidance of artificial grade inflation;
 - d) The concurrent work that has been undertaken at institutional level through substantive improvements in teaching and learning leading to higher student attainment.

7) Areas for development

- a) In line with sector dialogue and developments in this area, the University will review its use of two classification calculation methods in order to ensure that this is not contributing in any way to grade inflation.

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Academic Registrar
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Upper Degrees awarded by the University of Gloucestershire by student characteristic:

