



BIRMINGHAM CITY
University

DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

2019/20

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this statement is to describe how Birmingham City University meets the expectations for standards set out within the UK Quality Code and the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration (B4 and B5) that relate to protecting the value of qualifications. It provides an overview of the range of deliberate steps we have taken as an institution to enhance our quality assurance and regulatory frameworks to further safeguard academic standards and the value of our qualifications both now and in the future.

1. INSTITUTIONAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION PROFILE



Figure 1: Percentage of final awards by degree classification and comparison between Birmingham City University and the UK Sector (excl. BCU).

- 1.1. Although there has been a steady increase in the number of upper degrees awarded over the past 5 years the University has remained below the sector average during this period. The gap has however narrowed in the past three academic years. We do however expect the upward trend in 1st and 2:1 classifications to level off as a result of the various steps we have taken as an institution, as described in this statement.
- 1.2. A further breakdown of upper degrees by a range of student characteristics is located at Appendix 1. The data sets show a number of gaps in degree attainment across various student populations. These include disabled students when compared to students with no declared disability, BAME compared to white students and the least deprived (IMD quintile 5) when compared to the most deprived (IMD quintile 1).
- 1.3. As a traditionally widening participation institution, our mission is to be the University for our City, and to enable our students to transform their lives. Our strategic aims include supporting equality of opportunity for all students to succeed in their chosen course, irrespective of socioeconomic and/or protected characteristic at entry and to identify under-performing groups and create positive interventions to secure successful outcomes by reducing gaps in continuation and attainment. Specific targets are set out within our [Access and Participation Plan](#) to close attainment gaps between the groups listed in 1.2 above and between young and mature students.

2. ASSESSMENT AND MARKING PRACTICES

- 2.1. University courses are designed and approved in line with a rigorous process which takes account of key external reference points for academic standards such as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), relevant subject benchmark statements, and the appropriate elements of the UK Quality Code. Approval, re-approval and periodic review processes scrutinise the intended learning outcomes of modules and courses and determine whether the assessment strategy for the course and the individual assessment methods at module level enable students to demonstrate achievement of those learning outcomes.
- 2.2. Externality is a key aspect of the University's quality assurance framework. External academic subject specialists and industry practitioners, as appropriate, feature on all course approval, re-approval and periodic review panels. External examiners, as described elsewhere, also perform a fundamental role in maintaining the academic standards of our awards through their work in approving draft assessment tasks, carrying out external moderation of samples of student assessed work and their impartial expert involvement in Progression and Awards Boards where their role includes confirming that University policies and regulations have been applied correctly and equitably and that academic standards continue to be secure.
- 2.3. Our assessment and marking practices are under constant review, with account taken of external examiner feedback, the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and the outcomes of processes such as annual monitoring. Responsibility for assessment policy is partly delegated to the four Faculties, each of which is required to have in place policies and procedures for the double marking and/or internal moderation of assessed work. All courses must have at least one external examiner appointed and every module that contributes to the final classification is subject to external moderation. We believe these approaches to be effective and this continues to be confirmed by external examiners in their annual reports. External examiners also continue to confirm that standards set for awards are appropriate and that standards of student achievement are comparable with other institutions with which they are familiar.
- 2.4. We continue to take a strategic approach to the ongoing maintenance of academic standards and quality which we believe enables us to protect the value of qualifications over time. We have taken the publication of the revised UK Quality Code, the Office for Students Regulatory Framework and latterly the Statement of Intent as an opportunity to carry out a 'root and branch' review of our quality assurance and regulatory frameworks. This work commenced with a review of our regulatory framework in 2017/18, resulting in the development and implementation of new Academic Regulations from 2018/19. The focus in 2018/19 moved to aspects of the quality assurance framework including the development of revised approaches for Course Modifications, Admissions, Collaborative Provision, Course Monitoring and Enhancement and Periodic Review. The focus for 2019/20 has been the development of the Degree Outcomes Statement, a review of external expertise, a review of assessment policy and practice and the policy and procedures for course design and development. As a package of measures we are confident that, once completed, the University will have in place an up to date and robust policy and regulatory framework for the setting and maintenance of academic standards that will continue to provide internal and external assurance that the value of qualifications is being safeguarded now and in the future.

3. ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

- 3.1. In common with the sector we have in place a clear and robust academic governance structure and associated arrangements. Within the structure primary and ultimate responsibility rests with the Academic Board, supported by its Standing Committees, regulatory frameworks, policies and procedures, for the management of academic standards and quality and consequently for protecting the value of qualifications over time.
- 3.2. As first tier Standing Committees, the Academic Regulations and Policy Committee (ARPC), Collaborative Partnerships Committee (CPC) and the Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Quality Committee (LTAQC), have delegated authority for the management of the University's quality assurance and regulatory frameworks and the maintenance of academic standards and quality for awards delivered through partnership arrangements. LTAQC has lead responsibility for the quality assurance framework, approval and re-approval of courses and conferment of awards. ARPC is responsible for academic policy and the day-to-day operation of the Academic Regulations and approval of any amendments to the regulations. CPC is responsible for the quality assurance framework for awards delivered in partnership with UK and overseas partners and the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative partnerships and apprenticeships. All awards delivered in partnership follow the University's academic regulations and all Boards responsible for assessment decisions are chaired by University academic staff.
- 3.3. Academic Board is ultimately responsible for the conferment of the University's awards and delegates this authority to LTAQC and in turn to Progression and Award Boards (PABs) convened in each academic School. Membership of PABs includes External Examiners who perform a critical role in providing assurance that the academic standards of our awards continue to be maintained and that they are comparable with sector recognised standards. As part of the introduction of the new Academic Regulations in 2018/19 the University introduced a two-tiered assessment system consisting of first tier Module Assessment Boards (MABs) and second tier Progression and Award Boards (PABs). MABs are responsible for confirming the marks for each module and maintaining standards of assessments in conjunction with External Examiners. PABs then use those confirmed marks to award credit and make decisions on progression and award, including final degree classifications. PABs are also expected to maintain oversight of the conduct and outcomes of the assessment process and report on this annually. At least one External Examiner must always be in attendance at any PAB where a final award is made.
- 3.4. An annual Quality Assessment Report is provided to Academic Board and the Board of Governors in the autumn of each year. The report contains a detailed overview of the University's quality assurance and regulatory frameworks, including any changes during the year in review. The report also includes student survey outcomes and year-on-year comparison data, details of inclusive approaches to learning and teaching, academic professional development, student engagement and student support, graduate outcomes data and academic appeals data. The report also includes detailed information on undergraduate and postgraduate degree outcomes including year on year comparison of good honours outcomes dating back at least five years for undergraduate awards, benchmarked against sector data on degree outcomes. Degree outcomes data is also separated by different characteristics such as ethnicity, disability, domicile and by academic school and subject area. It also includes degree outcomes data for students studying through partnership arrangements in the UK and overseas. These reports provide Academic Board with a broad range of detailed information to assure itself that academic standards and quality are being effectively maintained over time and in turn enable it to provide those same assurances to the Board of Governors.

3. ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE (CONTINUED)

- 3.5. As a result of changes to our quality assurance framework during 2018/19 and 2019/20 the reports of School level periodic reviews (carried out on a 5 year cycle) will, from the 2020/21 academic year, be scrutinised directly by Academic Board. The review process includes detailed reflection by academic schools on student outcomes and achievement, which includes the degree classifications achieved by students. This will include reflections on the performance of students according to a range of characteristics such as entry qualifications, ethnicity, disability, gender, age, participation (POLAR¹) and socio-economic status (IMD²) and action where necessary to reduce any gaps in attainment and also to ensure that the academic standards of awards continue to be maintained. Scrutiny of the outcomes of periodic reviews will enable Academic Board to provide assurances to the Board of Governors that the value of qualifications awarded to students is, and continues to remain, in line with sector-recognised standards.

4. CLASSIFICATION ALGORITHMS

Academic Regulations 2014/15 – 2018/19

- 4.1. The Standard Undergraduate Assessment Regulations (Version 5) were introduced with effect from the 2014/15 academic year. The principal change from Version 4 saw a reduction in the standard number of permitted assessment attempts from four to two. A further significant change saw the removal of a minimum qualifying mark of 30% for each element of assessment in modules with more than one assessment. This was replaced by a weighted average mark. The standard calculation method for degree classifications was based on the overall weighted average of the best 30 credits at Level 5 and best 90 credits at Level 6.
- 4.2. A University wide curriculum transformation project took place in 2016/17. The project involved the review and re-approval of all courses and a move from a credit framework based on modules of multiples of 15 credits to one based on multiples of 20 credits. This change also resulted in the approval of new Undergraduate Assessment Regulations (UAR20) to support the new 20 credit framework. The standard calculation method was based on the overall weighted average of the best 40 credits at Level 5 and best 80 credits at Level 6 to fit with the change of credit framework. All other aspects of the regulations remained fundamentally unchanged.

Review of the Academic Regulations: 2017/18

- 4.3. During the academic year 2017/18 we carried out a detailed review of our Academic Regulations. One of the aims of the review was to simplify the regulatory framework, consolidating different sets of regulations for different awards into a single set of regulations for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards. The review also aimed to develop regulations that better supported student progress and continuation and engaged students more effectively with all aspects of their learning by making more of the credit at Levels 5 and 6 contributory to the final classification.

¹POLAR (the participation of local areas)

²IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation)

4. CLASSIFICATION ALGORITHMS (CONTINUED)

Revised Academic Regulations: with effect from 2018/19

- 4.4. The new academic regulations were implemented from September 2018 under the principle of 'no detriment' for continuing students. A key aspect of this principle was that continuing students would have the final classification calculated using the algorithm set out in the regulations in place when they started at the University and the algorithm set out in the new regulations and would receive the better of the two outcomes. We consider this to be a fair and equitable approach for students. As a result, the first graduating students whose classifications will be based solely on the new regulations will be in July 2021. At that point we anticipate that we will see a change in our institutional classification profile. We will, however, need to keep the regulations and our algorithm under constant review to ensure that there are no unintended detrimental effects for specific groups of students and they continue to be fair and equitable for all. This will be carried out through the academic governance structures and the quality assurance processes set out in this statement.
- 4.5. The standard classification algorithm that applies to three year undergraduate degree awards is based on the overall weighted average of 120 credits from the second year (Level 5) and 120 credits from the third year (Level 6) at the ratio 40:60. The higher weighting attributed to the final year reflects 'exit velocity' and the higher degree of academic challenge as the course progresses. The first year is not weighted as it recognises that it is a transition year for many students. As a widening participation institution we recruit students from a wide range of backgrounds with different levels of attainment and prior qualifications and therefore consider it appropriate that the first year does not contribute to classification. All marks from Levels 5 and 6 are included in the calculation, including any modules that have been compensated and/or condoned. The regulations include a 1% borderline zone for degree classification. Promotion to a higher classification is automatic where 50% or more of the credit that contributes to classification is in the higher band.

5. TEACHING PRACTICES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

- 5.1. We have invested considerably in learning and teaching and in our curriculum, building on our Silver rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework. Our mission is twofold: to be the University for Birmingham and to enable personal transformation. To achieve this mission, there has been substantial investment in our estate (circa £340 million), including a major expansion of the city centre campus and expansion at the city south campus including new learning and teaching spaces and specialist facilities at both sites. This work has been ongoing since 2015 and covers the time period of this statement. Alongside development of the campuses and resources, we introduced an ambitious Academic Plan in 2015/16 to redefine the academic offer and effect a curriculum transformation. The strategic intent of the plan was for the University to pursue excellence by providing practice-led, knowledge applied education that is interdisciplinary, employability driven and internationalised. It is our view that a range of improvements in learning and teaching, and in resources and facilities in recent years have supported an increase in upper classifications during a period in which our degree algorithm has remained largely unchanged.

5. TEACHING PRACTICES AND LEARNING RESOURCES (CONTINUED)

- 5.2. The University supports and actively encourages the continuing professional development of its academic staff. Staff on academic contracts are actively supported to achieve Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE). The majority (circa 60%) of our academic staff have their practice, impact and leadership of teaching and learning recognised by Advance HE through Fellowship with 18% at the level of Senior and Principal Fellow. The past three years figures are shown below:

	Total number of HEA Fellowships at 11 June 2020				
	Associate Fellow	Fellow	Senior Fellow	Principal Fellow	National Teaching Fellow
2020	99	638	139	18	8
2019	81	645	128	19	8
2018	38	520	65	9	10

- 5.3. All new staff with less than 3 years UK HE teaching experience who do not already hold a teaching qualification or recognition as a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) are required to complete the University's PG Cert Learning and Teaching. Successful completion confers FHEA status. The course is designed around teaching development activity in the Schools, supported by mentoring and specialist input arranged by the Education Development Service. At least 60 staff complete the PG Cert each year. An Academic Professional Apprenticeship, incorporating the PG Cert, has been running since 2018/19.
- 5.4. In addition to our Teaching Fellows of all categories we have also been successful in winning Advance HE (AHE) Collaborative Awards for Teaching Excellence (CATEs). Launched in 2016 these AHE Awards recognise whole teams rather than individuals. There are currently less than 60 successful institutions nationwide so we are justifiably proud of securing awards in both 2018 and 2019. The 2018 award was for the [High Achievers Recognition Scheme \(HARS\)](#) in the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences. The 2019 award was for [Project TIGERS](#) (Tech Innovation Growing Engagement, Retention, and Satisfaction) in the Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment.
- 5.5. Our Centre for Academic Success provides teaching and support for students throughout their university journey in subjects such as academic writing, study skills, English language and maths and has grown considerably in recent years (including more than doubling the number of 1-1 tutorials delivered in 2018/19 to circa 3500). This opportunity to enhance their learning is available to all students and aims to support them in achieving their aspirations; reaching their target classification or broadening their career options, for example. The Centre also provides regular 1:1 coaching to students who are repeating their first year of study. Established in 2018/19, this support empowers students to identify their barriers to success, set achievable goals and work with their coach to develop the skills needed to progress through their course. The coaching provision supported 60 students to progress to the next year of study in 2018/19.

6. IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICE AND ACTIONS

- 6.1. We believe that quality assurance and enhancement activities relating to academic standards and quality undertaken in specific areas, such as in the Faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences (HELs), demonstrate good practice. Each course within the Faculty is required to hold an annual Quality Day to focus on academic quality matters. Course teams are expected to discuss data including recruitment, retention, completion, attainment and first destination (e.g. employment) data along with qualitative and quantitative student feedback data. They provide an opportunity to identify and discuss themes and trends for reflection in the annual monitoring report and action plan. The days also include a wide range of discussions involving staff, students, service users, placement providers and external examiners. Our quality assurance processes routinely identify instances of good practice and innovation in learning and teaching and assessment that are shared across the institution.
- 6.2. Over the past three academic years we have taken a number of positive steps to further enhance and modernise our quality assurance and regulatory frameworks to support student continuation and achievement of positive outcomes and to ensure that the University continues to meet the expectations for 'Standards' set out within the UK Quality Code.

7. ACTIONS FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

- (i). Consultation on and development of a University-wide assessment 'code of practice' to promote consistency in assessment practice. This includes development of generic assessment criteria to inform local assessment and marking criteria.
- (ii). Development and implementation of revised policies and procedures for external examining, taking account of the External Expertise advice and guidance theme within the Quality Code.

Richard Monk

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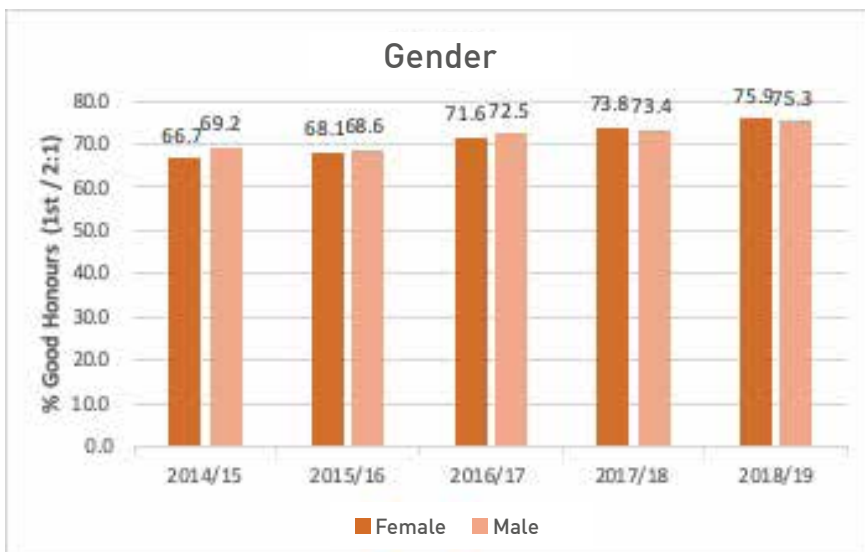
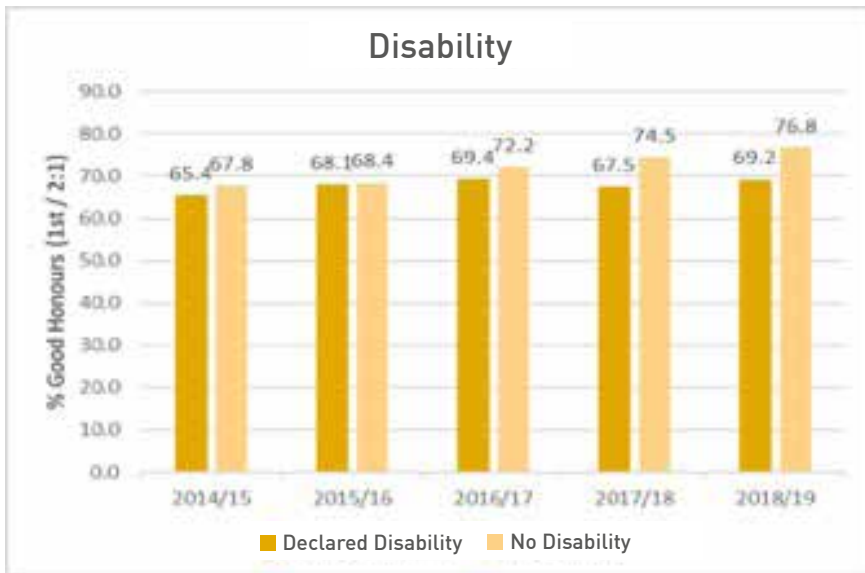
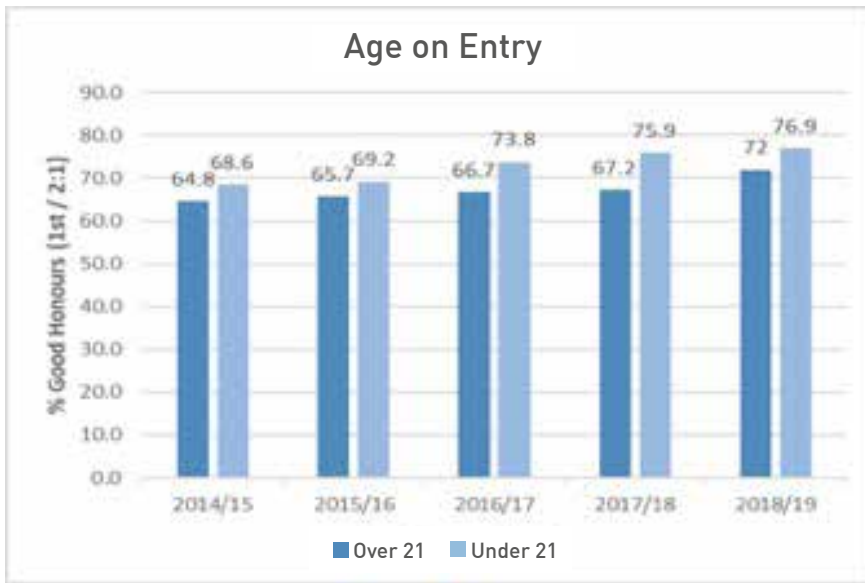
June 2020

Statement approved by:

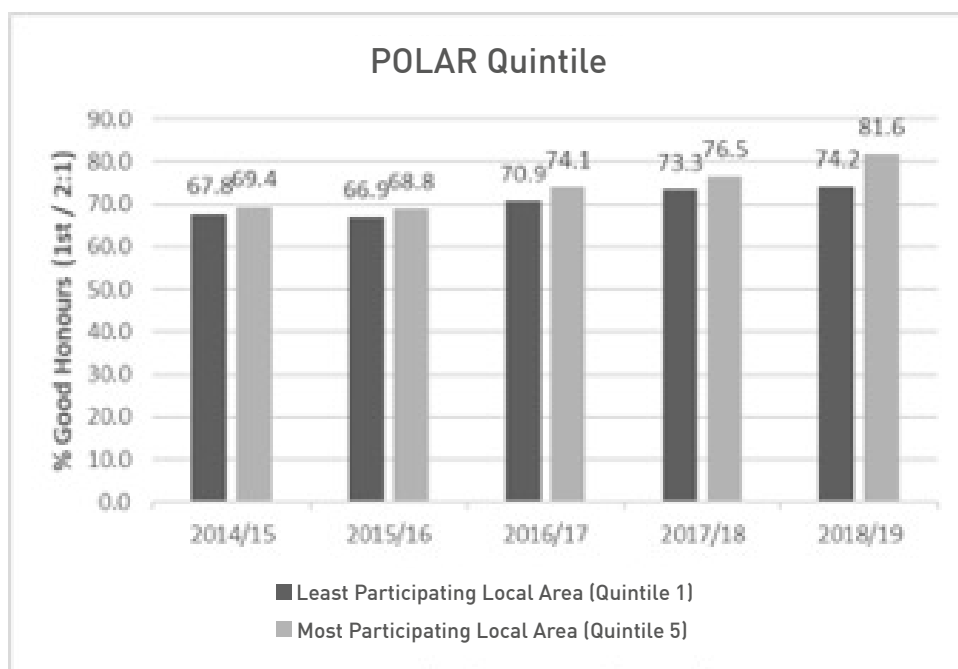
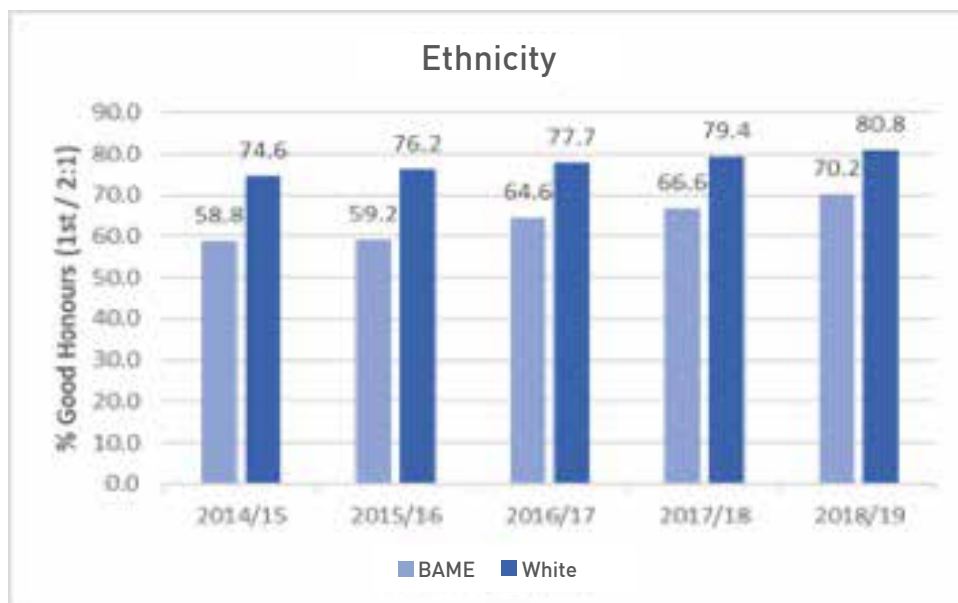
Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Quality Committee	17 June 2020
Academic Regulations and Policy Committee	26 June 2020
Academic Board	1 July 2020
Board of Governors	14 July 2020

BCU DEGREE OUTCOMES DATA

(UK Full-Time first degree award by student characteristic)



(UK Full-Time first degree award by student characteristic)



(UK Full-Time first degree award by student characteristic)

