



BIRMINGHAM CITY  
University

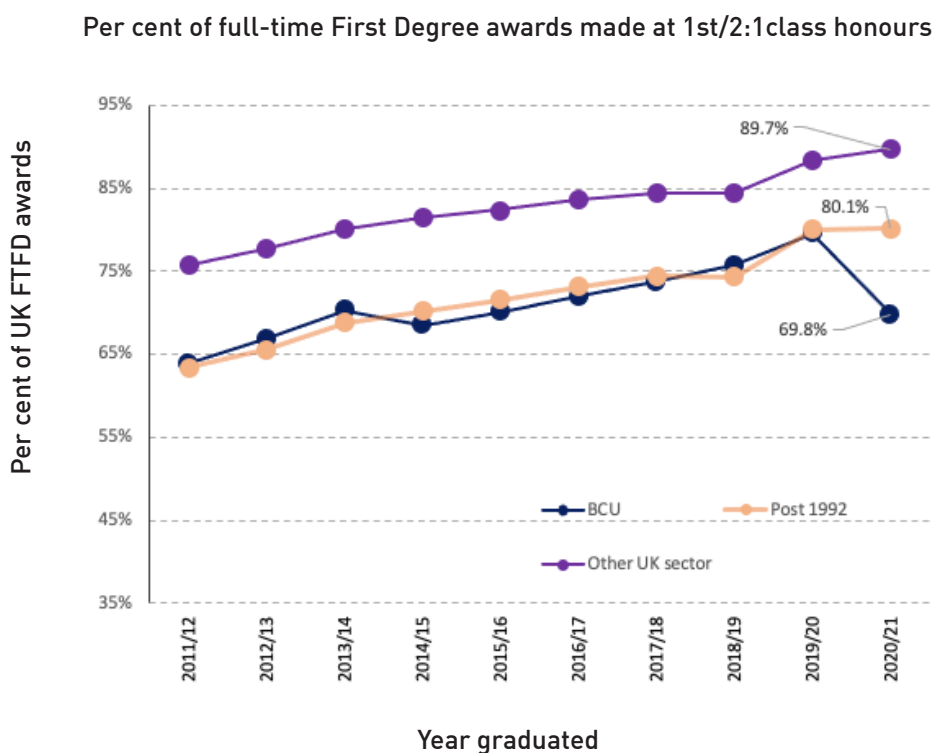
# DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT:

## 2020/21 OUTCOMES

# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this statement is to describe how Birmingham City University meets the requirements for standards set out within the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration (B4 and B5) that relate to protecting the value of qualifications. Specifically, that awards are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously and align with sector-recognised standards. It provides an overview of the range of deliberate steps we have taken and are taking 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 full-time first degree awards (1st and 2:1 classifications) and comparison between Birmingham City University, post-92 HEIs and the UK Sector (excl. BCU).

- 1.1. As outlined in our previous statements covering 2018/19 and 2019/20 degree outcomes, there had been a steady increase in the proportion of upper degrees awarded over the time period shown above. The University has, however, consistently remained below the sector average during this period and in line with other post-92 HEIs. In our previous statements we described a range of steps we had taken to protect the value of our qualifications and awards and our expectation that these would result in a levelling off or potentially a reverse of the upward trend in first and upper second classifications from 2020/21.

# 1. INSTITUTIONAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION PROFILE (CONTINUED)

- 1.2 As described in previous statements, our current academic regulations were implemented from September 2018 under the principle of 'no detriment' for continuing students. Section 4 below details the different classification algorithms used to calculate undergraduate awards since 2014/15, including the current algorithm. The current classification algorithm was applied in full to students who were new entrants in September 2018 and were therefore due to graduate in July 2021. The current algorithm calculates the award outcome using all 240 credits at Levels 5 and 6; contrastingly previous algorithms calculated the award outcome using the best 120 credits across Levels 5 and 6. We anticipated that the algorithm change would result in a change to our institutional classification profile, which can be seen clearly in Figure 1. The proportion of BCU students achieving upper degrees decreased from 79.6% in 2019/20 to 69.8% in 2020/21. This level of attainment is closer to levels achieved by students in 2010/11 (65%) and represents a reversal of the year on year increases observed since 2014/15. It is also significantly below the sector average of 84.4%<sup>1</sup> in 2020/21. There was a similar decline in the proportion of first class degrees awarded in 2020/21; from 38.1% in 2019/20 to 28.4% in 2020/21, compared with a sector average of 37.9% in 2020/21.
- 1.3 A further breakdown of upper degrees by a range of student characteristics is located at Appendix 1. The data sets show several gaps in degree attainment across various student populations. These include BTEC entrants when compared to A Level entrants, BAME compared to white students and the least deprived (IMD quintile 5) when compared to the most deprived (IMD quintile 1).
- 1.4 Some of the awarding gaps widened during the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 (ethnicity, IMD and entry qualification) whereas others closed (disability). These were the academic years affected by Covid-19. Efforts were introduced to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic including moving learning, teaching and assessment online and, in common with the HE sector, the use of a 'Safety Net and No Detriment' policy to further minimise negative impact on student outcomes. It is apparent from the data that the mitigation measures implemented in 2019/20 and 2020/21, in particular the shift to online, was beneficial for disabled students and closed the awarding gap from 7.4% in 2018/19 to a positive gap of 2% in 2020/21 with disabled students outperforming students with no declared disability.
- 1.5 Conversely and despite the mitigation measures, the various effects of the pandemic have appeared to impact BAME student outcomes disproportionately in 2019/20 and 2020/21. Prior to 2019/20 the BAME/white awarding gap had closed from 12.9% in 2016/17 to 9.3% in 2018/19 but has since widened to 18.6% in 2020/21. Whilst BAME attainment remained similar in 2018/19 (72.8%) and 2019/20 (73.9%), good honours attainment by white students increased from 82.1% to 87.6% in those years. This indicates that white students were less negatively impacted by the pandemic or benefitted more from the mitigation measures put in place. In 2020/21 the proportion of upper degrees awarded by the University decreased to 69.8% overall. The proportion of BAME students achieving good honours decreased from 73.9% in 2019/20 to 61.4% in 2020/21 (-12.5% overall) whereas white student attainment decreased from 87.6% to 80% (-7.6% overall) in the same period. The change in student outcomes in 2020/21 is attributable in part to the effect of the revised classification algorithm which took effect for the first time in 2020/21. Despite the other mitigation measures put in place, the negative impacts of the pandemic on the learning opportunities available to certain groups of students (IMD1 and BAME in particular, such as access to technology) and the change in classification method, appear to have disproportionately affected those groups or have affected IMD5 and white students to a lesser extent.

<sup>1</sup>Office for Students: Analysis of degree classifications over time (OfS 2022.22)  
[Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2020-21](#)  
[officeforstudents.org.uk](https://officeforstudents.org.uk) (accessed 14 June 2022.)

# 1. INSTITUTIONAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION PROFILE (CONTINUED)

- 1.6 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, and to be the best they can be. 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 underperforming 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 1.3 above and between young and mature students.
- 1.7 Having returned to a largely pre-Covid mode of delivering our courses to students, whilst leveraging some of the benefits of the alternative delivery methods and online assessments that were developed during the pandemic, we expect to see the various increases in awarding gaps begin to reduce again and in line with the targets we set out to achieve by 2024/25 in our Access and Participation Plan (APP). In light of the widening awarding gap between white and BAME students since 2018/19, the University's APP Strategy Board has in July 2022 agreed a set of focussed interventions to address the key reasons for the widening gap and target improvement measures at courses most likely to be negatively impacting the awarding gaps (and student outcomes). This includes a focus on poorer performing modules which may affect overall attainment; a focus on specific programme performance; and further work to understand the impact of assessment briefs, and the non-submission of assessments on overall attainment.

## 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 parts of the Office for Students Regulatory Framework and conditions of registration. 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 Award 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 Course Monitoring and Enhancement. Responsibility for the assessment process is partly delegated to our four Faculties but is governed by the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy which applies to assessment setting, marking and moderation across all BCU academic provision. All courses must have at least one external examiner appointed and every module that contributes to the final degree 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. ASSESSMENT AND MARKING PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

- 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 took the publication of the revised UK Quality Code, the Office for Students Regulatory Framework and the UKSCQA 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. 2020/21 saw the development and implementation of a new External Examining and External Expertise Policy, the development of an institution-wide Assessment and Feedback Policy (implemented in 2021/22) and a review of the University's policy framework as it relates to academic integrity and academic misconduct and its alignment with the principles set out in the QAA's Academic Integrity Charter, to which the University is a signatory. As a package of measures, we are confident that the University now has 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 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. ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE (CONTINUED)

- 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.
- 3.5 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) have, from the 2021/22 academic year, been 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 (POLAR<sup>2</sup>) and socio-economic status (IMD<sup>3</sup>) 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 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.

<sup>2</sup>POLAR (the participation of local areas)

<sup>3</sup>IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation)

## 4. CLASSIFICATION ALGORITHMS (CONTINUED)

### 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.

### Revised Academic Regulations: with effect from 2018/19

- 4.4 The current 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 would be based solely on the new regulations was in July 2021.
- 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 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. ACTIONS FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

- (i) Carry out a review of the academic regulations introduced in 2018/19, mapping them against the Universities UK 'Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design' and reflecting on outcomes achieved by students with a range of different characteristics and against our Access and Participation Plan targets;
- (ii) Develop further the work associated with the APP, including to address the key reasons for the widening gap and target improvement measures at courses most likely to be negatively impacting the awarding gaps (and student outcomes);
- (iii) Continue to work with the Students' Union on degree outcomes and ensure student voice informs the interventions implemented by BCU;
- (iv) An effectiveness review of the University's academic governance arrangements, originally introduced in January 2019.

**Richard Monk**

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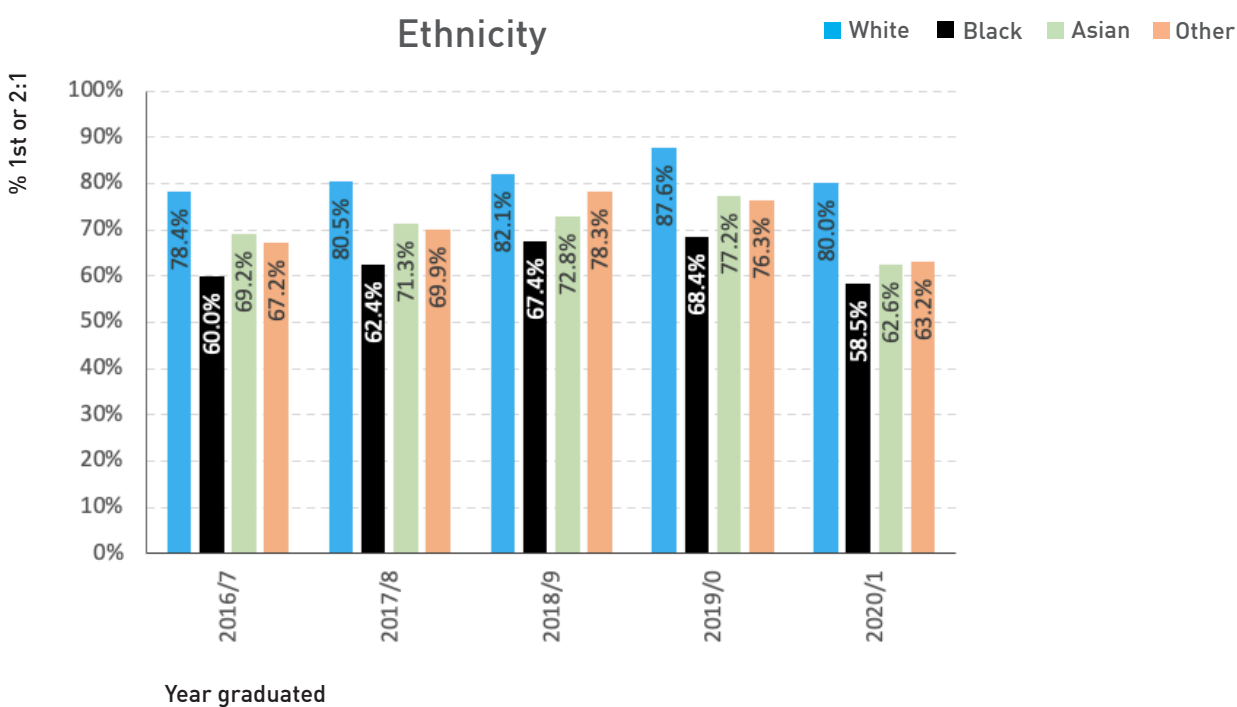
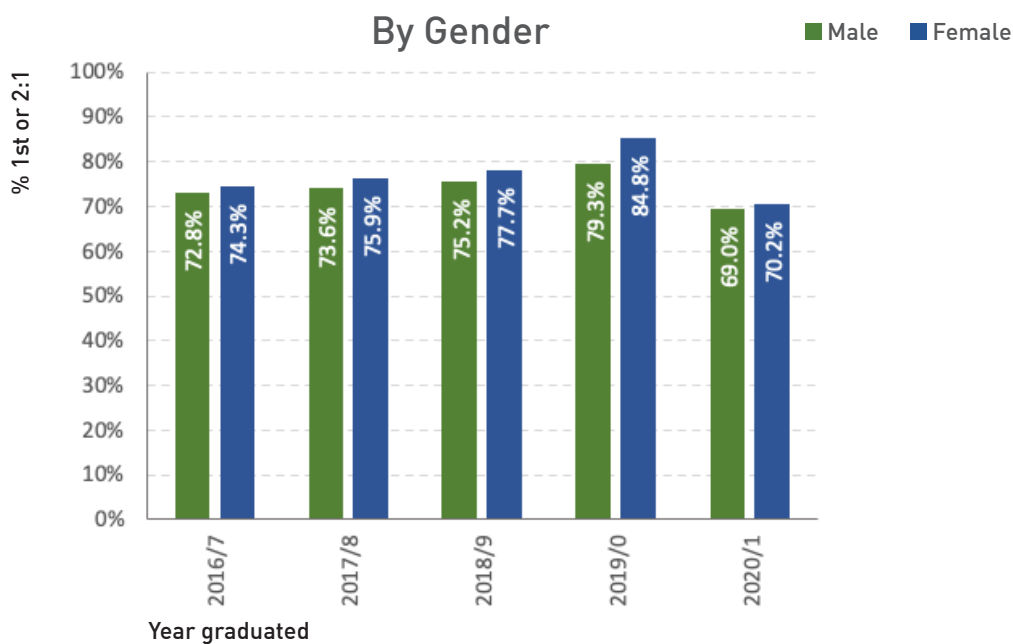
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Statement approved by:

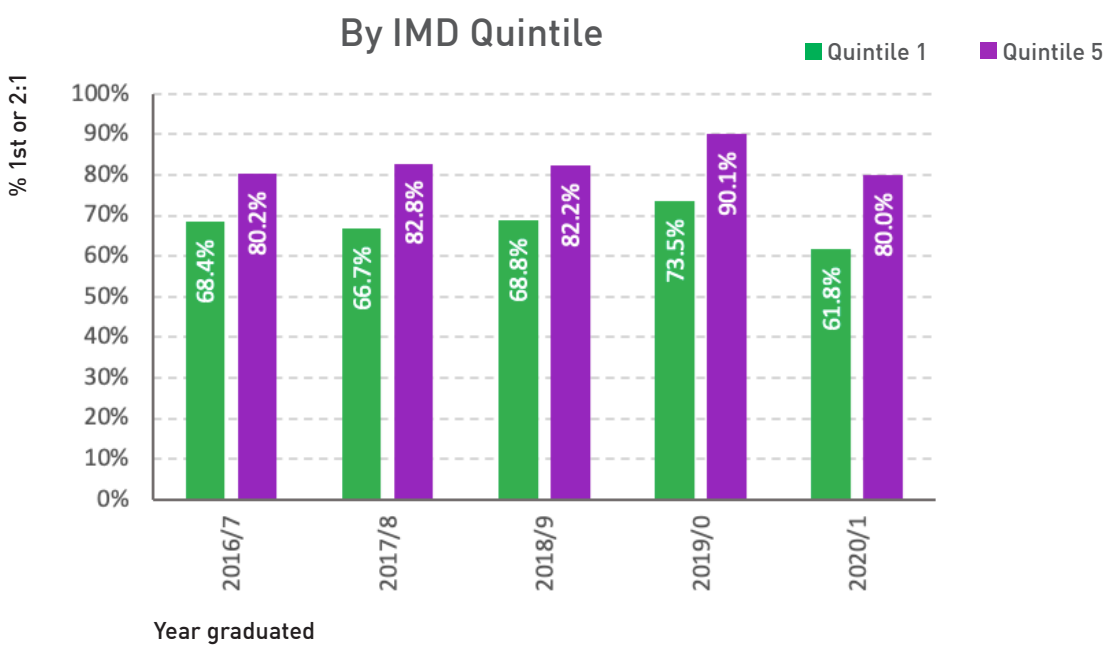
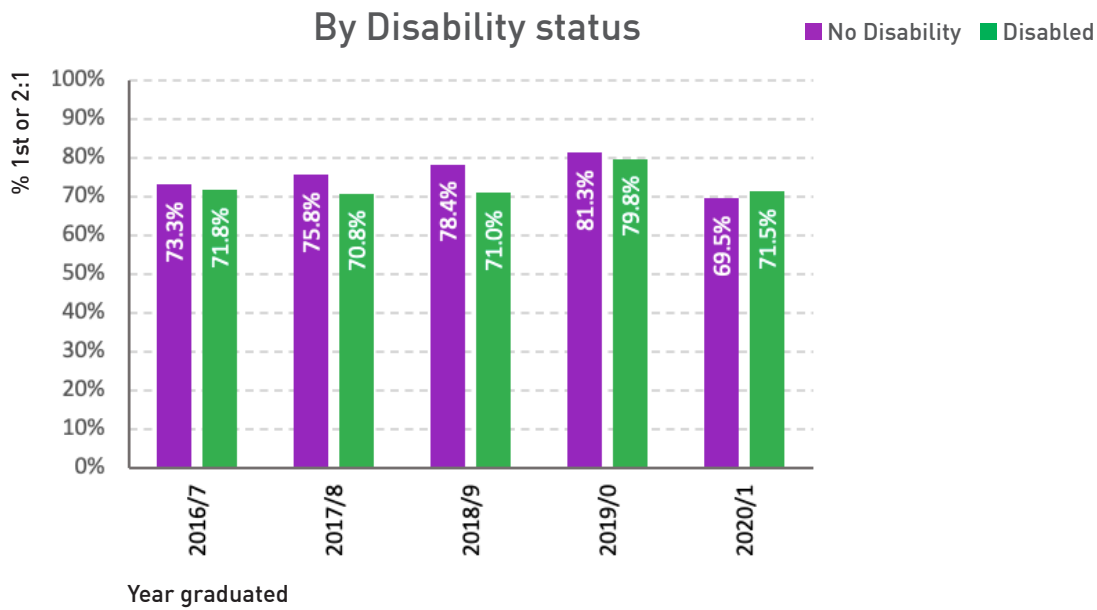
Academic Board	29 June 2022
Board of Governors	27 July 2022



(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)

