

Degree Outcomes Statement 2022/23

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

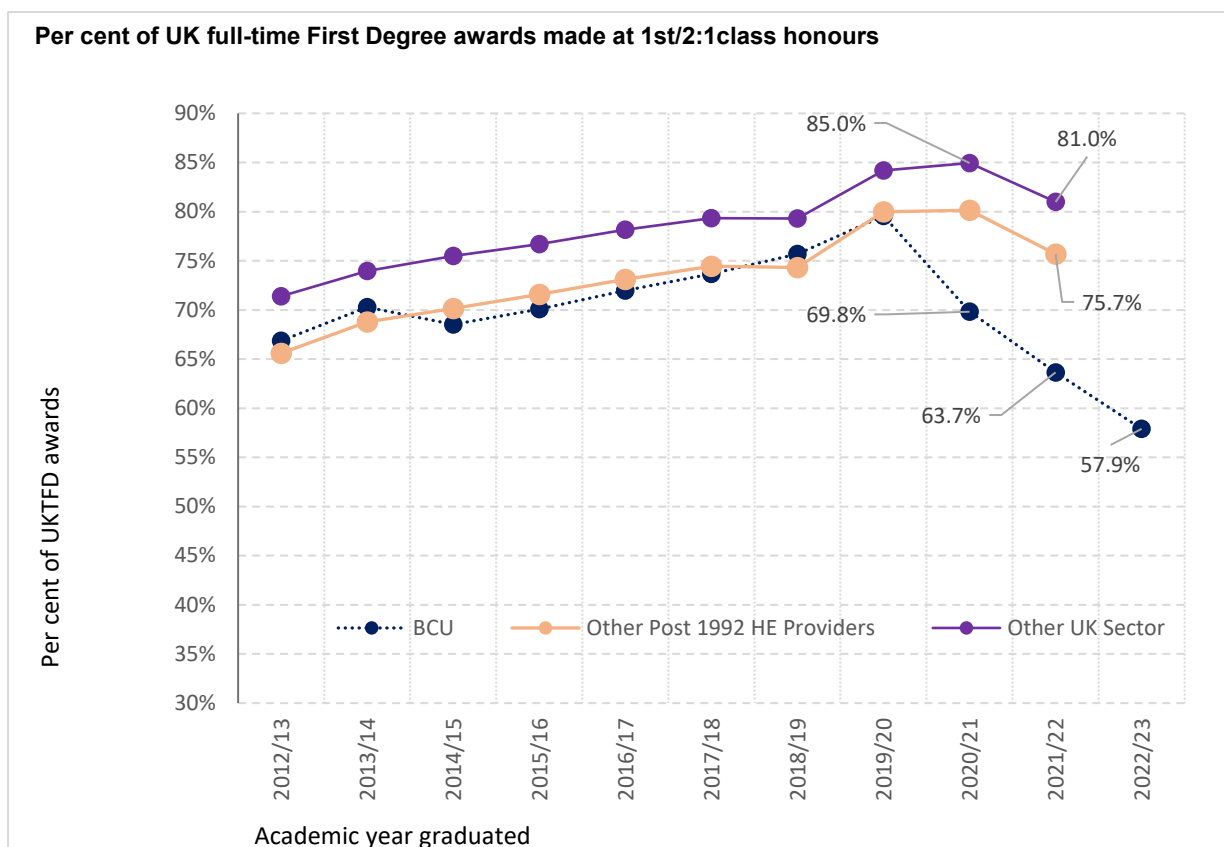


Figure 1: Percentage of full-time first degree awards made at 1st and 2:1 classifications and comparison between Birmingham City University, post-92 HEIs and the UK Sector (excl. BCU).

- 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 consistently remained below the sector average during this period and in line with other post-92 HEIs and previous statements 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. As shown in the figure above, a reversal of the upward trend can now be seen from 2020/2021 and continuing in subsequent years.
- 1.2 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 sharply from 79.6% in 2019/20 to 69.8% in 2020/21 and has seen further decline, on average, of 5.9% per year in subsequent reporting periods. This represents a cogent reversal of the year-on-year increases observed since 2014/15. The current 2022/2023 position continues to fall below the 2021/2022 sector average of 81.0%¹ and a similar, continued, decline away from the sector average of 33.5% in 2021/2022 can be seen in the proportion of first-class degrees awarded, falling from a peak of 38.1% in 2019/2020 to 28.5% in 2020/2021, 23% in 2021/22 and 20% in 2022/2023.

- 1.3 A further breakdown of upper degrees by a range of student characteristics is located at Appendix 1. The data sets show several year-on-year gaps in degree attainment across various student populations. These include disabled students when compared to students with no declared disability, age on entry, domicile and sex.
- 1.4 Other awarding gaps which have continued to widen during the academic years 2021/22 and 2022/23 are those between least deprived (IMD quintile 5) and most deprived (IMD quintile 1) increasing overall by 5.1%. For those most deprived there is a further 7.4% increase in 2022/2023 compared to a 2.3% increase for those least deprived, however this continues to be a year-on-year increase. Since the 2020/21 algorithm changes, the number of students achieving good honours fell at a slower rate in 2022/2023 by 5.8% compared to 6.1% in 2021/2022. The awarding gap between White/Asian has increased from 23.7% in 2021/2022 to 25.5% in 2022/23, similarly the White/Black awarding gap has increased year on year between 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 by 4.8% from 33.1% in 2021/2022 to 37.9% in 2022/2023. Students declaring a disability continue to outperform those with no declared disability. The gap increases from 1.8% in 2020/2021 to 3.4% in 2021/2022 to 7.3% in 2022/2023 however, in 2022/2023 the gap between disabled and non-disabled fell at a slower rate than that of 2021/2022. 2022/2023 is the first time males performed better than females by 1.2%. Outcomes still demonstrate the legacy of Covid 19 despite efforts during affected years to mitigate the impact of the 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.
- 1.5 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. An internal project, entitled Project Zero, will be initiated during 2023/24, with the aim of working towards reducing the ethnicity degree awarding gap at BCU.
- 1.6 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 Asian, black, mixed and white students since 2018/19, the University's APP Strategy Board agreed, in July 2022, 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; as well as further work to

¹ [Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2021-22 \(officeforstudents.org.uk\)](#). Published 20 July 2023

understand the impact of assessment briefs, and the non-submission of assessments on overall attainment. The impact of these interventions has been monitored throughout 2022/23.

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. Changes in 2022/23 has ensured that attainment gap data at modular level is provided for award boards enabling external examiners to inform assessment approaches. Their impartial expert involvement in Progression and Award Boards ensures 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.
- 2.4 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 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. 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. 2022/2023 saw a review of the Regulations leading to revised University Regulations which were approved by Academic Board for phased implementation from 2023/2024.. More recently, the Course Monitoring and Enhancement process has been reviewed and strengthened with the introduction of College Course Performance Committees in 2023/24 to assess student outcomes at course and module level using a range of key performance indicators. As a package of measures we are confident that the University 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 In October 2022 and February 2023 existing first tier Standing Committees, the Academic Regulations and Policy Committee (ARPC) and the Collaborative Partnerships Committee (CPC) were dissolved. The Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Quality Committee (LTAQC), assumed responsibility for the remainder of ARPC's work, principally the oversight and management of the Academic Regulations, LTAQC also has delegated authority for the management of the University's quality assurance and regulatory frameworks, the maintenance of academic standards and quality for awards delivered through partnership arrangements, and lead responsibility for the quality assurance framework, approval and re-approval of courses and conferment of awards. In April 2023, two new first tier Standing Committees were approved: the International Recruitment and Transnational Education Committee (IRTC) assuming responsibility for the quality assurance framework for awards delivered in overseas partners and; an Apprenticeship and UK Partnerships Strategy Committee (APSC) having responsibility for the strategic development and quality and standards of UK 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. A full review of the academic governance committee structure is scheduled for 2024/2025.
- 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 college. Membership of MABs and 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.
- 3.4 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 college 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 colleges on student outcomes and achievement, which includes the degree classifications achieved by students. This includes reflections on the performance of students according to a range of characteristics such as entry qualifications, ethnicity, disability, gender, age, participation (POLAR²) and socio-economic status (IMD³) 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 enables 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

Review of the Academic Regulations: 2017/18

- 4.1 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

- 4.2 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 considered 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.
- 4.3 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.

Revised Academic Regulations: with effect from 2023/24

² POLAR (the participation of local areas)

³ IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation)

4.4 During the academic year 2022/2023 a detailed review of existing regulations took place. The aim of the review was simplification of the existing regulations by removing policy, procedure and operational detail and ensure a focus on attendance, engagement, passing and progressing, reduction of permissible compensation, discontinue the practice of condonement, apply a standard cycle of assessment to all students, remove discretionary decisions and use specific criteria to permit repeat stages of study. The revised regulations will be implemented in a phased approach from 2023/24 for students studying at levels 3, 4 and 7, with all other students continuing on the existing regulations. The degree classification algorithm remained unchanged in the new regulations, however, to address continued increases in attainment and awarding gaps, a review of the current algorithm is scheduled for early 2023/2024 for implementation in 2024/2025.

5. Actions for the next 12 months

- (i) Develop further the work associated with the APP and Project Zero, 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).
- (ii) Monitor the impact of the new Academic Regulations and revised degree algorithm.
- (iii) Undertake a review of the academic governance structure
- (iv) Continue to work with the Students' Union on degree outcomes and ensure student voice informs the interventions implemented by BCU

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Statement approved by:

Academic Board	26 June 2024
Board of Governors	17 th July 2024

