

UWE Bristol Degree Outcomes Statement, 2022/23

March 2025¹

¹ Publication delayed due to delays in the release of HESA data for 2022/23.

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Institutional degree classification profile	3
3. Academic governance	5
4. Assessment and marking practices.....	6
5. Classification algorithms.....	6
6. Enhancement activity and good practice	7
7. Progress against actions set out in previous Degree Outcomes Statements	8
8. Action plan	8
9. Risks, challenges and mitigations/ Areas for further review	9

Degree Outcomes Statement: UWE Bristol

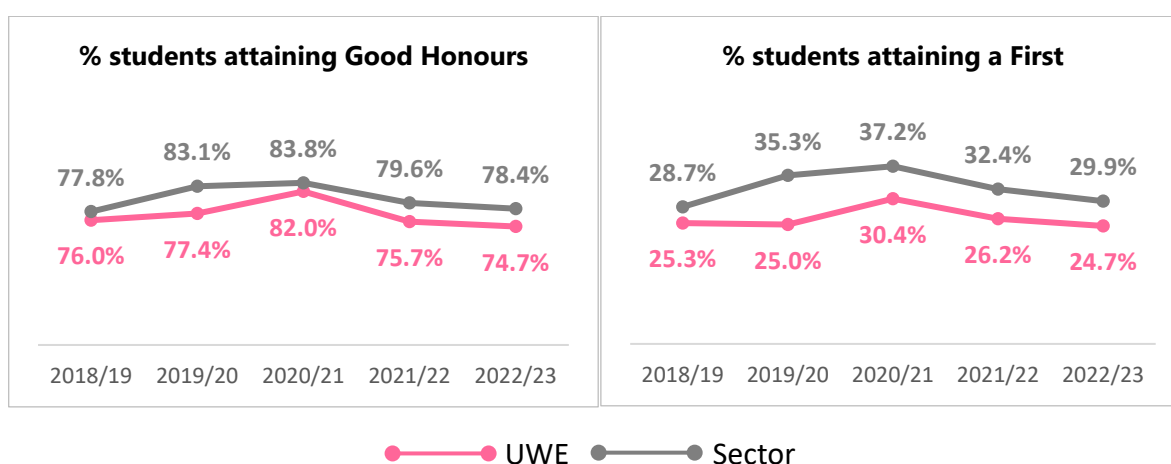
1. Introduction

This Degree Outcomes Statement sets out how UWE Bristol protects the value of our awards and ensures that our academic standards align to UK sector benchmarks. It demonstrates that:

- UWE Bristol takes a proactive, evidence-based approach to the management and oversight of our academic standards and the degrees we award.
- The proportion of UWE Bristol students achieving a first or upper second-class honours degree has been slightly below the sector average over the past five years and is now lower than in any of the preceding four years.
- The University's method of calculating degree classifications has been in place since 2001, and the frameworks, policies and procedures that govern our academic standards are stable, reliable, consistent and align to relevant benchmarks.
- Our strategic focus on enhancing pedagogic practice and the learning environment, combined with our sector-leading approach to student mental health and wellbeing, enable students to thrive, and this is reflected in our degree classification profile.
- The Board of Governors can have confidence that the arrangements in place to protect the value of the University's awards and ensure academic standards align to UK benchmarks are appropriate and are functioning effectively within a culture of continuous improvement.

2. Institutional degree classification profile

Figure 1: Good honours and first-class degree attainment 2018/19-2022/23 (UWE vs sector)

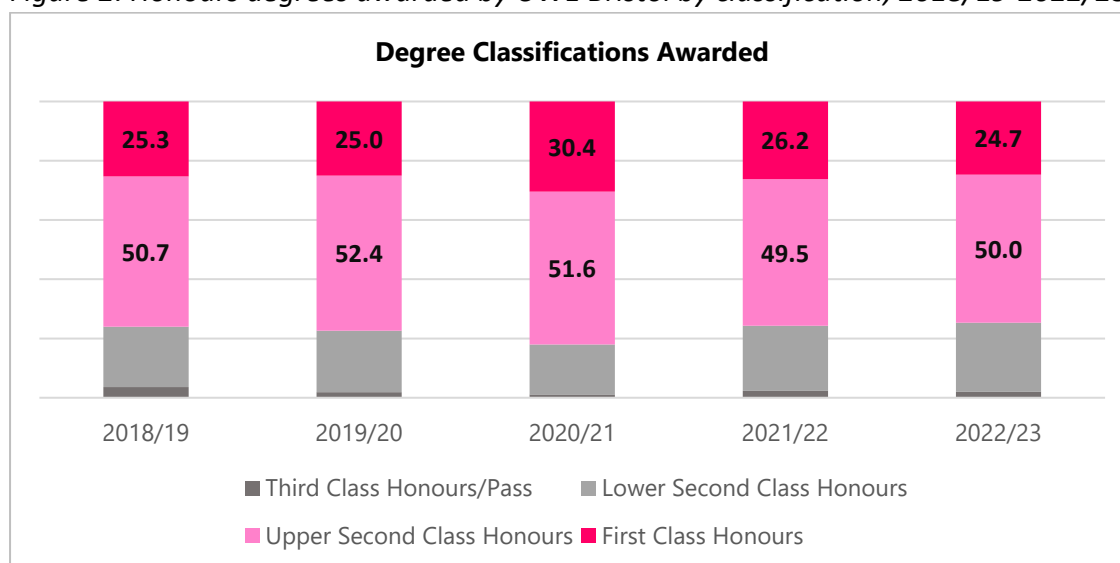


The proportion of UWE Bristol students achieving a first or an upper second-class honours degree, often referred to as “good honours”, has remained below the market average over the last five years. It is now lower than any of the preceding four years (Figure 1) and remains slightly below pre-pandemic (i.e. 2018/19) levels.

Our most recent first-degree award data, for 2022/23, show 74.7% of students achieving an upper second or above against a market average of 78.4%. The proportion achieving first class honours is also lower, at 24.7% against 29.9% for the market as a whole. Whilst both figures represent a slight drop against the previous year, this is line with a downward trend across the sector as a whole.

As Figure 2 shows, the peak in good honours in 2020/21 was driven largely by an increase in first class honours. This was most likely related to the impact of changes to the academic regulations adopted under *force majeure* in March 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, the decrease in good honours since then is due to year-on-year decreases in the proportion of first class degrees awarded.

Figure 2: Honours degrees awarded by UWE Bristol by classification, 2018/19-2022/23



Demographic analysis of data on upper second/ first class honours awards amongst UWE graduates over the same five-year period highlights:

- There is little variation in award outcome in relation to age group. The exception is in the 18-20 years category, where small overall numbers can result in significant fluctuations year-on-year. The proportion achieving good honours fell by -18.7 percentage points in 2022/23. At 65%, it was markedly lower than the market average for that age group (78.7%). This will be investigated further.
- Female students continue to be slightly more likely to achieve a good honours degree than male students. However, the differential reduced in 2022/23 by 2.4 points to 1.4 percentage points – compared to the previous year. It also remains lower than that of the market as a whole (4.7 percentage points).
- Students with a known disability continue to outperform those with no reported disability, achieving good honours at a slightly higher rate than those with no reported disability for the second year running (76.5% compared to 74.2%). This is in line with the sector as a whole.
- In line with the sector, there continues to be an awarding gap between Black, Asian and Minoritised Ethnic students and White students, although this reduced slightly in

2022/23 compared to the previous year (to 14.4 from 15.1 percentage points; the sector comparator is now -11.4 percentage points). This was largely due to a lower rate of reduction in good honours attainment amongst black and minority ethnic students than for white students (-0.8% cf -1.5%). Importantly, these data reflect UK-domiciled students only; whilst international students are included in the overall student numbers reported they appear in the “unknown or N/A” category as HESA only reports ethnicity data for UK-domiciled students.

These data underline the institutional importance of our ongoing focus, via the Access and Participation Plan and Strategy 2030, on reducing and eliminating all award gaps.

The Office for Students (OfS) periodically conducts longitudinal analysis of degree classifications to determine the proportion of good honours and first class awards it considers to be “unexplained”, which simply means not accounted for by a statistical model that predicts attainment based on certain characteristics of the graduating cohort (entry qualifications, age on entry, provider, subject, graduation year). The most recent report (September 2024; 2022/23 data) identified “unexplained” good honours attainment of 17.6 percentage points and “unexplained” first class honours attainment of 15.2 percentage points for UWE. Whilst this discrepancy may seem large, the trend is downwards, as is the case for the sector as a whole. Moreover, the University can point to significant activity to account for student achievement beyond what the OfS’s model predicts, through ongoing investment in learning and teaching practice and facilities, and in developmental activities and personalised support that help drive academic success.

3. Academic governance

Academic Board is responsible for the governance of our academic activity and is accountable to the Board of Governors for the effectiveness of its approach. The University’s Academic Assurance Framework sets out how Academic Board works to scrutinise academic activity and ensure that academic standards are maintained. Data considered through the annual committee cycle include the distribution of degree classifications at institutional, School and programme level, and in the context of market data over time, as well as evidence of the good functioning of the regulatory framework, and associated policies, procedures and processes. Analyses are presented to the Board of Governors in the Annual Report on Quality and Standards in February/ March each year.

Our [Enhancement Framework for Academic Programmes and Practice](#) drives a holistic approach to the design, development, approval and review of our provision and of our teaching, learning and assessment practice. It is aligned to the principles and key practices of the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and is designed to ensure compliance with the Office for Students’ Ongoing Conditions of Registration in relation to quality and standards (“[the B conditions](#)”). The procedures through which it is operationalised ensure that the academic standards of all programmes align to the [Frameworks for Higher Education](#)

[Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) and to the relevant [Subject Benchmark Statements](#). The effectiveness of the Enhancement Framework is overseen by the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (LTSEC) on behalf of Academic Board.

The University makes appropriate use of [external peer review](#) to assure the comparability of our academic standards with those of other UK universities. External advisers contribute to programme design, approval, and revalidation activities. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies provide external scrutiny of the robustness of our processes and standards for accredited programmes. External examiners provide assurance that our assessment and marking practices are in line with sector benchmarks and are consistent across successive cohorts of students. External examiner feedback is scrutinised in detail by School Boards of Studies and the University Quality and Standards Sub-Committee, with any issues of concern escalated to LTSEC and addressed by Academic Board within the Annual Report on Academic Quality and Standards. Recommendations are fed into the University's [continuous improvement](#) processes and any cross-University actions are driven forward through LTSEC.

4. Assessment and marking practices

Our [Assessment and Feedback Policy and supporting policies and guidance](#) set out how we ensure an efficient, effective, fair and transparent end-to-end assessment experience for students and establish the conditions for students to achieve degree outcomes that reflect their full academic potential. Effective operationalisation of these policies and procedures is overseen by LTSEC and is confirmed to the Board of Governors through the Annual Report on Academic Quality and Standards.

Cross-institutional understanding of assessment and marking practices is achieved through our suite of professional development programme for academic staff, which is accredited by Advance HE against the [UK Professional Standards Framework \(UKPSF\) for Teaching and Supporting Learning in HE](#). This learning is developed further in those with leadership roles through our [Programme and Module Leadership Development Programme](#). Our network of Partnership Leads and Link Tutors ensure that staff engaged in the delivery of UWE Bristol's provision through our UK and international partners undertake equivalent professional development. This is evidenced within annual monitoring reports and confirmed through periodic Partnership Agreement Reviews.

5. Classification algorithms

We operate a single, University-wide degree classification algorithm across all undergraduate honours degree programmes, with students admitted prior to August 2022 classified using a formula in use consistently since 2001/02 and those admitted thereafter subject to a slightly revised formula. The change in algorithm responds to the UK Standing

Committee for Quality Assessment's [New guiding principles for effective algorithm design](#) and brings UWE Bristol into alignment with wider sector practice.

Both formulae exclude foundational learning at FHEQ level 4 (the first year of a typical undergraduate programme) and draw on a combination of credits achieved at FHEQ levels 5 and 6, weighted in favour of achievements at level 6 (typically the final year of study). This approach means that the final degree classification represents a student's overall achievement but also reflects the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills over the course of their programme of study. Whereas the pre-2022/23 algorithm takes a student's 100 best credits at each of FHEQ levels 5 and 6, the new algorithm includes all 120 credits at level 6. The new algorithm will impact undergraduate student outcomes for the first time at the end of the 2024/25 academic year. Similar adjustments to the postgraduate taught degree classification algorithm will also take effect from that point.

Variation to the University-wide algorithm formula is permitted only where required by an accrediting body, for example to specify that a particular module outcome must contribute to the overall calculation. All variations require Academic Board approval and are published to students within programme specifications.

Information to help students understand how their degree classification is calculated is provided within the [student-facing](#) section of our internet. This includes an indicative degree outcome [calculator](#).

6. Enhancement activity and good practice

Major initiatives designed to improve student academic attainment over the past five years include:

- Effective use of performance data to inform continuous improvement of programmes and identify good practice for wider dissemination.
- Consistent implementation of the Enhancement Framework, underpinned by investment in developing staff expertise in curriculum design and delivery, learning spaces, and digital learning.
- Implementation of a consistent approach to pre- and post-assessment moderation of all assessments by external examiners to provide assurance of their validity and robustness and fairness in marking practices.
- Significant work to respond to rapid developments in access to generative artificial intelligence tools in higher education settings, including guidance for staff and students on appropriate use in learning, teaching and assessment.
- Significant work to strengthen the University's approach to embedding students' understanding of academic integrity and to the prevention, identification and appropriate and proportionate management of assessment offences
- Enhanced student induction and ongoing development of academic literacies, as well as access to academic and study skills support, including through in- and co-curricular learning, our Student Experience Coaching service, our peer assisted learning (PAL)

scheme, and opportunities for volunteering, study abroad, work-based and work-related learning.

- A sector-leading, whole-University approach to student mental health, encompassing investment in specialist services, embedding mental wellbeing and the development of resilience in curriculum design and across the wider learning community, and early identification of at-risk students, enabling us to work meaningfully with individuals to manage personal challenges so that they can progress and complete their programme successfully.

7. Progress against actions set out in previous Degree Outcomes Statements

The University has made good progress on delivery of actions set out in previous Degree Outcomes Statements:

- Full implementation of the new Academic Regulations as of August 2024.
- [UWE Programme Principles](#) agreed that emphasise authentic, inclusive, enabling programmatic assessment as a critical part of the learning journey and set clear expectations for assessment design and assessment load.
- School Boards of Studies established and operating as key drivers of programme performance and enhancement of the student academic experience.
- Completion of the Subject Readiness Review project, providing a comprehensive view of the strategic alignment and performance of our taught portfolio and informing ongoing decision making about opportunities for growth, consolidation and reconfiguration of our academic offer.
- Ongoing roll out of Advance HE's external examiner training across subject areas.
- The development of an anti-racist strategy and guiding principles, along with sustained work on award gaps across the University.

8. Action plan

Key actions planned or in progress to ensure that our awards continue to align with sector reference points, whilst simultaneously enabling all our students to achieve their full potential, include:

- The UWE Programmes initiative, through which all taught provision will be reviewed to ensure alignment to the UWE Programme Principles by the end of 2024/25.
- Implementation of a new single tier examination board model during 2024/25, aimed at releasing time for richer, enhancement-focussed consideration of module outcomes and quality through distinct Module Enhancement Boards.
- Analysis of the impact of the first run of the new undergraduate and postgraduate taught algorithms on student outcomes at the end of 2024/25.

- A partnership project with our Students' Union to understand and improve the student experience of assessment feedback.
- Sustained work on personalised and tailored learning and support, and other key initiatives on closing award gaps.

The Board of Governors has oversight of this work through regular reports on Strategy 2030 and the Annual Report on Academic Quality and Standards.

9. Risks, challenges and mitigations/ Areas for further review

- New degree algorithm: inclusion of all 120 credits of FHEQ level 6 may have an effect on students' overall performance for the level and therefore on their final classification. Modelling to date has predicted a small (1-2%) decrease in the overall good honours rate under the new algorithm but has not been able to estimate potential differences in how students might approach individual module assessments when all modules are of equal importance. Given that the changes bring UWE in line with broader sector norms, the University can have confidence that the change will not undermine academic standards or disadvantage students in the employment market.
- Regulatory intervention: OfS's analysis of degree classifications (most recently published in September 2024) does not take into account local factors, such as action to improve learning and teaching practice or address differential performance between different demographic groups or subject areas. We will continue to analyse OfS data in light of local factors to determine whether rates of good honours give cause for concern and take further action, depending on findings.