University of Essex Degree Outcomes Statement
**Updated June 2021**

Institutional degree classification profile

We pride ourselves on our commitment to educational excellence and placing student success at the heart of our mission. As part of our commitment to maintaining robust academic standards and a high-quality student experience, we analyse our student outcomes every year and the outcomes are scrutinised by our Education Committee.

Over the past five years we have seen an average of 76% good honours attainment, which is in line with the sector average of 76.6%. The percentage of 1st class awards was averaging at 27% for the period 2015 – 2019 and we saw this increase to 33% in summer 2020, in line with a similar pattern across the sector. We have explored the factors influencing this upward shift as part of a wider review of changes to assessment methods in 2020. The impact of Covid-19 is referred to in more detail below.

Figure 1: Good honours degrees (1st and 2:1 classification)

Blue: % Essex Good Honours, Orange: % Sector Good Honours
Data source: HESA
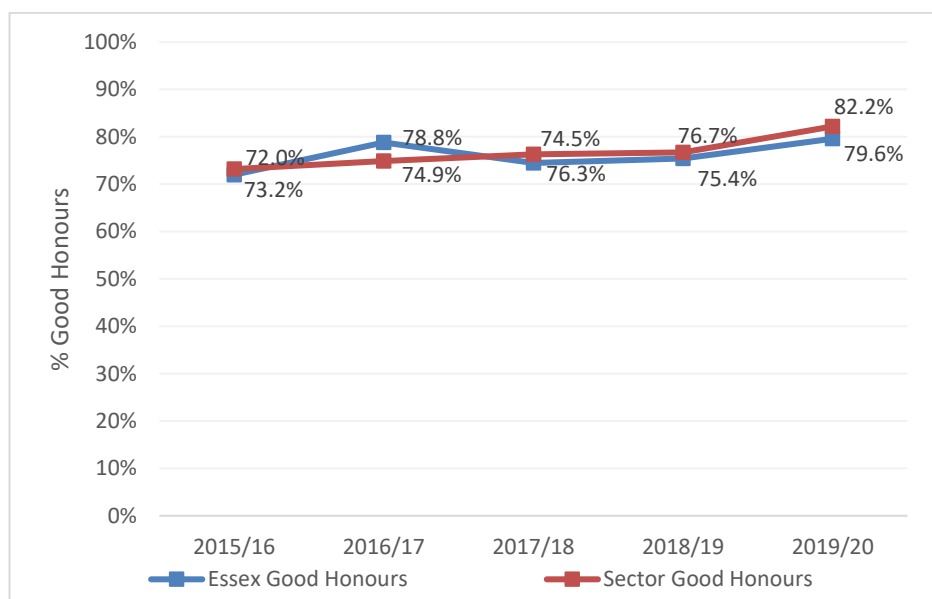
Student characteristics

Our student body is very diverse for a research-intensive university. For example, a high proportion of young entrants are from low participation neighbourhoods and over 95% of our UK students come from state schools. At the same time over a third of our students come from outside the UK.

We welcome students on the basis of their potential and analysis of our data shows that students from backgrounds with lower rates of participation in higher education often perform better than the national average with respect to earning good degrees.

The outcome gap between BAME and White student groups has been gradually narrowing with a positive change in 2019/20. Despite these improvements the differential in outcomes between Black and White students remains an area of focus. We have set an institutional target to

reduce all outcome gaps, and our commitment to tackling this is set out in our Access and Participation Plan.

Figure 2: Good honours degrees by student characteristic

Figure 2: Degree Outcome Rates by characteristics over 5 years											
Characteristic		**2015-16**		**2016-17**		**2017-18**		**2018-19**		**2019-20**	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
University		1,671	76%	2,078	77%	2,161	77%	2,210	77%	2,565	82%
Age	**Mature**	164	76%	190	69%	212	72%	234	71%	303	75%
	Young	1,507	76%	1,888	78%	1,949	78%	1,976	78%	2,262	83%
Disability	**Declared Disability**	153	80%	170	83%	227	84%	215	78%	284	83%
	No Declared Disability	1,518	76%	1,908	76%	1,934	76%	1,995	77%	2,281	82%
Sex	**Female**	989	79%	1,203	80%	1,245	80%	1,246	80%	1,391	83%
	Male	682	73%	875	73%	915	73%	964	74%	1,173	81%
	Prefer not to say					1	100%			1	100%
Ethnicity	**Arab**	6	75%	14	58%	17	63%	21	70%	30	76.9%
	Asian	237	60%	392	67%	362	68%	458	72%	508	83%
	Black	197	66%	237	62%	300	68%	270	63%	424	75%
	Mixed	96	82%	77	79%	112	79%	102	73%	139	83%
	Other	24	92%	23	79%	21	64%	37	80%	43	81%
	White	1,064	83%	1,294	85%	1,310	84%	1,274	84%	1,371	85%
POLAR4	**Q1**	132	84%	197	79%	205	78%	183	75%	221	77%
	POLAR4 Q5	305	85%	332	79%	375	81%	382	79%	426	85%

POLAR is an acronym which stands for Participation of Local Areas. The UK is divided into 'local areas' which are used in the production of statistics collected via the UK census. POLAR4 classifies local areas across the UK according to the young participation rate in higher education and this data is split into 5 (quintiles) referred to as Q1-Q5. Q1 represents areas with the lowest participation rate and Q5 represents areas with the highest participation rate.

Subject mix
The pattern of degree classification is fairly even across all subject areas but there are specific differences in two of our departments – our East 15 Acting School typically delivers over 95% good honours degrees, whilst figures for our School of Health and Social Care average at 61%. Both figures reflect the sector norms for the vocational subject areas represented.

Impact of COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative methods of assessment were approved for summer 2020, which students could complete remotely. The University's Force Majeure Regulation was updated to cover matter relating to academic assessment and progression, and a 'no detriment' policy was adopted to ensure that no student would be unfairly disadvantaged. Our approach to assessment was informed by the QAA guidance on securing academic standards and supporting student achievement during the COVID-19 crisis. We asked our External Examiners to look specifically at the adjustments being made to assessment in response to the pandemic

to check that these were reasonable and appropriate. We undertook a review of our Alternative Assessment model in autumn 2020 and this has informed our approach to assessment in 2020/21.

Assessment and marking practices

Our [Marking Policy](#) sets out the ways in which the various forms of assessment are carried out at Essex, and the processes for moderation and marks reconciliation to support consistency. This information is also provided at a departmental level via the [Student Handbooks](#), which are issued annually.

If students experience circumstances beyond their control which might have an impact on their assessed work, the [Extenuating Circumstances Policy](#) is available. Our [Academic Appeals Procedure](#) sets out the grounds on which a student can appeal against a decision of the Board of Examiners.

In line with all UK HE providers we appoint External Examiners whose [role](#) is to review whether:
- The course meets its stated aims and the curriculum remains current.
- The assessments and types of assessment in modules are appropriate and of comparable standard to other institutions.
- The marking has been applied fairly on assignments and the marking scheme/grading criteria have been properly and consistently applied.
- The assessment process complies with the University of Essex Rules of Assessment and national reference points such as the UK Framework for Higher Education.

External Examiners are appointed for each course, including those delivered via our academic partner institutions, and provide feedback on the assessment process, whether it is properly designed and applied, and whether it is carried out in a way that is fair and equitable to all students, and supportive of the achievement of learning outcomes. Comments from our externals are consistently positive but where specific issues are raised these are responded to swiftly and we use our academic governance arrangements (see below) to assure ourselves that our processes and activities are effective.

Academic governance

The detailed institutional analysis of student outcomes and degree classification profiles takes place via our Education Committee, reporting to the University Senate and ultimately to our governing body, Council.   In reviewing our degree outcomes, we look at quantitative trends in student degree outcomes over time, including the impact of student demographics, and subject differences. For courses delivered at our partner institutions we consider classification data at our Partnership Committees, and where we have franchise arrangements the outcomes are assessed against comparator data from the home Essex department.

The Framework for University of Essex awards applies to all taught provision both within our academic departments and externally at our academic partner institutions and has been aligned with the UK Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). In course approval and review, provision is considered in the light of the FHEQ, subject and qualification benchmark statements, qualification descriptors, and any professional body requirements. Course approval and review panel members are directed to consider qualification descriptors and subject benchmarks in the process of programme approval and review.

Feedback from External Examiners (for courses delivered on our home campuses and at our partners) is reviewed at a departmental, faculty and institutional level in order to capture themes and generic issues as well as points specific to each subject. Consolidated reports are

considered by our Academic Quality and Standards Committee and reported through to our Education Committee.

The review cycle of our annual planning process is aligned with the Annual Review of Courses (ARC) process and this ensures a strategic and systematic approach to planning and performance monitoring, in support of our students and their education. Our process of five-yearly Periodic Review of our courses, which includes external and student panel members, ensures that our curriculum remains current and provides opportunities for wider sharing of good practice.

In the process of assuring the content of this degree outcomes statement we have consulted with staff and student representatives through our Education Committee and Senate. The draft statement was externally reviewed. The final degree outcomes statement has been formally approved by University Council.

Classification algorithms

Our Rules of Assessment for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Awards apply to all Departments and Partner institutions. The Rules of Assessment are regularly tested both against the analysis of student retention, progression and achievement data at Essex, and against practice across comparator institutions, and we are confident that they are in line with sector norms and principles for effective degree algorithm design.

A student's degree class is based upon marks achieved at Level 5 and Level 6, weighted 40 and 60 respectively and combined to give the Degree Mark. A student's final outcome is thereby derived from their performance across two years, whilst ensuring an element of 'exit velocity' to recognise the growth achieved by their final year.

Figure 3: Degree Classification algorithm

First Class Honours (1)	- A Degree Mark of 70 or more; or 120 credits (from Year Two and Final Year) at 70 or above with a Degree Mark of 68 or 69.
Upper Second Class Honours (2.1)	- A Degree Mark of 60 or more; or 120 credits (from Year Two and Final Year) at 60 or above with a Degree Mark of 58 or 59.
Lower Second Class Honours (2.2)	- A Degree Mark of 50 or more; or 120 credits (from Year Two and Final Year) at 50 or above with a Degree Mark of 48 or 49.
Third Class Honours (3)	Meet the criteria for the award of an Honours degree but without sufficient marks to obtain a Lower Second Class Honours Degree or higher.

Other key principles are:

- Students must pass at least 330 credits, with 90 or more at Level 6, to be awarded a degree. A maximum of 30 credits can be failed (condoned) across the whole degree, but none of them can be core modules.
- The pass mark is 40 for all modules.
- Students are permitted three attempts to pass an individual module, however, unless Extenuating Circumstances apply, the module aggregate mark will be capped at 40 after the first attempt.
- Extenuating Circumstances may mean that a student performs less well than expected or misses assessments. If a student submits Extenuating Circumstances and they are

accepted as valid, the Board of Examiners may offer additional assessment opportunities in line with the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and guidelines.

- Some courses have extra requirements that must be met, often to meet the needs of professional, statutory or regulatory bodies. These variations to the rules of assessment require approval from University Senate.

To aid students' understanding of the Rules of Assessment, in 2018/19 we revised the language and presentation to improve their accessibility. We worked closely with our Students' Union, and with input from staff and student focus groups, to create model which is now more directly addressed to the student.

Teaching practices and learning resources

A dual-intensive University, we are committed to research-led education, enabling our students to develop critical, analytic, and transferable skills. Our Education Strategy sets out our commitment to supporting every student from every background to achieve success, and our ethos of continuous improvement ensures that there has been considerable investment by staff and students in investing in genuine, positive improvements in learning outcomes.

We have undertaken a range of initiatives to ensure that our forms of assessment take account of the diversity of prior learning styles with which our students enter university. We help smooth the transition to University-level study by ensuring a variety of methods of assessment while also developing skills, such as independent thinking and critical evaluation associated with university study.

Significant developments over the past five years include:
- An increase in the proportion of staff (now over 60%) who hold a professional teaching qualification recognised by the UK Professional Standards Framework, and Fellowship of the HEA.
- Our Learner Engagement Activity Portal (LEAP), which has demonstrated a strong link between student engagement and student progression and outcomes, enabling a targeted approach to student learning support
- Enhancement of our Personal Tutor system to embed LEAP data
- Systematic investment in campus facilities with the aim of improving the quality of the student experience and student outcomes
- Developments in learning technologies such as our Listen Again lecture-capture system, and our Moodle VLE

Our average of 76% good honours attainment over the past five years demonstrates the effectiveness and consistency of our enhancements in teaching practices and learning resources. We continually challenge ourselves to do better and have no room for complacency - our emphasis for the next five years is to close outcome gaps where these exist.

Identifying good practice and actions
Through our annual planning process we systematically monitor departmental performance and identify areas of good practice. We interrogate degree outcomes data through Tableau, our interactive dashboard, in order to better understand performance at an institutional level and within the departmental context. Institution-wide access to these dashboards facilitates continuous improvement.

Academic skills support is embedded in the curriculum - predominately targeted at first years and focuses on core and transferrable skills including essay writing, research skills, note taking, managing study time, as well as maths, statistics and digital skills. Our Skills for Success team

evaluate the impact of academic skills support to ensure that it is helping the delivery of all departmental performance priorities, including the closing of outcome gaps.

Risks and challenges

Our Strategic Plan 2019-25 includes a Key Performance Indicator to reduce outcome gaps and our Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25 has specific targets relating to attainment across demographic groups. We are committed to supporting every student from every background to achieve their potential by addressing disparity in outcomes between different groups of students, and embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in the curriculum. Through our Inclusivity Leads in each department, we are developing knowledge and resources to establish inclusive practice and support our commitment to closing our outcome gaps.