University of Essex Degree Outcomes Statement

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 75% good honours attainment, which is consistent with the sector average of 74.5%. The percentage of 1st and 2:1 classifications has remained consistent throughout, averaging at 27% first class honours and 48% upper second class honours.

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.

Although we have narrowed the outcome gap between BAME and White student groups, the differential in outcomes between Black and White students remains a concern. 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>1,706</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
<td>1,681</td>
<td>76.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>68.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
<td>1,542</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
<td>1,516</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declared Disability</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Disability Declared</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>1,561</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>1,527</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>81.7%</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>1,065</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLAR4 Q1*</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLAR4 Q5*</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*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 our School of Health and Social Care delivers under 60%. Both figures reflect the sector norms for the vocational subject areas represented.

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 Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Education Committee and Senate. The draft statement was externally reviewed.
by a senior academic from the University of East Anglia. 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 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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Class Honours (1)</th>
<th>▪ 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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Second Class Honours (2.1)</td>
<td>▪ 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Second Class Honours (2.2)</td>
<td>▪ 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Class Honours (3)</td>
<td>▪ Meet the criteria for the award of an Honours degree but without sufficient marks to obtain a Lower Second Class Honours Degree or higher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 75% 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.