



Degree Outcomes Statement 2020



1. Purpose of the Statement

The University of Exeter is an autonomous Higher Education provider holding university title and degree awarding powers under the UK's Higher Education and Research Act 2017. This autonomy means that the University is responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards and quality of its undergraduate degrees and other qualifications. It does this within the context of the academic policies and ordinances of its Council, and in accordance with the procedures, frameworks, codes of good practice and guidance set out within its Teaching Quality Assurance (TQA) Manual.

The purpose of this statement is, therefore, to present prospective and current undergraduate students, partners, stakeholders and other interested parties with information, and thus assurance, on how the University monitors and manages the academic standards of its undergraduate awards at Level 6 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-awarding bodies (FHEQ). The statement also aims to meet the expectations of the UK Standing Committee on Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) to ensure transparency, reliability and fairness in relation to outcomes for University of Exeter students.

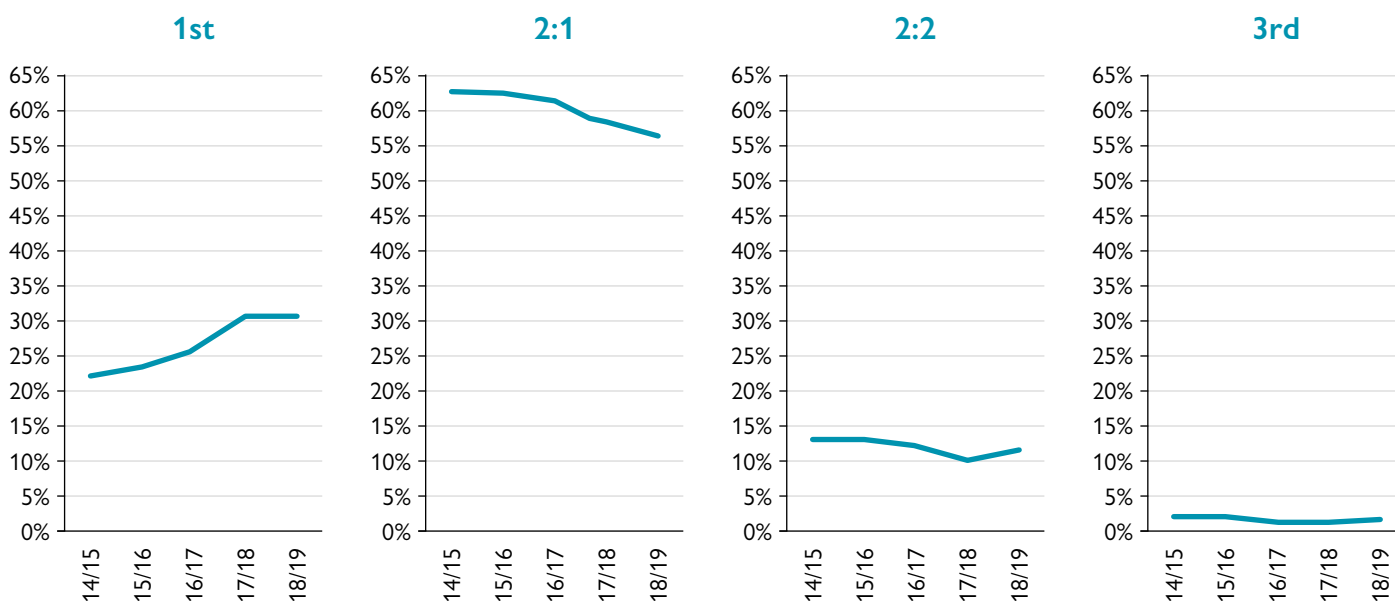
Please note that this statement is based on data up to and including the 2018/19 academic year. It does not, therefore, include data which may have been impacted by Industrial Action or by measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the implementation of the University's No Detriment Policy.

2. Institutional Degree Classification Profile

This section presents data and demonstrates trends in the classifications of degrees awarded by the University of Exeter to its undergraduate students between 2014/15 and 2018/19. The data is presented as the percentage or proportion of different degree classifications awarded (1st, 2:1, 2:2 and 3rd), both overall and to priority demographic groups for access, success and progression in Higher Education (HE).

The data also includes Integrated Masters Degrees, which are four year, Level 7 of the FHEQ programmes, which incorporate an honours degree. The results for students on the Bachelors of Medicine and Surgery, who are not awarded traditional degree classifications, have been excluded from the data.

Figure 1: University of Exeter Trends in Undergraduate Degree Classification



Overall there has been an upward trend in the number of 1st and 2:1s; also referred to as 'good honours degrees', awarded by the University (from 85% to 89%). Some of the key changes underpinning this trend are as follows:

- There has been an increase of 9% in the percentage of 1st class degrees awarded by the University, which by 2018/19 was 30%, equidistant between the Sector average at 28% and the average for the Russell Group and Competitor Group at 32%;
- There has been a decline of 7% in the percentage of 2:1s awarded by the University, which by 2018/19 represented 57% of awards, compared to the Sector average of 49% and 54% and 56% for the Russell Group and Competitor Group respectively;
- Therefore, there has been an increase of 2% in 'Good Honours Degrees' (1st plus 2:1) to 87%, comparable with the Russell Group average of 86%, equivalent to the Competitor Group average of 87% and above the Sector average of 78%;
- The percentage of 2:2s awarded by the University has declined by 2% to 11% in 2018/19, compared to 19% for the Sector Average, 12% for the Russell Group and 11% for the Competitor Group;
- The percentage of 3rd class degrees awarded by the University has fluctuated very slightly but remained largely stable at just 2% through to 2018/19, a pattern matched by the Competitor Group and the Russell Group, also both 2%, while lower than the Sector average which is 4%¹.

Key:	Sector -	Data for all undergraduate degree awarding institutions
	Competitor Group -	Data for similar institutions within the sector
	Russell Group -	Data for a group of research intensive universities, which the University of Exeter is part of

Contributions to the improvement in awards and improved student performance between 2014/15 and 2018/19 include: (i) improvements over time in the entry standards of students; (ii) the development of new educational facilities and resources; and (iii) the pan-institutional focus on enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment practices. As the impact of (ii) and (iii) has not been measured, there may be an element of what the Office for Students (OfS) define as unexplained change, that is: change over a time period that cannot be accounted for by change in the characteristics of the graduating cohort².

The University is confident that its commitment to excellence in teaching and learning and investment in educational facilities, resources and support services has had a positive impact on academic outcomes for its students. However, there is a need for more definitive evidence to establish a clear relationship between such factors and the increase in good honours degrees awarded. The University will, therefore, be undertaking further research and analysis to better understand the multiple contributions to the improvements in awards.

Additional data held by the University indicates that there are differences in the degree awarding profiles in individual Colleges and between Disciplines within those Colleges, which are scrutinised at an institutional level through the Quality Review Framework and the Faculty of Taught Programmes. While these reflect sector-wide patterns, the University is committed to developing both its knowledge and understanding of these differences and appropriate responses at College and Discipline level.

1 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Data Set for 2018-19

2 Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2017-18, OfS 2019 (updated 2020)
Available at: [officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time/)

Table 1: University of Exeter Award of Good Honours Degrees by Demographic Group

		Proportion Awarded %				
		1st and 2:1				
		2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Age Group	Mature	69%	77%	82%	79%	78%
	Young	86%	87%	87%	89%	88%
Disability	Disability	82%	86%	86%	88%	88%
	No Disability	85%	86%	87%	89%	87%
Ethnicity	BME	68%	72%	77%	74%	76%
	White	90%	90%	90%	92%	90%
Gender	Female	89%	90%	91%	92%	90%
	Male	80%	81%	82%	84%	83%
Participation in HE	LPN	85%	84%	89%	90%	78%
	Non-LPN	90%	90%	90%	92%	91%
School Type	Independent	87%	89%	88%	91%	92%
	State	85%	85%	87%	88%	87%

Key: BME - Black and Minority Ethnic students
 LPN - Students from Low Participation [in HE] Neighbourhoods

The University recognises that the data demonstrates awarding gaps between some of its demographic groups of students and it is committed to driving down and eliminating such gaps. These are defined by the OfS as identified gaps in degree outcomes for underrepresented groups when compared with their peers³. It should be noted that the data above relates to all undergraduate students at the University, including international students. There may, therefore, be some differences in the gaps shown above and those identified in the University's [Access and Participation Plan](#). This plan utilises data from the OfS' [Access and Participation Data Dashboard](#) which covers UK Domiciled students only.

Additional data held by the University indicates that there are also differences in the scale of awarding gaps shown between individual Colleges and between Disciplines within those Colleges. The University is using these analyses to consider actions at a finer-grained level of detail (e.g. at Discipline and College levels). There have been some improvements since 2014/15, with awarding gaps reduced or closed, however, addressing such disparities remains a top priority for the University, in particular, reducing the awarding gap between BME and white ethnic students, which stood at 14 percentage points in 2018/19. This is, therefore, an area in which the University is committed to, and engaged in, further research, analysis and action.

This commitment is evident in the University focus on Success for All Our Students within the University's [Education Strategy \(2019-2025\)](#) (see Section 7). Furthermore, in 2020, the [Provost's Commission](#), which oversees work to ensure an open, diverse and safe university community for all, established in conjunction with the BME Staff, Students and Allies Network a forum focussing specifically on the BME awarding gap. The 'Let's Talk' series provides an open forum to discuss work underway to improve the University's BME awarding gap, and consider opportunities to increase the impact of actions and the pace of change.

The series has already identified a number of key areas that are being taken forward, including: work to support the transition of BME students into and through Higher Education; the development of a BME support and mentoring network and tailored health and wellbeing support. Finally, the University has profiled its Professional Services to ensure that there is a strong join-up between Widening Participation, Social Mobility, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Education and Student Support and Taught Faculty Professionals.

3. Assessment and Marking Practices

Regulation of standards is set out in the University's Taught Programmes' Handbook. The University has a robust and rigorous approach to assuring the standardisation of assessment, marking and decision-making on the award of its degrees, confirmed through prior QAA Institutional Review and Institutional Audit. These have not changed significantly during the period covered by this. Consistency of marking is ensured through standard and best practice quality assurance measures, such as [anonymity](#) (wherever possible) and the use of [moderation and sampling](#). [External Examiners](#) are appointed to oversee the standards of assessment on all taught programmes, producing annual reports, which feed into the University's quality review processes.

The University operates a three tier system of [Assessment Progression and Awarding Committees](#) (APACs). Tier One is the Discipline APAC, whose primary responsibility is to safeguard academic standards. Tier Two is the College APAC, whose primary responsibility is to ensure that academic regulations are applied consistently and equitably across Disciplines within a College. Tier Three is the University APAC, whose primary responsibility is to identify areas where policy clarifications or enhancements are required, to consider patterns of degree outcomes and academic standards and make associated strategic recommendations.

To ensure that the [assessment criteria](#) meets sector reference points, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statements are considered during the approval of programmes, together with the competency requirements of a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) where appropriate. [External Assessors](#) are also appointed during the approval process to ensure that academic standards and the quality of the student academic experience are assured from the outset. The University also supports opportunities for academics to work as External Examiners and Advisors to enhance standardisation within the HE sector and participates in Advance HE's [Degree Standards Project](#).

The procedures governing student academic appeals against assessment, progression or awarding decisions are detailed in the [Student Cases Handbook](#). Students may also apply for mitigating circumstances, the procedures for which are set out in [Chapter 10](#) of the Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook. This provides a 'safety net' in the event that a student is ill or affected by personal circumstances that potentially preclude them from undertaking an examination or submitting an assignment on time.

4. Academic Governance

The [Statutes](#) and [Ordinances](#) of the University of Exeter are the fundamental rules and principles that govern how the University undertakes its learning and teaching. Detailed [Regulations](#) cover the operation of teaching, examinations and other matters relating to students. The [Council](#) is the University's governing body, with responsibility for institutional policies and finances, estates and legal matters. Academic governance is provided by [Senate](#), which is responsible for teaching and learning, examinations and research. The high-level work of Council and Senate is supported through various key [Committees](#) and the [Dual Assurance](#) structure, which focuses on particular areas of the University's activity.

The University has a well-established process of annual internal institutional review of its degree classification data, with the Business Intelligence Team of its Planning, Policy and Business Intelligence Department preparing a detailed and extensive report on degree classifications over time, up to and including the preceding academic year. The report is presented to Senate, as the senior forum for academic staff to shape academic strategy and scrutinise plans and raise issues of major strategic importance to the University, as well as to Council.

It is an expectation of the UKSCQA that governing bodies or academic senates should incorporate external assurance into the preparation of their Degree Outcomes Statements. The University, therefore, made an appointment to the role of University External Academic Advisor for the Degree Outcomes Statement 2020. The appointee is an experienced Senior Academic and Dean from a Russell Group University and has provided external scrutiny, quality assurance and advice. Their written recommendations are reflected in the content and presentation of this statement.

Arrangements for teaching, learning and assessment delivered through partnership arrangements are outlined in the [Academic Partnerships Handbook](#) and the [Validated and Accredited Awards](#) that may be delivered in partnership are listed in the Regulations.

5. Classification Algorithms

Degree classification algorithms are the rules by which degree awarding bodies consistently determine the degree classification for individual final year undergraduate students. Algorithms may vary slightly from one university to another but are typically based on the weightings attributed to each stage or year of study and the final credit weighted mark achieved. The University of Exeter's approach to undergraduate degree classifications may be found in [Chapter 9](#) of the [Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook](#). More specifically the Rules for the Classification of Bachelors and Integrated Masters Degrees are set out in [Section 9.4](#).

There have been no changes to the degree algorithms used by the University of Exeter during the period covered by this statement. The degree algorithms are applied rigorously and consistently by Discipline APACs and verified by College APACs. Any exceptions, such as Aegrotat Awards made under [Ordinance 16](#) of the University's Regulations, must be approved by the Academic Dean for Students / Dean of the Faculty of Taught Programmes at the University APAC.

To ensure that academic standards are upheld, there are consequences for failure in individual assessments and modules, and whilst referrals and repeat study are permitted within strict limits, the maximum grades that may be achieved are capped at the pass mark of 40%. Students may, however, apply for mitigating circumstances, which if approved would permit them additional time or an additional opportunity to complete an assessment without penalty. Further information on the consequences of failure in assessment is available in [Chapter 11](#) of the Handbook.

6. Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

The University prides itself on its commitment to excellence in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. This is evidenced by the award of Gold under the provider level [Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework](#) (TEF) in 2017, an award it still holds. The TEF Panel judged that University of Exeter students from all backgrounds achieve outstanding outcomes. The metrics indicated outstanding levels of student satisfaction with teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support in all cases notably exceeding benchmarks. More information on [Teaching Excellence](#) may be found on the University's website.

Beneath this headline, the University consistently strives to enhance the quality of its teaching and learning. The cross-University work of the [Teaching Quality Assurance and Enhancement Department](#), which provides a range of professional services to both staff and students to support the development of high quality teaching and learning, provides a good example of this and includes the:

- [Programme Development Team](#);
- [Technology Enhanced Learning Team](#);
- [Quality and Standards Team](#);
- [Academic Development Team](#) (supporting teaching staff); and
- [Academic Skills and Student Engagement Team](#) (supporting students).

The University's [Quality Review Framework](#) sets out the process for the annual [Quality Review of Taught Programmes](#). This is a multi-layered process starting with the Annual Review of Modules and culminating with the Annual Review of Colleges by the University. There are two elements within this, which focus specifically on teaching excellence and standards:

- Teaching Excellence Action Plans (TEAPs) have been designed to reflect the strategic importance of teaching excellence, respond to emerging issues and record completed actions, as part of a cyclical process of quality assurance and enhancement; and
- Teaching Excellence Monitoring Meetings (TEMs) are the annual University scrutiny meeting with each Discipline within the Colleges, which ensure that its expectations in relation to teaching and learning are being upheld and that best practice is highlighted and shared.

The University continues to develop its facilities and services to support its educational priorities, its teaching and learning and the academic experience of its students. Projects overseen by its [Estate Services](#) include the refurbishment of existing, and the provision of new, learning and study places and spaces. There is also considerable ongoing investment in [Library Resources and Services](#), both physical and online, and in the [Exeter Learning Environment](#) the University's virtual learning environment, which enables students to access programme materials and interact online.

The University adopts an evidenced based approach to the enhancement of its teaching, learning and assessment practices ensuring that they are designed from the outset to have a positive impact on academic outcomes for students. Monitoring and evaluation is also built into every stage of development and many improvements are co-created with, and reviewed by students through a well-established system of [Academic Representation](#) and close partnership with the University of Exeter [Students' Guild](#) (Exeter) and Falmouth and Exeter [Students' Union](#) (Cornwall).

7. Identifying Good Practice and Actions

7.1 Commitment to Success for All

The University's new [Education Strategy 2019-25](#) makes a commitment to delivering education and student experience of the highest international quality, and to supporting all of its students to realise their potential; this commitment is also captured in our [Access and Participation Plan](#). One of the strategy's priorities is to, 'enhance our undergraduate offer in: the quality of learning, teaching, student support and student outcomes'. The strategy also defines as a characteristic of excellence in education, 'Success for All Our Students', underpinned commitments include: to support all students to fulfil their potential and make a positive contribution to the wider world; and to strive to eliminate gaps in access, awarding and progression to employment seen between groups defined by socioeconomic (dis)advantage, ethnicity, age, disability, gender and nationality.

The University continues to evolve its approach to delivering success for all and has augmented its leadership and governance arrangements by creating an enhanced Success for All Strategy Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education), to lead this area of work from 2020-21 onwards. The Strategy Group will be supported by a series of working groups, each focusing on a key area of access, success and progression, including the BME awarding gap. Student Representatives are fully engaged with this process and the work will be further enhanced through the creation of, and appointment to, a new dedicated role of Associate Academic Dean for Students (Racial Equality and Inclusion) in 2020-21.

7.2 The Centre for Social Mobility

The University's [Centre for Social Mobility](#) is the UK's only university centre dedicated to improving social mobility through evidence-informed practice and policy. The Centre's goal is to help disadvantaged young people so they do better at school, access higher education and succeed at university. Researchers and practitioners from the Centre will contribute to the University's work on analysing degree outcomes, in particular awarding gaps, and identifying actions, including through their work to: support a whole institution approach to social mobility to enhance the access, success and progression of widening participation students at the University; and undertake institutional research to enhance knowledge and practices at the University.

7.3 The Education Incubator

The University's [Education Incubator](#) is an investment in cultivating innovation and collaboration in the theory and practice of teaching and learning. The Incubator enables any academic from the University to participate in networks of interested peers, providing access to expertise and examples of inspirational educational practice, whilst developing their own ideas and approaches. Partnership with students is a core commitment at the University and the Incubator champions and supports effective partnerships. Work undertaken through the Incubator aligns closely with the University's [Education Strategy 2019-25](#), with previous and current projects focusing on the experiences of underrepresented cohorts, including peer mentoring initiatives and approaches to developing inclusive pedagogy and curricula.

7.4 Establishment of Degree Outcomes Steering Group

Chaired by the Academic Dean for Students/Dean of the Faculty of Taught Programmes, a steering group supports the annual internal review of the University's degree classifications and the preparation of the Degree Outcomes Statement. Drawing on academic and professional expertise across the University and engaging with student representatives and members of the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team](#), this will enable a more collaborative approach to be adopted. Amongst other matters, the Steering Group will focus on: developing a clear annual process by which data on degree classifications and the content of the Degree Outcomes Statement is considered and formally approved; and identifying the questions that need answering, including on the benefit of interventions and impact of policy change.

7.5 Further Research and Analysis

Throughout this first Degree Outcomes Statement, the University of Exeter has identified areas in which further research and analysis is required to better understand the factors giving rise to the institutional degree classification profile identified, both in terms of the overall increase in the award of good honours degrees and the persistence of awarding gaps between different demographic groups of students. The University recognises that awarding gaps derive from a multiplicity of reasons, academic, social and cultural, and start even before students come to University. The University will, therefore, take a holistic approach to reducing and closing gaps, not only through its academic systems, but through linked work within the [Provost's Commission](#), [Equality Groups](#), [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team](#) and [Widening Participation Team](#).

The University will also review the impact of the events of the 2019/20 academic year, which included Industrial Action and the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be a particular focus on the implementation of the University's [No Detriment Policy](#). The conclusions and recommendations of such activity will be reflected in future versions of this statement. The University is by its nature a learning institution, in which research and education are inextricably linked and learning and teaching is consistently and constantly informed by internal and external research and best practice.