

Aston University, Degree Outcomes Statement

Context

Aston University's Degree Outcomes Statement, approved through the University's academic governance arrangements, summarises the outcomes of an institutional review of how the University meets the expectations of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment to make clear our specific commitments to :

1. Ensure assessments continue to stretch and challenge students
2. Review and explain how final degree classifications are calculated
3. Support and strengthen the external examiners system
4. Review and publish data and analysis on students' degree outcomes.

In addition, this statement shows Aston's commitment to meet the UK Quality Code and the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration (B4 and B5¹) that relate to protecting the quality of assessment, the standards applied and value of qualifications.

Related University Regulations, Policies, and Guidance

The Statement has referenced the University's General Regulations for Programmes, as considered and approved on an annual basis by the University's Regulations Sub-Committee (RSC) and University's Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC), and the University's published [Access and Participation Plan](#).

Base data and role of HESA

The core data for the Degree Outcomes Statement in Table 1 are drawn from the [Access and participation data dashboard - Office for Students](#) as previously published.

1 Institutional degree classification profile

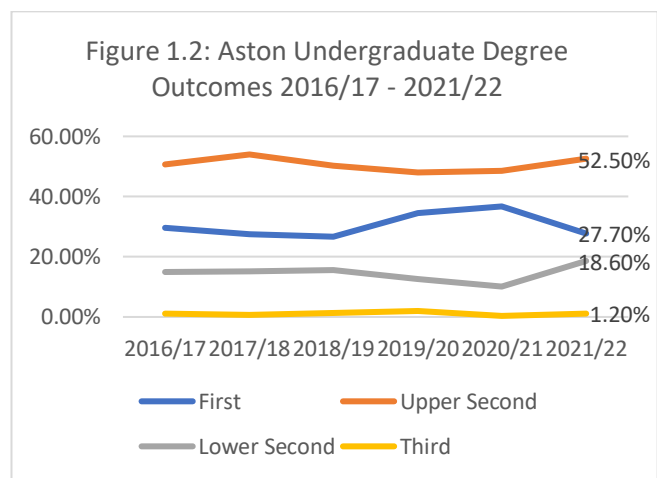
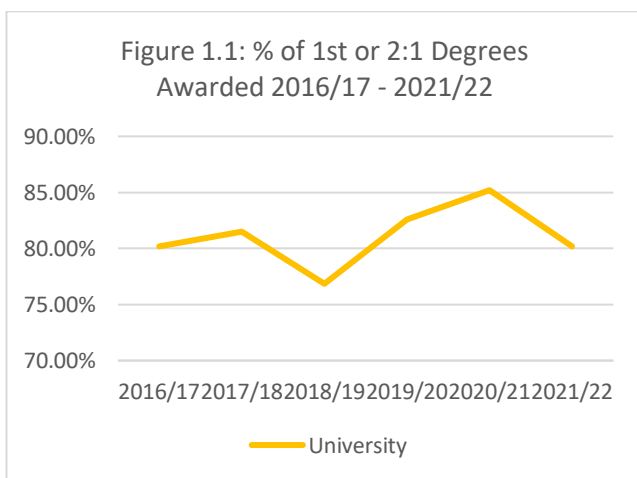
a) This statement and results relate to Aston University's undergraduate students. Aston has a diverse student population with nearly 70% of students coming from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds and a considerable proportion of students from low-income backgrounds.

¹ Condition B4: The provider must ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards.

Condition B5: The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) at Level 4 or higher.

Characteristic		2018-19 1 st /2:1	2019-20 1 st /2:1	2020-21 1 st /2:1
Age ²	Young	85%	88.8%	91.2%
	Mature (21+)	74.0%	86%	84%
National IMD Quintile ³	Q1, or Q2	85%	87%	91%
	Q3, Q4 or Q5	85.4%	89.4%	91.4%
Ethnicity	White	91%	92%	95%
	Asian	82.6%	88.9%	91.6%
	Black	75%	80%	82%
	Mixed BAME	88.0%	82%	90%
	Other	90.0%	85%	85%
Disability	Yes	83%	87%	87%
	No	84.6%	88.9%	91.3%
Sex	Male	74.7%	84.9%	84.5%
	Female	84.6%	88.4%	88.6%

Table 1: Award of undergraduate degrees 2018/19 to 2020/21 by degree classification



- b) Aston University delivers a range of degree provision through its three Colleges: Business and Social Sciences (BSS), Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS) and Health and Life Sciences (HLS).
- c) In the academic year 2021/22, 80.2% of our undergraduates achieved a First or 2:1 qualification; 27.7% graduated with a First Class Honours degree, where the HESA reported sector average for graduation with First Class Honours degrees in that year was 32%.
- d) Degree outcomes are recognised to vary over time being affected by a range of factors, including subject mix, entry qualifications, student demographics, enhancements to learning

² Young students are considered to be under 21 years of age upon entry and mature students over 21 years of age upon entry

³ The Index of Multiple Deprivation, commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. Areas falling in quintiles 1 and 2 are considered the most deprived.

and teaching, student choice, changes to the curriculum, and degree algorithms. [The Analysis of Degree Classifications Over Time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2020-21](#) published by the Office for Students in May 2022, takes some of these factors into consideration in its evaluation of degree outcomes across the sector.

- e) Students graduating in 2019/20 experienced disruption to their learning, teaching and assessments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing this, the University introduced a range of 'no-detriment' measures to seek to ensure that students were not unduly disadvantaged by COVID-19 in 2019/20. Institutional standard guidance was issued such that a University-wide approach was adopted by Boards of Examiners. Boards of Examiners (BoE) were given greater discretion to consider a wider range of learning experiences and (formative) assessments to make an academic decision as to whether students had satisfied the learning outcomes for modules and programmes.
- f) The guidance ensured that BoEs treated students consistently and BoEs' approval was sought from External Examiners, and where appropriate, also Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), for actions proposed.
- g) We are satisfied that these measures represent a proportionate and necessary response to the COVID-19 pandemic, making use of our General Regulations for programmes and standards. Our approach was comparable to similar measures applied across the sector. We continue to analyse our approach to establish any impact on student outcomes.
- h) The University monitors degree outcomes annually. Aston attributes its First or 2:1 Honours degree results to factors such as:
 - i. The significant proportion (61%) of undergraduate programmes that are accredited by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) developing industry/professional skills through professionally accredited awards.
 - ii. The significant proportion (63%) of Aston undergraduate programmes have compulsory placement experiences.
- i) The percentage of students awarded a First or 2:1 Honours degree in 2021/22, was identical to the percentage of students gaining a First or 2:1 Honours degree in 2016/17 (80.2%). The intervening years note rising levels of Firsts and 2:1 Honours degrees across the years with the rate particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. HESA Student outcomes data show a sector increase of 3% from 75% to 78% in the same period (Figures 1.1 and 1.2)⁴.

2. Assessment and marking practices

- a) The University's Credit and Qualifications Framework sets standard requirements for awards that are consistent with national qualification frameworks.
- b) When a new programme is approved by the University, the award standard is validated and consideration given to the meeting of QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, and where relevant, PSRB educational requirements, Apprenticeship Standards or other national expectations.
- c) Assessment is scrutinised internally at the design stage. Assessment plans and marking criteria contributing to the final award are scrutinised by External Examiners before issue to students.
- d) Marking is undertaken using the University's generic undergraduate marking scale provided in the University's General Regulations for programmes. This applies to all undergraduate and

⁴ HESA Progression Rates & Qualifications Data release 31st January 2023 <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes>

Integrated Master's programmes. All marking is criterion-based, and the full range of marks are available to reward performances appropriately.

- e) Internal moderation of marked work is undertaken using a sampling model to monitor the consistency and reliability of marking.
- f) Double-blind marking is adopted for larger projects or dissertations, or where the work has a significant contribution to the final award. This ensures objectivity, since the marks of the first marker are not available to the second marker.
- g) Examinations and, where practical, other assessments such as coursework, are marked anonymously to guard against unconscious bias.
- h) Module Boards are conducted using anonymous records, to ensure consistent information and judgements of outcome are reached.

3. External scrutiny and External examining

- a) Aston's programme approval approaches involve external scrutiny from outside the University, from approval of a new programme by External Advisers and External Examiners advising on the development proposals for curriculum, through to making the award of the degree.
- b) The External Examiner and Adviser processes meet strict criteria to ensure their expertise and impartiality with the work at Aston.
- c) Every programme has at least one academic and where appropriate a professional expert, independent of the University, appointed to act as External Examiner. Their role is to provide advice and guidance on the quality of the educational experience and the maintenance of academic standards. External Examiners review assessment, reviewing this in the design phase and scrutinising samples of marked work and the effectiveness of Aston's internal moderation processes.
- d) External Examiners regularly meet with students on programmes and include consideration of student views when feeding back their evaluations.
- e) External Examiners attend Boards of Examiner meetings and are required to report on their findings, at least once a year, following these Boards of Examiner meetings. Reports from External Examiners confirm the thorough and considerate decisions made in our examining processes and the effective processes supporting the decisions reached.
- f) The External Examiners specifically confirm the careful adherence to application of the General Regulations for Programmes and confirm the standards of the degree awards made.
- g) The reports from External Examiners are considered by ULTC and consideration is given institutionally to these through activity managed by the Programme Directors, through Programme Committees and School or Department engagement. Progress on responses to items raised are noted in Colleges and reported to ULTC. The External Examiner reports are shared with students and published via Aston's 'MAP' system.

4. Academic Governance

- a) Two levels of decision-making are used in determining a degree award:
 - i. Module Boards are responsible for determining Module outcomes

- ii. Assessment Programme Boards are responsible for determining programme and progression outcomes.
- b) Consideration is given to trends in the Module Performance to ensure that changes from previous runs of the Module are accounted for.
- c) Boards of Examiners and External Examiners are not permitted to act to change the marks of individual students. Should there be evidence that the marks are not an accurate reflection of standards, the University's General Regulations for Programmes enable a Board of Examiners to scale the marks of part, or all of the cohort.
- d) The Programme Board of Examiners may take into consideration Exceptional Circumstances that have affected a student's performance. The parameters for consideration are set out in the [Guide to Exceptional Circumstances](#) as part of the [General Regulations for Programmes](#).
- e) Independent observers, appointed from within the University, may attend Boards of Examiners and report their findings. At least one External Examiner must attend the Board of Examiners for Programmes for finalists. Training is compulsory for all new Chairs of Boards of Examiners and for all External Examiners new to the role. New External Examiners are provided with a senior University staff member to provide support as mentor in their first year.
- f) The University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Sub-committee of ULTC receives an annual report on assessment processes including a summary of issues and good practice raised by External Examiners.
- g) Where a programme is delivered at a collaborative partner organisation, the Board of Examiners is chaired by a member of Aston University staff, and the External Examiner is appointed by Aston University to ensure confident application of the University's General Regulations for Programmes.
- h) Senate receives a report annually on degree classifications. Degree outcomes also form a key part of the annual report on the University's performance provided to University Senate and Council.

5. Classification algorithms

- a) The University's [Approach to Award Calculation Algorithms](#) are included in the [General Regulations for Programmes](#).
- b) The General Regulations for Programmes make clear the rules for progression and awarding of undergraduate degrees.
- c) Students are expected to complete their degrees within a fixed time period and complete each stage of study within a maximum period of three years. The fixed time period for study is currently under review by the Regulations Sub-Committee to ensure that the Regulations remain robust in the light of sector and data reporting changes.
- d) Students may retake a failed module if their overall results meet the criteria described for reassessment. Students are allowed a maximum of three attempts at any assessment and may not normally resit any module that has already been passed. Assessments that need to be resat have their mark capped at the pass mark.¹
- e) The weighting of the years of study are outlined in the [Approach to Award Calculation Algorithms](#). The first stage (year) does not contribute to the final award. This is to enable students to acclimatise to higher education practices and develop necessary skills over the

time on the course The final year, or part, of all degrees contributes 75% to the student's achievement to allow students to demonstrate achievements at the level of the final award.

- f) The University does not discount low or outlier marks from student's degree calculations, though discounting low or outlier marks may be considered and applied in cases of exceptional circumstances.
- g) Students are provided with information on the key aspects of the General Regulations for Programmes, including the relative weightings of parts of their programme when they join the University, with reminders for returning students when they re-enrol.
- h) A review of degree classification algorithms and borderline calculations is currently underway.

6. Teaching practices and learning resources

- a) The University's Education Department drives Aston's [Education Strategy 2021 - 2025](#).
- b) The Education Strategy outlines strategic principles which include delivery of high quality, innovative and inspirational teaching from well-qualified staff, facilitated through the institutional adoption of high quality designed blended and hybrid learning.
- c) The [University's Access and Participation plan](#) describes work, both undertaken and planned, to improve the outcomes of underrepresented groups of students.
- d) The [University was rated Gold](#) for its learning and teaching in the Teaching Excellence Framework in 2017. The outcome of its next TEF assessment will be published in 2023.
- e) All new teaching staff are required to gain professional recognition against the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), either through completion of the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert LTHE) (for those with less than three years' full-time teaching experience); or via the University's Research-Inspired Teaching Excellence (RITE) scheme, both of which are externally accredited by Advance HE.
- f) Both External Examiners and students hold the University's approach to learning and teaching in high regard. The University scores well in the National Student Survey and was the Guardian's University of the Year 2020.

7. Identifying good practice and actions

- a) The [Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement](#) of modules and taught programmes is a key part of the University's quality assurance processes, and part of a cycle of continuous enhancement.
 - b) The CME process highlights the identification of good practice and enables Aston to attend to developments identified in review. We will continue to monitor the impact of our practice and degree outcomes.
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