University of Huddersfield Degree Outcomes Statement

December 2022

Purpose of the statement

This statement provides information to prospective applicants, current students, partner organisations and other stakeholders on how the University manages and assures the quality and standards of our undergraduate awards within the Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England. It represents our commitment to protecting the value of our degrees over time and contributes to our academic governance and monitoring processes.

1. Institutional degree classification profile

The figures below show the percentage of first class and upper second class degrees awarded by the University over the past five years. The first table shows how the number of first class degrees rose during 2019/20 and 2020/21 during the global pandemic and returned to a pre-pandemic level in 2021/22. The trend for upper second class degrees was much flatter over the same period. During 2019/20 and 2020/21 the University applied its emergency regulations, including a Safety Net to reassure students that they would not be disadvantaged due to the unprecedented disruption to their learning in the 2019/20 academic year.
The second table below profiles a similar trend across the majority of student characteristics measured, with no obvious outliers. There are, however, differences in the degree of impact on degree outcomes across different sections of the population.

In line with the general trend across the sector, good degree outcomes have gradually improved since 2015/16 and had stabilised at an average of 75% prior to the pandemic. This was a result of initiatives designed to improve teaching quality, the calibre of our teaching staff, and assessment and feedback practice. We worked with external advisors including Advance HE to help us achieve this improvement.

The University continues to address differential attainment. Initially launched through a HEFCE catalyst funded project “Intervention for Success”, early initiatives demonstrated impact through a clear uplift attainment in 2019/20 data for those students who identify as Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority heritage (labelled ABMO above). The work has developed into the Huddersfield Differential Attainment Project (HuDAP) which maintains momentum in our goal to eradicate the attainment gaps between different sections of our student population (for more information see section 6 below).
2. Assessment and marking practices

The University’s policies and practices ensure that we meet the Expectations of the Quality Code for Higher Education, particularly with respect to protecting the value of our awards and upholding appropriate academic standards over time.

The Regulations for Awards specify the University’s requirements on the structure of undergraduate programmes, and our assessment and marking practices. These regulations are reviewed annually and presented to the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) for scrutiny and approval.

The course assessment strategy is specified at validation and any subsequent changes to assessment design have to be approved through a formal validation process. All courses undergo a rigorous validation process before being approved for delivery, and as part of that process they are explicitly mapped to the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, and the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Course teams develop their courses and assessments in the context of the QAA’s Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development, and on Assessment.

Our Inclusivity Framework for Course Design was approved by UTLC in March 2020. This framework encapsulates our commitment to ensure all students, including those from protected characteristic groups and diverse backgrounds, can access the learning experience equally and achieve their full potential. It requires those proposing new courses to demonstrate how they will offer an inclusive curriculum and how their assessment strategy will support the University’s strategic aim to eradicate the attainment gap between White students and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students.

Staff and students are expected to comply with the University Assessment and Feedback Framework which has recently been reviewed and developed to build on positive lessons learned during the pandemic. It sets out our vision that assessment will inspire and challenge students and has a strong emphasis on personalised feedback and support.

An important part of the quality assurance process for awards is the external examiner system. The role of the external examiner is to provide independent and impartial advice on a provider’s academic standards and on students’ achievements in relation to those standards. External examiners are appointed to all programmes and their role is to provide academic peer review. In some subjects, additional examiners are drawn from the relevant profession to ensure that our degree courses continue to prepare students well for their chosen profession. External examiners are expected to undertake University training in order to fulfil their role effectively, and those new to the role are provided with a mentor drawn from the wider external examiner cohort.

3. Classification algorithms

Over the period since 2010, the algorithms used to calculate degree classification have not altered and the grading scales are set out in the Regulations for Awards.

In 2019/20 the algorithms were supplemented by emergency regulations (the Safety Net) to ensure that marks achieved in the 2019/20 academic year did not detrimentally skew a student’s overall
profile of performance. For 2020/21, a Grade Safety Policy was developed to enable comparison between current marks and the historical distribution of marks for that module. Where a statistically significant difference was highlighted, marks could then be scaled to bring them back in line. This applied to all module marks awarded in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The emergency regulations were revoked with effect from 01 August 2022.

4. Teaching practices and learning resources

The Teaching and Learning Strategy aligns with the aims of the University Strategy to 2025. It encompasses a wide range of initiatives designed to improve teaching quality.

The following policies and initiatives also contribute to our high teaching standards:

- All our academic staff undertake research or scholarly activity, and 77% of our permanent academic staff have PhDs with the remainder working towards one.
- All academic staff are Fellows of the HEA (now Advance HE) or working towards this within 12 months of appointment.
- We continue to grow our vibrant community of National Teaching Fellows and University Teaching Fellows who act as mentors, trainers and facilitators for innovation in teaching practice. Two members of academic staff were awarded NTF in 2021/22 (one from the School of Computing and Engineering and one from the School of Education and Professional Development). These individuals play an active part in the development of good practice in the post pandemic learning environment.
- To facilitate the operational and organisational aspects of our delivery of teaching and learning, all senior managers are accredited by the Chartered Managers' Institute. Our staff are highly professionalised, and this provides a strong base for delivery of excellence in teaching and learning and consequent positive outcomes across a diverse student population.

5. Identifying good practice and actions

The University has a well-established history of intervention through teaching and learning to improve student attainment. A range of strategic projects are overseen by UTLC and good practice is shared. The Huddersfield Differential Attainment Project (HuDAP) uses attainment data to identify areas for priority intervention to reduce attainment gaps and has led to a number of targeted initiatives. One example of this is Flying Start, a transitions initiative to increase confidence in all newly arrived first year students, which has had the impact of improving retention and success across all student groups. In Summer 2022 all Schools participated in HuDAP workshops, leading to Department-level action plans which have been deployed for the 2022/23 academic year. HuDAP was recognised by Times Higher Education Awards as winner of the Outstanding Contribution to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion category in 2022.

Senior leadership structures for oversight of teaching and learning were strengthened in July 2022 with the formal establishment of the Strategic Teaching and Learning Team, consolidating a wide
range of key teaching and learning interventions developed since 2018. It supports initiatives in our academic Schools and across the University, ensuring that central services as well as School-based staff are able to contribute.

The University holds an annual Teaching and Learning conference which encourages innovation and offers space for sharing good practice across the institution. It supports projects to enhance distance learning, student engagement and staff training and, uses data analytics to inform our understanding of student engagement and differential attainment. Thematic reviews are undertaken periodically; they provide in-depth analysis of a particular aspect of learning and, with the help of external experts and student representatives, facilitate a holistic view of practice across the University to share good practice and highlight areas for development.

The University continues to develop its virtual learning environment (Brightspace) and provides comprehensive training and resources for staff around pedagogic practice for in-person, online and blended learning.

6. Risks and challenges

The HuDAP analyses the relative performance of students across a range of recognised characteristics. Our analysis of module marks provides a granular level of attainment detail which Schools use to plan innovative and inclusive teaching and learning practices appropriate to their context. These interventions are monitored centrally and inform our developing understanding of the efficacy of various initiatives. Our aim is to reduce the attainment gap to zero and meet one of the KPIs on the current Strategic Plan (2019-2025). This is challenging but is supported through enabling projects including Flying Start, Personal Academic Tutor system, Academic Skills Tutors, and a review of assessment design. Progress towards the KPI is monitored by UTLC, the Senior Leadership Team and Council, as well as through an Annual Evaluation process which requires course teams to reflect in detail on what works for their students and where further development is required.