

THE MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT 2021/22

1. INSTITUTIONAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION PROFILE

The University is asked to set out quantitative trends in degree outcomes over five years, analysing student characteristics and subject mix.

The proportion of students awarded good honours degrees (defined as either First Class Honours or Upper Second Class Honours) increased over a five year period from 73.2% in 2017/18 to 78.2% in 2021/22. Since 2019/20, the proportion of good honours degrees has reduced (82.9% in 2019/20 and 82.5% in 2020/21). The overall rise in good honours degrees over the five-year period is attributable to a number of factors, including changes to assessment strategies which have seen better alignment between assessment types and many students' previous experiences of vocational qualifications and students' extremely positive engagement with their studies and assessments.

Within the University's good honours awards the proportion of First Class degree awards reduced from 45.3% in 2020/21 to 40.1% in 2021/22, whereas Upper Second Class honours increased from 37.2% in 2020/21 to 38.1% in 2021/22. The University provided a full, on-campus university experience from September 2021, with 95% of teaching activities taking place face to face, placing the University in the top 1% across the sector for delivering on-campus teaching. The benefits to teaching and learning afforded by the return to face-to-face delivery was illustrated in the University's National Student Survey 2022 results, which saw overall student satisfaction significantly above the sector average at 78.1%. Academic programmes across the University have varying proportions of First Class degree awards, which is mainly attributable to the academic delivery model during 2021/22, which had different teaching and assessment consequences for different academic programmes.

Following an increase in the number of First Class degrees awarded to students during the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years – a consequence of the range of exceptional adjustments implemented in response to the pandemic – additional mechanisms for scrutiny of degree outcomes were put in place internally, and detailed feedback sought from External Examiners relating to the appropriateness of grading and marking practices across the University. During the pandemic the University used contextualised marking to support students, this practice was discontinued during academic year 2021/22.

Degree outcomes vary between faculties, with Arts and Humanities seeing the highest proportion of good honours degrees in 2021/22 (82.1%) and Business and Law the lowest (75.4%). The entry qualifications of students affect degree outcomes, with 84.1% of students entering with academic qualifications (e.g. A Levels) achieving good honours degrees in 2021/22, compared with 65.1% of students with vocational (e.g. BTEC) qualifications.

The University remains committed to eliminating the awarding gap for all students as part of its Road to 2030 Strategy. In 2021/22, the gap between white and BAME students was 15.5%. Good honours outcomes between White and BAME students vary between academic departments, and following targeted interventions the gap in some departments has been closed to less than 1%.

Through the University's Education Annual Review process, data relating to departmental awarding gaps are routinely scrutinised and challenged. Targeted action plans are developed and monitored, with progress reported through University governance structures. An institutional working group has been established to further drive progress in this area, and the University continues to work closely with the Students' Union to deliver the BAME Ambassador Scheme – a collaborative programme which delivers campaigns and events for students, and feeds back students' views to influence positive change on campus.

Widening participation is central to the University's Education Strategy, which positions an Inclusive Learning Community as a key characteristic of the University. As part of the Strategy, the University will continue to evolve its truly inclusive educational environment where all members thrive as part of our transformational learning community regardless of their identity, background, or beliefs. This will be built on a culture that values diversity, removes barriers and supports students in shaping their own learning journeys in ways which accord with their personal goals and aspirations, with a particular focus on the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessments, and in all co- and extra-curricular experiences to define a truly inclusive environment for our students.

The University is committed to ensuring students with a disability, students from estranged backgrounds and students who are care leavers are supported to the best of its ability during their time at the University. In 2021/22 the awarding gap between disabled and non-disabled students was closed entirely. The University targets and supports students through its First Generation programme, which offers a complete journey of support for young people from the North West whose parents have no direct experience of higher education. The scholars who progress to Manchester Metropolitan University are supported to maximise their potential through a financial bursary along with an innovative programme of funded activities that support their employability and develop their social and cultural capital. The University's First Generation Scholarship Programme won the Widening Participation and Outreach Initiative of the Year prize at the Times Higher Education 2021 awards.

2. ASSESSMENT AND MARKING PRACTICES

The University is asked to set out how it assures the institution's assessment criteria meets sector reference points, including those set by OfS/HEFCQ and PSRBs, non-mandatory guidance and referencing use of external expertise.

The University has in place a well-established regulatory framework, which governs the structure and delivery of all awards. This framework is mapped against sector requirements and expectations, including those detailed within the OfS quality and standards conditions.

The Regulations for the Academic Awards of the University provide the definitive reference point for all awards offered by Manchester Metropolitan University, their credit profile and academic level under the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Under this sits the University's Curriculum and Assessment Framework, which outlines the detailed requirements regarding credit volume, structure and assessments for all academic programmes. Alignment with the relevant Framework is scrutinised at programme approval/re-approval to ensure that all programmes meet the required standard and conform to structural expectations. Where variations from this Framework are requested, a strong rationale - in most instances alignment to professional body requirements - is needed and approval considered by the Education Committee.

The University's Assessment Regulations for Undergraduate, Taught Postgraduate and Postgraduate Research programmes contain definitive requirements for the achievement of academic and practice credits, progression between the levels of study, calculation of degree classifications and the conferment of awards. Having implemented a set of Emergency Assessment Regulations in March 2019, the University returned to its substantive Assessment Regulations at the start of the 2020/21 academic year. Following the announcement of a further national 'lockdown' on 4 January 2021, and the requirement for teaching of all but a small number of health and education-related programmes to move online, the University, in consultation with the Students' Union, rapidly implemented adjustments to the standard progression rules in order to support students.

Early in the Autumn Term of academic year 2021/22, the University – through its Academic Board, and with the support of the Students' Union – agreed to maintain the temporary adjustments to the academic continuation regulations, permitting students to progress between the levels of study contingent upon achievement of a level average of 40% across the full 120 credits, and passing at least 90 credits – rather than requiring passes in all individual units. These adjustments were implemented in recognition of the widespread disruption that new and existing students had faced to their education during the previous two years. Previous adjustments to degree classification logic (which consisted of reintroducing the 50:50 classification method to sit alongside the existing 25:75, rather than implementing any broader 'no detriment' approach, and using Level 6 profiling for final year students) were discontinued, placing the emphasis on supporting student continuation without impacting on the perceived value of academic awards.

Through academic and Professional Services networks, staff engagement as External Examiners and through discipline-specific fora, staff from across Manchester Metropolitan University routinely monitor and feed-back to the University on sector developments and practice. Through this feedback, the University has been able to

benchmark the range of adjustments to policies, regulations and procedures detailed in this paper against sector practice – and retains a high degree of assurance that the adjustments approved are proportionate and consistent with those implemented elsewhere across the sector.

Adherence to the Assessment Regulations is assured through Assessment Boards, convened on behalf of the Academic Board and comprising senior academic staff and designated External Examiners. Having rapidly adapted the institutional approach to Assessment Boards in response to the disruption created by Covid-19, the University returned to Faculty-level Assessment Boards for 2021/22. The establishment of a ringfenced ‘checking window’ ahead of Assessment Boards provided additional scope for academic scrutiny of individual student outcomes.

In 2021/22, the University had links with 64 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). When there are changes to PSRB guidance and/or frameworks, or where the University updates Assessment Regulations, checks are carried out to ensure alignment. In instances where a variation or exemption from the regulations may be required in order to meet PSRB criteria, a Request for Variation to/Exemption from the University Assessment Regulations and/or Frameworks must be submitted and approved by the Faculty Director of Education, Head of Assessment Governance and the Education Committee.

The University currently employs circa 200 External Examiners, with all taught programmes having oversight from at least one independent examiner. The University prioritises the appointment of External Examiners working at Senior Lecturer level or above, and from those institutions which have a strong track record in the relevant subject area(s).

Examiners monitor and review all academic provision to ensure the ongoing maintenance of academic standards, alignment with national and international expectations and subject currency. They work closely with academic teams to support the processes for verifying the standard of assessments, and moderating student work to ensure marks are applied consistently and at the appropriate level. Chief External Examiners attend Assessment Boards and formally endorse their outcomes. Through the provision of an annual report, Examiners affirm the ongoing maintenance of academic standards, comment on student performance and highlight any areas for enhancement. An annual overview of Examiner feedback is provided to the Education Committee, with feedback also informing the Education Annual Review (EAR) process.

The University’s Verification Marking and Moderation Policy ensures there is a standardised approach to both internal and external moderation and the role of External Examiners.

3. ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

The University is asked to cover how the institution’s governance structures provide assurance that the value of our qualifications is protected.

The University’s Academic Board retains ultimate oversight and accountability for all aspects of the University’s regulatory framework, as well as policies and procedures for assessment and examination of the academic performance of students and procedures for the award of qualifications. Academic Board is chaired by the

University's Vice-Chancellor. Membership includes the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Chief Operating Officer, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Faculty representatives and Students' Union representatives. Whilst the development and/or approval of a number of sub-regulatory procedures may be delegated to its committees or senior representatives, the Academic Board retains ultimate oversight and accountability for all aspects of the University's regulatory framework.

The Education Committee has delegated responsibility for the oversight of all taught provision, including responsibility for the maintenance of academic quality and standards. Adherence to the University's Assessment Regulations is assured through Assessment Boards, convened on behalf of the Academic Board, and comprising senior academic staff and designated External Examiners. As part of the University's Assessment Board Procedures, Assessment Boards are attended by a Chief External Examiner, who is responsible for confirming their satisfaction with the standards and conduct of the Board, and with the integrity and equity of the University's processes for conferring awards.

The Education Annual Review (EAR) process, which has been in place since 2017, assesses Departmental and Programme-level performance against institutional objectives, and ensures appropriate levels of accountability for the Education Strategy KPIs. Education Annual Review meetings take place for each Department, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and with scrutiny informed by a dataset and qualitative information. Data examined by EARs includes student entry tariff, Level 4 – Level 5 progression, differential student outcomes and good honours outcomes. Actions are targeted around local enhancements to the student experience and progress towards achievement of the KPIs and tracked through Faculty and University committee structures. From 2019/20, EAR meetings had authority to require programmes to submit for full re-approval.

One of the core sources that informs the EAR process is External Examiner feedback. Through provision of an annual report, External Examiners affirm the ongoing maintenance of academic standards, comment on student performance and highlight any areas for enhancement.

4. CLASSIFICATION ALGORITHMS

The University is asked to describe its classification algorithm and the rationale.

The University's Assessment Regulations for Undergraduate, Taught Postgraduate and Postgraduate Research programmes detail the University's classification algorithm. Any proposed changes to the Regulations are scrutinised in detail by a working group of senior academic and professional services staff and elected Students' Union officers, before ratified proposals are taken forward for approval through the committee structure. Changes are only implemented where there is demonstrable evidence that there will be no adverse impact upon the student experience, and that standards will continue to be maintained.

The Classification Algorithm referenced in the Assessment Regulations is applied across the Institution. There is no opportunity to exercise discretion when determining degree awards outside of what is detailed in the Assessment Regulations. Whilst the University applies the same classification algorithm to the overwhelming majority of its partnership arrangements, due to professional accreditation reasons a minority of partnership arrangements use an amended algorithm.

The University reduced the re-assessment entitlement from two attempts to one attempt from academic year 2019/20.

The University's Student Life (<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/student-life/teaching-and-learning/assessments>) pages provide further information about assessments, including the University's Assessment Regulations.

5. TEACHING PRACTICES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The University is asked to cover whether there have been any enhancements to teaching, resources, support or curriculum that have impacted on degree classifications.

Manchester Metropolitan University launched its new Education Strategy in 2023, this sets out the University's goal to provide all students with an active learning experience, consisting of collaborative and enquiry-led processes, supported by appropriate pedagogies and resources. The University will seek to utilise the excellence and relevance of its research and practice-led teaching and learning to ensure the best possible outcomes for its students. Projects and initiatives that are generated to operationalise this Strategy will be included in future versions of the Degree Outcomes Statement.

The RISE programme curates and credits a range of activity focusing on employability, confidence building, and mental wellbeing. Opportunities include volunteering abroad, gaining work experience or learning a new language, alongside their usual degree. RISE is open to all students but is proactive in encouraging students at risk of disengaging from the University, or from poor employment outcomes. A range of measures took place over 2021/22 to expand and augment the offer, and engagement with RISE has grown considerably over the past academic year, especially amongst the students most likely to benefit from it.

Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme is an academic support service for students that takes the form of student-led, timetabled, coordinated group study workshop. In PAL sessions, students reflect on course content, share knowledge and develop skills as a group through activities. PAL Leaders are from a higher year group and share their first-hand experience of the student journey. The scheme supports students academically whilst also creating learning communities.

'My Five-Year Plan' (My 5YP) launched in September 2021 and provides undergraduate students with a detailed framework which starts from induction and continues through to two years after graduation, with clear routes that boost both personal and professional development. Planned benefits include a dynamic and well-managed personal tutor and student learning community, and improved graduate outcomes and alumni take-up. My 5YP works with existing University services, such as RISE. Students are encouraged to complete at least one My 5YP cycle per academic year, with support from their personal tutor.

Throughout 2021/22 the University Teaching Academy (UTA) has played a crucial role in supporting the development of educational practice, promoting innovative and effective approaches to teaching and assessment, and informing institutional thinking about the organisation of education. The UTA has stepped up its activity in providing resources to support staff in enhancing the inclusive learning experience for students

and in supporting the move to semesterisation described below. This has included developing an online toolkit for Addressing Awarding Gaps and guidance for supporting international students. UTA also provides support in relation to enabling career development, enhancing performance, facilitating leadership and supporting curriculum development. The UTA provides core educational development opportunities through the Postgraduate teaching qualification, AdvanceHE Fellowship, the Future Educational Leaders programme for the Education, Pedagogy and Citizenship (EPC) pathway, and a comprehensive workshop programme explaining the resources and providing opportunities for staff to share good practice in learning and teaching that has attracted over 2000 participants.

It became increasingly clear during the 2019/20 academic year that the University could not rely on a return to normal conditions for the start of the next academic session in September 2021. There remained a high level of uncertainty about the kind of restrictions the University would be facing, and the high probability of significant restrictions around social distancing, contact tracing, international travel, and localised lockdowns. Following extensive consultation, the University Executive Group (UEG) made the decision that the University would continue to deliver via the block teaching delivery framework successfully rolled out the previous year. This framework is based on four, sequential six-week delivery blocks of 30 credits, each followed by an assessment week. This allowed the potential to flexibly blend online and on-campus delivery methods in the event of the introduction of less stringent social distancing requirements.

The University undertook an extensive review of its academic delivery model during 2021/22, which included an analysis of approaches taken by other institutions and engagement the academic community and students. Following this review, the University moved to a semester-based teaching and operations model for the 2022/23 academic year. The model breaks the academic year down into two semesters, the autumn semester and the winter semester, consisting of 22 teaching weeks in total. A semester-based approach will allow for both curriculum enhancement and extra-curricular activities, particularly those that relate to employability. During the 2021/22 academic year a dedicated workstream of the Semesterisation Project was established to undertake a full review of the University's Assessment Regulations to ensure optimal alignment to the new delivery model. All aspects of the Regulations were benchmarked against sector practice and national guidelines on quality and standards, with adjustments modelled against student performance data. As a result of this exercise, a range of enhancements to the Regulations were implemented for 2022/23, following approval by Education Committee and Academic Board.

The University is committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of its students, and offers a range of support, including appointments with our specialist teams, who can make recommendations based on a student's needs and make referrals to other support services, group wellbeing workshops and courses, online self-help information and wellbeing podcasts. The support services that students have access to during their time at the University include:

- Counselling, Health & Wellbeing, which provides individual counselling and mental health support.
- Student Hubs, which provide a first point of contact for all student matters, including finance, timetables and careers advice, and refer to specialist support if required.

- Academic and Study Skills, which supports students by running self-selecting provision such as one-to-one appointments, workshops and drop-ins, as well as offering bespoke input into units.
- Disability Service, which works with students to provide advice and information about the support that is available to them.
- Library workshops, which help with studies and research skills.

The University continues to make a considerable investment in transforming its estate to ensure that it is fit for purpose, enhances the student experience and supports the highest quality research and training.

Academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 were periods of unprecedented change. The University will continue to review the impact of these changes through its usual governance routes to ensure their impact on degree outcomes is evaluated.

6. IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICE AND ACTIONS

The University is asked to state examples of good practice in any aspect of classification.

Institutional wide assessment regulations have been in place for many years, along with associated policies and procedures. The University has robust mechanisms in place to ensure its regulations, policies and procedures are rigorously reviewed. Assessment regulations are managed through core University systems.

The Education Annual Review (EAR) process, referenced in section 3, is an effective method of identifying improvements for assessment and marking that has direct input from the Students' Union. Actions from the EARs are followed up with focused professional development opportunities that are always aimed at improving assessment literacy and decision making.

As described in section 3, External Examiners play a key role in verifying the standard of assessments and sharing best practice from across the sector. External Examiners are asked to note examples of good practice in their annual reports. These reports are sent to Programme Leaders and academic managers, and the examples of good practice are reflected in the analysis presented to EAR meetings. Staff engagement with the AdvanceHE/OfS Degree Standards Project on External Examining has had a positive impact on the assessment literacy of the University's staff and has improved practices.

7. RISKS AND CHALLENGES

The full impact of students in higher education being taught online for periods of the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years on degree outcomes has yet to be fully determined.

The University has found that additional support has been required for students during the progression from Level 4 to Level 5 over the past two academic years, which is perhaps due to lockdowns and periods of school closures impacting on student's experiences and confidence levels to study at a tertiary level of education. The University has experienced a significant increase in demand from students for support from its Counselling, Mental Health and Wellbeing services since the pandemic.

Given these factors, and the efforts made to support student progression the University is reviewing:

- the support it provides for students at key transitions, particularly from Level 4 to Level 5;
- the processes and support that are informed by student attendance data; and
- the provision of support services for students to ensure they are effective and responding to student's needs.

The University strategically assesses its taught portfolio according to metrics and performance as part of its drive to improve quality, consistency and the student experience. In addition to this, the University continually strives to improve how it supports its students both in their academic work and wider student life. It is a reasonable assumption that these activities will impact the University's degree outcomes and may well result in an increased number of good honours awards.

The University is committed to developing its understanding of what factors can affect student performance, (e.g. socio-economic, entry qualifications, ethnicity) to address differential student degree attainment and graduate outcomes. The University's Access and Participation Plan and Education Strategy are focused on building on the University's strong foundations in these areas and making further improvements.

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