



BISHOP
GROSSETESTE
UNIVERSITY

Degree Outcomes Statement

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Document Administration

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Version Number	Date Authorised	Summary of Key Changes
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1.0	8 July 2020	Approved by University Council

1. Institutional Degree Classification Profile

Every year since 2014/15, around 460 students have been awarded an undergraduate honours degree from Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU). The proportion of students with an upper degree (i.e. 2:1 or 1st) has averaged 69.3% (see Figure 1) with fluctuation of $\pm 2.6\%$. There was a modest rise of 3.5% to 70.2% in 2018/19, though this remained below the sector average of 76.7%, which had also shown a greater increase of 5.2 % since 2014/15.

Amongst the upper degrees there has been an increasing proportion of 1st class awards. The proportion of 2:2 awards has fallen slightly, with 3rd class awards mainly static.

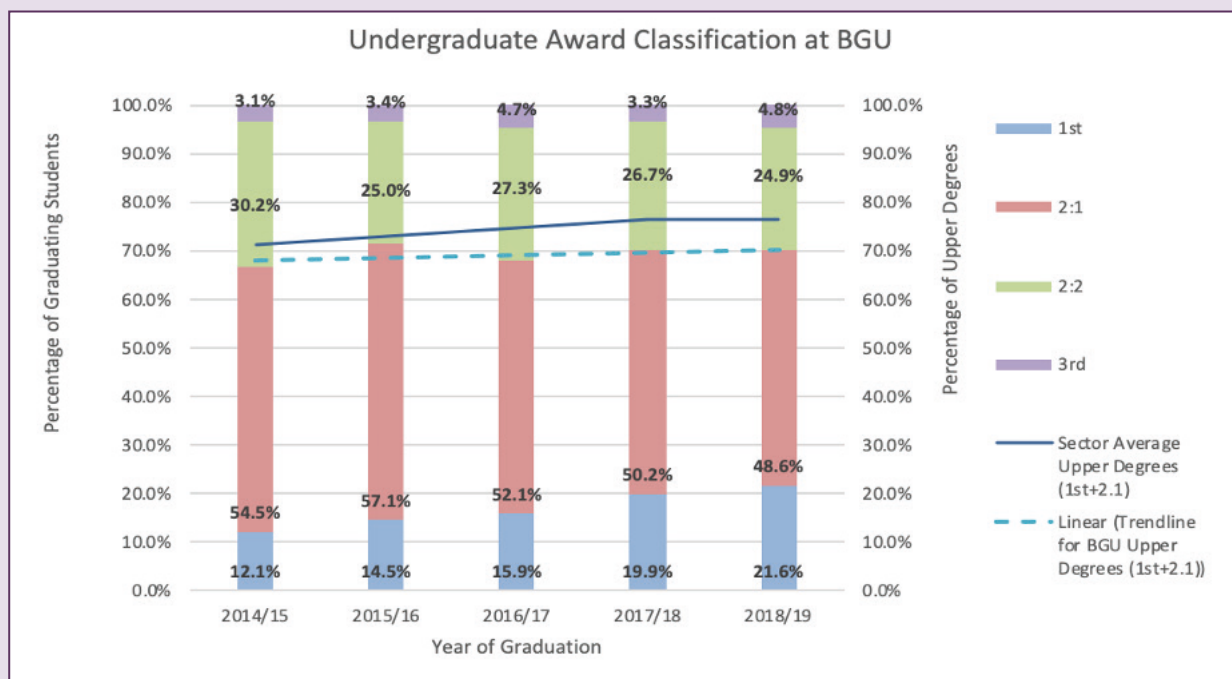


Figure 1: Honours undergraduate awards at BGU, 2014/15 – 2018/19

The distribution of awards across different subject areas varies within year and from year to year. In 2018/19 the proportion of 1st class awards ranged from 5.6% to 40% and for 2:1s from 29% to 59%. This variation is explained, in part, by the relatively small cohort sizes in the relevant subject areas and different entry grade profiles across subjects.

The data show that the proportion of upper degrees achieved by students under-represented across the Higher Education (HE) sector (i.e. students from low economic or participation backgrounds, ethnic minority students, mature learners and students with a known disability) is typically within 5% of the graduating cohort as a whole. The University's [Access and Participation Plan](#) provides more information on how it is reducing the attainment performance gap for specific groups.

In comparison to the sector as a whole, since 2014/15 BGU has shown a more modest increase in the proportion of upper degrees awarded. The improved performance at BGU reflects a combination of a steady rise in the average tariff of entry qualifications and the significant investment in devising, resourcing and delivering the Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Strategy since University status was granted in 2012. There are no emerging trends in the fluctuating differences between different subject areas and groups of under-represented learners in HE.

2. Assessment and marking practices

Consistent with the *Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (FHEQ), [BGU's credit framework](#) informs the design and (re)validation of awards as well as their assessment arrangements. External engagement with subject specialist peers and industry sector representatives is incorporated at the validation and revalidation of programmes, as well as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) accreditation and endorsement, to confirm the programmes' currency, relevance and alignment to the quality threshold associated with FHEQ level 4 or higher.

To support consistency, assessments are marked anonymously using FHEQ level-appropriate criteria referencing and are subject to processes of internal sample verification and second marking. For programmes delivered by collaborative partners, there is a process of across-partner moderation of briefs, marking standardisation events and grade verification by BGU staff.

External Examiners from other HE institutions are appointed, following sector adverts and a robust assessment of potential applicants, for four-year terms to each of the subject areas. Following inductions to the University's Codes of Practice and the relevant academic area(s), the External Examiners, in line with the [Code of Practice for External Examining](#), moderate assessment briefs, conduct sample verification of assessment grades across all modules and attend the Boards of Examiners to assess consistency of assessment practice. The subsequent External Examiner reports feed into the academic assurance processes of the university. Students who believe their academic performance may have been negatively affected by an unforeseen circumstance may submit an [extenuating circumstances claim](#) which is managed centrally to ensure objectivity and consistency.

Quality is assured through the Annual Monitoring Review (AMR) process. Data-driven reports from each programme include year-on-year comparisons and trend analyses, as well as feedback from

External Examiners, student evaluations and HE sector benchmark data. The performance of collaborative partnerships for the delivery of BGU awards is monitored via the Joint Board of Studies and mirrors BGU's programme-level process.

Whilst assessment and marking are prominent within BGU's commitment to continual enhancement, there have been no step-changes in practice over the last five years.

3. Academic governance

The University's [academic regulations](#) provide the overall governance framework for all awards offered by BGU. The AMR process (including the arrangements for collaborative partners) is overseen by Programme Committees and, in turn, by the University's Academic Enhancement Committee, which reports to Senate. It culminates in an annual Academic Health of the Institution Report, which is scrutinised and approved by Senate and University Council.

Marking practices are subject to moderation, and cross-moderation in partnership arrangements, to ensure consistency of practice. Assessed work, marks and feedback are available to External Examiners who assist with ensuring the maintenance of academic and professional standards as appropriate, and in accordance with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. External Examiners also ensure that the assessment process evaluates student achievement fairly and rigorously against the intended outcomes of the module/programme of study in accordance with BGU's regulations and policies (including the conduct of Boards of Examiners). External expertise also informs BGU's annual monitoring and appropriate periodic reviews.

Prior to being finalised this Degree Outcomes Statement will be debated at the Academic Enhancement Committee, Senate, the University's Academic Advisory Group (made up of academic staff and members of University Council, including members with experience of the HE sector) and University Council.

4. Classification algorithm

The University uses a consistent [degree classification algorithm](#) for all of its undergraduate programmes. The algorithm calculates the 'classification grade average' (CGA) by including all modules and attaching equal weighting to performance at Level 5 and Level 6. The CGA does not embrace 'exit-velocity' (where improved performance at Level 6 carries more weighting than at Level 5) – see section 7. Students are allowed two resit attempts subject to the volume of failed credits being carried at each point. This is outlined further in the University's [Regulations for Undergraduate Awards for Students Enrolling from September 2018](#). The zones of consideration for uplift criteria are outlined in the same Regulations. Consideration of how these relate to sector norms is outlined in section 7 below.

The University monitors sector guidance in relation to degree algorithms and standards. The degree algorithm was last reviewed in 2019 and, with no changes made, it has remained consistent over a

period of time (15 years) . The algorithm is outlined in the [Regulations for Undergraduate Awards](#) on the University website and is explained to students in programme inductions and reiterated at the start of Level 5 and Level 6. The steadily improving degree outcomes demonstrated in Figure 1 have been achieved through ‘learning gain’ rather than through changes to the method of calculating the award.

5. Teaching practices and learning resources

Dedicated tutoring by subject academics and support provided by professional service teams - e.g., Library, Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), Student Advice - enable students to engage effectively and demonstrate learning gain.

Nested learning objectives for the programme, module and teaching session are clearly stated at each level. Assessment is explicitly aligned to module learning outcomes and self- and peer-assessment helps students understand the purpose and value of assessment. Feedback on assessment supports students’ development, progression and attainment and provides a basis for personal tutorial support and goal-setting.

Since 2014/15 BGU has delivered an ambitious programme of development to the estate and facilities including the creation of CELT, the building of new and refurbished modern classrooms, an enhanced virtual learning environment and integrated reading list management software.

The University has developed an institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching. Academic staff are appropriately qualified; 82% hold a teaching qualification and 70% are Fellows of AdvanceHE. They are supported to be reflective practitioners through staff induction, Continuing Professional Development opportunities (including BGU’s annual learning and teaching conference), performance review and peer observations.

The University’s strategic decision to maintain smaller cohort and teaching group sizes allows for a personalised approach to learning. Personal tutoring is captured in the Personal Development Plan used by all programmes and integrated within a net of personalised support (advice and counselling; learning, teaching and assessment support and adjustments) provided by professional support services, including the Library, Student Advice, CELT, Chaplaincy, the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Service and the Students’ Union.

The effectiveness of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is informed by listening and responding to the student voice through student representation, module evaluations, BGU-SU student-staff subject liaison meetings, annual National Student Survey / BGU Student Satisfaction Survey and AMR reports.

6. Identifying good practice, and actions

At BGU, we recognise that enhancements to resourcing and delivery of learning and teaching bring about genuine and sustained learning gain. With over 60% of our students identifying with at least

one of the groups of under-represented learners in HE (see section 1), positive outcomes for all our learners are especially important.

The degree awarding regulations have remained constant for 15 years and any proposed changes are guided by reflection on practice from across the sector and careful data modelling. For example, some of the University's external examiners had speculated recently that by failing to accommodate 'exit velocity', the existing algorithm militated against some undergraduate students achieving higher award classifications. During 2018/19, the Quality Assurance Committee commissioned a review of the honours degree classification algorithm. Using the [UKSCQA](#) review of degree classifications as context, BGU classification data for 2017/18 were modelled using four algorithms reflecting an increasing emphasis on Level 6 performance (Level 5: Level 6 ratios of 50:50, 40:60, 30:70 and 20:80). The findings showed that the best cohort performance profile was secured from the current 50:50. It was concluded that there was no immediate need to adjust the algorithm which was then reported through the committee structure to University Council. BGU's external examiners were briefed on the findings and they commended the review.

7. Risks and challenges

The national review of degree classification algorithms by the [UKSCQA](#) in 2018 demonstrated variation across the sector. The algorithm used by BGU is amongst the more 'conservative' and includes all modules (i.e. no removal of lower performance grades) from Levels 5 and 6 which are weighted equally (see section 4).

This provides a challenge as some exit velocity might be expected to be beneficial for some BGU students, who may need the whole 3 years to achieve their academic potential. In addition to the review described in section 6, further consideration needs to be given to how the current algorithm, the study behaviour of students and the current uplift criteria with a 3% border-zone all combine to work together. Over the next 3 to 5 years, the University will seek to develop and introduce a revised algorithm that incorporates some exit velocity and narrows the 'uplift zone' whilst not creating an artificial step-change in its degree outcomes. The potential risks posed within this exercise will be carefully managed by careful data modelling.

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