



## University of Salford Degree Outcomes Statement 2020

In keeping with the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) statement of intent on degree classification (May 2019) the University of Salford is pleased to confirm that we share the UKSCQA's commitment to the protection of the value of UK degrees. This statement sets out how we are fulfilling, and will continue to fulfil, this commitment.

### Institutional Degree Classification Profile

In the last three years, the University of Salford has awarded a lower proportion of First and Upper Second Class degrees than sector average (See tables 1a and 1b). The overall proportion of such awards has remained reasonably steady during this period with a bandwidth of approximately 4% points between the highest and lowest proportion awarded and no clear trend of either upward or downward movement.

Tables 1a and 1b do however highlight that, within the so called 'Good Honours' band (First and Upper Second Class), between 2014/15 and 2017/18 we awarded a higher proportion of First Class and lower proportion Upper Second Class degrees than sector average. As a consequence of changes to our approach to classification boundaries, the proportion of First Class awards reduced by approximately 6% points in 2018/19 to bring it in line with sector average with a net drop in Good Honours awards of ~2% points.

Table 2 shows the distribution of classifications across each of the Schools for 2018/19. The highest proportion of First Class awards is found within the School of Science, Engineering and the Environment (SEE: 34.2%), a pattern which is consistent with outcomes across the sector (sector average for equivalent disciplines = 32.5%). SEE also award the lowest proportion of Upper Seconds resulting in this School awarding approximately 6% points fewer Good Honours awards than equivalent subject areas across the sector. The high proportion of First Class awards in SEE is in line with the subject norms and reflects the nature of both the student cohorts and pedagogic practice. However there are relatively fewer Upper Second Class awards than at other providers, the reasons for this are less obvious and are being investigated as part of the normal cycle of academic review within the School. By contrast the School of Arts and Media (SAM) award the greatest proportion of Upper Seconds and the lowest proportion of Firsts. Overall, SAM has the highest proportion of Good Honours awards, consistent with the pattern across the sector where the same is true.

The University of Salford is committed to ensuring that all students are supported to succeed. Degree outcomes, split by Gender, Disability and Ethnicity of students, are monitored at institution level to identify any differences and inform policy. For 2018/19 there were no significant differences in the proportion of First and Upper Second-Class awards according to Gender and Disability characteristics. For Ethnicity there is a significant awarding gap for the BAME group in comparison with the non-BAME group. For 2018/19 Salford has seen this gap widen to 18 percentage points to just above that of the comparator group which stood at 17 percentage points for 2017/18. A working group has been created to investigate the reasons for the difference in award outcomes and implement corrective policy.

Table 1a Proportion of University of Salford undergraduate degree awards by classification 2014/15 to 2018/19

University of Salford	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
First class	1,048	30.97%	1,065	30.39%	1,112	30.95%	1,349	35.40%	1,091	29.33%
2(i)	1,364	40.31%	1,496	42.68%	1,388	38.63%	1,455	38.20%	1,578	42.42%
<b>1st &amp; 2(i)</b>	<b>2,412</b>	<b>71.28%</b>	<b>2,561</b>	<b>73.07%</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>69.58%</b>	<b>2,804</b>	<b>73.60%</b>	<b>2,669</b>	<b>71.75%</b>
2(ii)	781	23.08%	770	21.97%	824	22.93%	815	21.40%	870	23.39%
3rd/pass	191	5.64%	174	4.96%	269	7.49%	187	4.90%	181	4.87%
	3,384		3,505		3,593		3,806		3,720	

Table 1b Sector average proportion of undergraduate degree awards by classification 2014/15 to 2018/19

UK HE Sector	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
First class	81,638	22.01%	88,889	23.62%	100,943	25.76%	110,474	27.83%	114,230	28.38%
2(i)	183,680	49.52%	186,567	49.58%	192,395	49.10%	192,424	48.48%	194,600	48.35%
<b>1st &amp; 2(i)</b>	<b>265,318</b>	<b>71.53%</b>	<b>275,456</b>	<b>73.20%</b>	<b>293,338</b>	<b>74.86%</b>	<b>302,898</b>	<b>76.31%</b>	<b>308,830</b>	<b>76.73%</b>
2(ii)	85,250	22.98%	81,594	21.68%	79,513	20.29%	76,210	19.20%	76,346	18.97%
3rd/pass	20,338	5.48%	19,278	5.12%	19,023	4.85%	17,830	4.49%	17,330	4.31%
	370,906		376,328		391,874		396,938		402,506	

Table 1c Proportion of comparator group undergraduate degree awards by classification 2014/15 to 2018/19

Comparator Group	2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19	
First class	10,386	21.93%	11,426	24.55%	13,106	26.85%	14,039	28.16%	14,067	28.40%
2(i)	22,370	47.23%	21,944	47.15%	22,810	46.72%	22,811	45.76%	22,497	45.42%
<b>1st &amp; 2(i)</b>	<b>32,756</b>	<b>69.15%</b>	<b>33,370</b>	<b>71.70%</b>	<b>35,916</b>	<b>73.57%</b>	<b>36,850</b>	<b>73.92%</b>	<b>36,564</b>	<b>73.82%</b>
2(ii)	11,764	24.84%	10,603	22.78%	10,386	21.27%	10,394	20.85%	10,366	20.93%
3rd/pass	2,847	6.01%	2,566	5.51%	2,518	5.16%	2,604	5.22%	2,601	5.25%
	47,367		46,539		48,820		49,848		49,531	

Table 2 Distribution of University of Salford undergraduate degree classifications by School for 2018/19

	Awarded 2018/19										Total Awards (excluding UC/Ord)
	First		Upper Second		First and 2i (excluding UC/Ord)		Lower Second		Third Class/ Pass		
<b>Arts &amp; Media</b>	292	27.01%	553	51.16%	845	78.17%	199	18.41%	37	3.42%	1,081
<b>Business</b>	176	28.39%	255	41.13%	431	69.52%	153	24.68%	36	5.81%	620
<b>Health &amp; Society</b>	321	28.23%	449	39.49%	770	67.72%	303	26.65%	64	5.63%	1,137
<b>SEE</b>	302	34.24%	321	36.39%	623	70.63%	215	24.38%	44	4.99%	882
<b>UoS</b>	1,091	29.33%	1,578	42.42%	2,669	71.75%	870	23.39%	181	4.87%	3,720
<b>Sector (18/19)</b>	114,230	28.38%	194,600	48.35%	308,830	76.73%	76,346	18.97%	17,330	4.31%	402,506
<b>Comparator (18/19)</b>	14,067	28.40%	22,497	45.42%	36,564	73.82%	10,366	20.93%	2,601	5.25%	49,531

Table 3 Proportion of Good Honours awards for BAME and non-BAME graduates 2014/15 to 2018/19

Type	Ethnicity Summary	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Comparator	BAME	60%	60%	63%	63%	64%
	non-BAME	77%	79%	80%	81%	81%
Salford	BAME	58%	63%	59%	65%	59%
	non-BAME	77%	78%	74%	78%	77%
Sector	BAME	62%	63%	66%	68%	68%
	non-BAME	77%	78%	80%	81%	81%

## Academic governance

As the academic authority of the University, Senate maintains the quality and standards of the awards of the institution and in so doing protects the value of the degrees we award. Senate delegates responsibility for institutional oversight on academic quality assurance, standards, and the management of the curriculum for taught programmes to the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQAC). ASQAC, which includes two external members, consider degree outcome data annually and has confirmed that degree standards are good and that there are appropriate steps in hand to address differential outcomes linked to ethnicity.

At approval and periodic reapproval, programmes are benchmarked against FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements with input from both external academic and industry advisors to ensure that programmes present the most relevant and appropriate learning opportunities to students. Assessments are overseen by external examiners who act to verify the assessment design and confirm the appropriateness of the marks awarded. Our external examiners consistently confirm the quality of assessment and feedback practice. In addition to external examiners for all programmes, there is also an Institutional External Examiner (a senior member of staff from another university) who has confirmed the robustness of our process, having had access to all of the subject external examiner reports. Student satisfaction with assessment and feedback is also evident in the National Student Survey where above sector and benchmark results for those questions related to the quality and fairness of assessment and feedback have been consistently achieved.

Degree outcomes at collaborative partners are subject to the quality assurance processes as described above. Where provision is delivered in more than one location, Joint Boards of Study are held to facilitate collaborative management, with the same external examiner covering all programme iterations. Moderation and verification of assessment are also integrated across all points of delivery to ensure outcomes are consistently benchmarked to the same standards. No systematic differences in outcome have been reported.

We are committed to ensuring that external scrutiny is rigorous and effective. In 2018/19, University staff participated in the pilot of the Advance HE professional development course for external examiners. This course is now available for any University staff engaged in external examining or who are interested in becoming external examiners in future.

## Classification Algorithm

The University publishes the degree algorithm annually in Section 9 of the [Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes](#) which is made available to all students, staff and external examiners. For students who registered in or after the 2016/17 academic session, the Honours classification of Bachelor awards is based on the weighted aggregate of the best 100 Credits at each of Level 5 (25%) and Level 6 (75%), grade boundaries are set at 10% intervals from 40% (Third Class) to 70% (First Class). Prior to this (from 2013), the weighted aggregate of Levels 5 and 6 were calculated in the same manner but grade Boundaries were set at 40% (Third Class), 49.5% (Lower Second Class), 59.0% (Upper Second Class), 68.5% (First Class). Assessment Boards make awards on the basis of these boundaries with no bandwidth for borderline discretion or consideration of contextual factors.

The changes to degree algorithm made in 2013, were intended to address a disproportionately low proportion of students at the University of Salford gaining Upper Second and First Class degrees. This change was effective and saw a correction to the historical imbalance. However, other changes to the learning environment and experience,

as described below, contributed to a continued upward trend particularly with regards to the number and proportion of First Class awards. This trend was identified through routine monitoring of degree outcomes through the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQAC) and the grade boundaries adjusted to their current position for cohorts entering study from September 2016 (Senate minutes March 2016). The impact of this change is seen for graduates completing their studies in July 2019 where the anticipated reduction in the proportion of First Class awards is evident (Table 1a). Detailed modelling of how further changes to the classification algorithm may affect outcomes has been conducted on behalf of the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee. Senate agreed that this modelling indicates that the changes already introduced should bring the institutional classification profile in line with sector norms in 2019 and that further changes are not required at this time (Senate minutes December 2018).

### **Teaching, assessment and marking practices and learning resources**

Over the last five years, the University has focused its academic endeavour on a strategy of industry collaboration which has fundamentally changed our students' experience of learning. Our approach to teaching and assessment results in a personalised approach to learning which encourages students to actively engage in co-producing their outcomes such that these are not only benchmarked against programme and module learning outcomes and subject benchmarks but are also tailored to stimulate and stretch, resulting in their being propelled towards success. As a consequence, student satisfaction with assessment and feedback (as measured via the NSS) has been consistently in the first quartile.

The introduction of our Industry Collaboration curriculum design principles has been supported by a programme of staff development focused on teaching and assessment. New common terminology for assessment description and the consistent application of grade descriptors and marking criteria have contributed to improved student outcomes. All new staff undertake the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice to develop their teaching and assessment practice. Many staff have also gained Fellowship, Senior or Principal Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. We continue to evolve our approaches to supporting excellence in learning and teaching including through the creation of the University's Academic Career Framework and Salford Behaviours.

Many of the areas of particularly high student attainment share a similar profile of applied, authentic assessment and collaborative learning. For example, in the performing arts the curriculum is continuously co-created, informed and reviewed through engagement with academic experts in the field and industry. Teaching and assessment strategies are designed to provide a balance of technical teaching (to enable skill development) and context (in order to apply skills to real-world situations). At the heart of the discipline is the need for students to investigate and produce a creative output in response to a live brief. The provision of concerts, productions, workshops and masterclasses fosters an attitude of continual personal development, and tutor feedback is tailored to students' individual creative profiles. The opportunity to develop personal creativity and artistic excellence is central to the success of these programmes and is reflected in the high proportion of Good Honours awards.

In the School of Health and Society, our professional, values-based curriculum, learning outcomes and authentic assessment prepare students for the standards and real-world expectations of the health and social care sector. Programmes are largely anchored in the practice setting, making learning experiential and assessment, which includes continuous assessment by practising healthcare professionals, relevant and authentic. With extensive

engagement with employers, many assessments are aligned to real-life issues creating a perfect 'work ready' platform after graduation.

The University of Salford Students' Union (USSU) recently conducted a 'referendum' where students were asked to vote on where they wanted the USSU to focus its engagement with the University. The result emphatically supported the focus to be on 'Excellent Teaching'. Working together, through the USSU/University Partnership Steering Group, senior University staff and USSU Sabbatical Officers seek to co-create policy to enhance the student experience and, by so doing, support student success.

### **Identifying good practice and actions**

We have taken a number of steps to embed good practice with respect to the teaching and assessment processes that inform degree outcomes. We have established an Assessment Forum drawing colleagues together across all areas of the institution to debate and inform assessment policy and practice. Students have played a key role in the deployment of an institutional assessment template for communicating the rationale, task, intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria as well as developing methods to unpack tasks in class settings.

Action: The Assessment Forum will continue to act as a forum to inform the development of pedagogic and assessment policy.

School Progression Administrators have been introduced to support individual students at all stages of the student journey. They follow up all assessment non-submissions to identify any barriers to engagement and facilitate supportive intervention. The School of Health and Society has developed an Interprofessional Education Strategy which has been aligned to the development of the learner from entering as a student to graduating as a professional at the forefront of modern, collaborative working. Students work together in communities of practice and participate in key masterclasses from specialists in a specific field, for example, mental health, and then in their community of practice working on group activities.

Action: Building upon the enhanced capability to monitor student engagement, steps will be taken to evolve our student support strategies to enhance retention and student success.

Co- and extra-curricular activities developing student employability are central to our Industry Collaboration strategy. Examples of good practice can be found across the institution, for example Quays News offers students opportunities to fulfil a variety of roles involved in the production of live news broadcasts. Law students are able to gain professional experience in delivering legal advice alongside qualified mentors in our pro-bono community legal service SILKS and construction students engage in live build projects at the Constructionarium. Examples of best practice are captured and shared across areas to expand the number and range of opportunities available to students.

Action: Continue to build industrial collaboration into programme design and authentic assessment.

### **Risks and Challenges**

The University recognises the sector-wide risks to the reputation of UK HE through grade inflation and as described above is committed to maintaining degree outcomes and avoiding inflation. However, we also recognise the importance of addressing the differential in award



outcomes between BAME and other students and between students with a disability and those without. Efforts to remove inequalities and address the needs of such students will lead to an increase in the number of students achieving higher degree classifications. Movement towards more diverse delivery e.g. through the expansion of work-based degree apprenticeships may also create upwards pressure on classification outcomes as we are aware that our most authentic and engaging provision tends to lead to better student achievement.

Action: Working in partnership with the University of Salford Students' Union we will focus on addressing the awards gap between BAME and other students using a targeted approach in subject areas with the largest differentials in outcome.