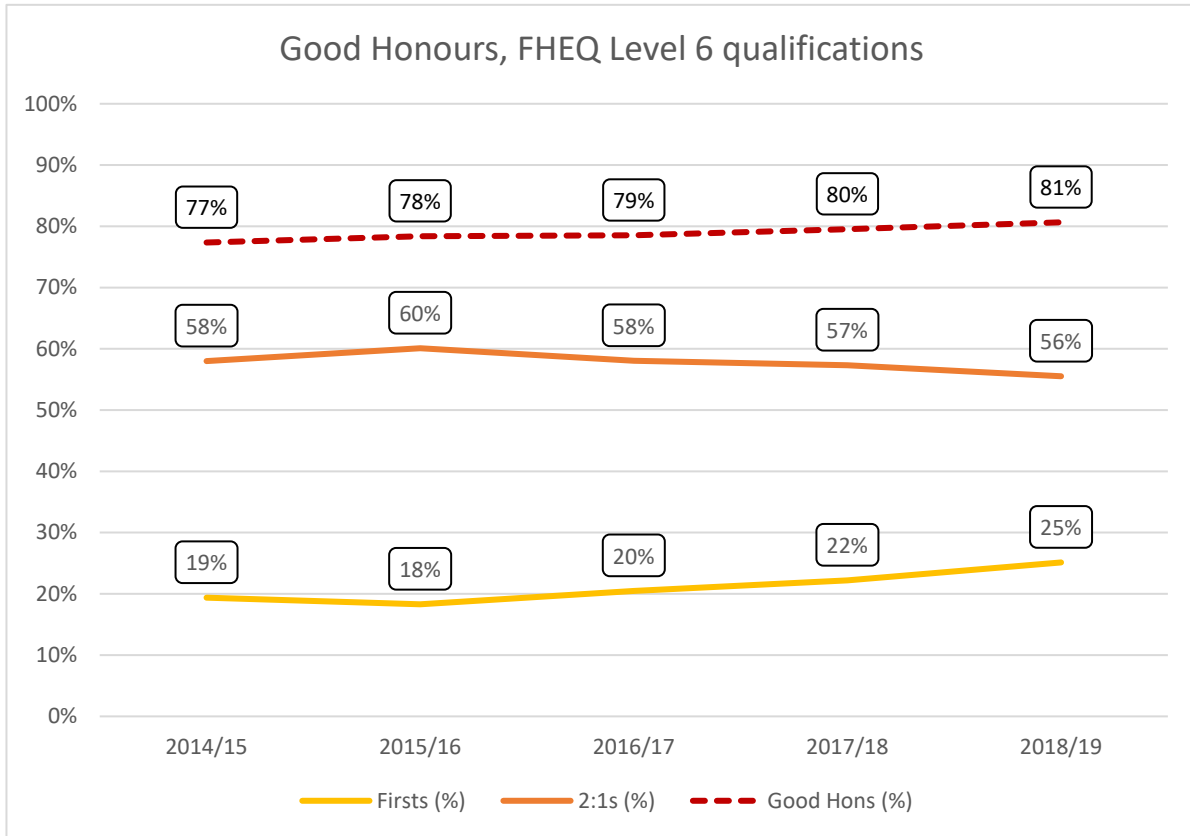


# University of Sheffield Degree Outcomes Statement

## 1. Institutional Degree Classification Profile

1.1 The institutional degree classification profile for the last 5 years, for FHEQ Level 6 is provided below.



1.2 Over this period the data show a 4% increase in good honours degrees awarded with a 6% increase in first class degrees awarded. Analysis by entry qualifications (tariff band) show a trend towards improvement across all bands, with a greater improvement for lower entry qualifications (AAB-). Although the overall good honours rate for students with higher entry qualification has only increased slightly, the rate of firsts for those students has increased markedly with a corresponding fall in the rate of 2:1s.

1.3 As set out in the University's [Access and Participation Plan 2020-25](#) the analysis of attainment rates (percentage of students achieving 1st or 2:1s) has identified:

- no statistical significance in the attainment gap for full time, first degree students from POLAR4 Q1 and IMD Q1 however there is a general trend towards improvement in attainment.
- a sustained attainment gap between White and BAME students. The gap is particularly pronounced amongst Asian and Black students, 19% and 17% respectively. The gap is however closing (from 31% in 2013/14 to 17% in 2017/18) for Black students, whereas for Asian students the gap has remained largely unchanged at 19%.
- Students from Mixed backgrounds are now close to having parity in attainment outcomes.
- A recent improvement in attainment rates amongst mature students.
- An attainment gap between students with a disability and those without of 2 percentage points although not statistically significant there has been a downward trend over the past three years.

The Access and Participation Plan sets out the targets and strategic measures that the University is taking to ensure that these attainment gaps are reduced and will be monitored by the Office for Students.

## 2. Assessment and Marking Practices

The University makes active use of sector reference points including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and the QAA Code of Practice in developing its programmes, its assessment and associated regulations and its policies and guidance. External examiners are appointed for every taught programme of study and provide an annual report in which they specifically confirm whether the programmes and assessment meet these sector reference points and the University regulatory framework.

To ensure consistency in assessment and marking, in 2012, the University introduced an institution-wide set of outcomes criteria for FHEQ Levels 4-7. This forms the framework within which departments publish and use both level and task specific assessment criteria for each major assessment type and the descriptors for degree classifications. This has been reviewed and updated (February 2020) following publication of the QAA Annex D outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6.

University policies, procedures and guidance are in place to ensure that the marking process is fair and reliable. These include policies and guidance on anonymous marking, graduate teaching assistants, moderation and exam boards.

In addition to policies and guidance, there is comprehensive support and training on assessment and marking practices for academic staff.

The University appoints an appropriately qualified external examiner for every taught programme of study to ensure that the methods of assessment used are credible, rigorous, equitable and are fairly and consistently conducted within relevant University regulations and policies; and that student performance and degrees awarded are of an appropriate standard nationally and are comparable to those delivered by other institutions in the UK. The [code of practice](#) sets out the criteria we use for appointing appropriately qualified external examiners to fulfill this role. The role of the external examiner includes reviewing primary evidence e.g. samples of marked work that have contributed to the assessment of students and confirms whether internal examiners have applied standards consistently and appropriately.

The University takes an equitable and consistent approach to maintain academic integrity and fairness to other students when dealing with requests for extenuating circumstances to be taken into consideration for matters relating to examinations and assessments (e.g. extensions to deadlines or progression and award decisions made by Examination Boards). Clear [information](#) is made available to students on how to report extenuating circumstances that have impacted assessment and how the University considers these.

A published academic appeals [procedure](#) is in place for students to apply for a reconsideration of a recommended grade for any module or degree classification or examination in the event that either there has been a procedural error, failure of supervision or that there is new evidence concerning mitigating circumstances that was not made available to the examiners and could not have been produced at an earlier stage. The number of academic appeals that are upheld is consistently below 0.1%, demonstrating that procedures are operating effectively.

### 3. Academic Governance

Council, as the University's governing body, has oversight of the degree classifications awarded and trends through reports from Senate (via the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee). Senate has responsibility for the academic governance of the University and is supported by a number of committees including the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee. Via this route the institutional overview of degree classifications and any trends are considered and policies, guidance and procedures relating to learning, teaching and assessment are developed and approved.

External examiners' reports provide key assurances that marking practices are being followed and standards upheld. In addition to Faculty review and use of the reports in routine quality processes such as Annual Reflection, an overview report is produced annually for Quality and Scrutiny Committee which brings together the findings from the reports and identifies any issues for consideration at an institutional level.

For those FHEQ Level 6 awards where learning and assessment is delivered through partnership arrangements the University appoints the external examiners, the forms of assessment are subject to University approval and there is involvement in the exam board where award recommendations are made. There are currently only 3 partner institutions involved in delivery of FHEQ Level 6 awards and no plans for growth in this area.

### 4. Classification Algorithms

The University has used a unified institution-wide algorithm for degree classifications since 2006-07, following work to enhance consistency in response to QAA institutional audit recommendations. The institution-wide algorithm ensures that all students are treated equitably. In summary:

- the grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5 and 6 count towards the degree calculation, with grades awarded at FHEQ Level 6 having twice the weight of grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5;
- The student must have been awarded sufficient credit at FHEQ Level 5 and above to be eligible for a classified degree. Credits are only awarded where students have met the pass mark. Students may resit failed units on one occasion for FHEQ L5 and above and the resit result is capped at a pass mark.
- Two calculations are used: the weighted mean grade and the distribution of weighted mean grades.
- Where the *weighted mean grade* and the *distribution of weighted grades* both indicate the same class of degree, this is the class of degree awarded. Where one of these calculations indicates a particular class of degree, but the other places the student in the borderline range to that class, they will be awarded the higher class. However, should one calculation indicate a particular class of degree but the other indicates the class below, the student will become a borderline candidate to the higher class. Or if both calculations place the student in the borderline range to a higher class they will also become a borderline candidate to the higher class. In both borderline situations the class of degree awarded will be decided by the Examination Board with reference to the weighted mean grade of the modules studied during the final Level.

The [University General Regulations for First Degrees](#) set out the approach in full. The method used is available on the University student-facing web pages, supplemented by an animated step by step [guide](#) and is also explained to students in course handbooks and materials provided by their academic department.

Credit is only awarded where a student has passed a module. At FHEQ Level 4 a student may resit a failed module on up to two further attempts and the result is capped at the pass mark (40). At FHEQ Level 5 or 6 a student may resit a failed module once and the result is capped at the pass mark.

Any future changes to the University's degree classification algorithm would only be made following careful consideration of the impact on students, the classification profile and maintaining the value of our awards over time.

## **5. Teaching Practices and Learning Resources**

Over the five year period the University has continued to enhance the quality of teaching, resources and academic practice to provide our students with opportunities to reach their potential. Examples of developments that have contributed to a positive impact on our student outcomes include:

- Since 2015 there has been significant investment ( £165.3m) in projects to support improvements to the physical spaces for teaching and learning across the campus, including the £81m Diamond Building. Open 24/7 the Diamond offers a unique range of general and specialist teaching spaces, student laboratory spaces, and social space for 5,000 students.
- In 2013 we opened a specialist skills development centre (301) to provide student skills training, support and development.
- The University introduced Encore lecture capture in 2017 in response to student demand and over 85% of lectures in enabled rooms are now being captured. This has provided students with a valuable tool to support their understanding, with high usage in particular during revision time.
- The Virtual Learning Environment provides access to online course materials whenever students need them and is heavily used for coursework and to work online with others.
- The University's Library provides high quality services to students and was voted No.1 for Library Services by our students in the 2017 Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey.

## **6. Review of degree outcomes statement**

The data in section 1 will be updated annually and the rest of the degree outcomes statement will be reviewed on a 2- yearly cycle, or if a significant change is introduced e.g. new regulations, degree algorithm or assessment policy.

June 2020

Academic Programmes Office