

## Institutional degree classification profile

A summary of degree outcomes at Bournemouth University (BU) for the period 2018/19 to 2022/23 is provided in Table 1. In summary there has been a reduction in the proportion of First and Upper Seconds over the period.

**Table 1: Overview of Bournemouth University degree outcomes 2018/19 to 2022/23**

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<b>Proportion of Firsts and Upper Seconds (%)</b>					
Overall 1st/2.i	79.4	81.1	80.8	78.2	75.1
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) – Home	68.8	64.7	71.8	65.4	59.5
Mature	73.5	75.2	77.1	79.1	81.5
Young	80.9	82.3	81.6	78.0	73.5
Female	82.7	84.8	85.0	84.2	81.0
Male	75.4	76.9	76.2	71.2	67.9
<b>Student Population Statistics (Graduating Cohorts)</b>					
Overall student numbers	3558	3523	3655	3400	2947
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) – Home	483	445	518	454	365
Average tariff	123.7	123.3	118.5	114.2	116.4

Degree outcomes vary across different student groups, as does the number of Home students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds graduating from the University. The number of BAME students as a proportion of the total student population at BU is small and therefore the data is prone to fluctuation, with the number of BAME students graduating in 2022/23 decreasing by 20 percentage points (pp) compared to the previous year. In 2022/23, approximately 60% of BAME students achieved a good honours degree. Action to address the BAME attainment gap as identified in the current **Access and Participation Plan** remains a priority. BAME attainment will be an objective in BU's new Access and Participation Plan covering 2025/26 onwards, with activity to address the awarding gap embedded in our intervention strategies. This is fully aligned to the University's 'Fusion' strategy by promoting progression and success for all students.

For the second consecutive year, mature students received a higher proportion of First and Upper Seconds than

young students: 81.5% compared to 73.5%. This follows a narrowing of the attainment gap since 2018-19.

Female students continue to outperform male students in their degree outcomes, with the attainment gap remaining relatively stable compared to the previous year (13.1 pp).

2022/23 marks the first year where the average UCAS tariff of students graduating has increased, by 2.4 points compared to 2021/22. Whilst there has been a modest increase in average tariff, this may have been inflated by alternative processes used to award grades in 2020/21, such as the use of centre assessed grades to assess school leavers. These students formed the majority of 2022/23 graduates. Access to schools and colleges varied a lot during the pandemic and the full effects are still unknown. However, there is evidence to suggest that 2020/21 enrolments entered higher education with differential knowledge and skills compared to those prior to them, potentially contributing to lower attainment rates seen in the latest data.

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BU's Academic Regulations, Policies and Procedures provide an overarching framework for the assurance of assessment outcomes against sector reference points and published criteria. This framework ensures alignment to sector standards and assurance of the effectiveness of these policies and procedures is maintained through regular monitoring, review and reporting. Oversight is provided through the academic governance structures at Faculty and University levels, reporting ultimately to the University Senate and University Board.

### BU's **Programme Structure and Curriculum Design**

**Characteristics** procedure outlines the requirements for programmes to align to recognised sector reference points including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Other reference points are also considered including characteristic statements applicable to certain types of qualification, subject benchmark statements and requirements published by Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Alignment against key reference points is confirmed as part of the programme approval and review process: **Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Policy** with individual programmes being subject to review on a periodic basis. External academics are appointed during programme approval or review to provide independent advice and an objective perspective on the alignment of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment methods.

The University has policies and procedures in place relating to assessment and marking practices, confirming expectations for both staff and students:

- **Marking, Independent Marking and Moderation: Policy and Procedure** outlines how assessed work will be marked to ensure all assessment is conducted in a manner that is consistent, fair and transparent. Assessment criteria are reinforced by the University's Generic Assessment Criteria to ensure consistency across programmes.
- Students may request special consideration through the **Exceptional Circumstances Policy and Procedure** which enables an individual's circumstances to be taken into account, allowing for fair assessment outcomes for all students.
- If a student wishes to appeal a decision of an Assessment Board the **Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure** is made available to all students and outlines the grounds under which an appeal would be considered.

External Examiners provide independent, expert and impartial oversight of assessments aligned to an award. The **External Examining: Policy and Procedure** outlines recruitment criteria as well as the process of appointment, ensuring that External Examiners are independent of the University. External Examiners submit an annual report to the University where they comment on the academic standard of degrees, the appropriateness of assessment methods, the distribution of marks, the consistency and clarity of the internal marking process and the administration of the process.

In 2022/23, all BU Examiners confirmed that student performance was comparable with similar programmes in other UK institutions and that BU's marking processes had been appropriately conducted.

## Academic governance

The University **Scheme of Delegation** identifies governance structures and responsibilities. As the academic governing body of Bournemouth University, Senate is ultimately responsible for policies and procedures governing assessment and examination of the academic performance of students, and academic standards, with delegation to the Education Committee where appropriate.

The University undertakes a holistic review of the outcomes and effectiveness of all quality assurance processes annually, including assessment. The Quality and Standards annual report provides assurance at an institutional level regarding the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards through quality assurance and enhancement processes. It also provides overall assurance that the University's assessment processes have been applied fairly and are aligned with sector recognised standards. The report includes award outcomes, the conduct of assessment boards, exceptional circumstances procedures, academic offences, External Examining arrangements and an analysis of reports from External Examiners. The report is considered at Education Committee and Senate. Executively, the Student Experience, Quality and Standards Committee and the University Board also consider the report and its supporting action plan.

In addition to the Quality and Standards annual report, Education Committee receives an annual report providing statistics including detailed data on degree outcomes which is used to benchmark outcomes against sector results, and historical internal data. The analysis of institutional trends is referred to Faculties and other relevant committees for further scrutiny and action as appropriate.

## Assessment and marking practices

The University's Standard Assessment Regulations are published and made available for students on the **Important Information** pages. BU's assessment regulations are within accepted sector norms and have been designed as a balanced system to ensure a fair and equitable outcome for all students that as a principle reflects consistency of performance and achievement within a programme of study. The assessment regulations also recognise the potential for students to demonstrate enhanced levels of performance later in their programme once previous learning has been fully embedded. Students are required to demonstrate, through their assessments, that they have met the requirements of knowledge and understanding for minimum threshold standards at and across each level. In support of these principles, BU's assessment regulations provide relatively limited discretion for assessment boards in borderline cases and avoid both the rounding up of marks and condonation of failed assessments. In addition, no discounting of credit is allowed in calculating the final degree classification.

Assessment regulations have limits on the volume of compensation and reassessment permitted at each level. Students are able to 'carry credit' up to a limited amount per level.

For undergraduate Honours provision degree classification is calculated using a weighting of 70% for Level 6 units and 30% for Level 5 units. Where students have joined a programme with advanced standing, classification is based on Level 6 units only (100%). Degree classification is reached by taking the most favourable outcome for the student from one of either two possible options: the 'credit-weighted aggregate' mark or the 'mark profile' rule.

In 2020/21, BU approved the removal of the 1% discretionary borderline policy following the mapping of the assessment regulations against the *Principles for effective algorithm design* (published by Universities UK (UUK) and GuildHE on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) in July 2020) in recognition that the use of any discretionary rule within a degree algorithm may not be consistently applied, can become subjective and lead to inequitable or unfair decisions. This was approved for implementation for new students from 2021/22, with the first cohort to be affected by the change graduating in 2023/24.

## Teaching practices and learning resources

BU2025 is BU's strategic plan, launched in 2018 as the successor to BU2018. As part of the 2018 strategic plan a centre of excellence in learning, the Centre for Fusion Learning, Innovation and Excellence (FLIE), was established to inspire and share effective teaching practice. The introduction of this Centre at the core of University structures has manifested itself positively in a number of ways, with students benefitting from the multitude of enhancements in the learning environment.

During the five year period on which this statement is focussed, a significant body of work has been undertaken to improve the student experience of assessment as well as students' understanding of the expectations of assessment. Over time this has had the effect of bolstering student performance and enabling students from a variety of social and educational backgrounds to achieve their full potential. For example, emphasis has been given to the provision of formative feedback within academic units and academic policy stipulates that all units include formative assessment within their design, enabling students to benefit from the principle of assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning. The introduction of a revised set of generic assessment criteria has improved the communication of assessment outcomes and feedforward into the next task. This has been supported by ongoing work promoting assessment literacy and greater emphasis given to more personalised student support and feedback.

In 2020/21 the University's generic assessment criteria has been updated to align with the QAA's Outcome Classification Descriptors (2020).

BU has further strengthened the teaching practices of its academic staff through support for Advance HE fellowship over the period covered by this statement. The 2022/23 HESA staff record dataset shows that BU performs well with 72% of staff holding a teaching qualification and/or

fellowship of Advance HE, 5 pp above the sector average of 67%, ranking BU 51st out of 134 Higher Education Institutions.

Other institutional initiatives likely to have contributed to improved student performance in more recent years include:

- **Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Review (AMER)** requires all programmes, departments and Faculties to review and action the institutional theme(s) which has been focussed on BAME attainment for the past three years, supporting more inclusive review of curricula as well as learning, teaching and assessment practices. An annual Inclusivity Health Check for departments is now embedded in the annual monitoring process.
- **Peer Reflection on Education Practice (PREP)** activities with different themes identified by Faculties from year to year, supporting continuous improvement in teaching and assessment practice;
- A very successful Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme which continues to evolve, and has become more focussed on assessment over time and is closely aligned to BU's Access and Participation Plan.

In response to student demand, both study spaces and provision of library computers has been increased. SCONUL statistics show that the University's spend on learning resources as a percentage of total library expenditure is in the upper quartile in the sector.

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## Identifying good practice, and actions

FLIE has been active in a range of interventions working with colleagues across all Faculties facilitating workshops on benchmarking, increased use of rubrics in assessment, improved guidance for students on expectations, and the development of support through a broad set of resources through the **Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Toolkit, and the Assessment and Feedback Toolkit**.

BU encourages staff to maintain a balanced portfolio of education, research and professional practice as fundamental to its strategy of 'Fusion'. Excellent teaching is underpinned by strong links to professional practice with 43.4% of current academic staff holding recognised professional affiliations. Furthermore, students benefit from teaching staff who are also engaged in research activities. The proportion of academic staff holding a Doctorate is currently 67.0%, a figure which has increased from 50% in 2012.

2021/22 HESA data relating to sandwich placement years in UK universities indicates BU has the 7th highest absolute number of students undertaking sandwich placement years, ranking 8th in the UK for the proportion of students undertaking placement years. The drive to encourage our students to undertake sandwich placements continues to have a positive impact on degree outcomes and employability; based on the 2020/21 Graduate Outcomes survey 79% of BU undergraduates are in highly skilled employment compared to 74% across the sector. In addition to placement opportunities, and to further support employability within the curriculum, the University places major emphasis on professional practice and employer relevance with 71% of BU programmes, recognised by Professional, Statutory and Regulation bodies (PSRBs) as compared to 29% within the sector as whole.

## Progress update October 2022

### 7.1 A review of progress against actions set out in degree outcome statements of 2020 and 2021

#### BU Degree Outcome Statement published in 2020:

Three actions were identified following the data analysis completed for the 2019/20 Degree Outcomes Statement. The three key actions were intended to further strengthen the institutional approach to monitoring student outcomes, and potential grade inflation. The actions and updates are detailed below:

- i. **A mapping of BU's generic assessment criteria to the QAA's Outcome Classification Descriptors.** The mapping to the QAA's Outcome Classification Descriptors was approved in May 2021 and implemented across the University in 2021/22.
- ii. **A review of BU's Assessment Regulations to consider how progression is supported, as well as areas of assessment board discretion (including rules for borderline cases) to ensure award outcomes reflect student achievement.** BU's degree algorithm was mapped to **UUK's Guidance on Principles of Effective Degree Algorithm Design**. Changes to the assessment regulations to remove the discretionary borderline policy<sup>1</sup> were approved for implementation for new students from 2021/22. The first cohort to be affected by the change will be graduating in 2023/24 and reflected in the Student Outcomes data for that year.
- iii. **A review of the policies and procedures that support effective internal moderation will take place, including the use of data to benchmark award outcomes, to ensure that qualifications awarded by BU hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards.** A strengthened approach to unit monitoring was one of the areas identified for improvement. The introduction of Unit Boards enabled an enhanced approach to unit monitoring that supported internal moderation, raised awareness regarding the potential for grade inflation and provided academic teams and Assessment Boards with a robust framework through which to monitor student outcomes including through data benchmarking, as part of the institutional approach to maintaining standards for degree outcomes.

#### BU Degree Outcome Statement published in 2021:

Five actions were identified in the 2021 Degree Outcomes Statement to support BAME attainment and narrow the attainment gap between underrepresented groups and the wider student cohort. These were aligned to actions to address Access and Participation Plan targets and milestones relating to BAME attainment and continuation. The actions and updates are detailed below:

- i. **Further analysis of the programme-level Inclusivity Health Check.** The analysis was completed and considered by Access Excellence and Impact Committee (AEIC) in December 2021 and enhancements were made to the Inclusivity Health Check (IHC) to further embed this activity as part of the annual monitoring process. Following this, translation of findings surfaced by the IHC and the institutional theme of BAME attainment and continuation into actions to address these gaps was evaluated and reported to the AEIC in December 2022.

- ii. **Further research into understanding the causes of the BAME attainment gap to develop actions targeted to address the gap.** This research was undertaken and reported to the Access Excellence and Impact Committee in December 2021. 2022 outcomes have also been evaluated and work is ongoing based on the research findings.
- iii. **Develop communication channels to share good practice in relation to BAME attainment.** The Digital Pedagogies Framework has been expanded to include good practice in the area of the inclusive curriculum to provide a single source of guidance for staff. The outcomes of the IHC and Student Curriculum Review project are being used to identify priority areas for enhancement.
- iv. **Identify lessons and principles from the experience of 2019/20 and continue those measures which can further reduce gaps, remove inequalities and achieve targets as defined within the Access and Participation Plan.** An analysis of the 2019/20 outcomes data indicated pass rates at level 4 improved where there was a move away from the traditional exam. This appeared to benefit certain student groups with non-traditional qualifications ie. BTECs. These findings will be taken forward as part of a wider assessment-focussed project considering continuation and attainment at BU led by the Fusion Learning Innovation and Excellence team.
- v. **To undertake further research to understand why certain underrepresented student groups are more likely to require support in their assessments via the Exceptional Circumstances policy and procedure.** The research found no difference in the reasons for Exceptional Circumstances submissions for students from underrepresented groups compared to other students, though there was some indication that students with caregiving responsibilities may be more likely to utilise the process. This analysis was considered by AEIC in September 2022. Further research will be undertaken into how students with caregiving responsibilities are supported. In the interim, the student communications, guidance and policies for all students around support for assessment and support to study will be reviewed in 2022/23. The impact of policy changes on underrepresented groups will continue to be monitored in the annual data analysis of Exceptional Circumstances and the increased use of Exceptional Circumstances generally, and by underrepresented groups, and is a discussion at the next Academic Registrars Council Quality Practitioner Group meeting. Other providers reported on similar trends around the increased use of Exceptional Circumstances at the Academic Registrars Council Assessment Practitioner Group meeting on 3 February 2023. In recognition of the data findings, BU is establishing a cross-institutional working group to review its exceptional circumstance policy and procedures in line with sector practice. Update May 2024 – a cross-institutional group collaborated to develop a set of recommendations for updating the Exceptional Circumstances policy, drawing on sector research, data and feedback from staff and student focus groups. The policy is due to be updated for 2024/25.

<sup>1</sup> BU's borderline policy was discretionary and allowed Assessment Boards to use academic judgment to uplift a result to the higher classification boundary if the credit-weighted aggregate mark fell within 1% of the borderline and the student's academic profile and overall performance justified the uplift.



## **7.2 A commitment to restart any outstanding actions paused during the pandemic with revised timelines, where they are still relevant**

Bournemouth University did not pause any actions identified in the Degree Outcomes Statement in 2020 or 2021.

## **7.3 An assessment of pandemic-related changes and the impact on degree classification, using pre-pandemic data (relating to 2018/19) as an appropriate benchmark and setting out how they will return to pre-pandemic levels by 2022/23**

The 2020/21 Quality and Standards Reports contains a detailed analysis of the impact on student outcomes of the temporary assessment changes introduced as part of the University's response to the pandemic. The analysis of 2019/20 data showed that overall student outcomes at BU increased marginally in 2019/20, with a slightly higher proportion of Good Honours achieved (81.22% in 2019/20 compared to 79.67 in 2018/19). It is likely that the 'No Detriment' approach implemented in 2019/20, as mitigation for students whose assessments were disrupted by the pandemic, influenced the higher proportion of Good Honours degrees observed in 2019/20 data.

The 2020/21 BU student outcomes data indicates that award outcomes appear to be returning to pre-pandemic levels. The proportion of Good Honours awarded in 2020/21 has decreased marginally with 80.9% Firsts and Upper Second awards combined compared to 81.22% in 2019/20. It is likely that the impact of the 'No Detriment' approach carried forward in the level 5 marks from 2019/20, and the continuation of mitigation policies that BU implemented in 2020-21, including increased flexibility for exceptional circumstances and extensions, and uncapped reassessments, will have contributed to the proportion of Good Honours awarded in 2020/21.

In 2022/23 BU has returned to standard assessment regulations and there are no further temporary amendments required as mitigation for students whose assessment experience was adversely impacted following the pandemic. The actions identified in the 2019/20 Degree Outcomes Statement have established a robust mechanism to monitor for potential grade inflation and take action where required. It is expected that the student outcomes

data for 2022/23 will continue to align towards 2018/19 levels. In addition to this, the impact of the removal of the discretionary borderline policy will be felt in 2023/24 at which point it is anticipated that outcomes data in certain subject areas will fall below 2018/19 levels.

The data for 2021/22 shows that BU has returned to pre-pandemic levels in terms of the proportion of Good Honours. Update May 2024 – for the second consecutive year, the proportion of Good Honours awarded to graduates remains below the pre-pandemic figure in 2018/19.

## **7.4 A commitment to further actions to address any areas where there is unexplained inflation**

BU is committed to maintaining effective oversight of student outcomes data through the robust approach to monitoring embedded in the quality assurance framework.

## **7.5 An explanation of how sector-supported principles on degree algorithms and external examiners are being followed**

The **UUK's Guidance on Principles of Effective Degree Algorithm Design** was applied as a tool to map the BU algorithm against during 2020/21. As a result of this mapping, further data modelling work was undertaken to test the impact of removing the discretionary rule<sup>2</sup> on all student groups. Academic Standards and Education Committee approved the removal of the discretionary rule for new level 4 and level 7 students from 2021/22 in recognition that the use of any discretionary rule within a degree algorithm may not be consistently applied, can become subjective and lead to inequitable or unfair decisions.

The Academic Quality Team has undertaken an initial review of the External Examining Principles published by UUK, GuildHE, and QAA in August 2022 and can confirm BU policy and procedure for external examiners align to the principles outlined in this document. A more detailed mapping will take place in 2022/23 to identify potential areas for enhancement in the overall approach to external examining at BU. Update May 2024 – the external examiner process is due to be reviewed as part of an ongoing project to review and update BU's processes for programme approval, review and monitoring.

<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1 on the previous page.