Degree Outcomes Statement, 2024

The University of Leicester is committed to ensuring that the value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.

The University's academic governance structure, led by Senate acts strategically to protect the value of qualifications over time. Senate monitors the effectiveness of the University's strategies implemented to achieve this aim.

This statement has been drafted on behalf of the University's Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee and covers five academic years up to 2022/23. The statement includes analysis of the University's assessment and marking processes, an outline of the academic governance structure, a summary of quality assurance practices, and an outline of awarding regulations and the institutional degree classification profile.

1.   Assessment and Marking Practices

Assessment practices are scrutinised through the programme development and approval process. Programme teams are required to reference relevant benchmarks to ensure that assessment criteria meet relevant sector reference points. Approval Panels include relevant external academic expertise to confirm academic standards and assessment approaches. External Examiners are appointed for every programme and confirm each year the appropriateness of the University's assessment, marking and moderation practices. The process of nominating, appointing and inducting External Examiners was reviewed and enhanced in 2022, and the University complies with sector best practice including the recent UUK and QAA guidance on the external examining system.[1] The University has in place standard Degree Classification Descriptors for level 6 in line with the UKSCQA descriptors[2] which are benchmarked against in programme development and approval process, and are reviewed by External Examiners for current programmes. The University seeks to continuously increased its level of staff with recognised teaching qualifications. The University delivers a range of professional development activities to staff in teaching roles which range from introductory self led online courses, to a full Postgraduate Certificate in Academic and Professional Practice, and support for staff to gain accreditation via the internal PEERS route.

There is a single consistent University wide Policy and Procedure for the management of mitigating circumstances and similarly for considering academic appeals, informed by the OIA good practice framework. In line with sector best practice the University operates limited self-certification for mitigating circumstances in relation to certain assessment types to allow students to take greater ownership of their studies and align more closely with the world of work.

The University framework for marking and moderation practice is set out in Senate Regulations. The University operates a three stage process. Marking and Moderation is undertaken in line with the

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[1]

[2] https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/annex-d-outcome-classification-descriptions-for-fheq-level-6-and-fqheis-level-10-degrees.pdf?sfvrsn=824c981_10

framework within Senate Regulations and supported by the provision of central guidance and training from the University's Education Services. This guidance is reviewed and updated annually under the oversight of the Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee.

Panels of Examiners consider and approve module level outcomes and a Board of Examiners determines overall student outcomes via the application of the progression and classification algorithms. Panel of Examiners are responsible for reviewing outcomes at module level and confirming that appropriate marking and moderation practices have been applied. These are subsequently confirmed by the External Examiners for the programme both at the Board of Examiners and through the annual reporting process. The University receives assurances on the operation of these processes via regular summary reports considered through the Education Committee and Senate. A summary report on the operation of all of the University's academic quality assurance processes is considered annually by the Governing Body, Council.

The University has recently developed and approved a new Policy on the role of Generative AI in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. The University believes that a balanced approach to the use of AI in learning, teaching and assessment is essential. It does not seek to outright forbid its use, rather provide a supportive and common-sense approach to outlining safe and responsible use. An overreliance on AI can negatively impact a student's learning as this can reduce engagement with the criticality and reflection that is essential for meaningful learning. Students at the University will receive the support that they need to be confident in the ethical, responsible and effective use of AI in learning, teaching and assessment. All assessments will state whether and how AI may be used within the assessment process, noting that AI must never be used to generate content that a student then presents as their own.

2. Academic Governance

Senate has ultimate responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards. This responsibility is delegated to the Education Committee. Senate is informed of developments through a report to each of its meetings and considers regular reports on each of the key quality assurance procedures. The operation of the academic governance framework is set out in a University level Code of Practice on Academic Governance which is owned by Senate.

The University operates standard quality assurance processes across the lifecycle of its programmes to ensure that they remain current and offer an excellent learning experience to our students. This includes programme development, approval and modification, annual monitoring, collaborative provision and a robust system of external examining to ensure that programmes are scrutinised and benchmarked against relevant sector standards such as the OFS B conditions, the UK Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and relevant PSRB requirements.

Each core quality assurance processes is governed by a Code of Practice which is approved by Senate. The monitoring of the assurance activities is undertaken by the Curriculum and Quality Sub-Committee which reports to the Education Committee. This range of processes, which include external input at relevant points contribute to the University's confidence in the academic standards of its award and their value over time.

Processes for the management of collaborative provision are set out in the Code of Practice for the Management of Higher Education with Others, and in the most recent QAA Higher Education Review (2016), were found to meet requirements and the associated risk level was confirmed as low. Robust processes are in place for the risk assessment, business case and academic approval of new partnerships. All aspects of course design, teaching, assessment and the student experience are scrutinised through the relevant approval processes. All standard processes for the monitoring of programmes are applied to collaborative provision, and these are supplemented by additional components, which focus on the particular complexity of partnership arrangements.

In 2020 and 2021 the University, like many others in the sector, introduced a range of policies to support students and protect their outcomes in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The relevant policies ensured that the onset of the global pandemic and its effects on the lives our students did not negatively impact their outcomes. In each case the relevant policy was developed using appropriate reference points and data to model the potential impact, and was approved by the Education Committee and Senate.

The University analysed the outcomes of these policies, taking into account feedback from External Examiners and other stakeholders such as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). This process informed the managed move back to standard regulations and processes from the 2021/22 academic year.

3.   Classification Algorithms

The University's undergraduate degree classification algorithm is set out in Senate Regulation 5[3]. The vast majority of Students graduating in 2023 were under the scheme of classification which applied to students commencing their studies in 2018/19 or later.

The University's degree algorithm is designed to ensure academic standards by the limitation of credit which may be compensated or failed, recognising the particular role that the final year of study plays in terms of meeting learning outcomes and ensuring that borderline regulations and rules around compensation would not contribute to grade inflation. This algorithm was also benchmarked against the Principles for Degree Algorithm when they were released by the UKSCQA in July 2020[4].

Students may be awarded a classification either on the basis of their credit weighted average or by a combination of their average and preponderance of credits. Students falling into a defined borderline category are reviewed by the Board of Examiners and a decision made on whether to promote to a higher classification according to set criteria. These align to level 6 programme intended learning outcomes, such as independent analysis and research, which reflect the requirements of the FHEQ and the Characteristics Statement for Bachelor's Degrees.

One capped re-sit attempt is allowed for any failed module as standard. One further re-sit opportunity may be offered at the discretion of the Board of Examiners. A student achieving a mark of between 35-39% at module level may be granted compensation and credit for the module, subject to the

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[3] https://le.ac.uk/policies/regulations/senate-regulations/senate-regulation-5
[4] https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/principles-effective-degree-algorithm-design.pdf

achievement of a sufficient credit weighted average for the level and within an overall maximum amount of compensation available across the programme.

Degree classification regulations are set out to students in Senate Regulations, student handbooks and in the Digital Learning Environment. A Student Guide to Regulations and video guide are also provided. Students have access to University advice via their Schools and independent advice from the Advice Service in the Students' Union.

3.1   Impact of Covid-19

The University recognised that students graduating in 2023 would have experienced the impact of Covid-19 during their studies. The University put in place many allowances over the course of 2020 and 2021 for current students including the introduction of remote assessment, the opportunity to defer assessment and the removal of evidence requirements for mitigating circumstances claims. These various policies were removed from the 2021/22 academic year and therefore none were in place for finalists in 2022/23. No policies or regulatory amendments in light of Covid-19 applied to the calculation of awards or classifications for the 2023 graduating cohort, and there were no variations to other standard policies such as the Mitigating Circumstances Policy, which was applied in full.

The University considered the potential impact of some of the elements of previous COVID-19 related policies on the graduating cohort of 2023 and took action where appropriate. In response to feedback from external examiners and professional bodies the University undertook a strategic review of assessment approaches and determined where it may be appropriate to return certain forms of assessment to being campus based. All proposals to return to campus based assessment were reviewed by a University level panel, with specific conditions applied for the support of students through the provision of mock examination opportunities and specific preparation sessions.

3.2   Looking forwards

After 5 years of the operation of the Senate Regulations governing Undergraduate programmes the University undertook a detailed review. The review considered extensive internal and external stakeholder feedback, sector benchmarking and best practice. Revised regulations were approved in November 2023. The revised regulations set a single, clear minimum baseline for award through the removal of condonement and the simplification of the compensation system. The removal of borderline classification rules ensures consistency of academic thresholds whilst giving students appropriate opportunities to achieve a higher classification on the basis of their credit weighted average or their performance across their modules. The new regulations also limit students to two attempts at an assessment in the majority of instances.

The new regulations will come into force for students commencing in the 2025/26 academic year and are available online[5] along with supporting resources for their implementation.

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[5] https://le.ac.uk/policies/regulations/senate-regulations/senate-regulation-5/2025-26-study

4.   Institutional Degree Classification Profile

4.1   Overall Profile

After an increase in the 2020 and 2021 academic years the overall University rate of Good Honours reduced to pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

Distribution of Good Honours Awards for Mainstream and Pre-92 Providers - Shaded by Quintile
First degree qualifiers with a classified degree outcome (all modes, all domiciles)
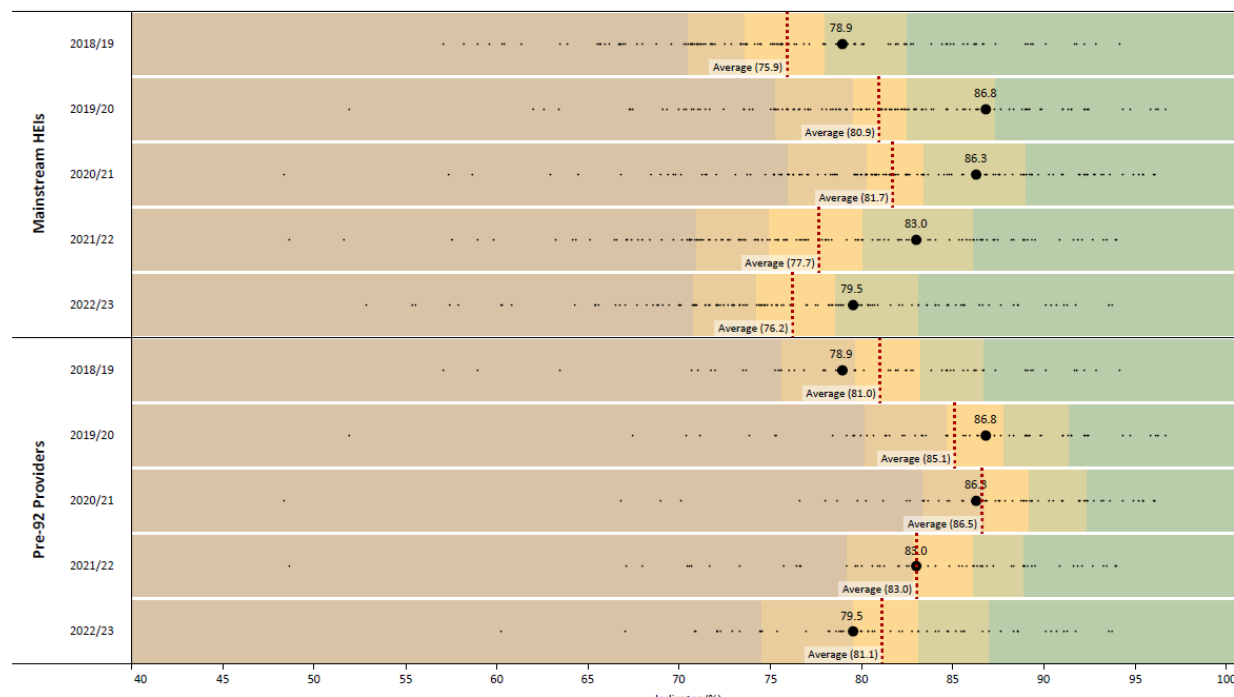
The plot shows a five-year trend in the percentage of good honours (1st and 2:1) awarded for all mainstream HE providers. Leicester's position is shown as the larger black dot and labelled with its percentage. The dotted red line in each year marks the 'sector' average. The background colour gives the quintiles with the green area showing the threshold for the top 20% highest awarding providers.

Source: HESA (Heidi database)

For 2023 the University's overall Good Honours rate was 79.5%. This compared with a sector average of 76.2% for all mainstream Universities. The University has consistently tracked above the sector average over the period although the gap has reduced slightly in 2023. When compared with pre-92 institutions the University's outcomes have been within 0.6% of the average for this group over the past three years.

There has been an observed pattern at sector level, including for the pre-92 grouping, of an increase in the period 2020 – 2022, falling back to the equivalent level from 2019 by 2023. The University of Leicester's outcomes have directly tracked this pattern. The change in good honours in 2020 and 2021 reflected the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic[6] and the actions taken to protect student outcomes in unprecedented circumstances.

The reduction in Good Honours outcomes in 2022 and 2023 reflect a general reduction of higher awards within the wider sector post-pandemic, where there was a drop of 5.5% from the peak in 2021. Despite the extent of the challenges faced across the pandemic period and immediate aftermath the University

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[6] https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-08/degree-classification-2019-20.pdf

has maintained a relatively consistent position within the sector, remaining within the same quintile for the award of Good Honours across the five year period. A good honours rate of 79.5% in 2023 places the University 45th of 131 mainstream HEIs and 38th of 61 pre-92 providers. Over the last three years the University has retained the same broad ranking within the sector for good honours.

Metric	Academic Year	UoL	Mainstream HEIs					Pre-92 Providers				
			Decile	Quintile	Quartile	Rank	No. HEIs	Decile	Quintile	Quartile	Rank	No. HEIs
% GH	2020/21	86.3	4	2	2	41	131	7	4	3	39	61
	2021/22	83.0	3	2	2	40	131	6	3	3	35	61
	2022/23	79.5	4	2	2	45	131	7	4	3	38	61

Overall levels of Good Honours outcomes demonstrate that the University's award standards remain robust and aligned with the wider sector.

2023 also saw a fall in the percentage of 1st class awards made to 25.9%. This represents a slight re-balancing in the overall profile of Good Honours and reflects a general reduction within the sector for the number of first class degrees awarded. The extent of the reduction slightly exceeds that at sector level and will be kept under review.

4.2   Changes over time

The following plot compares the difference in the rate of good honours awarded in 2023 against those awarded in 2021 and 2022. UoL is designated by the dot in bold.
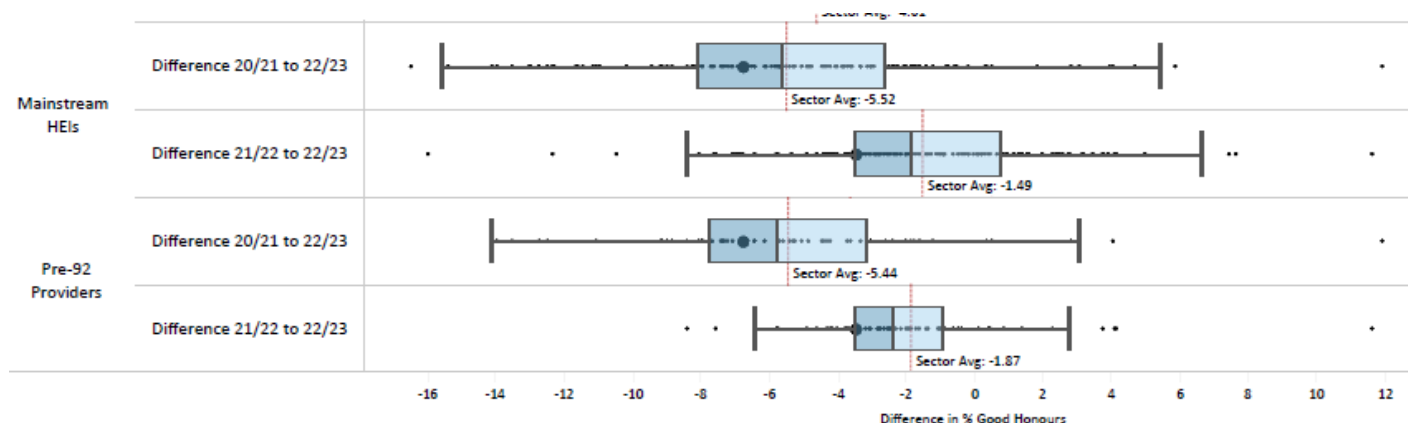
Source: HESA (Heidi database)

In 2022 and 2023 the University of Leicester saw a reduction in good honours outcomes which was greater than the average drop within the wider sector. This in part represents a re-adjustment following the atypical covid affected years. Pre-92 providers saw a slightly greater fall in good honours rates during this period than the wider sector and Leicester matches that trend.

The Office for Students (OfS) publishes an analysis of degree classifications over time with the most recent analysis (July 2024) covering the period 2010-11 to 2022/23. The OfS reported that the 'unexplained' difference, between expected and actual awards for all students achieving Good Honours level for Leicester in 2023 was 12.8%. This represents a drop of 5.4% from the previous measure (2022) and a drop of 8% from 2020. Overall the University is slightly above the sector average 'unexplained inflation calculation' for mainstream providers of 11.2% and ranks 42 of 98 providers (with degree awarding powers) by this metric. The OFS Unexplained analysis also demonstrates that the rate of inflation on first class degree awards for Leicester in the period is below the sector average, at 12.7%.

The gap in this measure reflects the extensive work undertaken within the University to enhance learning, teaching and assessment practice over this period. This commenced with the institution wide Curriculum Transformation process which saw all undergraduate curriculum revalidated against new principles for programme coherence and resilience, a new assessment strategy and the development of institutional baselines around themes such as Education for Sustainable Development. Continuous improvement has been sustained through a range of further strategic initiatives to enhance teaching quality and student outcomes. The recent award of TEF Gold in 2024 is testament to the success of the University in delivering beyond the baseline.

4.3   Closing the awarding gap

The University of Leicester is a selective institution with an embedded commitment to widening participation, diversity and equality. The University's [Access and Participation Plan](#) details the University's ambition and strategy to widen participation for the 2020/21 to 2024/25, and 2025/26 to 2028/29 academic years. The University remains one of the most diverse universities in the UK with 68% of its student population coming from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background.

The University has identified where gaps in access, continuation, attainment and progression have occurred over time and compared to the sector. The institution has many initiatives already in place to reduce the gap for under-represented groups in higher education set out in an approved and published [Access and Participation Plan](#) (APP). The Plan sets out the various actions and robust targets that the University has set to address the awarding gaps between different student groups.

The rate of Good Honours achieved by students of typically underrepresented groups is consistently higher at the University of Leicester than the sector average. In 2022/23 the rate of Good Honours achieved by Black students at the University of Leicester was 9.3% higher than the sector average, and for students from the most deprived areas (Q1 IMD 2019) it was 7.2% higher than the sector average.

Gaps in outcomes between some demographic groups are narrowing. The awarding gap between students from the most deprived areas and the least deprived areas (Q1:Q5, IMD 2019) has decreased by 1.1% and is now at -11%. However, the awarding gap between black students and white students has increased from -14.1% to -18.6%.

The University recognises that these gaps remain too high and, as set out above, has a range of projects in place to understand and address this issue. We were one of the very first Universities of Sanctuary and are a Quality Mark recipient for Carers and Care Leavers: these are just a few examples of our commitment to creating a welcoming, inclusive and enriching environment where all students can develop a sense of belonging and achieve success. This is complemented by a number of targeted initiatives in individual schools to identify and address factors which contribute to the awarding gap.

5.   Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

The University was proud to be awarded TEF Gold status in 2024 which represents an external verification of the quality of teaching and education that we provide to our students.

Over the past 3 years the University has seen the first cohorts graduating through programmes that underwent Curriculum Transformation in 2017/18. Curriculum Transformation was a campus wide initiative which reviewed all taught undergraduate programmes to ensure they develop fundamental

academic and transferrable skills, to diversify and make assessment methods more authentic and to support student's academic progression.

In 2021 the University launched a new Research Inspired Education Strategy, a central pillar of which is to '*provide challenging programmes that enable students to achieve their full potential regardless of background*'. The implementation of the Education Strategy is supported by Education Services which works with Schools in the design, development, delivery, and continuous improvement of high-quality programmes that meet the needs and expectations of our diverse student body.

A programme of work underpins the delivery of the Education Strategy to support teaching staff to develop and enhance their practice and for the University to continuously improve its delivery, teaching and assessment processes. Examples include the completion of Racial Inclusivity Action Plans in schools, the implementation of Blackboard Ultra as a key component of the University's digital learning environment and the revalidation of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic and Professional Practice against the HEA framework to provide a route for even more staff to gain teaching qualifications.

The University has developed a new framework for Research Inspired Education. This is a key pillar of the University's Education Strategy and articulates how all University of Leicester programmes will be research inspired. The framework supports the University's Schools to create inspiring research led curricula tailored to their specific subject areas and students. Students are supported to work from being receivers of research to producers over the course of their studies.

The University has recently developed a new Assessment Strategy. The strategy emphasizes the dual purpose of assessment: as a means for learning and as a measure of learning. By aligning assessments with learning outcomes, providing constructive feedback, and promoting self-reflection, the strategy aims to enhance students' learning experiences and outcomes, enabling all students to become agents of their own learning. To support the implementation of the strategy all schools will produce new Assessment maps to demonstrate how different forms of assessment are introduced and scaffolded over the course of each programme.

6.   Actions

Following the approval of Senate Regulation 5 a significant programme of work is underway to implement the new regulations for the 2025/26 cohort of students. This includes support for schools to consider and redesign programme structures and assessment as may be appropriate, and also a programme of work to communicate the requirements of the regulations to students before and after they join the University.

The University has launched a review of the processes underpinning the effective operation of Panels of Examiners to ensure that Schools are supported to review module outcomes, identify areas that may require further action and ensure enhancements can be made for the next academic year.

Closing the awarding gap has been identified as a central strategic theme for the University and there are a range of projects underway that seek to address this issue.

7.   Risks and Challenges

Through the implementation of the Research Inspired Education Strategy the University is ensuring that the lessons and progress from the pandemic in areas such as digital delivery continues to feed through into teaching and assessment practice, whist maintaining high academic standards. The University will

continue to review the appropriate balance between campus-based and remote assessment, especially in light of the challenge represented by the growth of generative AI.

Other challenges include the ongoing work to address the awarding gap between different student demographic groups. The University is committed to eliminating the awarding gap but recognises that this will require significant work and engagement with our student body.

Student outcomes have returned to pre-pandemic rates and the University will continue to work to ensure that outcomes at module and degree level are robust and support students to achieve the degree classification that they deserve.