Degree Outcomes Statement

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 produced by the University’s Quality and Standards Sub-Committee in the 2019/20 academic year and covers five academic years. The statement includes analysis of the University’s degree classification profile, an outline of the academic governance structure, a summary of quality assurance practices, an outline of awarding regulations, student support, monitoring of future outcomes and next steps.

1. Analysis of the University of Leicester’s degree classification profile

Good Honours Classifications

For the past five years the proportion of students who have received good honours has stayed at a relatively static level (figure 1). The proportion of good honours at the University of Leicester (figure 2) has performed on the boundary of the upper quartile consistently for the past 4 years. The upper quartile is made up of predominantly Russell group universities and the University of Leicester’s group of benchmarked universities. The box and whisker plot displays how the University has been consistent, while the remaining sector performance has increased their proportion of good honours and separately first degree percentages.

Figure 1 - Source: Planning Office, University of Leicester
The Office for Students (OfS) reported that the ‘unexplained’ difference, between expected and actual awards, within the sector in 2017/18 for first class degrees was 13.9 percentage points. The University of Leicester performed better, with a difference of 10.3 percentage points. Similarly, the ‘unexplained’ difference at Good Honours level for Leicester during the academic year of 2017/18 was 4.3 percentage points lower (9.0%) than the sector average of 13.3%.

For 2017/18, the University ranked 68th on the percentage of 1st class degrees given against expectations of 41st for First class and 34th for First class and Upper second honours combined, if all Universities achieved their expected proportion of attainment. This outcome implies that the University has a lower rate of growth in good honours degrees than the sector average.

Closing the Awarding Gap

The University of Leicester remains one of the most diverse universities in the UK with 52% of its students coming from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. The University currently has an awarding gap of 10% (table 1) compared with the national average of 13%. The university has also identified a BAME student satisfaction gap of 10%. Although lower than sector average, awarding gaps have remained stable over the past five years.

Upon his arrival in November 2019, the new Vice-Chancellor and President, Nishan Canagarajah boldly pledged to eliminate both awarding and satisfaction gaps within the next five years (by 2025). The University’s vision is to enhance the experience of all students from every background and to equip them with all the necessary skills to be successful in whatever career they choose (see section 5).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>White students achieving 1st/2:1 degree (%)</th>
<th>BAME students achieving 1st/2:1 degree (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2016/17</td>
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<td>79</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>76</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 1 - Source: Education Excellence, University of Leicester

2. Academic Governance at the University of Leicester

Senate has ultimate responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards. In the 2018/19 academic year this responsibility was delegated to the Learning and Teaching Committee. Senate is informed of developments through a report to each of its meetings. In addition, it considers regular reports on each of the key quality assurance procedures from the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee.

The University operates standard quality assurance processes including annual and periodic developmental review to ensure that new and existing programmes are scrutinised and benchmarked against relevant sector standards which include the UK Quality Code, Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body 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 Quality and Standards Sub-Committee which reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

Processes for the management of collaborative provision are set out in the Code of Practice for the Management of Higher Education with Others. The University’s processes for the management of collaborative provision were reviewed 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 and review of programmes are applied to collaborative provision, and these are supplemented by additional components, which focus on the particular complexity of partnership arrangements. The Global Strategic Development Board has responsibility within the academic governance structure for the oversight of the processes relating to the quality assurance of partnerships, reporting to the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee.

3. Quality Assurance at the University of Leicester

The University aligns all of its awards to the appropriate level of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. Each new programme is subject to internal development and review processes which scrutinise the content of the proposed new programme to ensure that it is at the correct level for the proposed award. All Programme Approval Panels include an external member in an appropriate discipline from a peer university whose role it is to provide confirmation of the content and
academic standards of the award, alignment with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements, and comparability with similar awards across the sector.

In 2017/18, all undergraduate curricula and the majority of taught postgraduate programmes underwent a process of re-approval. This consisted of an internal review of programmes to confirm the currency, level and standards of the content and the fitness of assessment. External Advisors were engaged to provide comments on all programmes going through the re-approval process and were specifically asked to confirm the overall standard of the award with reference to the relevant FHEQ descriptors and subject benchmarks.

The University holds professional accreditation across a wide range of disciplines. This demonstrates the University’s commitment to delivering qualifications which are benchmarked against both national academic standards and the current and future needs of employers.

All award bearing programmes follow University policy on marking and moderation. All award bearing programmes have in place one or more external examiners to review the academic standards of the University’s awards. External Examiners review curriculum, assessment materials, students’ work and marking and moderation practices at programme level to confirm their appropriateness. An analysis of External Examiners’ reports is undertaken annually. In the 2018/19 academic year, this analysis demonstrated that External Examiners had confirmed the ongoing academic standards of all the University’s awards.

4. Degree algorithms at the University of Leicester for students who commenced their studies before the 2018/19 academic year

The university operates one undergraduate algorithm for students who commenced their studies before the 2018/19 academic year, and one for students who commenced their studies from the 2018/19 academic year. A review of undergraduate regulations and the undergraduate degree classification algorithm took place in 2018. The review was informed by feedback received from external examiners and resulted in amendments to the regulation and algorithm to ensure that borderline regulations and rules around compensation do not contribute to grade inflation or compromise the overall academic standards of University of Leicester awards. A guide to the regulations for undergraduate students is available online.

If a student falls into a borderline category, the Board of Examiners will review their marks to decide whether it considers there might be grounds to promote the student to the higher degree classification. Promotion to the higher class is not automatic. Each student’s case is considered and the Board will be examine whether there are any circumstances which should be taken into account in reaching its decision, for example, if they have accepted mitigating circumstances, and for students beginning their studies before the 2018/19 academic year, whether the higher marks were obtained in the final year or a particularly high mark was obtained in a dissertation/project. This aligns degree awarding criteria to level 6 programme intended learning outcomes, such as independent analysis and research, which reflect the requirements of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the Characteristics Statement for Bachelor’s Degrees.

Normally two attempts at a module are allowed. A further final attempt may be granted by a Board of Examiners in exceptional circumstances. There are some exceptions in line with the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies. Exceptions are detailed in programme documentation.
5. Academic Quality and Student Support at the University of Leicester

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 academic year.

The University takes an evidence-based, holistic approach to its widening participation activity, working across all the elements of the enquirer, applicant and student lifecycle. The UK domiciled undergraduate intake had seen a 39% increase over the previous five years, standing at 3,430 in 2017/8 but has since declined by 23% for 2018/9 at 2,745. Over the same period, the total intake tariff has seen a drop from 147 to 132. The number of BAME students as a proportion has increased year-on-year from 34.4% in 2013/14 to 52% in 2019/20. To contextualise this, within the ex-1994 Group and Russell Group institutions, Leicester has the ninth highest proportion of UK domiciled BAME students, and has the highest proportion outside Londonix.

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, but recognises the national strategy to be more ambitious in setting and achieving strategic aims and targetsii. A number of these initiatives are summarised below.

Enhancement of learning, teaching and assessment is supported by the Leicester Learning Institute and the Education Excellence Programme. The Institute and Programme are helping staff at the University tackle differential degree outcomes for different student groups, including eliminating the BAME awarding and satisfaction gaps. Primary research into “The Role of Belonging in Tackling Ethnicity-Related Disparities in Retention, Attainment and Outcomes” is being undertaken as part of a joint Education Excellence/Students’ Union project in 2019/20. The Programme’s Inclusivity Theme is also addressing these issues through participation in the AdvanceHE’s project “Towards Embedding Equality Diversity and Inclusion in the Curriculum” (2019/20), where our focus will be on “decolonising the curriculum”vii.

In December 2019, the Education Excellence Programme team produced awarding gap and outcome difference data packs for each school in order to inform schools at subject level. In February 2020, a ‘Closing the Gap at Leicester’ event was to determine clear actions to be taken throughout the University to close the awarding and satisfaction gaps. Participants included Heads of School, Learning and Teaching Directors, Senior Tutors, other academic staff and professional services involved in the teaching, learning and inclusivity agenda at our institution. In the spirit of co-creation, Student Representatives (including Students’ Union Officers) also attended the dayviii.

Following the event, the Leicester Learning Institute is supporting schools to devise action plans for consideration by their School Learning and Teaching Committees. These will be considered and monitored by College and University Learning and Teaching Committees.

Annual Developmental Review operated in the form of College level Thematic Workshops in 2018/19. Examples of enhancements and good practice that have been surfaced through the Thematic Workshops process include:

- Several schools introduced specific tools to help students better interpret their assessment marks and feedback in order to contribute to their development. These included guidance on using feedback, holding feedback clinics, introduction of feed forward coversheets and published assessment rubrics. There were several examples of assessment criteria being co-
designed with students in order to ensure that they were accessible, such as in Informatics, and Psychology, or through Assessment and Feedback Working Groups with students in Law and Criminology.

- There are a number of initiatives underway to enhance local student support and personal tutoring arrangements in response to student feedback in this area.
- A number of schools across all three colleges identified student attendance and engagement as a major theme of work. Approaches have included working closely with the Student Staff Committees to launch student-led initiatives to improve attendance including Student Support Workshops with academic year cohorts by subject.

6. Monitoring of University of Leicester Degree Outcomes by Council

As the Committee of Senate with oversight of overall academic standards and quality assurance, the Learning and Teaching Committee prepares an annual assurance statement, which is endorsed by Senate. This statement is considered by Council annually and is the mechanism by which degree outcomes and compliance with the Office for Students’ Ongoing Conditions of Registration are monitored.

7. Next Steps

The University is currently developing a new institutional strategy. As key part of this is the Vice Chancellor’s commitment to eliminate both awarding and satisfaction gaps within the next five years (by 2025). Progress to achieving the new strategy will be monitored by Council.

As a first in the country, the University of Leicester will establish the Leicester Institute for Inclusivity in Higher Education. The new unit will be dedicated to transformative education research and innovation in higher education, which enhances inclusive learning for all students and teaching policy and practice.

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1. UK-domiciled first degree graduates who studied full-time, were registered at higher education providers in England and graduated in the academic years from 2013-14 to 2017-18
4. Defined as the difference between the chances of white and BAME students getting a first or upper second class honours degree.
7. University of Leicester (2020) Annual Assurance Statement regarding compliance with OfS Ongoing Conditions of Registration, B1 – B6, Senate