



BUCKINGHAMSHIRE NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891

Degree Outcomes Statement 2021/22

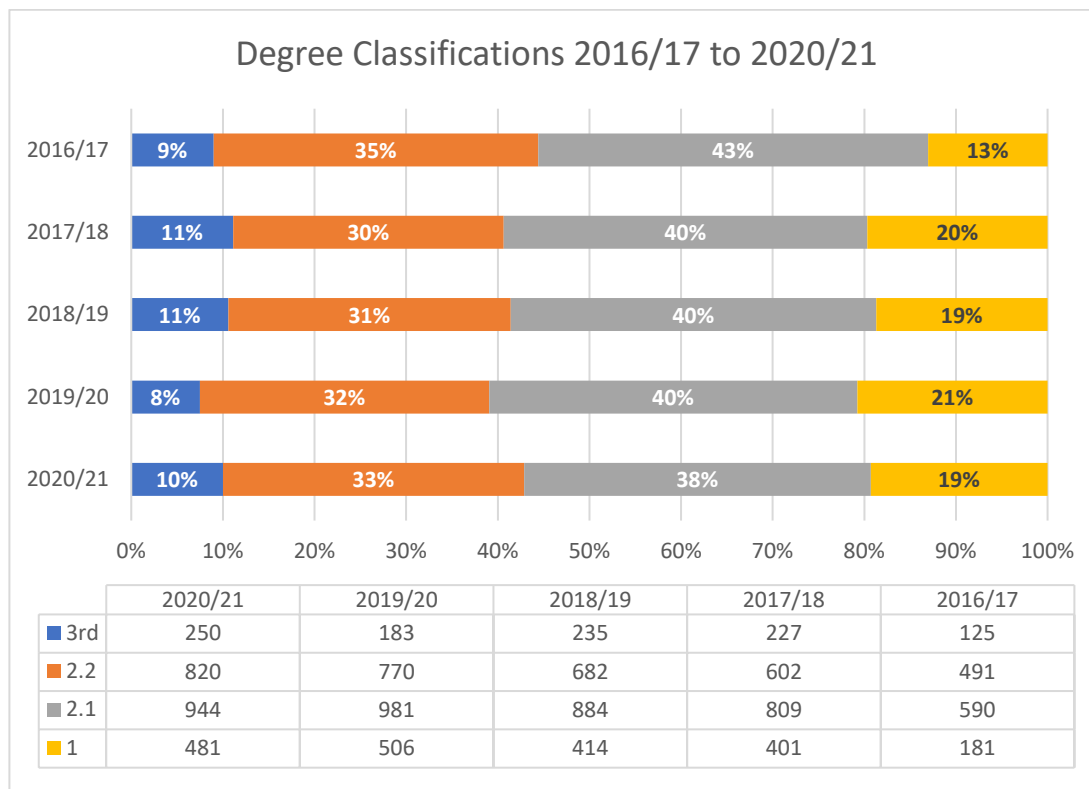
Buckinghamshire New University
UKPRN: 10000975

1. Background

This Degree Outcome Statement has been prepared in accordance with sector Guidance and was approved by the University's Senate on 8 June 2022 and its Governing Body on 19 July 2022.

2. Institutional degree classification profile

This section presents an overview of the classifications of degrees awarded by Buckinghamshire New University (BNU) to its students between 2016/17 and 2020/21. This includes students studying both directly at the University and at its range of partners. The data is shown as a percentage of the overall number of honours degrees awarded for each year while the student numbers are noted in the table below.



Over the past five years the University has observed a consistent pattern of achievement with on average just under 20% of graduates achieving first class honours and 59% of students achieving good honours (first or

upper second class degrees combined). This is set against a growing number of students achieving degrees from the University overall, which has risen by 80% over the reporting period.¹

In 2019/20 under our *No Detriment Policy* students were provided a ‘safety net’ to preserve their academic position immediately before the pandemic. Across the sector this led to a rise in achievement. For 2020/21, the policy was adjusted to account for the additional time to prepare which saw less impact on the assessment process.

In preparing this statement, the University has considered the Office for Students (OfS) [analysis of degree classifications over time](#). This shows that BNU has a very low level of ‘unexplained’ changes being reported for both first and upper second class degrees combined and for first class degrees alone. This gives confidence that the standard of the University’s awards remain valid and credible over time.

3. Trends in Degree Classification by Demographic Group

This section compares ‘good honours’ rates awarded by BNU to its students between 2016/17 and 2020/21 broken down by demographic. BNU maintains a highly diverse student intake and is above the sector average for our mature and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) population of students. This reflects our widening participation mission to reach out to under-represented groups in higher education.

Category	Breakdown	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
Age Group	Mature	51%	52%	51%	53%	49%
	Young	59%	66%	65%	73%	73%
Disability	Known Disability	54%	64%	59%	75%	77%
	No Known Disability	56%	59%	58%	59%	55%
Ethnicity	BAME	39%	45%	44%	48%	47%
	White	63%	69%	67%	74%	68%
Gender	Female	54%	62%	65%	64%	59%
	Male	57%	56%	52%	58%	55%
Participation (POLAR4)	1 - Lowest rate of participation	52%	59%	61%	68%	59%
	5 - Highest rate of participation	60%	65%	62%	71%	63%

The data demonstrates that performance is generally improving across all demographic groups. Our [Access and Participation Plan](#) is being reviewed to identify further interventions to support underrepresented groups, particularly BAME and mature students.

4. Assessment and marking practices

The University takes seriously its duty to maintain the standards of its awards and operates a robust approach to assuring the integrity, validity and credibility of the assessment process. In 2021, BNU signed up to the [QAA Academic Integrity Charter for Higher Education](#) to promote and maintain academic integrity and take action

¹ Presentation of results this year has changed to report student outcomes under the academic year in which they completed their studies (rather than when the final year commenced). This addresses discrepancies with previous reports when students who complete their studies mid-cycle are included. The new approach will lead to fewer discrepancies in future reports as the University will be able to declare the results for more students at this point in the cycle.

against academic misconduct. The University has since launched a new *Academic Integrity Policy* which embeds the principles enshrined in the Charter.

BNU employs established sector best practice to ensure a robust assessment process. During programme approval, curriculum development teams consider sector reference points, including the [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#) (FHEQ), [Subject Benchmark Statements](#), and applicable Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Body (PSRB) standards. External reviewers are appointed to ensure that awards are set at the appropriate point. The use of anonymous marking, moderation and sampling of assessed work is intended to ensure fairness during the assessment process itself; while the employment of marking guidance, grading descriptors, and assessment criteria enable a consistent approach across the University. [External examiners](#) are appointed to all programmes based on their expertise and enable further scrutiny. Examiners complete an annual report which feeds into our annual review process and wider quality framework.

Boards of examiners operate throughout the year to consider student performance and eligibility for progression and award. Boards operate in accordance with the University's assessment regulations and are attended by representatives of the programme team, external examiners and a centrally appointed quality assurance representative; they are chaired by a senior member of the University to ensure independence and their operation is supported by the Academic Registry. In making decisions Boards will also exercise discretion for students with [exceptional circumstances](#) seeking to avoid any disadvantage. During the pandemic this was extended to all students who may have suffered any disadvantage under our *No Detriment Policy*. Students have the right to [appeal](#) a Board decision but are not allowed to challenge academic or professional judgement.

5. Academic governance

Our Governing Body (Council) is responsible for the University's educational character and mission. Council has oversight of the University's activities and receives assurance that academic standards are appropriate and being maintained through regular reports from Senate (our Academic Board) covering: academic awards and their regulations, assessment and examination of the academic performance of students, and the standards of awards and quality of provision.

The University's [Annual Monitoring](#) process evaluates data sources including student assessment and achievement data, external examiner reports and student feedback, comparing this over time and against sector benchmarks. The resulting report and enhancement action plans for all University provision, including that delivered through partnership arrangements, is considered fully by the Education Committee which reports to Senate.

Education Committee is responsible for maintaining a framework of academic quality assurance and standards for all programmes taught at the University and with its partners. This includes the development and maintenance of regulations, policies and processes. Annual Monitoring provides assurance that these processes - and therefore the awards and the achievement of students - is comparable with preceding years and aligns with sector best practice and benchmarks.

6. Classification algorithms

Degree classification algorithms are the rules which determine a student's final classification. The University uses two algorithms as set out in the [Academic Assessment Regulations](#) and explained to students on our [academic advice pages](#):

Undergraduate Level (Year of Study)	Credits	Weighting (Algorithm 1)	Weighting (Algorithm 2)
Level 4 (Year 1)	120	0%	0%
Level 5 (Year 2)	120	33%	0%
Level 6 (Year 3)	120	67%	100%

- Algorithm 1 is widely used across the sector. It allows students to use Level 4 as a transition into higher education, with only the module credits (and not the marks) being considered. The weighting enables students to develop through Level 5 and become independent learners by Level 6. Therefore, the weighting given to the final marks reflects the standard the student is performing at as they complete their degree.
- Algorithm 2 is used for “top-up” degrees where students transfer credits from learning gained at Level 4 and Level 5 and study Level 6 modules only for the award. It is also used for those disciplines (particularly those with many practical assessments) where it is recognised that Level 4 and Level 5 work is developmental, building towards final independent work at Level 6, a concept known as “exit velocity”.

Programme Specifications published on individual course webpages confirm the algorithm that applies. The University is reviewing its academic portfolio for September 2023 as part of a change programme and will use this exercise to reserve Algorithm 2 for top-up degrees only. This ensures consistency across our degree provision. The University’s algorithm is currently under review and is expected to be updated from 2022/23; this has involved surveys of staff and students (including those at partners). The review follows sector guidance recommending that algorithms should be reviewed every five years.

Students are given a first attempt at every assessment. This is followed by reassessment if they do not reach the module pass mark of 40%, and in some instances, students can repeat the whole year. Reassessment is generally ‘capped’ at the threshold pass mark but may be ‘uncapped’ if a student’s exceptional circumstances have been accepted. The University may also apply ‘compensation’ for a failing module mark that is within 5% of the normal pass mark. Restrictions apply to the volume and eligibility of credit for compensation, especially where PSRB regulations have precedence, and are either specified within Programme Specifications or appended to our assessment regulations.

The final classification of an undergraduate Honours degree is determined using either of the algorithms above. Thresholds for each classification are based on sector norms as follows:

Classification	Lower threshold (rounded)	Upper threshold (rounded)
First Class Honours	70%	100%
Second Class Honours (Upper Division)	60%	69%
Second Class Honours (Lower Division)	50%	59%
Third Class Honours	40%	49%
Ordinary Degree (Unclassified)	N/A – Based on 300 Credits achieved	
Fail	0%	39%

University regulations allow ‘borderline’ students to be considered for a higher classification where the overall mark achieved is within 2% of the next classification band. A decision will be based on the volume of credits in each classification which ensures objectivity. Students who do not pass their registered award will normally be eligible for an intermediate award.

During 2020/21 the University reinvoked its *No Detriment Policy* to protect students from disadvantage during the pandemic. This included uncapped reassessment for impacted modules and an alternative overall weighted average where classifications were calculated based on Level 5 and Level 6 modules as normal and then compared to a classification based on Level 6 modules only – with students given the higher classification. The impact of this has crossed over into the 2021/22 session as Level 5 students progressed into Level 6. The University’s assessment regulations were otherwise enforced in respect of credit requirements and borderline regulations. As noted above, student performance has returned to a pre-pandemic position.

7. Teaching practices and learning resources

Our educational aim is to provide highly accessible university learning that will transform lives and nurture abilities in all our graduates to enable them to succeed and ultimately change their world. The University is proud of its high-quality, high-intensity approach to teaching, which focuses on real-world, practical learning and produces very high levels of student engagement. This is evidenced by the award in 2018 of Silver in the [Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework \(TEF\)](#). Further information about the TEF can be found on our [website](#).

Teaching practice at Bucks is designed to maintain output standards while ensuring that all students, regardless of background, can succeed. Teaching enhancements have focused on marking and moderation workshops and staff development. More formal staff development is offered through the Academic Professional Apprenticeship, the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice, and the Teaching and Supporting Learning in HE short course which leads to Fellowship of AdvanceHE. We also operate a [peer observation](#) process guided by the policy and an induction buddy system for new academic staff.

Learning resources provided by the University support students' learning and teaching at all levels. Modules have online reading lists with essential and recommended items provided by the library. This is supplemented by student driven acquisition which students can use to request additional items for their research. Relevant subject specific online resources such as the Purple Guide and Mintel are provided to allow in depth research and prepare students for using these resources in the workplace. Students are supported to find and use these learning resources by academic liaison librarians who give embedded teaching sessions with students as well as 1-1s and online chat support for students at their point of need.

8. Identifying good practice, and actions

External examiners in their reports continue to commend both the comprehensive feedback on assessments to students and the careful and consistent consideration of student performance at Assessment Boards. This has included implementation of the measures outlined to protect students during the pandemic.

As part of its ongoing academic portfolio review, the University is embedding 5 Hallmarks into its degree programmes. These include greater use of authentic assessment practices using tasks that mirror those students might undertake as professionals, providing students with opportunities to develop the graduate attributes and skills valued by employers. It also supports the University's activities proactively to address sector-wide concerns around academic integrity by reducing the opportunities for students to commit misconduct through good assessment design.

9. Risks and challenges

No risks are identified in this report as the University returns to business as usual following the pandemic.