DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT 2018/2019

1. Introduction

1.1. The University's mission is to create, share and apply knowledge to make a difference to individuals and society. In doing so, the University is proud of our high-quality student experiences and successes and is committed to protecting the value of the University of Portsmouth degree over time.

1.2. This Degree Outcomes Statement provides an analysis of the 2018/19 final year degree classifications for graduates, with a focus on first class and upper second-class awards (referred to as good degrees). We have reviewed the 2018/19 undergraduate degree outcomes against previous years and for different student characteristics.

1.3. A representative from the Students' Union, and a representative from the University's Associate College, Sparsholt University Centre, have been involved in preparing this Statement. This Statement has also been independently externally peer reviewed.

1.4. For consistency of reporting to our Board of Governors, this report uses the University's internal reporting data as analysed in our annual Examination and Assessment report to Academic Council and to the Board.

1.5. Data reported by the Office for Students (OfS), notably in its report 2019.28 *Analysis of Degree Classifications Over Time,* differs from the University's data.   This difference is a consequence of the OfS data including UK-domiciled full-time first-degree graduates only. Whereas the University's degree outcomes data includes all first-degree UK, EU, and international student outcomes for home and sub-contracted collaborative provision. In its *Analysis of Degree Classification Over Time* report, the OfS reported that for 2017-18 (the last year referenced in the report) the University had an unexplained good degrees attainment gap of 20.3 percentage points.   For first class degrees only, the OfS reported the University as having a gap of 16.3 percentage points. The OfS's definition of unexplained percentage points refers to first or upper second-class degrees at the provider relative to the average attainment in the sector in 2010-11 as derived from its modelling. The University reviewed the OfS data supplied in 2019 and was satisfied that the University assessment regulation review in 2010-11, which was aimed at better aligning the University regulations and student outcomes to the sector, was the primary cause for the percentage point difference. The adjustment made to the Regulations in 2010-11 has maintained student outcome comparability with the Sector over subsequent years, noting that in 2017-18, the OfS's report cites the University's 1st degree outcomes at 27.7% compared to the sector at 29.3%   Going forward, the University will report separately good degree outcomes for UK-domiciled full time first degree outcomes to enable improved OfS-related sector comparison of these specific outcomes.

2. Review of Degree Classification Algorithms

2.1. As part of the University's engagement with the national debate relating to potential degree outcome inflation across the sector, in 2018/19 the University reviewed its degree classification algorithms. This review took into account feedback from two External Examiners who had commented explicitly on the algorithms in their 2016/17 reports. This internal review included a comparison of the University's percentage of good degrees awarded against the sector average (HESA data) and a sample of ten other universities over the past 10 years. The finding of this review was that there was no evidence that the University's degree algorithms since 2011/12 (the last date when significant changes were made to the algorithms) would have provided an advantage to student outcomes. However, it was recognised that in the UUK/GuildHE report, *Understanding Degree Algorithms*, of the 112 responses received by the UUK , only eight universities used more than one algorithm (although many had very specific information about how borderline classification were considered). The University will reflect further on its use of multiple ways to calculate the classification in its more detailed review of Academic Regulations and Policies which is scheduled in 2020/21.

2.2. Also, in 2018/19, the University undertook an analysis of the revised UK Quality Code against University policies and practices to ensure that they continue to meet the updated Quality Code Expectations for Standards and Quality. In the latter part of 2019/20, a working group was set up to review the University's Assessment Criteria and guidance, the outcome of this activity is expected in 2020.

3. Institutional degree classification profile

3.1. For the last three years, the University has been in the top quintile for 'Value Added' scores in the Guardian University League Table, confirming that the University successfully develops students and enables them to achieve good degree outcomes. The percentage of first class and upper second-class degrees, referred to as 'good degrees' awarded by the University of Portsmouth in 2018/19 was 74%, 3% below the national average.

3.2. The 5-year analysis in Table A below illustrates a stable good degree classification profile with a 4-percentage point range between 2014/15 and 2018/19. Whilst always remaining below or at the national average, the University's overall percentage of good degrees trajectory during this 5 year period has mirrored the increases within the sector as a whole, with the exception of 2018/19 when it was 3% below the sector average.

Table A: Overall percentage of good degrees for UK, EU and International students

	Academic Year				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
University of Portsmouth	71%	73%	74%	75%	74%
National Average*	72%	74%	75%	76%	77%

* Figures taken from www.hesa.ac.uk

Graph A: Percentage of good degrees by characteristic for UK, EU and International Students
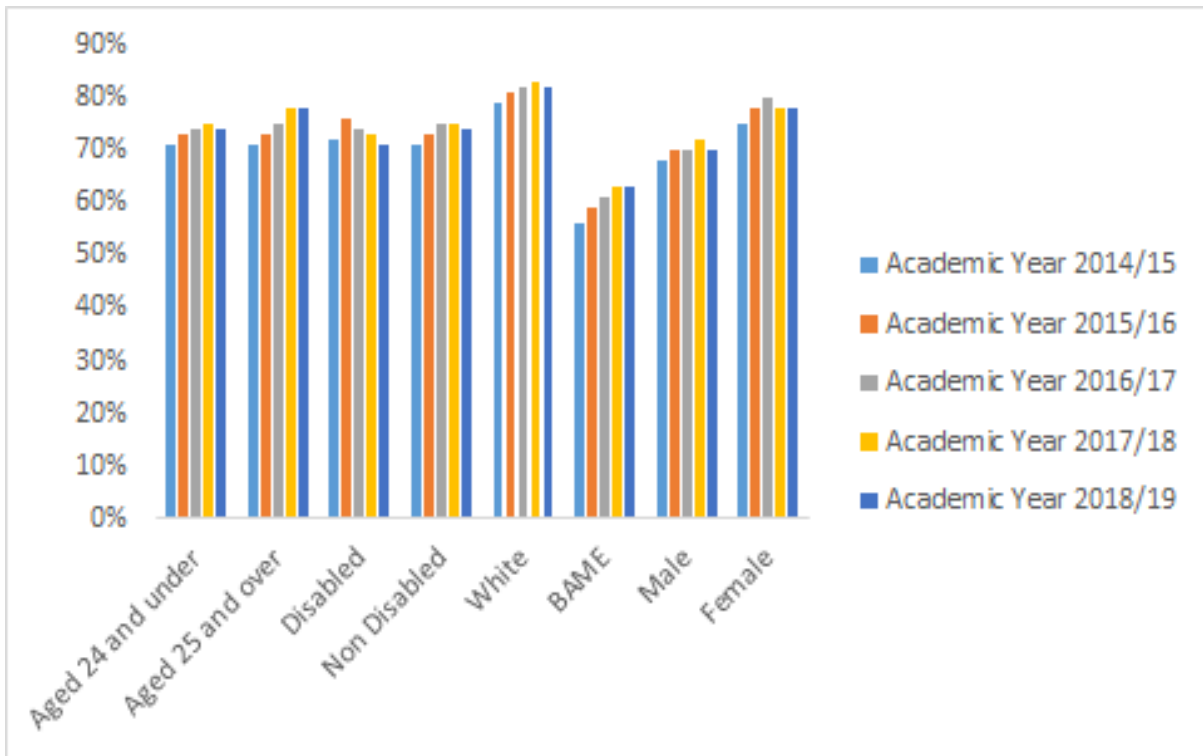
3.3. Graph A above provides a more detailed breakdown of good degrees based on specific student characteristics. Of particular note is the good degrees attainment gap between Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and white students.

3.4. The BAME achievement gap is a priority area for the University, with a particular focus on black students and those from the most deprived areas. The focus areas, along with detailed action planning to address attainment gaps, are set out in the Access and Participation Plan 2018/19 available here, and in our five year Access and Participation Plan which is available here. Section 6 of this Statement illustrates some of the recent research and investment activities referred to in the Plans.

3.5. The University is committed to addressing unexplained gaps in performance and outcomes between priority groups by 2025 and to going further in addressing absolute gaps in performance by 2030. The University's Strategy and Vision 2030 Our Strategy sets out our ambition to be the leading modern University in the UK. Through innovative and inclusive education, we will support every student to reach their potential, with outstanding outcomes. By 2030 we will ensure that attainment gaps are a thing of the past. Unexplained gaps exist when comparing BAME students' percentage of good degree to white students' percentage of good degrees, and when comparing male students against female students, over the 5-year period. Reducing and eliminating these gaps are a priority focus for the university[1].

---

[1] Note, the data presented in this Outcomes Statement differs to that in the Access and Participation Plan due to the Access and Participation Plan data relating to UK/EU full fee-paying students only whereas this Outcomes Statement data relates to all registered students.

4. Assessment and marking practices

4.1. The University's [Examination and Assessment Regulations](#) are publically available, and are explicit, transparent and accessible to ensure availability to all audiences.

4.2. The Examination and Assessment Regulations include the University's marking and feedback practices. These practices have been developed to meet the relevant core expectations of the UK Quality Code and reflect the wider guidance on assessment [UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Assessment](#). As such, these practices are central to how the University sets and maintains the academic standards of its awards.

4.3. The University was one of the Sector early adopters of the AdvanceHE External Examiner training courses. The University offers this course to all its staff and to staff at its collaborative partners and has trained over 100 staff to date.

4.4. The University recognises the value of calibration as a tool to support staff in the setting and marking of assessments. Staff among the University and staff at our collaborative partners are engaged in calibration exercises where marking expectations and practices are examined across groups of academic staff. Particular noteworthy examples include calibration undertaken in Learning at Work provision and Early Years Foundation provision delivered across a number of Further Education College partnerships. The Assessment Criteria working group will be exploring how to disseminate calibration practices more widely across the University.

5. Classification algorithms

5.1. The University publishes its degree algorithm in the Examination and Assessment Regulations and is summarised below.

The Board of Examiners shall recommend to a student who is eligible for the relevant award, the highest classification arising from the application of the following formulae:

a) the classification of the weighted mean of all relevant credits at Level 5 and all relevant credits at Level 6 in the ratio of 40:60 respectively after first discounting the marks in the lowest 20 credits both at Level 5 and at Level 6;

b) the classification of the weighted mean of all relevant credits at Level 6 after first discounting the marks in the lowest 20 credits at Level 6;

c) the minimum classification in which more than 50% of the combined relevant credits at Level 5 and Level 6 were attained after first discounting the marks in the lowest 20 credits both at Level 5 and at Level 6."

5.2. The algorithms incorporate the most common methods within the sector of adjusting borderline grades and use classification methods that replicate these to remove discretion and unconscious bias to ensure fairness. Method b above replaces discussion on exit velocity whereas method c replaces discussions on preponderance and grade profiles. There is no further discussion at Boards of Examiners of any borderline cases. We believe removing any potential for unconscious bias in the classification of awards is a strength of the University's examination and assessment practices. Notwithstanding, as referred to in the 2018/19 review, we recognise the University is out of sync with the majority of the sector in its use of different ways to calculate the classification and this will form part of the Academic Regulations Review in 2020/21.

5.3. The University provides examples of how classifications are calculated on its website and details are presented to students to explain the algorithms.

6. Teaching practices and learning resources

6.1. The University's Strategy commits to being recognised nationally and internationally for our success in offering world-class undergraduate and postgraduate education to people with the potential and motivation to succeed. Through the University of Portsmouth Student Charter and the Hallmarks of a Portsmouth Graduate we will develop knowledgeable, independent graduates with a global outlook, who are set for success in their future careers and make a positive contribution to society. Thanks to exceptional teaching, facilities and student experience, students are empowered to meet and exceed the expectations in the Charter, and develop the characteristics outlined in our Hallmarks.

6.2. The University reviews and updates course curricula annually to ensure they incorporate the latest research evidence and professional practice, meet national standards, employer expectations and respond reflectively to student feedback. Within and beyond the curricula, students are supported in developing their wide-ranging research, problem-solving and personal skills.

6.3. In September 2019, taking account of student feedback, we implemented our revised academic year structure and curriculum structure. The 2019 Curriculum Framework includes the revised Assessment for Learning Policy which encourages course teams to explore different approaches to assessment and addresses the perception of assessment overload that students reported at levels 5 and 6. Year-long modules remain at level 4 to aid transition to higher education.

6.4. The University invests significantly into researching and applying innovative pedagogic practices and approaches to enhance student engagement and outcomes and build transformational opportunities. One such recent example was the use of TESTA when revising our curricula to align with our 2019 Curriculum Framework. Further current examples include the University's Changing Mindset project, Raising Awareness, Raising Aspiration (RARA) project, and Learning and Teaching Innovation Grants.

7. Identifying good practice and actions

7.1. Our approach to maintaining academic standards and assuring quality through annual monitoring is based on three core pillars: the effective sharing of good practice; data informed early intervention through local action planning; and student co-development.

7.2. Captured through the course action plan, the annual monitoring process provides a structure for consistently disseminating and recognising excellence at all levels, for sharing that effectively, and for understanding the impact of the good practice that colleagues and students have developed, and for making that knowledge, expertise and experience available to support enhancement in those areas that would benefit from it.

7.3. Students have a central role to play in working with staff to drive consideration of how data can be used to shape our enhancement activities. Their voice is also crucial in helping staff better understand the context in which the data have come about, and to engage with cultural concepts for which data and benchmarks are not readily available such as student identity, belonging and community.

7.4. Applying a data-informed, risk-based approach to the annual monitoring of courses, and set against internal performance benchmarks, key areas are targeted for action planning. These action plans are co-developed with students, where relevant.

8. Academic governance

8.1. Annually, four principal standards and quality reports are considered through the university senior committee structure, reporting, where relevant to Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), Student Experience Committee (SEC), University Education and Student Experience Committee (UESEC), Academic Council (AC), and Board of Governors. The reports are:

- Analysis of NSS outcomes
- Academic Standards and Quality - Annual Monitoring Report and Action Plan
- Examination and Assessment Report
- Assurance Statement on Quality to the Board of Governors

8.2. A detailed analysis of NSS outcomes is submitted each year to the committees for evaluation, identifying trends and actions. The outcomes are widely disseminated to Faculties, departments and course teams in order to develop local action plans.

8.3. The Academic Standards and Quality annual report and action plan is the final reporting point in the annual monitoring process, providing to Academic Council a data analysis of course performance and student outcomes, highlighting notable good performance and where performance falls below university quality benchmarks.

8.4. The Examination and Assessment report reviews the university classification outcomes for the year, providing a summary of overall degree awarding profiles by Department and Faculty. In addition, the report details any assessment irregularities, issues raised by External Examiners, staff development, and analyses assessment offences and academic appeals.

8.5. The Assurance Statement on Quality report to the Board of Governors provides a holistic quality assurance review of the academic year. Key areas of coverage in this report include the setting and maintaining of academic standards, how the university is improving the student experience and developing student engagement, and an analysis of student complaints.

9. Challenges and Opportunities

9.1. The University is aware of attainment gaps for BAME students, Disabled and Male students (see Table B) and, in the latest Vision and Strategy of the University, has committed to reducing these gaps, and we have set ourselves challenging targets by when to do this.

9.2. The University is undertaking a detailed review of its academic policies in 2020/21. Its focus will be to reflect on continued sector best practice regarding degree classification methodologies, interconnectivity and streamlining between policies, and capitalising on more recent learning, teaching and assessment practices deployed during the Covid-19 pandemic.