

DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT – UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

Introduction and production of the statement

This statement has been produced collaboratively by members of our faculties, professional service areas and student representatives. The statement has been signed off by our Academic Board and by the Board of Governors.

Our institutional degree classification profile

The University of Wolverhampton uses one institutional degree algorithm, which applies to all courses except for a few accredited Engineering courses where an individual algorithm has been agreed with the Professional Body.

A link to the algorithm is included here

<https://www.wlv.ac.uk/media/departments/office-of-the-vice-chancellor/documents/University-Academic-Regulations-2020-2021.pdf>

A review of the University's algorithm is undertaken on behalf of Academic Board every six years. The latest review was during the 2019/20 academic year, and so the production of this degree outcomes statement has happened alongside the latest review.

The University of Wolverhampton consistently awarded fewer Good Honours Outcomes (GHO) than the majority of Universities over the period 2010/11 through to 2018/19. The University is in the lower third of institutions in sector rankings for the award of GHO. The University has not made any changes to the algorithm calculation itself in the last ten years, although our marking schemes moved from alpha numeric to percentage-based for the commencement of the 2013/14 academic year. The move to a percentage scheme was a student-led development instigated by the Students' Union but which had also been recommended by external examiners. Extensive consultation with students and external examiners was undertaken. A review and analysis of the marking system identified that students found the alpha-numeric system to be difficult to understand and also that it inhibited the number of GHO that could be achieved resulting in an atypical degree outcome profile. Only three grades were previously identified as 'first class' performance marks. This limited lecturers' ability to recognise and reward excellent performance and thereby limited the opportunity for very high performance in one area to increase aggregate degree marks used in classification, as happens in a percentage mark scheme. Analysis undertaken also showed that employers were unfamiliar with the alpha-numeric system. A decision was therefore taken, following detailed deliberation, to move to a percentage marking scheme, in line with the majority of the sector.

The move from our alpha numeric to percentage marking led to an increase in the number of first class and overall good degrees awarded between 2012/13 and 2013/14. Once the full effects of the move to percentage marking were felt then there was a further, although much smaller, increase in 2014/15. These increases simply brought the University's GHO profile into line with the rest of the sector although, as noted above, we are still in the lower third in terms of outcomes.

In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, we have introduced an alternative algorithm for our undergraduate programmes, in place temporarily, to sit alongside our standard algorithm. It allows slightly more flexibility in the use of marks from Levels 5 and 6 to be used in the algorithm to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19 on the outcomes of our students, many of whom are disproportionately affected by the outbreak. There is also a slight reduction in the amount of credit used to calculate the degree. We will undertake a review of the impact of this change during 2020/21.

During our review of the algorithm, we have considered the performance and outcomes of students broken down across faculties and by considering the performance through the lens of student characteristics, such as ethnicity, gender, age and entry qualifications. We have also undertaken some benchmarking of elements of our algorithm against others in the sector, focussing on areas such as discounting, and zones of consideration. The group did conclude that there were larger differences in outcome between some groups of students than others, albeit with slightly different patterns across the faculties. The main differences in degree outcomes were in relation to students' ethnicity, with students declaring themselves as BAME achieving a lower proportion of good degrees than students from a white background. Work on reducing this gap has been articulated in our Access and Participation Plan, and we have also begin to evaluate the impact of interventions to support attainment.

The data for the previous five academic years of outcomes, which formed part of the evidence base for the review, is provided in Appendix A.

Changes to the degree algorithm in light of our review

The group reviewing the algorithm has concluded that it broadly continues to be fit for purpose. The group did, however, note that some elements of our calculations around borderline zones of consideration seemed out of line with other benchmarked institutions, an issue which had also been picked up by a small number of our External Examiners. As a result we are making adjustments to two elements of the algorithm: we are removing a mark profiling which enables a student with a proportion of their marks in a higher category than their overall result to be upgraded irrespective of whether they are in the official zone of consideration; we will also decrease the borderline zone of consideration from 3% to 2%. These changes will be made for students joining us from the 2021 academic year.

Ensuring assessment practice is in line with sector guidance

We have robust processes in place for ensuring that our assessment criteria meet sector reference points. Each course approval or re-approval panel is asked to comment on how our provision is benchmarked against the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), as well as any relevant Quality Assurance Agency Characteristics and Subject Benchmark Statements. Where there is a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation conferred to a course, we would also need to ensure that our course meet any additional requirements.

In line with the Quality Code, there are External Examiners for all of our provision. Examiners are asked to report annually, and their reports cover such areas as assessment, fairness of marking, and standards and outcomes, and this includes all provision undertaken with collaborative partners.

Academic Governance

The overview of our External Examiner system is considered through our University Academic Enhancement Committee and Academic Board. Where there are specific issues around standards, these are noted and specific action planning is put into place and monitored. Examiners are specifically asked to comment on marking practices and see marking and outcomes at all levels from module up to course and faculty level, and make a comparison against standards and outcomes elsewhere. The proportion of examiners identifying issues with standards at University of Wolverhampton is low, but taken very seriously. Some issues that have been raised by examiners include differing standards where our awards are offered in partnership and, as noted above, some concern over elements of the calculation of the degree outcomes where students are on the borderline between two classifications.

As noted above, our partnerships are considered as part of our work on standards. There are various ways in which there is consideration across partnerships, including through marking days across consortia, or through links between faculty link tutors and the partner organisation.

Risks and challenges

Our group reviewing the algorithm made two other recommendations for the future, both of which were approved through Academic Board. These were:

- that there should be a more regular review of the algorithm;
- our award calculation for our postgraduate taught provision is also reviewed during the 2020/21 academic year.

As noted earlier in this statement, we will also review the impact of the changes made by our temporary COVID-19 regulations.

