



Degree Outcomes Statement

Context

This degree outcomes statement has been prepared by the University of Lincoln in response to the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment's suggestion. The statement aims to analyse our institutional degree classification profile and set out the review process we have carried out. We intend to demonstrate how we meet the expectations of the Quality Code for Higher Education relating to the protection of the value of qualifications and to fulfil our conditions of registration as required by the Office for Students.

This statement has been structured in line with guidance published in October 2019 ([link here](#)) and will be presented for approval by Academic Board and Board of Governors in June and July 2021. By approving this statement, our governors have assured themselves that the relevant expectations are being met.

Please direct any questions about this statement to Liz Mossop, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student Development and Engagement) or Caroline Low, Director of Planning and Corporate Strategy.

Institutional Degree Classification Profile

The table below sets out quantitative trends in degree outcomes for the past five years for Home/EU students. It includes consideration of student characteristics (including analysis of entry qualifications and the distribution of outcomes across different student groups) and subject mix.

Institutional Level Headline	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	15/16 to 19/20 ¹
University of Lincoln	73.6%	78.2%	77.2%	78.1%	83.2%	9.7%

By Classification						
First class honours	21%	23%	25%	27%	33%	12.1%
Upper second class honours	51%	54%	50%	50%	49%	-2.1%
Enhanced degree	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	-0.3%
Lower second class honours	22%	16%	18%	17%	14%	-7.9%
Third class honours/Pass	5%	5%	5%	5%	3%	-1.8%
By Gender						
Male	69.9%	76.9%	72.1%	71.1%	77.1%	7.2%
Female	76.5%	79.2%	81.3%	83.8%	88.0%	11.6%
Unknown	-	100.0%	-	100.0%	100.0%	-

¹ the difference between the degree attainment rate in 19/20 v 15/16.

By Ethnicity						
BAME	64.8%	64.3%	64.0%	62.6%	71.8%	6.9%
White	74.2%	79.6%	78.5%	79.5%	84.3%	10.1%
Unknown	89.5%	65.2%	81.3%	85.7%	89.5%	0.0%
By Age Group						
Young	73.9%	79.9%	78.9%	79.2%	83.7%	9.9%
Mature	72.3%	71.0%	70.0%	73.8%	80.9%	8.6%
By Disability						
Disability	69.0%	73.7%	73.1%	71.2%	80.1%	11.1%
No Disability	74.5%	79.1%	78.2%	79.7%	84.0%	9.5%
By Mode of Study						
Full Time	73.7%	78.8%	78.6%	78.9%	84.4%	10.7%
Part Time	71.8%	72.2%	63.8%	72.3%	71.5%	-0.3%
By Entry Qualification Group						
A-Level	79.4%	86.7%	86.0%	85.8%	88.5%	9.1%
BTEC	55.4%	56.8%	60.4%	60.9%	70.9%	15.5%
Combination of A level and BTEC	66.6%	71.2%	67.8%	69.5%	76.9%	10.3%
Higher than level 3	72.5%	69.9%	72.0%	70.7%	81.4%	8.9%
Other	65.0%	72.4%	63.4%	76.0%	79.0%	14.0%
By Academic Area						
Art and Humanities	77.7%	82.0%	78.3%	78.4%	82.7%	5.1%
Sciences	77.6%	78.7%	78.4%	76.1%	83.3%	5.7%
Social Sciences	65.2%	72.5%	73.4%	79.9%	85.0%	19.8%
Business	76.8%	79.5%	80.2%	76.9%	81.2%	4.3%

Degree Attainment Tables – five years up to and including 2019/20. Source: UoL DW, GH HESA Return. Home/EU students are considered.

Over the five-year period considered, there has been an 12.1% increase in first class honours – from a degree classification perspective, this is the driver behind the 9.7% overall increase in upper degrees. Considering demographic groups, the three groups with the largest increases in upper degrees are females (+11.6%), students who have disclosed a disability (+11.1%) and white students (+10.1%). BAME students, who constituted on average 8.8% of our Home/EU degree attainment population, saw an increase of +6.9%. Full time students (the majority of our undergraduate population) saw a +10.7% increase over the time period. Students across all entry qualification types saw increases in upper degrees over the period. When considering Academic Area, the largest increase was seen in the Social Sciences (+19.8%). The increase in engagement with degree apprenticeships, together with significant growth in programmes with PSRB requirements and professional accreditations, especially in the College of Social Sciences, has contributed to this increase.

Factors influencing this profile are explained in the following sections.

Assessment and Marking Practices

There are many ways the University assures itself that our assessment and marking practices are robust and consistent. Institutional quality assurance processes are benchmarked against external UK and European standards, including the OfS ongoing quality and standards related conditions of

registration. Managed centrally, and overseen by External Examiners, these processes provide assurance that assessment activities are effective. Internal processes are aligned, and annually mapped, to the requirements of OfS and QAA, and PSRBs as appropriate. All programmes and modules are validated against QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. The University has institutional Assessment Regulations ([link here](#)) to support consistency of marking, appeals, and treatment of special circumstances, and marking standards are calibrated through a significantly enhanced engagement with HEA activity and External Examiner duties at other institutions across the sector. Academic integrity is ensured through clearly articulated policies and procedures around Academic Offences, promoted through a number of forum including through the University Digital Learning team output, and enforced by a well established Academic Offences Committee.

The University's Assessment Framework ([link here](#)) details the institutional Assessment Policy, which includes Grade Descriptors mapped to the FHEQ and the Level 6 Outcome Classification Descriptors ([link here](#)) and which sets students as partners in the assessment process. The Policy also includes an Assessment Checklist and institutional Summary of Double and Second Marking, Internal Moderation and External Examiner scrutiny. Policies on key academic processes such as second and double marking ensure consistency and appropriateness of standards, monitored through School and College level processes and overseen by College Directors of Academic Quality and Standards. Engagement in formal review of module performance occurs through in-year Subject Committees and at end of cycle Subject Boards where significant improvements in data reporting mechanisms now allow evaluation of module performance over a five-year period holistically and by protected characteristics. Formal sign-off of module marks at Subject Board prior to the presentation of individual student performance data at a subsequent Board of Examiners further ensures the academic integrity of the marking process.

Rigorous use of External Examiners to oversee our standards begins with thorough, institutional-level appointment of suitably qualified external expert. Training and ongoing support are provided, and Externals in their first position are provided with a mentor. External Examining systems are managed centrally and supported by the External Examiners Committee. The University is also participating in the AdvanceHE External Examining Degree Standards Project, with three colleagues training as developers to lead the embedding of further good practice across the University.

Academic staff are supported in their assessment and marking practices by training provided by the Lincoln Academy of Learning and Teaching. Staff reflect on and improve their practice through participation in the Advance HE Fellowship scheme, and new academic staff participate in formal inductions and where appropriate the Academic Professional Apprenticeship programme. Schools and Colleges also deliver discipline specific development for staff, facilitating the sharing of best assessment and feedback practice. Our students are also involved in staff development, and their feedback often stimulates specific interventions or development courses. All awards delivered through academic partnership arrangements are subject to the same assessment regulations and quality assurance policies as on-campus programmes. Programme Leaders additionally provide oversight and direction on student engagement, assessment and feedback approaches which is supported by a dedicated Continuous Programme Management System (CPM) which provides timely data on programme activity and on enhancement planning. An annual snapshot of CPM activity forms a key aspect of the quality assurance cycle for programmes and additionally informs the teaching and learning activities across the institution by highlighting areas of best practice for promotion through a number of CPD activities.

Academic Governance

On behalf of the University, Boards of Examiners exercise the power to make academic judgments about the attainment of students, their right to progress and their entitlement to have conferred the awards for which they are candidates. The decisions of Boards of Examiners reflect the collective academic experience of the University's teaching staff and the External Examiners appointed to the boards. Boards of Examiners take seriously the responsibility to uphold the academic standards of the University and provide assurance that the value of qualifications awarded over time is protected.

All awards delivered through academic partnership arrangements are subject to the same regulations and quality assurance policies as on-campus programmes. They operate within the University's regulatory framework, and are validated, monitored and reviewed to the same policies and processes as on-campus provision, including those relating to marking and grading. Examination boards are

convened and operated by the University. The rights, obligations and responsibilities of all parties are detailed in a comprehensive and legally binding collaborative partnerships agreement signed by both parties.

Classification Algorithms

The University's undergraduate degree algorithm has remained unchanged for over 10 years. It is publicly available to students and stakeholders as part of the institutional academic regulations ([link here](#)).

Undergraduate Regulations B.2 Calculation of Bachelor Degree Honours

Where a student has been awarded a total of 360 credit points with 240 credits at Levels 2 and 3 and at least 120 at Level 3, then the Board of Examiners shall award the student an honours degree based on the most favourable outcome from the following three algorithms described:

- Calculating the weighted mean of all Level 3 module marks
- Calculating the weighted median of all Level 3 module marks
- Calculating the weighted mean of all Level 2 and Level 3 module marks

N.B. Level 2 equates to FHEQ Level 5, Level 3 equates to FHEQ Level 6.

Degree Algorithm Review

During academic year 20/21, a Degree Algorithms Working Group was established to undertake a review of the University undergraduate classification algorithms. Comprising of the University Academic Registrar; Head of Student Administration and Deputy Academic Registrar; Chairs of University Board of Examiners; Governance Manager and Governance Officer; Director of Quality, Enhancement and Standards; Academic Partnerships Manager; VP Education of the University Student Union and Chaired by the Acting Chair of the University Standing Regulations Oversight Group (under instruction from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student Development and Engagement)), the group was tasked to evaluate the three algorithm approach, to compare other degree classification mechanisms from across the sector and to promote a consideration of the mechanisms in place from a wide variety of stakeholders including from the student body.

Initial promotion of the review was commenced with a formal project initiation presentation at University Academic Board, which was followed by presentations at all of the University College Leadership Team meetings and feedback gathering sessions of interested parties in both academic and student contexts. An evaluation of potential impacts of removing any one of the three algorithms on the classification outcomes for all students who graduated in the previous 5 years was also conducted and used as a discussion point in most of these sessions. The summary data from this evaluation is presented below.

AY	Count (n)	Degree Classification Outcomes				
		All Algorithms Identical	L3 Mean is Unique	L3 Median is Unique	L2/3 Mean is Unique	Two Algorithms Shared
1920	3820	2624	80	282	219	615
		69%	2%	7%	6%	16%
1819	3758	2792	46	281	138	501
		74%	1%	7%	4%	13%
1718	3410	2377	54	266	148	565
		70%	2%	8%	4%	17%
1617	3325	2319	74	239	139	554
		70%	2%	7%	4%	17%
1516	3419	2377	59	274	172	537
		70%	2%	8%	5%	16%
Average %age		70.4%	1.8%	7.6%	4.6%	15.7%

Feedback on the current approaches identified a considerable degree of reassurance that over the five-year period covered by this data evaluation there was a high level of consistency in the operation of the three-algorithm process. This was particularly notable for Academic Year 2019/20 where the University

had operated a no detriment policy through the application of a Safety Net Mark system to counter any potential impacts on student performance as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. The data confirms that on average in 86% of cases over the five-year period, the removal of any one of the three algorithmic approaches would have garnered no change to the most favourable outcome. Academic feedback confirmed the view that the three algorithms provide a suitable mechanism for identifying overall student performance, and student feedback welcomed the application of a median calculation that offers mitigation against lapses in performance during a stressful final year of study which might otherwise have a detrimental impact on an otherwise healthy student profile.

In addition, alternative sector algorithmic mechanisms were considered to provide alternate viewpoints as to how degree classifications might be implemented. A range of mechanisms are in use broadly fall into two categories:

- Varying weighted mean calculations of the final 240 credits of study
- A weighted mean calculation based upon all 360 credits of study (often with a smaller weighting applied to the first year of study).

Many institutions also utilise some form of 'majority of modules', 'removal of best and worst marks', or 'mean mark for the best X credits' approach to mitigating against outlier low level of marks.

The Degree Algorithms Working Group concluded that the inclusion of the median calculation in the best of three approach at Lincoln provides a workable and statistically consistent approach to mitigating against outlier performance drops, and that the two mean calculations used offer comparable overall performance indicators for our students. In consideration of continuing with the first year of study remaining non-contributory in terms of final degree classification, both academic and student colleagues concurred that this works well, is clearly understood by all and offers significant advantages for the University's widening participation agenda. The Degree Algorithms Working Group recommend that no change to the University's undergraduate degree algorithm is necessary.

Reassessment Opportunities

Reassessment opportunities are also clearly detailed within the undergraduate regulations. Reassessment shall only be allowed as an attempt to retrieve an initial failure and shall not be allowed with a view to improving performance in any component of assessment where the pass standard has been met, except where the University Extenuating Circumstances Panel approves a claim relating to the assessment. As part of the review process, we have benchmarked with our competitor set HEIs to ensure resit and retake regulations are in line with sector norms. The University progression requirements do make allowance for condonement to an extent that is in line with sector norms, but many programmes require minimum performance requirements, some at module level and some at assessment level that are dictated by PSRB requirements. In support of this the University has a Standing Regulations Oversight Group which formally approves and maintains the variation to standard regulations which form an addendum to the University Regulations.

Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

A steady enhancement plan for our teaching and support of our students, developed over several years of continuous improvement approaches, has led to a 9.7% increase in upper degrees from 15/16 to 19/20.

This improvement in outcomes is in line with the changing entry tariff of Lincoln students over the same period of time. The entry tariff profile of students entering the University of Lincoln has shifted to include a higher proportion of students with A Level/combined entry qualifications (69% of all graduates in 19/20, +1% from 15/16). This is in line with the change in programme offer over a similar period, with a significant increase in our STEM subjects such as Engineering and Life Sciences.

Alongside significant investment in our teaching facilities, improvements in the quality of delivery through staff training and qualifications, and better aligned methods of assessment, we have also invested in significant systems to report on and support the engagement of our students through

advancements in Personal Tutoring. Our Personal Tutor Dashboards use live data analytics on individual students, including information on attendance, attainment and engagement through activity monitoring on our Virtual Learning Environment and activities in and supported by our Library service. We believe our increase in upper degrees is appropriate, and further contextualised by our sector position in this respect. We would further evidence this in that our methods of calculating and awarding degrees has not changed in this time.

As our degree programme offer has altered extensively in this time, growing STEM subjects from a standing start for example, it is difficult to compare like with like in this period. The improvements in teaching and student mix and ability, is consistently reflected in positive comments from our External Examiners who benchmark our standards. They concur that our degrees provide stretch and challenge with quotes from recent reports including “...clear evidence of stretch...” (BA (Hons) Business Management), “*These assessments stretched students considerably*” (BA (Hons) English), “*There is also a wide variety of assessment techniques which are bound to stretch even the strongest student*” (BA (Hons) Public Relations).

Supporting our Students

The University of Lincoln is extremely proud of the range of academic and personal support offered to our students, many of whom are first in their family to engage in Higher Education. Our Access and Participation Agreement with the Office for Students outlines our specific areas of focus for improving attainment for certain student demographic groups, and this is being achieved through a number of projects, the evaluation of which is overseen by the Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute.

Recent initiatives include:

- The Lincoln First Year project, which has overseen a number of different support mechanisms to help students transition successfully to university life.
- The Library Academic Writing Support and Maths and Stats Help services, which provide bespoke one to one and group support for students.
- Breaking Barriers – a future careers initiative aiming to raise aspirations and attainment.
- The Festival of Learning – a two-week period of activity outside of standard teaching and assessment weeks which focusses on advancement of digital skills and employability activities.
- The Lincoln Equality of Attainment Project (LEAP) which is investigating differential attainment within our students and running initiatives at curricular and University level to ensure we provide equal opportunities for attainment for all.

Identifying Good Practice and Actions

The University of Lincoln has developed an Assessment Framework ([link here](#)) to ensure consistency of practice across all Schools and programmes within the institution. The Framework includes extensive policy as outlined above covering marking practice, moderation and generic grade descriptors.

Across the Colleges there are a number of examples of good practice which ensure we are assessing our students appropriately.

- We are currently participating in AdvanceHE’s External Examiner development programme, which will be delivered to academics across several areas during 2020/21.
- In the College of Arts, colleagues carry out additional benchmarking activity by attending degree exhibitions at other institutions. This allows us to identify standards across a range of practice based disciplines, ensuring our outcomes are appropriate and fair and improving assessment practice within our programmes.
- Progress Panels across the Colleges are run at the halfway point of the academic year. During these sessions we review student outcomes to date, and follow up with weaker students, signposting to further support and resources. This gives us an opportunity to monitor outcomes and ensure appropriateness.
- Many Schools use level specific assessment criteria to help frame an overarching learning pathway for undergraduate students.

- Personal Tutor activities, supported and enhanced by the Personal Tutor Dashboard system that uses data analytics to encourage proactive personal tutoring that is directed more to study and assessment achievement enhancements than to the more common reactive approach to Personal Tutoring that traditionally only responded to problems.
- Improved moderation processes now encourage consideration of future enhancement strategies as well as fulfilling the requirements of quality assurance.

Risks and Challenges

The University follows a process of identifying and mitigating potential issues around our degree outcomes through the quality assurance processes outlined above. Where necessary, working groups are established to investigate specific issues, feeding back into Education and Student Life Committee, co-chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student Development and Engagement) and the Vice President (Academic) of the Student Union. The quality of our degrees is paramount in such discussions, and any policy or regulatory changes resulting are formally approved by the Academic Board.

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