

DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

INSTITUTIONAL DEGREE CLASSIFICATION PROFILE

The Open University provides learning opportunities in all four nations of the UK and is the largest Higher Education Institution in the country with 208,308 students¹ and 43,156 students on validated programmes. We are distinctive in offering flexible part-time study which is supported at a distance. We are open entry, in that the majority of our qualifications have no entry requirements. In 2021/22 the Open University awarded 10,926 Honours degrees. Table 1 shows the overall classification profile of directly taught honours degrees over the last nine years.

Table 1 Overall classification of directly taught honours degrees by year as a percentage.

	3rd	2.2	2.1	1sts
2011/12	14	29	40	17
2012/13	14	29	39	17
2013/14	15	28	40	17
2014/15	15	28	40	18
2015/16	16	29	39	17
2016/17	17	29	37	17
2017/18	19	30	36	15
2018/19	16	27	39	18
2019/20	12	26	40	22
2020/21	9	23	43	25
2021/22	9	24	42	25

The striking feature of the degree profile is the consistency of ‘good degrees’ awarded over the 2011/12 and 2018/19 period of time. An increase in the number of ‘good’ degrees (firsts and 2:1 degrees) can be seen in the period 2019/20 to 2021/22. Whilst still below the sector average, initiatives, such as those made during the pandemic can contribute to incremental increases and provide useful learning for future change. It is interesting to note that our percentage of first-class honours in 2012 was on par with the average for the sector, but since then the average percentage of firsts in the sector has doubled. At present the percentage of third-class honours degrees is much higher than the average in the sector and this may reflect a number of factors such as the part-time nature of study and the life context of mature students with family, work and caring responsibilities. There is a slight decline in the classification profile in 2017/18. This was attributed to the ending of the “old framework” of degrees in 2017 and the introduction of the “new framework” as a result of the changes in funding in England in 2012. It is thought that a number of students were studying at a much higher intensity to complete their “old framework” degrees in the time available and this may have had a detrimental effect on their performance.

Analysis of equalities monitoring data suggests differential outcomes when analysed by location in the UK, disability, and ethnicity, in relation to the awarding of undergraduate qualifications and on the classification outcomes of such an award. These awarding gaps are being addressed through our Access, Participation and Success strategic objectives and Access and Participation Plan. As seen across the sector, the greatest gaps exist when the data is analysed by ethnic background. Initiatives to address this include a focus on ensuring curriculum is inclusive, staff are diverse and well-trained and that the institution fosters students’ sense of belonging. The Access Participation

¹ [Facts and figures | About The Open University](#)

and Success team are working with faculties and supporting units on a range of initiatives to close awarding gaps.

We oversee the awarding of over 6,000 validated degrees annually, through our partner institutions. Validated partners support our mission to widen participation and access to Higher Education. Table 2 shows the honours degree award profiles of our validated partner institutions.

Table 2 Classification of honours degrees at validated partner institutions by year as a percentage.

	3rd	2.2	2.1	1sts
2011/12	17	35	35	13
2012/13	15	33	38	13
2013/14	17	35	35	13
2014/15	22	38	30	9
2015/16	20	38	29	12
2016/17	23	39	28	10
2017/18	25	36	29	11
2018/19	25	35	28	11
2019/20	28	36	25	11
2020/21	8	37	43	12
2021/22	3	30	54	13

Within our portfolio of partner institutions, there is always variation of classification profiles depending upon the nature of their intake and the slight variation across the years shown in Table 2 which reflects the changing make up of partner institutions within the portfolio. The figures for 2020/21 and 2021/22 report an upward shift in classifications, which is in part due to our largest partner institute who advised that this upward shift was due to improvements in teaching and assessment.

ASSESSMENT AND MARKING PRACTICES

The OU continues to be above the sector average for Assessment and Feedback in the National Students Survey². One of the important distinctions of The Open University is our central management of all assessment activities³. All assessment strategies are agreed centrally, all assignments are submitted to a central handler that is also responsible for the distribution to markers and the capture of the marking outcomes. All Module Result Panels (MRPs), Cluster Examination and Assessment Boards (CEABs) and the Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel (MRAQCP) who oversee the award of grades are managed centrally and thus we can monitor assessment outcomes in detail across the whole university. Our assessment materials and the detailed marking schemes are produced by the module team through many iterations to ensure they are of the highest quality. Our marking is carried out by academic members of staff, Associate Lecturers, with multiple moderation steps to ensure consistency. More details can be found in the [Module Results Determination Policy](#), which demonstrates our focus on transparency, fairness, and consistency. Students can apply for special assessment arrangements

² [NSS data: provider-level - Office for Students](#)

³ <https://www.open.ac.uk/about/main/teaching-and-research/quality-and-standards>

which are considered centrally, through groups such as the Assessment Exception Group or the Accessibility Referrals Panel, to ensure consistency. Students can appeal individual grades of their assessment through centrally published procedures which align with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator good practice framework. Students can advise the MRP of any circumstances that may have affected their performance on assessment activities during the module. The MRP can take this information into account when considering the student's module result outcome.

Procedures for assessment in partner institutions are laid out in the regulations for validated institutions and their quality assurance is part of the regular oversight visits and 5 yearly revalidation process⁴. These procedures vary slightly to those of the direct provision to meet the needs of full-time students taught in a face-to-face environment.

Academic standards and the achievement of subject benchmarks are overseen by experienced External Examiners who are appointed at university level and agreed by the University's Qualifications and Assessment Committee (QAC). The Open University greatly values the roles External Examiners play in agreeing assignments and assessment strategies and ensuring academic quality and standards. The OU has been involved in the Advance HE's External Examiner professional development programme for its own staff and is one of the largest training providers. We have been limited by the extent to which similar training has been undertaken by other universities for the External Examiners on our modules and we will be offering the Advance HE training for External Examiners to those appointed to oversee OU modules.

ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE⁵

Assessment strategies for modules and qualifications are approved by the Tuition and Assessment Strategy Approval Meeting (TASAM), agreed by Boards of Studies, Academic Committees (Learning, Teaching and Assessment) and then approved by QAC. This ensures we meet the needs of UK national frameworks⁶ and subject benchmarks. The Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC) provides a similar oversight of validated partner provision. The award of individual student module results is overseen by the relevant MRP which recommends results to the CEAB. This provides an oversight of the performance within qualifications and the CEABs involve External Examiners with the relevant subject expertise.

Before release to students all module results are ratified by the MRAQCP, which reviews the result distribution within similar areas and compares them with previous years to identify any substantial change in performance. The MRAQCP engages with CEABs and MRPs on the result outcomes to ensure any such changes in performance are considered and explained. This can lead to module results being 'pending' before they are released to students. MRAQCP has access to the individual MRP report proformas as well as the CEAB proformas so they can interrogate the recommended module result for students if there is a requirement to do so. MRAQCP has a similar oversight of the

⁴ <https://www.open.ac.uk/about/validation-partnerships/about-ou-validation/regulations-validated-awards-open-university>

⁵ <https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/governance/cttee-chair-training/Published%20Training%20Documents/OU%20Academic%20Governance%20Structure%20Chart.pdf#search=academic%20governance%20structure>

⁶ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

validated provision with minutes of award boards and reports from OU representatives at the boards being scrutinised before the final results are released to students.

The Open University values the input of external representatives who are involved in all aspects of teaching and learning as well as in OU committees and the award of results in both the direct provision and validated provision.

CLASSIFICATION ALGORITHMS

Unlike other Universities that award a percentage score for individual modules that are brought together by an appropriate algorithm for the award of classifications, The Open University uses the weighted grade score of individual modules to generate a grade outcome.

Following Senate request in 2018, the OU classification algorithm has undergone a substantive review.

A revised algorithm was approved by Senate in January 2023 and implemented on 1 March 2023 for all students studying Bachelor's Honours degrees who complete and are offered their degrees with the Open University. Details of the classification algorithm can be found within [Student Policies and Regulations](#)⁷. The change meets the Office for Students' requirement for universities to regularly review their degree classification policies, maintains fairness of outcomes for our students and upholds the high standards of quality for which OU degrees are known and respected for in the UK HE sector and internationally. The impact of this change will be reviewed and reported in the 2024 Degree Outcomes Statement.

Partner institutions use an algorithm that calculates the average percentage score based on credit size and the individual percentage awarded for each module with again a two to one weighting for level 3 modules to level 2 modules, as outlined in the regulations for partner institutions⁸.

TEACHING PRACTICES AND LEARNING RESOURCES

The Open University has always invested in improved teaching and learning and is an international leader in teaching and supporting part time students at a distance. Recent examples include the use of analytics to identify students who may require and can be offered extra support⁹, the introduction of learning design to enable module teams to ensure their teaching is of the highest quality¹⁰ and investment in the Virtual Learning Environment through which the University delivers its teaching¹¹.

The University is focussed on improving student outcomes: increasing student success, improving student satisfaction, access, participation, and success and supporting personal and career outcomes. In recent years we have increased the numbers of our academic and professional staff

⁷ [Understanding your Class of Honours | Student Policies and Regulations | The Open University](#)

⁸ <https://help.open.ac.uk/documents/policies/academic-regulations>

⁹ <https://help.open.ac.uk/learning-analytics-and-you>

¹⁰ <https://iet.open.ac.uk/themes/learning-analytics-and-learning-design>

¹¹ <http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/what-is-distance-learning>

categories who have Advance HE accreditation at all levels. Many of our Associate Lecturers work elsewhere in the sector and bring good practice from their other employer into the OU.

IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICE AND ACTIONS

The University reviews the outcome of its teaching and learning and identifies areas of good practice through its annual Quality Monitoring and Enhancement (QME) process and six yearly Periodic Qualification Reviews¹².

The University has an Assessment Programme managed from the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) which is responsible for the enhancement of assessment practice and processes across the University.

¹² <https://openuniv.sharepoint.com/sites/quality/quality-standards>