**Degree Outcomes Statement 2021**

The University of Kent is committed to maintaining robust academic standards and ensuring that student attainment is assessed fairly and consistently in line with relevant sector external reference points, so that our awards hold their value at the point of qualification and over time.

Since March 2020, the University of Kent has been facing unprecedented challenges of Covid-19. The University subsequently moved to online education provision ensuring that it adhered to revised regulatory guidance (OfS, QAA, CMA and PSRB).

**Degree Classification Profile**

Undergraduate degree outcomes have largely remained stable at the University of Kent over the five years leading up to and including 2019/20, with some slight increase in the percentage of First class degrees awarded becoming evident in 19/20. That this year saw the introduction of several ‘no detriment’ measures intended to offset the disruption to student learning experience caused by the Covid-19 pandemic may indicate the source of this increase. Further analysis will be undertaken this year to see if this was the case. The detail of the ‘no detriment’ measures is set out at relevant points in this document.

This increase has occurred at the same time as great reductions have been achieved in many of the targets set by the OfS for reducing the BAME awarding gap. It is important that if we reduce the higher provision of 1st and 2(1)’s, we do so while not losing this beneficial equality work.

Table 1 presents the distribution of degree classifications across the five-year period, showing evidence of some grade inflation, with the percentage of 1st / 2(1) awards increasing to 85% from 79-80% in the previous four years, and the percentage of 1st class awards increasing to 31% from 26-27% in earlier years.

In 2019-20, Kent had a slightly higher rate of awarding 1st/2(1) degrees than the national sector average (85% vs 82%).



Degree outcomes at the University of Kent and our partner institutions over the last five years are summarised in Appendix A.

**Covid – 19**

In line with UK Government advice and guidance on social isolation and closure the University began to transition all teaching and assessment activities to online platforms, with effect from the end of week 21 (14/03/2020). In response to the global Covid-19 pandemic, Senate authorised the implementation of a number of dispensations from the University’s regulations. These dispensations are noted below in each relevant section.

Kent’s **‘No-detriment’ policy** became effective asof 14/03/20 as this was the point at which the disruption to student learning experience was first experienced. The policy covered various measures, authorised by Senate, intended to mitigate the disruption to any assessments and to ensure the continued quality and standing of Kent degrees.

**Assessment and Marking Practices**

The University’s academic provision aligns with the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code), with sound processes in place to ensure that assessment and marking practices operate in accordance with the expectations, core practices and other reference points (e.g. [Subject Benchmark Statements](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements) and [Degree Classification Descriptors](https://ukscqa.org.uk/what-we-do/degree-standards/)) set out in the Code (See: Credit Framework [Annex 6: Marking](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-annex6-marking.pdf)). In addition, where relevant to the provision we take into account the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and Apprenticeship Standards.

In 2012/13 Kent adopted a University-wide [categorical marking scale](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-annex6-marking.pdf) for use with respect to single pieces of work that require a qualitative judgement to be made, such as essays, dissertations, reports, individual examination questions, with a view to providing benchmarked grading points within each class band and thereby encouraging markers to make definitive judgements on the standards achieved. Marking consistency is ensured through standardised moderation or double marking processes, which are managed by the [Chief Examiner](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexj-boards-of-examiners-v2.pdf) in each School. Assessments are designed to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are attained at the appropriate level for the module. Methods of assessment are published in a module specification and held on central university websites. Overall assessment strategies for courses are set out in the approved course specifications.

Assessment and marking practices are reviewed by the [Board of Examiners](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexj-boards-of-examiners-v2.pdf) for each course in consultation with one or more external examiners, who provide informed and impartial assurance of the academic standards achieved, both in comparison to the [FHEQ](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks) and those at other universities in the UK. [External examiners](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexk-external-examiners-v2.pdf) are required to comment explicitly on the soundness of assessment and marking practices and on the standards achieved by students in their annual reports. These reports are reviewed by the relevant Divisional Committees, and by the University’s Education and Student Experience Board, which ensures that good practice is highlighted and any areas for improvement are addressed.

To ensure all students can demonstrate their true level of academic performance, Kent operates a policy to [mitigate extenuating circumstances](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-annex9-mitigation.pdf) that may have negatively affected the student’s achievement on particular assessments. In addition, students may [appeal](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-annex13-appeals.pdf) against the recommendations of the Board of Examiners on the grounds of administrative, clerical or procedural error, or with regard to extenuating circumstances there were not made known previously or evidence of prejudice or bias.

All collaborative courses leading to awards of the University are subject to the University’s standard [academic regulations](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/regulations/index.html), [Codes of Practice for Quality Assurance](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/index.html) and [Credit Framework](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/index.html) conventions, including those for marking and assessment. Boards of Examiners for courses offered by partner providers operate with a Kent academic member of staff as Chair and with one or more University appointed external examiner as a member of the Board. In the way, the University ensures comparability of standards for all courses leading to its awards, regardless of the point of delivery.

**Covid-19 notes:** All students were assumed to have a case for mitigation due to the impact of Covid-19 on their studies and supporting evidence was not required in such cases. In addition, the University remained sensitive to the fact that some evidence might have been more difficult to obtain even for non-Covid-19 circumstances. In addition, the University decided that students that failed their modules in Summer Term would be given an automatic deferral.

The University has also authorised Schools to allow a blanket extension for coursework, subject to their requirements for marking work and processing the marks in time for them to reported to the Board of Examiners. In addition, the requirement for students returning from a period of study to have achieved at least 33% of the credits available for the stage / period in order to qualify for the additional progression assessment(s) was waived. Any student who did not qualify for automatic progression to the next stage of their programme by achieving the standard minimum of 66% of the required credit would have been permitted to take the progression assessment(s) at the next available opportunity.

**Method of Calculating Degree Classifications**

The University uses [two methods of classification](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-credit-framework-sept2020.pdf) for its taught degree courses—the ‘average’ method and the ‘preponderance’ method—with students awarded the better result achieved under either methodology. Classification under the ‘average’ method is based on the calculation of a final weighted course average mark, which is used to place student performance in the relevant honours degree classification band. The ‘preponderance’ method of classification requires the achievement of a final weighted course average mark that falls within 3% of the boundary for a higher class band and for at least 50% of the contributing credits to be achieved in that higher band.

While the ‘average’ method favours those courses which allow for high numerical achievement in comparatively few modules, the ‘preponderance’ method rewards more consistent achievement at a higher level across the contributing stages.

Condonement and compensation may be applied to relevant modules up to a maximum cumulative total of 25% of the credit required for the stage, an allowance which reflects the norms of national credit systems.

Students are normally allowed a maximum of two reassessment opportunities where a module has been failed and compensation or condonement are not applied. Component(s) that are reassessed are not capped at the pass mark but the overall module mark is capped.

The University does not operate any zone of consideration for raising a ‘borderline’ performance to a higher classification band on a discretionary basis. Classification is based on the marks achieved.

Details of these methods are published on the University websites and are available to students. Student’s progression/award results are communicated via Kent’s Student Data System.

**Covid-19 note:** Kent’s‘no detriment’ policy allowed for the calculation of an alternative average for the Stage based on the marks achieved for assessments completed up to and including 14/03/2020. Firstly, where the student was in the position to pass the Stage a check would have be made to see if the ‘Safety-net average weighted mark for the Stage’ was greater than the actual weighted Stage average achieved after all of the assessments had been completed. Where the safety-net average weighted mark for the Stage was the greater of the two, it was selected for use for the purposes of progression and classification instead of the actual weighted average Stage mark. A second comparison check was made at the point of classification to ensure that the Safety-net Average Weighted Stage Mark had no negative impact on the calculation of the Final Overall Weighted Average Mark for the programme used for classification purposes.

Through these two comparison checks, use of the Safety-net Average Weighted Stage Mark acts as a safeguard for students, guaranteeing a minimum baseline mark for student performance for the Stage and allows for this to substitute for the Actual Stage Average Weighted Mark achieved where to do so would be advantageous for the classification of the award.

Marks for individual assessments would have not made a raw contribution to the calculation of the safety-net average weighted mark for the Stage but would have made a proportionate contribution based on the weighted contribution that each piece of assessment makes to the module in which it took place and the credit weighting of that module.

Analysis shows that the overall classification uplift resulting from use of the ‘Safety Net’ calculation in isolation of the other ‘no detriment’ measures was lower than 1%.

**Academic Governance**

The University’s academic governance arrangements operate to ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards. Analysis of trends in degree outcomes is undertaken annually by Divisions as part of the [annual course monitoring](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexe-annual-monitoring-v2.pdf) procedure.

The University’s Education and Student Experience Board (ESEB), which includes Divisional representation, analyses five yearly trends in the proportions of ‘good degrees’ awarded by Divisions, partner providers and campus of delivery at its first meeting in the academic year.

Similarly, the recommendations to the University made by external examiners in their annual reports are considered in detail by ESEB and are again summarised for the benefit of Senate and Council. The awards made by partner providers are subject to these same procedures for quality assurance. In this way the University’s governance arrangements function to ensure that the level of student attainment is reviewed appropriately year-on-year and that academic standards are maintained over time.

**Learning and Teaching Practices**

The University has made a range of enhancements to teaching practices and the student learning environment in 2019-20, some specifically in response to the pandemic:

• Increasing the focus on the enhancement of pedagogical practices using technology enhanced learning (TEL) developments, specifically to support online teaching and assessment (including exams) from March 2020. Two new Moodle courses were developed to support staff and students in adapting to our new circumstances to enable successful teaching and learning experiences online. This included guidance on using core technologies (e.g. MS Teams and lecture capture), plus tips on how to adjust teaching to encourage active learning and collaboration online. ‘Digitally Enhanced Education’: a guide to teaching online had 1,612 enrolments (including all academic and professional service staff, plus GTAs); ‘Online Learning at Kent’: a guide to successful study online (21,543 enrolments (including all students and staff) described as "a necessary prerequisite to having a better learning experience in this unprecedented era."

• Staff have continued to gain fellowships of the Higher Education Academy (Advance HE) through our accredited programmes and CPD provision (now both running online), that acknowledges their professionalism in learning and teaching. The proportion of University academic staff with Advance HE (AHE) recognition has increased to 78.4% in 2019-20, with a further 17 experienced academic and professional service staff gaining Senior Fellowships for their leadership and support of student learning. This is significantly above the sector average of 50.3%.

• The University's revised promotion guidelines came into effect in 2019-2020, which are intended to recognise a wide range of academic contributions. Senior Fellowship of the HEA is explicitly mentioned as an example of evidence of leadership in teaching or learning support in the Academic Career Map, with some applicants successfully achieving promotion to Senior Lecturer/Reader. In 2019-20, a total of 17 staff were promoted on the basis of education-led practice (16 on ES&P contracts, 1 on an E&R contract).

• Extended enhancements to the academic support provided to students, in order to provide a highly supportive, personalised learning environment for students, one that embraces and values diversity. We have promoted our emphasis on inclusive practice and access through our online guidance for staff and students, with evidence from our Student Success team that this has not only improved student engagement, but also, reduced awarding gaps. **The BAME awarding gap has come down dramatically in the most recent year to 12% from the 19% it has been at for the past 3 years.**

• In terms of responding to the pandemic, we have optimised the use of our teaching and social spaces in line with Government guidance, plus enhanced our Digital Library provision to support remote access to staff and students. All the main University study hubs remained open with reduced capacity to support the wider learning experience on campus, and spaces not being used for timetabled teaching sessions were made available as additional study spaces for students. Student Services worked closely with IT services to enable staff and student access to hardship funds and/or equipment required for remote access to work and study.

• Building on our Powerful Learning Experiences project, our annual Learning and Teaching Conference was conducted online (“Enhancing Relevance: how we connect academic learning to the wider world” - 8-15 June 2020), supported by regular staff symposia/webinars to enhance pedagogy, address diversity (e.g. race in the curriculum) and support the graduate attributes and outcomes. With the sudden shift to online teaching, the first in a series of webinars entitled “Teaching Online: Learning from Colleagues’ Experiences” (online 7-16 May, 2020) was launched to share practice and ensure a high quality student learning experience online.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Education and Student Experience Board notes that UG degree outcomes have remained largely stable over the five year period under review and that the proportion of first class and upper second class honours degrees awarded is broadly in line with the sector average.

Four lines of continued investigation and action are recommended, however:

1. Variations in attainment outcomes between Divisions, with a sixteen percentage point range evident in the proportion of 1st/2(1) honours degrees awarded;

**Action:** ESEB, Divisional Education and UG Student Experience Committees;

1. The sizeable attainment gap between White and BAME students;
2. The sizeable and growing difference between 1st/2(1) rates between students from the most deprived localities and those from the least deprived areas.
3. In preparation for the Degree Outcomes Statement 2020/21, commence early investigation of degree outcomes achieved by students in 2019/20 following the shift to online teaching and assessment during the course of the academic year in order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

**Action 2 & 3:** ESEB, Student Success Project.

**Action 4:** ESEB via EASC.

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**Appendix A**

Table 1 presents the distribution of degree classifications across the five-year period, showing evidence of some grade inflation, with the percentage of 1st / 2(1) awards increasing to 85% from 79-80% in the previous four years, and the percentage of 1st class awards increasing to 31% from 26-27% in earlier years.

In 2019-20, Kent had a slightly higher rate of awarding 1st/2(1) degrees than the national sector average (85% vs 82%).



Overall levels of achievement are highest amongst validated institutions (see tables 2 and 3), based on smaller populations studying towards highly specialised awards.









Across demographic splits in the data, female students outperform their male counterparts (see table 5), with a 9% percentage difference 2018-19 and 3% percentage difference in 2019-20. There is a sizeable attainment gap between White and BAME students (see table 7), this is a major focus of activity for the Student Success Project. Students declaring a disability do not appear to be disadvantaged in terms of degree award outcomes, maintaining comparable rates of 1st/2(1) achievement with those with no known disability.

**However, the BAME awarding gap has come down dramatically in the most recent year to 12% from the 19% it has been at for the past 3 years. This reduction is also seen amongst the gap between First class degrees awarded. Within this, the Black/White awarding gap has reduced by 11% points to 16%, the lowest it has been for at least the past 6 years, similarly for the Asian/White gap which now sits at 9%, 7% points lower than last year. The Mixed&Other/White awarding gap has also reduced by 1% point.**

**In short, while there has been an overall increase in awarding of First and 2(I)’s, this has occurred at the same time as great reductions have been achieved in many of the targets set by the OfS. It is important that if we reduce the higher provision of First and 2(I)’s, we do so while not losing this beneficial equality work.**

1st/2(1) rates for student coming of areas of low higher education participation have seen a larger increase than the rates for students from areas of high participation, so there is now a slightly smaller disparity between POLAR4 quintile students (see table 9). However, there remains a sizeable and growing difference between 1st/2(1) rates between students from the most deprived localities and those from the least deprived areas (see table 10), with a 16% difference seen in 2019-20 (74% for Quintile 1 and 89% for Quintile 5).











Nb. [s] = suppressed – HESA rounding strategy applied – percentages need at least 22.5 people in the denominator.