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# **Degree Outcomes Statement 2023**

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.

The 2021/22 academic year was less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and given the relaxation of public health restrictions prior to the commencement of the academic year, the University reverted to a more pre-pandemic ‘business as usual’ (BAU) approach to managing the student learning experience.

Kent’s ‘No-detriment’ policy was no longer applied in the academic year 2021/22 (unless it was applicable to a subset of the finalists). However, Kent implemented the following changes in response to the sudden and severe worsening of the pandemic in December 2021:

* the period of self-certification for periods of illness was extended to twenty-eight days in line with the government’s guidance;
* a flexible submission period equating to a week’s extension for coursework throughout the Spring Term to offset the continued Tier 4 level lockdown in Kent from November 2021 – April 2022.

Kent has also retained innovations in online delivery and assessment that have proven beneficial pedagogically during the previous two years. The recording of lectures for replay by students at a time of their convenience has become the norm and formal examinations (with one PSRB-driven subject area exception) were staged online.

Kent has continued to adhere to the regulatory guidance (OfS, QAA, CMA and PSRB) to ensure that all its students receive an educational experience equivalent to that of the pre-Covid era in which the quality and academic standards of the provision are maintained.

## **Degree Classification Profile**

Kent had experienced a period of stability in awarding good degrees until 2019/20 - 80% in 2017/18 and 79% in 2018/19, although the rate of awarding 1st/2(I) degrees was slightly higher than the national sector average.

Since 2019/20, Kent has seen an increase in the proportion of good degrees awarded, which has coincided with the pandemic. In 2019/20, Kent has awarded 85% of 1st/2(I) degrees and in 2020/21 awarded 87% of 1st/2(I) degrees. Although the percentage of good degrees has reduced to 85% in 2021/22, it has not dropped to the pre-pandemic rates. In addition, Kent continues to have a higher rate of awarding 1st/2(I) degrees than the national sector average (85% vs 79%).

Table 1 presents the distribution of degree classifications across the five-year period, showing evidence of a sustained increase in the percentage of 1st / 2(1) awarded from 2019/20. These rates of higher award exceed the national sector average throughout this period.

We will re-assess the data in 2022/23 when we fully reverted to BAU to consider what measures might be necessary to address this increase.

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



## **Assessment and Marking Practices**

The University’s academic provision aligns with the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code), with 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/education/documents/credit-framework/credit-framework-annex-6.docx)). 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/education/documents/credit-framework/credit-framework-annex-6.docx) 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/education/documents/code-of-practice-taught/code-of-practice-taught-annex-j.docx) in each Division. 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/education/documents/code-of-practice-taught/code-of-practice-taught-annex-j.docx) 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/education/documents/code-of-practice-taught/code-of-practice-taught-annex-k.docx) 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/education/documents/credit-framework/credit-framework-annex-9.docx) that may have negatively affected the student’s achievement on particular assessments. In addition, students may [appeal](https://www.kent.ac.uk/education/documents/credit-framework/credit-framework-annex-13.docx) 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/education/documents/regulations-taught/academic-regulations-for-taught-courses.docx), [Codes of Practice for Quality Assurance](https://www.kent.ac.uk/education/regulatory-framework/codes-of-practice-for-taught-courses) and [Credit Framework](https://www.kent.ac.uk/education/regulatory-framework/credit-framework) 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.

## **Method of Calculating Degree Classifications**

The University uses [two methods of classification](https://www.kent.ac.uk/education/documents/credit-framework/credit-framework.docx) 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.

## **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.

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 continued to make a range of enhancements to teaching practices and the student learning environment in 2021-22, in response to the return to ‘on campus’ delivery following the pandemic, we have:

* successfully transitioned to a blend of synchronous and asynchronous teaching at the height of the pandemic, in which the majority of our students returned to in person teaching on campus, although some students were approved to continue to study remotely due to local Covid restrictions. Of note were the positive responses received to the optional questions in NSS 2021, which revealed that 75% students agreed they had received ‘useful’ and ‘timely’ (67%) information about the changes made to their courses to adapt to pandemic conditions; 79% agreed that they had been able to access the learning resources required for them to study remotely. Over 77% of students agreed that the University had taken sufficient steps to protect student safety, an outcome that reflected our ranked priorities of ‘Safe, Study, Social’ at Kent and the efforts we made to provide information and address concerns through regular student webinars.
* enhanced our registration, transition and Welcome Week activities by offering online activities pre-arrival, as well as range of on campus sessions for academic and student services before the start of term. Our enforced Digital First approach due to the pandemic led to the design and development of a remote registration process and a pre-arrivals student experience activity programme that included University Student Services Fair, with online guidance and advice about adapting to University study and life. We have continued this extended transition support both before and after Welcome Week with refreshers sessions, including an events calendar, arrivals guide and online resources and activities promoted via dedicated Welcome webpages and Uni Kent Student App (7,850 users in September 2021).
* extended our Digital Library (512,000 additional e-books purchased up to 2021), tailored to academic need and supporting wider demographic shifts in our student profile by embedding inclusive resources. Through engaging students in purchasing schemes and resource decisions, we have procured 2,049 e-book titles and embedded disciplinary-focused information skills training for students in the curriculum (librarians delivered 8,400 sessions in 2021). This supported access to, and critical appraisal of resources, that included 2,385 academic reading lists for course and modules alongside disciplinary research databases (e.g., for final year dissertations).
* continued to enhance our digital pedagogical practices using technology enhanced learning (TEL) developments, with our internal Moodle modules (Digitally Enhanced Education for staff; Online Learning at Kent for students) being well-used and supplemented by regular staff and student webinars. For 2021 (2022), the staff course had 826 (139) unique users and 1,497 (262) views and the student course had 11,291 (6,069) unique users and 29,611 (17,219) views. Students first access this material in a Welcome Week webinar (3,300 views). The Digitally Enhanced Education (DEE) webinar series brings together experts and prestigious speakers from around the world to share practice, exchange ideas and forge professional relationships. The DEE webinar series continues to attract a global audience of 4,779 people (with 2,612 attendees) and has focused on a range of topics including online pedagogy, digital accessibility, electronic assessment and post-pandemic teaching. The Association for Learning Technology recognised Dr Phil Anthony (Head of Technology Enhanced Learning) as ALT Learning Technologist of the Year 2021 for ‘sharing practices in TEL with a global audience’, that also demonstrates Kent’s ongoing commitment to delivering an outstanding digital teaching and learning experience for our staff and students.
* taken significant action to ensure that our graduates are employable and can be supported into employment by having staff dedicated to placements and employability in each Division for all students. In addition, our Careers Advisers provide tailored support for specific student groups to address their needs and inequities in terms of employment. For example, there is now specialised central support for POLAR Q1&2 finalists and ‘at risk’ graduates with a specialist team (GradCore), who deliver a programme targeting unemployed or underemployed graduates (~500 per year), along with our Destination Success Bootcamp for POLAR 1&2 students around career readiness. In 2021/22, these advisers moved 68.3% of graduates in this group into positive outcomes, and of the graduates who found work, 71% went into highly skilled employment. When working with finalists in POLAR Q1 and 2, 77.7% had positive outcomes, and of those in employment, 77% went into highly skilled employment.
* achieved successful re-accreditation of our Higher Education Academy (Advance HE) professional development programmes and CPD provision with several commendations for ‘demonstrating a clear institutional priority to championing teaching excellence, through its Academic Career Map and promotion policy’, as well as ‘the impressive number of staff with relevant Fellowships’, which is significantly above the sector average. The ‘innovative new (Leadership in Education and Academic Practice (LEAP) programme’ was launched to support Fellows wishing to develop their leadership and scholarship practice towards Senior Fellowship. Academic staff are successfully achieving promotion to Senior Lecturer/Reader/Professor based on evidence of teaching excellence through their leadership and scholarship.
* Academic and professional services for students have been enhanced during the pandemic, with a greater range of services and resources being delivered online, as well as on campus and demand has remained high. We have continued to monitor the impact of our No Detriment policies (with 2020/without 2021 the safety net) on student performance and attainment gaps during Covid. The majority of exams in 2022 continued to be conducted online where overall, attainment increased (~2-4%) and gaps were significantly reduced (especially for Black and Asian students vs White). We are conducting further evaluation and research to understand better how academic delivery and assessment modes can level up outcomes for all our students to inform the upcoming TEF and our actions/targets for our Access Participation Plan.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Education and Student Experience Board notes that UG degree outcomes have reduced in 2021/22, however the proportion of first class and upper second-class honours degrees awarded (85%) has not dropped to the pre-pandemic levels. Kent also awards a higher rate of good degrees when compared to the national sector average of 79%. In addition, this difference of 1st/2(I) awards is continuously increasing.

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

1. Consider what FURTHER STEPS are necessary in order to meet the Universities UK commitment for universities in England to return to pre-pandemic classification levels for the award of undergraduate honours degrees.
2. The sizeable attainment gap between White and BAME students.
3. The sizeable difference between 1st/2(1) rates between students from the most deprived localities and those from the least deprived areas.

**Action 1 & 2 :** ESEB, Student Success Project.

**Action 3:** ESEB via EASC.

DN/MD   
May 2023

# **Appendix A**

**Table 1** presents the distribution of degree classifications across the five-year period, showing evidence of a sustained increase in the percentage of 1st / 2(1) awarded from 2019/20. These rates of higher award exceed the national sector average throughout this period.

Since 2019/20, Kent has seen an increase in the proportion of good degrees awarded, which has coincided with the pandemic. In 2019/20, Kent has awarded 85% of 1st/2(I) degrees and in 2020/21 awarded 87% of 1st/2(I) degrees. Although the percentage of good degrees has reduced to 85% in 2021/22, it has not dropped to pre-pandemic rates. In addition, Kent continues to have a higher rate of awarding 1st/2(I) degrees than the national sector average (85% vs 79%).



**Tables 2 and 3** present the overall levels of achievement across Kent and validated institutions. The highest levels of achievement are seen amongst validated institutions, based on smaller populations studying towards highly specialised awards.





**Table 4** presents data on achievement levels across the Divisions within Kent, where the lowest number of good degrees is awarded in the Division of Computing, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences (80%).



**Table 5** shows the demographic splits in the data, where female students are seen to outperform their male counterparts, with an 4% percentage difference in 2021/22. This is a reduction of 8% percentage difference seen in 2020/21.



**Table 6** shows the demographic splits in the data by age group. Although the level of achievement of 1st / 2(1) awards is largely similar across all age groups, there is a significant increase of good degree awards in the age group of 36 years and older in 2021/22 (88%) when compared to previous years.



**Table 7** shows data on level of student achievement for White and BAME students. Kent has seen a dramatic drop in the attainment gap of 12% in 2019/20 and a further reduction to 10% in 2020/21, which could be attributed to the Student Success Project. However, the attainment gap has increased to 15% in 2021/22. It is important that in our attempts to reduce the higher provision of 1st and 2(1)’s, we do so while not losing the beneficial equality work.

The data also shows that the Black/White awarding gap increased to 20% and the Asian/White gap increased to 10% in 2021/22. Mixed&Other/White awarding gap has also increased by 4% point when compared to 2020/21.



**Table 8** shows data on level of student achievement by declared disability. 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.



**Table 9** presents data on level of student achievement by POLAR4 quintile, where 1st/2(1) rates for student coming of areas of low higher education participation has reduced to 82% in 2021/22 when compared to the previous year. 1st/2(1) rates for students from areas of high participation increased to 90% from 88% recorded in two previous years.



**Table 10** shows data on level of student achievement by IMD 2019 (England) quintile. There remains a sizeable difference between 1st/2(1) rates between students from the most deprived localities and those from the least deprived areas. This difference has increased by 6% percentage points in 2021/22 when compared to the previous year (16% vs 10%).



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