

## Degree outcomes statement 2021-22

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 At York St John University we have been changing lives through education for over 185 years. We are proud to reaffirm our ongoing commitment to protect the value of our degrees and to our transparent, consistent and fair approach to academic standards.
- 1.2 Over 70% of our undergraduate students come from one or more of the different social groups that are underrepresented in higher education. Our [Access and Participation Plan](#) sets out our longstanding commitment to widen access and promote fairness in education. This degree outcomes statement demonstrates our commitment to protecting the value of our students' degrees over time.

### 2. Our degree classification profile

- 2.1 Our degree classification profile sets out the percentage of degree classes awarded over the last five years for our undergraduate (level 6) degree programmes. It is provided at the University level because data is otherwise aligned to our internal structures, which is not meaningful to an external audience.
- 2.2 As with the rest of the sector, we have seen an upward trend in first and upper second-class awards (6.2%) in this period. The upward trend can be accounted for by improvements in student performance and increased professionalism in our teaching and learning approaches and practices. This is described in section 7, teaching practice and learning resources (below). The increase in 2019-20 and 2020-21 (10.3%) may also have been affected by measures introduced to ensure students were not disadvantaged by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and by changes in the wider study environment. This is described in section 3, Covid-19 measures in 2019-20 and 2020-21 (below).
- 2.3 Notwithstanding this, the percentage of students achieving a good degree fell by 7.5% between 2020/21 and 2021/22, aligning with sector commitments to returns levels of good degrees to pre-pandemic levels by 2023. Further commentary on this is provided in section 8.
- 2.4 We have made significant progress in closing the attainment gaps for students with disabilities, mature students, and for students from the most deprived areas over the last few years. There is still work to do for students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds where the most recent data highlights ongoing challenges in closing the attainment gap.

Year of award	Total awards	First Class	Upper Second Class	Lower Second Class	Third Class
2017-18	1,270	20.6%	47.5%	26.1%	5.8%
2018-19	1,600	21.4%	50.1%	24.5%	4.0%
2019-20	1,729	30.0%	46.6%	21.1%	2.4%
2020-21	1,693	31.4%	50.4%	16.5%	1.6%
2021-22	1,367	30.3%	44.3%	22.6%	2.9%

Figure 1: Total awards and degree classifications over time

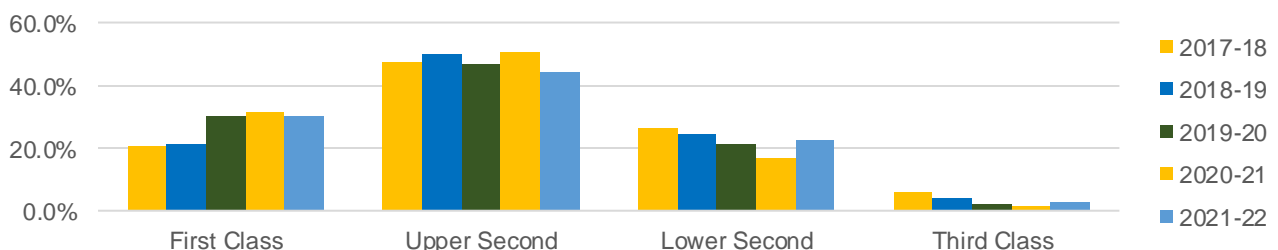


Figure 2: percentage classification of undergraduate (level 6) awards by academic year

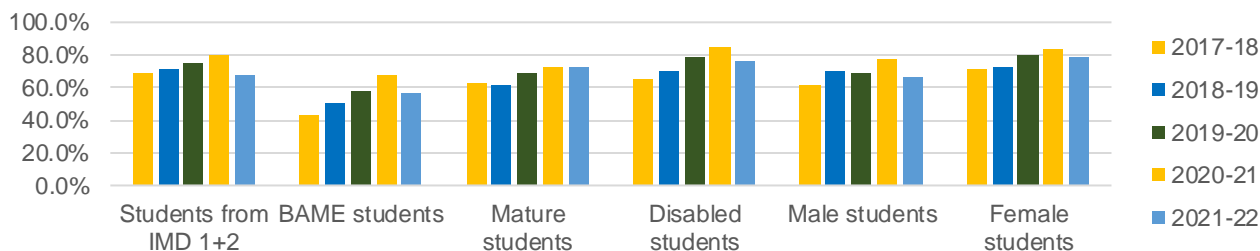


Figure 3: percentage of first and upper second-class degrees awarded to undergraduate (level 6) students by academic year (IMD: Index of Multiple Deprivation)

### 3. Covid-19

- 3.1 The safety net policy of 2019-20 and the safety net framework in 2020-21 were put in place so students were not disadvantaged by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.2 The two safety net policies worked in similar ways. [The Safety Net Policy 2019-20](#) guaranteed that a student's programme-level average would not be lower than a benchmark calculated from confirmed assessment outcomes prior to March 2019. School Assessment Boards were also able to scale modules for a whole cohort where performance was out of line from that of the previous three years' performance in that module.
- 3.3 In 2020-21, the safety net framework expanded on this approach, and continuing students had a benchmark of the credit-weighted average achieved in 2019-20. Where the benchmark had been applied in 2019-20, this meant that was the benchmark applied in 2020-21. Students had their credit-weighted average for the level calculated as normal in 2020-21, and this was compared to the benchmark, and the student awarded whichever was higher.
- 3.4 Final year students benefitted from the Safety Net Policy in 2019-20 and the Safety Net Framework in 2020-21. These were removed in 2021-22.

### 4. Assessment and marking practices

- 4.1 The University's learning, teaching and student experience strategy underpins programme design.
- 4.2 All of our degrees undergo detailed scrutiny through our [programme approval process](#) which ensures that assessment criteria and learning outcomes for all programmes are appropriately mapped to sector reference points ([subject benchmark statements](#) and the [UK framework for higher education qualifications](#)) and professional or regulatory body requirements. Following an internal compliance review all programmes proposals are considered at an external approval event, which provides independent external scrutiny by subject experts.
- 4.3 Assessment and marking practices used across the University are described in the [Code of Practice for Assessment and Academic Related Matters](#). This includes arrangements for [marking and moderation](#), the application of [exceptional circumstances](#), and the appointment of independent [external examiners](#), and the operation of [School Assessment Panels and School Assessment Boards](#). The [progress and award examination panel](#) ensures that assessment procedures are properly conducted, and an independent external examiner for progress and award sits on this panel. This consistent application of procedures and policies ensures the value of the University's qualifications awarded over time is protected.
- 4.4 Marking criteria are designed to help students know what is expected of them. In the last five years, external examiners in certain disciplines have argued for greater use of the full marking range, particularly the top of the first-class range. In combination with the introduction of generic assessment descriptors, enabling students to see what they need to do to achieve marks within a specified range, the increased use of the full marking scale is likely to have contributed to the increase in award of first-class degrees.

### 5. Academic governance

- 5.1 The University's academic governance framework is overseen by [Academic Board and its committees](#). Academic Board safeguards the academic integrity of the University and is the custodian of its degree awarding powers. Academic Board provides the Vice Chancellor and the

Governing Body with the assurance on the standards of the University's awards and the University's academic portfolio.

- 5.2 The oversight of quality and standards is delegated to the Quality and Standards Committee, who are responsible for the University's [Regulations](#) and [Code of Practice for Assessment and Academic Related Matters](#), which describe the operation of the framework, and have been developed and reviewed with reference to the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).
- 5.3 The effectiveness of learning, teaching and assessment practices within the University and at our [collaborative partners](#) is reviewed through a process of [annual monitoring](#), culminating in the presentation of an annual quality report and action plan to Academic Board and Board of Governors. Implementation of the action plan is overseen by [Academic Board](#) and its committees.
- 5.4 A new data led approach to Programme Review and Enhancement (PRE) was introduced in 2020-21 to standardise and simplify the process by which various aspects of programme performance are measured and analysed. Quality and Standards Committee oversees this process, scrutinising outcomes and sharing best practice across the institution.

## 6. Classification algorithms

- 6.1 Our approach to degree classification is described in the [Code of Practice on Assessment and Academic Related Matters](#).
- 6.2 We recognise that some students do not achieve their full potential performance until their final level of study. Consequently, we award students on Bachelor's degrees the better of two calculations, an approach widely used across the sector. Level 4 marks are excluded from the calculation, level credit-weighted averages are calculated and rounded to the nearest integer, and two award mark calculations are made using different level-weightings:
  - equal weighting of the final two levels (levels five and six);
  - double weighting of the final level (six) and single weighting of the second level (five).
 Students are awarded the better of the two calculations to determine their degree classification. Only credits gained at the University are used in the calculation.
- 6.3 In November 2020, Quality and Standards Committee reviewed the algorithms used in degree classifications in line with the UKSCQA report on principles of degree algorithm design. It was confident in the use of two algorithms as suitable for the University student population and pedagogy.
- 6.4 The University introduced a new scheme of compensation for students entering in September 2020. This allows marginal failure in up to 20 credits of modules per level, to be compensated by achievement in other modules in the same level. If a student is eligible to compensate a failed module, the credit is awarded after 120 credits of the level have been attempted.
- 6.5 The scheme of compensation replaces a scheme of condonement, which allowed the award of credit in a single non-compulsory module of 20 credits in each level of study where a student has made a serious attempt (achieved a mark of at least 20, but less than the passing mark of 40). This scheme still applies for students who entered the University before September 2020. Following a review in 2018-19, it was felt that the new scheme of assessment better reflected the balance between poor performance in a single module, and a student's overall achievement in a level of study.
- 6.6 We allow reassessment attempts, up to a maximum of two, where condonement or compensation will not be applied. Reassessment is capped at the pass mark at module level.
- 6.7 If a student's credit-weighted average falls within the borderline range (defined as 0.5 below the threshold average for achievement of the higher classification), the higher classification is awarded if the final-level (six) credit-weighted average is within the range of the higher classification and does not fall within the threshold range.
- 6.8 There has been no change to the University's classification algorithm in the last five years.
- 6.9 For students entering in September 2020, the University has removed the borderline consideration in recognition of the compensation already applied to achieve credit within a single module. This will first be applied in 2022-23.

## 7. Teaching practice and learning resources

- 7.1 We value, recognise and reward teaching excellence and outperform the sector with 42% of staff holding a teaching qualification (compared with 27% nationally) and 92% with [HEA Fellowship](#) (42% nationally). Our commitment to using the [UK Professional Standards Framework \(UKPSF\)](#) as a tool for both initial and continuing professional development has underpinned our ambition to provide high quality learning, teaching, assessment and research, and contributed to the development of our degree outcomes.
- 7.2 Sustained investment in physical and technical learning resources demonstrates our commitment to a high-quality campus, to access to IT and course specific equipment. Spending on library resources has been above the sector average and resulted in increased use by students.
- 7.3 The development of our approaches to [academic tutoring](#), [student attendance](#), and [student engagement](#) have enabled the University to offer pastoral and academic support when students need it the most.

## 8. Identifying good practice and actions

- 8.1 Examples of good practice include the University's whole-person approach, where students are supported not just academically, but with student skills, information and digital literacy, and with skills needed for key course-specific technology and for assistive technology. Students tell us that they value this support. Students also develop through initiatives outside the classroom, including students as researchers and opportunities through the Students' Union.
- 8.2 With the rest of the sector, York St John University is committed to working to return good degree outcomes to pre-pandemic levels by 2023. We will undertake the following actions in 2022/23:
- Further consideration of the use of the degree classification descriptions [published by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment in October 2019](#).
  - Further consideration of the use of alternative approaches to marking, such as stepped marking.
  - Further review of subject level data by School Quality Panels.
- 8.3 Through our annual monitoring and academic governance processes, the following broader actions have previously been identified and are in progress:
- further closing attainment gap for identified underrepresented groups through the objectives set out in the [Access and Participation Plan 2020-21 to 2024-25](#);
  - Identification of potential enhancements to be developed via the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Action Plan 2022/23 to support students to engage with assessment.
  - Consideration of assessment processes for disabled students in areas such as extensions, reasonable adjustments and alternative assessments.

## 9. Risks and challenges

- 9.1 In the next decade, the concept of the 21<sup>st</sup> century University will continue to be reshaped. Whilst we're confident in our assessment processes and practices, we will continue to adapt in the best interests of our students. Throughout, we will continuously monitor degree outcomes and ensure that our processes continue to protect the value of our awards over time.

### Version control statement

Document property	Detail
Version:	1.0 (2021-22)
Document title:	Degree Outcomes Statement
Author role and department:	Registry
Approved date:	
Approved by:	Board of Governors
Equality analysis undertaken:	Not yet undertaken