St George's University of London – degree outcomes statement 2020-21

Institutional degree classification profile
Guidance (to be deleted) Set out in a tabular format any quantitative trends in degree outcomes over five years, analysing student characteristics (including analysis of entry qualifications and the distribution of outcomes across different student groups), and subject mix. You can then explain the factors influencing this profile in the next sections.

In this degree outcomes statement we are publishing the classifications profile for our graduating cohorts for the period covering academic years 2016-17 to 2020-21. The data are derived from the returns we have provided to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and include all students (home, EU and international students). Numbers are rounded or suppressed in line with HESA's standard methodology. Programmes are grouped into subjects that reflect OfS's subject areas employed in the Teaching Excellence Framework.

By way of context, we offer 10 honours degree programmes. Our largest first-degree programme is the MBBS, accounting for nearly a third of our first-degree cohort (30% in 2021). This programme is not a classified degree, and the achievements of our medical students are not therefore included in this statement.

During COVID-19, we put measures in place to ensure that our students were not disadvantaged by the impact of the pandemic on our capacity to deliver onsite assessments. Adaptations mirrored those used widely across the sector, including the use of a 24-hour submission window and a shift to more open book assessment design where appropriate. External Examiners commented favourably that this shift enabled some students to produce particularly high-quality work. We provide more information about the measures that we took to protect the interests of our students elsewhere in this statement.

In the five-year period covered by this statement, the number of students who graduated from honours degree programmes rose from 472 to 606, an increase of 28%. The main driver for this growth has been the introduction of new programmes and the expansion of our BSc Biomedical Science programme. Our honours degree portfolio is predominantly full-time and 93% of our 2021 graduates were home students.

In 2020-21:
o 65% of our honours degree graduates were female compared to 72% in 2016-17.
o 57% were from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities where ethnicity is known or declared; 58% of students in 2016-17 were from BAME communities.
o 15% were known to have a disability compared to 12% in 2016-17.
o 75% were young. Undergraduates are classed as young if they are under 21 on entry. 76% of students in 2016-17 were classed as young.

In 2020-21, 34% of students graduated from allied health programmes (as defined by OfS) and 64% graduated from programmes in the medical sciences. The equivalent percentages from 2016-17 were 15% and 77%. (The remaining graduates completed post-registration nursing programmes.)

In the period covered by this statement, the percentage of first class and upper second (2.1) degree awards that we conferred rose by 8% from 75% in 2016-17 to 83% in 2020-21. In the same period, the percentage of first-class awards rose from 23% to 39%. The year-on-year breakdown is shown in the following table:

2016-17						
	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd/pass	%1st	%1st/2.1
TOTAL	105	250	105	10	23%	75%

2017-18						
	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd/pass	%1st	%1st/2.1
TOTAL	130	260	90	5	27%	80%

2018-19						
	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd/pass	%1st	%1st/2.1
TOTAL	150	275	110	10	27%	78%

2019-20						
	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd/pass	%1st	%1st/2.1
TOTAL	197	260	84	10	36%	83%

2020-21						
	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd/pass	%1st	%1st/2.1
TOTAL	236	269	87	14	39%	83%

Prior to the pandemic, there had been a levelling off in the year-on-year increase in good degree awards. In 2018-19, 78% of our students achieved good degrees compared with 80% in the previous year. In both of the subsequent COVID-19 affected years, 83% of our graduating students achieved good degrees. In the period covered by this statement, therefore, there has been an oscillation in the proportions of good degrees awarded with a drop (in 2018-19) followed by an increase (in 2019-20) and no change in 2020-2021.

The greatest increase in first class awards was in the COVID-19 affected years: first class awards increased by 9% in 2019-20 and by a further 3% in 2020-21. Prior to COVID-19, the proportion increased from 23% in 2016-17 to 27% in 2017-18 and remained at that level in 2018-19.

The pandemic required the redesign of some existing assessments for online delivery and the creation of wholly new assessments if existing tasks could not be delivered as planned. These changes are likely to have been a factor contributing to the uplift in the proportion of good degrees awarded in 2019-20, an increase that was maintained in 2020-21. More detail is provided later in this statement.

In the period covered by this report, in terms of the achievement of a "good degree" (defined as a first or a 2:1):
o   There was no difference in the proportion of male and female students achieving a good degree in 2020-21. In the previous years, female students had been significantly more likely to achieve a good degree. The gap in outcomes by sex in 2019-20 was 9%.

o   In 2020-21, 41% of female students achieved a first-class degree compared with 35% of male students. In previous years, there had been no significant difference in the proportions of first-class awards by sex.

o   The gap for award of good degrees between white and BAME students has been closing year- on-year from 2017-18 when the gap was 11%, was eliminated in 2019-20 and stands at 6% in 2020-21.   White students are more likely to achieve a first-class degree. The difference was 17% in the 2020-21.

o   In all years, students who were known to have a disability were less likely to achieve a good degree than those with no known disability. In 2020-21, 84% of students with no known disability achieved a good degree compared to 82% of disabled students. That gap was significantly smaller than in 2019-20 (86% compared to 71%).

- The proportion of students known to have a disability achieving a first-class degree has grown in the period covered by this report. In 2020-21, 36% of students with a known disability achieved a first-class degree compared to 38% of non-disabled students.

- Young students are more likely to achieve a good degree than mature students with varying differences in each year covered by this statement. In 2020-21, the gap was 7% (85% compared to 78%) compared to a 6% gap in the previous year.

- The intercalated degree undertaken by medical students is the programme that awards the highest proportion of good degrees. 100% of intercalating medical students achieved a first or 2:1 in 2020-21 with 72% first-class awards. Medicine is a highly selective programme and a subset of the cohort (~64 students in 2020-21) is given permission to intercalate in any one year, based on academic selection. High levels of achievement are in keeping with the profile of these students nationally. They are academically selected for the intercalated degree from an already high-tariff MBBS population.

- Our BSc Paramedic Science graduated its first cohort of students in 2017-18 and all 35 students received a 1st or 2:1. The graduating cohort in 2020-21 numbered 71. Outcomes for the programme remain strong with 90% of students achieving a good degree.

- The outcomes of students on our BSc Biomedical Science programme have increased in the years covered by this statement. 74% of the 2016-17 graduates (168 students) achieved good degrees. There was a year-on-year increase in each of the subsequent years so that 94% of the 2020-21 graduates achieved a good degree. We graduated 232 Biomedical Science students in 2020-21.

- The greatest increase in first class awards was in the COVID-19 affected years as a consequence of achievements of students on the Biomedical Science and Paramedic Science programmes.

- For other programmes, there is considerable volatility in the year-on-year proportions of good degree awards with significant upward and downward shifts. Student numbers on these programmes are smaller and reduced cohort sizes can magnify percentage changes.

Assessment and marking practices

Guidance (to be deleted) should set out how you assure yourselves that your assessment criteria meet sector reference points, in particular those you are required to meet by OfS and any PSRBs, and non-mandatory guidance such as QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. This section should describe how external expertise and development of academic staff and workplace assessors provides relevant assurance. This may include whether you have made use of QAA's guidance on External Expertise or recruited external examiners who have taken part in Advance HE's external examiner professional development programme.

Engagement with sector reference points is embedded within our quality assurance processes. When we offer a new programme, our approval mechanism ensures that programmes are benchmarked against sector reference points including the UK Quality Code, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and, where they apply, subject benchmark statements.

We fully involve external experts from other universities and from professional communities in our approval process. As an established provider of programmes that enable our graduates to practice as healthcare professionals, our programmes are

overseen by external regulators including the Health and Care Professions Council who work with us to assure our standards.

We have well-developed processes for designing assessment tasks, developing assessment criteria and for internal moderation to ensure consistency of marking within programme and module teams. More detail about our approach can be found in our Quality Manual. Our approach is underpinned by a mature external examiner system. Our external examiners advise on the extent to which our practices comply with sector-wide expectations. Reports from our externals provide high levels of assurance regarding fairness, validity and reliability of all aspects of assessment. This continued to be the case during the pandemic when our external examiners were supportive of the assessment adaptations that we made.

Where students are assessed in the workplace, we provide training and development opportunities for assessors, promulgate assessment criteria to ensure consistency and use moderation processes to ensure reliability in assessment.

Our programmes are reviewed against a five-year cycle. External experts are at the heart of a review process that ensures that our assessment practices remain current. During the pandemic, we deferred a number of reviews to allow us to focus predominantly on the maintaining continuity in programme delivery and assessment. We have now reinstated our periodic review programme and the first reviews will be taking place in 2022-23.

Applications from students for an adjusted assessment (e.g. more time in an exam) with a health condition or a SpLD must be accompanied by a report from an independent specialist or healthcare practitioner. Academic appeals are submitted to a specialist team and considered independently of the programme team to ensure fairness and rigor.

Academic governance

Guidance (to be deleted) 'Academic governance' should cover how your institutional governance structures provide assurance that the value of qualifications you award over time is protected, including for awards delivered through partnership arrangements. It should set out how your academic governance structures ensure that your marking practices are followed, including for awards delivered through partnership arrangements.

Academic governance encompasses policies, structures, relationships, systems and processes.

We have clear, fully documented policies and processes related to all aspects of assessment. In practice, Course Directors (sometimes working alongside expert assessment leads) are responsible for managing the assessment process including the identification, preparation and support of staff involved in marking student work. Course Directors are accountable in two ways (i) to senior staff within the management structures and (ii) by reporting through the committee structure.

Course Directors are required to analyse and comment on trends in student outcomes at programme level and compared with institutional norms as part of our annual monitoring process. Course Directors are also asked to comment if the characteristics of students seem to have a bearing on student outcomes. These analyses are contained in Annual Programme Monitoring Reports and are considered and approved by independent quality monitoring committees with issues escalated to senior committees if needed.

In parallel, we have constituted an expert group (Data Improvement Group) to monitor patterns of degree awards at institutional level and, where there are discernible changes,

to investigate the drivers for change with programme teams. The Group informs the work of other groups within the University. For example, the priorities of the Inclusive Education Steering Group were shaped in part by the outputs from the Data Improvement Group.

Each of our programmes is reviewed or revalidated, usually every five years. Reviews and revalidations provide an opportunity for programme teams to evaluate in detail all aspects of programme design and delivery, in including assessment strategies, methods and outcomes, and discuss their findings with independent peers. The BSc Paramedic Science programme was revalidated in 2022 in a process that included the regulatory and professional bodies. The BSc Biomedical Science is scheduled for revalidation in the current year.

We do not deliver honours degree programmes under partnership arrangements although our allied health programmes have been delivered through the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, a joint venture with Kingston University. The joint venture agreement with Kingston University has ended and from 1st August 2022 onwards, our allied health programmes will be delivered solely by St George's.

Classification algorithms

Guidance (to be deleted) should clearly describe your classification algorithm(s) and the rationale for it; if you already publish a clear description, you can provide a link to it. It should clarify whether you use multiple algorithms and why, how you ensure they are clearly understood by students and other stakeholders, and whether you use zones of consideration or automatic uplifts for 'borderline' cases. It should briefly set out what your resit limits are and whether they are in line with sector norms. If they are not, it should explain how this affects your responsibility to protect the value of your qualifications. You can also explain whether you are making, or have made, any changes to your algorithm(s) and why. Any impacts of changes or reviews on your partnership arrangement can be covered here too.

We operate a clear and transparent algorithm for classifying honours degree programmes. The algorithm is based on weighted average of all work carried out by the student. The algorithm allows minor variations in the weightings between different years of study although level 6 (the final year of a full-time honours degree programme) must have a weighting of at least 0.6. In practice, the majority of our three-year honours programmes (7 out of 9) have a 70/30 weighting,

Key features of the algorithm are:
o   With very few exceptions all module marks are used to determine a student's classification as per the algorithm. A practice-based module assessed on a pass/fail basis is an example of when a module might not contribute to the classification.

o   Students must pass all modules. Historically, a marginal failure in a single module was permitted on one programme. This facility has been phased out

o   the highest module mark at level 6 is used to calculate a 15-credit enhancement to the overall final year mark.

o   A standard borderline zone of 1% for all the BSc degree classification boundaries, effectively operating at 68.5% (First class honours), 58.5% (Second class honours (upper division)), 48.5% (Second class honours (lower division)) and 38.5% (Third class honours) due to rounding.

o   There is no provision to alter classification based on the personal circumstances of students.

o   Undergraduate students have one reassessment opportunity as of right. If students fail at resit, they can apply for a discretionary third attempt. Three is the maximum number of attempts available to honours degree students. These arrangements are commonplace across the sector.

The algorithm is included in our regulations which are available to all students. Further advice and guidance are available on a programme-by-programme basis.

The algorithm, as it is described here, was introduced in 2014-15. We reviewed the algorithm following the publication by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) of the Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design. Our approach was in alignment with the principles. We adopted a small number of refinements, to remove anomalies and provide for greater standardisation. For example we now have one approach to weightings. Minor variations are permissible although this is under review.

The protocol that enables the highest module mark at level 6 to be used to calculate a 15-credit enhancement to the overall final year mark will not be available to new entrants in 2022-23. For avoidance of doubt, the protocol continues to be applied for awards in 2022-23 and 2023-24, but not in 2024-25 or thereafter. The protocol was removed because our algorithm already placed a greater weighting on level 6 modules and this was compounded by further enhancing an individual module mark.   Removal of this regulation is expected to reduce marginally the proportion of good degrees we confer. We were not able to remove the protocol prior to 2022 because this would have been a material change to the terms and conditions for continuing students.

We have now adopted a university-wide approach to rounding to ensure consistency, Assessment marks and module marks are to one decimal place. Rounding to a whole number only takes place at the end of the assessment process when determining classification.

We did not make any changes to the algorithm or to our wider regulatory framework in 2019-20 and 2020-21 in response to the pandemic. In 2019-20 our pandemic response in relation to assessment included the following elements:

o   Removing some assessments if intended learning outcomes had already been met

o   Replacing on-campus exams with coursework or alternative online assessments wherever possible

o   Removing rigid time constraints for remaining online exams wherever possible. In these instances, examination questions were redesigned accordingly.

o   Deferral of some key practical assessments for which alternative assessment was not appropriate

o   Extension of registration periods where necessary

o   Controlling for Covid-19 effects on assessment by analysing marks and considering, in consultation with External Examiners at Exam Boards:

o   Revised mitigating circumstances policy that recognises the impact of Covid-19 on a student's ability to prepare for and undertake assessments.

Many of these elements were retained in 2020-21. Some were not. For example, in examinations taking place in summer 2020 students were given a 24-hour window in which to take an online examination. In 2020-21, the 24-hour window for online examinations was removed. In that year, there was also a greater emphasis on the redesign of assessment tasks and on the security issues in relation to offsite assessments.
We also faced renewed challenges in some programmes in 2021 in terms of the delivery of assessments. For example, plans to return to the use of on-site Objective Structured

Clinical Examinations (OSCEs) to assess the clinical and communication skills of our Paramedic Science students were disrupted by a number of factors. The OSCEs had to be adapted at the last minute for online delivery and the lateness of the changes may have contributed in part to the increase in the proportion of good degree awards on this programme,

Teaching practices and learning resources

Guidance (to be deleted) should cover whether there have been any discernible effects of enhancements to teaching practices, learning resources, student support, curriculum and assessment design on your degree classifications.

The period from covered by this degree outcomes statement reflects a period of rapid change for teaching and learning at St George's following appointment of a new Principal (now Vice-Chancellor) in 2015. Enhancements across learning resources, learning development, academic and curriculum development, student voice and the addressing of a BAME attainment gap have aimed at improving student success. We expected to see this work feeding through into an increase in the proportion of our Honours students achieving good degrees. This is consistent with the increase in good degrees seen over this period..

A virtual learning environment transition from Moodle to Canvas was an opportunity for a curriculum enhancement project to transform the coherence of the student learning journey consistently across all programmes from 2016. Hand-in-hand with this, academic staff were supported to redesign modules grounded in sound pedagogical principles to encourage active learning and effective use of the online learning environment.

Panopto lecture capture was also introduced in 2016, enhancing student learning by providing opportunities to listen again to troublesome lecture content and revise effectively for assessments.

Building on an annual student experience survey, in 2016-17 a new Student Online Teaching Survey (SOLTS) was introduced across all programmes, providing valuable feedback from students on their modules and teachers, to inform and enhance teaching and learning. Parallel introduction of a Student Experience Action Group has fostered a focus on enhancing student experience, including the setting up student-staff liaison groups, student-staff partnership project grants and opportunities for student and staff to collaborate on improvement projects. In 2020 we introduced an additional, dialogic, student voice platform (Unitu).

Ensuring a good environment for BAME achievement and identifying barriers to success has been a major area of focus. There has been fluctuation in the attainment gap between BAME students in the period covered by this statement. At its highest the attainment gap was 12% in 2016-17. The gap narrowed to 2% in 2018-19 and in 2019-20 84% of BAME students achieved a good degree compared with 83% of white students. There was a reversal in 2020-21 with 87% of white students achieving a good degree compared to 81% for BAME students. (In terms of first-class award, the gap was greater: 49% compared to 32%.).

Inclusivity remains a priority for us. In 2020-21 we established an Inclusive Education Steering Group and appointed a lecturer in Inclusive Education to lead and coordinate work. A key component is the use of student advisors to review curricular content and pedagogic approaches. There is also a focus on students' differential experiences in practice-based education.

Over this period, learning development staff provision was doubled and adopted an effective "in and alongside" approach. This combines the provision of elective 1:1 study

support and access to Study Plus learning resources within the Academic Success Centre with learning development sessions embedded within programmes and designed to synchronise with assessment activities, in context.

Academic staff development in teaching and learning benefitted from the introduction of an inhouse Advance HE-accredited scheme for award of Senior Fellowship (SHINE) and the formation of a Centre of Innovation and Development in Education which trebled academic development support. Access to new workshops on topics such as on active learning, assessment and feedback, inclusive curriculum and a curriculum advisory group have provided opportunities for teaching staff to develop their practice and learning design to enhance student learning.

Identifying good practice and actions

We have a small portfolio of honours degree programmes with high levels of external professional regulation. The programmes apply the same algorithm to ensure consistency of practice and the equitable treatment of students. Our academic regulations also place limits on the discretion available to Boards for the same reason.

Our quality assurance processes foster dialogue between programmes teams and this dialogue allows shared solutions to common problems to emerge and for good practice in assessment to be identified and shared. For example we have significant expertise in medical education and our processes have enabled the MBBS assessment team to share its expertise in the assessment of clinical and communication skills and in the assessment of the scientific knowledge that underpins safe practice.

Through our annual monitoring process, our paramedic science team reported that one factor contributing to the increase in the proportion of good degrees awards was an enhanced support package for in-service students. The in-service students are already employed in an ambulance trust and enrol on the BSc Paramedic Science programme so that they can be registered paramedics. The online package better supported students in the transition to higher education and helped them to achieve to their full potential.

We carried out an internal review of degree awards in 2018-19 and initiated a number of plans in response to the review. We updated the membership and terms of reference of Boards, introduced a role description and appointment criteria for Board chairs and developed a standard agenda for Examination Board meetings. We also offered training for all staff in Examination Boards. A number of proposals from the 2018-19 review are on hold. These include plans to include senior academics from other programmes as members of examination boards and to ensure a senior registry staff presence at all boards. We had been intending to offer staff development focused on the Outcome Classification descriptions for FHEQ level 6 degrees. We were unable to do this as a consequence of the pandemic. In the current year, we will be working with our BSc Biomedical Science team to use the level 6 outcome descriptors to explore ways in which the descriptors can both enhance practice and provide assurance with regard to setting and maintaining standards.

The internal review of degree awards in 2018-19 and review of the impact of the COVID-19-driven adjustments (i.e. for disabled students and for closing the degree awarding gap between BAME and white students) will both feed into work across programmes on streamlining curriculum architecture and reviewing assessment design. This forms part of our strategic vision to reimagine the St George's curriculum for inclusive and interactive learning, teaching and assessment, underpinned by tailored academic support and digital technology.

Risks and challenges

Guidance (to be deleted) can state whether you have identified any risks and/or challenges, or areas for further review, and any actions to address or mitigate them. It is not mandatory to publish risks, challenges and proposed actions in statements if you wish to consider them internally.

In this statement we have referred to the action plan we put in place following the internal review of our practice in 2018-19.   A challenge that we identified at time was the difficulty is predicting the degree outcomes of the initial graduating cohorts from newly validated programmes. This can also be a challenge if existing programmes are re-validated and major changes to assessments and assessment strategies are introduced as part of the revalidation process.   In this statement, we have also outlined in some detail the enhancements to teaching practices, learning resources, student support, curriculum and assessment design that we have made. We have also referred to the enhancement plans that we have for the future. These enhancements are made with the intention of improving the student experience and student outcomes. However, it is difficult to measure the extent of the impact of any enhancement in a reliable way.

We recognise that the pandemic, and or response to it, may have had a bearing on degree outcomes in the most recent years covered by this report. As we move beyond the pandemic, we might expect to see a reduction in degree outcomes. Explaining the context for a reduction in degree outcomes to our various stakeholders will present a challenge for all providers.