University of East London

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UKPRN 10007144

Degree Outcomes Statement 2019/20

University of East London

Pioneering Futures Since 1898

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Scrutiny of this statement

This statement is the product of collaborative working between University Executive Board, Quality Assurance and Enhancement, UEL Student Union, Student and Academic Services, the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, the Centre for Student Success, and Academic Colleagues. It has been scrutinised by our Lead Examiners, considered at our Education and Experience Committee, approved by our Academic Board and the Board of Governors.
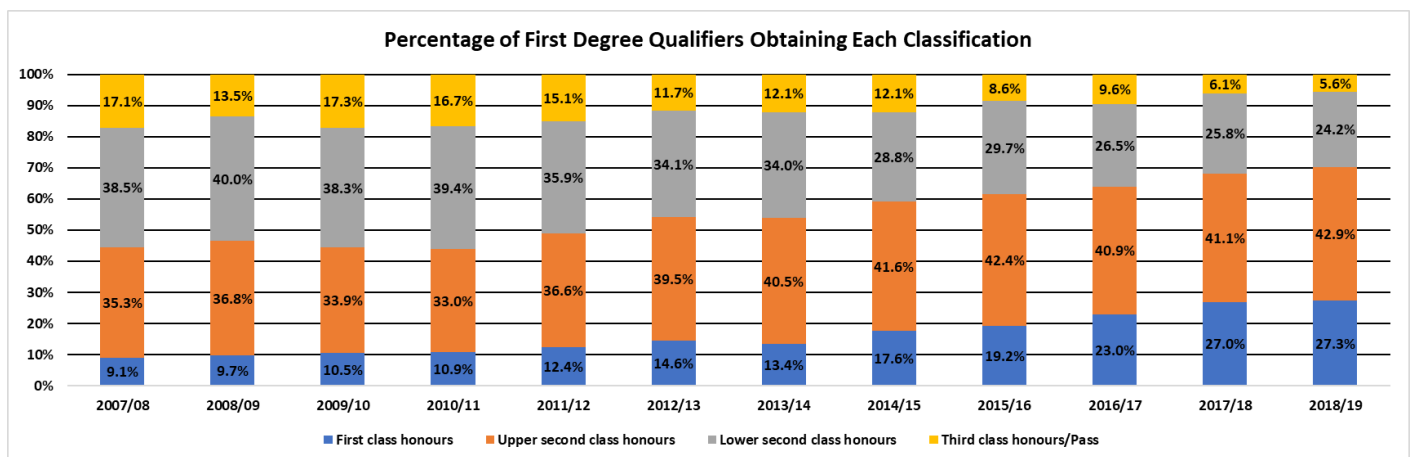
The statement is a short summary of a more detailed report, we are happy to share the long version on request, please contact qae@uel.ac.uk.

Our degree classification

For consistency and transparency UEL use a universal classification system across all subjects. Regulations are under constant review. There have been three sets of regulations and therefore three classification systems in operation within the last 10 years. The regulations are laid out in our Manual of General Regulations Part 3.

Analysing and responding to trends

UEL has seen a rise in good honours outcomes in the last 10 years. 2018/19 data shows the award of good honours degrees to be 70.3% with 27.3% at First class. This is lower than the sector average of 76% with 28% at First Class. UEL will be satisfied if this continues to rise, resulting from improvements in standards, particularly where that involves closing awarding gaps in line with our Vision 2028 strategic plan.

Percentage of First Degree Qualifiers Obtaining Each Classification

Year	First class honours	Upper second class honours	Lower second class honours	Third class honours/Pass
2007/08	9.1%	35.3%	38.5%	17.1%
2008/09	9.7%	36.8%	40.0%	13.5%
2009/10	10.5%	33.9%	38.3%	17.3%
2010/11	10.9%	33.0%	39.4%	16.7%
2011/12	12.4%	36.6%	35.9%	15.1%
2012/13	14.6%	39.5%	34.1%	11.7%
2013/14	13.4%	40.5%	34.0%	12.1%
2014/15	17.6%	41.6%	28.8%	12.1%
2015/16	19.2%	42.4%	29.7%	8.6%
2016/17	23.0%	40.9%	26.5%	9.6%
2017/18	27.0%	41.1%	25.8%	6.1%
2018/19	27.3%	42.9%	24.2%	5.6%

Trends at subject level are largely in line with those at institutional level. BAME vs White outcomes shows a slight convergence over the last 10 years. It is a strategic goal to eliminate this gap entirely by 2028 (The Vision 2028 Strategic Plan). Gender data reveals no consistency in one gender outperforming another, improvement is in line with the overall trend with no significant or consistent gap occurring over time. Age data shows that for any student aged 21 or over, the gap has closed over time to the point where outcomes have not varied by age in the last two years. Our entry tariffs have risen over this period and we do see students with higher entry points go on to better degree outcomes, but not by as much as they did in the past (5 or more years ago). Over this period, we can see that our entry tariffs and degree outcomes have largely converged with other London based Post-92 institutions.

Ensuring assessment standards are in line with sector reference points

All learning outcomes on every module are assessed and students must meet the minimum threshold mark on every component of assessment. All module level learning outcomes map to programme level learning outcomes. All components of assessment at all levels are subject to internal and external moderation.

The Assessment and Feedback Policy and associated Toolkit outline how assessment should be conducted, including marking, second marking, anonymity, resolving differences, tariffs and timescales. This is supported by other assessment related policies and regulations such as the Extenuating Circumstances Policy, Academic Integrity Policy, Appeals Policy and Complaints Procedure.

The Assessment and Feedback Policy and accompanying Assessment Toolkit was last updated in 2018/19 and is under constant review. It is designed to operate within the inclusive culture of UEL, encourage and ensure fairness, consistency and clarity and support flexible subject specific authentic assessment.

Assessment practices that have an impact on degree outcomes have developed over time in line with sector norms. For instance, in response to external examiner feedback there is greater emphasis on the use of the full range of marks and marking rubrics that allow for marking in the full range.

All newly validated or revalidated courses must provide evidence that they meet the UEL Quality Criteria (Quality Manual Part 4) and meet external benchmarks such as QAA Subject Benchmark Statements, and the FHEQ. Internal scrutiny through the School Quality Committee and external scrutiny through External Advisors is always required where new learning outcomes are being approved. External Advisors need to meet the appropriate criteria for appointment laid out in the Quality Manual Part 5.

External Examiners are appointed in line with the criteria in the Quality Manual Part 9 and provide assurance that assessment tasks measure learning outcomes and standards effectively. Academic Review processes, which include External Advisors, check periodically that the standards set within learning outcomes and the assessments meet internal and external expectations on an ongoing basis (Quality Manual Part 8).

Maintaining the value of degrees over time

Assuring standards

Around 270 External Examiners taking part in the External Examining System (Quality Manual Part 9 and the Assessment and Feedback Policy) moderate every component of assessment at every level. Lead Examiners are appointed to Assessment Boards to ensure processes and regulations are followed. This demonstrates that UEL have maintained consistently high assessment standards over an extensive period of time.

External Examiner Responses to Questions on Standards
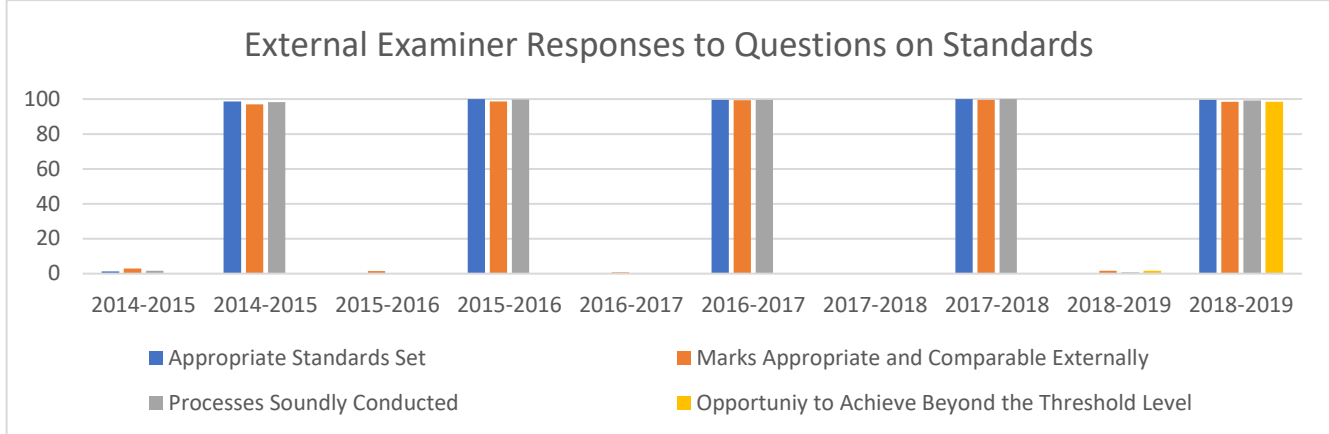
An annual overview report on External Examiners is submitted to the Education and Experience Committee (E&EC) and ratified by Academic Board. A subsequent action plan is monitored by (E&EC) throughout the year.

These processes apply equally to UEL and our collaborative academic partner organisations.

Monitoring and reviewing degree outcomes

Degree outcomes are monitored through the Continual Monitoring Process (Quality Manual Part 7). School level reports are summarised in an overview report submitted to the Education and Experience Committee (E&EC) and ratified by Academic Board. A subsequent action plan is monitored by E&EC throughout the year.

The Collaborative Review and Enhancement Process includes the monitoring of degree outcomes as part of an annual reporting cycle equivalent to the on-campus process (Quality Manual Part 7).

Both the External Examiner and the Continual Monitoring overview reports feed into the Board of Governors via the Annual Overview of Quality and Enhancement.

Departments are periodically reviewed on a six yearly basis and partners on a five-yearly basis (Quality Manual Part 8 and 11). Reviews provide further scrutiny of standards over time and an opportunity for reflection and analysis regarding the outcomes of students.

Students are engaged throughout these processes via the Course Committee and through student representation on university committees and review panels.

Our classification algorithm

To avoid individual bias, we have taken subjective decision making out of the classification process. An algorithm combines marks into a classification. Assessment Boards check the correct credit has been achieved for the award and in accordance with our regulations.

With our student entry profiles in mind we measure attainment towards the end of the degree; more final year credit is counted toward the classification and it is given more weight.

We use a 'best of' approach when selecting the credit for inclusion. This mitigates against the disproportionate impact of capping, where a student has only failed in one or two module components.

All three degree algorithms used in the last 10 years have used these principles, but changes to regulations and credit frameworks have had some impact on the calculation of the overall mark.

Regulations that impact on degree outcomes

Progression rules: From 2014/15 progression rules clarify expectations about how students pass through the levels of study toward their final award.

Combined Studies: From 2014/15 UEL removed the Combined Studies framework, which acted as a safety net for failing students to pick up remaining credit by taking university wide modules.

In-year Retrieval: From 2015/16 students on 15/30 credit modules who undertake an assessment before March, can under certain conditions have an additional opportunity (capped) to pass the assessment before the formal resit period.

Continuous Assessment: From 2019/20, students on 20 credit modules will undertake their resit within 6 weeks of the release of their marks.

Borderline Cases: There is no consideration given to borderline cases, there is a policy of rounding up to the nearest whole number, ensuring there is at least a 1% difference between pass and fail.

Module and Component Capping: From 2014/15 to 2018/19 a student who passed a component at resit would either be capped at module or component level depending on the best outcome, from 2019/20 only module capping applies.

Late submission of Coursework: From 2014/15 coursework submitted up to 24 hours late is deducted 5 marks. Prior to this late coursework received a zero mark.

Extenuation: Rules regarding extenuation have not changed radically over time. However, after the introduction of progression rules, extenuation panels are mindful that students are no longer automatically entitled to further opportunities.

Impact of changes to regulations

In 2014/15 we introduced changes to our framework, moving to 30 credit year-long modules, moving away from multiple intakes and Combined Studies, and introducing progression rules. The intention was to build cohort identity, set clear expectations for progress, and facilitate additional formative assessment opportunities.

In 2019/20 we introduced changes to our 2014/15 academic framework, moving to 20 credit semester long modules. Resulting in minor changes to the regulations and degree algorithm as a consequence of the 20-credit framework; key principles such as progression rules and early re-assessment have been maintained. An impact analysis using the 2018/19 outcome data showed no increase in student outcomes based on the algorithm alone, assuring us that any increase will be via improvement rather than inflation. We also took this opportunity to modify our capping rules, where practice was reviewed and seen to be out of line with the sector. Regulations will continue to be monitored to ensure outcomes for students are an accurate reflection of the standard they have achieved.

Regulations that help students avoid capping, such as late submission of coursework rules and the application of extenuating circumstances may help to improve degree outcomes as it is less likely that capped modules will be counted in the overall average. Data around extenuation shows that a greater proportion of claims are being accepted year on year. There are various factors that could be contributing to this, such as interpretation of rules

by extenuation panels, better advice given to students, higher quality claims provided by the students, and the impact of late submission rules. Extenuation is monitored through an annual overview report to Academic Board.

Both in year retrieval and continuous assessment seek to respond to student demand for the opportunity to improve their assessment at the earliest available opportunity. In year-retrieval and continuous assessment both allow for earlier re-assessment, but in year-retrieval allows for an additional opportunity to pass under certain circumstances. Continuous assessment is a continuation of the principle of early reassessment but does not allow for an additional opportunity and can be applied more universally. Both systems result in capped marks so there is no direct difference in the impact on degree outcome as opposed to any other form of reassessment, however our students have identified to us that the opportunity to focus on end of year assessments without the distraction of re-assessments will give them a better opportunity to focus on improving their first sit marks.

Supporting learning and teaching practices

The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) support and enhance technology enabled learning and blended learning so that academic colleagues can manage learning environments and respond to industry 4.0 demands. Through the transformational Flourishing Talent Framework efforts focus on engaging academic staff in reflective discussions the UEL journey towards an inclusive and equitable University community. Reflective behaviour-led strategies feed into the culture that will enhance teaching, learning and assessment within the University and thus play a central role in improving UEL systems to guard against grade inflation.

The CREST programme is our CPD route to the various Fellowships of the Higher Education Academy. This allows staff to become part of a community of practice and to share and promote their innovative work. Reading groups encourage Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and reflective thinking, and a virtual writing circle provides a platform to share excellent practice and to peer review. Academic staff new to teaching are required to achieve HEA Fellowship which is incorporated into a PGCert in Learning and Teaching. Around 275 staff achieved HEA status through the scheme between 2015/16 and 2018/19 and around 633 staff currently hold accreditation. CELT also train Postgraduate Research Students to act as Teaching Assistants. Pre and post survey analysis shows that staff are likely or very likely to use knowledge gained from CELT workshops in their teaching and assessment.

Resources for learning and other types of support

Our **Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle)** supports teaching with supplementary material such as quizzes and videos. It also embeds other platforms such as Panopto, our lecture and video capture platform; Kortext, an electronic core textbook per module; and LinkedIn Learning. These platforms and others are also utilised to induct and develop staff, and to support management systems that contribute to the development of teaching, learning, and assessment activities.

The Centre for Student Success, launched in 2016/17, provides a service to all students but also targets at risk students based on predictive analytics. They can identify initiatives that will improve outcomes, for example the 'MyFeedback' project which engaged with 1,250 students in 2018/19 saw 95% of service users progress to the next stage of their degree and 6% of users improve their grade. Schemes such as Professional and Peer Mentoring, Internships, Career Coaching and Academic Tutoring in English and Maths have seen students who engage with these services show better progression rates than the institutional average, and the status within the predictive analytics system improved for 49% of the students. Overall the service is accessed by a higher proportion of younger (under 21) and BAME students compared to the overall student profile. Year on year the

service has seen their engagement with the student population grow, for instance the academic writing team saw an 18% increase from 2017/18 to 2018/19 with 4,595 individual students seen. Students with better progression profiles are less likely to have to resit and have their marks capped or have the distraction of reassessment, leading to better overall outcomes.

The CfSS also oversee the application of access funding (Access and Participation Plan), there are 44 funded projects with 26 of those directly related to 'success'. 22% of each student's tuition fee is spent on access funding. A CfSS impact team was created in 2019/20 to help measure the outcomes of these projects.

Library and Learning Services (LLS) has been an area where investment and modernisation has driven increased engagement from students. For example, in 2013 the Stratford Library was opened and achieved awards for its design. The use of technology in both the Stratford and Docklands libraries has engaged students with digital resources, such as eBooks, which have the advantage of being instantly accessible (particularly around assessment time). Interactions with e-books has risen from 1,142,980 in 2014/15 to 1,948,451 in 2018/19, indicating far greater confidence from students in using this medium. During this process of change, student satisfaction with the service has been maintained, always scoring between 85% and 90% on the NSS.

The Student HUB is a frontline service in operation since 2015/16 implemented to respond quickly and consistently to student enquiries. Internal surveys indicate that satisfaction with this service has improved from 69% in 2015/16 to 93% in 2018/19. The HUB handles 103,000 queries a year with 8 out of 10 resolved at first touch. The team directs students to second line services, including making appointments and organsing drop-in sessions. This service and second line services, such as Health and Wellbeing, Disability and Dyslexia, and the Student Money Advice and Rights Team, help student to resolve any difficulties, and their success means students are better equipped to progress to better degree outcomes.

UEL Sport, since a major launch of Sporting facilities in 2012 UEL have grown our sporting provision. In 2019/20 there are 172 students studying with sports scholarships opposed to 28 in 2012/13. An analysis is to be conducted in 2019/20 to ascertain whether the improvements in sporting provision has impacted on degree outcomes for the participants.

Good Practice

- Regular review of regulations and policies to safeguard fairness and accurately measure standards.
- Widespread use of the full range of marks.
- Responding to student demand for earlier resit opportunities and revised late submission rules.
- Identifying at risk students and directing them to the appropriate support offerings.
- Responding to the changing way that students interact with library facilities and online learning technology.
- Building communities of practice for staff to develop authentic and equitable assessment.

Areas for further investigation

- Considering ways to reward students who perform well earlier in their degree.
- Exploring how to make degree outcomes easier to monitor for students, for example by creating an online degree calculator.
- Exploring the impact of sporting activity and sports scholarships on degree outcomes for students.

- Considering the impact of using the full range of marks in relation to traditional classification boundaries and alternative marking systems.