

# Degree Outcomes Statement 2021-22

Item	Description
Document Reference:	PL.0054-v001
Document Name:	Degree Outcomes Statement 2021-22
Review Date:	December 2022
Last Reviewed:	December 2022
Commencement Date:	
Approving Authority:	Education Committee
Date Approved:	
Department Responsible for maintenance & review:	Student, Library and Academic Services, Quality and Teaching Excellence
Contact:	<a href="mailto:ar.qte.regs@northumbria.ac.uk">ar.qte.regs@northumbria.ac.uk</a>

## Degree Outcomes Statement 2021/22

### 1. Overview

This document provides an update on Northumbria's previous degree outcomes statements (for 2019/20 and 2021/22), the most recent accessible [here](#). It provides a comprehensive overview of Northumbria's awards profile over the last six years, and a reflection on recent changes in outcomes, particularly for specific groups of students. The Statement also highlights some key initiatives and developments that potentially impact on our degree outcomes profile, and has been written in line with the Universities UK (UUK) [statement](#) on commitment to degree classifications after the pandemic, published in June 2022.

### 2. Degree Outcomes Data and Analysis 2016/17 - 2021/22

Segment	2016/7	2017/8	2018/9	2019/0	2020/1	2021/2
NU 1st and 2:1s (%)	77.0%	77.3%	78.7%	83.0%	82.5%	79.8%
NU 1sts and 2:1s / NU All First Degrees (#)	(4651 / 6039)	(4589 / 5933)	(4164 / 5288)	(4122 / 4967)	(4183 / 5070)	(3904 / 4890)
UK (%)	79.4%	79.9%	80.8%	84.8%	83.8%	82.6%
International (%)	56.3%	55.7%	61.7%	70.2%	70.6%	58.1%
UK 1sts and 2:1s Rank (Times Good University Guide)	48	51	49	49	49	**
BAME attainment gap (against white)	-23.3%	-22.6%	-18.6%	-13.4%	-12.6%	-18.3%
UK BAME attainment gap (against UK white)	-19.2%	-18.0%	-12.4%	-10.5%	-11.0%	-9.7%
UK Black attainment gap (against UK white)	-34.6%	-29.0%	-23.2%	-27.3%	-35.0%	-20.7%
International BAME attainment gap (against International white)	-17.1%	-23.1%	-28.8%	-15.5%	-19.9%	2.2%
International attainment gap (against Home)	-23.1%	-24.2%	-19.1%	-14.6%	-13.2%	-24.6%
Gender attainment gap (Male against Female)	-1.8%	-2.8%	-1.1%	-2.1%	-3.5%	-11.7%
Mature attainment gap (against young)	-11.0%	-10.5%	-12.0%	-8.8%	-10.6%	-6.4%
POLAR 1 attainment gap (against POLAR4 2-5)*	-3.4%	-8.0%	-5.6%	-5.4%	-7.3%	-2.5%
POLAR 1+2 attainment gap (against POLAR4 3-5)*	-2.8%	-8.5%	-5.2%	-6.6%	-7.6%	-2.1%
Gap FY vs L4 entry	3.0%	3.9%	2.5%	4.1%	5.5%	1.0%
Average entry tariff points	142.0	146.6	139.6	139.1	134.3	143.2
Entry Point rank - English HEIs (Times Good University Guide)	30	30	29	30	31	**
Student Staff Ratio	16.7	16.3	15.5	15.5	15.7	15.5

\* POLAR 1 is a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage

\*\* To be confirmed pending publication of the Times Good University Guide 2024 due to be published in September 2023

79.8% of Northumbria's First-Degree graduates achieved a first class (1<sup>st</sup>) or upper second-class (2:1) degree award in 2021/22. This is 3.2% below the pandemic peak of 83.0% in 2019/20, and within 1.1% of the pre-pandemic awarding rate in 2018/19. Between 2016/7 and

2021/2, the proportion of 1sts and 2:1s has increased by 2.8 percentage points. This modest 5-year increase is attributable to several factors, most notably a strategy which focused on improving and maintaining high entry tariff – Northumbria now consistently ranks in the top 30 among English universities for entry points. Northumbria also has an improved student-staff ratio (SSR), moving from 16.7 to 15.5 in the last six years, and a growing year-on-year foundation year intake, alongside a step-change in the average entry tariff of foundation year entrants with those students now achieving greater levels of success on graduation for each of the last six years. Northumbria's rank amongst universities in the Times Good University Guide for the proportion of 1sts and 2:1s has remained consistent over the 6-year period.

Analysis of the data shows that progress has been made in addressing attainment gaps for students from areas of low participation in HE (POLAR 1+2), UK BAME students and UK Black students. The attainment gaps for all these students are now at the lowest level in the last six years. The data shows that the proportion of international students achieving upper degrees fell from 70.6% in 2020/21 to 58.1% in 2021/22, the lowest level since 2017/18. This drop in the attainment of international students is also driving the overall BAME attainment gap which has increased from 12.6% in 2020/21 to 18.3% in 2021/22. Other gaps, including mature students, persist and the gap for male students has increased. These areas will be the focus of targeted work which will complement the university's stated commitments in the Access and Participation Plan (APP).

Targeted interventions and impact evaluation have been critical to addressing gaps in student attainment. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives directed at all aspects of the student journey are increasingly important elements of the University's Strategy 2018/23. The University's APP for the period from 2020-21 to 2024-25 commits to an institution-wide, strategic approach, 'fostering a culture where diversity is valued and encouraged, where we advance equality of opportunity, and all colleagues and students feel respected'. Northumbria's APP, approved by the Office for Students (OfS), includes ambitious targets to reduce significantly gaps in continuation, attainment and progression by 2024/25, all of which are integrated aspects of the Education Strategy 2021-25.

### **3. Review of progress against actions set out in degree outcome statements of 2020 and 2021**

Northumbria has made the following progress against actions stated in the last plan of 2020/21:

#### **3.1 Review of annual programme monitoring process**

Northumbria's new Continuous Programme Performance Review (CPPR) was introduced for all standard-calendar undergraduate programmes in September 2021. It is a single process for evaluating a range of qualitative and quantitative data on programme performance across the academic year. It brings together what had previously been several separate review processes (NSS outcomes for instance) and aims to facilitate timely interventions to resolve any identified issues by reviewing relevant data throughout the year. The process avoids duplication of effort, builds up feedback from module to faculty level, includes integrated monitoring of actions, and has clearly defined governance with transparent accountability.

One primary aim of CPPR is to assist the university in monitoring the impact of interventions, to identify practice and solutions that can be effectively deployed to other areas, with a view to enhancing the student and staff experience. The first year of operation has seen increased engagement with the process with robust reporting through the governance structure. The introduction of module marks review panels as part of this process ensures that (among other

things) factors that could potentially impact on degree outcomes are identified formally and acted upon quickly.

### 3.2 Review of the external examiner system

Northumbria introduced a revised external examiner policy in August 2021, which addressed the key areas outlined below:

- A clearer focus on programmes to ensure that at least one external examiner is responsible for programme oversight and outcomes. This included introducing the role of lead examiner for all programmes.
- An explicit requirement to review student outcomes in relation to previous years (including attainment gaps) at programme and module level, and across all deliveries.
- Revisions to the examination board structure and greater clarity about attendance requirements.
- A stated requirement for examiners to attend the institution and to meet with students.
- Strengthening the induction and training process.
- Revising the report format to include more narrative and analysis.

Although pre-dating the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) – External Examining Principles (published August 2022), the Northumbria Policy is in line with them, but will be formally reviewed in June 2023.

### 3.3 Integration of the outcome classification descriptors

This action was paused as a result of the pandemic and will now be incorporated into the new Quality, Excellence and Development (QED) Framework (see Section 4).

## **4. Commitment to restart any outstanding actions paused during the pandemic with revised timelines, where they are still relevant**

Before the pandemic Northumbria was considering aspects of its Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards (PFNA). Approved in 2015, the Framework had four pillars: research-informed learning; employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship; assessment for learning and achievement, and technology enhanced learning. An additional plinth was approved by Education Committee in early 2020 covering equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) but work on embedding this plinth was paused during the pandemic. A new Education Strategy (2021-2024) was approved in November 2021. As part of the implementation of the new strategy work is underway to build on PFNA to develop a new Quality Enhancement Development (QED) framework which will incorporate the EDI initiative.

## **5. Assessment of pandemic-related changes and the impact on degree classification, using pre-pandemic data (relating to 2018–19) as an appropriate benchmark and setting out how they will return to pre-pandemic levels by 2022–23**

In line with the sector Northumbria made key decisions relating to student assessment and award in response to the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic during the period March-June 2020. Northumbria's Emergency Regulations (originally approved in 2016) were reviewed and invoked in March 2020.

Northumbria moved to on-line delivery and learning and applied 'reasonable adjustments' to assessment. Alternative assessments for in-person examinations were implemented, including a move to 24 hour take-away papers, and innovative ways were devised to assess

activities such as studio projects and final shows for arts and design students. These changes were introduced and adapted at pace, with monitoring to ensure that module and programme learning outcomes were covered. Where possible, normal assessment protocols were followed, and any adjustments were carefully considered to balance the need to protect standards with the desire to ensure that students were not disadvantaged by the circumstances caused by the pandemic.

Maintaining quality and standards at all levels of study was paramount, and the attainment of a minimum amount of credit for award or continuation was defined and enforced, but with a degree of flexibility (such as automatic extensions to deadlines) to support students to succeed.

In terms of degree outcomes, the classification calculation is normally highly automated with examination boards only considering students where there are personal or technical extenuating circumstances. During this period examination boards considered every student profile to assess evidence of material difference in performance pre- and post-pandemic to determine appropriate outcomes and mitigation.

The Emergency Regulations were formally rescinded for the start of academic year 2021/22.

## **6. Commitment to further actions to address any areas where there is unexplained inflation**

The figures suggest that good degree outcomes at Northumbria are in line with the sector, and that the position has already returned to pre-pandemic levels. The systems, processes and governance outlined in the Northumbria Quality and Standards Framework gives the University confidence in the veracity of its awards. Other factors, such as increasing entry tariffs, improvements to teaching and learning practice, increasing opportunities for research-enriched and experiential learning, and the success of Foundation Years in preparing students for their academic journey, all contribute to student academic achievement.

As outlined under 7.1, Northumbria will need to assess the impact of the recent changes to assessment regulations before identifying any further actions.

## **7. Explanation of how sector-supported principles on degree algorithms and external examiners are being followed**

### 7.1 Degree Algorithms

Revised Assessment Regulations were introduced (following extensive consultation) for academic year 2020/21. These changes were informed by the [UUK Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design](#) and included:

- removal of the discounting of credit so that awards are calculated on 120 credits per level,
- standardising the borderline thresholds,
- moving to a single algorithm for calculating the award.

The new regulations have been phased in so that continuing students are not disadvantaged. The first graduating cohort will be in June 2023, at which point it will be possible to start to draw conclusions on the impact of these changes.

## 7.2 External Examiners

See paragraph 2.2.

### **8. Future Actions**

- 8.1 Deliver the Education Strategy (2021-24), including the development of the Quality Enhancement Development Framework (QED), review of the academic calendar and the implementation of the EDI-specific workstreams. QED will encompass integration of the outcome classification descriptors.
- 8.2 Review the External Examiner policy in June 2023
- 8.3 Monitor and review the projects approved via the Access and Participation Plan (APP) specifically relating to attainment gaps.
- 8.4 Analyse the impact of the regulatory changes on the 2022/23 graduating cohort.