

Degree Outcomes Statement 2022-23

Ref: PL64-v001

Brief Description & Purpose:	This document provides an update on Northumbria's previous degree outcomes statements which are 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 activities, initiatives and developments that potentially impact on our degree outcomes profile		
Applicable to (list cohorts):	Staff: All staff, including Governors and co-opted Board Committee Members	Students: All students	Third Parties: All who are in a formal relationship with the University
Effective From:	01 September 2024	Last Review Date:	25 January 2024
Approval Authority:	Education Committee/Academic Board	Approved:	25 January 2024
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Degree Outcomes Statement for 2022/23

1. Overview

This document provides an update on Northumbria's previous degree outcomes statements which are 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 activities, initiatives and developments that potentially impact on our degree outcomes profile.

2. Degree Outcomes Data and Analysis 2017/18 - 2022/23

Segment	2017/8	2018/9	2019/0	2020/1	2021/2	2022/3
NU Higher First Degrees (%)	77.3%	78.7%	83.0%	82.5%	79.8%	76.9%
NU Higher First Degrees / NU All First Degrees (#)	(4589 / 5933)	(4164 / 5288)	(4122 / 4967)	(4183 / 5070)	(3904 / 4890)	(4012 / 5218)
UK Higher Degrees Rank (Times Good University Guide)	51	49	47	59*	57	N/A
BAME attainment gap (against white) **	-22.6%	-18.6%	-13.4%	-12.6%	-18.3%	-17.8%
UK BAME attainment gap (against UK white)	-18.0%	-12.4%	-10.5%	-11.0%	-9.7%	-10.5%
UK Black attainment gap (against UK white)	-29.0%	-23.2%	-27.3%	-35.0%	-20.7%	-15.5%
Gender attainment gap (Male against Female)	-2.8%	-1.1%	-2.1%	-3.5%	-11.7%	-7.4%
Mature attainment gap (against young)	-10.5%	-12.0%	-8.8%	-10.6%	-6.4%	-5.9%
POLAR 1 attainment gap (against POLAR4 2-5)	-8.0%	-5.6%	-5.4%	-7.3%	-2.5%	-4.8%
POLAR 1+2 attainment gap (against POLAR4 3-5)	-8.5%	-5.2%	-6.6%	-7.6%	-2.1%	-3.5%
Gap FY vs L4 entry	3.9%	2.5%	4.1%	5.5%	1.0%	4.3%
Average entry tariff points	146.6	139.6	139.1	134.3	143.2	139.7
Entry Point rank - English HEIs (Times Good University Guide)	30	29	30	31*	28*	N/A
Student Staff Ratio	16.3	15.5	15.5	15.7	15.5	N/A

2022/3 notes: Methodology for calculating Good Honours and entry points has been based upon an interpretation of Good Honours as defined for previous Student Return data. As award submission data has now fundamentally changed, and no methodology has been made available by JISC/HESA, this is provided on a 'best efforts' basis.

* Published ranks differ as Times Good University Guide combined multiple years to offset pandemic impact

** Ethnicity should no longer be returned for non-UK students in Data Futures

Good awards for 2022/23 have dropped by 2.9 percentage points and are now slightly below pre pandemic levels of awards in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

- Foundation Year vs level 4 entry shows a 2022/23 gap of 4.3 percentage points, a positive trend that has continued for 8 years and highlights the strength of the Foundation Year access route.
- The UK black attainment gap has narrowed to 15.5 percentage points, which has declined from a peak of 35 percentage points in 2020/21. (It is worth noting that the small population of black students means this figure has the potential to be highly variable and this difference in outcomes will continue to be a high priority).
- Attainment gaps for mature students and those from areas of low participation in Higher Education (POLAR Q1+2) are at the lowest levels in recent years with the gap for mature students at its lowest level in six years.
- Although the attainment gap between males and females narrowed from 11.7 percentage points in 2021/22 to 7.4% in 2022/23, it remains considerably higher than the previous four years. The university's [Access and Participation Plan](#) (approved by the Office for Students in October 2023) and covering the period 2024/25 to 2027-28 includes objectives to close attainment gaps for black students, male students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

3. Assessment and marking practices

Northumbria's Assessment for Learning and Achievement guidance emphasises the alignment between assessment and marking and programme learning outcomes (PLOs). It includes guidance on the consistent use of grade descriptors, marking schemes and assessment criteria, assessment briefs, feedback standards, and approval of assessment tasks. Student views on assessment and feedback are monitored throughout the year.

In line with sector good practice external examiners actively engage in the approval of assessment tasks, the moderation of student work at module level and overall outcomes at programme level to confirm assessment quality and standards. Programme Assessment Boards (PABs) consider feedback from external examiners, student profiles and adherence to regulations in confirming student progression and awarding degrees. Marking practice and standards are reviewed through the Continuous Programme Performance Review (CPPR) process, the outcomes of which are scrutinised at Faculty Education Committees and the Quality and Standards Sub-committee.

All academic staff are expected to achieve HEA fellowship, for which assessment and feedback is a core area of activity, and CPD sessions on these specific topics are required as part of staff development. The University also delivers a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) for academic staff new to teaching, which includes a focus on assessment and marking and incorporates HEA fellowship. The academic-led Teaching Excellence team offers guidance on assessment design and exemplars of good practice on the website and through both open and tailored sessions on assessment practice.

Data from annual reports submitted by External Examiners for 2022/23 show that 98.7% of external examiners confirmed that the University's approach to quality and standards was consistent with sector norms. This strongly indicates that external examiner induction and support is robust, and that assessment processes are effective and efficient overall.

4. Academic governance and processes

Overseen by the Board of Governors and the University Executive, the University manages its portfolio and curriculum through Academic Board, Education Committee and Planning Committee as part of its [governance structure](#). There is a university-wide approach to assessment regulations, which are overseen and approved by Academic Board. The roles, remit and purpose of the University's governing committees and organisational structures are clearly defined and subject to regular review.

Northumbria's [Quality and Standards Framework](#) articulates the overarching processes and governance context for managing quality and standards. Programme and partnership approval and review processes ensure standards are defined, monitored and maintained. Approval and review documentation, including panel guidance and checklists, is designed to articulate and confirm that Northumbria's programmes meet external requirements (including Degree and Higher Apprenticeship standards), and to ensure the quality, currency and consistency of awards over time. Student involvement is integral to this ongoing process.

Following the introduction of Continuous Programme Performance Review (CPPR) our approach to annual monitoring activity has been recalibrated and strengthened to be more systematic, accountable and data informed. CPPR is part of the Review strand of the Northumbria Quality and Standards Framework and is a key part of the following related processes:

- Institutional performance review and quality and standards monitoring for Board of Governors.
- Partner performance review.

CPPR provides a robust and dynamic quality and student-focused assurance and enhancement tool. It offers a single place for standardised and timely data to support specific foci including the Office for Students' Conditions of Registration and EDI requirements. Critical to the success of the revised approach is the opportunity for student voice feedback at all review points.

Adherence to the National Qualifications Framework, QAA Subject Benchmarks and PSRB requirements is confirmed by external, discipline-specific input to all approval and review panels. External advice and guidance is also provided by external examiners, relevant professional bodies and employer networks relating to practice. Partnership approval and review sits within this framework, with partner programmes considered alongside the equivalent programmes delivered in Newcastle.

5. Classification algorithms

The algorithm for the classification of an honours degree is applied consistently to all students across the University and is detailed in the [Academic Regulations for Taught Awards](#). Awards are calculated automatically with examination board discretion applied only where there are approved extenuating circumstances. Final year Programme Assessment Boards (PABs) (which include external examiners) provide oversight of all outcomes. Students have access to on-line guidance on how their degree is classified on the student portal and in their Programme Handbook.

Currently the degree classification algorithm is based on the best average of either final year marks or a combination of levels 5 and 6 (weighted 40%:60%), whichever is more favourable to the student. Students are also considered for a higher classification where their average mark place them within 2% of the higher classification.

There are established threshold rules for students to progress to the next stage of their programme which includes regulations around eligibility to re-sit a module. The emphasis is on ensuring students have the opportunity to succeed.

Northumbria continues to monitor the appropriateness of its classification algorithm and is undertaking a full review in 2023/24.

6. Programme design, teaching practices and learning resources

Northumbria's [Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards \(PFNA\)](#), introduced in 2015/16, ensures all programmes at the point of design and approval are subject to standard criteria. The Framework has four pillars: research informed learning; employability; assessment for learning and achievement, and technology enhanced learning. PFNA underpins the aim that all Northumbria graduates are prepared for employment or future study. In 2020 an explicit commitment to inclusivity was added to the framework to bring focus to issues of diversity, inclusion, decolonisation and globalisation. The Northumbria graduate characteristics, as summarised below, are the shared outcome of all Northumbria Programmes, providing a synergy between Northumbria's research and teaching excellence.

A Northumbria graduate will be able to:

- Be able to think independently, understand and justify their own opinions, and will recognise the need to challenge their thinking, and the thinking of others
- Be able to apply their disciplinary knowledge to complex problems in their discipline and its professional or industrial practice in order to identify appropriate solutions which are sustainable and justifiable.
- Value curiosity, collaboration and analysis as keystones in the creation of new knowledge and practice
- Be able to communicate effectively to diverse audiences utilising a range of formats and media
- Display the attitudes and skills to engage and work constructively and sensitively in multi-cultural environments and teams and have an awareness of ethical considerations
- Combine all of the above to support their future employability and long term career prospects

In addition, a Northumbria Masters graduate will be able to:

PG Cert / Diploma will be able to:

- Critically reflect on their own work and that of others
- Present and justify their work, in the context of wider theories and practice, to their peers
- Display and critically apply expert knowledge within areas of their discipline and /or its practice

Master's degree will further be able to:

- Conceptualise, theorise and undertake research which addresses complex issues and which advances understanding within the discipline or practice
- Contribute to the creation of new knowledge and /or applications to practice within their discipline through a critical understanding of the processes through which knowledge is created.
- Formulate balanced judgements when considering incomplete or ambiguous data and can communicate these judgements clearly to both specialist and non-specialist audiences

The academic-led Teaching Excellence team provide CPD sessions and support to academic staff throughout the year. All academic staff participate in a peer observation and support scheme which delivers 1-1 mentoring on academic practice and is part of a wider mechanism for identifying good practice.

The [University Library](#) (which achieves some of the highest student satisfaction levels in the UK) works closely with academic colleagues to develop the [library collections](#) to meet the University's education and research needs. It offers [study skills support](#) sessions and drop-in appointments, as well as working with academics to develop inductions and other provision tailored to particular programmes and subject areas. The Library offers 24/7 access to study space. The value that students place on the skills support is evident in the positive NSS outcomes in this area.

Blackboard Ultra is the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), a system that enables the provision of all learning materials and resources to students as well as facilitating communication/collaboration and evaluating student progress. Lectures are recorded and made available to students via this platform. Alongside Northumbria's ongoing commitment to technology enhanced learning, the University has also invested significantly in its campus to support high quality learning and teaching.

Our Student Engagement and Student Life and Wellbeing teams work directly with students and closely with academic personal tutors to support students with a range of issues. There is a particular focus on identifying students who are finding aspects of their experience challenging. Timely interventions are designed to support students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes, alongside supporting their resilience, health and wellbeing.

7. Progress on actions

The Degree Outcomes Statement for 2021/22 outlined the following actions.

7.1 Deliver the Education Strategy (2021-24), including the development of the Quality Enhancement Development (QED) framework

This activity is subsumed into the new University strategy (2024-30).

7.2 Review External Examiner policy

This action was specifically in relation to the [UKSCQA/QAA External Examining Principles](#) (published in August 2022). This review (and a review of remuneration) has been completed.

7.3 Monitor and review Access and Participation Plan (APP) projects

APP projects have been monitored and reviewed by the newly constituted Student Access and Success Sub-Committee at which the implementation plan is shared. A showcase event was held in June 2023 to report on project outcomes to date and share practice.

7.4 Analyse the impact of the regulatory changes on the 2022/23 graduating cohort

An initial analysis has been completed and will inform the current review of the Assessment Regulations for Taught Awards (ARTA).

8. **Future Actions**

8.1 Review of Assessment Regulations

Continue to monitor the impact of the Assessment Regulations on outcomes and attainment gaps. Conduct a full review of the regulations during 2023/24.

8.2 Close attainment gaps

The new programme design framework (QED) will incorporate key areas where there is potential impact on attainment, specifically:

- assessment and feedback
- inclusivity
- quality and standards
- employability

The new framework will support the commitment in the [Access and Participation Plan](#) (approved in October 2023) to reduce gaps in student outcomes.

8.3 External Examiner Policy

Further review of external examiner process and regulation to include optimising external insight into student outcomes.

Version No.	Reviewer	Date	Changes
1.0	Academic Board	27/09/2024	Approved Version in January 2024