



AECC University College Degree Outcomes Statement (DOS) 2020-2021

Introduction

The purpose of this Statement is to set out how the University College meets the expectation that 'The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards'.

The formal criteria for the provision of DOSs by Providers is to focus on final classifications for graduates on courses with outcomes at Level 6 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) (Bachelors awards), looking at trends over time (five years is suggested). In 2020-2021 the University College had only two undergraduate courses for which there is final award data. Of these the BSc (Hons) Clinical Exercise and Rehabilitation Science had level 6 students completing for the first time; however there were only three students completing with final degree awards. The other course is an integrated Masters, with final year outcomes on Level 7 FHEQ. We received taught degree awarding powers in May 2016, admitted the first students to courses leading to our awards in September 2017, and made our first awards in July 2018 to students who took up the opportunity to transfer to our courses. This means that samples are small and data that relates only to our own awards is limited, currently covering three years only.

While there is no national expectation, therefore, that we should currently publish a DOS, the University College has undertaken to do so, in the interests of transparency and good practice. Given our circumstances described above, it is not possible to identify meaningful trends and as the identification of individuals could be possible, so we are not at this point publishing an **Institutional degree classification profile**, and will do so when sufficient data is available. The data available has however been considered internally and presented to the Board of Governors as part of our annual assurance reporting process.

This statement will be reviewed and revised annually as part of our annual assurance processes.

External input to this statement

As set out in the introduction above, the University College has only two undergraduate courses for which there is final award data, one of which is formally outside the scope of a DOS, and one of which has only one year of data and a very small number of students. Both courses have had external examiner input in reviewing standards and quality. Given the scope of the statement at this point, therefore the University College has not sought additional external input in reviewing data and creating this statement, but will revisit this when that situation changes.

Assessment and marking practices

The University College assures itself that its assessment and marking practices meet sector reference points through the following key processes:

- Courses are designed and developed to align with the FHEQ, national credit frameworks, subject benchmark statements (where relevant) and the standards set by relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs and other accrediting bodies), and this is rigorously tested through our [Course Consideration, Approval and Review Policy and Procedures](#). This process benefits from the input from external academic and professional advisors from related fields.
- External examiners are appointed in line with our [External Examining Policy and Procedures](#), using criteria that reflect the current UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance on Externality. All external examiners have an induction and where external examiners are not already experienced in the role they are appointed a mentor and/or strongly encouraged to attend the AdvanceHE Professional development course for external examiners. External examiners are charged with confirming that our academic standards align with national expectations taking into account the standards outlined within the FHEQ. They scrutinise samples of work (following internal marking and moderation), and are full members of the relevant Assessment Board where marks and awards are ratified. They submit a formal annual report which is considered in detail by the relevant course team, and received and revised by Academic Standards and Quality Committee. External Examiner reports are made available in full to students and staff.
- Internal marking and moderation policies which check consistency of marking standards.
- Consistency of Assessment Board decision-making is supported by having the Academic Registrar (or

nominee) present at all pre-board and boards, to oversee the process and offer regulatory advice. Going forward our revised assessment regulations are reducing scope for Assessment Board discretion, to make decisions more transparent, and avoid the possibility or perception of bias.

Students with exceptional personal circumstances are considered in accordance with our published [Exceptional Personal Circumstances Policy](#). Exceptional Personal circumstances are only actioned in the event the student has failed the affected assessment(s), and therefore cannot be used to improve grades. Where circumstances are accepted a student may have a 'first (or second) uncapped sit or assessment submission.

Students may appeal against a decision of the Assessment Board, on specific grounds and with appropriate supporting evidence, as set out in our published [Academic Appeals Policy](#). Overarching data on academic appeals held is presented to ASQC and Academic Board, as part of our annual assurance statement to the Board of Governors.

Academic governance

The University College has operated with a revised revised academic governance structure since May 2020, in response to a report from our internal auditors, and to take into account changes to the internal structure of the institution.

Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC), is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. It approves, on behalf of Academic Board, proposals for new courses and has oversight of the course consideration/approval (and review/re-approval) and ongoing course/unit monitoring processes. External examiner appointments are considered and approved by this committee.

The *Education Committee* has responsibility for developing and recommending to Academic Board strategy and policy on all aspects of the taught student educational experience, and for leading on strategic initiatives that enhance the educational experience of students. It has oversight of, reports and make recommendations to the Academic Board on academic policies, procedures and regulations underpinning the University College's taught provision. Therefore all student-facing and quality assurance policies and procedures are under the auspices of this committee, and are normally reviewed on at least a three-yearly cycle.

Assessment Boards have clearly defined terms of reference and operate in accordance with our Assessment Boards policy and procedure. They have delegated authority from Academic Board to approve awards of the University College. Should any issues arise with the conduct of Assessment Boards these would be reported through, and any necessary actions overseen by, ASQC.

The full [terms of reference and membership of academic committees](#) are available on our website.

Academic Board provides an annual assurance report to the Governing Body that it continues to manage and oversee the academic standards of awards and related quality of learning opportunities.

Classification algorithms

To take into account the recommendations within the '2017 report ['Understanding Degree Algorithms](#) we reviewed our assessment regulations in detail over the 2018-9 and 2019-2020 academic years.

Revised regulations came into effect in 2021-22 for all students (following a consultation). The key changes in the regulations were:

- To come into line with the Sector, and move to a 40% pass mark at levels 3-6, retaining 50% at level 7 (the pass mark for all historic courses and all levels was 50%).
- Removal of provision for compensation in core units other than at levels 3 and 4
- The introduction of an additional resit opportunity, subject to reaching specific conditions to give students another opportunity to achieve, and progress with their cohort, rather than requiring repeat units in the following year.
- The removal of any restriction on the number of units in which a student may be reassessed, to allow students more opportunity to be reassessed and progress with their cohort
- Removal of a number of instances providing for Assessment Board discretion, to ensure clarity and reduces discretion, thus avoiding potential allegations of bias.
- Removal of provision for the possibility of an uplift for borderline students who marginally fall short (within 1%) of a classification boundary, to avoid suggestions of bias and to reduce possibility of perceptions of grade inflation.

During 2020-2021 the University College has undertaken a further review of the revised regulations, taking into account the Principles set out in the Standing Committee on Quality Assurance (UKSCQA) ['Principles for](#)

[effective degree algorithms \(undergraduate awards\)](#), and revisions were approved by Academic Board in March 2021. The key changes made as a result are that:

- *The Zone of consideration of 3% has been removed and the final degree classification will be calculated on the Credit-weighted aggregate mark only, for all awards.* The final award will be based solely on an algorithm focussed on the final credit-rated aggregate mark. If the final credit-weighted aggregate mark is less than or equal to 0.5% below the higher classification the Assessment Board will automatically award the higher classification, but there will be no other uplift
In reaching this decision the Board noted that AECC was one of only two universities that had a zone of consideration of 3% (the other presumably being Bournemouth University, meaning that we were out of kilter with the sector. Applying the credit-weighted aggregate mark algorithm only also removes the possibility of 'double counting' good performance at level 6 or 7 in calculating final results within the Zone of Consideration.
- *Marks at unit level will be truncated rather than rounded to ensure there are not multiple opportunities for rounding.*

Academic Board however decided, not to change the existing weighting for Bachelor's degrees with honours to 33/67, as recommended in the report, but to retain the 30% (level 5) /70% (level 6) split (and the, existing weightings for Integrated Masters awards). The Board agreed that moving to the 'majority sector view', which was the only rationale given in the report for proposing the specific change of weighting, was not sufficient reason to change. Working Group considered this principle, but saw no specific reason to amend our current weighting of 30:70. Working in 'round numbers' seems easier for students and staff to follow.

The new regulations apply in 2021-22 to all undergraduate students who entered Levels 3 or 4 (including students entering Level 4 from Gateway and student transferring between University College courses into Level 4 or Gateway), all postgraduate (MSc) students entering year 1/stage 1, and any student repeating Levels 3 or 4. Undergraduate students enrolling for level 5 or above (including any direct entrants to level 5 or above), and Postgraduate (MSc) students already enrolled in 2020-21 continue on the existing regulations for 2021-22. A consultation is to be held with these students this academic year, about implementing the revised regulations for all existing students from September 2022. Should students not agreed to accept the new regulations this will mean that the impact of removing the Zone of Consideration on degree outcomes for the MChiro will not be seen for four years.

The [assessment regulations](#) are published for stakeholders on our public website, Staff Information Portal and Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) for students.

Academic integrity

The University College has signed up to the QAA Academic Integrity Charter, meaning that as an institution we have pledged to 'implement its principles and commitments which include working with staff and students and, in collaboration across the sector, to protect and promote academic integrity, and take action against academic misconduct'.¹ To take this work forward we have set up an Academic Integrity Working Group, with representation across Schools, Professional Services and the ASU, Chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor who has been nominated as institutional Academic Integrity Lead. The Group has used the recommendations set out in the QAA publication 'QAA Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education How to Address Essay Mills and Contract Cheating, Second edition, published 17 June 2020 as the basis for its work. The Group will continue to meet to take this forward during 2021-22

Managing academic standards during the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to result in challenges for all institutions in the higher education sector that clearly affected student and staff experience. The University College was one of a few that remained open, and within the government's guidelines sought to continue to deliver a high-quality educational experience and deliver practical based learning.

The University College agreed at Academic Board in July 2021 to continue to operate within its approved emergency regulations during 2020-2021, but without the clauses which provided for a no-detriment 'safety net' within the assessment regulations.² The 'safety net was removed on the grounds that:

¹ Academic Integrity Charter for UK Higher Education

² The safety net operated in line with that which Bournemouth University set for its students:

- *The University College may consider student achievement and progression based on assessments completed up to the date that these regulations are invoked, to ensure that no student is disadvantaged by the exceptional circumstance(s) outside of our control.*

- Previously a key rationale for including a safety net was to ensure parity between AECC University College award students and students studying at the University College who remained on courses leading to awards of Bournemouth University (BU).³ However in 2020/21 new assessment regulations came into force for AECC students only, meaning AECC and BU students would be treated differently in assessments, effectively nullifying the requirement to treat BU and AECC students the same.
- BU were not using emergency regulations in 2020/21, and therefore no detriment would not be used for their students.
- Evidence/experience had shown that the change to assessment strategies did not adversely affect students.

With the exception of practical assessments the majority of written examinations were again conducted online.

Teaching practices and learning resources

Given limited data at this point, and also the difficulty in demonstrating direct correlation, it is not feasible to identify if there have been any discernible effects of enhancements to teaching practices, learning resources, etc on degree classifications. However, the institution does aim to take an embedded, whole institution approach to the delivery of academic services, for example Library and Student Services academic support is embedded in the curriculum wherever possible. Students are taught literature searching, critical evaluation, referencing and academic writing skills in class and additional workshops are delivered, aligned to the curriculum, for small groups and one-to-one support.

Since September 2019 the University College has had its own Student Services Team (the service was outsourced prior to 2019). Students have access to a dedicated team, employed directly by the University College providing study skills, language, wellbeing support and counselling.

Approved by Academic Board **24 November 2021**

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- *This specific no detriment approach will employ a 'safety net' calculation of the level average up until the point these regulations come into force (specified date), and assessments attempted after the defined date will only contribute to the level mark where this is in the student's favour. For clarity, a level average mark will either be the same or higher than the average attained up to the specified date.*
 - *The 'safety net' calculation will only be used where a student has passed all their assessments.'*

³ Our validating partner before the University College secured TDAP. On our achieving TDAP students had the opportunity either to transfer to AECC University College awards or to remain on Bournemouth University awards. Students are however taught and assessed together.