



AECC University College Degree Outcomes Statement (DOS) 2021-2022

Introduction

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).

The University College 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.

In 2021-2022 the University College had only one undergraduate course with final outcomes at level 6 for which there is final award data. This course has had only small numbers of students enrolled, with three students completing with level 6 awards in 2020-21 and 6 in 2021-22. The other undergraduate course is an integrated Masters, with final year outcomes on Level 7 FHEQ ('undergraduate course with postgraduate elements'). 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.

At this point, as publishable data relates to this one course only, we are not publishing an Institutional degree classification profile. The data available has however been considered internally and presented and reviewed by to the Board of Governors as part of our annual assurance reporting process.

It is likely that Covid 19 impacted on the outcomes for the MChiro for 2019-2020, and 2020-21 when assessments were adjusted and written examination papers online although, as indicated in the 2019-2020 Degree Outcomes Statement, other factors may also have been at play, that continue to be monitored by the School. For that year we also adopted a 'safety net' (no detriment) policy in order to ensure that our students were not disadvantaged in comparison with those students studying our courses but who had chosen to remain on awards of our former validating partner (which was taking a 'safety net' approach).

The University College has now returned to in-person examinations, sat under full exam conditions.

The School of Chiropractic has taken deliberate steps to review assessment breadth and depth, and statistical analysis of units most at risk of grade inflation. Where a unit has been identified, it has been tracked with stats and multiple interventions considered including assessment amendments, standardisation of range of question difficulty, mentorship from experienced staff members and amendment of weighting of question types across papers. No one single response has been made, the response has been tailored to the unit and the staff. Similarly high fail rate units have been targeted to identify why and a student centred approach to review has been created. The number of first class awards has fallen and has now been brought back in line with OFS pre-Covid-19 figures where the 2018-19 year nationally recorded a figure of 29.5%.

It is however too soon to confirm the ongoing impact of these actions, and the policy and regulation changes indicated below; further years of data will be needed to confirm.

With regard to the overall very high number of 'good' degrees at 2:1 and above, the University College highlights that until 2020-21 the pass mark for all MChiro units at all levels was 50%, and the course continues to operate a 50% pass mark for the final (level 7) year.

Data is presented to the Board of Governors regarding attainment in relation to a range of student characteristics, in our annual assurance statement to the Board, and as part of their oversight of our Access and Participation Plan, but is not published here due to small numbers.

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/buddy. All external examiners are 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 reviewed by Academic Standards and Quality Committee. External Examiner reports are made available in full to students and staff.
- Internal marking and moderating 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 full [terms of reference and membership of academic committees](#) are available on our website.

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 and make recommendations to the Academic Board on academic regulations policies and procedures 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.

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 and to demonstrate that it is meeting the Office for Students ongoing conditions of registration for quality, reliable standards and positive outcomes for all students.

Classification algorithms

To take into account the recommendations within the 'Understanding Degree Algorithms' and 'Principles for effective degree algorithms (undergraduate awards)' reports, we have reviewed our assessment regulations in detail over the past three years. Through these reviews we have

- 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%).
- removed provision for compensation in core units other than at levels 3 and 4

- introduced an additional resit opportunity, subject to students reaching specific conditions .to give students another opportunity to achieve, and progress with their cohort, rather than requiring repeat units in the following year.
- removed 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
- removed a number of instances providing for Assessment Board discretion, to ensure clarity and reduces discretion, thus avoiding potential allegations of bias.
- removed provision for the possibility of an uplift for borderline students who marginally fall short (within 1%) of a classification boundary.

More recently we have

- removed the Zone of consideration of 3% - the final degree classification will now be calculated on the Credit-weighted aggregate mark only, for all awards. (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).
- specified that marks at unit level will be truncated rather than rounded to ensure there are not multiple opportunities for rounding.

The new regulations regarding uplift and roundings applied in 2021-22 to all undergraduate students who entered Levels 3 or 4, all postgraduate (MSc) students entering year 1/stage 1, and any student repeating Levels 3 or 4. However, following a student consultation, continuing students (other than Gateway students) continued on the existing regulations for 2021-22. This means that the impact of removing the Zone of Consideration on degree outcomes for the MChiro will not be seen for four years.

We have however decided not to change the existing weighting for Bachelor's degrees with honours to 33/67, as recommended in the 'Principles for effective degree algorithms (undergraduate awards) report, but to retain the 30% (level 5) /70% (level 6) split (and the, existing weightings for Integrated Masters awards). Academic Board agreed that moving to the 'majority sector view', which was the only rationale given in the report for the specific change of weighting, was not sufficient reason to change, and working in 'round numbers' seems easier for students and staff to follow.

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

Academic integrity

During 2021-22 we have 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 to review our policy and practice. As a result for 2022-23 we have

- adopted the definition of academic misconduct used by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator; this definition has the advantage of not including any reference to 'intent'.
- included a specific definition of and reference to 'contract cheating and to the use of AI to prepare work within the list of practices that may be regarded as academic misconduct, and formalised the examination rules by including them specifically within this policy
- introduced the possibility of more severe penalties, including the possibility of termination of course, in the event of very serious cases.
- included additional information about academic integrity and support available in the student handbook and on the VLE for students – for example highlighting the self-study courses available.

As far as possible all written coursework is now submitted via Turnitin, and this enables originality checking. It is however clearly specified in policy that originality reports are tools only and that decisions regarding academic misconduct remain a matter of academic judgment.

Teaching practices and learning resources

Given the difficulty in demonstrating direct correlation, and limited data for this institution that is not potentially affected by the effects of the pandemic 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, we have grown our student support (wellbeing and academic support) and continued to develop our provision, including developing our range of group workshop opportunities (generic study skills workshops and bookable presentation rehearsals). Institutional data shows that promotional activities for student services are working well; students are aware of the service and accessing it in much greater numbers.

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