

AECC University College Interim Degree Outcomes Statement (DOS) 2019-2020

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 2019-2020 the University College had only one undergraduate course for which there is final award data. This 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. We have not therefore had a full cohort of our own final year undergraduates; this means that samples are small and data that relates only to our own awards is limited, currently covering two 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, we are not at this point publishing an **Institutional degree classification profile**, and will do so when sufficient data is available.

At this point we have not yet sought external input to this statement. Given timing of the completion of this statement in relation to meeting dates in our revised committee structure, this statement has been taken directly to Academic Board rather than being considered first through Academic Standards and Quality Committee. This document is therefore described as an interim statement – external input and full committee scrutiny will take place before a revised version is submitted to the Board of Governors as part of our Annual Assurance Statement.

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

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 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.
- 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 will reduce 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.

External examiners in their 2018-2019 reports have commented positively on the consistency and fairness and rigour of the assessment process, and the robust delivery of assessments that ensure learning outcomes are met.

Academic governance

The University College has reviewed and introduced a revised academic governance structure during the 2019-2020 academic year, 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 new *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 Organisation and Conduct of 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, on the basis of the following principles:

- There should be a consistent set of regulations for the institution. Exceptions might be needed for a particular course, but the regulations should not be designed on the basis of exceptions
- Regulations should as far as possible be rules-based (ie rather than based on assessment board discretion), to make them more transparent, and avoid the possibility of bias, and also to streamline the administration of assessment and the Assessment Board.
- Regulations should as far as possible be self-explanatory for both staff and students.
- Everything necessary to determine a student's progression/classification must be explicit within the regulations.
- Regulations should support student progression (in particular the ability for a student to progress with their cohort) , where they have the potential to succeed

We were desirous to ensure that as an intuition we now had a clear rationale for all the approaches we adopt within these regulations.

As part of this process, and related to the diversification of our course portfolio. the decision was taken 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%).

The classification algorithm itself did not change significantly as party of this review. All unit marks above level 4 count towards the final award. Greater weighing is placed on level 6 (for BSc) and level 7 (for Integrated Masters) to recognise exit velocity. Levels 3 and 4 do not contribute to the final award on the basis that these focus on transition to higher education and engagements with new skills and fields of study. Final awards continue to be based on both weighted average and marks profile, to provide the opportunity to recognise both

consistent performance and 'exit velocity'. This is now automatic, not an Assessment Board recommendation. However provision for the possibility of an uplift for borderline students who marginally fall short (within 1%) of a classification boundary has been removed, for transparency, to avoid suggestions of bias and to reduce possibility of perceptions of grade inflation.

. The key changes in the regulations are:

- 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.

The [assessment regulations](#) are published for stakeholders on our public website, Staff Information Portal and Virtual Learning Environment (Moodle) for students (together with a paper detailing the rationale for all key changes, with significant changes specifically highlighted).

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. In addition to this whole institution approach, the institution has made a significant financial commitment to spending to enhance resources for example:

- 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.
- Since summer 2017 we have undertaken a major project to refurbish our library. This has improved library use by over 33% as it is now a contemporary, welcoming and user-friendly environment, including group study pods bookable by students, additional study spaces, an increased number of computer stations for student use, and USB charging points and power supplies throughout. The Library also provides access to a wide range of health science databases, electronic books and sophisticated 3D anatomical software and a dedicated online guide for each course; streamlining access for students to resources focused around their area of study and supported by senior library staff who are qualified teachers.

22 June 2020

Approved by Academic Board 1 July 2020

Approved by the Board of Governors for publication [17 July 2020]