

Degree Outcomes Statement

University of Northampton

June 2020

Summary

This Degree Outcomes Statement has been produced and published in response to the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA)'s Statement of Intent on Degree Outcomes¹. It provides assurance to the governing body of the University, to the public and to the Office for Students that the University of Northampton meets its ongoing conditions of registration B4 and B5².

The University has undertaken an institutional review of degree outcomes. Actions identified in the statement arise from this review.

This Degree Outcomes Statement has been approved by the University's Senate and Board of Governors.

Institutional Degree Classification Profile

1. The University has an expected range associated with good degrees, and challenges programmes that fall outside this range to provide justification. Justifications reference the nature of the subject matter, the nature of the cohort, and the nature of the teaching and learning methods used.
2. Institutional committees oversee the University's response to sector concerns on degree inflation; institutional discussions are informed by relevant data.
3. External examiner reporting provides opportunities for externals to raise concerns regarding practices that might cause degree inflation; such concerns have not been present in recent years.

Assessment and Marking Practices

1. The University marks in letter grades. Each grade has associated, qualitative criteria which allows students to understand how the quality of the work has been assessed against the learning outcomes.
2. The University reviews its assessment and marking practices through its annual and periodic quality assurance and enhancement processes.

¹ <https://ukscqa.org.uk/what-we-do/degree-standards/> (accessed on 12 June 2020)

² <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/> (accessed on 12 June 2020)

3. The University implemented a review of the its Modular Framework in 2017/18. This included work to map Programme Learning Outcomes explicitly to modules; to ensure all Programme and Module Learning Outcomes were appropriate to the academic level of study; to ensure that all student work was marked explicitly to learning outcomes; and to realign the volume of assessment to meet sector norms.
4. The University has policies that ensure consistency of approach to marking and moderation and consideration of mitigating circumstances and academic appeals. These are reviewed and reapproved annually by Senate.
5. The University follows the QAA guidance on the appointment and management of external examiners.
6. New partners are provided with information on the University's marking and assessment practices and offered training on these are necessary.

Academic Governance

1. The University chairs and officers all module and award boards leading to an award of the university, including those related to partners delivering provision under a validated services arrangement³.
2. Many of the University's programmes are overseen by professional bodies that approve and monitor standards and, in many instances, ratify assessment and marking approaches.
3. The University's Annual Reflective Board of Examiners considers comparability of standards and outcomes over time, between delivery locations, across protected characteristics and across subject areas.
4. University-level committees and panels provide assurance that quality and standards of provision are appropriate.
5. Module External Examiners approve the exam papers for each module or, where there is no exam, the largest item of assessment; they also approve the processes undertaken at each module board. Framework External Examiners monitor the University's Award and Status Boards along with the operation and validity of the University Modular Framework.
6. Training on assessment regulations and policy is provided for new academic staff and for new external examiners.

Classification algorithms

³ There are two variations to this, documented in the University's institutional review of degree outcomes.

1. The University has not changed its undergraduate degree algorithm for many years. The University's Undergraduate degree classification algorithm is documented in the University Regulations.
2. The classification algorithms discount Level 4 and the worst 40 credits of performance from across Levels 5 and 6 (maximum of 20 credits discounted at Level 6).
3. There is no discretion for Module Boards or Award and Status Boards to adjust a module grade or a student's degree classification if they are close to a borderline. The University runs two algorithms and awards a student the best outcome from the two.

Teaching practices and learning resources

1. The University has developed a unique Active Blended Learning approach to learning and teaching.
2. The University runs an Integrated Learner Support model. All students receive embedded, subject and level specific skills and employability support, supplemented by a range of tutorial and drop-in opportunities.
3. In 2018, the LEARN student engagement dashboard was rolled out to Levels 4 and 5 and foundation year students, primarily to help Personal Tutors better support disengaged students and monitor engagement.

Good practice

1. The Integrated Learner Support Model.
2. Clear and constructive alignment between teaching and learning approaches, assessment practices and learning outcomes.
3. Long term stability in institutional regulations associated with degree outcomes, including classification algorithms.
4. Institutional chairing of all assessment boards, including those associated with partner provision.

Risks, challenges and actions

The University is confident in its oversight of degree outcomes and in its ability to provide justification for any increases in good degree performance over recent years. It has identified some small actions to undertake prior to the 2020/21 academic year, to enhance its oversight and its evidence base. Additional, data-driven reviews of certain areas will be undertaken during the 2020/21 academic year. An action plan has been produced, for oversight by the University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee on behalf of the University's Senate.

Author's note

The institutional review which informed this Degree Outcomes Statement was completed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. The content of the Statement relates to the University's Standard Academic and Student Regulations, and not to the Emergency Regulations implemented as a response to the pandemic.

Kathryn Kendon

Academic Registrar and Director, Student and Academic Services

May 2020