The University of Law

Degree Outcomes Statement 2022

Introduction

The University of Law is a private, for profit higher education institution which specialises in legal education, but also offers programmes in business, management and accounting through its Business School, and criminology and policing. Its income is generated through tuition fees, funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency for its apprenticeship programmes and some financial support is provided under section 39 (1) HERA by the Office for Students (OfS) (both recurrent grant funding and formula capital funding).

The University is registered with the OfS and Skills and Funding Agency's Register of Training Providers for the purposes of delivering degree apprenticeship programmes.

In 2006 the College became the first independent institution to be granted Taught Degree Awarding Powers by the Privy Council, leading to development of its degree programmes. On 22 November 2012, the College was awarded full University status and its name was changed to 'The University of Law'.

The Degree Outcomes Statement has been published with reference to the Statement of Intent published by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) and guidance issued by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

Degree Outcomes Statements analyse a higher education institute with Degree Awarding Powers' classification profile and are intended to provide reassurance that the institution is meeting the expectations of the Office for Students' ongoing Conditions of Registration on academic standards (B4 and B5). They are also intended to demonstrate to current and prospective students, partners and other interested parties how a University monitors the academic standards of its undergraduate awards, taking into account the diverse characteristics of its student body.

The statement draws on undergraduate degree (level 6 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-awarding bodies (FHEQ)) outcomes of students on the Undergraduate Law programmes between the years 2015/2016 and 2020/2021. The data that informs the analysis is split to provide a broad illustration of the performance of the entire UK-based study body. They are split by gender, disability, ethnicity and participation in higher education (POLAR).

Section 1: Institutional Degree Classifications Profile

1.1 Trends in Undergraduate Degree Classifications

	2016/2017	**2017/2018**	**2018/2019**	**2019/2020**	**2020/2021**
Total awards	191	279	325	360	507
1st	9%	12%	18%	34%	41%
2.1	39%	41%	39%	46%	41%
2.2	38%	36%	38%	17%	16%
3	14%	11%	5%	3%	2%

Table 1: Distribution of LL.B degree classifications as % of total awards

This section presents trends in LL.B degree classifications awarded by the University of Law between 2016/2017 and 2020/2021 (1st, 2:1,2:2, 3rd). There has been an observed year-on-year increase in 1st class honours degrees during the period while at the same time there has been a noticeable decrease in the percentage of 2:2s and 3rds.

It is worth noting that the University's undergraduate population has grown considerably during the 5-year period and continues to increase. Therefore, it is not unusual for the differences in statistics to be more prone to exaggeration or distortion with the smaller cohorts five years ago than with more recent intakes.

Increase in 1st/2:1s for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021

The increase in 2:1s and 1st class honours degrees in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 can be attributed to a number of factors:

Degree outcomes throughout the sector have become increasingly strong in recent years. Grade improvements in the past two years have been further affected by measures to alleviate the disruption for students caused by COVID. The University of Law is pleased that it has been able to achieve degree results that have narrowed historic gaps and disparities between groups so that profiles reflect patterns across the HE sector. It expects degree outcomes for its Law programmes to settle in the next two years, remaining commensurate with student outcomes for similar providers.

In 2019 the University undertook a major review to investigate reasons for the gap in overall outcomes measured against the sector. This considered student entry standards, preferred teaching and learning styles, diverse social backgrounds as well as comparative assessment practices and standards across providers as well as more specific details relating to the programme itself. The analysis confirmed that issues affecting uneven performance outcomes could be identified across the student experience but that no single factor accounted on its own for the degree of disparity.

The University therefore introduced wider approaches to teaching methods to provide a range of learning experiences to ensuring the programmes are more suited to diverse social and personal needs. It changed the course structure, design principles and course materials. It also recognised the importance of providing a range of assessment opportunities. Following benchmarking potential algorithms against the sector[1], in 2019/20 a new algorithm was adopted to ensure that individual performances more accurately reflected the disparate learning experiences of differing ethnic groups, gender characteristics, learning situations and disabilities. The revised algorithm now drops the marks in the weakest performing 20 credit modules at both Level 5 and Level 6 from the final calculation. Section 4 describes how the revised algorithm works and the rationale behind it.

The data on first class honours and 2.1 degrees awarded by the University to undergraduate students in 2019/20 and 2020/21 confirm the effectiveness of the range of measures adopted.

In addition, the University introduced a 'No Detriment Policy' in April 2020 in response to growing concerns about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on assessment. Section 1.3 describes how the implementation of the University's 'No Detriment Policy' played a part in influencing degree outcomes for 2019/2020 and 2020/2021.

All these factors contributing factors have together resulted in a greater increase in 2:1s and 1st class degrees than had any been taken into consideration on their own.

1.2 Trends in Undergraduate Degree Classifications by Demographic Groups
This section presents data on first class honours and 2.1 degrees awarded by the University to undergraduate students that is differentiated according to demographic groups.

As described above, the University has taken steps to redress disparities in degree outcomes for BAME and female students.

In common with most HE institutions good degree outcomes at the University generally favoured white male students. BAME student underperformance has been a continuing cause for concern. Gender disparity has also been marked but to a much lesser extent.

The data demonstrates that there have been some historic awarding gaps, but these gaps have been narrowing in particular areas. The 10.3% percentage of BAME students achieving first class honours or 2.1 degrees in 2018/19 increased to 44.5% in 2019/20 and to 74.5% in 2020/21, narrowing the disparity gap significantly, strongly indicating the effectiveness of programme developments. Outcomes for

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[1] This exercise investigated the impact of a range of algorithms as set out by UKSCQA: Degree classification – Transparent, consistent and fair academic standards

White students, whilst also showing improvement, had a much lower trajectory. In addition, outcomes amongst disabled students have improved significantly.

		2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Gender	**Male**	50.8%	43.9%	50.0%	74.1%	73.8%
	Female	35.9%	42.0%	53.9%	82.3%	84.3%
Disability	**Disability**	38.9%	45.7%	44.9%	71.7%	82.5%
	No Disability	41.3%	41.6%	55.1%	82.8%	80.8%
Ethnicity	**BAME**	4.3%	7.2%	10.3%	44.5%	74.5%
	White	46.2%	54.2%	66.5%	88.9%	90.3%
POLAR	**1**	45.0%	38.7%	63.2%	87.0%	81.7%
	2	64.3%	46.6%	55.8%	78.4%	83.7%
	3	40.0%	43.8%	54.8%	75.3%	77.8%
	4	36.6%	47.3%	46.7%	79.2%	83.8%
	5	28.6%	44.6%	54.5%	80.2%	79.1%

Table 2: Proportion of Graduates Awarded a First and 2.1 Degree – By demographic group

The University of Law remains committed to identifying, monitoring and ultimately reducing any awarding gaps through a number of planned activities and interventions. For example, the University launched a large-scale programme in 2021/22 to work with BAME students to improve BAME outcomes and experiences. The projects are wide-ranging across the student lifecycle and include a BAME student survey to identify actions for improvement, direct involvement in inclusive module design and the delivery of events and activities aimed at fostering a sense of belonging.

1.3 No Detriment Policy

In order to mitigate the impact of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic on student assessment, the University introduced a No Detriment policy in April 2020, which remained in place until 31st July 2021.

The "Safety Net"

The No Detriment policy made provisions for a "safety net" algorithm, which was designed to ensure that students' final overall averages were not brought down by results in assessments they sat during the pandemic.

Internal analysis showed that the "safety net" only triggered a change in grade in a minority of cases. Table 3 below shows that the percentage of students receiving a higher grade classification through application of this algorithm was statistically very small (<4%). This suggested that students, on the whole, performed better in assessments that were sat during the pandemic than anticipated.

Year	Total Students	Safety Net Not Activated	Safety Net Activated		Grade change as % of Safety Net	Grade change as % of Total Students
			Grade Went Up	Grade Stayed Same		
2019/20	363	257	13	93	12.3%	**3.6%**
2020/21	26[1]	22	1	3	25.0%	**3.8%**

Table 3: Impact of "Safety Net" algorithm on LL.B final averages

[1] The reason for the significant drop from 363 to 26 students from 2019/2020 to 2020/2021 is that the majority of 2020/2021 completing students sat all of their Level 6 assessments inside the Covid-19 window and therefore the "safety net" could not be applied to these students.

Automatic concessions for absence from assessment

As part of the No Detriment policy, the University also relaxed its rules regarding concessions for absence which meant that students were not penalised if they were unable to sit an assessment during the pandemic and were automatically given an additional attempt to sit that assessment at a later date.

A significantly large number of LLB students chose to take advantage of this relaxed policy during the time the No Detriment was in force between 18th March 2020 and 31st July 2021. For the 2020/21 academic year in particular, 21% still had one or more assessments to sit at first attempt at the point by which they would normally have been expected to complete the course and therefore were not in a position to receive a final result alongside the rest of their cohorts.

Our own internal analysis suggests that it was students who were not expected to score highly (e.g., those who already had other outstanding resits) who were more likely to choose to take advantage of the opportunity to not sit some or all of their assessments. We have also observed fewer outstanding resitters from previous cohorts choosing to sit, thereby pushing back some of the expected weaker passes to next academic year and beyond. It is therefore anticipated that once they do pass this proportion of first and upper second class degrees will decrease, and the proportion of third class degrees will increase.

Section 2: Assessment and Marking Practices

The University has a robust and rigorous approach to designing authentic assessments, standardising assessment, marking and ratifying awarded marks. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statements and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) are considered in the scrutiny approval process of assessments.

Annual staff training on assessment design forms an integral part of the 'Training for Teaching Excellence' for staff new to teaching and within the Postgraduate Certificate

in Higher Education programme. Both education activities are aligned to the Advance HE UK Professional Standards Framework.

Assessment design is based on fundamental principles, ensuring assessments measure student achievement against learning outcomes in an applied context. All assessments are considered through a design and scrutiny panel and are approved by external examiners.

Consistency in marking is upheld through calibration and standardisation exercises undertaken before marking commences. Moderation and External Examination play a key role in sampling and checking that standards have been met. External Examiners' reports feed directly into the Academic Quality and Standards Committee of the Academic Board (AQSC), which rigorously scrutinise quality assurance.

The design and assessment principles articulate the common expectations for creating inclusive and authentic assessments. A group tasked with monitoring inclusive learning analyses the design and delivery of the learning. Recommendations are made at the subject and institutional level to strengthen student learning.

Section 3: Academic Governance

The Academic Board is the ultimate academic authority at the University of Law. It oversees the University's academic management, including the curriculum and all aspects of quality and standards associated with the University as a degree-awarding body. The Vice-Chancellor Chairs the Academic Board.

The Academic Board has a number of committees that are responsible for implementing and monitoring the University's quality assurance and standards framework including its degree classification algorithm and outcomes. The Academic Standards & Quality Committee plays a critical role in monitoring action plans arising from external examiners' reports, student outcomes data including classification and progression rates and student feedback on all University of Law programmes including those that are delivered via partnerships. The Committee is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor Education. Three sub-committees of the Academic Standards & Quality Committee have been established this year to allow for additional, specialised robust challenge and monitoring.

The Programmes Approval Committee, which reports directly to the Academic Board, is responsible for approving new programmes and for approving modifications, amendments and updates to existing programmes, ensuring that the curriculum and assessment practices are informed by good practice across the sector and national regulatory requirements.

The work of the Academic Board is assured by the Academic Standards Committee, which meets shortly after each Academic Board meeting to review and challenge its deliberations and outcomes on behalf of the University of Law's Board of Directors.

Section 4: Classification Algorithm

In an effort to align its awarding practices with those across the sector, the University revised its degree classification algorithm in 2020 following a rigorous benchmarking exercise.

Degree classifications are determined by an overall weighted average which is calculated by combining the Level 5 average (weighted at 40%) and the Level 6 average (weighted at 60%). Level 4 modules do not contribute towards the overall weighted average.

Students are permitted to resit any failed modules twice (except where a student has been granted an additional attempt following an application for mitigating circumstances). Marks for reassessments are capped at 40%. The algorithm also discounts the lowest performing one-sixth of credits at both Level 5 and Level 6 (normally this would be 20/120 credits). Analysis shows that for 2021 this resulted in a weighted average difference of 2pp, compared with the weighted average for all credits.

The University employs standard degree classification bands commonly used across the sector: **1st = 70% and above; 2:1 = 60-69%; 2:2 = 50-59%; and 3rd = 40-49%.**

The University's assessment and award regulations do not provide for any form or compensation or condonement (condonation). Students are required to pass all modules in award to qualify for an award.

The degree classification algorithm is published as part of the undergraduate assessment and award regulations which are provided to students upon induction and made freely available via our VLE.

Section 5: Teaching practices and Learning Resources

At the University of Law, we have an intellectually stimulating, culturally sensitive, and inclusive environment to enable students to meet their full potential academically and as global citizens. Our continuous review of our Prepare, Engage and Consolidate (PEC) academic model creates affordance for authentic learning through collaborative activities with the student population, partners and diverse stakeholders.

Our learning community maintains its vibrancy through student-informed initiatives. Those are, but are not limited to:

- Digital Skills and literacy – The Digital Academy is a virtualised learning space where dedicated staff support students to enhance their digital skills for study and in the workplace.

- Student Wellbeing service - A Student Wellbeing service for students includes counsellors, student welfare advisors and disability support advisors. Students also have access to a ULaw BeWell app.

- Student Support – We have named Student Journey Advisors to support students with pastoral issues during their time at the University; Academic Coaching is also available to assist students to 'stretch and challenge' themselves in their academic performance.
- Technology Enhanced learning - The TEL team adopts a student-centred approach to exploring technology requested within curriculum delivery. i.e., Virtual Reality, simulated learning scenarios.
- Inclusive curriculum – This work is multi-layered across the University to create a new and enhanced learning experience that is flexible and to ensure all students have an equal experience.
- Campus learning spaces - The University continues to adapt its campus space to meet the academic experience of all its students.
- Academic Enhancement - The University has a dedicated team to support students who wish to write for publication.

The University has a route to support academic staff achieve their teaching qualification and threshold recognition as an Advance HE Fellow. The University currently has 307 staff with Advance HE Fellowship and anticipates submitting over 30 further appointments later this year. The University also has a path to recognise and promote academic staff in teaching only or teaching and research roles to professorial level. The University received QS 5 Star recognition in 2021, for outstanding Teaching, Academic Development, Graduate employability, and inclusiveness.

In addition, the University performed exceptionally well in the 2021 National Student Survey. In this survey, 85% of our students agreed that they are satisfied with the overall quality of their course at the University of Law (amongst top 5 of English Higher Education providers).

Section 6: Areas of Good Practice

Our external examiners' reports in 2021-2022 have identified a number of areas of good practice. Two comments which have been extracted from their reports that are of particular relevance to this statement are presented here.

1 "The way in which the team reacted to the pandemic was exemplary and ensured that no student suffered adversely as a result of the revised teaching and assessment arrangements."

2 "Despite the interruption from COVID-19, the methods and general standards of marking have been wholly consistent, and the feedbacks were clear, detailed and helpful."