# Degree Outcomes Statement 2021

1. Institutional Degree Classification Profile

The degree classification profile for the University of South Wales (USW) for the academic years 2015/16 to 2019/20 is illustrated in the table below.

Academic Year	First class honours	Upper second class honours	Lower second class honours	Third class honours/Pass	Good Honours
2015/16	22.3%	44.0%	27.6%	6.0%	66.4%
2016/17	23.1%	44.2%	26.3%	6.5%	67.2%
2017/18	25.3%	42.0%	25.9%	6.8%	67.3%
2018/19	26.9%	43.5%	23.3%	6.3%	70.4%
2019/20	34.5%	41.5%	19.7%	4.3%	76.0%

The data shows that that the University's profile of First and Upper Second Class honours degrees (good honours) has shown growth over this period but not to the same levels as either the UK or Welsh sectors or at to the same levels as the University Alliance; USW's Mission Group.
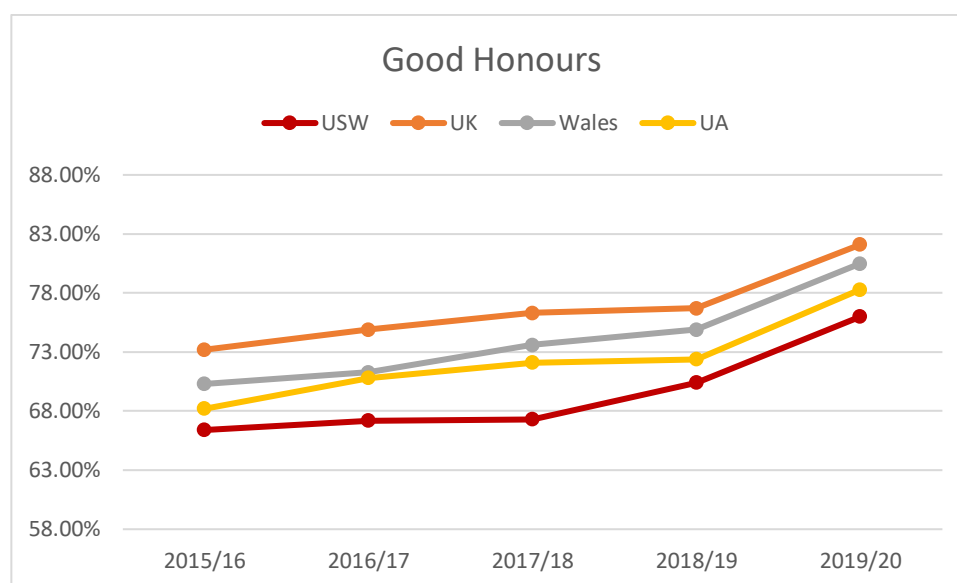
Increases in the profile of 'good honours' degrees have been attributable to a number of reasons:

- Merger of the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales, Newport which resulted in improvements between 2014/15 and 2015/16. The creation of a new University meant the

establishment of new policy around pedagogy, assessment, student experience and outcomes which has impacted positively on outcomes.
- Improvements in weaker subject areas providing increased consistency across the portfolio, notably within the subject areas of Computer Science, Law, Business & Administrative Studies and Education.   We consistently review across a range of metrics the performance of courses and this includes the breadth of good honours awards, at both ends of the range awarded.
- Improvements from students with entry qualifications other than A/AS Levels, particularly Access Courses
- The no-detriment approach applied in 2019/20, this caused rises across the sector.

2. Assessment and Marking Practices

The validation and review of courses provide the opportunity to quality assure the initial design of courses, ensuring that learning outcomes and assessment are clearly mapped against the QAA quality code, meet PSRB requirements, consider QAA Subject benchmark statements and align to the national qualifications framework. This provides assurance that degree standards are maintained and that external experts, (PSRBs representatives, service users, students, employers, stakeholders) as identified by the QAA, both inform and quality assure our courses.

In 2015, the University developed an Academic Blueprint which outlines a set of identified principles to ensure consistency of approach to developing and implementing courses, ensuring that no course is over assessed, that a course wide approach to assessment is adopted and that modes of assessment are varied and develop employability attributes.

An Assessment for Learning Policy (2015) operationalises the assessment elements of the Blueprint, by providing principles of assessment and requirements and thus drives enhancement in assessment practice. A University Assessment Tariff additionally supports the Assessment for Learning Policy. The Tariff comprises of eighty-four approved modes of assessment, maximum word counts, presentation timings and exam/test duration. Any amendments to courses, whether at revalidation or modification, are reviewed against the policy criteria.

An annual course level Assessment Dialogue, is required at the end of each academic year, where staff course teams and students meet to review the course assessment offering, providing an opportunity to reflect on current practice and make changes for the forth-coming year. Assessment dialogue guidance outlines the expectations and necessary resulting actions. These dialogues are informed by external examiner comments and data sets (i.e. NSS, good honours, Leo, withdrawal figures) together with feedback and reflection from both staff and students. Assessment dialogues provide an opportunity for staff development through reflection and understanding of sector data. They also link in to the continuous monitoring process with actions set against any issues raised and the modification process where assessments can be amended for future delivery. In the period from immediately before the introduction of the Academic Blueprint our NSS outcomes for 'Assessment and Feedback' have risen from 75% to 77%.

Another element of our quality framework that we use to ensure consistency to support the practices above are the Regulations for Taught Courses, these include areas such as marking scales and progression and award.

All academic staff new to HE have to complete the PGCLTHE through which they are introduced to the QAA Code of Practice, all aspects of course design and quality assurance processes. Further workshops covering all aspects of assessment and marking are provided by the Centre for

Enhancement for Learning and Teaching. The university's requirement for all academic staff to achieve Fellowship of Advance HE ensures that staff meet the dimensions and Areas of Activity of the UKPSF, including A3 - Assessment and Feedback.

An Advance HE's external examiner (EE) professional development programme, delivered internally, enables staff to benchmark their understanding against sector norms. The appointment of External Examiners is overseen by a panel of senior academic and professional staff. Externals appointed are often allocated a mentor to support them and wherever possible there is an overlap between Examiners to ensure continuity of understanding.

3. Academic Governance

Academic governance is essential to protecting the value of qualifications that are awarded by the University. Academic Board provides an Annual report to the Board of Governors which provides assurance to them that quality and standards are being maintained. As part of the HEFCW Quality Assessment Framework for Wales, the Board of Governors are asked to confirm a number of statements on an annual basis including, for providers with degree awarding powers, that the standards of awards for which they are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained. To assist the Governors in making that assurance, there is a reporting mechanism that feeds up through the institution via Faculty and Institutional level Quality Assurance Committee (FQAC and QAC) to Academic Board. There is also a Partnership Quality Sub Committee (of QAC) which oversees any Partnership arrangements. The University has moved to a position of risk based quality assurance. A key part of this is the Continuous monitoring process which ensures that course leaders have to establish a risk rating for their course. One of the key indicators in this process and areas for review is degree outcomes. These are reported on an annual basis at Course, School and Faculty level through FQAC and QAC. Discussion is held at both these committees about comparability of performance within (FQAC) and across faculties (QAC), clear actions are set to address any identified issues. The process also involves a senior auditor at Faculty level. These are senior members of staff who are external to the Faculty and bring an external view to discussions held within the Faculty and allow for the sharing of good practice. Partner colleges complete the same process and their commentaries are fed into USW course level reporting and a review of their reports are presented at both QAC and Academic Board. Should the outcome levels fall outside set parameters the risk rating would be raised and a response made for action in the corresponding action plan. This information is also reviewed at Assessment Boards with regards to performance of cohorts in comparison to previous cohorts and university performance indicators. The External Examiner is asked to comment annually on maintenance of standards through their engagement with assessment processes such as assessment boards and moderation and – an institutional level report that reviews their findings is presented to QAC and Academic Board for discussion and assurance. Academic staff and external assurers are also asked to comment on outcomes at re-validation events. A sub-committee of QAC is the Regulations Sub-committee which meets regularly throughout the academic year. Regulations are published on an annual basis, but the committee provides an opportunity for areas of review to be carried out with an aim to make recommendations to QAC for any regulatory change. The regulations related to degree outcomes and learning and teaching related practices have been reviewed twice at an institutional level in the last five years.

4. Classification Algorithms

The University of South Wales (USW) classification regulations are published within its [Regulations for Taught Courses.](#) These regulations remain unchanged from those in existence at the time of the

institution's creation in April 2013. USW uses two algorithms to ascertain a student's classification at degree level:

Method 1: Calculating the average of the marks from the 180 credits obtained from the best 60 credits at level 5 and the 120 credits at level 6.

Method 2: Calculate the average of the marks from the 120 level 6 credits.

The student classification is then determined using the higher of the two averages calculated based on the following table:

Mean %	Classification
At least 69.5% up to 100%	First Class Honours Degree
At least 59.5% and less than 69.5%	Upper Second Class Honours Degree
At least 49.5% and less than 59.5%	Lower Second Class Honours Degree
At least 39.5% and less than 49.5%	Third Class Honours Degree

The University does not operate automatic uplifts for borderline cases and there are no zones for consideration or discretionary considerations at Boards. Students can resit modules if they have passed at least 50% of the credits taken in an academic session. The standard pass mark for modules is 40%. These regulations are in line with sector norms.

The No Detriment Approach for 2020-21 has also been updated this year to include the following:

- To re-invoke uncapped resits where a student fails a module that counts towards their qualification (where it does not count, the resit will be capped as usual) *as with last year, if they perform more poorly in the resit they will retain the original mark
- To re-invoke uncapped resits where a student passes a module *and that module counts towards their qualification*. The student would have to make the request (as was the case last year) *as with last year, if they perform more poorly in the resit they will retain the original mark
- To relax the repeat regulations to permit more resit opportunities: - To re-invoke the non-submission of assessment regulation amendment so that students who have failed to submit any assessment for a module be permitted a capped resit (rather than repeat, which is the normal regulation) - To re-invoke the opportunity for course leaders to make the case that a student failing more than 50% of the credits taken in the academic year be permitted to resit in the first instance, rather than repeat
- To provide flexibility in progression regulations: • Allowing an additional (non-core) 20 credit compensation to the standard 20 credits at each level
– To provide flexibility for students at the boundary of a classification: • Automatic uplift to next classification where the profile is within 1% of the boundary in either of the classification methodologies[1] provided they either have at least 50% of the credits at levels 5 and 6 at that higher classification; OR at least 80 credits out of the final 120 level 6 at the higher classification. • For postgraduate students, they would need to have 50% at the higher classification.

5. Teaching Practices and learning resources

The underpinning infrastructure from the Academic Plan, to Blueprint to Student Experience Plan has enabled the institution to develop a series of planned steps towards the enhancement of teaching practice and learning resources. These include the creation of a Personal Academic Coaching

scheme based on academic research around supporting transition into and through higher education, and the strengthening and relaunching of the Reflection and Observation of Practice Scheme for all academic staff.

The Student Experience Plan has now been completed and superseded by the 2030 Strategy, which has led to a review of curriculum principles and this is currently being piloted this academic year.

The Academic Blueprint includes a requirement for a summatively assessed immersive learning experience at levels 4 and 6 to provide assessment and feedback within the first six weeks. This appears to be one of the contributing factors to increased student outcomes in first time pass rates at level 4, in that it enables staff to support early academic achievement. At level 6, it enables staff to identify students who may be struggling with the transition from level 5 to level 6.

Support for continuing professional development of academic staff includes the TSL@USW Scheme is the AdvanceHE accredited provision which enables staff to achieve the appropriate category of Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. In addition, staff new to teaching in higher education are required to complete the Post Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, and are also supported in their early teaching experience by the New2TeachHE structured one day provision.

In response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and working towards the USW 2030 Strategy, the University has developed and implemented the USW Digitally Enabled Active Learning (DEAL) Framework ensuring the quality of the student experience.

Academic staff work closely with colleagues in Learning Services and IT Services to enhance student experiences and to deliver high quality learning resources. The improvement in NSS scores for learning resources is an indication of the close relationships between academic staff and key staff in the professional support departments.