

# GUIDANCE FOR DEGREE AWARDING BODIES ON PRODUCING DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENTS



## Context and purpose of the statement

In May 2019, the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) published a [Statement of Intent](#). It proposed that providers should publish a degree outcomes statement analysing their institutional degree classification profile and articulating the results of an internal institutional review. This review should help assure providers that they meet the Expectations of the Quality Code for Higher Education that relate to protecting the value of qualifications and, for providers in England, the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration on academic standards (B4 and B5).

While it is for you to determine the way that reviews are conducted, this guidance should support you in producing an evaluative degree outcomes statement. Following this guidance will help to assure you that you are meeting your Expectations, but it will not in itself satisfy your regulatory responsibilities.

For providers in England and Wales, the majority of the first wave of degree outcomes statements, outlining their institutional degree classification profile and the outcomes of the review and associated actions, were published by the end of 2020. It is expected providers will update their statements before the end of the calendar year 2021 and then set out how and when future reviews will occur. Arrangements for providers in Scotland and Northern Ireland are set out in the Statement of Intent.

## What to cover

The statement should cover final classifications for graduates on **Level 6 FHEQ / Level 10 FQHEIS** courses. Much of the information should already be available in other sources which you may link to or summarise. These may include descriptions of your degree algorithms, the outcomes of any recent review of classification practices and policies, and how they help you protect the value of qualifications you award. Specific review activities can then address any gaps.

You can explain the scope of such review activity, and the extent to which external experts took part or fed into it. One of the purposes of the degree outcomes statement is to look at trends over time, so compare the results for the last academic year (the 2019-20 HESA cohort) with a meaningful range of previous years - we recommend a minimum of five.

## Style and approach

Your degree outcomes statement should follow the style of a brief, high-level report, setting out:

- what has happened (the 'institutional degree classification profile' section suggested below)
- what has changed (for example, where were the major changes to grade distribution), and
- why it has changed (exploring any justification for sudden or unexpected changes to distribution, plus details of any planned internal review).

Avoid descriptions of processes or regulations. The compilation of the statement should prompt reflection on what you are doing strategically to protect the value of qualifications over time, and how effective these strategies are, in the context of continued efforts to improve standards and teaching quality (including, in England, access and participation plans).

## Collaborative partnership arrangements

It is expected that you actively involve any external UK organisation delivering academic provision leading to the award of your credit or qualifications, whether or not they have degree awarding powers, to review your practices and inform your degree outcomes statement. Partner organisations without degree awarding powers are not expected to complete their own statements. You should briefly describe the arrangements you have in place to ensure the comparability of awards made under these partnerships.

## Sign off, presentation and publication

The degree outcomes statement should be signed off by your governing body and relevant external assurance (if used), to help them assure themselves that the relevant expectations are being met. We also provide complementary guidance for providers' governing bodies to help satisfy them that the review process and statement cover what is needed.

It should be between two and five sides of A4, but this may vary due to the individual nature of your student numbers, mission and governance structures. It will need to be understood by a variety of audiences, so use plain English and inclusive, rather than overly technical, language.

It should be published online and publicly available, alongside your academic regulations and policies.

It is not expected that a full review of degree outcomes will be conducted each year, but the document should remain relevant. For example, each year it is appropriate that data is updated and progress against planned activities evaluated. Updates may be required to respond to changes in circumstance, for instance, providers should reflect on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to degree classifications within the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. In future, when monitoring the statement some aspects may remain relevant and not require further changes. However, where a significant change or time period has taken place, a provider may wish to engage in a more extensive degree outcomes review.

## Content of the statement

We recommend that your degree outcomes statement should cover the following areas, as appropriate for your circumstances:

- 1 institutional degree classification profile**
- 2 assessment and marking practices**
- 3 academic governance**
- 4 classification algorithms**
- 5 teaching practices and learning resources**
- 6 identifying good practice and actions**
- 7 risks and challenges.**

'**Institutional degree classification profile**' can set out in a tabular format any quantitative trends in degree outcomes over five years, analysing student characteristics (including analysis of entry qualifications and the distribution of outcomes across different student groups), and subject mix. Providers in England should reference how they have reflected on the OfS's unexplained degree classification analysis. Similarly, providers in Wales should summarise how they have reflected on the five-year trend data provided by HEFCW's Quality Assessment Committee. You can then explain the factors influencing this profile in the next sections.

**'Assessment and marking practices'** should set out how you assure yourselves that your assessment criteria meet sector reference points, in particular those you are required to meet by OfS/HEFCW and any PSRBs, and non-mandatory guidance such as [QAA Subject Benchmark Statements](#). This section should describe how external expertise and development of academic staff and workplace assessors provides relevant assurance. This may include whether you have made use of QAA's guidance on [External Expertise](#), or recruited external examiners who have taken part in Advance HE's external examiner professional development programme.

**'Academic governance'** should cover how your institutional governance structures provide assurance that the value of qualifications you award over time is protected, including for awards delivered through partnership arrangements. It should set out how your academic governance structures ensure that your marking practices are followed, including for awards delivered through partnership arrangements.

**'Classification algorithms'** should clearly describe your classification algorithm(s) and the rationale for it; if you already publish a clear description, you can provide a link to it. It is recommended that you reflect on the [Principles for effective degree algorithm design](#), explaining how these guiding principles inform and align with your approach. It should clarify whether you use multiple algorithms and why, how you ensure they are clearly understood by students and other stakeholders, and whether you use zones of consideration or automatic uplifts for 'borderline' cases. It should briefly set out what your resit limits are and whether they are in line with sector norms. If they are not, it should explain how this affects your responsibility to protect the value of your qualifications. You can also explain whether you are making, or have made, any changes to your algorithm(s) and why. Any impacts of changes or reviews on your partnership arrangement can be covered here too.

**'Teaching practices and learning resources'** should cover whether there have been any discernible effects of enhancements to teaching practices, learning resources, student support, curriculum and assessment design on your degree classifications.

**'Identifying good practice and actions'** should state whether you have identified any good practice in any aspect of classification, for example in particular subjects or departments. If you have, and you wish to share them publicly, your statement may highlight these and state how you intend to communicate them across your organisation. This might relate to assessment and marking practices, algorithm design, data analysis and monitoring, or external examining, among other matters. You can also state any actions arising from the review, including any future reviews, but it is not a requirement to do so.

**'Risks and challenges'** can state whether you have identified any risks and/or challenges, or areas for further review, and any actions to address or mitigate them. It is not mandatory to publish risks, challenges and proposed actions in statements if you wish to consider them internally.

*This guidance has been developed in response to consultation and with support of advisory groups, through work undertaken by QAA, UUK and GuildHE on behalf of UKSCQA.*

*The UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) provides sector-led oversight of higher education quality assessment arrangements that continue to be shared across the UK. The committee has members drawn from regulated providers in England and Wales, publicly-funded universities and colleges in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and providers currently designated for student support by the Secretary of State in England. Student interests are represented by both the National Union of Students and individual student members. Membership is also drawn from the four UK higher education funding/regulatory bodies, sector bodies and regulatory partners.*

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