

# Degree Outcomes Statement



**Harper Adams  
University**

JULY 2021



### 1 Institutional Degree Classification Profile

Harper Adams University is a small specialist provider of land-based Higher Education. The University currently also validates the majority of the land-based HE provision at Askham Bryan College (levels 4 – 7). Both the University and its partner operate under a single set of assessment regulations across all programmes and the recent degree classification profile is summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1 Summary of Harper Adams University Student Achievement since 2015/16**

Year	Student Numbers	1 <sup>st</sup> class	Upper second class	Lower second class	3 <sup>rd</sup> class	BSc
2019/20	487	26.1%	51.0%	18.3%	1%	1.4%
2018/19	538	16.7%	51.7%	23.0%	1.3%	2.2%
2017/18	426	19.2%	50.9%	22.5%	1.6%	3.9%
2016/17	497	16.3%	47.7%	28.9%	1.8%	4.6%
2015/16	436	12.1%	43.8%	32.8%	1.8%	7.1%

Having considered the achievement data over the last five years, we have observed the following trends:

- The proportion of 'upper' Honours degrees (1<sup>st</sup> class and 2:1) has modestly increased over time, with a more significant increase in 2019/20 due to the rise in 1<sup>st</sup> class honours degrees awarded. This improvement in achievement is considered to be based upon the revised assessment format that was adopted by the University in 2019/20 (due to COVID) rather than any substantive change to the assessment regulations.
- Home and EU students (approx. 86% of our students) achieved a greater proportion of 1<sup>st</sup> class honours degrees than our international students (approx. 14% of our total students);
- When reviewed by student personal characteristics (i.e. disabled and mature students), achievement is typically within 3% of the overall achievement levels of the University. However, BAME student achievement is lower than the overall achievement levels in 2019/20, although the small size of the data set means that this outcome is subject to significant variance;
- A closer evaluation of the data indicates a difference in the attainment between male and female students across all subject areas, with achievement of upper degrees typically 15 - 20 percentage points higher for female students. This difference is partially caused by the changing gender profile for the University (from 49% female enrolments in 2012 to 56% in 2016), that has contributed to overall higher levels of attainment, alongside enhancements in the quality of learning opportunities. The University has various actions in hand to reduce and minimise this attainment gap.

### 2 Assessment and Marking Practices

The University assures itself that assessment criteria meet sector reference points as follows:

- Programmes are designed and developed to ensure with alignment to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), national credit frameworks and subject benchmark statements;
- The use of University approved examination and coursework marking schemes to ensure consistency across the different academic departments within the institution;
- External examination of its programmes, which is based upon the expectations within the QAA Quality Code, which also considers the standards outlined within the FHEQ. Both module and award level examiners are appointed (30 for Harper Adams and 5 for Askham Bryan in 2020/21) to ensure that cross-sector comparability is achieved at subject and institutional levels.

- All student assessments are internally sample double marked/moderated, with student assessments at level 5 and higher additionally reviewed by external examiners;
- The continuing professional development of academic staff through engagement in the HE community, acting as external examiners, undertaking research and scholarship, engaging in knowledge exchange and support for high levels of staff attainment of fellowship at all levels from Advance HE;
- Each of the aspects detailed within this section also apply equally to the University's FE partner;
- For our FE partner, the University also supports staff development activities (where appropriate) to underpin awareness of key policies and procedures and/or pedagogic developments.

The University appoints suitably qualified external examiners from other UK institutions to verify that the University's academic standards are comparable with national expectations, via attendance at Assessment Boards where marks and awards are confirmed and through submission of a formal annual report. To date, we have consistently received endorsement of the standards of the modules and awards offered by the University.

### 3 Academic Governance

The University operates well developed quality assurance processes to protect and maintain the academic standards of its awards. On behalf of the University's Academic Board, the Quality and Standards Committee monitors the academic standards and quality of our awards (including those of our FE partner) via routine annual monitoring and the periodic review and (re)validation of awards, under the procedures defined within the [Academic Quality Assurance Manual](#). The University's Academic Board endorses and provides an annual statement to the Board of Governors on the extent to which academic standards and quality of learning opportunities are being maintained and effectively managed. The University's Academic Board membership also includes an external Governor with significant HE experience, which further ensures that the academic arrangements are effectively monitored at the highest level.

To ensure consistency between the University and our FE partner, an annual partnership review is undertaken and the University's Quality and Standards Committee includes a representative from Askham Bryan College. Furthermore, the examination boards which confirm module results and award outcomes at our FE partner are chaired by a senior member of Harper Adams University and adopt the same marking criteria and assessment regulations as all other modules/awards validated by the University.

### 4 Classification Algorithm

The University operates a single classification algorithm for all undergraduate (level 6) students (including students who are studying with our FE partner). For each of the graduating cohorts reflected in Table 1, the algorithm is as follows:

Undergraduate study level	Credits	Weighting within Calculation
Level 4 (typically year 1)	120	0%
Level 5 (typically year 2)	120	30%
Level 6 (typically year 4)*	120	70%

\* All HAU undergraduate awards include a mandatory 12 month placement period

In common with the majority of UK HE providers, level 4 modules are not included within the classification algorithm, with the majority of the classification weighting applied to the level 6 modules studied in the final year. This enables the students to draw upon skills and knowledge developed during the industrial placement year to underpin their analysis and evaluation of complex problems.

The final classification is determined by the algorithm above, plus a review of those student profiles which are in a 'borderline' position i.e. within 2% of the higher classification level. The University operates a rule-based approach to determine if a student is eligible for an upgrade to the final classification of their award, with no discretion. The full assessment regulations for the University can be accessed [here](#).

In 2019/20, as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University developed and approved a safety net variant of its assessment regulations (which also applied to students at Askham Bryan College). The degree classification algorithm was unchanged within the safety net, as was the definition of 'borderline' classifications (i.e. within 2%). However, given the disruption caused by COVID, the safety net permitted the removal of the final year project from the degree calculation if it represented the lowest contributing module to the overall classification. This was permitted, as the first COVID lockdown required many students to significantly revise their projects at a late stage in the process. The safety net also reverted to the 2018/19 regulations for classification upgrades i.e. that upgrades would be allowed if at least one of the criteria had been clearly met.

## **5 Teaching Practices and Learning Resources**

A number of key enhancements underpin our teaching practices and support for learning:

- A high proportion of academic staff (circa 80%) (and a growing number of support staff) with an accredited teaching qualification (including the opportunity to enrol on an in-house Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Supporting Learning in HE accredited by Advance HE).
- An increase in the provision of student support arrangements, including academic guidance, support for students with specific learning needs, alongside enhanced mental health and wellbeing support;
- Ongoing investment in physical resources to support the curricula including significant recent investments to extend our science laboratories, expansion of the companion animal facility, improved campus connectivity and the development of the Hands Free Farm;
- Introducing greater emphasis on formative assessment within the curriculum for students, enabling the volume of summative assessment to be reduced. Work has also been undertaken to ensure that assessment diets are suitably inclusive for all students.

## **6 Identifying Good Practice and Actions**

Internal good practice identification and action planning to share such is predominantly focused on improving the quality of learning opportunities, given the adoption of institution-wide assessment policies and procedures. In particular:

- The University's Assessment Regulations are predominantly rule-based to ensure consistency of Board outcomes across all disciplines;
- The University has a cross-institution marking scheme for discursive examinations to promote a common understanding of standards amongst academic staff;
- The COVID-19 pandemic required the University to review its end of year assessments (predominantly examinations) which provided an opportunity to enhance inclusivity within ed of year module assessments, which was beneficial for students.

The University's Quality and Standards Committee receives an annual overview of standards and the quality of learning opportunities. This report (and a separate report for the University's FE partner) draws upon internal and external student quantitative data (including progression, achievement and student satisfaction), internal and external qualitative data (including external examiner feedback, student survey feedback and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies). The Annual Overview Report results in the creation of a University-wide action plan and the identification of exemplary/innovative practice. Examples include ways in which tutors have created online resources to mitigate the impact of the pandemic (e.g. virtual field walks) and the strong partnership between the Students Union and University which helped to define the training and support required for the move to online delivery in 2020/21.

## **7 Risks and Challenges**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in continued disruption to University activities in the 2020/21 academic year, with the University required to adopt online delivery for much of the period December 2020 to April 2021. However, the impact of COVID could be most severe for those cohorts recruited in 2020 and 2021, as some of the students may not have completed formal time constrained assessments for up to two years prior to commencing their HE studies. Therefore, it will be vital for the University to manage this transition effectively, including the provision of appropriate support where necessary.