

COUNCIL

Title of paper: Degree Outcomes Statement 2023

Main purpose of the paper: For decision

Presenter: Professor Ruth Valentine, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education

Date of paper: 21 February 2024

Purpose of the paper

To provide Council with the updated University Degree Outcomes Statement for 2023

Recommendations:

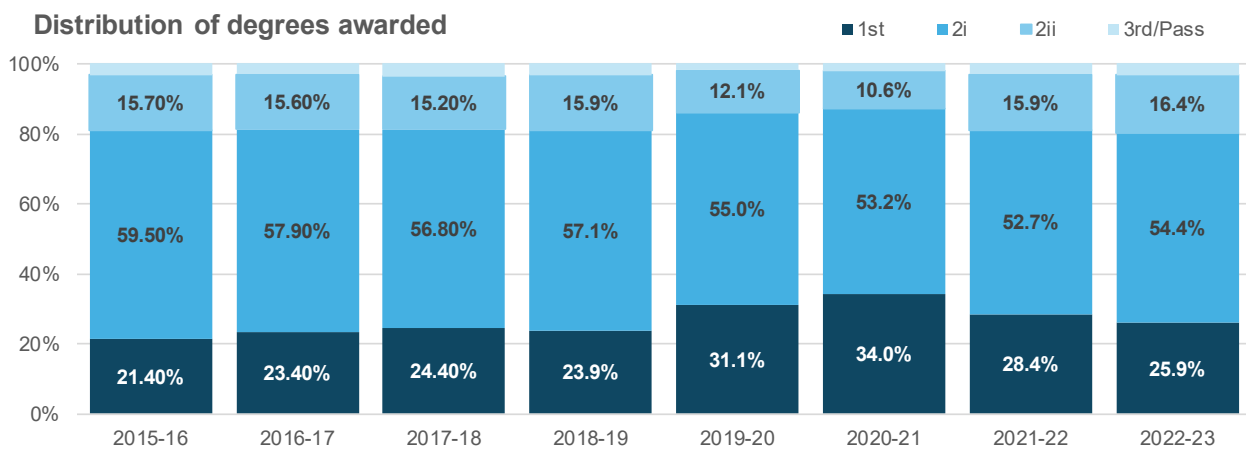
Council is asked to approve the Statement.

Consultation to date (including any previous committee consideration and its outcome): University Education Committee, 14 February 2024; Senate, 28 February 2024 (endorsement and recommendation to Council to approve).

Degree Outcomes Statement 2023

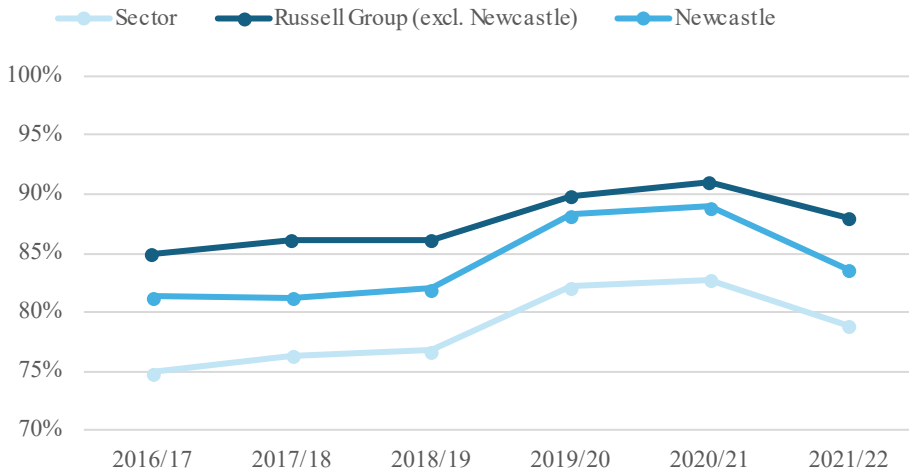
Degree classifications profile

- The chart below shows our degree classification profile for undergraduate programmes resulting in an Honours award at Level 6 and Level 7 (integrated Masters) of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

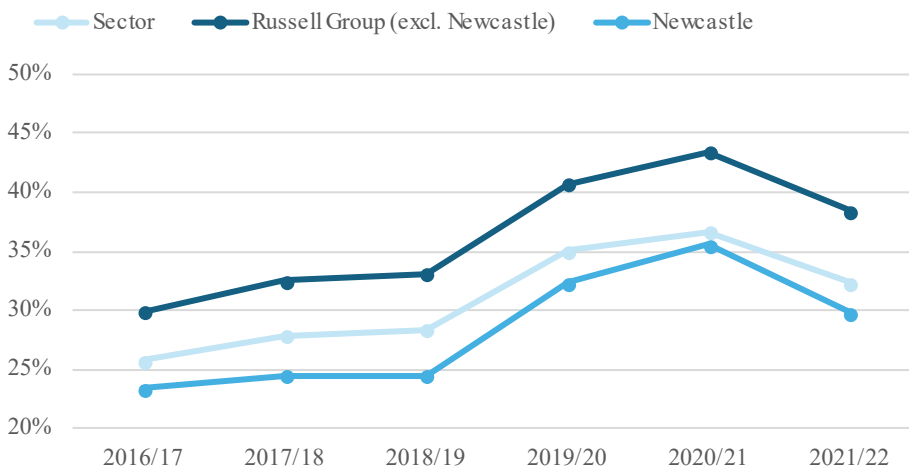


- We also have a number of degree programmes, our Medicine (MBBS) and Dentistry (BDS) programmes, which are not awarded on the honours classification basis, which are therefore not included in these figures but are a core part of our portfolio of programmes.
- The data show a slight upward trend over the period in the proportion of First class honours awarded, followed by a 10% increase during the two most pandemic affected years. The 2021-22 and 2022-23 results show a fall back towards pre-pandemic levels with the level for 2022-23 now only 2% above 2018-19. This is also of noticeable impact of the summer 2023 marking and assessment boycott on the distribution of degrees awarded; analysis at subject level also supports this conclusion.
- As the chart below shows, this is a trend that is in line with the overall sector, and of our comparators the Russell Group. Comparator data is not yet available for the 2022-23 results. Newcastle University consistently awards a smaller proportion of firsts and upper second class awards than the average across the Russell Group.
- Please note: the below charts are based on HESA reported data, whereas the figure above uses internal data from 2018-19 onwards, there are minor variations due to timing of data collection.

1st & 2:1 combined



1st only



Assessment and marking practices

6. Programme learning outcomes are set in consultation with the relevant [subject benchmark statements](#), providing a link to national expectations, and at the appropriate level for the award according to the [Framework for HE Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (FHEQ). These are key reference documents in programme approval and as part of the periodic review and reapproval of existing programmes (Learning and Teaching Review). These processes ensure that all taught programmes at Newcastle University, and the assessments and marking on these programmes, are in line with national expectations and appropriate for the level of the programme award. Additionally for programmes which are accredited by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), on which a significant proportion of our undergraduate student body are studying, assessments are also aligned with the requirements of these bodies.
7. We have a comprehensive set of policies on the design and setting of assessments, and the undertaking of marking, which provide a foundation for all assessment on taught

programmes. These include the principles of design in our [Policy on Assessment and Feedback](#), which ensure a common understanding of the expectations and purposes of assessment and feedback; and consistent arrangements for the submission and return of marked work. Assessments are linked directly to the programme and module learning outcomes, which are available to students in their degree programme handbooks and in the details provided in the [module catalogue](#).

8. Marking criteria that are specific to each subject are provided to students in advance of completing assessments. As well as providing a framework for feedback to students, these criteria make explicit the expectations of work at each level of attainment. We make extensive use of anonymous marking for summative assessments, in all appropriate circumstances, and there are processes for the internal moderation of marks, which support consistency across markers.
9. Each programme of study has one or more external examiners, who are part of the University's processes for assuring the academic quality and standards of the degrees, and in their annual reports confirm that the programmes, learning outcomes and the assessments meet these national reference points. External examiners are impartial experts who ensure that the academic standards of the University's awards are consistent with those of similar programmes in other UK higher education institutions. They provide written reports to the University on whether the processes for assessments are being followed, and the assessments are rigorous and fair measures of student achievement. To undertake their work these external examiners consider both assessment questions and approaches, and look at samples of marked assessed work and are asked to reference against the FHEQ.
10. The recruitment of external examiners follows our [detailed policy and procedure](#) and ensures that those appointed have a high level of knowledge and understanding of these UK sector-agreed reference points, standing in the discipline and field, and experience of designing and operating assessment tasks. The University is working towards AdvanceHE recognition to be permitted to deliver this training itself to its staff (accredited by AdvanceHE), and once this is further established within the sector this will be part of the credentials that we look for in the external examiners that we appoint.

Academic governance

11. The University makes use of its robust academic governance structures to provide assurance that the value of qualifications awarded is protected. The [Taught Programme Sub Committee](#) (TPSC) of the [University Education Committee](#) oversees academic quality and standards, which includes the consideration of management information in relation to degree classification. It considers annual reports on degree classifications, providing both the most recent data and a longitudinal view of trends over time, and should this be required makes recommendations to University Education Committee following these reports.
12. Boards of Studies regularly review all taught programmes through the [Annual Monitoring and Review](#) (AMR) process, a key part of which is to provide assurance to the University that core quality assurance activities relating to taught programmes have been undertaken. This process which involves the consideration by Boards of Studies of key data in relation to their programmes as part of a holistic review of the programmes and to identify opportunities

and actions. This includes at least annual consideration of degree outcomes data for a 6 year period to allow for a historical consideration of any variation.

13. Both AMR and external examiner reports are considered each year at a Faculty level, and reported centrally and then to TPSC who clarify any issues emerging from these reports, including where these involved processes and policies, and report key findings to University Education Committee. This process ensures there is a join up across the institution, and clear accountabilities at the level of the Academic Unit, Faculty and University.
14. We offer a small amount (as a proportion of the whole) of undergraduate provision through partnership arrangements in the UK. To ensure that the University is discharging its responsibility for assuring the academic standards of all awards made in its name, all UK-delivered undergraduate degrees are classified in line with normal University regulations; and academic standards are managed under the same set of policies and procedures.

Classification algorithms

15. We have in place a set of institution-wide regulations that govern student progression, classification, and award across all undergraduate programmes.
16. The University's approach to the classification of undergraduate degrees is based on a weighted mean model. There is a universal approach of no weighting for the first year across all programmes, enabling the transition to higher level study for first year students prior to embarking on the later honours years of the programmes. All classified programmes operate a weighted mean approach across the later years of study. To recognise legitimate disciplinary difference, and that the extent to which programme learning outcomes are demonstrated at different programme stages due to this, all programmes must choose one of the following weightings of marks: 1:1, 1:2, or 1:3 (for 3 year honours programmes); 1:1:2, 1:2:2 or 1:3:3 (for four year honours programmes) or 1:2:2, 1:2:3 or 1:3:3 (for integrated master's programmes).
17. The specific approach for each programme is detailed in the [programme specifications](#), which are publicly available to students in advance and during their years of study, and are retained historically for reference. This information is also detailed in the specific degree programme handbooks provided by academic units.
18. Our University Regulations provide a consistent approach to borderline consideration, and Boards and Examiners will consider under their academic discretion all cases where a final programme average is within two marks of a classification boundary, apart from during 2020-21 where this was extended to 3 marks as part of the Safety Net measures put in place to address the issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. Students are given one resit opportunity,

Actions

19. Given the near return to pre-pandemic awarding patterns no specific action is recommended this year and our University Education Committee will continue to monitor degree awarding patterns over time.

February 2023

Analysis of degree outcomes

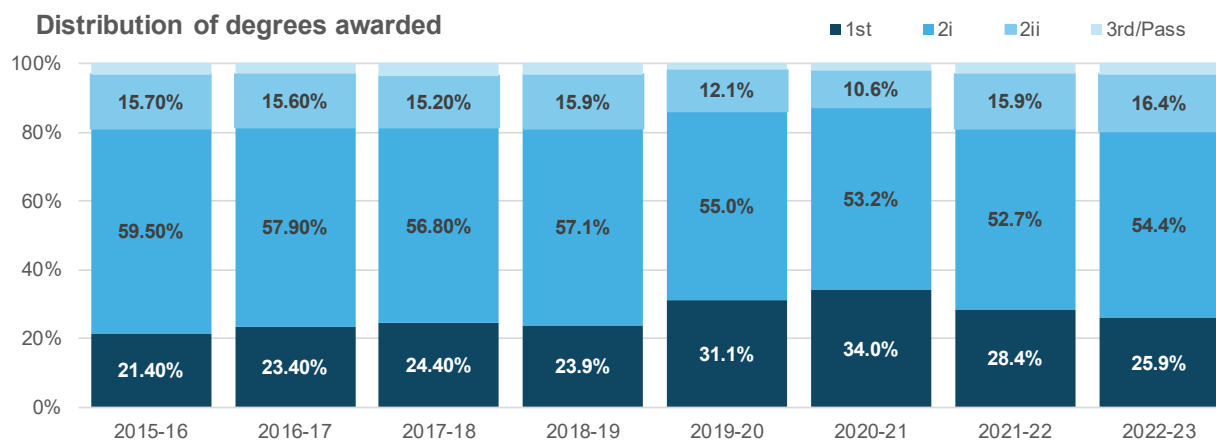
Notes on the data

1. This report uses internal data drawn from the Student Experience Journey Dashboard and does not exactly match that published by HESA/OfS due to timing of reporting and other factors.
2. The data presented relates to awarding patterns for Honours classified degrees and covers our full undergraduate population, UK and international domicile (fee status), data presented for other purposes such as the Access and Participation Plan focuses on UK domicile students only.

Awarding patterns over time

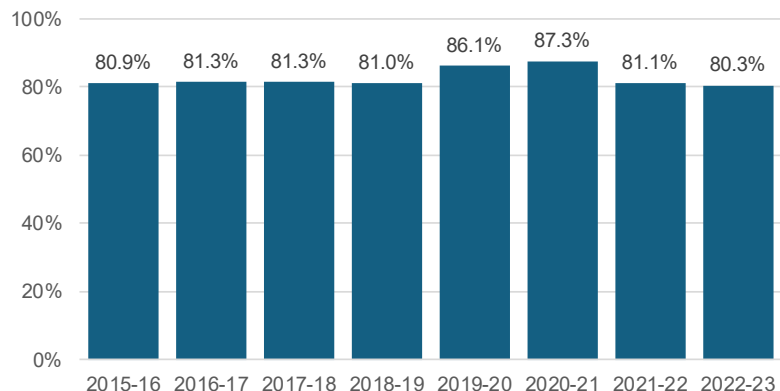
University

3. Following a change in awarding patterns during the years affected the Covid-19 pandemic 2020-21 shows a return close to pre-pandemic levels – with awarding of 1st class degrees at 2% above 2018-19.



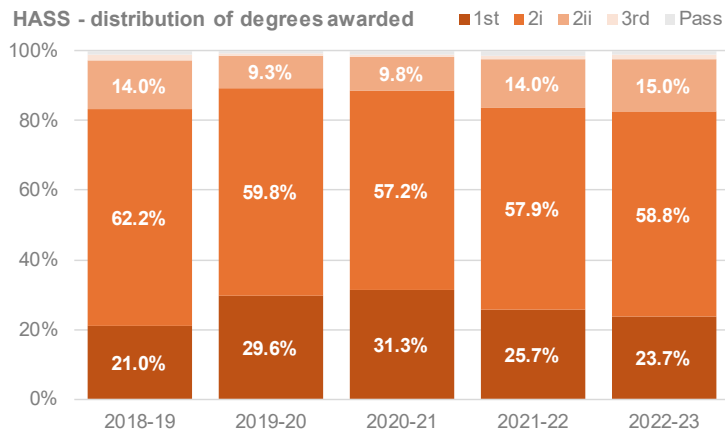
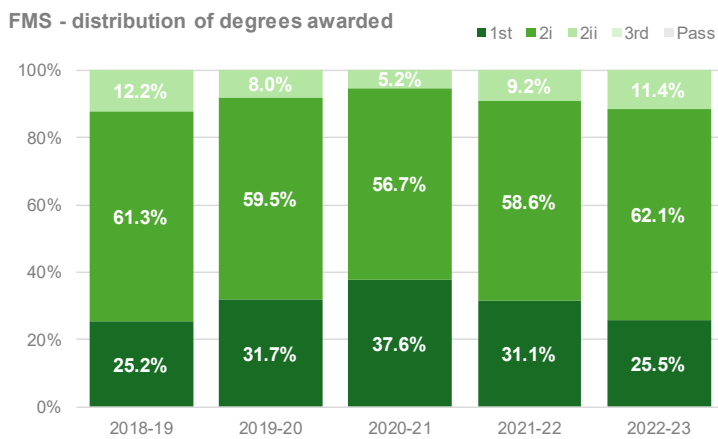
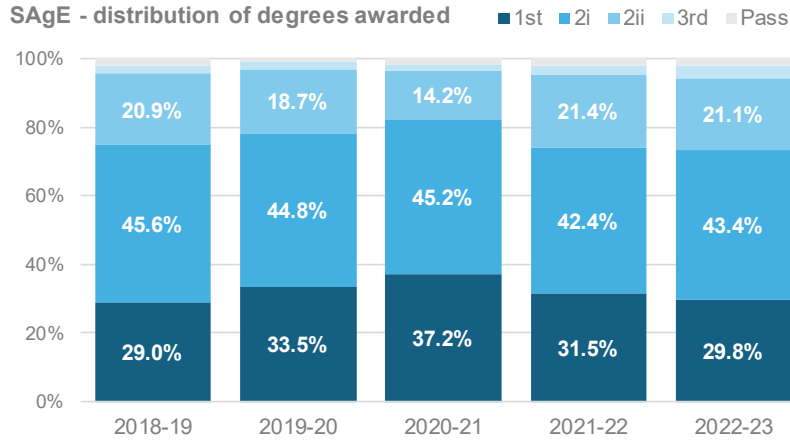
4. In July 2022 UUK made a commitment on behalf of the sector to return to pre-pandemic levels of 1st and 2i awarding by 2023 – Newcastle's 2022-23 results have met that commitment.

1st & 2ii class degrees awarded



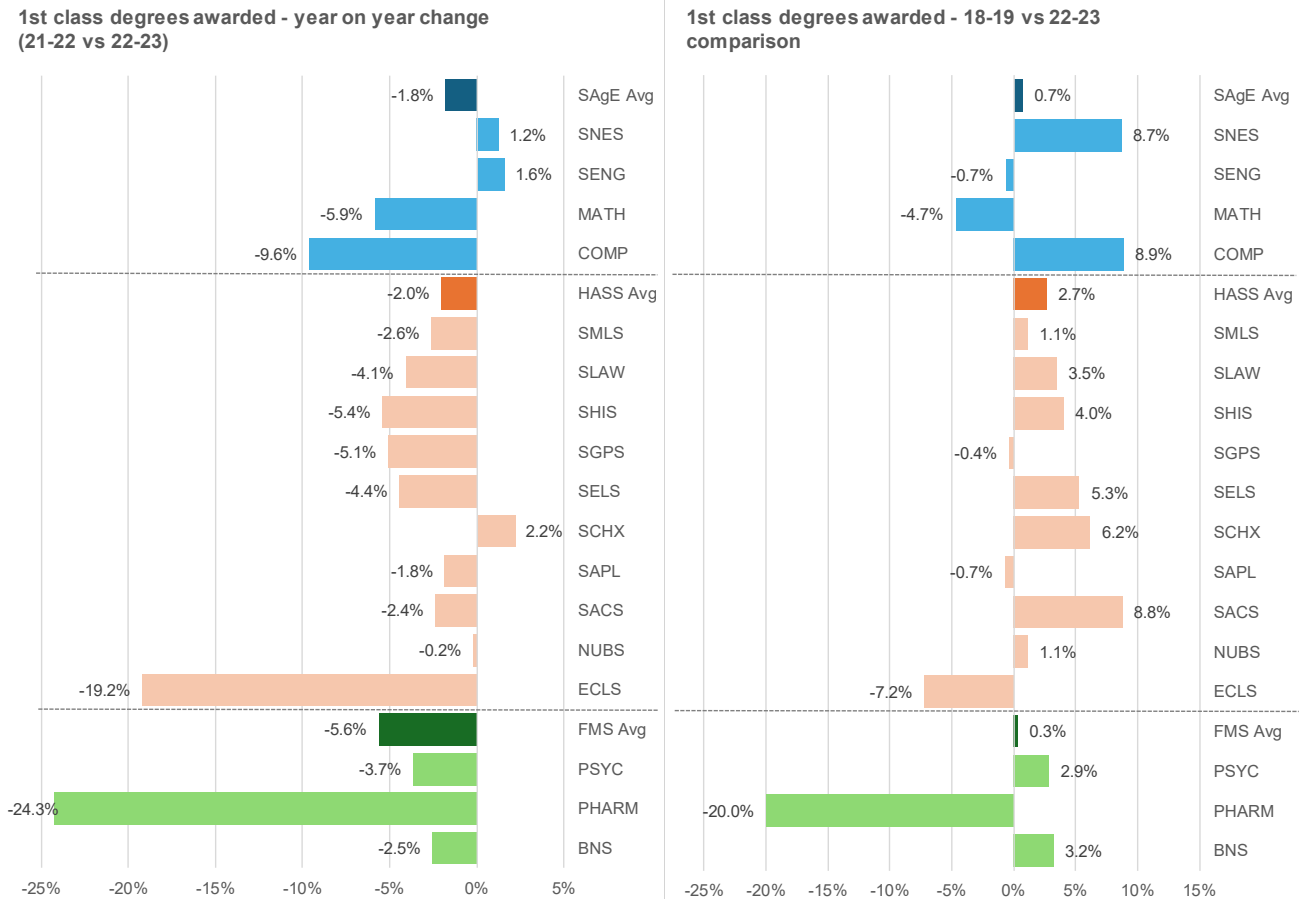
Faculty

5. Similar patterns can be seen across all three Faculties with FMS and SAgE returning a pattern of awards inline with 2018-19. HASS still show a greater proportion of 1st class degrees awarded in comparison with 2018-19, but noting the original lower base in comparison with the other Faculties.



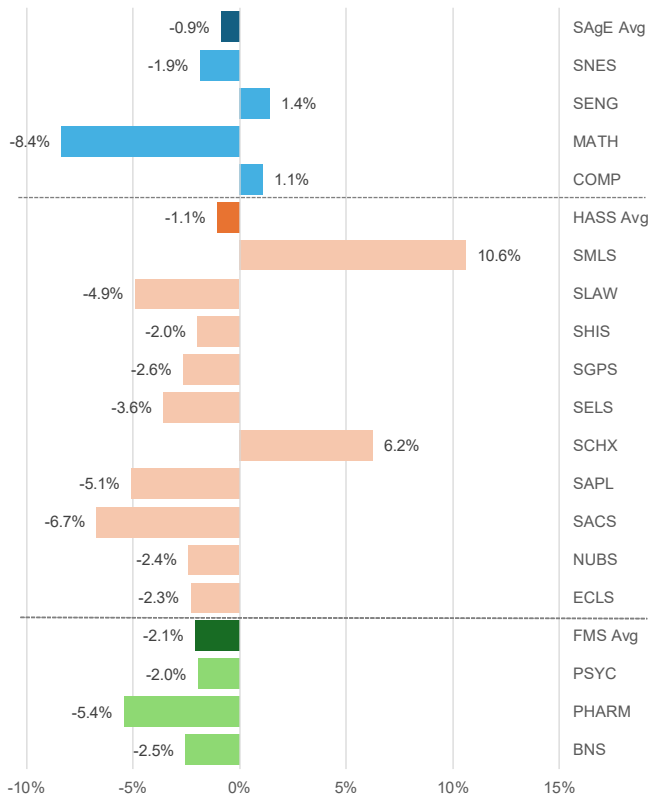
School

6. Nearly all academic units show a reduction in the proportion of 1st class degrees awarded in 2022-23 in comparison with 2021-22. Most academic units awarded a higher proportion of firsts that in 2018-19 noting that SELS, School X, SACs, Computer and SNES all awarded more than 5% above their 2018-19 level. An anomaly is the change in 1st awarding in Pharmacy which shows a substantial reduction on pre-pandemic levels.

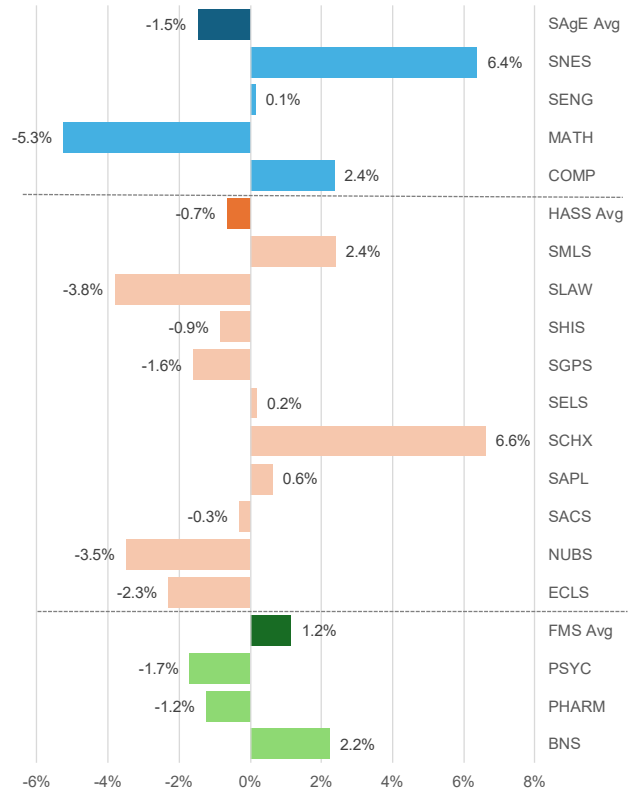


7. Nearly all academic units show a reduction in the class of 1st & 2i degrees awarded in 2022-23 in comparison with 2021-22 with the exception of SMLS and School X. Both also show an increase in comparison with 2018-19 although only 2.4% for SMLS but 6.6% for School X, this is in the light of a much higher proportion of 1st & 2i degrees awarded than the HASS and University average (School X 96.6%, SMLS 93% in 2022-23 compared with HASS 82.5% and University 80.3%). SNES also shows a higher proportion of 1st & 2i degrees awarded in 2022-23 than 2018-19 with an overall rate of 83.5% (SAGe 73.1%, University 80.3%) – with more of those awards at 2i than at 1st. Conversely Maths shows a reduction both at 1st and 2i degrees awarded with the lowest total rate in the University 66.0%. Full data is provided in **Annex A**.

1st & 2i class degrees awarded - year on year change (21-22 vs 22-23)



1st & 2i class degrees awarded - 18-19 vs 22-23 comparison

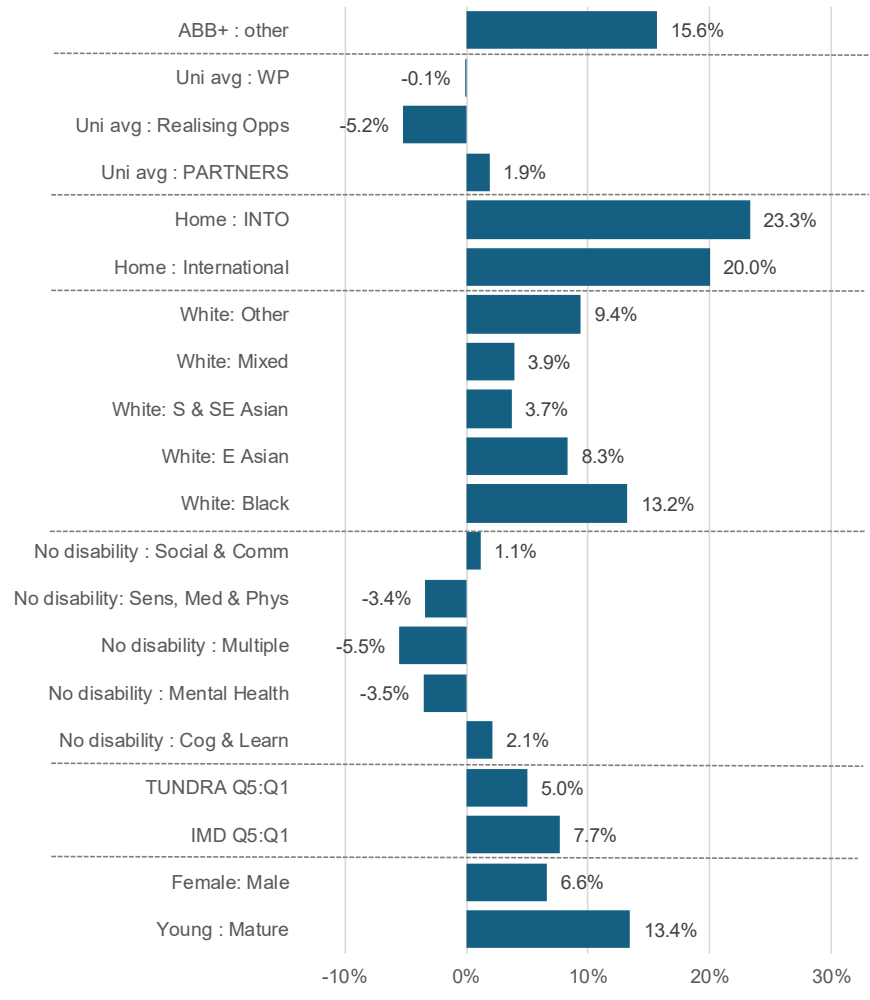


8. The confirmation of results in 2022-23 was affected by the marking and assessment boycott with the application of Emergency Guidance meaning that a number of students were given an interim classified degree in July 2023, with their final degree classification only remaining the same or increasing when final results were available. Noting the variation that exists between academic units and over time, there is no immediately clear sign in the pattern of awards that the application of the Emergency Guidance has led to an unusual increase in the award of 1st class or 2i degrees in the academic units most affected.

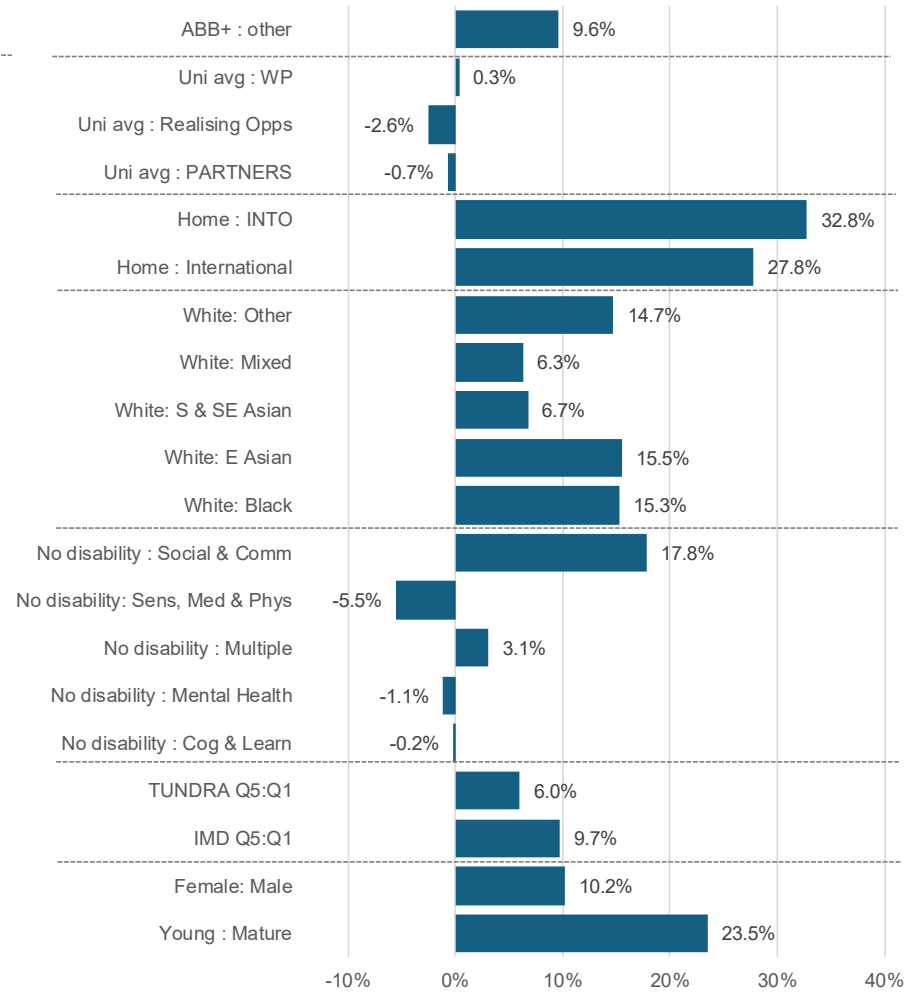
Awarding gaps

9. In examining the differences in awarding patterns between groups of students with different characteristics, for many groups, numbers of students are too small to look at patterns over time. The following charts present a 5-year aggregate across a range of student groups.
10. In reading the charts note a 'positive' gap shows gap in achievement between the first and second group e.g. students with entry grades below ABB+ are awarded fewer 1st class degrees than those entering with ABB+. 'Negative' shows the reverse, that the second group outperforms the first.
11. The largest awarding gaps are for students who have entered via INTO, International students, minoritised ethnic students (particularly Black and East Asian) and Mature students (those age 21 or over on entry), with still substantial gaps for students for Male students and TUNDRA Q1 and IMD Q1. Students with a social or communication impairment are also less likely to receive a 2i degree but not a 1st class degree.

Awarding gaps: 1st class degrees (5 yr aggregate)

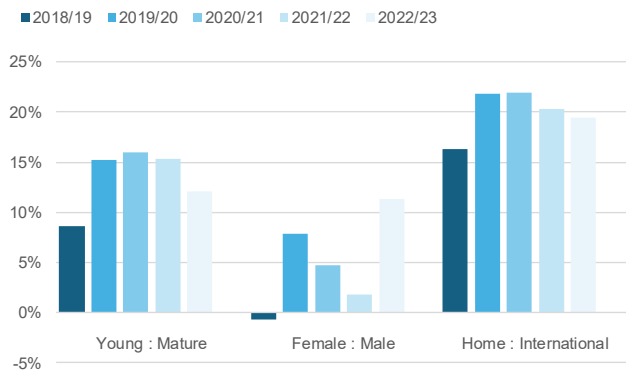


Awarding gaps: 1st & 2ii degrees (5 yr aggregate)

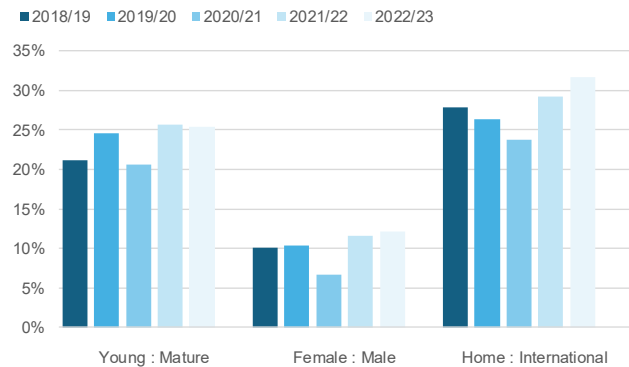


12. For some of the larger groups of students we can look at gaps over time which show they are generally consistent, with the exception of the Female:Male gap at 1st.

Awarding gaps: 1st class degrees

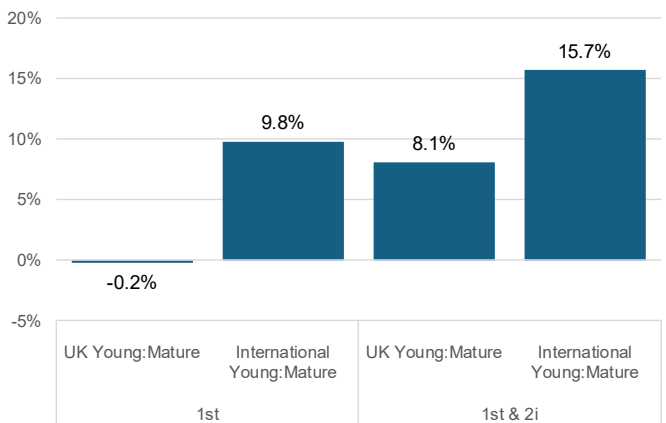


Awarding gaps: 1st & 2ii degrees



13. Given the large overall awarding gap for Home:International the intersection of domicile with other characteristics can substantially change the profile of gaps. The following chart shows the interaction of domicile and age. In terms of population ratio, international domicile students are roughly 1:2 mature:young, whereas UK domicile students are 1:25 mature:young.

Young:Mature awarding gaps by domicile (5 yr agg)



14. Understanding of awarding gaps needs analysis of this and other intersections. The Access and Participation Plan consideration of awarding gaps only considers UK domicile students and so will provide insight into gaps for students with different characteristics within that population group.

Annex A

		1st							1st&2i						
		2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	YOY	22-23 vs 18-19							
		2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	YOY	22-23 vs 18-19	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	YOY	22-23 vs 18-19
FMS	BNS	24.4%	31.2%	40.0%	30.2%	27.6%	-2.5%	3.2%	82.1%	89.4%	92.4%	86.9%	84.3%	-2.5%	2.2%
	PHARM	44.4%	57.1%	59.1%	48.8%	24.5%	-24.3%	-20.0%	92.1%	95.9%	97.0%	96.3%	90.8%	-5.4%	-1.2%
	PSYC	19.5%	25.7%	25.5%	26.0%	22.4%	-3.7%	2.9%	93.5%	94.3%	97.6%	93.8%	91.8%	-2.0%	-1.7%
	FMS Avg	25.2%	31.7%	37.6%	31.1%	25.5%	-5.6%	0.3%	86.5%	91.2%	94.3%	89.7%	87.6%	-2.1%	1.2%
HASS	ECLS	38.0%	44.9%	34.5%	50.0%	30.8%	-19.2%	-7.2%	90.0%	85.7%	84.5%	90.0%	87.7%	-2.3%	-2.3%
	NUBS	18.5%	27.0%	30.2%	19.8%	19.6%	-0.2%	1.1%	74.3%	85.3%	85.0%	73.2%	70.8%	-2.4%	-3.5%
	SACS	24.8%	46.7%	41.4%	36.0%	33.6%	-2.4%	8.8%	85.8%	96.3%	90.5%	92.1%	85.4%	-6.7%	-0.3%
	SAPL	21.6%	22.0%	25.1%	22.7%	20.9%	-1.8%	-0.7%	74.7%	78.0%	80.4%	80.4%	75.3%	-5.1%	0.6%
	SCHX	27.7%	40.1%	38.7%	31.7%	33.9%	2.2%	6.2%	90.0%	93.7%	93.8%	90.3%	96.6%	6.2%	6.6%
	SELS	23.1%	30.7%	30.1%	32.9%	28.4%	-4.4%	5.3%	89.4%	91.7%	87.6%	93.2%	89.6%	-3.6%	0.2%
	SGPS	16.5%	22.0%	24.0%	21.2%	16.1%	-5.1%	-0.4%	88.9%	93.6%	89.7%	90.0%	87.3%	-2.6%	-1.6%
	SHIS	22.2%	32.8%	33.9%	31.7%	26.3%	-5.4%	4.0%	84.6%	91.7%	92.6%	85.8%	83.8%	-2.0%	-0.9%
	SLAW	13.8%	20.3%	31.5%	21.4%	17.3%	-4.1%	3.5%	87.8%	89.6%	94.9%	88.8%	83.9%	-4.9%	-3.8%
	SMLS	27.3%	37.1%	35.1%	31.1%	28.5%	-2.6%	1.1%	90.6%	94.3%	95.2%	82.4%	93.0%	10.6%	2.4%
	HASS Avg	21.0%	29.6%	31.3%	25.7%	23.7%	-2.0%	2.7%	83.1%	89.4%	88.5%	83.5%	82.5%	-1.1%	-0.7%
SAgE	COMP	53.3%	59.5%	71.3%	71.8%	62.1%	-9.6%	8.9%	87.4%	87.9%	90.0%	88.7%	89.8%	1.1%	2.4%
	MATH	34.1%	34.2%	39.1%	35.2%	29.4%	-5.9%	-4.7%	71.2%	81.3%	79.7%	74.3%	66.0%	-8.4%	-5.3%
	SENG	30.8%	42.9%	39.1%	28.5%	30.1%	1.6%	-0.7%	74.9%	83.8%	84.5%	73.6%	75.0%	1.4%	0.1%
	SNES	20.7%	23.5%	32.9%	28.1%	29.4%	1.2%	8.7%	77.1%	82.1%	90.7%	85.3%	83.5%	-1.9%	6.4%
		SAgE Avg	29.0%	33.5%	37.2%	31.5%	29.8%	-1.8%	0.7%	74.6%	78.3%	82.4%	74.0%	73.1%	-0.9%
University		23.9%	31.1%	34.0%	28.4%	25.9%	-2.5%	2.0%	81.0%	86.1%	87.3%	81.1%	80.3%	-0.8%	-0.7%