

Degree Outcomes Statement 2022

Degree classifications profile

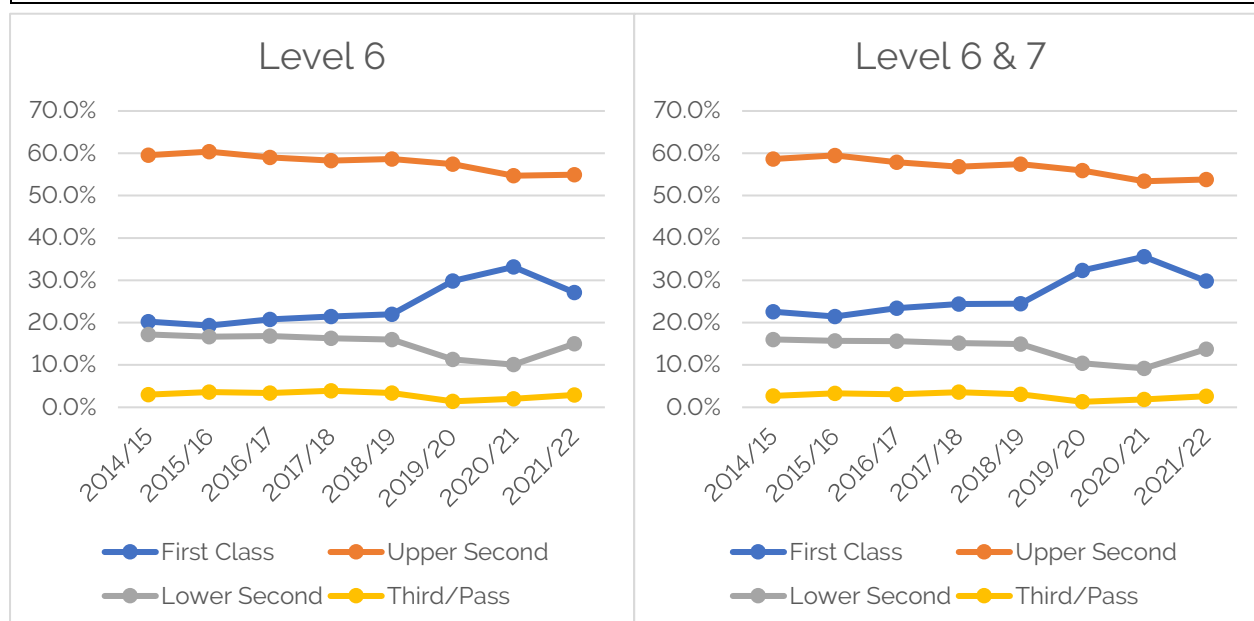
- Our degree classification profile for undergraduate programmes resulting in an award at Level 6 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and a combined figure for Level 6 and Level 7 awards (including integrated Masters awards) is provided below. The number of awards for each classification band, and proportion of overall awards that these represent, is given.

Table 1: Degree classifications for Level 6 honours degree programmes, 2014-15 – 2021-22

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
First Class	20.3%	19.3%	20.8%	21.5%	22.0%	29.9%	33.2%	27.1%
Upper Second	59.5%	60.4%	59.0%	58.3%	58.6%	57.4%	54.7%	54.9%
Lower Second	17.2%	16.7%	16.9%	16.3%	16.0%	11.3%	10.1%	15.0%
Third/Pass	3.0%	3.6%	3.4%	3.9%	3.4%	1.4%	2.1%	2.9%

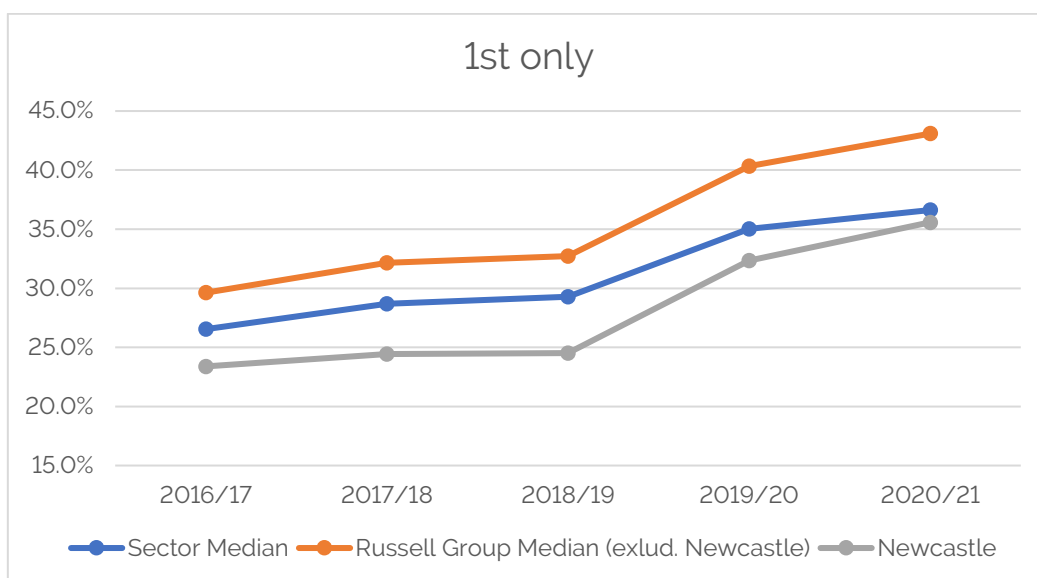
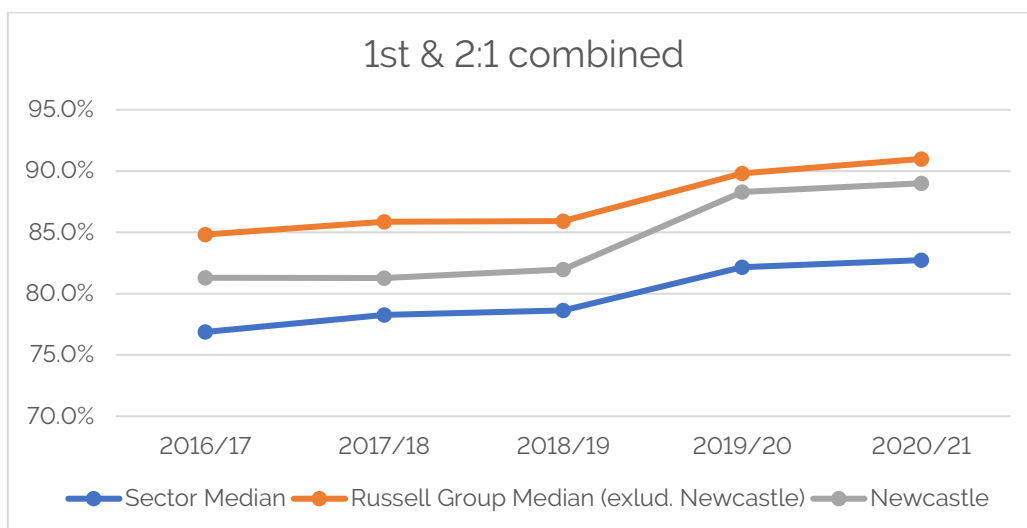
Table 2: Degree classifications for Levels 6 & 7 honours degree programmes, 2014-15 – 2021-22

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
First Class	22.6%	21.4%	23.4%	24.4%	24.5%	32.4%	35.6%	29.8%
Upper Second	58.7%	59.5%	57.9%	56.8%	57.5%	56.0%	53.4%	53.8%
Lower Second	16.0%	15.7%	15.6%	15.2%	15.0%	10.4%	9.2%	13.7%
Third/Pass	2.7%	3.3%	3.1%	3.6%	3.1%	1.3%	1.8%	2.6%



- 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 since 2014-15 in the proportion of First class honours awarded, followed by a 10% increase during the two most pandemic affected years. The 2021-22 results show a fall back towards pre-pandemic levels but a full return has not yet been achieved.
- 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 2021-22 results. Newcastle University consistently awards a smaller proportion of firsts and upper second class awards than the average across the Russell Group.



Assessment and marking practices

- 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.

6. 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](#).
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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

10. 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.

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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

14. We have in place a set of institution-wide regulations that govern student progression, classification, and award across all undergraduate programmes.
15. 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).
16. 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.
17. 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

18. Given the very moderate change in degree outcomes overtime before the pandemic the University had agreed a watchful waiting approach. A review was undertaken of our approach to degree classification in 2020-21 which found our approach in line with the sector.
19. Consideration of results in 2021-22 identified that the proportion of Firsts awards was at approximately 5% above that of the last pre-pandemic year of 2018-19. Our University Education Committee has agreed to ask academic units to undertake a 'stop and look' review of their awarding patterns and consider any potential explanatory factors to be completed by the end of 2022-23.

December 2022