

Degree Outcomes Statement

Scope

The Queen Mary Degree Outcomes Statement has been published in response to the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment's (UKSCQA) [Statement of Intent](#), which asked providers to review and reflect upon institutional classification profiles and monitor emerging trends. This statement considers five years' worth of data, covering level six degree outcomes at Queen Mary from 2014-15 to 2018-19. It also discusses the means by which Queen Mary assures its academic standards in this area, and some of the logic behind those approaches. Queen Mary has drawn on past feedback from external examiners in writing this document, and the statement has been reviewed by the External Member to Queen Mary's Degree Examination Boards.

Institutional degree classification profile

The tables below show degree outcomes for each of the academic years 2014-15 to 2018-19, at institutional level and then by faculty. A gradual increase in so called 'good honours' degrees can be observed year-on-year, particularly in the number of first class degrees awarded. This statement describes the initiatives and resources that Queen Mary has put in place to support students in achieving their best possible outcomes. Queen Mary reflects on these figures as part of its annual review processes, and anomalies that occur in a particular year or in a particular school or institute are investigated through those means.

The figures for Medicine and Dentistry appear particularly high, but when placed in context this is expected. There are relatively few students taking non-clinical undergraduate programmes in Medicine and Dentistry, and a significant proportion of those students take intercalated programmes, which - as in many institutions - are highly selective on the basis on academic attainment in the admissions process.

Queen Mary University of London

	First Class (%)	2:1 (%)	2:2 (%)	Third (%)	'Good honours' (%)
2018/19	36	50	12	1	86
2017/18	32	51	14	3	83
2016/17	28	52	16	4	80
2015/16	25	51	18	6	76
2014/15	23	51	19	7	74

Humanities and Social Sciences

	First Class (%)	2:1 (%)	2:2 (%)	Third (%)	'Good honours' (%)
2018/19	32	57	11	1	89
2017/18	27	59	12	2	86
2016/17	24	60	13	3	84
2015/16	20	59	18	4	79
2014/15	20	59	16	5	79

Science and Engineering

	First Class (%)	2:1 (%)	2:2 (%)	Third (%)	'Good honours' (%)
2018/19	42	40	16	1	82
2017/18	38	40	19	4	77
2016/17	31	40	22	7	71
2015/16	32	37	20	11	69
2014/15	25	38	25	11	64

Medicine and Dentistry

	First Class (%)	2:1 (%)	2:2 (%)	Third (%)	'Good honours' (%)
2018/19	48	44	8	0	92
2017/18	49	44	6	1	93
2016/17	35	61	4	0	96
2015/16	37	55	8	1	92
2014/15	32	66	2	0	98

A particular strength of Queen Mary, consistent with the university's core value of inclusivity, is that we attract a particularly diverse student body. In comparison to the sector and specifically to other Russell Group universities, relatively high proportions of students entering Queen Mary are:

- ❖ first in the family to go to university;
- ❖ commuter students (many remaining in the family home for the duration of their degree);
- ❖ from families classified within the lower two quintiles of "indexes of multiple deprivation" (IMD1 and IMD2);
- ❖ from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) families.

Over the period of report, each of our faculties has made significant steps to ensure that the education provided at Queen Mary and the assessment of outcomes better meets the needs of this diverse student body. Faculties have worked to identify and narrow potential attainment gaps, ensuring that the assessment of academic performance provides a reliable reflection of each student's potential that is not unduly influenced by that student's sex, gender or ethnicity. This work has been successful in addressing relative underperformance of specific student sub-groups and will have contributed, at least in part, to the progressive improvement in degree outcomes over the period of report, while maintaining confidence that students are being assessed in a way that is robust and secures academic standards.

A second example of an initiative to better support all students in achieving their best possible outcomes has been the strengthening of academic and pastoral support through the personal tutor ('Academic Advisor') scheme. Over the period of report, there has been better identification and dissemination of good practice within and between faculties, the consequence of which has been that students are better supported when they start to encounter difficulties (either within or outside of the university) that may have otherwise compromised their ability to study and to demonstrate their full academic potential over the course of their degree. The support provided by academic staff acting as personal tutors, and by professional services colleagues in each faculty (e.g. Student Support Officers or Student Experience Managers) has improved progressively since 2014. Within faculties, many departments (school and institutes) have noted a decline in the proportions of students requesting interruptions of studies / withdrawals concomitant with an improvement in degree outcomes.

Assessment and marking practices

Queen Mary's assessment and marking criteria have been designed to ensure compliance with sector reference points, including the [Office for Students conditions of registration](#), requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and guidance documents such as the QAA's [Subject Benchmark Statements](#) and the Advice and Guidance sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education; Queen Mary has conducted detailed benchmarking against all of those chapters (notably, here, the chapters on [Assessment](#) and [External Expertise](#)) and is satisfied that our processes are fully in line with the recommended and required practices.

Assessments at Queen Mary are designed to test specific learning outcomes set out in module paperwork. The governance arrangements around this are described [below](#). Marking is always criterion referenced and not norm referenced – the marks awarded are based on an individual student's attainment measured against the marking criteria specific to that assessment. Queen Mary has generic grade categories at institutional level, but detailed marking criteria are set at school/institute level in accordance with the relevant subject benchmark statements – these may be generic to a whole school or tailored to individual assessments where appropriate. Scaling of marks to meet expected 'norms' is expressly prohibited, and scaling is reserved as a repair mechanism for 'broken' assessments, where a problem was discovered. Such scaling is rare and requires the approval of both the school-level Subject Examination Board and the faculty/institution-level Degree Examination Board.

Staff must be trained to mark and must do so in accordance with Queen Mary's Code of Practice on Double Marking and Moderation. The Code ensures that at least half of the assessments for each module undergo quality assurance testing beyond the initial marking; this can be double-marking, where a second marker marks all submissions in full and the two markers agree a final mark (either 'open' or 'blind' – respectively with or without sight of the first marker's comments), or moderation, where the second marker looks at a sample of scripts and determines whether the first marker's marks, as a whole, are appropriate. Samples from across the range of achievement and in sufficient numbers to allow an informed judgement are then sent to external examiners for comment and to ensure that the marking is in line with Queen Mary's expectations and norms for the sector and discipline. Subject Examination Boards have a particular remit to review module marks and trends, and there are several examples of good practice where schools have developed reporting mechanisms for this purpose, including the School of Geography and the School of Politics and International Relations where detailed records of longitudinal performance on assessments and modules are maintained. Queen Mary has invested in developing a business intelligence tool, PowerBI, with a module mark reporting function. This has been well received and offers powerful reporting to examination boards and to external examiners, who will be able to access this system directly. It allows for year-on-year reporting to show differences between cohorts on the same module, comparison between the results for the specified module and other modules taken by the same cohort, and isolation of individual students to compare results between modules and years.

Several schools have adopted 'laddered' or 'stepped' marking, using only certain numerical marks; this has tackled a historical unwillingness to mark above 70 that was identified internally and by external examiners. It has aided in decision-making, as markers can now focus on slightly broader grade descriptors when assigning marks rather than focusing on the difference between, e.g., a 54 and a 55. The system has been well-received including by external examiners in their comments. It has resulted in more marks issued at the higher end, which has contributed in part to the observed increase in the award of higher classifications. While we continue to monitor this, it does not present an issue for concern at this time – this is the intended outcome of ensuring that students performing highly are appropriately recognised in their marks.

[External examiners](#) attend Subject Examination Boards and submit annual written reports to Queen Mary. These have been positive in relation to marking and assessment, and no issues of institutional concern have been raised. All reports are considered by the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat, which submits an annual report to the Education Quality and Standards Board. An 'External Member' – a senior member of staff with responsibility for academic quality and standards at another university – fulfils a similar role for the Degree Examination Boards, commenting on issues of process and the appropriateness and comparability between institutions of regulations.

Academic governance

The [Senate](#) of Queen Mary, subject to the overall superintendence of Council, has general responsibility for the academic activity of Queen Mary. The Senate delegates responsibility for the operation of matters relating to academic standards and the quality of the student experience to the [Education Quality and Standards Board](#). [The Education Quality and Standards Board](#) is chaired by the Vice-Principal (Education) and includes representation from academic and professional services colleagues from across the institution, including the Degree Examination Board Chairs and the Deans for Education. It is serviced by the same team that services the Degree Examinations Boards. This ensures that there is a strong link between approved policy and observed practice.

The [Degree Examination Boards](#) (DEBs) have authority to approve awards. In most cases there is one undergraduate and one postgraduate taught DEB for each faculty, all serviced by the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat for consistency of approach, including consistency of application of regulations and policies. Numerous school/institute level [Subject Examination Boards](#) (SEBs) report to the DEBs; these are responsible for confirming marking and progression outcomes. DEBs have a responsibility to ensure consistency and appropriateness of approach within and between the SEBs and review qualitative and quantitative reports on their outputs each year. DEBs and SEBs are chaired by academic staff with considerable experience in assessment.

Queen Mary does not franchise its degrees or accredit degrees on behalf of other providers. Where we enter a partnership with another provider we engage in review exercises to establish commonality in our standards, including in marking criteria – where appropriate this includes a mark conversion scheme, approved by the Education Quality and Standards Board, to draw direct equivalencies between the marks issued at Queen Mary and at the partner institution.

Classification algorithms

Queen Mary degrees at level six are classified using a weighted aggregate mark held to one decimal point (the 'Classification Mark'). All three developmental years count towards this mark, with year one counting for 10%, year two 30%, and year three 60% (1:3:6 weightings). We believe that including the first year in this aggregate mark is important; we have a high proportion of students from non-traditional backgrounds and wish to ensure that they are given the maximum possible incentive to engage fully with their programmes and assessment from the start; this is balanced by the relatively low overall weighting given to the first year, as we also wish to recognise positive exit velocity. Students must take the majority of modules in each developmental year at or above the corresponding academic level; having the final year count for 60% of the Classification Mark ensures that the degree outcome is properly reflective of material at the level of the award itself. We do not practice discounting – all 360 credits count towards classification except in rare cases where up to 30 credits affected by severe extenuating circumstances can be excluded at the point of classification. We use a single algorithm for each award rather than a 'best of two' or similar approach as we believe that consistency of approach is paramount. We amended our regulations for 2015/16 entry, significantly increasing the minimum requirements for award; at the same time, we harmonised the degree algorithms in use – previously some schools used 1:2:4 weightings and others 1:3:6. Universal adoption of 1:3:6 has allowed us to be much clearer in communications with students, particularly where there are joint honours programmes between two schools, and has had no material impact on degree outcomes – in percentage terms, the two were very similar (1:2:4 = 14:29:57% and 1:3:6 = 10:30:60%).

Our undergraduate Law award, the LLB, operated on different regulations for many years, largely for reasons of historical practice. From 2020/21 entry it will follow the same rules as the other awards offered at Queen Mary (BA, BSc, BSc (Econ), BSc (Eng), BEng), but the LLB data in this statement used a calculation under which the first year did not count towards classification, and the second and third years were weighted equally; the LLB was classified through a system of profiling (how many modules at each grade) rather than an aggregate mark. Certain of the exceptions for the LLB were linked in part to guidance and requirements from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs); there are a small number of other programmes with additional PSRB

requirements – these have special regulations and in all cases the exception results in a more stringent rather than a more lenient approach (this generally concerns minimum requirements to qualify for the award itself, rather than the classification algorithm).

Queen Mary operates a borderline classification policy, which was adopted by all programmes excepting the LLB from 2014/15. It is a largely mechanistic system but has some scope for discretion where a student has approved extenuating circumstances that could not be taken into account elsewhere. All students within one percentage point of a classification borderline fall into the zone of consideration (except at the pass/fail borderline, where there is no borderline consideration of this kind). A student in the zone who has half or more of their final year credits with marks at or above the level of the higher classification will be raised into the next classification banding. Where a student has significant extenuating circumstances not taken into account elsewhere we can either extend the zone to 1.5 per cent, or raise a student within one per cent but with fewer than half of the credits at the higher level into the next classification. Examination boards and external examiners pay particular attention to borderline cases; in the event of any concerns or unusual patterns of achievement the Degree Examination Board would intervene and, if appropriate, escalate this for consideration.

Students at Queen Mary have two attempts to pass each module, a first attempt and one resit of the assessment (without a repeat of the teaching). On resit, the module mark is capped to the minimum pass mark to reflect the fact that the student did not pass it at the first attempt. Where students have extenuating circumstances, they can be given additional attempts ('first sits') without penalty and without incrementing the attempt number; in rare cases a repeat of the whole module including teaching can be offered (a 'first take'). Queen Mary operates a 'fit to sit' policy; if a student attempts an assessment they cannot normally claim for extenuating circumstances against that assessment – this protects the integrity of the assessment as a measure of students' attainment.

Queen Mary's degree algorithms and borderline classification policy are available for students and other stakeholders to view in the [Academic Regulations](#) for their year of entry, the [Assessment Handbook](#), and in school/institute student handbooks.

Teaching practices and learning resources

Queen Mary works to continuously enhance its teaching practices and learning resources and, and our work in this area has supported students to increase their ability to achieve to the best of their potential.

Teaching practices

Investment in and recognition of the importance of teaching and of teaching staff is central to our provision. Academic staff are supported in achieving recognition of teaching excellence through the Queen Mary Accredited CPD Scheme, with increases by Fellowship category in recent years of: Associate Fellow (increase from 102 to 342 staff), Fellow (increase from 309 to 940 staff), Senior Fellow (increase from 7 to 94 staff) and Principal level (increase from 2 to 12 staff). Furthermore, Queen Mary gained three National Teaching Fellows during this period, bringing the total number of NTFs at the institution to 15 in 2018-19. We have also seen an increase in the number of academic staff gaining qualifications in teaching through our Certificate in Learning and Teaching (CILT) and our Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP); these are formal programmes of study at academic level seven. In the past five years, 221 staff completed the CILT, and 238 the PgCAP.

The profile and recognition of teaching at Queen Mary has been enhanced through initiatives such as the Queen Mary Students' Union Teaching Awards and the Queen Mary Education Excellence Awards. The annual Teaching and Learning Conference provides a venue for celebrating and sharing excellence in teaching practice at Queen Mary and is attended by around 300 members of staff each year. We also host an annual Drapers' Lecture, a high-profile free public event, on themes related to teaching and learning.

The funding of new and innovative educational strategic projects to support students has also aided students in achieving to their full potential. The Westfield Fund for Enhancing the Student Experience, for example, has

provided £105,000 each year to projects across the institution to support the development of educational initiatives which are focused on enhancing student experience.

Learning resources

Queen Mary has invested considerable resource and effort into the ongoing improvement of learning resources, so that students are equipped with the best possible materials to help them succeed. In addition to the specific changes we have made, more general changes in the world – such as the increase in the ready availability of publically-available resources online in recent decades – have had a great impact on learning.

At Queen Mary, we have made changes to our Library provision to ensure that as many students as possible can access as much material as possible, and that they are well-equipped to make use of these provisions. Changes in the past five years have included:

- ❖ increased Library opening-hours, including overnight, over weekends and over vacations, providing access to students who may have other responsibilities during weekdays. There has been a 34 per cent increase in the number of hours opened annually over the past five years.
- ❖ a significant increase in Library resources made available online, leading to an 263 per cent increase in e-book accesses and an increase in e-journal article downloads of 86 per cent over the reporting period
- ❖ a 32 per cent increase in provision of information literacy training to undergraduates over the reporting period: after training, attendees report an average 19 per cent increase in confidence in accessing and using information resources (from 65 per cent to 83 per cent).