# Degree Outcomes Statement

# April 2022

# Wrexham Glyndŵr University

This statement is a short summary of recent degree classification outcomes, an explanation of how Wrexham Glyndŵr University calculates degree classifications and the mechanisms in place to assure and protect the value of degrees both at the point of qualification and over time.

The University published this report for the first time in July 2020 and will update annually following the conclusion of the degree outcomes reporting process.

This statement provides a summary analysis of undergraduate degree classifications for the period 2016-17 to 2020-21, including partner organisations in the UK.

## Institutional Degree Classification Profile

Wrexham Glyndŵr University (WGU) was identified as the most socially inclusive University in the UK by the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide (2021) and 90% of our Full-time, undergraduate students have one or more characteristics associated with students identified within widening participation. We are also a small institution in terms of the numbers of degree programme students and frequently cohort sizes (whether that is defined by a demographic characteristic or subject area) have data sets too small to be published and that can vary significantly one year to another. As an institution with a mission to widen participation in higher education, many of our students often do not have formal entry qualifications so the University takes into account relevant experience via robust processes to evaluate and match experiential learning against the programme learning outcomes.

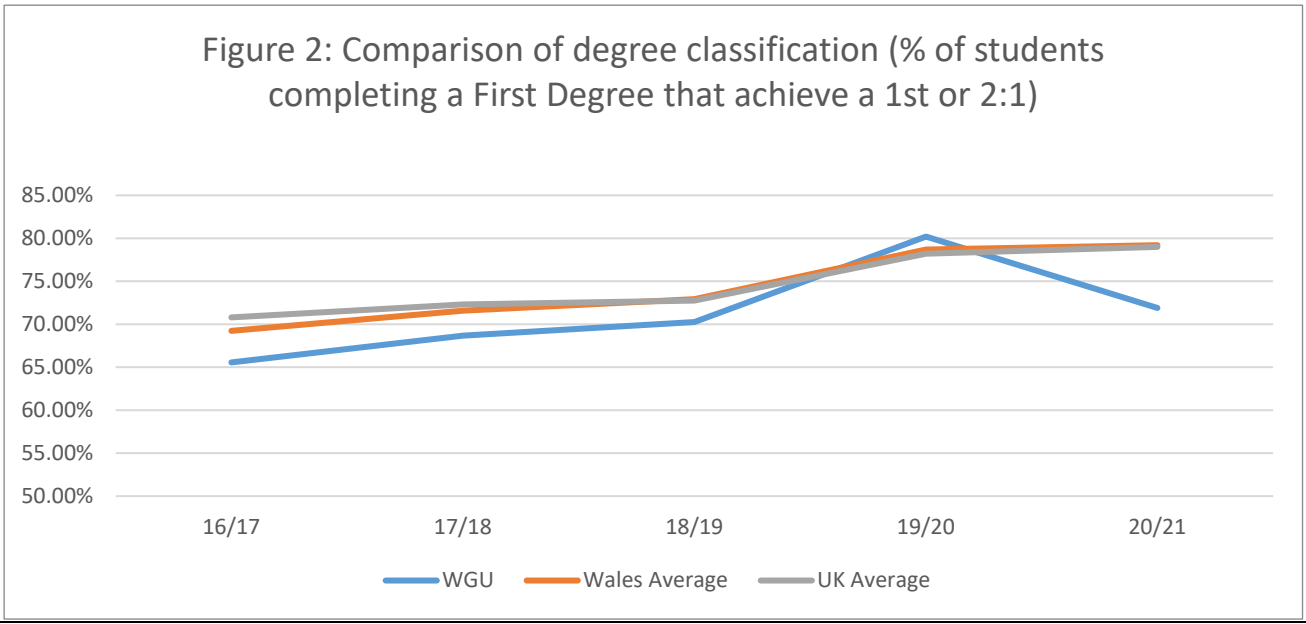
Degree outcome information forms a standard part of the Annual Monitoring and Review process that all Programme Teams undertake annually and is used, along with other data, to inform and enhance future teaching and learning practices. The data that is presented in this Statement represents students enrolled on first degree programmes and includes students studying both full and part time from any country of domicile.

Over the last five years, WGU has seen a rise in good honours attainment (i.e. First Class (1st) or Upper Second Class (2.1) awards). As Figure 1 illustrates in 2020/21 the award of good honours degrees was 71.9%. This is below than the sector average of 79.0%.

Figure 1: % of students enrolled on First Degrees that are awarded a classification of First or Upper second class honours

| | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Wrexham Glyndwr University | 65.6% | 68.7% | 70.3% | 80.2% | 71.9% |

Figure 2 below, illustrates that during the past 5 years, the University's degree classification profile has transitioned to become much more closely aligned with the pattern of degree classification seen in the UK as a whole. As outlined within this Statement, in the 'Teaching Practices and Learning Resources' section, the University has developed specific and measurable strategies which have driven enhancements in staff development, learning and teaching approaches and assessment which are reflected in measurable improvements in student performance at module and degree level. These University-wide interventions are having a positive impact on our degree classification profile, reflecting the gains in student achievement.



Degree outcomes during 19/20 were influenced by the University response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the 'No Detriment' policies applied to students. The underlying principle of these policies was that no student should end up achieving worse outcomes as a result of the pandemic. Policies were developed rapidly and implemented in a timely fashion in line with sector norms. The University moved away from 'No Detriment' for Academic Year 20/21, bringing regulations on progression and attainment back in line with pre-pandemic.

## Assessment and Marking Practices

**Programme assessment strategies and criteria** are considered during all validation / revalidation events and panel members confirm compliance with internal and external reference points to ensure University awards are appropriately designed and approved; including • The QAA Quality Code • QAA Characteristics Statements • QAA Subject Benchmark Statements • The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications • Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales • PSRB requirements. Validation panels must contain at least one suitably qualified academic external member and there is also set criteria for internal panel members that is approved by the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee. Students are involved as validation panel members and current students on the programme are consulted as part of programme redesign. The annual Validation Overview report evaluates the effectiveness of these processes and is scrutinised by the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee.

**Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Body** (PSRB) accreditations also contribute to the setting and maintenance of standards. The University holds a PSRB register that gives details of any PSRB that has a formal association with any of our academic programmes. Approximately one third of current programmes hold professional recognition or accreditation, and assurance of assessment standards of practice is provided through approval of accreditation submissions to the relevant body.

The University uses **External Examiners and External Assessors** in the setting, maintaining, reviewing and assessing of academic standards of all provision, including partners, and maintains an External Examiner Register. All processes for the nomination of external examiners / assessors and associated processes align with the QAA's Advice and Guidance on External Expertise.
All internal regulations relating to assessment and awards are aligned to the QAA Quality Code; the regulations specify the level of sampling that should be undertaken in relation to assessment task approval and moderation. External Examiners are required to report annually on the conduct of the assessments related to the award and on matters related to assessment. An External Examiner Overview Report is considered annually by the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee and any recommendations for actions may be referred to other working groups to drive enhancement relating to academic standards and assessment practice.

The University operates two tier **assessment boards** and Chief External Examiners will attend Award and Progression Boards to ensure the Academic Regulations are applied consistently and fairly across different subject areas and awards. Subject External Examiners attend module award boards to apply academic subject judgement and to confirm that assessment practice is in line with academic standards across the sector. **Academic appeals** are dealt with by the central Strategic Planning and Student Administration team and not devolved to subject area level. This practice ensures appeals are dealt with in a consistent fashion across all subject areas. Special cases are escalated to Academic Board, when necessary, again ensuring a consistency of approach. There is a policy in place to support this area of work and the overarching Academic Regulations are reviewed on an annual basis. The University implements an Academic Integrity Procedure to consider any allegations of academic misconduct and has signed up to the principles of the Quality Assurance Agency Academic Integrity Charter.

The University's External Examiner nomination process is rigorous and each nomination is approved via the Chair of Learning and Teaching Quality Committee. All External Examiners are invited to an induction day on commencement of their contract and mentoring arrangements are implemented for inexperienced External Examiners. Approximately 26% of the University's current External Examiners have participated in the AdvanceHE External Examiner Professional Development Course. The University is confident its External Examiner recruitment processes are robust; evidence of participation in the AdvanceHE programme is additional confirmation of relevant experience. . The University has supported over 50 of its own staff to undertake the programme and is now able to offer the Advance HE programme internally. Engagement with this work demonstrates the seriousness with which the University takes its responsibilities in relation to External Examining and the support it provides to its own staff to engage with External Examining duties at other institutions.

All partner institutions are expected to follow the University regulations and policies, this is monitored by the Partnerships Office.

Academic staff engage with **CPD on assessment and marking practice**. This occurs formally within the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, a 'supporting student learning in higher education' module and a programme leaders training module. For partner provision, the Programme Leader and Academic Link ensure partner staff receive appropriate guidance and support on assessment and marking practice. Informal opportunities for CPD related to assessment and marking is regularly available via 'learning lunches', 'bitesize sessions' and university staff conferences. There is also an academic development team that reviews assessment practices, develops new approaches and identifies CPD/training requirements for staff. Standardised assessment templates are now used across the university to ensure rigorous and appropriate assessment criteria.

Response to Covid-19
The University implemented a suite of appropriate mitigations in response to the complex challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. These included: redesign of assessments; moving to online examinations; changes to policy and procedure surrounding Extenuating Circumstances claims; relaxed progression regulations for levels 3 and 4; relaxed compensation regulations; and the introduction of a 'Safety Net' policy to ensure that students' academic outcomes were not detrimentally affected by the impact of the pandemic.
Professional and Accrediting Bodies were consulted on all 'No Detriment' related principles including any adjustments to assessment types, progression requirements or awards regulation principles to ensure the quality and rigour of the student outcomes was not compromised.

During Academic Year 20/21 the University moved away from 'No Detriment', meaning standard academic regulations regarding progression and award were re-instated. The University did introduce a number of safety nets regarding evidence standards required for Extenuating Circumstances and the volume of credits students were permitted to re-sit over the summer period, however these were not as significant as the temporary revisions to regulations in 19/20.

## Academic Governance

Academic governance plays a pivotal role in protecting the value of our qualifications over time.

In 2019, the University's **Quality Enhancement Review** confirmed that the University meets the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) and meets the relevant baseline regulatory requirements of the Quality Assessment Framework for Wales. The Quality Enhancement Review Outcome Report noted: "*This*

*is a positive judgement, which means the university has robust arrangements for securing academic standards, management of academic quality and for enhancing the quality of the student experience."*
Within our academic governance structures, the **Board of Governors** is responsible for the educational character, mission and strategy of the University. They also have oversight responsibility for academic standards and the quality of the student experience and provide an annual assurance statement to confirm that academic governance is effective across all academic provision, delivered by the University and its Partners. Annually the Board are asked to confirm six assurance statements to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) relating to quality and standards. Of these statements, one confirms that '*the methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are to the best of (the Board's) knowledge robust and appropriate*' and a second confirms that '*the standards of the awards for which (the Board) are responsible have been appropriately (set and) maintained'.* Indeed, the Board has in place a **Quality and Standards Scrutiny Panel** which considers key reports regarding academic quality and standards; this Panel engages with key staff who have responsibility for quality and standards. The full Board of Governors receives an annual report of the Scrutiny Panel's considerations and recommendations.

WGU's **Academic Board and its sub-committees**, such as Learning and Teaching Quality Committee, have a critical operational role in overseeing the University's academic activities and maintaining academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement of learning and teaching opportunities, the student experience and collaborative provision. Academic Board approves the Academic Regulations and regularly receives reports, for example, on degree outcomes; external examiner feedback; student complaints and conduct; programme validation and programme monitoring to assure itself that academic governance is robust. An effectiveness review of Academic Board in 2020, led by an independent consultant, confirmed that the University's academic governance structure is fit for purpose and that Academic Board and its sub-committees are effective in carrying out the responsibilities, functions and objectives set out in the Articles of Government, the University Standing Orders and in the Terms of Reference.

A key part of the University's quality management framework (which is overseen by Learning and Teaching Quality Committee) is the **annual programme monitoring and evaluation process,** whereby programme reports include the evaluation of key performance indicators (including degree outcomes) and feedback from the External Examiners. All reports are considered at subject level review meetings and a summary of key findings considered at the relevant Faculty Boards of Studies, the Academic Programmes Sub-Committee and the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee which has responsibility for providing assurance that the process is robust and rigorous and agreeing any institutional level actions for addressing issues.

Annual **External Examiner reports** provide independent and impartial feedback on threshold academic standards, the standards of student performance, the currency of the curriculum, assessment practice, learning support and identify areas of good practice. These reports are critical to confirm the robustness of assessment practice and the value of awards over time. External examining arrangements cover all sites of delivery and information from the reports is considered as part of the programme team's annual monitoring and evaluation report. The External Examiner's report also provides overall assurance that the External Examiner processes have operated effectively with sufficient and timely information. Actions to address comments and feedback arising from External Examiner reports is fed back via the programme teams with oversight provided by the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee. We are confident that this external scrutiny ensures that our assessment meets the required national academic standards.

The **Academic Partnerships Committee**, as a sub-committee of Academic Board, has central oversight of all collaborative provision activity. The assurance of the academic quality and standards of all provision is overseen by the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee. Risk based monitoring of partners is conducted annually as part of the University's annual partner risk management review process for international and UK based educational partnerships, including private providers. The exercise considers academic and strategic

management information about the partnership. The Academic Partnerships Committee receives a report annually and identifies appropriate actions to be taken in terms of academic quality and standards, which may include, but are not limited to, additional staff development and/or additional visits or special audits. Compliance with the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement, in terms of strategic financial and legal matters, are also monitored via the annual risk management process, and matters of concern reported to Vice Chancellor's Executive Team, as appropriate. As per the Statement of Intent, WGU's UK partners have had the opportunity to input into the Degree Outcomes Statement.

## Our Classification Algorithm (how we determine a student's classification)

The University uses the same classification algorithm across all subjects, including those delivered at partner institutions, as set out in our **Academic Regulations** which are available to students via the student portal (*WGU log on required; see Academic Regulations - Section 2 Award Regulations Bachelors and Foundation Degree*). The classification algorithm has been consistent since the institution achieved University-status in 2008. Like all aspects of our Academic Regulations, the classification algorithm is periodically reviewed against sector practice. Students are signposted to information on degree classification and the award regulations in the generic Student Guide.

The University operates a centralised administration system, including the servicing and administration of Assessment Boards. This centralised approach ensures consistency in decision-making and compliance with University regulations. The University is relatively small so has never seen any need to devolve classification calculations to faculty level.

Classifications are calculated using two methods:

- Method A is the average of marks at Level 6 and at Level 5 using a 70% (Level 6) /30% (Level 5) weighting;
- Method B is the average of marks at Level 6.

The two calculation methods are performed for each student, with the student being granted whichever is higher. As the University has a number of students who join for Level 6 only, with recognition of prior learning for Levels 4 and 5, it is necessary to have both calculation methods available. We do uplift students who are on borderlines but students must meet all the criteria set out in the Academic Regulations to be uplifted to the next classification.

Borderline criteria for Undergraduate Degree awards:
38% Borderline Class III
48% Borderline Class II (ii)
58% Borderline Class II (i)
68% Borderline Class I

In line with sector norms, at the discretion of the Assessment Board, students who have been unsuccessful in any module are permitted up to two further attempts to redeem their failure unless derogations from regulations apply. Derogations may be in place due to PSRB requirements.

Response to Covid-19
The University implemented a no detriment policy for all degree classification calculations during the 2019-20 academic year. The two methods outlined above remained in place however calculations were based on the average of the best 60 credits, ie:

- Method A is the average of marks at Level 6 and at Level 5 using a 70% (best 60 credits marks at Level 6) / 30% (Level 5) weighting;

- Method B is the average of the best 60 credits marks at Level 6.

The University returned to standard (pre-pandemic) regulations regarding degree classifications for academic year 20/21. The safety nets put in place for 20/21 regarding covid-19 had no effect of degree classifications.

## Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

Our **Vision and Strategy 2025** drives continuous enhancement of the student experience. Excellent teaching and a learning environment that recognises and enables good student outcomes are two of the four strategic domains; "*Teaching that Inspires*" and "*Structure that Sustains*." The Vision & Strategy is supported by two sub-strategies in respect of quality and standards:

- **The Strategy for Supporting Student Learning and Achievement (SSSLA)**
- **The Enhancement Framework**

The 5 strands of the SSSLA are relevant curriculum, great teaching, innovative assessment, personalised support, and students as partners. This specific and measurable strategy is reviewed annually by the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee based on an iterative cycle of monitoring, review and feedback, with actions and targets updated annually. It has led to enhancements in staff development, learning and teaching approaches and assessment. This has been reflected in measurable improvements in student performance at module and degree level. The university has streamlined standardised procedures for assessment submission and consistent assessment documentation (e.g. assessment briefs). These university-wide interventions are having a positive impact on degree outcomes. Other strategies, guidance, and frameworks feed into the SSSLA where appropriate and this provides a holistic and measurable overview of our approach.

Grounded in the University's values of being accessible, supportive, innovative and ambitious, the Active Learning Framework (ALF) supports flexible learning that makes best use of spaces on Campus together with digitally-enabled learning opportunities designed to be accessed anytime, anywhere as appropriate. The pandemic provided an opportunity to full embed ALF as the operating framework for delivering the University's SSSLA and manage the challenges of the Covid-19 restrictions. The Active Learning Framework is underpinned by the Principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This approach offers students a flexible and adaptive learning experience that can accommodate a range of options that include both on campus learning and remote learning. UDL has significant advantages in supporting an inclusive approach to planning for learning that ensures that all students have an opportunity to engage in their learning in a way which suits them.

With respect to enhancing learning and teaching development, the university has an established **academic development team and associate network**. Based upon Kotter's dual operating model, our approach to supporting educational change crosses departmental boundaries and focusses on 'getting things done' in relation to learning and teaching development. ADT projects are all linked to the University's Vision and Strategy 2025 and the SSSLA. This has led to measurable improvements in areas such as assessment and feedback, digital capabilities, scale up, recorded content, employability and HEA fellowship.

There is a high-level focus on supporting professional recognition through **Fellowships of the Higher Education Academy**. There has been a significant increase in the number of academic and professional service staff with an accredited teaching qualification. The University currently has 141 staff who are HEA accredited, including 113 Fellows, 17 Associate Fellows, 10 Senior Fellows and 1 Principal Fellow. Overall, 94% of eligible staff hold a teaching qualification and / or HEA fellowship. This has benefitted our teaching practices as it allows staff to become part of a community of practice; to share and promote their innovative work; supports teaching excellence and supports the classification profile of the University. The Associate Deans for Academic Affairs

in each faculty provide CPD training, workshops and support for fellowship applications, through our internal scheme.

Through our innovative **Campus 2025 Strategy** there has been significant investment in the physical student learning environment. This was highlighted in our 2017 TEF Silver result which recognised 'high quality physical and digital resources including investment in new buildings and study spaces together with technology-enhanced learning and teaching facilities, which are used by students to enhance learning.' A few examples of areas where the University has made significant investment are:

- *Social learning spaces* (The Study and The Gallery) for students to interact in more informal settings which has grown networks of peer-learning and supported new approaches to learning and teaching;
- *Refurbished catering facilities* for students and staff;
- *SCALE UP (Student-Centred Active Learning Environment with Upside down Pedagogies) teaching space.* This is an innovative emerging pedagogy across UK higher education. SCALE UP 'flips' the classroom by providing a highly digitally-enabled, dialogic environment where the possibilities for co-creation of knowledge between lecturer and learner are maximised.

## Identifying good practice and actions

As confirmed by the Quality Assurance Agency (March 2019) a comprehensive set of coherent strategies support the enhancement of the student learning experience.
All External Examiner annual reports confirm that the University assessment processes were rigorous and meet national standards, fair for students and conducted within institutional regulations. In addition, good practice identified in reports highlight improvements on assessment practice and the use of alternative assessment methods during the pandemic situation.

*This statement has been produced in collaboration by Strategic Planning, Quality Assurance, Student Administration, Faculty Associate Deans, Partnerships and the Students' Union. The statement has been considered and approved by the University's Learning and Teaching Quality Committee, Academic Board, two Chief External Examiners and the Board of Governors. As per the Statement of Intent, the University's UK partners have had the opportunity to input into the Degree Outcomes Statement.*