



# Degree Outcomes Statement

September 2021

## Context and purpose of the statement

In May 2019, the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) published a [Statement of Intent](#). It proposed that providers should publish a degree outcomes statement analysing their institutional degree classification profile and articulating the results of an internal institutional review. This review should help assure providers that they meet the Expectations of the Quality Code for Higher Education that relate to protecting the value of qualifications and, for providers in England, the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration on academic standards (B4 and B5).

The University of Bolton is publishing this statement for the first time in September 2021 and will update it periodically in light of its annual monitoring processes and preparation of annual University Quality Enhancement Plans.

The University's annual monitoring process evaluates the performance of all programmes, subjects (HECOS CAH-02 classification) and the University in relation to the Office for Students' Core Metrics since 2018/19 and a set of University KPIs since 2016/17. The University KPIs include the module mean mark (%), the percentage of modules passed first time and the percentage of first and upper-second class degrees attained per cohort. The same metrics form the basis of routine reports to the University Executive, Deans of Faculty, Heads of Schools and Programme Leaders. In this way, the University has routinely provided academic teams and senior managers with management information about degree outcomes.

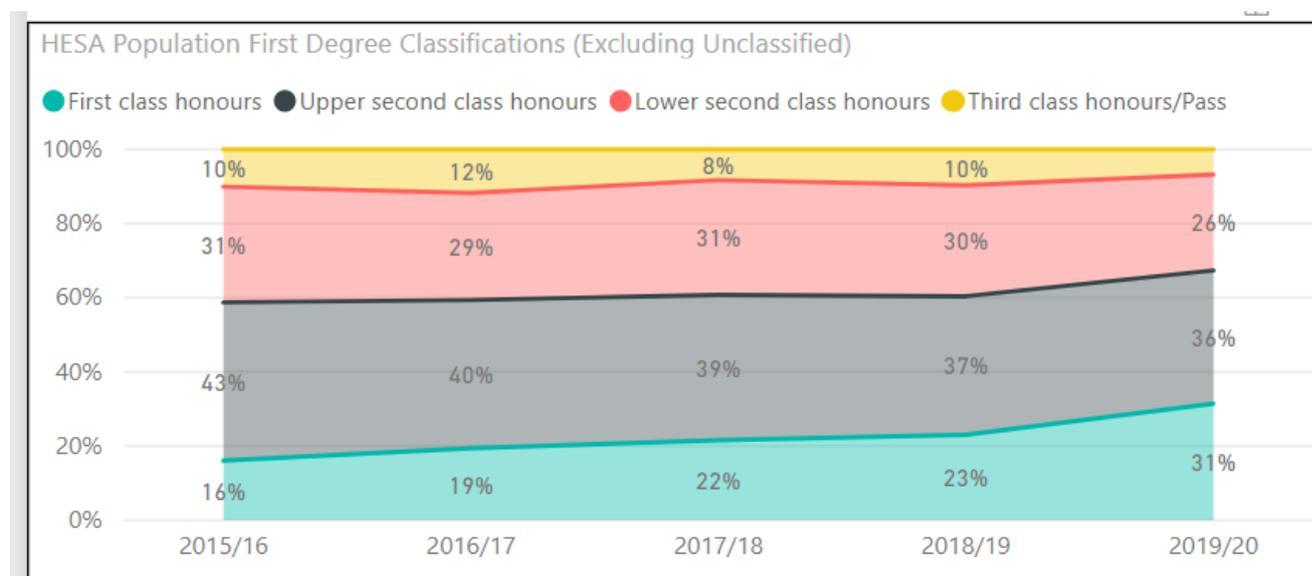
The Degree Outcomes Statement was produced with reference to the Checklist for Considering and Validating Degree Outcomes Statements, UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSQA), Second edition, 2021.

## Institutional degree classification profile

This statement provides a summary analysis of undergraduate degree classifications for the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20. It includes all subjects and delivery locations for five of the University's partner organisations in the UK, whose student numbers were indirectly funded during the period.

### First Degree Classifications

The following chart and table show the University's degree classification profile for all undergraduate first-degree students for the past five academic years. The data is sourced from the HESA Student Data Statutory Returns and excludes students who received awards with non-honours classifications and those who did not receive an award.



Classification Academic Year	First class honours		Upper second class honours		Lower second class honours		Third class honours/Pass		Total	
	Awards	%	Awards	%	Awards	%	Awards	%	Awards	%
2015/16	150	16%	398	43%	291	31%	94	10%	933	100%
2016/17	173	19%	356	40%	257	29%	105	12%	891	100%
2017/18	203	22%	369	39%	291	31%	78	8%	941	100%
2018/19	252	23%	408	37%	327	30%	106	10%	1093	100%
2019/20	315	31%	359	36%	259	26%	68	7%	1001	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1093</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>1890</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>1425</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>4859</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Distribution of degree classifications for first degree students (%) between 2015/16 and 2019/20

#### *The last five years*

Over the 5-year period, 61% of all students attained 'good honours' (first and upper-second class) degrees. The proportion of 'good degrees' increased over the 5-year period rising overall by 8% and by 7% in the most recent year.

Over the 5-year period, 22% of all students attained first-class degrees. The proportion of first-class degrees increased by 15% over the 5-year period and by 8% in the most recent year.

Over the 5-year period, the most frequently awarded class of degree was an upper second (39%) followed by a lower second (29%), first (22%) and third class (9%), respectively. The proportion of upper-second class degrees declined consistently with a decrease of 7% overall and a decrease by 1% in the most recent year.

*In the most recent year (2019/20)*

In the most recent year, 67% of all students attained 'good honours' degrees and 31% of all students attained first-class degrees. The distribution of degree classifications changed in 2019/20 when the most frequently awarded class of degree was an upper second (36%) followed by a first (31%), lower second (26%) and third class (7%), respectively. In that year the University awarded more first class than lower-second class degrees.

*No discernible differences by demographic characteristics of the students:*

Over the 5-year period and in the most recent year, there were no significant differences in the distribution of degree classifications by gender of the student. Similarly, during the 5-year period and in the most recent year, there were no significant differences in the distribution of degree classifications by self-reported disability status of the student.

*Small discernible differences by demographic characteristics of the students*

During the 5-year period (2015/6 to 2019/20) students in the '30 years and over' age group tended to attain more 'good-honours' degrees and first-class honours degrees than those in each of the other age groups. Students in the '21-24 years' age group tended to attain fewer good honours and first-class honours degrees than those in other age groups.

In the most recent year (2019/20) students in the '20 years and under' age group attained more 'good-honours' degrees than those in other age groups; students in the '30 years and over' age group attained more first-class honours degrees than those in other age groups; students in the '21-24 years' age group attained fewer good honours and first-class honours degrees than those in other age groups.

*Marked differences by demographic characteristics of the students*

There were marked differences in attainment by ethnic heritage, POLAR4 and IMD.

During the 5-year period, there was an attainment gap of 24% between the highest and lowest achievers for 'good honours' degrees, which was between 'White' and 'Black' students. During the same period, there was an attainment gap of 18% between the highest and lowest achievers for first-class degrees, which was between 'White' and 'Other' students.

In the most recent year, there was an attainment gap of 24% between the highest and lowest achievers for 'good honours' degrees, which was between 'White' and 'Black' students. In the same year there was an attainment gap of 24% between the highest and lowest achievers for first-class degrees, which was between 'Mixed' and 'Asian' students

There was a direct correlation between POLAR4 and attainment of 'good honours' degrees and first-class degrees during the five-year period, 2015/16 to 2019/20, and in the most recent year, 2019/20. During the five years and in the latest year, students from 'postcodes with the lowest participation rates in HE' attained the fewest 'good-honours' or first-class degrees. Equally, students from 'postcodes with the highest participation rate in HE' attained the highest proportion of 'good honours or first-class degrees. During the five years the attainment gap between students from the lowest (Q1) and highest (Q5) achieving groups was 9% for 'good honours' degrees and 10% for first class degrees. In the most recent year, the attainment gap between students from the lowest (Q1) and highest (Q5) achieving groups was 9% for 'good honours' degrees and 7% for first class degrees.

There was a direct correlation between IMD and attainment of 'good honours' degrees and first-class degrees during the five-year period, 2015/16 to 2019/20, and in the most recent year, 2019/20. During the five years and in the latest year, students from 'households in an area of most deprivation' attained the fewest 'good-honours' or first-class degrees. Equally, students from 'households in an area of least deprivation' attained the highest proportion of 'good honours or first-class degrees. During the five years the attainment gap between students from the lowest (Q1) and highest (Q5) achieving groups was 22% for 'good honours' degrees and 21% for first class degrees. In the most recent year, the attainment gap between students from the lowest (Q1) and highest (Q5) achieving groups was 24% for 'good honours' degrees and 29% for first class degrees.

#### *Subjects with above average attainment*

There were relatively few differences in attainment by Subject. During the four-year period from 2016/17 to 2019/20, attainment of both 'good-honours' degrees and first-class degrees was above average in only two Subjects: Engineering (+9% and 10%, respectively) and in Psychology (+11% and 5%, respectively). In the most recent year, 2019/20, attainment of both 'good-honours' degrees and first-class degrees was above average in only one Subject: Engineering (+11% and +15%). Attainment of 'good-honours' degrees was above average in one subject: Psychology (+6%). Hence, Engineering and Psychology were the Subjects with above average attainment either over the period or in the most recent year.

#### *Subjects with below average attainment*

During the four-year period from 2016/17 to 2019/20, attainment of both 'good-honours' and first-class degrees was below average in only two Subjects: Nursing (-11% and -7%, respectively) and in Business and Management (-11% and -8%, respectively).

In the most recent year, 2019/20, attainment of both 'good-honours' and first-class degrees was below average in one subject: Creative Arts and Design (-8% and -8%, respectively). Attainment of 'good-honours' degrees was below average in one subject: Nursing (-8%).

Hence, Nursing, Business and Management and Creative Arts and Design were the Subjects with below average attainment either over the period or in the most recent year.

## Assessment and marking practices

At the programme approval stage, programme teams are referred to the QAA's *Framework for Higher Education* and *Assessment Advice and Guidance* when developing assessment strategies. External Advisors are approved and appointed to advise and sign off on new programme developments including the assessment strategies. University-wide annual assessment design guidance is produced and disseminated, alongside the University's Assessment and Moderation Procedures and General Assessment Guidelines, Levels 3 to 8. This guidance draws on the QAA's Framework for HE Qualifications and Advice and Guidance on Assessment. Guidance on developing remote assessments was issued in 2019/20 and 2020/21 in view of the Covid-19 pandemic, and University-wide webinars were delivered to support academic staff through the restrictions caused by the national lockdown.

When assessing work, academic staff draw on the General Assessment Guidelines for written work at Levels 3 to 8. The guidelines have been adapted for practical subjects and approved by the Standards and Enhancement Office. Programme teams refer to relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) frameworks and guidelines. External Examiners of good standing are appointed for taught programmes with awards and approved through Senate. A desirable criterion for appointment is the Advance HE External Examiners' Professional Development Course. External Examiners are expected to comment on student outcomes at Levels 3-8 and on assessment requirements (including exam papers) prior to their use. The University has an annual forum for its External Examiners which affords the opportunity to examine and discuss internal and external activities/events. In 2020/21, the University delivered two External Examiner Professional Development Courses on behalf of Advance HE. The courses were attended by academic staff from the University and its External Examiners.

Assessment arrangements that were used to mitigate against the adverse effects of the pandemic, included:

- Remote assessments – alternative remote assessments – all approved by External Examiners.
- Exemptions on the basis of meeting Programme Learning Outcomes elsewhere – Signed off by Assessment Boards – including External Examiners.
- Adjusted marks on the basis of 2019/20 Semester 1 (pre-pandemic) average
- Additional time to complete Semester 2 2019/20 assessments where required (blanket Mitigating Circumstances).
- Feedback from Chief External Examiner to inform practice.

Evidence indicates that students were motivated to complete assessments to a high standard during the national lockdowns. Increased attendance/engagement by students was observed to correspond with remote access particularly assessment and pastoral tutorials (convenience). A laptop loan scheme allowed hundreds of students to access and use IT when their access to on campus facilities was restricted.

The University provided support to academic staff for remote working/delivery through a series of webinars including *Remote Assessment*, *Managing the Online Classroom*, *Supporting Students Remotely*, *Supporting Students with their Mental Health*.

## Academic governance

Academic governance of matters which reflect, influence or otherwise relate to degree outcomes and assessment and marking practices is embedded within the University's academic quality assurance procedures and assessment regulations and throughout the responsibilities of its deliberative and executive structures and key officers. What follows applies equally to programmes delivered solely by the University as to those delivered through a collaborative partnership arrangement.

The Board of Governors receives reports at each meeting from the Assistant Vice Chancellor (Office for Students) and from Senate, including minutes of its meetings, covering the academic performance of students. Also, summaries of the arrangements for assessment activities are considered by the Audit Committee on behalf of the Board as part of the Academic Governance Report produced for each meeting. Additionally, an annual '*Governors' Assurance Report on Quality*' is presented to the Board, reviewing the academic quality developments of the preceding year.

Senate, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, reports to the Board of Governors and is the ultimate approval body for the University's institution-wide quality assurance and academic regulatory framework. This framework encompasses:

- programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review and re-approval procedures (which incorporate external reference points, including external reviewers and, where appropriate, PSRBs);
- criterion-referenced marking band descriptors, assessment and moderation practices;
- assessment regulations for taught programmes, including assessment board structures, standard agendas, and guidance on their conduct; (A risk-based selection of assessment boards, is observed and reported on by officers from the Standards and Enhancement Office, with any identified threats to academic standards reported to the Academic Registrar for action);
- procedures for nominating and appointing external examiners, receiving and considering their reports and formulating action in response;
- regulations and procedures for dealing with academic appeals and academic misconduct;
- quality assurance and enhancement reporting and planning.

Senate receives, debates and, where appropriate, approves a number of regular and annual reports from its subcommittees and University officers which cover matters relating to assessment and marking practices and degree outcomes. These include:

- University Quality Enhancement Plan, which takes account, amongst other inputs, of Subject Quality Enhancement Plans (incorporating individual Programme Plans), all of which specifically report upon the proportion of 'good' honours degrees attained and comment upon patterns and trends;

- University Strategic Update, including the Key Performance Indicators;
- individual programme approval and periodic review and re-approval reports, which incorporate externality;
- nominations for the appointment of external examiners made by the External Examiners Nominations sub-committee;
- overview report on external examiners' reports for the previous academic year, including any urgent action taken in response (triggered by the Standards and Enhancement Office), and the report of the Senior Institutional External Examiner;
- overview report on collaborative provision and the collaborative provision register;
- annual reports on academic appeals and on academic misconduct.

Education Committee, chaired by the Assistant Vice Chancellor (Office for Students), is a sub-committee of Senate and is the main, working committee for learning, teaching and assessment and for academic quality and standards matters bearing upon degree outcomes and assessment and marking practices. The Committee considers: the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy; the outcomes of the annual Teaching Intensive Research Informed (TIRI) conference, where innovation and best practice in teaching, learning and assessment is celebrated, and any staff development priorities arising; the Student Experience Strategy, incorporating learning, teaching and assessment and degree attainment; the University Quality Enhancement Plan and Progress Report, which references Subject Quality Enhancement Plans (and both of which specifically report and comment upon degree outcomes data); the University Quality Assurance Strategy and Annual Plan; and the Students' Union Annual Quality Report and University Response. The majority of the papers are escalated to Senate for receipt and, where appropriate, approval.

A wide range of regular reports relevant to degree outcomes and assessment and marking practices are also considered by Education Committee and, where appropriate, progressed to Senate for receipt and approval. These include:

- PSRB accreditations;
- University Strategic Update, including the Key Performance Indicators;
- External Examiner nominations from the sub-committee;
- Programme Approval Reports;
- Annual and Overview reports on:
  - Academic Appeals;
  - Academic Misconduct;
  - Programme Approvals and Reviews;
  - External Examiner Reports, including any urgent action taken in response, and the report of the Institutional Senior External Examiner;
  - Collaborative Provision and the Partnerships Panel.

In summary, there are a significant number of elements and strands in the University's academic governance structures and processes which contribute to assuring the protection of the value of University's qualifications over time, whether teaching, learning and assessment is delivered through the University alone or with a collaborative partner. This framework encompasses initial programme design and approval; teaching and learning;

assessment, marking, moderation and external examining; and annual planning and review at programme, subject and University levels. It ensures that assessment and marking practices are influenced by and subject to a strong, institution-wide regulatory and quality assurance framework with a longstanding emphasis on learning, teaching and assessment.

## Classification algorithms<sup>1</sup>

Following reviews and recommendations endorsed by Education Committee and approved by Senate in 2018 and 2020<sup>2</sup>, for students joining programmes from 2021-22 the University calculates the class of honours for the vast majority of its undergraduate degrees using a single algorithm that is varied in only specific circumstances. The single algorithm applies to two, three and four-year honours degree programmes (but not to integrated master's degrees, which have their own classification system). It applies to all University honours degrees, whether delivered solely by the University or via a collaborative partner institution. The effects of the most recent changes will not be measurable until 2023-24 because CMA guidelines dictate that students already on-programme must be permitted to complete their programmes under the regulations that were in-force for them when they joined. The Assessment Regulations for Undergraduate Programmes are published on the Student Policy Zone web page and contain a much fuller account of what follows. They are referenced in the Programme Handbook produced for every University programme and made available to every student.

Each year of a three-year honours degree typically entails 120 credits of study and assessment at FHEQ Levels 4, 5 and 6 in successive years. In order to be awarded the credit for the module, the pass mark required for the module as a whole is normally 40 percent but there are exceptions, e.g. a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) may specify a higher pass mark and/or that each of the module's individual assessment components must be passed. In common with many institutions, first year marks<sup>3</sup> do not contribute towards the final honours degree classification. The final honours degree classification is calculated from a weighted average of the marks from modules worth a total of 180 credits at FHEQ Levels 5 and 6 combined, including the marks from modules normally worth 60 credits at FHEQ Level 5 (weighted 33 percent) and marks from modules worth at least 120 credits at FHEQ Level 6 (weighted 67 percent), which represent the best marks achieved by a student at those Levels. The weightings were marginally adjusted (from 30:70) following the most recent review. Discarding some of the credits with lower marks at Level 5 is felt to be consonant with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy,

---

<sup>1</sup> The information in this section is summarized and supplemented for students in a separate document: *A Brief Student Guide to Assessment and Degree Classification*.

<sup>2</sup> These reviews took account of the sector body publications available at the time, e.g. *Understanding Degree Algorithms*, UUK and GuildHE, 2017; *Degree Classification: Transparent, Consistent and Fair Academic Standards*, UKSQA, 2018; *Degree Classification: Transparency, Reliability and Fairness – A Statement of Intent*, UKSQA, 2019; *Principles for Effective Algorithm Design*. UKSQA, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> or first year (Level 3) - and second year (Level 4) marks in a four-year programme.

which recognises that the nature of the student intake reflects the University's widening participation mission and steers us towards an 'exit velocity' classification model. It also avoids discouraging study outside a main specialism and does not penalize atypically low module outcomes for individual students. For 'top-up' degrees the final honours classification is calculated from a simple average of the equally weighted marks from modules worth 120 credits at FHEQ Level 6 which represent the best marks achieved by a student at that Level.

The University uses the classification bands for honours that are standard across the sector, i.e.: First Class 70-100%; Second Class Division I 60-69%; Second Class Division II 50-59%; Third Class 40-49%. Where the average falls unequivocally into one of the following bands: 48.00 - 49.49, 58.00 - 59.49, 68.00 - 69.49; and a student has achieved marks clearly in an honours classification category higher than their average for modules worth at least 120 credits, drawn from FHEQ Levels 5 and/or 6 (or, for 'top-up' programmes, at least 60 credits at Level 6), then a student shall be awarded an honours degree in the classification category one higher than that indicated by their average. No discretion or boundary moderation is permitted by the regulations.

Apart from the 'top-up' degrees described above, other exceptions may arise to the standard approaches to honours classification, e.g.: where PSRB requirements dictate otherwise; for integrated master's degrees which are classified pass, merit, or distinction; or in other circumstances – for example where there are atypical credit requirements for an award – in which case the algorithm is modified to account for the differences.

A student is normally permitted one attempt to redeem unsatisfactory performance in a module (2nd attempt). At the discretion of the Assessment Board, one further final attempt (3rd attempt) may be made to redeem unsatisfactory performance. This may apply most commonly to those core modules which must be passed in order to gain the award, and only if permitted by the programme regulations and any PSRB restrictions. Students may not progress from Level 4 to Level 5 unless they have been awarded all 120 credits at Level 4; nor may they progress from Level 5 to Level 6 unless they have been awarded at least 80 credits of the 120 required to successfully complete Level 5.

A student who passes a module in which he/she has previously failed shall normally be awarded a mark of 40 percent for the module as a whole, unless capping at the level of the individual assessment component enables a better overall module outcome for the student. This will not be the case where the assessment regulations for the programme explicitly specify otherwise.

Compensation can apply to a maximum of modules worth normally one quarter of the total credits constituting a particular stage of a student's programme of study. This means that satisfactory overall performance can be used to compensate for unsatisfactory performance in a module if it has an aggregate mark normally no lower than 35 percent. The mark is not adjusted and a pass is recorded and credit awarded, with a note that the instance of unsatisfactory performance has been compensated. This is at the discretion of the Assessment Board and will not be utilised where PSRB requirements deem that it may not

be applied. The normal practice, summarised above, may be varied in the case of students with validated mitigating circumstances.

## Teaching practices and learning resources

In 2017, the University developed its *Curriculum Philosophy* and guidance on embedding this is provided at course design stage. Guidance at this stage of programme approval, as identified under *Assessment and Marking Practices*, also involves support for the development of effective assessment strategies and refers to the QAA's Assessment Advice and Guidance.

Since 2012, the University has required all new academic staff to undertake a teaching qualification, gain fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) now Advance HE and gain a PhD. The number of academic staff has risen since 2014 from 280 to 395 (HESA Returns 2014 and 2020). The number of academic staff holding a teaching qualification has risen from 68% to 75%. The University has a two-stage approach to gaining teaching qualifications. Academic staff undertake a 20-credit Level 6 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) module *Preparation for Education and Training* prior to completion of the full Level 7 *Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher and Professional Education*, which is accredited by Advance HE. Approximately 40-60 staff per annum undertake this qualification and gain Fellowship (FHEA) as part of the qualification. The proportion of staff who have gained the Fellowship (FHEA) has been significantly above the sector average for the last four years, when it has ranged from 71.6% (2016/17) to 75.1% (2019/20). A Master's degree in Teaching and Learning in Higher and Professional Education is offered to academic staff as a further progression route. The University also supports development for professional recognition with the Association of Learning Technologists.

In 2016, the University appointed its first Teaching Professors to support development of learning, teaching and assessment. Since when there have been three additional rounds of promotion to Teaching Professorships for academic staff. The Teaching Professors lead and engage academic and professional support staff in an annual *Teaching Intensive, Research Informed (TIRI)* conference. The University raises aspirations in relation to the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme and has a robust process to select and support potential candidates. The selection process is supported internally by senior staff and externally by two Visiting Professors.

The University's award-winning *LEAP Online* platform supports students in developing a wide range of academic skills, including academic writing, critical thinking, digital skills, referencing and avoiding plagiarism.

The University's library provides a wide range of support to help students make the most of the learning resources available to them. This includes library-focused sessions and workshops embedded in the curriculum as well as self-directed learning opportunities and online guides. The library's website was significantly redeveloped in June 2021 with a range of new support content including help videos and guides. The library developed a number of new online support services during the COVID-19 pandemic, including an online chat service

and online appointments and sessions with Academic Librarians. The Online Chat service was well received, dealing with over 3000 enquiries during the 2020-21 academic year. 96.65% of users rated the chat service as excellent or good during that time.

Academic librarians offer online appointments to students, to support them in searching for information for assignments and making the most of online resources. In 2020/21, 93% of students who attended an online appointment stated that it helped them feel more confident using library resources.

The library's online and print collection is continuously developed to ensure that it keeps up-to-date with the curriculum, new programmes and developments within the disciplines and their related industries. The library acquired significant new online resources for Management, Games Design and Creative Technologies in 2019-20 and is investing in new resources to support Performance courses in 2021-22. The library is committed to supporting graduate employability and acquired a new collection of employability-focused resources in 2020-21.

In this way, approaches to learning, teaching and assessment develop in line with the University's mission and drive degree outcomes. Mandatory teaching observations by senior staff of all teaching staff confirm the effectiveness of these developments. This includes observations known as *TIRI Walks* on strategic themes that identify any learning resource and development needs, thereby enhancing practice and influencing student success and degree outcomes. Feedback from students informs the adoption of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and acquisition of learning resources.

## Identifying good practice and actions

The areas where the University's good practice has been identified by students and external examiners include the following:

- Bespoke guidance that is provided on general assessment
- Thoroughness of marking/feedback
- Staff development for capability in assessment and marking, especially for new staff and staff of partner institutions including staff training and development offered through STEAM and the TIRI walks.
- The high levels of support provided by staff for the student learning and assessment.