



Senate

Paper title	Degree Outcomes Statement
Outcome requested	The Senate is asked to consider and endorse the statement, recommending that it be approved by the Council in due course.
Points to note and further information	<p>The Degree Outcomes Statement is a new initiative of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) in response to discussions and concerns in government and the media around alleged grade inflation and increases in the number of so called ‘good honours’ degree outcomes from universities.</p> <p>Each provider is required to have a Statement, approved by its governing body and made available online (though it is primarily intended for internal purposes). It is intended to be a reflective document, considering whether and how quality assurance processes are protecting standards, including the future value of the degrees made to students, and to look at and reflect upon trends in degree outcomes at various levels (e.g. institutional, faculty, school levels).</p> <p>The attached document is a draft Statement for Queen Mary, written by ARCS and using data from the BI. It is incomplete – at its recent meeting, the EQSB agreed that a section on learning resources, and a section explaining the upward trend in the award of good honours outcomes (particularly Firsts) would be drafted with input from teams including the Queen Mary Academy and Library Services; that work is underway, and the text will be added to the version that goes to the Council.</p> <p>The EQSB agreed that this external-facing document would not include school-level breakdowns of data, or a section on risks (identified as optional by the UKSCQA). Instead, Queen Mary will consider those as internal issues; the QAA noted that this was likely to be a common approach taken by many institutions.</p> <p>The Statement will ultimately require sign-off from the Council, and review by the External Member to the Degree Examination Boards. It must be published online before 1 August 2020, so we must ensure that a final draft is ready for the June meeting of the Senate, to make its way through the various committees.</p> <p>Two guidance documents from UKSCQA are appended to the Statement, and the original UKSCQA statement of intent on this issue is online here.</p>

Questions to consider	1. Is the Senate happy with the draft statement and approach?
Regulatory/statutory reference points	UKSCQA has asked that all HEIs publish a statement before the end of the academic year. While it isn't currently a condition of registration with the OfS, the QAA has commented that this may become a requirement in future (perhaps an annual one).
Strategy and risk	<p>This is an outcomes-based report looking at historical data, but aligns with many aspects of Queen Mary's strategies, including elements of programme, periodic, and curriculum review.</p> <p>Elements of risk are dependent on Queen Mary's readings of the data. More generally, failure to publish a statement by the deadline presents a risk of reputational damage, particularly given the QAA's comments on the likely future status of these statements, above.</p>
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	<p>Considered and endorsed by the EQSB</p> <p>Senate to consider.</p> <p>Specified additions to be made at EQSB's instruction and following any comments from the Senate.</p> <p>External Member to consider.</p> <p>Council to approve.</p>
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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. An overall increase in so called 'good honours' degrees can be observed, 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 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	87
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

[Additional text will be added here, drafted by the Queen Mary Academy. It will include references to changes in admissions tariffs, and initiatives such as the work to close attainment gaps, which will add to the explanation of the rise in 'good honours' 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/institutional-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, 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 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 issue of unwillingness to mark above 70, and 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 an expected consequence of 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 to academic quality and standards at another university – fulfils a similar role for the Degree Examination Boards, commenting on issues of process and the comparability and appropriateness of regulations between institutions.

Academic governance

The [Senate](#) of Queen Mary, subject to the overall superintendence of Council, has general responsibility for the academic activity of Queen Mary. 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 fully engage 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 real 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 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 award requirements in terms of credits and marks achieved, rather than the classification algorithm itself).

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.

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

[Text for this section is being drafted by Student and Academic Services around the bullet points below]

The key enhancements that have benefitted our teaching and learning practices are:

- An increase in the number of academic staff gaining recognition of their teaching through the Queen Mary Accredited CPD Scheme. The increases by Fellowship category are: - 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, QMUL gained 3 National Teaching Fellows during this period, bringing the total number of NTFs at the institution to 15 in 2018-19.
- An increase in the number of academic staff gaining qualifications in teaching through our CILT level 7 qualification, and our PGCAP level 7 qualification. The numbers of staff successfully completing awards these awards over the last five years is 221 for CILT and 238 for PGCAP.

- The enhanced profile and recognition of teaching at Queen Mary, through initiatives such as the Queen Mary Students' Union Teaching Awards and QMUL Education Excellence Awards. The annual Teaching and Learning Conference provides a venue for celebrating and sharing excellence in teaching practice at QMUL and is attended by around 300 members of staff each year. QMUL also hosts 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. The Westfield Fund for Enhancing the Student Experience 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.

The improvements in resources concerning Library provision are:

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