**Degree Outcomes Statement 2019/20**

The University of Kent is committed to maintaining robust academic standards and ensuring that student attainment is assessed fairly and consistently in line with relevant sector external reference points, so that our awards hold their value at the point of qualification and over time.

**Degree Classification Profile**

Undergraduate degree outcomes have remained stable at the University of Kent over the five years leading up to and including 2018/19.

Table 1 presents the distribution of degree classifications across the period, which shows there is no evidence of overall grade inflation, with the percentage of 1st / 2(1) awards remaining constant at 79-80%, and the percentage of 1st class awards remaining consistent at 26-27%.

Kent has a slightly higher rate of awarding 1st/2(1) degrees than the national sector average, just 2% higher in 2018-29 (79% vs 77%).



Degree outcomes at the University of Kent and our partner institutions over the last five years are summarised in Appendix A.

**Assessment and Marking Practices**

The University’s academic provision aligns with the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code), with sound processes in place to ensure that assessment and marking practices operate in accordance with the expectations, core practices and other reference points (e.g. [Subject Benchmark Statements](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements) and [Degree Classification Descriptors](https://ukscqa.org.uk/what-we-do/degree-standards/)) set out in the Code (See: Credit Framework [Annex 6: Marking](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-annex6-marking.pdf)). In addition, where relevant to the provision we take into account the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and Apprenticeship Standards.

In 2012/13 Kent adopted a University-wide [categorical marking scale](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-annex6-marking.pdf) for use with respect to single pieces of work that require a qualitative judgement to be made, such as essays, dissertations, reports, individual examination questions, with a view to providing benchmarked grading points within each class band and thereby encouraging markers to make definitive judgements on the standards achieved. Marking consistency is ensured through standardised moderation or double marking processes, which are managed by the [Chief Examiner](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexj-boards-of-examiners-v2.pdf) in each School. Assessments are designed to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are attained at the appropriate level for the module. Methods of assessment are published in a module specification and held on central university websites. Overall assessment strategies for courses are set out in the approved course specifications.

Assessment and marking practices are reviewed by the [Board of Examiners](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexj-boards-of-examiners-v2.pdf) for each course in consultation with one or more external examiners, who provide informed and impartial assurance of the academic standards achieved, both in comparison to the [FHEQ](https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks) and those at other universities in the UK. [External examiners](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexk-external-examiners-v2.pdf) are required to comment explicitly on the soundness of assessment and marking practices and on the standards achieved by students in their annual reports. These reports are reviewed by the relevant Divisional Committees, and by the University’s Education and Student Experience Board, which ensures that good practice is highlighted and any areas for improvement are addressed.

To ensure all students can demonstrate their true level of academic performance, Kent operates a policy to [mitigate extenuating circumstances](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-annex9-mitigation.pdf) that may have negatively affected the student’s achievement on particular assessments. In addition, students may appeal against the recommendations of the Board of Examiners on the grounds of administrative, clerical or procedural error, or with regard to extenuating circumstances there were not made known previously or evidence of prejudice or bias.

All collaborative courses leading to awards of the University are subject to the University’s standard [academic regulations](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/regulations/index.html), [Codes of Practice for Quality Assurance](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/index.html) and [Credit Framework](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/index.html) conventions, including those for marking and assessment. Boards of Examiners for courses offered by partner providers operate with a Kent academic member of staff as Chair and with one or more University appointed external examiner as a member of the Board. In the way, the University ensures comparability of standards for all courses leading to its awards, regardless of the point of delivery.

**Method of Calculating Degree Classifications**

The University uses [two methods of classification](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/cf2020-credit-framework-sept2020.pdf) for its taught degree courses—the ‘average’ method and the ‘preponderance’ method—with students awarded the better result achieved under either methodology. Classification under the ‘average’ method is based on the calculation of a final weighted course average mark, which is used to place student performance in the relevant honours degree classification band. The ‘preponderance’ method of classification requires the achievement of a final weighted course average mark that falls within 3% of the boundary for a higher class band and for at least 50% of the contributing credits to be achieved in that higher band.

While the ‘average’ method favours those courses which allow for high numerical achievement in comparatively few modules, the ‘preponderance’ method rewards more consistent achievement at a higher level across the contributing stages.

Condonement and compensation may be applied to non-compulsory modules up to a maximum cumulative total of 25% of the credit required for the stage, an allowance which reflects the norms of national credit systems.

Students are normally allowed a maximum of two reassessment opportunities where a module has been failed and compensation or condonement are not applied. Component(s) that are reassessed are not capped at the pass mark but the overall module mark is capped.

The University does not operate any zone of consideration for raising a ‘borderline’ performance to a higher classification band on a discretionary basis. Classification is based on the marks achieved.

Details of these methods are published on the University websites and are available to students. Student’s progression/award results are communicated via Kent’s Student Data System.

**Academic Governance**

The University’s academic governance arrangements operate to ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards. Analysis of trends in degree outcomes is undertaken annually by Divisions as part of the [annual course monitoring](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/documents/copt2020-annexe-annual-monitoring-v2.pdf) procedure.

The University’s Education and Student Experience Board (ESEB), which includes Divisional representation, analyses five yearly trends in the proportions of ‘good degrees’ awarded by Divisions, partner providers and campus of delivery at its first meeting in the academic year. A summary account of the review of this trend data is provided to Senate and Council as part of the Annual Provider Review Report (APR).

Similarly, the recommendations to the University made by external examiners in their annual reports are considered in detail by ESEB and are again summarised for the benefit of Senate and Council in the APR. The awards made by partner providers are subject to these same procedures for quality assurance. In this way the University’s governance arrangements function to ensure that the level of student attainment is reviewed appropriately year-on-year and that academic standards are maintained over time.

**Learning and Teaching Practices**

The University has made a range of enhancements to teaching practices and the student learning environment over the past five years, which we believe have contributed to improvements in student attainment, including:

• Launching and updating our[**Education and Student Experience Strategy 2016-20**](https://www.kent.ac.uk/uelt/strategies/BT_123056_ESE%20Strategic_v4.pdf) as part of a University-wide strategy ‘refresh’ initiative that has resulted in an integrated [Kent 2025 strategy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/strategy). With a shared vision and set of values (Equality, Diversity and Respect), we will deliver the best education and student experience that we can to enable all students to achieve their full potential.

• Increasing the focus on the **enhancement of pedagogical practices:** including technology enhanced learning [TEL developments](https://www.kent.ac.uk/elearning/), including our Lecture Capture policy and specialist MOOCs (FutureLearn). Staff have continued to gain fellowships of the Higher Education Academy (Advance HE) through our [accredited programmes](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qualifications/index.html) and [CPD provision](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/HEA%20Route%20to%20Fellowship/index.html), that acknowledges their professionalism in learning and teaching. The proportion of University academic staff with HEA recognition has increased from 31.9% in 2016 to 68.9% in 2018-19, with 29 experienced staff (including those in professional services), gaining Senior Fellowships for their leadership and support of student learning.

• Rewarding **excellence in education through** the launch of the [Academic Career Map](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5CMalcolm%5CDownloads%5C%E2%80%A2%09https%3A%5Cwww.kent.ac.uk%5Chuman-resources%5Cacm%5Cindex.html) alongside a new Academic Promotion Policy (May 2019) that provides a framework setting out relevant expectations, supporting development and recognising achievements at each academic career stage. There were also 15 [TESSAs](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/TESSAs/index.html) (Teaching Enhancement Small Support Awards) awarded across the University in 2018/19, plus the inaugural combined [Teaching, Research and Innovation](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/reward/index.html) awards.

• Continuing **enhancements to the academic support provided to students**, in order to provide a highly supportive, personalised learning environment for students, one that embraces and values diversity. For consecutive years, Kent has won the THE award for [Outstanding Support for Students](https://www.kent.ac.uk/news/kentlife/20344/kent-wins-national-award-for-student-support-for-second-year-running) for our [Student Success Project](https://www.kent.ac.uk/studentsuccess/index.html) (2017) and the [OPERA](https://www.kent.ac.uk/student-support/opera) project (2018), in recognition of the tailored support and dedicated research that these projects have respectively provided for the purpose of addressing attainment gaps and improving inclusive access to learning for all students.

• Investing in capital projects **to enhance our** [**facilities**](https://www.kent.ac.uk/estates/projects/index.html) **and** [**resources**](https://www.kent.ac.uk/library/your-digital-library) to support teaching and learning, including the completion of the extended [Templeman library](https://www.kent.ac.uk/is/templeman/), new academic buildings (e.g. [Sibson](https://www.kent.ac.uk/kent-business-school/facilities)), plus a substantial refurbishment of specialist teaching laboratories (e.g. sciences); and social spaces such as the [Parkwood Student Hub](https://www.kent.ac.uk/estates/projects/complete/pw-hub.html). Our [Digital Library](https://www.kent.ac.uk/library/your-digital-library) provides access to a huge range of high-quality digital resources, such as e-books, e-journals, databases, newspapers, and multimedia for staff and students.

• Conducting **scholarly, evidence-based research that contributes to educational enhancement**. This includes our [annual Learning and Teaching Conference](https://www.kent.ac.uk/cshe/news-events.html?tab=previous-events), regular research seminars and approaches to institutional research projects that enhance the student experience. We have a range of initiatives that are directed at supporting both students and staff—a small selection includes the [Kent Graduate Attributes](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/grad-goals), a [Framework for Powerful Learning Experiences](https://www.kent.ac.uk/cshe/projects.html), and [Kent Inclusive Practices](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/how-to-create-accessible-content/kips).

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Education and Student Experience Board notes that UG degree outcomes have remained stable over the five year period under review and that the proportion of first class and upper second class honours degrees awarded is broadly in line with the sector average.

Three lines of continued investigation and action are recommended, however:

1. Variations in attainment outcomes between Divisions, with a sixteen percentage point range evident in the proportion of 1st/2(1) honours degrees awarded;

**Action:** ESEB, Divisional Education and UG Student Experience Committees;

1. The sizeable attainment gap between White and BAME students;
2. The sizeable and growing difference between 1st/2(1) rates between students from the most deprived localities and those from the least deprived areas.
3. In preparation for the Degree Outcomes Statement 2020/21, commence early investigation of degree outcomes achieved by students in 2019/20 following the shift to online teaching and assessment during the course of the academic year in order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

**Action 2 & 3:** ESEB, Student Success Project.

**Action 4:** ESEB via EASC.

**Appendix A**

Table 1 presents the distribution of degree classifications across the five year period, which shows there is no evidence of overall grade inflation, with the percentage of 1st / 2(1) awards remaining constant at a79-80%, and the percentage of 1st class awards remaining consistent at 26-27%.

Kent has a slightly higher rate of awarding 1st/2(1) degrees than the national sector average, just 2% higher in 2018-29 (79% vs 77%).



Overall levels of achievement are highest amongst validated institutions (see tables 2 and 3), based on smaller populations studying towards highly specialised awards, typically in a dedicated conservatoire performing arts environment.







Across demographic splits in the data, female students outperform their male counterparts (see table 5), with a 9-10% percentage difference see in 2017-18 and 2018-19. There is a sizeable attainment gap between White and BAME students (see table 7), this is a major focus of activity for the Student Success Project. Students declaring a disability do not appear to be disadvantaged in terms of degree award outcomes, maintaining comparable rates of 1st/2(1) achievement with those with no known disability.



1st/2(1) rates for student coming of areas of low higher education participation have risen slightly, whilst rates for students from areas of high participation have fallen slightly, so there is now less of a disparity between POLAR4 quintile students (see table 9). However, there remains a sizeable and growing difference between 1st/2(1) rates between students from the most deprived localities and those from the least deprived areas (see table 10), with a 19% difference seen in 2018-19 (66% for Quintile 1 and 85% for Quintile 5).











Nb. [s] = suppressed – HESA rounding strategy applied – percentages need at least 22.5 people in the denominator.