

# Sheffield Hallam University

DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT SEPTEMBER 2023

## Introduction

The purpose of this statement is to describe Sheffield Hallam University's commitment to meeting the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment's (UKSCQA's) statement of intent to protect the value of UK degrees, the expectations of the UK Quality Code and the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration (B4 and B5) that relate to protecting the value of qualifications. This is achieved through a review of trends in Hallam's degree classification profile, the regulations, policies, and practice that protect degree standards at Hallam, and to outline actions and progress arising from this review.

### 1. Institutional degree classification profile

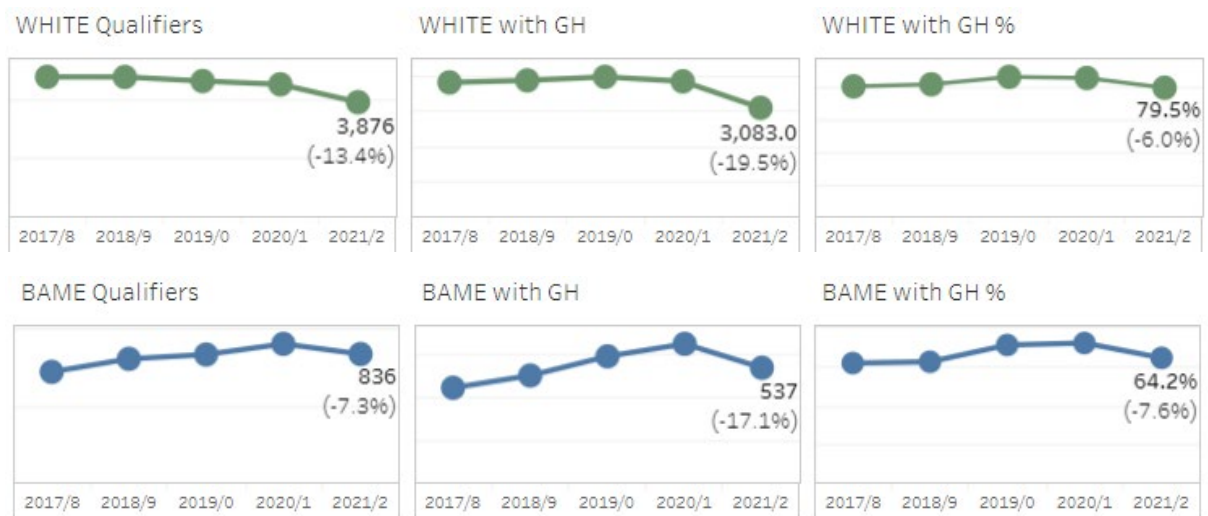
At Sheffield Hallam University (Hallam) our students' degree classification profile reflects the trends seen within the sector during the past five years (2018-2022) with an increase in good honours (students achieving a first or upper second classification) resulting from an increase in first class degrees, while the proportion of upper second-class degrees awarded decreased, peaking in 2021. The degree classification profile in 2022 reverses this trend with the proportion of good honours falling across the sector and this is again reflected at Hallam. Our data demonstrates that the proportion of good honours awarded in 2022 (74%) has returned to pre-covid levels, with the proportion of first-class degrees awarded decreasing towards pre-covid levels while upper second-class degrees continue to decrease. As a result, the proportion of good honours at Hallam is now 2 percentage points below the sector average.



	2017/8	2018/9	2019/0	2020/1	2021/2
Hallam	74%	75%	81%	81%	74%

Figure 1: proportion of first and upper second-class degrees awarded 2018-2022

We are one of the UK’s largest and most socially diverse universities and we educate more students from underrepresented backgrounds than any other UK university and have done so for the past five years. We understand that, in the sector and at Hallam, there are persistent and sometimes large gaps between the degree classifications of most underrepresented student groups in higher education. Our [Access and Participation Plan](#) contains a detailed analysis of attainment by the different student groups that make up our student body with a focus on mature, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME<sup>1</sup>), Disabled, students from areas of low participation, Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and Care Leavers, exploring intersectionality between these characteristics. Our data shows we are succeeding with most student groups. However, we see an awarding gap between white students and Black, Asian and minority ethnic students that cannot be explained by other demographic splits alone.



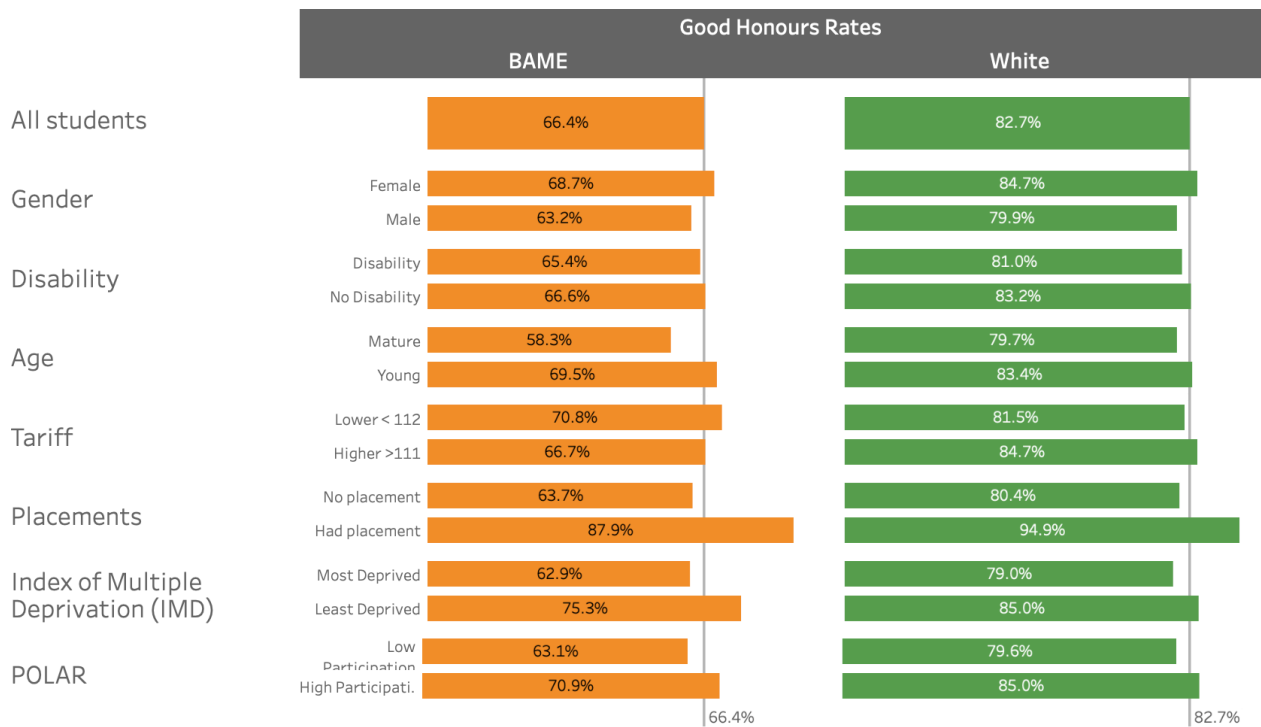
	2017/8	2018/9	2019/0	2020/1	2021/2
Hallam	-18.8%	-19.4%	-15.4%	-13.7%	-15.3%

Figure 2 Awarding gap between White and Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

<sup>1</sup> BAME in this context refers to the dataset used.

	# GH	# Quals	% Good Honours	% Gap BAME	% Gap White
Arab	108	176	61.4%	-5.0%	-21.4%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	93	142	65.5%	-0.9%	-17.2%
Asian or Asian British - Indian	346	460	75.2%	8.8%	-7.5%
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	616	978	63.0%	-3.4%	-19.7%
Other Asian background	158	248	63.7%	-2.7%	-19.0%
Black or Black British - African	418	751	55.7%	-10.7%	-27.1%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	94	145	64.8%	-1.6%	-17.9%
Other Black background	21	33	63.6%	-2.8%	-19.1%
Chinese	91	118	77.1%	10.7%	-5.6%
Mixed - White and Asian	215	273	78.8%	12.4%	-4.0%
Mixed - White and Black African	58	88	65.9%	-0.5%	-16.8%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	266	361	73.7%	7.3%	-9.0%
Other mixed background	160	207	77.3%	10.9%	-5.4%
Other ethnic background	76	117	65.0%	-1.4%	-17.8%
White	18,521	22,390	82.7%	16.3%	0.0%

*Figure 3 Awarding gap by ethnicity*



*Figure 4 Awarding gap between White and Black, Asian and minority ethnic students split by additional demographic factors.*

The awarding gap between White and Black, Asian and minority ethnic students has decreased over time we attribute this to our focus on embedding the Hallam Model (our common curriculum design framework) across our provision and development of academic and professional services staff supporting students, although the most recent data has shown an increase in the gap highlighting the persistent nature of this issue. We also recognise from our data that gaps between the most and least disadvantaged students are further compounded if students are male and/or from a BAME background.

## 2. Assessment and Marking Practices

Hallam’s Policy for Assessment and assessment regulations are reviewed and approved by The Academic Board annually. This policy and associated Principles and Procedures for Assessment set out how Hallam ensures fair assessment outcomes for students via rigorous design, standardisation delivery and moderation processes across all courses and modules ensuring assessments provide students with the opportunity to demonstrated they have achieved course and /or module learning outcomes consistent with OfS conditions of registration B4 and B5.

Verification of assessment tasks and the standardisation and moderation of marked tasks are the key processes by which the University maintains academic standards by assuring the appropriateness of assessment and the accuracy of marking and grading decisions ([Policy for the Verification of Assessment and Standardisation and](#)

[Moderation of Marking](#)). The approach to verification of assessment tasks and the standardisation and moderation of marked tasks ensures alignment with the QAA's guidance on External Expertise.

The University uses a University Grade Descriptor (UGD): generic grade and level descriptors for application to undergraduate and postgraduate assessment, including Foundation degree (FdA / FdSC /FdEng) and other provision using non-standard grade bands (including indicative guidance for Level 0 – Foundation Year). The UGD also shows the relationship between classification and grade point, as applicable to assessment at task and / or module level.

External Examiners are appointed for each course to comment on the consistent application of standards at Hallam and confirm their alignment with UK recognised standards in determining awards.

Our policy on Academic Conduct Regulations and our Examination Conduct Policy ensure that all assessments are conducted fairly and equitably for all students with clear and consistent processes in place to address any concerns.

We foster an environment in which all students are challenged, supported, and encouraged to succeed. Our expectations of students to engage with assessment is set out in our Policy for Engagement. However, we recognise that students may be affected by disability, ill health or other difficult personal circumstances and we monitor engagement using learning analytics using this information to provide support where most needed via our policies on extenuating circumstances and student support services.

### **3. Academic Governance**

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The University operates a well-established and effective set of quality assurance processes to protect and maintain the academic integrity of its awards. Awards of the University are formally conferred by the University Academic Board.

Academic Board has delegated authority to Departmental Assessment Boards, acting on its behalf, the conferment of awards and credit on individual students, subject to University regulations and policies and course specific requirements. Departmental Assessment Boards approve progression and award decisions and are provided with complete course level assessment data to support the decisions and to aid the review of assessment process. Heads of Department chair their Assessment Boards and are supported at a college level by Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) and centrally by the Director of Academics Services (equivalent to Academic Registrar in other universities), and by the Heads of Academic Quality and Standards.

Metrics on continuation, retention, completion, achievement (including 'Good' degrees and differential achievement) and progression are considered at a course, department, college, and university levels. Students at our partner institutions have additional scrutiny in the form of moderation, external examiner reporting and cross partner

review. External examiner reports are responded to by course teams, departmental quality leads as well as by the central Quality Assurance team.

The University's policies and processes for assessment and student continuation are both flexible and robust to respond to changing circumstances.

## **4. Classification Algorithms**

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The standard undergraduate classification algorithm is calculated by the following methods and the method which results in the better classification and overall average is automatically selected.

### **Method 1:**

- The overall weighted average of the 100 highest marked level 5 credits, weighted at 25%
- The overall weighted average of the 100 highest marked level 6 credits or higher, weighted at 75%

### **Method 2:**

- The average of 100 highest marked level 6 credits weighted at 100%

The following table explains how Honours degree classifications are calculated:

<b>Degree Classification</b>	<b>Level of achievement required for the classification. You will be awarded this classification if you:</b>
<b>First Class Honours (1<sup>st</sup>)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achieve a final average mark of 70.00 - 100.00%, or</li> <li>• achieve a final average mark on the first-class borderline (68.01 - 69.99%) <u>and</u> achieve first class module marks in at least 60 credits at level 6 or higher</li> </ul>
<b>Upper Second Class Honours (2.1)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achieve a final average mark of 60.00 - 69.99 %, or</li> <li>• achieve a final average mark on the class 2.1 borderline (58.01 – 59.99%) <u>and</u> achieve 2.1 class or higher module marks in at least 60 credits at level 6 or higher</li> </ul>
<b>Lower Second Class Honour (2.2)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achieve a final average mark of 50.00 - 59.99%, or</li> <li>• achieve a final average mark on the class 2.2 borderline (48.01 – 49.99%) <u>and</u> achieve 2.2 class or higher module marks in at least 60 credits at level 6 or higher</li> </ul>
<b>Third Class Honours (3<sup>rd</sup>)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achieve a final average mark of 40.00 – 49.99%</li> </ul>

The University has reviewed how all undergraduate and integrated masters awards are calculated in line with Universities UK (UUK) guidance to continue to ensure the integrity of our awards.

## **5. Teaching Practices and Learning Resources**

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Hallam was rated as Gold in the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) reflecting our focus on transforming lives through our applied learning offer and outstanding student support. Every course at Hallam is designed in accordance with our Hallam Model's four principles of Engage (Learning engages with the world beyond the University), Challenge (Learning is intellectually stretching in applied contexts), Collaborate (Learning with, from and alongside others) and Thrive (Learning enables students to thrive personally, culturally, and professionally). These principles inform and underpin not only course design, but also our learning, teaching and assessment practices with students which are recognised as outstanding.

Our students are taught by highly qualified and experienced staff, 77% of whom hold recognised a Higher Education teaching qualification, enabling them to stretch and challenge students and support their learning and attainment. Peer Review and Enhancement, including observation of teaching, encourages staff to reflect and develop their teaching practice further.

We were named University of the Year for Teaching Quality in the 2020 Sunday Times Good University Guide, informed by our high levels of student satisfaction with teaching. Aligned to the Hallam Model, our Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Framework sets out a range of principles, and features as reference points for all subject disciplines and their approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment.

This builds upon previous Hallam initiatives such as the "Assessment Journey Programme", which ensures all students gain early formative feedback on their work to support an effective transition to university and supports attainment. Generic grade and level descriptors, as noted above, assessment criteria and revised policies on the return of feedback are also well embedded, ensuring high quality practices.

Our approach to embedding early formative feedback across all courses, and our internationally published research in relation to assessment literacy in students has supported assessment design across all our courses to provide students with the scaffolded support they need to achieve their potential. We also have a well-established 'academic advising' system, which operates as a triage with professional services student support and employment advisor support. All students have a named 'academic advisors' to support them throughout the duration of their study. This personalised support allows for targeted guidance and intervention regarding academic performance.

We received the 2023 UK advising and Tutoring (UKAT) Institutional Award for Outstanding Student Support for our commitment to supporting students and student success through academic advising. Each student has an academic adviser who is



central to supporting students' academic development by providing a consistent point of contact and ongoing support signposting students to additional support as needed.

Finally, the university provides outstanding learning resources through its specialist facilities, library, and study skills offer. Tools such as Turnitin and Studiosity are available to all students and enable 24-hour access to online feedback for their written assignments in terms of originality, grammar, spelling, structure, and format. Our Skills Centre provides a range of academic skills development further supporting student attainment.

## **6. Identifying Good Practice and Actions**

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The Hallam Model and Learning, Teaching and Assessment framework are well established across the University and have embedded very high-quality teaching and assessment practices, with a strong emphasis on applied learning and research-informed teaching which engages and challenges students to fulfil their potential, supporting their learning and attainment.

Our application of assessment policies and procedures is supported by our professional services to ensure consistency, and clearly communicated to students via our student portal MyHallam. Regular review of the effectiveness of this approach informs further enhancements.

Our strategic aims and objectives related to attainment are detailed in our Access and Participation Plan. We aim to ensure all students are supported to achieve strong academic outcomes and any barriers to success are removed, with a particular focus on improving the degree attainment of black students; disabled students; most disadvantaged males and most disadvantaged BAME students, eradicating any awarding gaps.

Good progress towards this aim has been made in several subject areas and student groups with work continuing to enhance attainment through evidence informed interventions based on our data related to student attainment and student feedback. This work is shaped by our Equality Objectives: Cultural Competence, and Equality of Access, Outcome and Experience and we are committed to five key areas of intervention: strong leadership; understanding what works; gaining evidence and analysing data; developing racially diverse and inclusive environments; having conversations about race and changing culture.

## **7. Risks and Challenges**

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The University continues to focus on improving student outcomes through improved teaching and learning and ensuring that assessment activity is challenging and proportionate. Eliminating the degree awarding gap for our minoritised students

continues to be a significant priority for the University. We regularly review and update policies and practice related to assessment to ensure the value of our awards remains secure including in response to emerging risks such as those posed by the covid pandemic and developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI).