

## Degree Outcomes Statement

Managed by: Deputy Academic Registrar	Approved by: Academic Board
Department: Academic Services	Date approved: 17 <sup>th</sup> February 2021
Type of document: Statement	Approved by: Governing Council
	Date approved: 24 <sup>th</sup> February 2021

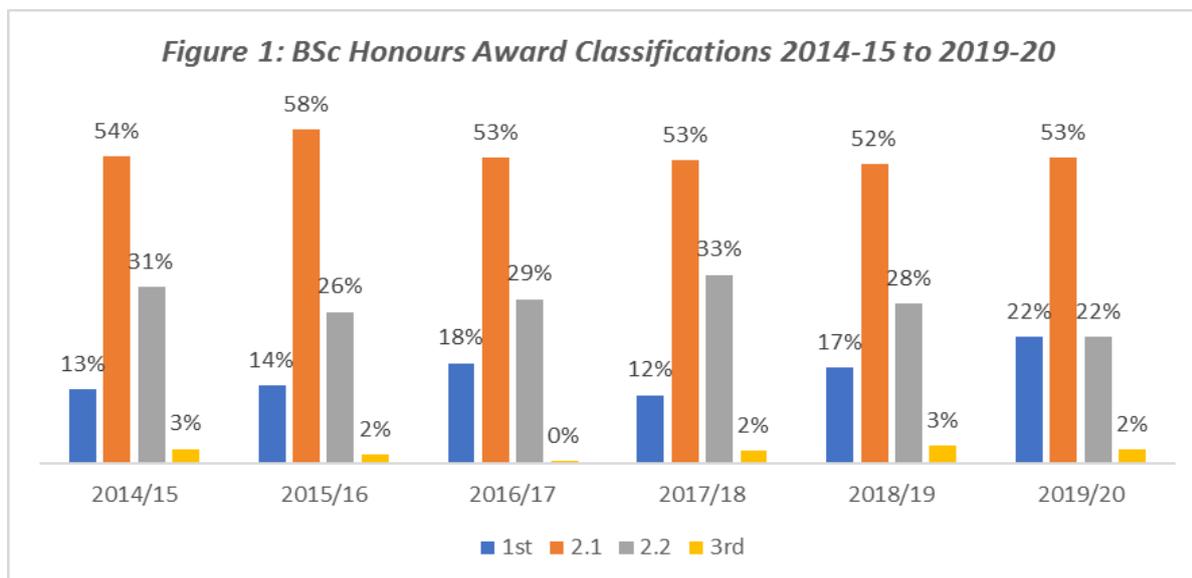
Version number	Purpose/change	Name and job title	Date (DD/MM/YY)
1.0	Initial Degree Outcome Statement 2019-20	Deputy Academic Registrar	17/02/21

---

### 1. Institutional degree classification profile

Having reviewed the proportion of awards made by classification over the last 6 years and considered the application of its awards algorithm, the University concludes that its methodology is fit for purpose, with the proportion of awards made at each classification remaining largely consistent year on year and those made at First or Upper Second similar to comparator institutions and a little below those made in the UK sector as a whole (particularly so for the proportion of first class awards). The application of a "No Detriment" policy has resulted in some increase in this proportion at RAU for 2019-20, although this is anticipated to be a temporary matter rather than presaging long term "drift", and likely to be consistent with increases elsewhere, due to the application of "No Detriment" policies when sector statistics are published in Spring 2021.

Figure 1 below shows the % breakdown in final award classification for all final year honours students, including Top-up students, for the past six years.

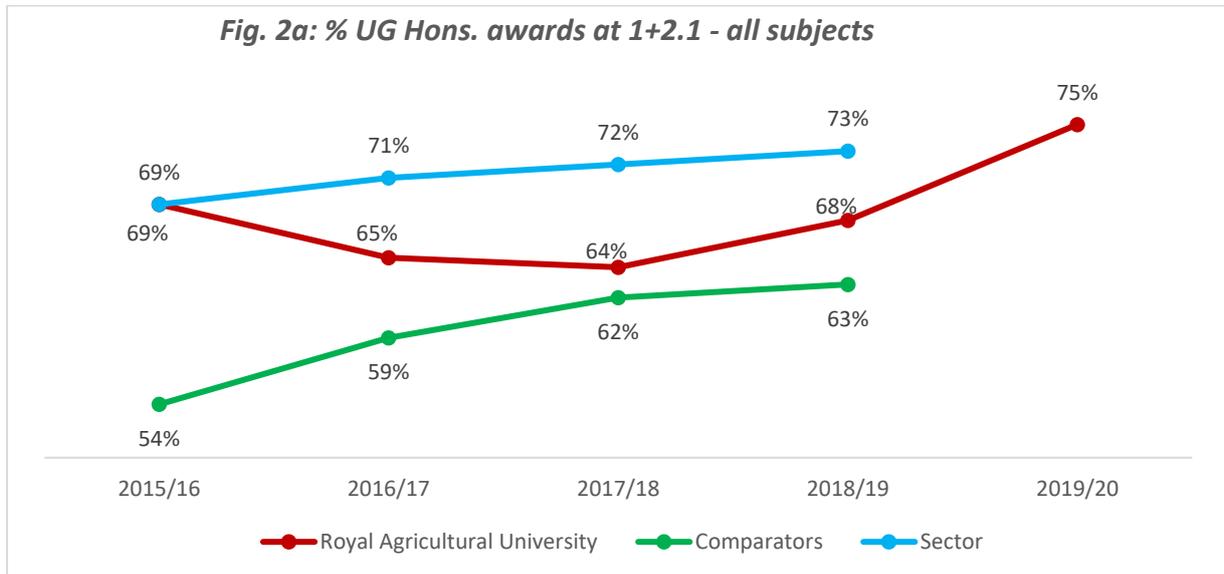


Between 2014-15 and 2018-19 the proportion of BSc awards made at first or upper second class honours thus remained little changed at 67-69%. Last year this rose to 75%, including a 5% increase in Firsts and a 6% reduction in 2:2 awards.

Whilst the latest changes do not, in themselves, relate to sustained grade drift, this phenomenon may result from the application of the RAU No Detriment policy for final awards, whereby students were awarded the higher grade outcome of overall end of year results where examination assessments (which do tend to result in slightly lower marks than coursework) had been replaced with alternative coursework-based assessments; or results as of the 20th March 2020 which would have been based on only partial completion of modules during Semester 2 and would also not have included marks for dissertations which again often impact on a students' final grade as a result of their weighting in the final assessment.

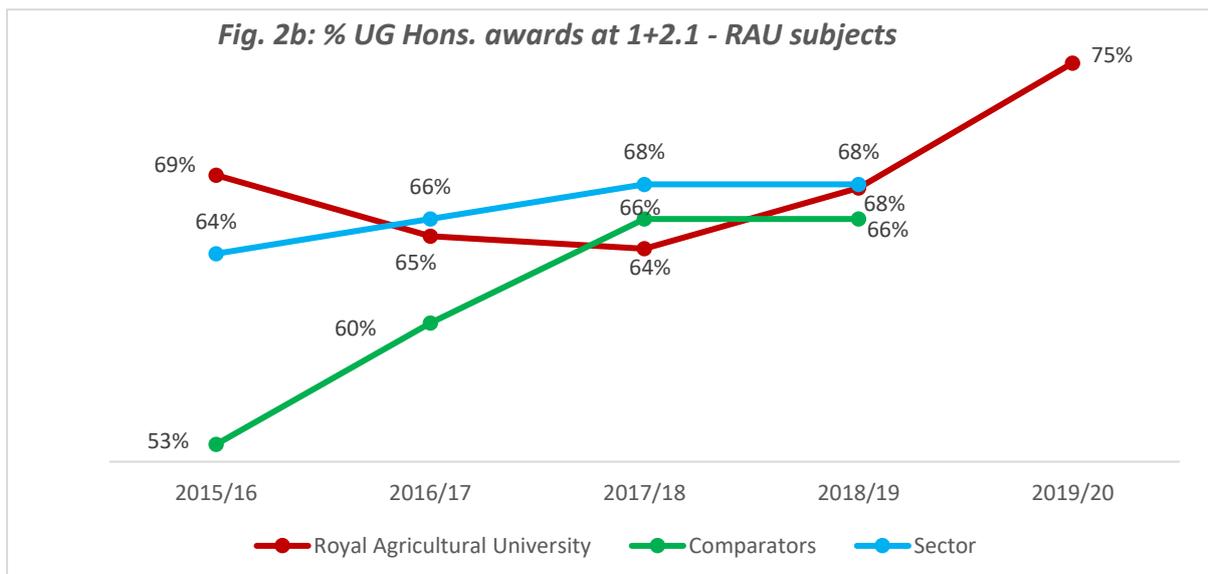
However, the exceptional nature of the 2019-20 academic year and changes to assessments means any trend analysis has to be considered with caution, as results will have been skewed as a result of the enforced changes compared to previous years.

Figure 2a compares the percentage of honours awards in any subject made at 1st or upper second (the "Good Degrees" KPI) at RAU, with the UK HE sector overall and the average across three comparator HEIS:



Source: 2019/20 internal, otherwise HEIDI+

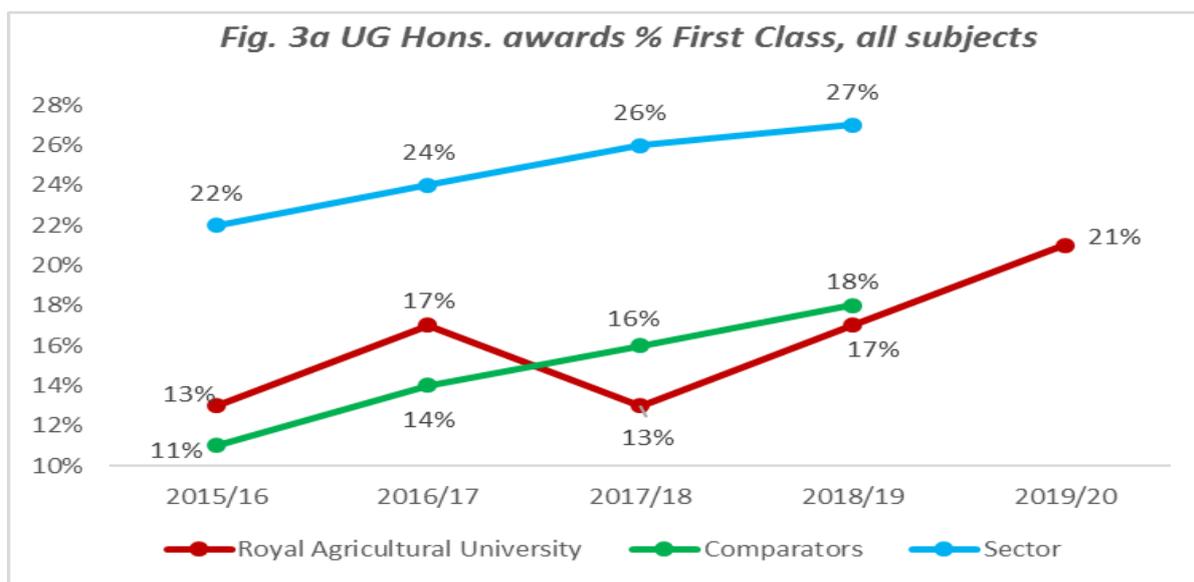
indicating that University classification percentages are broadly similar to elsewhere, falling midway between our comparator HEIs and the sector as a whole, although rising a little in 2018-19 and noting that our 2019-20 result would place us above the sector average, unless the latter shows a similar uplift as a potential result of the application of no detriment policy, including the removal of semester 2 written exams, which typically result in slightly lower marks than coursework, particularly for the relatively high proportion of dyslexic students at the RAU; (as anticipated when 2019-20 sector statistics are published next Spring). Figure 2b repeats the above but just for subjects taught at RAU:



Source: 2019/20 internal, otherwise HEIDI+

indicating that, historically, the proportion of “Good Degrees” awarded at RAU was very closely aligned, both with comparator HEIs and the overall UK sector within our disciplines, but that in 2019-20 the percentage awarded at RAU has pulled considerably ahead of the sector showing in previous years, but may not prove to be an outlier once sector 2019-20 results are published in Spring 2020.

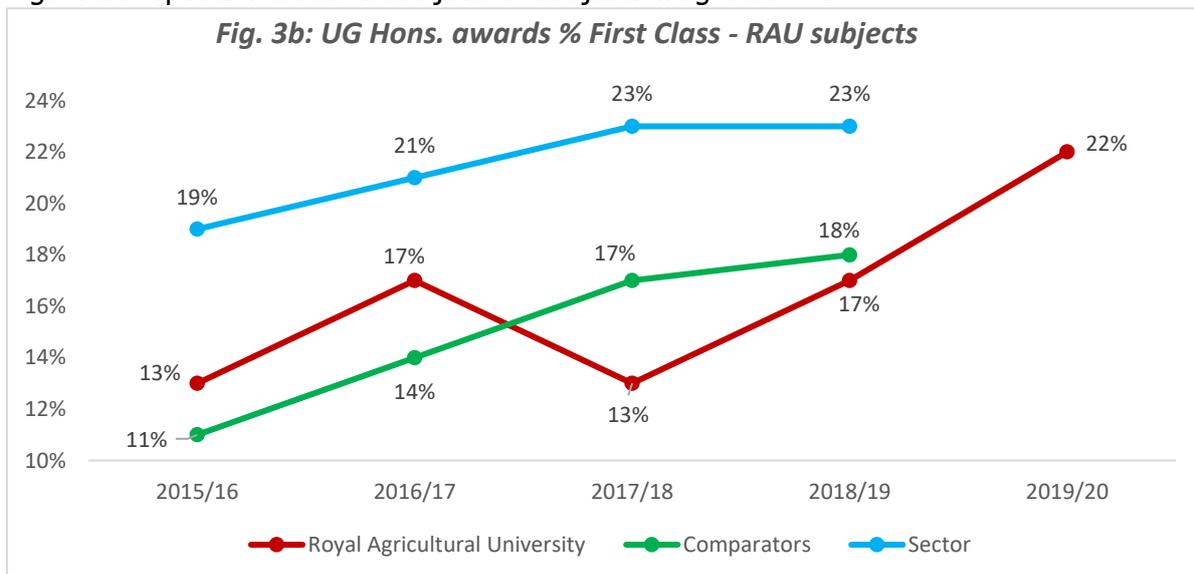
Figure 3a compares the percentage of RAU honours awards, in any subject, made at 1st class only vs. the sector and comparator HEIs:



Source: 2019/20 internal, otherwise HEIDI+

indicating that the University is closely aligned with comparable HEIs, but still awards noticeably fewer honours degrees at 1st class than the UK HE sector overall, even with some uplift as a potential consequence of no detriment.

Figure 3b repeats the above but just for subjects taught at RAU:



Source: 2019/20 internal, otherwise HEIDI+

again showing RAU's close alignment with comparator HEIS, but that the proportion of Firsts awarded is closer yet still some way below that in the wider sector within our disciplines, pending publication of 2019-20 sector results.

## **2. Assessment and marking practices**

All RAU programmes are developed and validated (and subject to periodic re-validation) with reference to key external reference points including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), QAA subject benchmark statements, and where required, relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) criteria. The process of validation (and re-validation) involves the close scrutiny of programme and module level Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO's) to ensure alignment with the proposed module assessment strategy, ensuring students are able to fully demonstrate achievement of the ILO's.

As part of the programme development and validation process, appropriate external expertise is provided through the appointment of independent external subject specialists and industry practitioners, both to the development team and for the Validation and Review Board (VRB) itself. In addition, External Examiners (EE's), appointed to oversee every programme, will review draft examination papers, comment on assessment briefs and review marked assessments. As full members of programme examination boards, EE's also confirm that University policies and regulations have been applied correctly and equitably, and that academic standards and awards are secure, in line with national expectations, and comparable with other institutions with which they are familiar.

University-wide marking criteria, comprising descriptors of expectations for key academic attributes of assessments and their associated marking bands are approved for use at levels 4, 5, 6 and 7. These ensure comparability of standards across all taught programmes, and are used by individual module leaders to create assessment-specific requirements where required which are then shared with students as part of individual assessment briefs.

## **3. Academic governance**

Authority and responsibility for academic quality assurance and thus for the standard and value of awards, rests with the University's Academic Board, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. Academic Board is supported by two key operational sub-committees for quality assurance, these being Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) and the University Examinations Committee (UEC). Academic Board reports regularly to Governing Council, including an annual academic assurance report, thus enabling Council to fully discharge its responsibility for institutional assurance to the Office for Students (OfS) that the University continues to meet the conditions of Registration B1-B5.

The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) develops and manages the processes for assurance of the quality of the University's programmes, the standards and values of its awards and the enhancement of the student academic experience. This is implemented via processes for programme validation, periodic review and annual monitoring; oversight of curriculum review and associated teaching, learning and assessment practices in line with sector-wide best practice. New programme proposals and periodic programme reviews are undertaken by a Validation and Review Board (VRB), reporting to AQSC, and tasked with ensuring that academic programmes meet the expectations of the University in terms of structure, are set and assessed at the appropriate academic level and will provide a high quality student experience leading to meaningful graduate outcomes. Programmes may be validated for a period of up to 6 years unless the programme is delivered by Collaborative Partners where the period of validation is normally no longer than 3 years.

Annual monitoring of all programmes includes reviewing of student feedback at module, programme and national level, review of External Examiner feedback and other inputs such as from School Industry Advisory Panels or PSRB's as appropriate. Statistics on the student lifecycle from admission through to awards classification and graduate destinations are considered longitudinally and benchmarked against the sector. The outcome of this being an annual report and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), and which is considered by AQSC, enabling periodic enhancements to modules and programmes to be approved within a validation cycle. Annual reports and QIPs are produced, and delivery monitored, by Programme and in summary at Partner and University level.

The University Examinations Committee (UEC) receives the recommendations of Programme Examination Boards (PEB's), held for both Schools of the University and for Collaborative Partner (CP) Institutions. Each PEB is attended by at least one External Examiner, and is responsible for ensuring that marks for all examinations and assessments are correctly recorded on the student record system, and makes decisions on individual students as to their progression and award status in line with approved academic assessment regulations which are then recommended to the UEC for ratification. Prior to the PEB's, Module Boards, held within each School or CP, ensure that marks are recorded for each student and that moderation of assessments has taken place in accordance with the Regulations.

The UEC is charged with the authority to ratify student results, progression and award decisions made by individual PEB's prior to publication to students. The UEC is attended by an Institutional External Examiner who ensures that any changes to previous PEB decisions are made in line with published regulations and are consistent for all awards of the University, including Collaborative Partners.

#### 4. Classification algorithms

The RAU uses a common degree classification algorithm for its BSc Honours Degrees, with students required to achieve 120 credits at levels 4, 5 and 6. Final awards are determined based on a weighted average of 30% for Level 5 modules plus 70% of Level 6 modules.

For BSc Honours Top-up programmes, final awards based only on the average of 120 level 6 credits.

Awards will then be graded as follows:

- First Class Honours: 70% or above
- Second Class Honours upper division: 60% to 69%
- Second Class Honours lower division: 50% to 59%
- Third Class Honours: 40% to 49%
- Fail 0% to 39%

Where a student's final award average is within 2% of a higher grade boundary, then a Dominant Quality uplift will be applied where a minimum of 75 credits of the final Level 6 module results are within the higher grade, and no module score is more than two classes below the dominant grade.

As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions, and the rapid move to on-line teaching from March 2020, a 'No Detriment' calculation was approved to ensure students were not disadvantaged as a result of the move to on-line delivery and the associated difficulties and additional pressures of remote working and a lack of access to the usual resources required for effective learning. Additionally, examinations for semester 2 modules were removed and replaced with alternative assessments which could be completed at a distance.

The No Detriment calculation had the following features for BSc Honours final year students:

- (a) Final awards were determined based on either the normal end of year outcomes or on the average of work completed prior to the 20th March 2020 when teaching moved on-line, and then adopting the normal algorithm for degree classifications, and
- (b) Dominant quality considerations for awards determined using the no detriment calculation methodology were based on the achievement of 50% or more credits in the higher classification.

The impact of the no detriment policy on final undergraduate classifications for the year can be seen in Table 1 below.

Award Level	Total Awards Made	No. awards based on No Detriment	% No Detriment awards
RAU BSc Honours Degrees	293	24	8.2%

**Table 1: Impact of No Detriment calculation on overall undergraduate awards for 2019-20**

That only 8.2% of all BSc Honours awards made in 2019-20 were based on no detriment outcomes bears testament to the appropriateness of the steps taken by the RAU to support continued student learning throughout national lockdown, with the vast majority of students able to maintain their pre-lockdown level of performance through to the end of their studies.

## **5. Teaching practices and learning resources**

Recent enhancements to the curriculum delivered at the RAU have been structured around the adoption of the RAU Pedagogic Framework that was approved in 2018. This outlined key requirements for all UG modules and programmes and established a standardised size of module. The Pedagogic Framework ensured the adoption of credit bearing skills modules across all UG provision, for many of our UG programmes this is delivered by University wide, shared modules (Academic skills –Level 4, Professional skills – Level 5 and Research skills – Level 6).

The Pedagogic Framework also revised the placement element of all RAU UG programmes by including a range of placement options (6 weeks or 15 weeks plus the option of a year-long placement). The placement options focus on the students' learning experience in a variety of work and employment situations and is assessed through a reflective report and diary.

The approach to module assessment at the RAU has been revised via the Pedagogic Framework which established a maximum of 2 summative assessments per 15 credit module and greater standardisation. Work is ongoing to further enhance assessment processes related to the quality cycle. The Pedagogic Framework encourages a range of summative assessment formats and the use of formative assessment opportunities as part of the module delivery.

All new staff who are not already Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) are supported and encouraged to commence a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice delivered by the University of Gloucestershire within two years of appointment. Additionally, an annual programme of staff development events, supported through regular on-line updates on technology enhanced learning ensures staff are up to date with the latest developments in teaching pedagogy.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the RAU has developed its own blended learning model for taught programme delivery, based upon existing experience of developing new blended learning programmes under a HEFCE catalyst funded project and informed by sector-wide good practice. The structures were shared with, and agreed, by both academic staff of the University and the student body, with excellent feedback received from students on their experiences of this 'new way' of working.