

Degree Outcomes Statement

1 Institutional degree classification profile

- 1.1 Over the last 5 years, the University of Worcester had seen a relatively steady rate of the proportion of first-class honours degrees awarded of between 22.8 – 24.6%, between 2020/21 and 2023/24. However, with the introduction of a new degree algorithm, which came into full effect during 2024/25, this proportion has significantly reduced in this year's report to 15.1%.

The significant change for the 2024/25 academic year was anticipated and is discussed in more detail in section 4.

We also anticipate that these figures will increase again in subsequent years as the number of remaining students on the older algorithm continues to reduce as they graduate. Students graduating with the old regulations equated to just 9% of the 2024/25 graduates in total.

The combined proportion of 1 and 2:1 degrees similarly remained steady during the same period 20/21 to 23/24 and has now also reduced, in line with the changes above.

Comparatively, the sector data, which was published by the OfS in November 2025, shows that the proportion of UK-domiciled, full-time first-degree graduates achieving a 1 or 2:1 class degree at HE providers in England fell for the third consecutive year in 2023/24 to 77.2%, down 0.4 percentage points from 2022/23 (OfS, 2026).¹

However, newer sector-level data published by HESA in January 2026, showed that since then between 2023/24 and 2024/25, both the proportion of first-class degree awards and the combined 1 and 2:1-degree awards, increased.

- 1.2 The profile for each of the 5 years for the University of Worcester can be seen in the table below. Note that all totals have now been updated with HESA figures, published in January 2026 and new data that wasn't previously available for the purposes of the last report, has also been entered for 2023/4 and 2024/5.

¹ Please note that as per OfS definition, "the graduate population considered in the report included UK-domiciled UGs (first degrees and degrees with PG components who were studying full-time when they started their course, were registered at the HE provider in England, graduated in the academic years from 2010/11 and 23/24 and attained a classified honours degree." See also <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time-changes-in-graduate-attainment-from-2010-11-to-2023-24/>

University of Worcester Degree Classifications 20/21 to 24/25 as published in January 2026

Academic Year	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25
Proportion of First-Class degrees (%)	24.6	22.8	23.7	23.6	15.1
Proportion of First/Upper Second-Class degrees (%)	71.8	68.0	68.2	65.3	58.5

Data taken from HESA, updated in January 2026 (www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes#classifications).

Sector Degree Classifications 19/20 to 24/25, as published in January 2026

Academic year	19/20 (OfS)	20/21 (OfS)	21/22 (OfS)	22/23 (OfS)	23/24 (OfS)	24/25 (HESA)
Proportion of First Class degrees (%)	34.9	37.7	33.3	29.6	28.8	29.7
Proportion of First / Upper Second class degrees (%)	81.9	84.5	80.7	77.6	77.2	78.4
Unexplained change From 2010/11 (%)	17.4	18.6	15.6	11.6	9.8	N/A

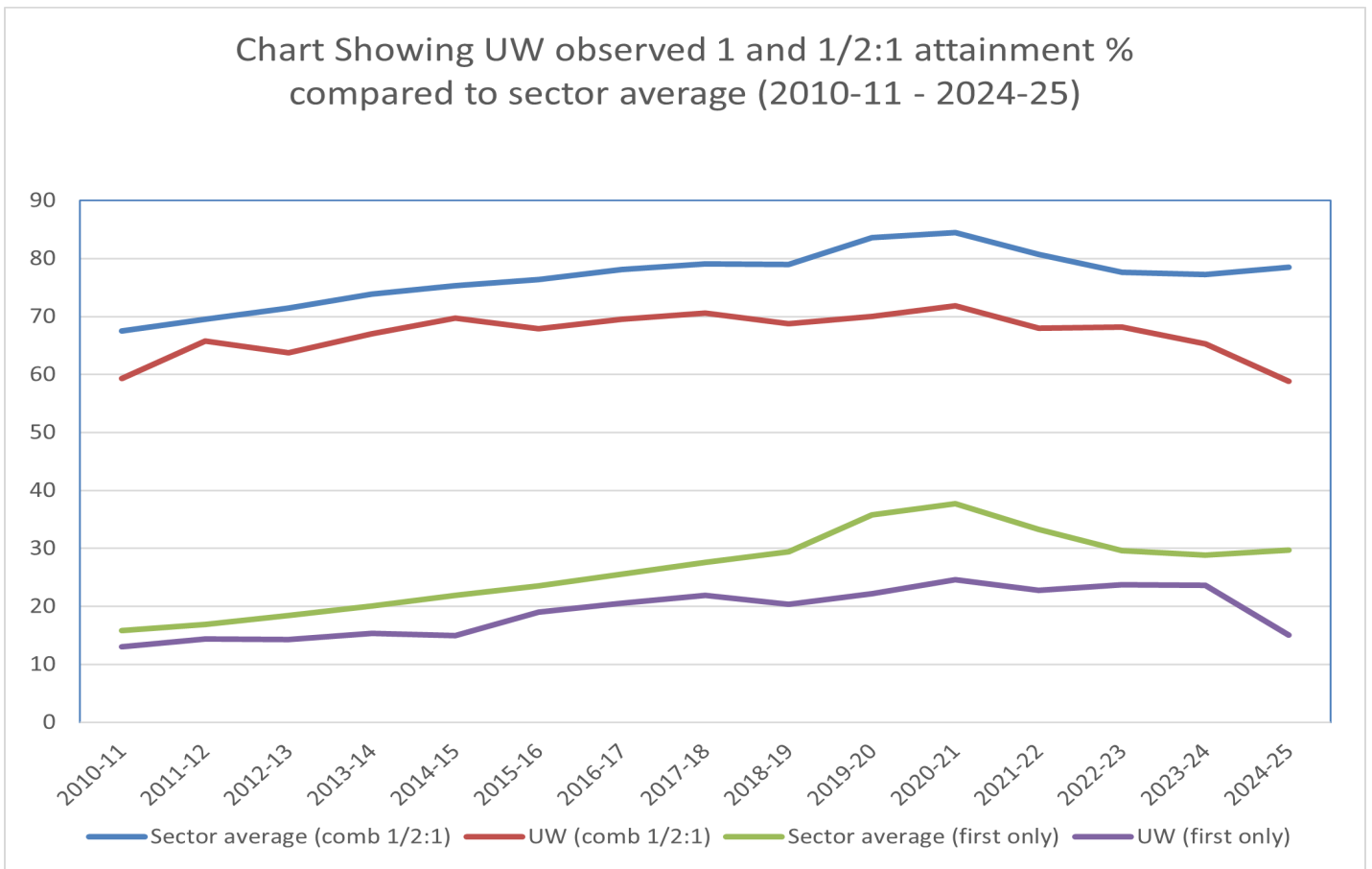
Data taken from OfS, January 2026 ([Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2023-24 - Office for Students](#)) and HESA, January 2026 (www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes#classifications).

- 1.3 Annually since 2018, the OfS has published the outcomes of statistical modelling to assess the extent to which increases/decreases in the proportion of upper Hons classification can be accounted for by prior attainment and subject studied. The aim is to account for sector-wide factors including entrance qualifications and student characteristics which may influence attainment. It also assesses for each provider the extent to which changes in classification outcomes are ‘unexplained’, i.e. cannot be accounted for by the observable factors (e.g. changes in subject mix, entry qualifications, age on entry), included in their statistical model.
- 1.4 The analysis published on 15 January 2026 indicates that the University had a 6pp ‘unexplained’ attainment for first and upper second degrees’ in 2023/24, relative to the attainment in the sector in 2010/11, therefore returning to the levels seen in 2013/14 and

significantly improving from a 13.9pp unexplained change in 2020/21 and 9.3pp in 2022/23.

- 1.5 This is in comparison to an overall ‘unexplained’ figure of 9.8% at sector level for 2023/24, which placed the University 40 out of 142 institutions, in terms of unexplained increases. This is a significant improvement from last year where we placed 99 out of 143 institutions.
- 1.6 Overall, the proportion of first and upper second-degree awards made by the University has been consistently below the sector average throughout the period 2010/11 to 2023/24 (Chart 1). In 2023/24, we reported 65.3%, compared to a sector average of 77.2%. This is influenced by the average entry qualifications of our students, their social characteristics and our subject mix. It is also likely to be impacted by our methodology for degree classifications (see below for further discussion).

Chart 1: Trends in the percentage of first and combined first and upper second-class degrees at UW and at sector level



The University’s long term observed increase in first and upper second-degree classifications from 59.3% in 2010/11 to 65.3% in 2023/24 coincides with a move on the part of the University to become more selective in student recruitment, whilst also strengthening its commitment

to widening participation in a period of growth. Thus, over the period between 2010/11 and 2017/18 the number of University graduates increased by over 60% and they were more highly qualified in terms of average UCAS points on entry.

Even in recent years where the context has been more competitive regarding recruitment, the average UCAS points on entry increased significantly between 2021 and 2023, before stabilising again over the last 3 years, as our total student numbers have remained more static (114 in 2021, 124 in 2022, 129 in 2023, 129 in 2024 and 129 in 2025) ².

- 2 Source: Guardian League Table 2022, 2023 and 2024 (note based on average tariff score for those aged under 21)

- 1.6 The University's Access and Participation Plan evidences where attainment gaps may be and sets clear targets to narrow these in relation to a number of defined criteria.

This plan is regularly reviewed and performance against our targets is assessed by the OfS. The work we have undertaken to date in our most recent OfS assessment (October 2025) indicated that good progress is being made across a number of access and participation objectives, including increasing applications and progression into University for targeted student groups, whilst also reducing the continuation gap for many groups of students.

Progress is being made in particular towards eliminating the Level 4 attainment gap between students entering with non-A-Level qualifications and those with A- Level qualifications, while further work is being set out to continue to reduce the award level gap for students receiving a good degree (1st or 2:1) between students entering with non-A-Level qualifications and those with A- Level qualifications (BTEC or equivalent).

Our targets for narrowing these gaps and associated action can be found in our [Access and Participation Plan 2020-2025](#).

- 1.7 Over the past five years, degree classification trends have been influenced by the pandemic, during which the University introduced a 'safety-net' approach that included additional reassessment opportunities and more flexible assessment arrangements, particularly in 2020 and 2021. These temporary measures, which still met our academic standards and were commended by our External Examiners, appear to have had a small impact on the proportion of first and upper-second class awards, particularly firsts. This may be associated in part to some changes to assessment practice, including unseen to seen examinations, additional time to complete assessments, and some relaxation on the standards of evidence for uncapped reassessments.
- 1.9 In 2021/22 and 2022/23, there were no adjustments to regulations related to Covid, except through the normal provisions of the mitigating circumstances procedures. The statistical analysis from last year

showed that the proportion of first-class honours awarded increased during 2020/21 but then reduced and was maintained during 2021/22 and 2022/23. The change to a new degree algorithm during 2024/25 accounts for the deviation from this trend.

- 1.10 We have been aware of the variation across our range of subjects in grade profile outcomes, such that some subjects have significantly higher proportions of first-class grades awarded than others. Over the last year, we have worked closely with External Examiners to ensure that classification profiles and any issues of 'grade inflation' were reflected and discussed in their reports. ²We are pleased to confirm that there were no concerns reported via any external examiner reports over the last academic year.
- 1.11 Where there might be evidence of inflation of first-class awards at course level, course teams are asked to review their assessment and grade criteria to ensure first class marks are aligned with University descriptors that are based on the sector recognized standards and descriptors.

2 Assessment and marking practices

- 2.1 All undergraduate programmes within the University are subject to a single set of [University regulations](#) to ensure consistent decision-making and equity in outcomes for students. In addition the University has a well-established [Assessment Policy](#). This provides a comprehensive statement of the requirements that govern the design and management of student assessment and marking processes to ensure these meet sector expectations. The University Regulations and the Assessment Policy apply equally to awards delivered through partnership arrangements.
- 2.2 The University utilises a literal grade, rather than a percentage-based system of marking. This has the advantage of enabling and encouraging marks to be awarded across the full grade scale without the false precision of very granular numerical marking, or the cliff edge of 'borderlines'.
- 2.3 The University's quality processes for course approval and review utilise external expertise in line with the UK Quality Code to assure academic standards. All course approvals and reviews therefore include external academic advisers with subject expertise to confirm appropriate engagement with – and alignment to – relevant sector reference points including the OfS sector recognized standards, FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, and PSRB requirements.

² All External Examiners receive a report of degree classification outcomes following the relevant Exam Board, so that they can comment on the distribution of degree classifications for their course and compare with the wider sector and other institutions that they are familiar with.

- 2.4 All courses are required to publish, for students, assessment and grade criteria that are referenced to the [University generic grade descriptors](#), that were developed following the publication of the Outcome classification descriptions for Level 6³, (and which are now incorporated into the OfS Sector recognised standards).
- 2.5 External examiner arrangements are managed according to the principles and procedures set out in the University's [Regulations for the Appointment of External Examiners](#).

The External Examiner reports for 24/25 confirmed that academic standards at the University remain robust and aligned with national frameworks and professional standards. External Examiners consistently reported that student achievements are comparable to those at other UK higher education institutions, and that assessment processes are rigorous, fair, and appropriately aligned with intended learning outcomes. The quality of assessment design was commended, highlighting the variety and innovation in assessment methods, the integration of formative assessments, and the clear mapping of assessments to learning outcomes. Internal moderation processes showed improvement following the introduction of a revised template, and the quality of student feedback was generally high. The Exam Board process was also positively received, with many Examiners highlighting the professionalism and efficiency of online boards.

3 Academic governance

- 3.1 [Academic Board](#) is the central University Committee with oversight of all matters relating to academic regulations, standards and quality. Authority is delegated to key committees, most pertinently the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) and the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (LTSEC). These Committees receive regular reports on key metrics and stakeholder feedback.
- 3.2 An overall report on quality and standards is presented to Academic Board members, and to the Board of Governors, annually. This report considers the University performance against key performance indicators, including the OfS B3 indicators for continuation, completion and progression and internal data on student outcomes for the latest academic year. It also presents evidence of the University course approval processes, external examiners reporting, annual evaluation, partnership activity, apprenticeship provision, and research degree programmes. The report enables Academic Board and the Board of Governors to fulfil their responsibilities for academic governance and specifically in relation to the University continuing to meet the OfS minimum conditions for quality and standards.
- 3.3 The University has a well-embedded annual evaluation process that

operates at course, School and University levels with a view to ensuring the maintenance of academic standards and identifying opportunities for quality enhancement.

- 3.4 Course annual evaluation reports are considered through School-level scrutiny processes to ensure they are appropriately rigorous and set clear actions to address any identified issues. Course reports feed into School evaluation and development plans. This process is reported to ASQEC where the committee considers a summary report. This process applies equally to courses delivered through partnership arrangements.

4 Classification algorithms

- 4.1 All students must achieve 360 credits in order to successfully achieve an honours award. Students have an automatic right to reassessment for any failed module and can repeat the module and take a further reassessment, if necessary, but all such grades are capped. Similarly, grades are capped for late submissions, an outcome that can only be reversed where there is an accepted case for mitigating circumstances.
- 4.2 Like many universities, we do not include the first-year module marks into a student's final degree classification. For all students who entered Level 4 before September 2022, two different methods were used to work out overall marks and calculate which of these two methods would give the student the best possible degree classification. The two methods are explained to students under [Awards information](#). Both methods count the number of grades achieved at module level.
- 4.3 The University recently completed a comprehensive review of our approach to the degree classification which has taken account of the outcome classification descriptors for Level 6 in the OfS sector-recognised standards, and the UKSCQA publication '[Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design](#)' (July 2020).
- 4.4 For all new students who entered at Level 4 from September 2022 and who graduated in 2024/25 and afterwards, two updated methods are being used to calculate degree classifications. The first uses the profile of 120 credits attained at Level 5 and 120 credits attained at Level 6. Grades are weighted on a ratio of 1:2. The second method uses the grade profile of 120 credits attained at Level 6 only.
- 4.5 This new approach removes the process of discounting modules and places greater emphasis on exit velocity. Our regulations do not permit compensation or condonement of modules, and there is no provision for 'borderlines' or discretionary 'lifting' of grades by examination boards. All this is anticipated to have a stabilising influence on the proportion of first-class degrees awarded. This new approach came into effect for students graduating in 2024/25 and largely explains the significant reduction in first class honours and combined first class and upper

second-class honours degrees being recently awarded.

- 4.6 Alongside our reviewed algorithm, we continue to identify classification profiles at course level to identify any that appear to be significantly out of line with the University average and/or sector averages. This is work-in-progress and stands alongside the work we have undertaken over the last five or more years to improve assessment and the consistency of marking practices.

5 Teaching practices and learning resources

- 5.1 The University is committed to creating and sustaining the conditions that enable all students to benefit from an educational experience which is intellectually, socially and personally transformative. We are committed to ensuring that our management of academic quality is enhancement-focused and this continues to include improvements related to teaching resources, student support and curriculum and assessment design. Recent enhancements that are expected to have a positive effect on degree outcomes include:

- Strengthening of the personal academic tutor system as articulated in our [Personal Academic Tutor Policy](#) to focus on supporting student engagement and academic progression
- Strengthening assessment and feedback practices in design, staff effectiveness and student experience.
- Focusing on inclusive course design across all aspects of the student experience, including inclusive approaches to assessment that provide students with some choice in the mode of assessment, provision of support for academic writing skills and of authentic assessments that involve application of learning to real world problems.
- Building staff capability in fostering respectful and effective learning environments that enhance student engagement, retention and overall experience.
- Focusing on strengthening the culture of teaching excellence and recognition by aligning professional development with PSF2023, expanding accredited fellowship pathways and enhancing internal and external visibility through awards, strategic dissemination and inclusive recognition frameworks.
- Embedding generative AI as a confident, ethical and creative part of university culture. Utilising AI in our curriculum, enhancing assessment and teaching practice, strengthening academic integrity and building staff and student capability for an AI-enabled future.
- Focussing on course design and clear course aims and learning outcomes with explicitly aligned learning, teaching and assessment strategies, improving the quality and consistency of feedback to students through strategies for early formative assessment, course specific feedback policies, standardisation of marking and ensuring use of the full range of grades as

- recommended by external examiners
- Ongoing developmental work on academic integrity to increase awareness and understanding on the part of students and staff.

5.2 We were pleased with the 2023 [TEF results](#) which endorsed the very high quality of our teaching and learning and assessment practices and the outstanding quality of our learning resources in supporting students to achieve. Planning is currently underway for preparing the University for the next TEF cycle.

6 Identifying good practice and actions

6.1 As indicated in previous sections of this statement, we have set key actions as part of Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Plans and University-wide projects, aligned to institutional priorities and overarching strategies.

6.2 Over the last three years we have supported all courses to review their assessment criteria and grade descriptors/rubrics to ensure that they reflect sector recognized standards as set out in University generic descriptors for each level of study. We have placed significant emphasis on course teams ensuring consistency in the provision of constructive feedback on student work to enable students to improve.

6.3 External examiners are provided with detailed data on course related classification profiles for all Honours degrees across the University. This practice was reviewed against the QAA principles for external examining back in 2022/23.

6.4 Going forwards we continue to actively consider how the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) impacts on student assessments. Advice and guidance have been provided for staff and students, and Schools have been encouraged to review assessments strategies in the light of these developments. We are actively sharing good practice internally and externally.

7 Concluding Statement

7.1 We continue to maintain strong oversight of the proportions of classifications awarded to our students both at subject and University level. As evidenced by the latest OfS data, we have visibly lower levels of 'unexplained' increase in proportions of first and upper second-class honours, compared to the sector.

7.2 The assessment adjustments introduced during the pandemic, such as pragmatic changes to assessment formats, extended completion times, and a 'safety-net' approach in place of a 'no-detriment' policy, may have contributed to a modest increase in the proportion of first-class honours awarded.

- 7.3 Over recent years we have mapped our assessment and grading criteria to the recognised sector standards and asked all subjects areas to review their criteria to align with these and we continue to update and review our guidance and policies to ensure they remain current. We provided more information to our external examiners so that they can comment on grade profiles and we continue to provide support for our staff in relation to the design and management of assessment and standards, course annual evaluation, and the use of AI. We also completed a review of our approach to classification and agreed a modified approach which came into effect for our 2024/25 graduates. The modifications were guided by sector-supported principles on degree algorithms.
- 7.4 We are committed to and well positioned for, addressing ever-changing sector-wide challenges, including awarding gaps and developments in GenAI, as part of our continued focus on enhancement.
- 7.5 We remain confident that the awards achieved by our students are appropriate and fair, largely as a result of our commitment to focus on inclusive assessment design, and on standardisation, moderation and marking and feedback practices. External examiners consistently commend the University's approaches in this regard, commenting regularly and positively on innovation in assessment, the thorough processes for moderation and the quality of feedback provided to students.

May 2026