



## Royal Holloway, University of London Degree Outcome Statement, June 2020.

This statement follows the guidance and recommendations of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) and the Quality Assurance Agency. It was compiled following internal review by the College's Quality and Standards Committee, and approved by its Academic Board and Council (governing body) in June 2020.

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# 1. Institutional degree classification profile

## 1.1 Overall pattern of awards for undergraduate degrees <sup>1</sup>

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2011-12
First class	28%	25%	25%	20%	22%	19%
Upper Second	54%	57%	55%	56%	53%	54%
Lower Second	17%	15%	17%	21%	21%	22%
Third class / Pass	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%	4%
Entry tariff points (with 3 year lag – *new system from 2015)	142* (2015 entry)	147* (2015 entry)	400 (2014 entry)	398 (2013 entry)	405 (2012 entry)	378 (2009 entry)

## 1.2 Proportion of First and Upper Second Class degree by declared ethnicity <sup>2</sup>

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2011-12
Overall	82%	83%	80%	76%	76%	74%
All BAME	72%	72%	68%	61%	66%	59%
Asian	72%	71%	63%	60%	62%	57%
Black	69%	69%	68%	52%	60%	47%

## 1.3 Proportion of First and Upper Second Class degrees by subject area <sup>3</sup>

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2011-12
Arts & Humanities	91%	92%	91%	89%	88%	88%
Management/ Social Sciences	76%	78%	73%	66%	70%	67%
Sciences	79%	78%	75%	74%	70%	64%

## 1.4 Proportion of First and Upper Second Class degree by other characteristics

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2011-12
Female	85%	86%	85%	81%	81%	79%
Male	76%	78%	72%	69%	69%	66%
IMD Quintile <sup>1.4</sup>	73%	73%	77%	73%	66%	66%
Declared disability	84%	84%	84%	75%	73%	74%

## 1.5 Proportion of First Class degree by declared ethnicity and other characteristics

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2011-12
Overall	28%	25%	25%	20%	22%	19%
All BAME	18%	19%	15%	13%	16%	13%
Female	29%	25%	24%	22%	21%	20%
Male	26%	26%	26%	18%	25%	18%
IMD Quintile <sup>1.4</sup>	21%	17%	15%	21%	15%	13%
Declared disability	31%	23%	27%	16%	17%	22%

## 1.6 Proportion of First Class degree by subject area

	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2011-12
Overall	28%	25%	25%	20%	22%	19%
Arts & Humanities	30%	22%	24%	18%	21%	23%
Management/Social Sciences	24%	25%	25%	19%	25%	17%
Sciences	29%	30%	25%	24%	22%	18%

<sup>1</sup> Percentages are of all students awarded in the year and excludes students who fail to complete.

<sup>2</sup> Ethnicity is as self-declared by the student on (re)enrolment. Ethnicities are grouped to align with use of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) by UCAS and by the Office for Students. The broad ethnic category 'Black' includes students self-declaring in HESA groups 21, 22 and 29. The broad ethnic category 'Asian' includes students self-declaring in HESA groups 31, 32, 33, 34 and 39. See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c18051/a/ethnic>

<sup>3</sup> Disciplinary divisions correspond to Royal Holloway's School divisions.

<sup>4</sup> English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, highest (ie most deprived) quintile. This data uses English-domiciled students only.

## 2. Assessment and Marking Practices

Marking practices at Royal Holloway are rigorous and systematic. All marking is anonymous, where practicable. There is compulsory double-marking or moderation of marking, following clear regulations. While Royal Holloway has sought to diversify forms of assessment, unseen timed examinations remain a key element of our assessment regimes. There are significant disciplinary differences, but in the institution as a whole in 2018-19 around 40% of summative marks are from unseen timed examination.

All programmes at Royal Holloway are assessed in relation to detailed marking criteria that reference benchmarking statements and other sector reference points. Academic staff are given guidance and training in the use of these criteria. There are specific, discipline-appropriate criteria for different forms of assessment. These criteria are publicised and explained to students, and one aspect of degree improvement over the past decade is that students have much greater awareness of the requirements of assessment. Criteria-based assessment is an integral mandatory element of the required training for new academic staff that leads to Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). HEA accredited Continuing Professional Development for established academic staff also requires detailed reflection on assessment/marketing/feedback and quality assurance practices.

In 2017-18, Royal Holloway introduced a system of stepped marking (with three assessment points in each class) to bring greater consistency to marking, and to ensure equal treatment for all students. The system was also introduced in response to sustained and consistent feedback from External Examiners that the full range of marks should be used, and that in particular, examples of outstanding undergraduate work should be awarded marks in the 80%+ and very exceptionally in the 90%+ range. This shift contributed to the increase in First Class degrees in 2018-19.

Assessment at Royal Holloway is assured through an extensive system of external expertise, complying fully with expectations and practices set out in the UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance on External Expertise as published in November 2018. The system of external expertise has developed in accordance with previous Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Codes. In 2018-19 the undergraduate degrees were reviewed by around 150 External Examiners, all subject experts from established UK universities, appointed in line with the detailed guidance in chapter B7 of the 2011 QAA Quality Code. External Examiners are asked to give signed assurance that standards of award are in line with those at comparable institutions, and since 2018-19 have been explicitly asked to give assurance that standards are also consistent between cohorts at Royal Holloway (External Examiners typically serve for 3 years). External Examiners routinely inspect samples of marked work, and comment on appropriate standards for individual modules as well as programme outcomes. External expertise is also central to programme development, validation, revalidation and periodic review. In all these exercises reference is made, where applicable, to relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Standards. Many of Royal Holloway's undergraduate degrees also undergo regular reaccreditation by relevant [Professional, Statutory and Regulatory bodies](#).

Royal Holloway has taken steps to strengthen external scrutiny of award standards. The College is now organised into Schools comprising around 4 or 5 cognate disciplines. As well as retaining subject specialist External Examiners, in 2019-20 the College appointed a Chief External Examiner for each School, whose role includes the calibration of awards against award pattern in other universities, and assurance of consistency of standards over time. These are experienced External Examiners. The College has also appointed a new Principal External Examiner (see section 6).

### 3. Academic governance

The Academic Board has overall responsibility for academic standards at Royal Holloway. Its functions in this respect work primarily through the system of Examination Boards, and its Quality and Standards Committee. From 2019-20, there is a system of Departmental Assessment Boards (DABs), which review the marking and standards of work on individual modules and programmes, reporting to School Progression and Awards Boards (SPABs), that make decisions about student awards, progression and extenuating circumstances cases. Both DABs and SPABs are required to review standards in relation to the wider sector and previous cohorts, and the parity of standards between on-campus provision and programmes delivered through partnership arrangements. External Examiners attend and sign-off on module standards at DABs, while Chief External Examiners sign-off on award standards at SPABs. All awards delivered through partnership arrangements are subject to Royal Holloway's marking and moderation policies, with overall oversight of standards monitored by Chief External Examiners. The College's Executive Committee for Assessment (ECA) has institutional oversight of the system of Boards and Awards. The new Principal External Examiner is a member of the ECA.

Detailed scrutiny of quality, standards, regulations and awards is undertaken by the Quality and Standards Committee of the Academic Board (QASC). QASC reviews patterns of award on Royal Holloway programmes, particularly monitoring changes in award pattern and marked differences from sector norms. QASC reviews Royal Holloway award patterns using statistical analyses that analyse award patterns and entry tariffs across the sector and at similar institutions. QASC also reviews comments on standards from External Examiners. In recent years, QASC has asked Departments to review and modify forms of assessment, assessment weighting and assessment criteria.

Council, the College's Governing Body provides independent scrutiny of academic quality assurance at Royal Holloway, particularly through the work of the Council Academic Quality Assurance Committee (CAQAC). Each year QASC, working with the College's Academic Quality and Policy Office (AQPO), produces the Annual Quality and Standards Report, which includes statistical details of awards, and a record of External Examining activity and reports. This is approved by the Academic Board and is scrutinised by CAQAC. CAQAC may audit procedures and cross-examine College officers. Subject to acceptable standards, CAQAC recommends that Council signs-off the Annual Quality and Standards Report. This in the past was required by HEFCE and has been maintained as a way of indicating Council's confidence that Royal Holloway is meeting the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration.

### 4. Classification algorithm

Royal Holloway has a single degree algorithm that applies across all undergraduate disciplines and degree programmes, with appropriate and consistent variations for four-year integrated Masters MSci and MEng degrees, transfer students, years abroad, years in industry etc. Full details of academic regulations can be found [here](#).

For three year (or equivalent) undergraduate degrees (BA, BMus, BSc, BSc (Econ), LLB.):

- First Stage (Year One for a full-time student) is on a pass-fail basis and does not contribute to the final year classification.
- The Final Average is the average of performance at Stage Two and Stage Three (Years Two and Three for full time students completing in three years), with Stage Three double-weighted, calculated to one decimal place:

**Final Average =  $\frac{2 \times \text{2nd Stage Average} + \text{final Stage Average}}{3}$**

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- The Final Average is used for classification, so students achieving 70.0% or better are awarded First Class honours; 60.0% to 69.9% are awarded Upper Second Class honours; 50.0% to 59.9% are awarded Lower Second Class honours; and 40.0% to 49.9% Third Class honours.

- Students within 2% of a class boundary who have achieved at least 60 credits in the final stage (half of the available 120 credits in the final stage) in the higher class are automatically raised. So, for example, a student with a Final Average of 58.8%, but with four 15 credits modules graded above 60% (half the year) would be awarded an Upper Second Class degree.

The algorithm is simple and consistent across all disciplines in the College. It achieves fair outcomes for all students by avoiding disciplinary variations and 'local practice', and potentially unfair discretionary decisions. The assessment of Stage One on a pass-fail basis helps us to support all students to benefit from and succeed in higher education. It recognises the importance and potential difficulties of transition to university, and the development of learning skills among a diversity of students. Our algorithm recognises the progressive nature of university learning by double-weighting the final stage of degrees.

The core algorithm has been unchanged since 2007. There have been changes to the zone for raising. This was set at 2% in 2011, but with discretionary powers to raise given to Examination Boards. To ensure equal treatment for all students, this was changed to automatic raising subject to the '60 credits in class above in final year' rule from 2014-15 onwards.

Royal Holloway has tight rules and limits on resits. In general terms resits are available to allow students to progress or graduate by resitting failed courses. Except in documented and approved extenuating circumstances, resit marks are capped at 40% (50% for final year MSci and MEng courses), and do not have a material effect on classification outcomes. Students without documented and approved extenuating circumstances are limited to two attempts at a module.

Emergency temporary regulations were applied in spring 2020 in response to the Covid-19 emergency. Third term assessments were made through 'open book' style and other alternative timed assessments, and through extended coursework. Finalists were given a 'Safety Net' (or 'no detriment') baseline classification below which their final class could not fall, based on all counting summative assessments completed before March 2020. The final year mark entered into the classification algorithm was based on the average of the best 90 of 120 credits. Full details of these changes and the measures taken for other students are in the [Emergency Regulations](#).

## 5. Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

A number of enhancements to teaching practices, learning resources and programme design have contributed to improved student performance in the past decade:

- Royal Holloway has made significant investment in Library and digital provision of learning resources, most notably with the opening of a major new Library building in 2017 at a cost of £57m. There is substantial and measurable evidence of greater student use of physical and digital resources, and the creation of a central learning space on the campus has positively impacted student engagement and learning culture. For example, between August 2017 and August 2019, the number of student library visits increased by 22%, from 0.84m to 1.02m visits, while student requests for digital full-text articles increased by 16% from 1.46m to 1.70m.
- As noted above, Royal Holloway makes greater use of marking criteria, and there is greater transparency of marking criteria, particularly through the use of rubrics and criteria-based feedback. Our students now have a much clearer sense of what is required to achieve higher classification marks. National Student Survey scores for assessment and feedback have improved from 63% in 2009 to 74% in 2019, and work continues to further improve this aspect of our work.
- There has been review of assessment strategies. Royal Holloway has diversified its assessment but retains a substantial proportion of unseen examination. It has also addressed bunching of assessment deadlines for coursework, and in some disciplines has decreased the volume of coursework assessment. This involved systematic comparison with other institutions and was often instigated by External Examiners' comments on assessment regimes. Assessment at Royal Holloway has become better organised and managed, giving students greater opportunity to fulfil their potential.

- iv. Royal Holloway has enhanced support for students with increased focus on study skills. This has been provided much more systematically within degree programmes, with a strong focus on the transition to university. This also supported by a College-wide Centre for the Development of Academic Skills (CeDAS), which has provided extensive structured support in academic writing, and in key numeracy skills underpinning degrees in sciences and social sciences. This additional support for study skills has helped students across the range of award outcomes but is likely to have been particularly significant at the 2:2/2:1 borderline. Uptake of CeDAS training has increased substantially in the past decade and continues to grow; for example, between 2016-17 and 2018-19 there was an 11% increase in students using this support.
- v. Royal Holloway has improved the professional development of new and established academic staff, notably through Higher Education Academy-accredited CPD that requires detailed reflection on assessment/markings/feedback and quality assurance approaches. The proportion of academic staff with HEA fellowship increased from 36% in 2014-15 to 49% in 2018-19.
- vi. The details of degree results above indicate attainment gaps for some groups of students. In line with our Access and Participation Plan, and our commitment to deliver successful outcomes for all student groups, Royal Holloway will support these student groups to achieve higher degree classifications, and will continue to target support, resources and curriculum changes at achieving those objectives.

## 6. Identifying good practice and actions, and further review

Items i-v in the previous section are identified as examples of good practice.

In addition, the College has adopted a data-led approach to the scrutiny of standards through the work of QASC. This involves annual calibration of award patterns against the sector and similar institutions, with analysis of entry tariff patterns. This takes place discipline by discipline.

Royal Holloway supports initiatives to maintain the standards and value of awards. It will undertake further actions to strengthen standards in 2020 and 2021.

- i. Royal Holloway has further strengthened its External Examining system and academic governance in 2020. School-level Chief Examiners were appointed in 2019, with responsibility for assurance of consistency of standards between cohorts. The College has now in 2020 appointed an Independent Principal External Examiner with responsibility for assurance of overall institutional standards and assessment regimes. They are an external member of the College's Executive Committee for Assessment. Their annual report is part of the scrutiny of quality assurance and standards by Council.
- ii. Royal Holloway is strengthening data, guidance and training for External Examiners. Data packs for External Examiners were extended for 2019-20 exam boards, and the College is providing more detailed data about past student performance on individual modules. The College will also strengthen its engagement with the professional development of External Examiners through active participation in Advance HE initiatives.
- iii. Royal Holloway's core algorithm and resit policy is in line with sector-norms and expectations. We are strongly committed to retaining a single, simple system to ensure fairness between students. Royal Holloway's degree algorithm meets the expectations and principles set out in the UKSCQA *Principles for Effective Degree Algorithm Design* published in July 2020. We welcome this sector level review of algorithms and zones for raising to achieve more consistency.