# BIRMINGHAM NEWMAN UNIVERSITY

# UPDATED DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT FOR 2023/24

## Purpose

The purpose of this Statement is to demonstrate how Birmingham Newman University meets the expectation that “The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards”, (that the degree awarded keeps its value over time and is recognised nationally).

## Authority

The highest and main authority in the University rests with the University Council with a number of responsibilities delegated to Senate, with operational implementation overseen by the Learning, Teaching and Academic Quality Committee, mainly through its oversight and management of the programme approval and annual monitoring procedures, and through oversight and monitoring of external examiners’ reports. Senate receives reports and minutes from the Learning, Teaching and Academic Quality Committee and other committees, including the Student Success Strategy Group, and monitors progression and outcomes for all students.

The University has a dedicated Student Success Directorate and supports the development of fellows of the Higher Education Academy (now called Advance HE), within the institution as a way of enhancing teaching and learning. Over 90% of academic staff hold an HEA fellowship (in comparison with the sector as a whole (47%)).

## Widening Participation

Newman University is proud of its successes in providing university education to students from a diverse range of backgrounds. It consistently exceeds sector averages and benchmarks for recruiting students from under-represented groups including mature students, disabled students, students from low participation areas and students from families with no previous HE experience. It is a fundamental part of Newman’s Catholic mission and ethos to offer a high quality, supportive yet challenging formative education to all sections of society and Newman is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive community.

## University Processes

All programme validation (approval) and revalidations (reviews) are required to include a statement relating to their degree outcomes and to provide relevant data as well as reflecting on the learning outcomes statements for their programmes. All validation and revalidation panels include a critical friend/external examiner at the first (faculty) stage and have at least one academic panel member who is external to the University with appropriate subject expertise for the final stage as well as using colleagues from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies and/or industry where required.

The University employs a system of moderation (where another academic reviews how the work submitted has been marked), and the work is then subject to external examining, (an academic in the same field at another university) before grades are confirmed by the Programme Assessment Boards. As part of further development for the University, named colleagues have taken the new Advance HE course for external examiners and are undertaking the further course (Developing the Developer) to enable them to provide this training to all academic colleagues within the University as well as to the University appointed external examiners.

All external examiner reports are reviewed by the Learning, Teaching and Academic Quality Committee and any items for consideration as well as good and innovative practice are highlighted. The external examiner reports confirm the appropriateness of our approach with the external examiners confirming that sector-recognised standards are met, that standards set for awards are appropriate, and that standards of student achievement are comparable with those elsewhere. The Learning, Teaching and Academic Quality Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students), is also responsible for approving the appointment of all external examiners including those of collaborative partners.

## University Regulations on how classifications are calculated

In order for a student to be considered for a degree classification, they have to have successfully passed 360 credits of modules, with 120 credits at each of levels 4, 5 and 6 of their programmes. For the four-year BA Primary programme with recommendation for QTS, 480 credits are required with at least 180 credits at level 6 and up to 60 credits at level 7.

The classification for all undergraduate programmes is a 40/60 weighting (the second year/Level 5 provides 40% of the outcome, and the third year/Level 6, 60% of the outcome). The higher weighting, we give to the final year of study reflects ‘exit velocity’ and also reflects that as students’ progress through their programme of study it becomes more challenging. The lowest single pass mark (for a 20 credit module at either level 5 or 6 is discounted but all other marks are included in the calculation. We do not include the marks from the first year (level 4) of study; as a University with a commitment to widening participation, we focus on the transition to higher education during this first year.

The Academic Regulations are available to all students on the University website, and intranet and are linked to every Moodle module page.

The regulations are reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they remain current and in keeping with Regulatory and Sector requirements.

(<https://www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/general-academic-regulations/>)

Assessment   
The assessment of student learning is an essential part of higher education. Assessment has a significant impact on staff time, student behaviour, the University’s reputation and students’ future lives. Assessment for learning serves important purposes in terms of directing student effort, focusing particular attention on key aspects of the curriculum and providing opportunities for feedback on learning. Assessment enables students to demonstrate their learning through the meeting of learning outcomes and enables the University to quality assure and set out academic standards.

The University’s principles of assessment are aligned to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and are set out in the principles below. The University recognises the need for subject level contextualisation.

### **Principle 1 – Assessment design is holistic and as an integral part of programme design should relate directly to the programme aims, learning outcomes and teaching activities**

Assessment design should begin with the programme then go down to modular level where relevant. The programme design must ensure that learning outcomes, teaching strategies, assessment criteria and methods are developed in accordance with the academic level of study, using relevant descriptors and consistent language. Furthermore, they must be aligned with each other to support effective learning and reliable assessment.

**Principle 2 - Assessment should be reliable, consistent, fair and valid.**

To ensure reliability, consistency, fairness and validity assessment must be objective and repeatable over time. Assessment tasks should clearly articulate assessment criteria, weightings and level descriptors that are understood by staff and students involved in the assessment process. Assessment criteria should be sufficiently robust to ensure reasonable parity between the judgements of different assessors. Policies and procedures for marking assessments and moderating marks must be clearly articulated, consistently operated and regularly reviewed. Where borderline marks are identified, policies for the consideration of grades to be awarded should be consistent, fair and freely available to staff and students. The validity of an assessment (how well a test measures what it claims to measure) should be reviewed regularly reviewed, supported by external subject specialists and external examiners.

### **Principle 3 Assessment should support the embedding of subject knowledge and develop a range of skills**

Assessment tasks should principally reflect the nature of the discipline or subject. Where appropriate they should reflect professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. The design should consider all modes of delivery and environment. Variety and choice, where appropriate, in methods of assessment should help to develop a range of skills and assess a range of learning strategies.

**Principle 4 - Assessment should be inclusive and equitable**

Every student should have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their learning and achievement through the assessment process. When designing assessments, the needs of students including location, additional learning needs and protected characteristics should be carefully considered. Furthermore, assessment should value students’ cultural and educational backgrounds and experiences. As far as is possible without compromising academic standards, inclusive and equitable assessment should ensure that tasks and procedures do not disadvantage any group or individual.

### **Principle 5 - Information about assessment should be explicit, accessible, transparent and timely**

Clear, accurate, consistent and timely information on assessment tasks, criteria and procedures should be accessible to all students, staff and other external assessors or examiners in a timely manner. It is essential that students are clearly informed of the purpose and requirements for each assessment task and standards expected. As part of their learning students should be supported to understand and interpret assessment criteria and how these will be used by staff to recognise differential student achievement.

**Principle 6 - The amount of assessed work should be purposeful, manageable and efficient.**

The scheduling of assignments and the amount of assessed work required should provide a reliable and valid profile of achievement without overloading staff or students. The spread, number and methods of assessment should be considered alongside other modules that run concurrently in mind to ensure the amount of assessment is not excessive and that the assessment of the learning outcomes within the programme is not overly duplicated. Coordination amongst the academic team and an overview of the assessment deadlines across a programme avoids bunching where possible, given students’ choice around modules.

### **Principle 7 - Formative and summative assessment should be included in each module**

Formative assessments have a significant developmental purpose and enable students to engage and learn more effectively by providing feedback on performance and feedforward on how it can be improved. Student reflection can make an important contribution to their learning, as such formative assessment is considered part of the learning and teaching but does not count towards the formal word count or the module grade. It is good practice to include formative diagnostic assessment at each level.

Summative assessments indicate the degree of a student’s success in meeting the assessment criteria to measure the intended learning outcomes of a module or programme.

Formative and summative assessment should be incorporated into each module to ensure that the purposes of assessment are adequately addressed.

### **Principle 8 - Timely feedback that promotes learning and facilitates improvement should be an integral part of the assessment process**

Students are entitled to timely and useful feedback on formative assessment tasks, and on summative tasks. The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be made clear to students in advance. Feedback (including feed-forward) should reflect student attainment relevant to the learning outcomes and marking criteria for the assessment task. Feedback on assessments must explicitly relate to the stated learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Furthermore, it should build on discussion and opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and increasingly support students to become independent learners.

### **Principle 9 – Assessment must encourage academic integrity**

Assessment should be designed to minimise opportunities for students to commit academic misconduct. This includes the use of a suitable variety of assessment methods and minimising the opportunity for students to incorporate plagiarised work.

### **Principle 10 – Assessment should be authentic**

Assessment should help students develop as active citizens able to make a positive contribution to the world of work or wherever they find themselves. To do this, assessment needs to be authentic; promoting engagement with current, real world issues, encouraging care, problem-posing, research informed practice and applied problem solving.

### **Principle 11 – The assessment diet should promote student partnership**

Student agency in the design, choice and process of assessment should be maximised. Student assessment literacy should be promoted by involving students in the assessment process as much as possible. The range of assessments across the programme should be designed with student input to ensure all students have opportunities to demonstrate their varied capabilities.

### **Principle 12 - Staff development policy and strategy should include assessment**

All those involved in the assessment of students must be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities. As such it is expected that staff will engage with relevant CPD opportunities and this will be monitored as part of the appraisal process.

A new scheme of Peer Observation is also in place as a method of sharing good practice in delivery to students and the University has a policy that every student has a Personal Tutor both for their academic and pastoral issues. Students are expected to meet with their personal tutors at least once a semester.

The University also uses SEAtS for monitoring attendance and engagement and help identify those students who may be in need of further support.

**Degree Outcomes 2017-18 to 2022-23**

This is an analysis of the University’s degree outcomes compared with national data. It covers the most recent five-year period up to the most recent national data available which relates to the academic year 2022-23

**Outcomes for individual classes of degree**

The table and graph below compare the results for Birmingham Newman University with those obtained nationally.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | I/IIi | | Other | | |  | University | National | University | National | | 2018-2019 | 66 | 76 | 34 | 23 | | 2019-2020 | 70 | 82 | 30 | 18 | | 2020-2021 | 70 | 82 | 30 | 17 | | 2021-2022 | 71 | 78 | 29 | 21 | | 2022-2023 | 71 | 78 | 29 | 23 | |  |

Results from the University follow the national trend in awarding most upper seconds and least thirds or pass degrees. Between 2017-18 and 2018-2019 more lower seconds were awarded than were firsts, which is the opposite of the national situation. Since 2019-20 a similar number of firsts and lower seconds have been awarded while nationally there have continued to be more firsts.

**University**

The data broken down by each class of degree in percentages is given in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | First | Upper S | Lower S | Third/Pass |
| 2013-2014 | 9.48 | 46.71 | 35.35 | 8.45 |
| 2014-2015 | 11.90 | 45.77 | 33.37 | 8.97 |
| 2015-2016 | 12.52 | 50.42 | 28.26 | 8.80 |
| 2016-2017 | 18.23 | 47.06 | 29.27 | 5.43 |
| 2017-2018 | 18.47 | 41.85 | 30.35 | 9.33 |
| 2018-2019 | 16.21 | 50.15 | 25.74 | 7.90 |
| 2019-2020 | 24.31 | 45.69 | 23.14 | 6.86 |
| 2020-2021 | 20.52 | 49.13 | 19.87 | 10.48 |
| 2021-2022 | 25.77 | 45.59 | 23.79 | 4.85 |
| 2022-2023 | 29.38 | 41.91 | 20.05 | 8.66 |

This shows a consistent increase in the number of first-class degrees awarded over the time period considered while there has been a consistent decrease in the number of lower seconds until the most recent year. There were sharp increase in the number of upper second class degrees awarded in 2018-19 and in first class degrees in 2019-20, but these both followed recent decreases in those classifications. The number of upper seconds subsequently fell in 2019-20, rose slightly in the subsequent year and in 2021-22 fell to a similar level as in 2019-20. The number of first-class degrees increased again in 2021-22 and 2022-23.

The data has been grouped according to good degrees (firsts and upper seconds) and other classes in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | I/Iii | Other | Difference |
| 2013-2014 | 56.19 | 43.81 | 12.38 |
| 2014-2015 | 57.66 | 42.34 | 15.32 |
| 2015-2016 | 62.94 | 37.06 | 25.89 |
| 2016-2017 | 65.29 | 34.71 | 30.59 |
| 2017-2018 | 60.31 | 39.69 | 20.63 |
| 2018-2019 | 66.36 | 33.64 | 32.72 |
| 2019-2020 | 70.00 | 30.00 | 40.00 |
| 2020-2021 | 69.65 | 30.35 | 39.30 |
| 2021-2022 | 71.37 | 28.63 | 42.73 |
| 2022-2023 | 71.29 | 28.71 | 42.58 |

When grouped in this way there is a sharp divergence between the number of good degrees and others since 2017-18. The difference has increased by 30% between 2013-14 and 2022-23

There has been considerable investment in Student Success over the past five years, including a substantial increase in the services and support available to students, and greater investment in the Newman Students’ Union to provide additional support to students as well as further investment in facilities and resources. Enhancements to learning and teaching and the recent establishment of a Directorate of Student Success and the increase in fellowship in the membership of Advance HE and the number of staff with higher degrees have also contributed to the increased attainment.

The University’s Student Success directorate includes provision for, amongst other things:

* **Academic Support Advisors** who advice, signpost and assist students in the resolution of pastoral concerns relating to academic studies.
* **Learning Development and Academic Support** who support students with academic writing and acquisition of study skills via online resources, 1:1 appointments or e-mail support.
* **E-Learning** who provide students with support on navigating the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and assessment submission via the VLE.