Degree Outcomes Statement 2024

1. Institutional degree classification profile

University College of Estate Management (UCEM) is the leading provider of supported online education solely for the built environment, with over 100 years' experience of providing learning opportunities of the highest quality.[1] UCEM provides industry-accredited qualifications through supported online education, accessible from anywhere in the world. The majority of students study part-time whilst in employment. Students are supported to balance their study alongside work and personal commitments. More than half of UCEM undergraduate students are apprentices.
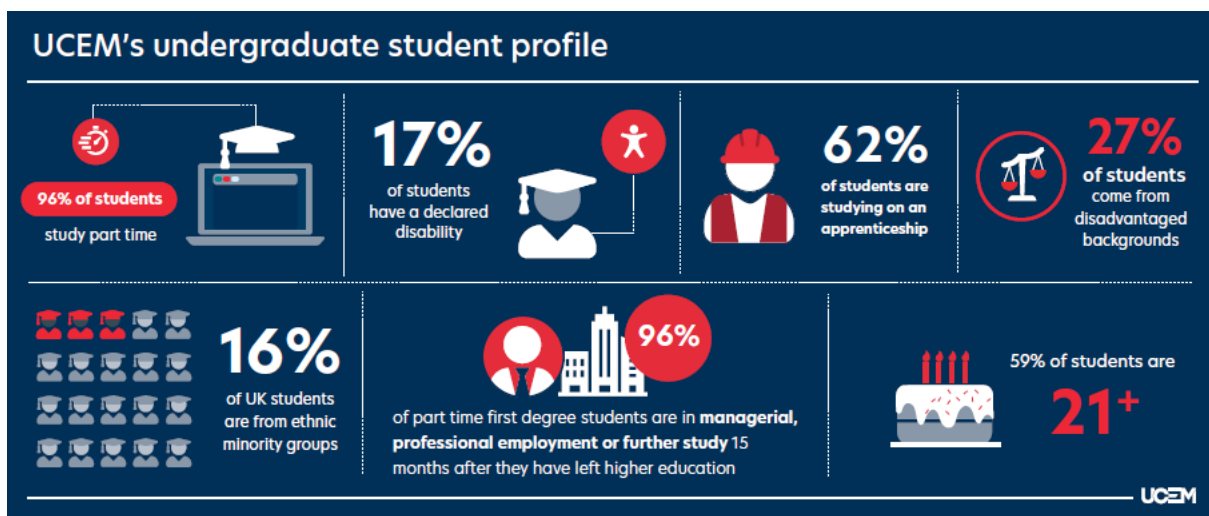

Table 1: UCEM student attainment rates 2018/19 to 2022/23[2]

Year	Number of awards (rounded to nearest 10)	Upper second class honours	First class honours	Good Honours
2022/23	350	53%	24%	76%
2021/22	340	54%	21%	75%
2020/21	480	52%	25%	77%
2019/20	180	48%	23%	71%
2018/19	170	44%	17%	61%

An analysis of the data reveals the following:

- the proportion of students achieving good honours has been consistent over the last three years. This follows an increase in previous years, which can be partly attributed to enhancements in learning and teaching practices (outlined in section 5) and changes to the characteristics of UCEM's graduating cohort with the increase of students studying as part of an apprenticeship, with the attainment rate amongst

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[1] This built environment focus means that UCEM has a very narrow subject offer. Accordingly, analysis by subject is not presented.

[2] This data is derived from an analysis of UCEM's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student return. All of UCEM's programmes are delivered online, which means our international students study outside of the UK and are therefore excluded from the Student return (the return is collected for all students registered at the reporting provider and studying within the UK; students studying wholly outside of the UK for the duration of their programme are excluded). Due to some small population sizes these numbers have been rounded to the nearest 10.

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this group being higher. UCEM's attainment rate remains below the overall sector attainment rate for 2021/22 for UK-domiciled, full-time first degree graduates of 79.6%[3];

- the proportion of students awarded a First Class degree increased from 21.2% in 2021/22 to 23.7% in 2022/23; however, the rate is still significantly below the overall rate for 2021/22 for UK-domiciled, full-time first degree graduates of 32.8%;

- all students entering UCEM's BSc programmes, regardless of their highest qualification on entry, have an opportunity of achieving a good honours degree, evidencing that UCEM's entry requirements are appropriate;

- there is a gap in the attainment rate in 2022/23 between the following groups of students:

  - young (83.4%) and mature (70.4%)[4];

  - female (85.6%) and male (72.7%);

  - white (78.8%) and ethnic minority (61.2%); however, this gap (17.6%) is lower than 2021/22 (23.3%);

  - from Index of Multiple Deprivation[5] (IMD) quintiles 4-5 (83.0%) and quintiles 1-2 (63.6%);

  - those who entered their programme with no credit exemptions (recognition of prior learning) (80.7%) and those who entered with exemptions: students with under 120 credit exemptions (64.3%); students with 120 credit exemptions (65.6); students with over 120 credit exemptions (40.0%);

- whilst the attainment rate in 2022/23 is lower amongst students that have declared a disability (72.6%) compared to those with no known disability (77.1%), those disabled with an additional support plan perform consistently (78.4%) with their peers.

2. Assessment and marking practices

UCEM's assessment strategy is based on using a range of assessment formats that encourage self-reflection and the opportunity to make linkages to key academic literature and the incorporation of experiential learning and industry practice. The types of approaches to assessment used are coursework, computer-based, portfolio, practical and project. UCEM ensures that assessment meets sector standards by:

- using contextualised grading descriptors, informed by The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) 2024);

- setting assessments informed by QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and the requirements of UCEM's accrediting Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs);

- ensuring assessments are scrutinised at authoring stage by External Examiners;

- ensuring that appropriate assessment direction and support is provided, particularly in respect of what a threshold, good and excellent assessment should look like;

- ensuring that there is appropriate consideration of student mitigating circumstances, support for students with disabilities through additional support plans and there is a clear procedure for consideration of student appeals;

- ensuring that marking criteria have been fairly, accurately, and consistently applied during first marking;

- ensuring all assessments are moderated (including statistical analysis of markers against the marking team, and EE review) in line with a QAA best practice informed UCEM policy;

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[3] Full report available at Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010-11 to 2021-22 (officeforstudents.org.uk).

[4] Consistent with HESA grouping 'young' here includes all students aged under 21 on entry whilst 'mature' is any student that is aged 21 or over.

[5] The English IMD measures relative deprivation for small areas (Lower Super Output Areas, LSOAs) in England, and ranks LSOAs in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). Further continuation about the English IMD is available on the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government website. Available at www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019 and www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015

- using Module Leaders reports to provide detailed analysis across the modules that feeds into level review and programme review.

UCEM appoints External Examiners with reference to the criteria laid down in the UCEM Code of Practice, to ensure they are suitably qualified and have relevant subject experience. For each programme UCEM appoints both an academic and industry practitioner External Examiner which has the advantage of encouraging the symbiosis of theory and practice knowledge. UCEM's External Examiners consistently agree that the marking and classification criteria are set at the appropriate level, that marking/grading criteria are properly and consistently applied, and that marking and grading is fair and reliable. UCEM has reviewed its external examining practices to ensure that they align with the UK Standing Committee for Quality (UKSCQA) External Examiners Principles.

Generative Artificial Intelligence is becoming a greater feature in coursework based assessments and UCEM is developing an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage policy to guide management and governance of AI across the institution.

In 2023, UCEM established an Assessment Steering Group to provide oversight and strategic coherence to developing assessments. This group provides an opportunity to direct assessment approaches at programme level and ensure the approach remains authentic and relevant to all stakeholders including students, employers and PSRB competency frameworks.

3. Academic governance

UCEM governance structures provide assurance that the value of qualifications is protected over time and that marking practices are adhered to. The Board of Examiners, reporting into the Academic Board, manages the scrutiny of results, utilising External Examiner critical review. Academic Board receives annual reports summarising the feedback received from UCEM External Examiners. Academic Board is the guardian of the academic quality and standards of UCEM's awards and, through its subcommittees, oversees the programme review and approval processes and the wider review of academic regulations, policies and procedures. Academic Board reports to the Board of Trustees, which receives reports on the maintenance of academic quality and standards including data on student achievement. There are student members on UCEM's main deliberative committees including Academic Board and on UCEM's Board of Trustees.

UCEM participated in the Advance HE Academic Governance Benchmarking Collaborative Project in 2023 to provide assurance around its academic governance arrangements. This provided assurance that 100% of Academic Board members were in agreement that the annual reports provide the Academic Board with a high degree of confidence in the standards of it awards and in the quality of academic and service provision.

UCEM has made use of external assistance in assuring the validity of the degree outcomes statement through the external representatives on the deliberative committees at which the statement has been reviewed and through the specific review by an External Examiner.

4. Classification algorithms

UCEM has a single algorithm to ensure fairness, consistency, and transparency which is made clear to students and other stakeholders within the regulations. UCEM awards are classified based solely on Level 6 modules, supported by zones of consideration on borderline classifications where the candidate can demonstrate dominant quality at the higher classification. UCEM's rationale for this approach is driven by:

- a significant proportion of students joining UCEM with advanced standing at both Level 4 and Level 5;
- the current approach assessing exit velocity; and
- UCEM intending to continue to offer flexible study options.

UCEM is committed to undertaking a review of degree algorithms on a 5-yearly cycle with the next review due in 2025.

UCEM offers students four attempts at a module (a first sit, a resubmission, a retake, and a resubmission of the retake) except where required otherwise by apprenticeship standards assessment plans. Overall module marks achieved at resubmission or retake are capped at the module pass mark unless there are valid mitigating circumstances, and the student has been given an attempt disregarded and the submission is treated as a first submission.

UCEM uses a zone of borderline consideration with marks only uplifted following Module Leader review where they have assessed that the student has met all learning outcomes.

5. Teaching practices and learning resources

UCEM continues to review and enhance its teaching practices and learning resources. These enhancements:

- enabled teaching and assessment approaches to be co-developed with learning designers and editors. The impact has been that learning materials are more logically structured in learner friendly sections, using a range of accessible online resources, and more effectively support students within a structured student-centred online learning environment;

- evidence a shift in focus from resources to activities, to deepen students' engagement and maintain their study focus, as part of developing high-level learning relevant to students' workplaces;

- strengthened module monitoring and evaluation, through analysis of performance against agreed module Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and weekly feedback from students reviewed by the Module Leader. This allows for more timely responses to student needs as they develop through the semester;

- promote the role of Academic Support Tutors (AST), facilitating a rigorous approach to monitoring engagement and providing targeted additional study skills support where needed.

More recent enhancements impacting on 2022/23 outcomes include:

- further embedding of enhancements made to UCEM modules via the HELP (Higher Engagement Lower Pressure) project. These enhancements increased the time students could spend on their assessments and focused their study time on core activities.

- more focused promotion of academic integrity which includes:
  - reframing of academic misconduct into academic integrity, with a focus on promoting good practice.
  - a dedicated position for an academic lead on academic integrity has been created.
  - drop-in sessions that are built into modules, especially around assessment periods, to provide one-to-one support for students.

UCEM continues to capture and respond to student feedback via in-delivery weekly feedback and module evaluation surveys, to continually enhance its modules and programmes. UCEM has recently enhanced its approach to student engagement through engaging student representatives in reviewing new module resources.

UCEM has a well-established delivery model to support apprentices to successful degree completion and onto completion of their End-Point Assessment. This includes support from an Apprenticeship Outcomes Officer to support and monitor their academic and work-based progress and development. Moreover, 20% of apprentices working hours are statutorily spent on off-the-job studies. Apprentices also have professional practice workshops and support from employers, providing wrap-around support. Accordingly, apprentice students consistently out-perform non-apprentice peers at module level and are more likely to achieve good honours. UCEM is anticipating a further increase in good degree classifications linked to the numbers of apprentices on programme and their access to greater support and time to study. UCEM is also considering any good practice that can be learnt from the success of its apprenticeship programmes that could support students that are studying with UCEM on a standard part time route.

6. Identifying good practice and actions

Areas of good practice identified include:

- External Examiners continuing to express confidence in academic standards, noting the: alignment with national benchmarks; industry relevance of programmes and assessment; high standard of student work; and appropriate assessment methods, including the use of CMAs (Computer Marked Assessment) early in the student journey.
- (Re)-validation panels commending the: passion for positive student outcomes; effective student monitoring and support to enable success; commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI); industry responsive provision; and programme alignment to professional competencies to support student achievement.
- Positive first feedback from UCEM's new Higher Education Apprenticeship External Adviser, an experienced Ofsted inspector, following his first review of UCEM's provision in 2023. This included comments on the well-resourced and structured VLE, effective Quality Assurance mechanisms and individualised student feedback.
- Ofsted's full inspection report of UCEM in November 2021 providing further validation of the quality of the provision for apprentices. Specific reference was made during the visit to the quality of learning.
- UCEM maintaining its status on the apprenticeship provider and assessment register (APAR), providing additional confirmation of UCEM's high quality provision.
- Positive feedback from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) as part of the successful re-accreditation of UCEM programmes in 2023, including the: impressive level of support given to teaching staff; dynamic approach to learning; excellent online learning resources; continuous development of programmes; and dedication to learning and teaching excellence.

UCEM has a culture of continuous improvement with all teams across the institution regularly reflecting on performance and acting upon student and stakeholder feedback. These actions are captured on the institutional scorecard and action plans, which are reviewed regularly by the deliberative committees or Senior Leadership Team and inform the annual review of the Degree Outcomes Statement.

7. Risks and challenges

The nature of UCEM's student cohort, in particular the fact that a significant proportion of students are studying part-time alongside full-time employment, means that UCEM needs to continue to allow flexibility in terms of pace of study in order to effectively support these students. This however poses challenges when trying to ensure that all groups of students complete their programmes in a timely manner and reach their potential to achieve good degree classifications. UCEM will continue to use its governance system to keep these identified areas of risks/challenges under review and to take action as appropriate.

As an online institution, UCEM was well positioned to continue delivery without making significant amendments to its teaching and learning approach during the Covid-19 pandemic. Feedback from students and External Examiners was positive on the mitigations UCEM had put in place during the pandemic, but it is important to note that the impact of Covid-19 will continue to be apparent in the timeliness of overall achievement of students for some time.

The cost-of-living crisis is likely to have an impact on students, especially for those who are self-funding, who may take additional paid work to support themselves. This could impact on the time that students have available to study and lead to lower student continuation and success on programme. UCEM continues to seek to mitigate this risk by continuing to monitor student engagement and outcomes. Alongside this the coming General Election could lead to implications around funding which could impact the types of students that UCEM admits. These changes bring an element of risk, challenge, and opportunity which UCEM will continue to monitor as 2024 progresses.

The emergence of generative AI, while creating new possibilities for learning and teaching, has exacerbated existing assessment challenges within higher education. The most immediate risk is that students may unethically use generative AI in assessment tasks, calling into question their personal learning attainment especially as generative AI can produce work of a passable quality for many assessment tasks. UCEM is taking action to mitigate this risk by using multiple assessments of different types based on authentic learning and by putting in a clear policy on AI.