



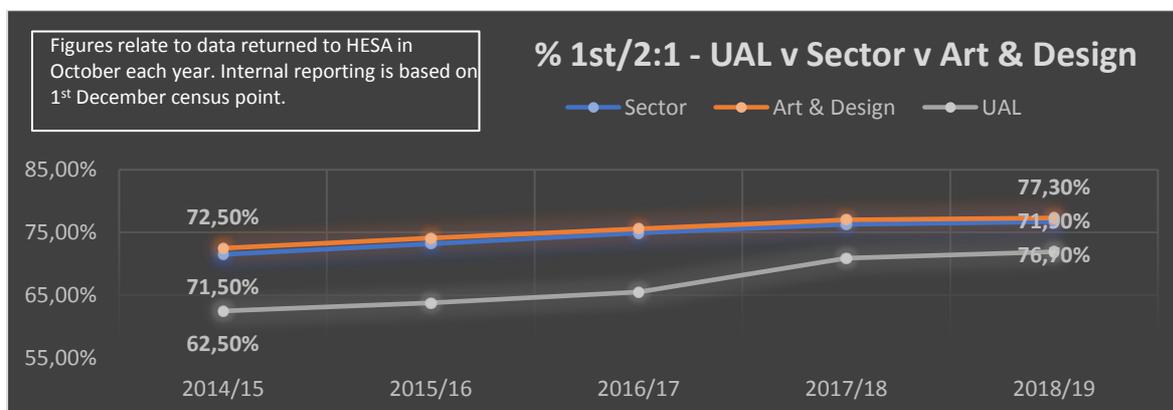
Degree Outcomes Statement December 2020

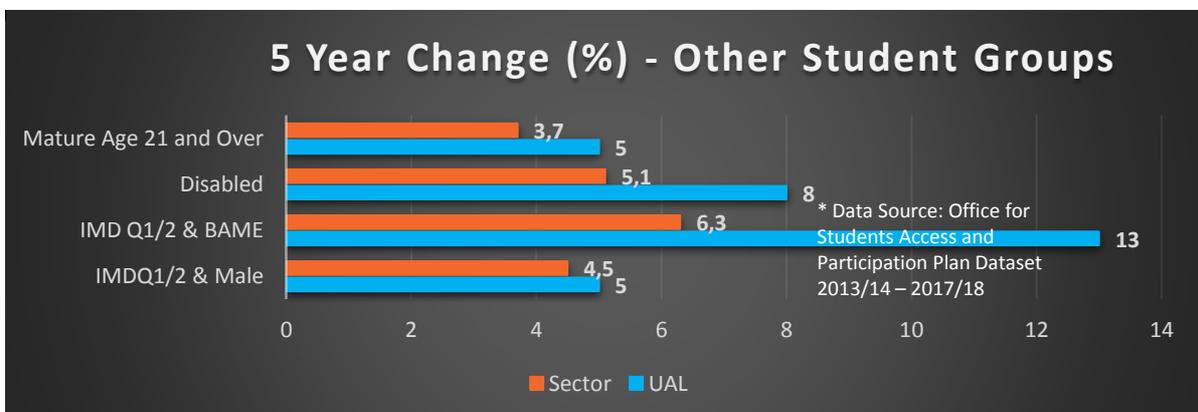
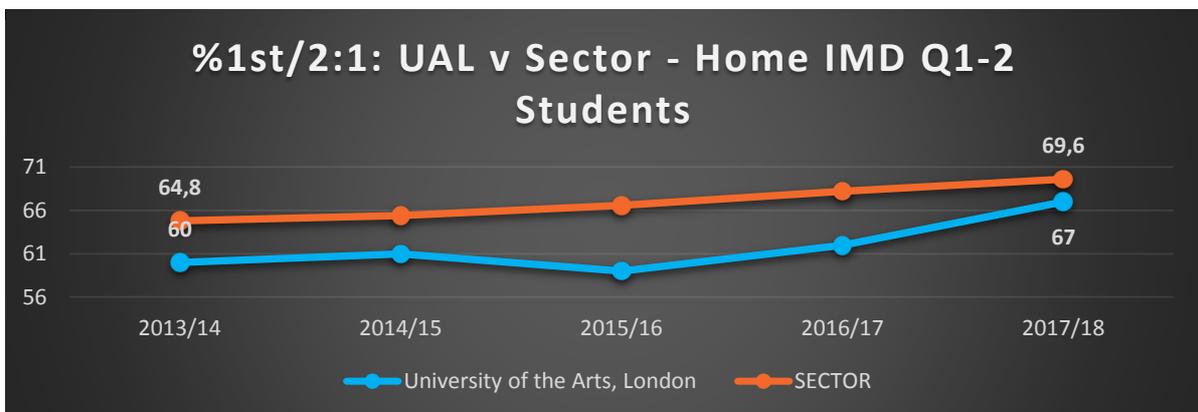
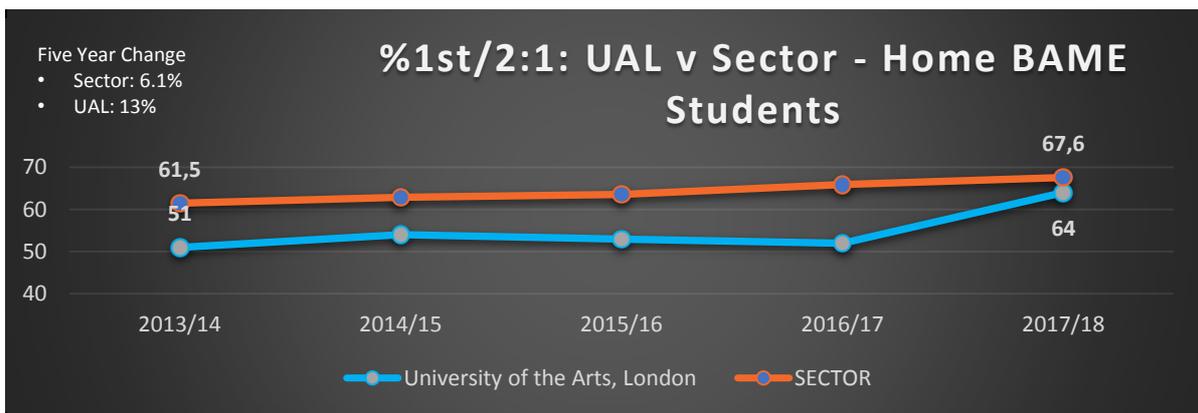
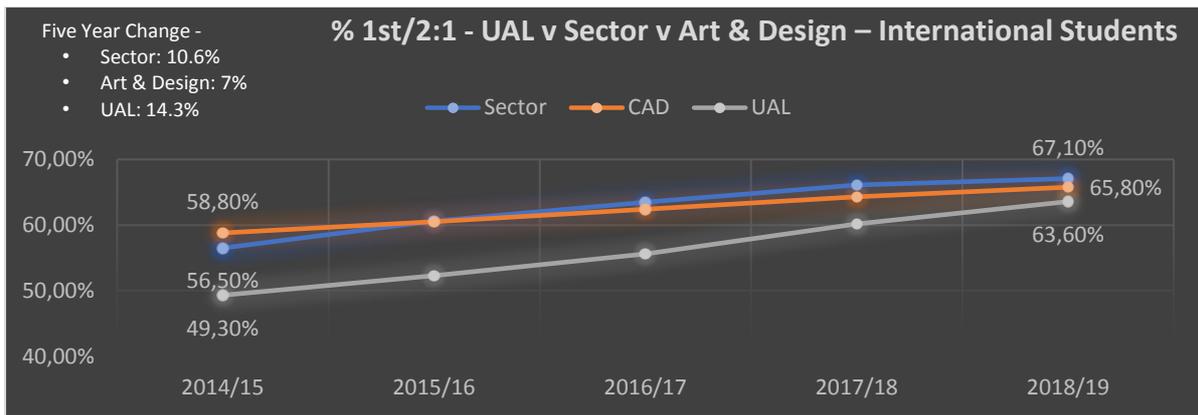
Introduction

University of the Arts London has a robust assessment framework which is designed to support student learning and provide a fair and accurate indication of performance. The University's assessment practices, criteria, marking scale and degree algorithms, together with internal moderation and external examination all support the security and integrity of awards made and the maintenance of academic standards. This Statement summarises the outcomes of a review undertaken by the University into all aspects of degree outcomes. We have carried out this review in support of the initiative launched by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessments with the particular focus on changes in award profiles over time.

1. UAL Degree Classification Profile

At the time of the University's Teaching Excellence Framework submission in January 2018 the classification profile over the previous 8 years indicated zero grade inflation. There have been modest rises in degree outcomes in subsequent years; the University always seeks to understand the patterns behind changes in outcomes, both overall and for particular groups. The main focus of work in recent years has been on reducing the gap in achievement between BAME and White students, an aim agreed by the University's Court of Governors which has now also been included in our Access and Participation Plan (20/21 – 24/25) which includes the commitment to eliminating this gap. The tables below summarise the trends in degree outcomes considered as part of this review.





2. Assessment and Marking Practices

2.1. Assessment Practices

Assessment practices at UAL are designed to complement creative practice and support learning and are constructively aligned with teaching and curriculum. Creative practice is assessed through portfolios of work, often following a set project, with supporting research material or visual journals often forming part of the assessment submission. Essays, presentations and other written work make up the rest of the assessment tasks with a very few time constrained examinations in some subjects. Marking is done either in groups by academic staff, or individually with sample second marking or full second marking for final year work.

At UAL our External Examiners are drawn from both academic and professional backgrounds and work as a team to sample student work and comment on academic standards and make suggestions for enhancement to courses. At UAL our External Examiners are drawn from both academic and professional backgrounds and work as a team to sample student work and comment on academic standards and make suggestions for enhancement to courses. UAL has been an active participant in the external examiner professional development scheme led by the HE Academy. UAL was an early adopter of the scheme and has delivered a number of sessions supporting staff to develop as external examiners. Our role in this project reflects our commitment to extending external examining opportunities to staff who are currently under-represented in the external examiner community.

The UAL assessment framework includes regulations and policies designed to ensure consistency, fairness, rigour, accuracy and security in the conduct of assessment and the award of degrees. Features include:

[Standard UAL wide assessment criteria](#) (see 2.2 below)

[Assessment regulations](#) covering internal moderation policy covering sample and double marking requirements, conduct of exam boards, rules on retrieval of failure

[Extenuating circumstances policy](#)

[Anonymous marking policy](#)

2.2. Marking Practices

UAL uses a standard set of art and design specific set of assessment criteria for use across the whole University. This whole university approach strengthens the rigour of our assessment practices and ensures that there is a commonality of assessment approach deployed across disciplines and across the diverse student outcomes associated with our creative portfolio.

In a major project over two years we have engaged in a full review and redevelopment of those criteria to make them more relevant to art and design, and meaningful to students. The key objective was to ensure that our approach to assessment aligned with our teaching and learning approaches which are characterised by enquiry led pedagogic approaches. A second objective was to ensure that the university's assessment criteria reflected our commitment to social justice and the elimination of awarding gaps. We also developed assessment

criteria level descriptors for levels 4 to 7. We now use the standard set of five criteria: enquiry, knowledge, process, communication, and realisation. The [revised criteria](#) were used for the first time in 2019/20.

3 Academic Governance

Academic Board takes overall responsibility for the award of UAL degrees and maintains an overview of classification trends over time, delegating more detailed analysis and monitoring to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. An extremely detailed report is produced annually presenting the overall outcomes of degrees with the presentation of trends and analysis of the relative performance of specific groups. This report also covers comparisons with national trends. A comprehensive discussion at AQSC and Academic Board on these matters is common and feeds into the development of major initiatives such as that on the BAME awarding gap, the changes to the degree algorithms (see below), the revision of the assessment criteria, and adaptations to the academic regulations.

All exam boards are run under the authority of Academic Board following a standard format and using the single set of academic regulations. Exam boards can only be chaired by staff approved by Academic Board who have undertaken the mandatory training. The University's student record system (SITS) holds all student marks and processes are in place to ensure the accuracy of results presented to exam boards. Exam boards also receive a profile report indicating 3 year trends of mean, median and mode with outliers flagged.

As part of this review the University appointed an independent academic external to the University to provide a commentary and critique of the review and this statement. That commentary was considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee in its final review and approval of the Statement in December 2020.

4 Classification Algorithms

The University established a single degree algorithm for use on all courses in all its colleges at the time it was awarded degree awarding powers in 1995. A significant shift was made in 2011 when the marking scale was moved from a 1-100 percentage scale to a 15 point marking scale. That change was made as a consequence of the introduction of a standard set of assessment criteria and the desire to make grades meaningful for students in terms of their art and design practice; we were also influenced by both the experience of UAL academic staff practice and literature which suggests that academic judgement is more secure across a less finely gained scale. The revision to the assessment criteria undertaken in 2018/19 enhanced that approach through the introduction of specific criteria for each level of study.

A revised [classification algorithm](#) was introduced in 2018/19 and 2020 graduates are the first to be awarded degrees under this revised way of calculating degrees. The shift was from a single algorithm under which only final year units were counted, to a dual algorithm under which two results are calculated and the one that provides a

better result is used. The two algorithms are the original final year, level 6, calculation and a new calculation based on a combination of unit results at levels 5 and 6. The alteration was made to ensure fairness to all students by recognising that there are varied patterns in the trajectory of achievement. In undertaking this significant change care was taken to model potential outcomes to ensure any grade inflation was kept to a minimum, and that students with protected characteristics were not affected differentially by the change. The first set of results will be analysed in detail to explore the impact of this change, and that of the introduction of the revised assessment criteria. However the 2020 set of results has also been affected by Covid 19 and the use of set of No Detriment regulations, so it will take a few years for the full impact to become apparent.

The University's assessment practices using the 15 point marking scale include an automatic rounding up for marks close to the grade boundary. In undertaking this review consideration was given to eliminating this practice, as suggested in the national discussion on these matters. However no change was made as the practice is seen as fair and consistently applied, and our grading profiles benchmark in an appropriate way with the sector.

5 Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

The university has reduced its awarding gap between home white and home students of colour by 6% in the last two years (16/17 – 18/19). This improvement links to a coordinated assessment enhancement strategy that included the following:

Academic Enhancement Model - A team of staff who have explicit responsibility for sharing best practice in assessment across the UAL portfolio and offer a range of staff development opportunities and online resources support to course teams seeking to strengthen assessment and learning outcomes for students. The AEM team work in a data led way ensuring that enhancement activity is focused on areas where there is the greatest need (this is determined by analysing NSS results and attainment data).

Blueprint - A cross UAL project that focused on making research informed improvements to formative assessment on all undergraduate courses.

Staff development on assessment benchmarking – Resources include, for example:

An innovative [animation](#) that informs UAL students about assessment
[Enhancing assessment for equity](#)
[Eliminating inequality in formative assessment](#)
[Reducing referrals and resubmissions](#)
[Creating inclusive briefs](#)

6 Identifying Good Practice, and Actions

Academic staff approach assessment design as an inherent part of learning and there is continual innovation and evolution of assessment at UAL. Practice is shared across teams and colleges through learning and teaching networks and centrally via the UAL Learning and Teaching Exchange. One particular feature of the overall assessment framework at UAL is the mapping of the revised assessment criteria to the [UAL Creative Attributes Framework](#). Which helps articulate and connect the curriculum to professional practice, demonstrating how UAL students continuously develop and prepare for their future.

7 Risks and Challenges

The University recognises that the current gap between the achievement of BAME and white students (15% in 2019) is too high and we are committed to reducing this to zero within five years. This is a major challenge but one to which we have placed our resources behind a range of actions led by the Attainment Differentials Action Group. It is worth noting that in making progress towards eliminating the achievement gap the overall figures for achievement will also increase.

As research shows that awarding gaps are not attributable to individual students' abilities, prior qualifications or cultural backgrounds, UAL continues to embed and develop interventions and support to enhance institutional cultures, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment practice. These have included numerous local initiatives such as dedicated staff development programmes and professional development days across Colleges that have focused on blended learning, decolonising curriculum, and the anti-racist agenda. We have formed communities of practice that produce spaces for reflection, critical discussion, and dissemination of good practice. A challenge is to ensure that efforts to enhance these areas in light of closing awarding gaps are supported by university wide commitments and actions. An example of this is the acclaimed anti-racism training programme led by [Shades of Noir: Centre for Race and Practice Based Social Justice](#) becoming compulsory for all UAL staff. The University's long term commitment is evidenced through the recently shared 10 point anti-racist action plan with points 9 and 10 focusing on decolonising curriculum and resources for decolonising curriculum. A flavour of the work underway at UAL can be found by following the links below.

[UAL AEM Resources Page](#) (which includes decolonising curriculum materials)

[Decolonising Arts Curriculum Zine](#)

[UAL Decolonising the Arts Institute](#)

[Arts SU](#) (decolonising UAL campaign)

[UAL Student Voices](#)

[UAL Inclusive Teaching and Learning](#) Unit offered by the Teaching and Learning Exchange

[Degree Outcomes Statement 2020, approved by the University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee, 8th December 2020]