

# Degree Outcomes Statement 2022

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Section 1 Institutional degree classification profile

St Mary’s is a small Catholic university with a student body of around 5,000 students studying on undergraduate and post-graduate programmes. Over the past 5 years, St Mary’s good honours outcomes (the proportion of students awarded 1st class or upper second-class degree) have consistently been within 3 percentage points of the Sector average, and in 2020/21 were within 0.9 percentage points of the sector average. During the period 2016/17 to 2021/22 good honours outcomes at the University increased from 72.8% to 77.4% (see **Table 1**). The data shows that St Mary’s ranking compared to the sector of 143 UK HEIs in relation to good honours increased very little from 79h to 74th over the past 5 years.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Awards |  | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 2021/22 |
| Good honours | **St Mary’s** | 72.8% | 76.9% | 74.3% | 82.9% | 81.8% | 77.4% |
|  | **London** | 73.0 | 74.7 | 74.1 | 80.6 | 81.1 |  |
|  | **Sector** | 74.0 | 75.2 | 75.2 | 80.1 | 80.9 |  |
|  | **St Mary’s rank**  | 79th | 65th | 81st | 62nd | 74th |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| First class | **St Mary’s** | 21.9% | 22.3% | 26.8% | 41.8% | 36.4% | 36.6% |
|  | **London** | 26.1 | 28.4 | 28.9 | 36.8 | 37.9 |  |
|  | **Sector** | 25.5 | 27.6 | 27.9 | 34.3 | 36.1 |  |
|  | **St Mary’s rank** | 99th | 107th | 81st | 29th | 76th |  |

***Table 1:*** *Percentage of students awarded first class and good honours degrees from academic years 2016/17 to 2021/22 at St Mary’s, a competitor group of London universities and the wider sector of 143 other UK HEIs. Ranking data is compared to sector. (Source OfS data, not yet available for 2021/22).*

The academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 were impacted by the introduction of a ‘No Detriment’ policy and associated algorithms at St Mary’s to limit the effect of COVID on students’ degree outcomes. Similar impacts were seen in many other universities. St Mary’s University is a member of Universities UK (UUK) which has published a [commitment to reversing apparent grade inflation](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/after-pandemic-our-commitment-degree) in the sector that appears to have occurred during the COVID pandemic, partly due to the impact of ‘No Detriment’ policies and other measures taken to safeguard students during the crisis. This commitment includes an objective to return to pre-COVID levels of good honours by 2023. St Mary’s University shares the commitment of UUK to return its own ‘Good Honours’ figures to pre-COVID levels and (as can be seen in **Table 1**) is on course to do so.

**Degree outcomes across academic units**

There are some differences in the number of good honours outcomes between the four academic units within the university. Data for academic years 2017/2018 to 2021/21 shows that an average of 76% of students graduated with good honours from SHA, compared to 85% of students from TLA (see **Figure 2**). Whilst all units have shown a slight increase in good honours outcomes over a four year period the largest increase in good honours outcomes occurred within our cohort of joint honours students. In 2017/18 68% of joint honours students graduated with good honours, that has now risen to be comparable with the other units in the university. The University recognises that it needs to develop a better understanding of the factors that drive such differences – for example, whether they are driven by differences in student socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicity, entry qualifications, prior family experience of higher education etc. The University, through its Degree Outcomes Steering Group (DOSG), will interrogate the data and explore opportunities to address differences across academic units.



***Figure 1:*** *Percentage of students awarded good honours and other degree outcomes by academic units from academic years 2017/18 to 2020/21[[1]](#footnote-1)*

#### Degree outcomes for different demographic groups of undergraduate students

It is clear that there are some differences in degree classification outcomes across demographic groups (see Table 2).

* White students are significantly more likely to be awarded a good honours award than other ethnic groups.
* Female graduates are significantly more likely to be awarded a good honours award than males.
* Young students are significantly more likely to be awarded good honours than mature students.
* Students from Polar quintiles 1 & 2 (the neighbourhoods where the proportion of young people entering higher education is lowest) are significantly more likely to be awarded a good honours award than students from more privileged neighbourhoods.

These demographic differences are consistent with sector outcomes apart from the performance of students from low participation neighbourhoods, a result of which the University is particularly proud.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | 5 year mean |
| Ethnicity | White | 76.9% | 78.7% | 77.6% | 84.3% | 85.3% | 80.6% |
|  | Non-white[[2]](#footnote-2) | 62.7% | 68.2% | 65.4% | 77.2% | 72.4% | 69.2% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gender | Female | 74.8% | 78.7% | 77.2% | 85.6% | 86.2% | 80.5% |
|  | Male | 68.1% | 70.0% | 70.3% | 77.0% | 73.6% | 71.8% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Disability | Disabled | 69.2% | 80.4% | 73.8% | 83.3% | 79.7% | 77.2% |
|  | Non-disabled | 72.7% | 74.0% | 74.5% | 82.0% | 80.5% | 76.74% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Age | Young | 70.6% | 90.0% | 80.0% | 88.9% | 94.3% | 84.8% |
|  | Mature | 72.3% | 74.4% | 74.1% | 82.0% | 80.5% | 76.7% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Domicile | International | 69.2% | 67.2% | 89.7% | 90.6% | 86.4% | 80.6% |
|  | UK | 72.4% | 75.6% | 73.7% | 81.7% | 80.7% | 76.8% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| LPN | POLAR4 1&2 | 73.5% | 78.2% | 75.0% | 83.1% | 86.9% | 79.3% |
|  | Non-LPN | 73.8% | 75.7% | 72.7% | 79.5% | 78.6% | 76.1% |

***Table 2****: Percentage of students awarded good honours degrees from academic years 2016/17 to 2020/21 by demographic group*

Section 2 Changes to our degree classification algorithms

#### In 2014/15 St Mary’s good honours outcomes were 7.1% lower than that of institutions in the London area and were 9.1 percentage points lower in 2015/2016. It was recognised that the University’s existing algorithms (inherited from its validating University) had become outmoded, and no longer reflected good practice. In 2016/17, following extensive research, data analysis and consultation with sector experts, St Mary's University adjusted the classification algorithms it used to determine award classifications in order to bring them into alignment with practice in the higher education sector. Consequently, the review resulted in [new degree classification algorithms](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/about/corporate-information/degree-outcomes/degree-classification-algorithms.aspx) being applied for the first time for finalists in summer 2017. As a result of these adjustments, the overall proportion of good honours outcomes in 2016/17 came into closer alignment with the sector average.

#### In response to the COVID pandemic, the University developed a comprehensive ‘No Detriment’ policy in April 2020 which included temporary [adjustments to our degree classification algorithms](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/about/corporate-information/degree-outcomes/covid.aspx) in order to minimise the potential impact on students’ performance.

#### As a result of changes to regulations, teaching delivery, assessment, and our classification algorithms, St Mary’s saw an increase in good honours outcomes. As the COVID algorithms covered semester 2 performance for students at level 5 and level 6 during the 19-20 academic year, there was an impact on degree outcomes for both 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years. Like many other universities, St Mary’s saw an increase, or COVID related ‘spike’ in the proportion of good honours outcomes in 2019/20 and 2020/21.

#### Following the publication of new sector guidance on the design of classification algorithms, in 2020/21 the University undertook another review of its classification algorithms, drawing again on sector research, extensive data modelling and external consultation. [A new set of algorithms](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/about/corporate-information/degree-outcomes/revised-algorithms.aspx) was approved in June 2021 and phased in from Sept 2021 for new students. It is anticipated that these new algorithms will support a return to pre-COVID levels of Good Honours and will enable a return to a target of 74% good honours in the longer term.

Section 3 [Teaching and assessment practices](https://url4.mailanyone.net/scanner?m=1oU5ZT-0004st-5a&d=4%7Cmail%2F90%2F1662120600%2F1oU5ZT-0004st-5a%7Cin4i%7C57e1b682%7C11051344%7C13540177%7C6311F3BB070104175D6DB5B60A032E2C&s=-TSjPwIaGA0mTZE_stEvhvNG5ho&o=%2Fphtw%3A%2Fwtsrxw.ate.eeokc.tabuu%2Fdc%2Ffgs%2Featc-remutoeoeseseatm-t9a%23%2Ftn)

The University is committed to excellence in all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment and consistently strives to enhance the quality of its teaching and learning. Enhancements are driven not just at Faculty/Institute, departmental and programme level, but also by our Organisational Development Team (OD) and our Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (CTESS), which acts as a dynamic catalyst for positive policy development, and enhanced approaches and practices relating to teaching, personal tutoring, assessment and feedback.

The University adopts an evidenced-based approach to the enhancement of its teaching, learning and assessment practices. Each annual Programme Review Board draws on a detailed and comprehensive data set provided via our PowerBI[[3]](#footnote-3) platform to inform decision-making around enhancements. The same emphasis on high quality data characterises programme approval, and periodic review processes. Monitoring and evaluation is also built into every stage of development and many improvements are co-created with, and reviewed by students through a well-established system of academic representation and close partnership with the St Mary’s Students Union (SMSU).

To ensure the quality and rigour of assessment, strict rules in [Section G of the Academic Regulations](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/policies/academic-regulations.aspx#SectionGAssessmentRegulationsOrganisationofAssessment) govern the way all students are assessed. Diverse forms of assessments, including essays, exams, practical exercises, group assessments, presentations, dissertations, projects, portfolios etc are utilised that enable students to demonstrate programme learning outcomes. With the exception of work-based assignments and dissertations, all coursework is marked anonymously to avoid any potential bias, and samples of work are moderated by a second marker, as well as by an external examiner. The rigour and checks in place to ensure the reliability of the marking process and the marks awarded means that the University, its students, staff, employers and other stakeholders can have confidence that the marks students receive are accurate and reliable. The University has a rigorous approach to assuring the standardisation of assessment, marking, moderation and the design of assessment, with clear expectations set-out in our [Assessment Policy](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/ctess/docs/assessment/assessment-policy.pdf). The quality of programmes is assured through the application of a rigorous annual quality assurance process that is conducted for all programmes, along with a periodic review every 5 years. The requirements for quality monitoring and enhancement are set out in the University’s [Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Handbook](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/ctess/qs/quality-assurance-and-enhancement-handbook/about.aspx).

The frameworks surrounding the assessment of students, combined with a systematic and comprehensive use of external examiners on each programme means that the our students, employers and other stakeholders (including the public) can have confidence that the assessments undertaken by our students are aligned with sector benchmark reference points, meet the requirements of Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), are aligned with learning outcomes, and prepare our students for progression into graduate level employment.

Section 4 [Academic governance](https://url4.mailanyone.net/scanner?m=1oU5ZT-0004st-5a&d=4%7Cmail%2F90%2F1662120600%2F1oU5ZT-0004st-5a%7Cin4i%7C57e1b682%7C11051344%7C13540177%7C6311F3BB070104175D6DB5B60A032E2C&s=Fw2WoV9ZBiwqWqAvp_xh13mFiXk&o=%2Fphtw%3A%2Fwtsrxw.ate.eeokc.tabuu%2Fdc%2Ffgs%2Featc-remutoeoeseseatm-t7a%23%2Ftn) and leadership

A comprehensive set of [Academic Regulations and Policies](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/registry/policies/registry-policies.aspx) cover the operation of teaching, examinations, assessments and other matters relating to students. Academic governance is by the University’s Academic Board, which is the most senior committee and decision-making body on all issues pertaining to the academic functions of the University and students. The work of Academic Board is supported through the work of various sub- committees of the Board, including the Academic Development Committee which is chaired by the Provost. This maintains oversight over all aspects of the quality of teaching, assessment and the student experience – this includes leading on the design and approval of marking scales/descriptors (which all markers utilise at St Mary’s and on franchised partnership programmes) to ensure consistency of marking practices and standards. Sub-committees of ADC drive enhancements across a range of areas pertaining to teaching and assessment. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) identifies ways in which the University can more effectively and efficiently maintain the quality of programme delivery including teaching and assessment, whilst the Collaborative Partnerships Committee (CPC) ensures that robust quality monitoring processes are in place to ensure comparability of standards in teaching, assessment and student outcomes between our own campus-based programmes and those delivered through franchise or validation arrangements with collaborative partners. The Student Experience Enhancement Committee (SEEC) identifies ways in which the wider students experience can be enhanced.

Robust mechanisms and quality assurance processes are in place at all stages in the design and approval of programmes, in assessment design, and in ensuring that consist rules govern the operational aspects of assessment, marking, moderation and – in the case of collaborative partnerships – cross-moderation of student scripts to ensure comparability of both marking standards and feedback practices, and close liaison between programme teaching teams. A Partnership Liaison Manager (always an experienced member of our academic staff) is appointed to every programme run in conjunction with collaborative partners. They play a crucial role in ensuring that programmes run in partnership conform to the same high standards in terms of assessment, feedback, moderation, and marking standards, and meet regularly with the delivery team to ensure that there is comparability of quality and standards in all aspects of programme management and delivery. The University ensures that its assessment and marking standards are properly informed by and compliant with the expectations of our regulator in terms of external scrutiny of standards by external examiners, who examine samples of marked work for every module and for every programme, including franchised programmes with collaborative partners.

Section 5 Identifying good practice and actions

This Degree Outcomes Statement was approved by the University’s Academic Board and its Board of Governors. We will add a new section to our Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Handbook for 2022/23 titled ‘Review and Publication of Degree Outcomes’. This will set out the functions of the Degree Outcomes Steering Group (DOSG) in the future, and how it reports into our Academic Development Committee, how classification algorithms will be reviewed, and how the Degree Outcome Statement will be published.

The DOSG will exercise a high level of diligence in its work and will draw on high quality internal and external data to ensure that measures are put in place, and actions taken when necessary, to ensure that any inflationary pressures on good honours are kept in check. DOSG will review good honours data on an annual basis, and, where necessary, will propose amendments to our algorithms to maintain standards, thereby safeguarding the quality and rigour of our awards. From 2023, our University Exam Boards will also monitor good honours outcomes more closely, and a copy of our Degree Outcomes Statement will be flagged for all members in advance. The Exam Board secretary will provide a tally of good honours outcomes which will be communicated to DOSG, enabling the group to monitor this metric in a timely manner through the academic year.

Section 6 Risks and challenges

It is likely that the University’s investment in enhanced learning resources, spaces and equipment, and continued commitment to improving teaching and learning will positively impact on student performance. This will exert upwards pressure on the proportion of students being awarded good honours outcomes. Increases in good honours outcomes may also be driven by achieving the closure of awarding gaps as set out in the [University’s Access & Participation Plan (APP).](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/about/corporate-information/docs/access-and-participation-plan-2020-24.pdf) Closing awarding gaps whilst avoiding overall increases in good honours figures in the future will be challenging.

The University has, within its [Vision 2030](https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/about/vision-2030/about.aspx) mission statement, identified growth in collaborative partnerships as a key priority. As it grows this aspect of its provision, however, the University will be mindful of the need to ensure parity of quality and standards, especially in relation to the quality of teaching and learning, and marking practices. We have set out in earlier sections of this Statement the safeguards and quality assurance processes that are already in place to ensure comparability of standards, but close monitoring of the operational delivery and student degree outcomes on all partnership programmes will remain a key priority for our Collaborative Partnerships Committee, Academic Development Committee, Academic Board and our Board of Governors. All stakeholders must have confidence that any increases in good honours degree outcomes are fully merited and justified by real improvements in our students’ performance.

25 November 2022

1. BLS = Institute of Business, Law and Society; EDU = Institute of Education; TLA = Institute of Theology and Liberal Arts; SHA = Faculty of Sport, Applied Health and Performance Science; Joint = Joint Honours programmes. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The ethnicity data is presented here in summary form to aid a clear understanding of the differences between white and non-white categories, but the underlying breakdown of outcomes for ethnic groups (e.g. ‘Asian’, ‘Black’ and ‘Mixed’) is regularly analysed by the relevant University bodies. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Power BI is an interactive data visualization software product developed by Microsoft with a focus on business intelligence and data reporting. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)