Student improvement or grade inflation?

NTU Course Leader Conference April 2019

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NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

Mail Online

Almost 50 universities awarded a First or 2.1 to eight out of ten students last year

ECHO NEWS

Top degree awards soar at Liverpool John Moores University by up to 83.2%

PlymouthLive NEWS

You are twice as likely to get a First at Plymouth as you were seven years ago

THE SCOTSMAN
SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

First-class degrees on the increase at Scottish universities

The Telegraph

Grade inflation 'race to the bottom' as first class degrees quadruple over eight years at some institutions

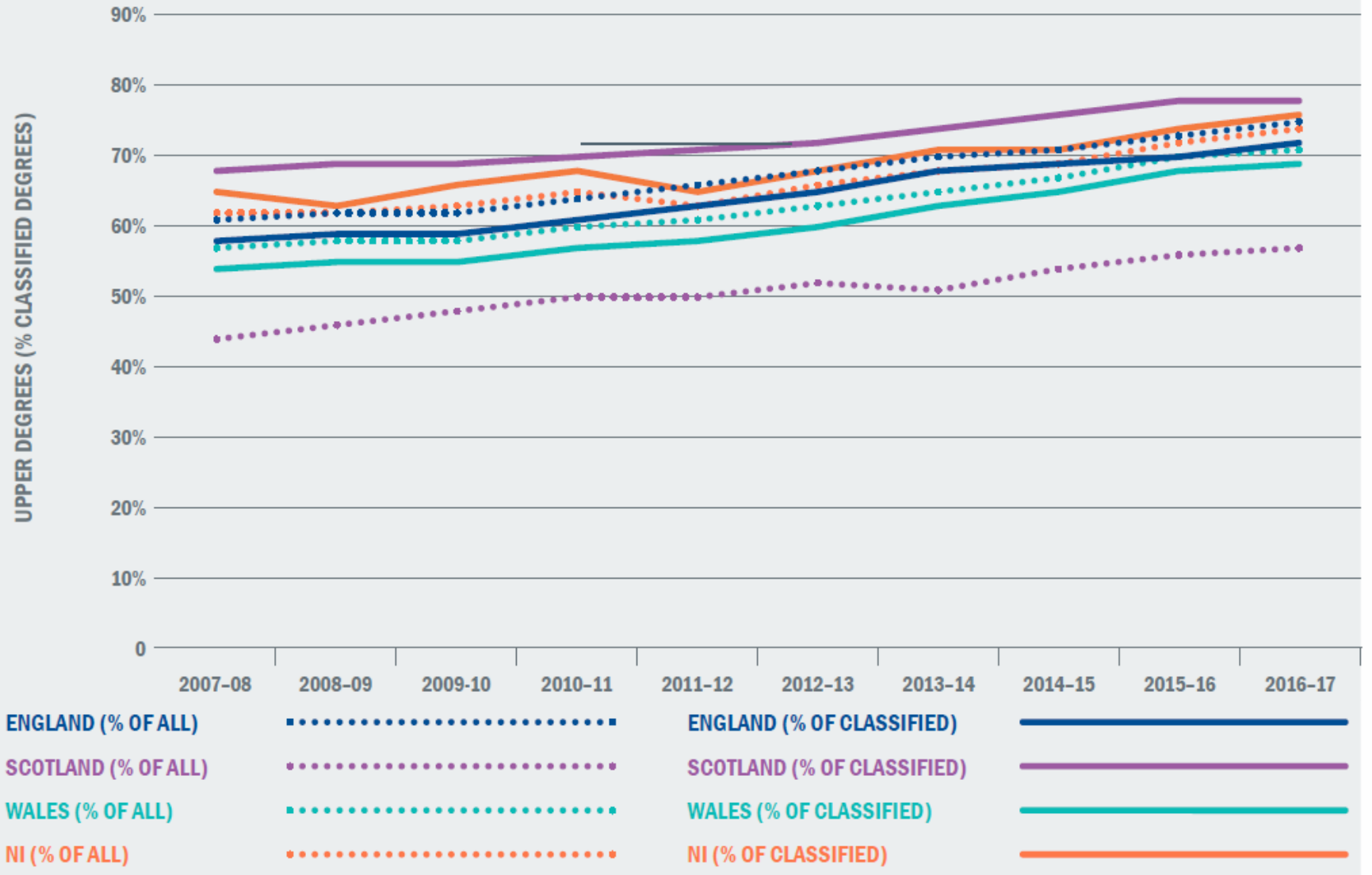
The Guardian

Higher education

UK university figures show up to fivefold rise in first-class degrees

THE CHALLENGE

FIGURE 1: UPPER DEGREES AWARDED (% OF ALL DEGREES, AND % OF CLASSIFIED DEGREES) BY UK NATION, 2007/08 TO 2016/17



Recommends that universities issue a sector-wide **'Statement of Intent'**, leading to actions to protect the value of qualifications over time.

Sector's responses to a consultation on what this might look like will be published later this month.

NTU Assessment Project (2011 – current)

Phase 1: Move to categorical marking (eg. high 2:1, mid 2:1, low 2:1)
Introduction of grading matrices *implementation 2012*

Phase 2: Shift from non-linear (0-100) to linear scale (0-16) for aggregation of grades *implementation 2017*

Phase 3: Revised grade-based degree classification algorithm
Removal of 'borderline' conventions at award boards
implementation 2018

Assessment is fair, transparent, consistent, easy to understand, non-arbitrary, and non-inflationary

NTU Assessment Framework

Phases 1 & 2 outcomes

(undergraduate)

Class	Grade	NOW Grade point	BEFORE Numerical equivalent
First	Exceptional 1st	16	96
	High 1st	15	89
	Mid 1st	14	81
	Low 1st	13	74
Upper second	High 2.1	12	68
	Mid 2.1	11	65
	Low 2.1	10	62
Lower second	High 2.2	9	58
	Mid 2.2	8	55
	Low 2.2	7	52
Third	High 3rd	6	48
	Mid 3rd	5	45
	Low 3rd	4	42
Fail	Marginal fail	3	38
	Mid fail	2	32
	Low fail	1	18
Zero	Zero	0	0

Systematic unfairness

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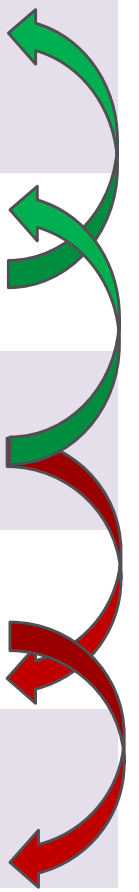


24 point gain

13 point gain

13 point loss

27 point loss

Students who are performing at a 2:1/1st class level benefit ***more*** than students who are performing at a 3rd/2:2 level

Why the revised algorithm?

1 It is based on an agreed set of values which are transparent and fair:

- A student should be awarded a degree classification at the level at (and above) which they have the majority of their credits (the 'majority' route)
- A student should be awarded a degree classification that takes into account evidence of much better performance in a smaller proportion of work, subject to consistently strong performance elsewhere (the 'weighted mean' route)

2 It is consistent with the categorical nature of Grade Based Assessment

- The old algorithm prioritised the weighted mean and relied on the 0-100 scale for aggregation of grades

3 It removes the potential inconsistency of boards across the University, particularly for students at the borderline of two classifications

NTU Assessment Project (2011 – current)

Phase 1: Move to categorical marking (eg. high 2:1, mid 2:1, low 2:1)

Phase 2: 6) for

Phase 3: hm
ards

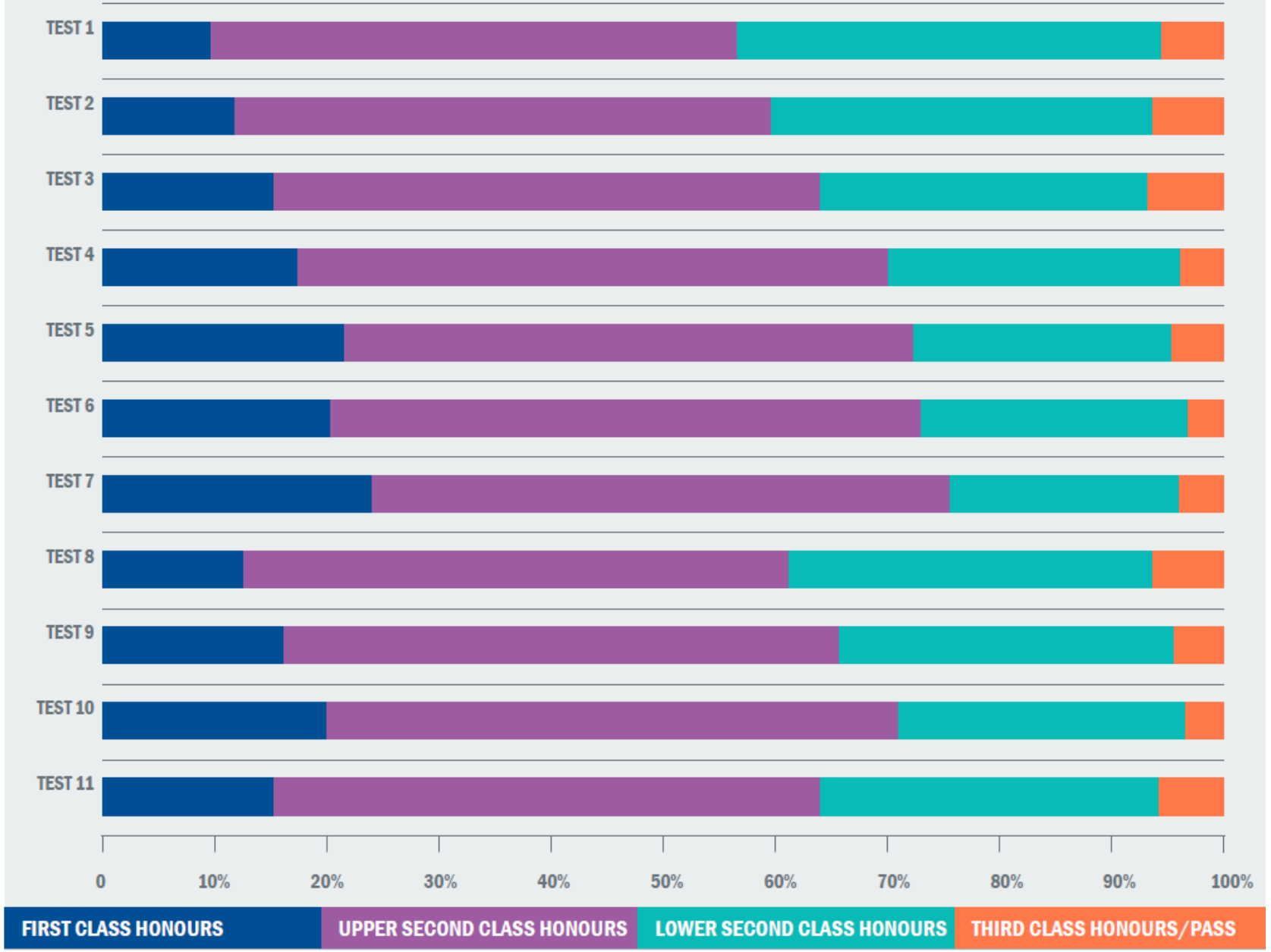
Assessment is fair, transparent, consistent, easy to understand, non-arbitrary, and non-inflationary

Assessment is fair, transparent, consistent, easy to understand, non-arbitrary, and non-inflationary

Degree Classification: Transparent, consistent and Fair Academic Standards
UKSQCA Nov 2018

UUK (2017a) *Understanding degree algorithms*. London: Universities UK available at: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/understanding-degree-algorithms.pdf UUK

FIGURE 16: INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL SIMULATION OF INFLUENCE OF DEGREE ALGORITHMS ON GRADE PROFILE



Our thoughts about the position of the sector

- Lack of consistency across the sector (and within institutions) of examination board ‘borderline’ rules
- Failure to start from marking descriptors, (and instead starting from percentage points) when considering student performance
- Misunderstandings about the meaning of ‘raw scores’ in relation to grades and degree classification boundaries
- Lack of understanding of the impact of assessment design (and particularly the number of aggregated grades) on aggregated measures of student performance

What this means for you

Messages to students need to be about **fairness for all** students.

And about how to **maximize their opportunities** for success.

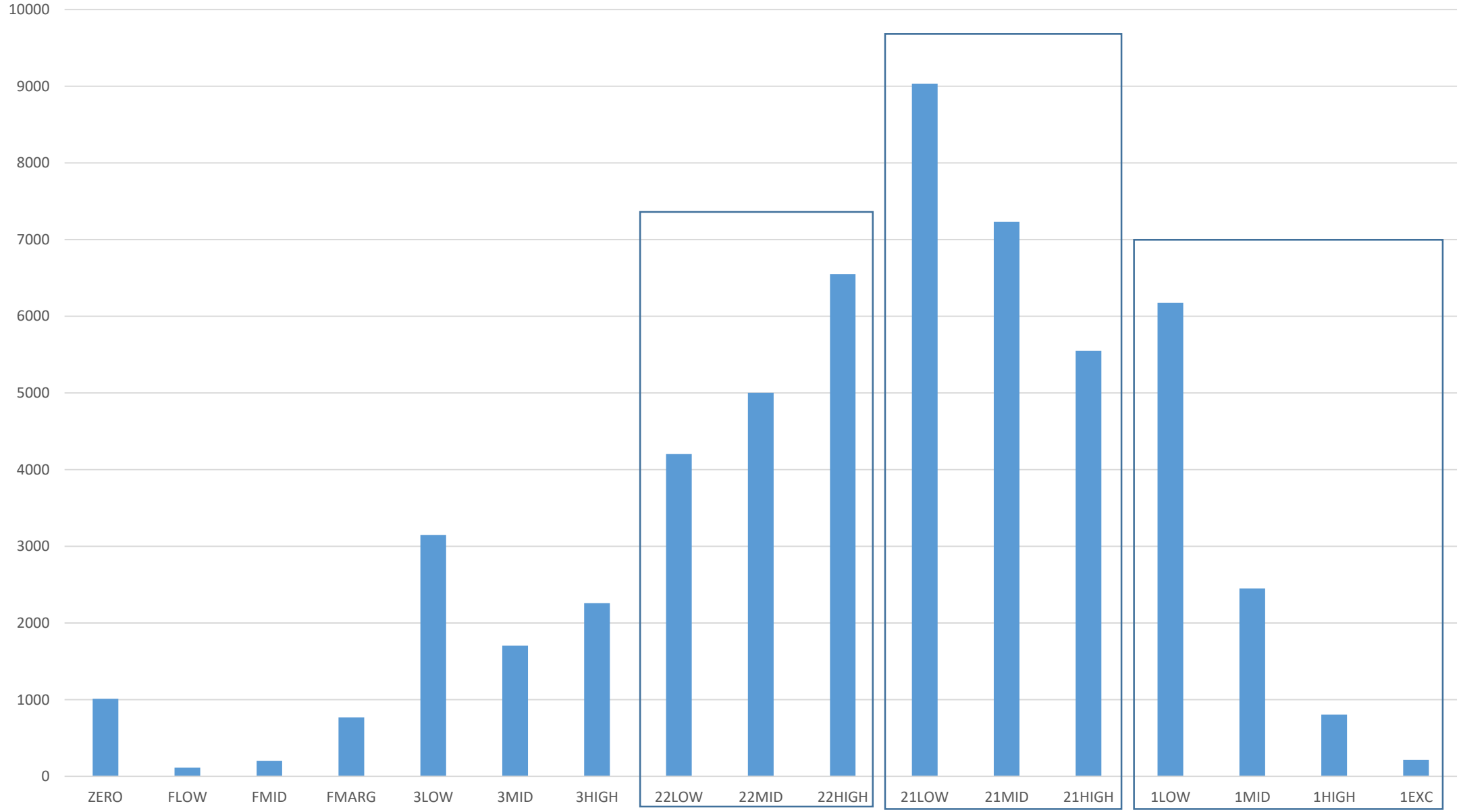
resources at **Assessment at NTU** sharepoint site

Likely effects

Small fall in proportion of ‘upper degrees’ (2:1s & 1sts) generally in line with ‘normal’ variation year on year.

Bigger fall in the proportion of 1sts that are awarded.
Ranging from relatively small to relatively large depending on the borderline convention in use, assessment structures and grading practices.

Understanding marking practices



University-wide (n=56,416 grades)

Marking grids

Criteria	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd	fail
a					
b					
c					
d					
e					

Criteria	1st	2.1	2.2	3rd	fail
a					
b					
c					
d					
e					