

Information for Students, Teachers and Examiners

Annex 2: Qualification Level Descriptors

Each module and programme within the University Credit Framework must be at one and only one of levels 3 through to 8.

The University has adopted, as the definitions of levels 4 to 8, the qualification level descriptors as set out in the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)¹, published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which are reproduced in Table A below. The University definition of level 3 is the descriptor as proposed by the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer in Credit Level Descriptors for Further and Higher Education, January 2003.

The QAA describes qualification level descriptors thus:

“Descriptors exemplify the nature and characteristics of the main qualification at each level, and comparison demonstrates the nature and characteristics of change between qualifications at different levels. They provide clear points of reference at each level and describe outcomes that cover the great majority of existing qualifications.”

Table A

Level	Qualifications at the level indicated are awarded to students who have demonstrated:	Typically, holders of a qualification at the level indicated will be able to:	And will have:
3	i) a limited factual and conceptual knowledge base, with some appreciation of the breadth of the field of study and the relevant terminology; ii) an ability to apply the skills of analysis, synthesis, evaluation independently in relatively simple and familiar contexts, or with guidance or structure when working with greater complexity;	a) apply knowledge and skills within a defined context and evaluate own strengths and weaknesses within criteria largely set by others; b) within a defined context, manage information and collect data from a range of straightforward sources c) apply given tools/methods to a well-defined problem and show emerging recognition of the complexity of associated issues;	d) the qualities and transferable skills to enable them to operate in predictable, defined contexts that require use of a specified range of standard techniques.
4	i) knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study; ii) an ability to present, evaluate, and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.	a) evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work; b) communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments; c) undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment;	d) the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility.

¹ See <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Framework-Higher-Education-Qualifications-08.pdf>

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Level	Qualifications at the level indicated are awarded to students who have demonstrated:	Typically, holders of a qualification at the level indicated will be able to:	And will have:
5	<p>i) knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed;</p> <p>ii) ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context;</p> <p>iii) knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in their subject(s), and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study;</p> <p>iv) an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.</p>	<p>a) use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis;</p> <p>b) effectively communicate information, arguments, and analysis, in a variety of forms, to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively;</p> <p>c) undertake further training, develop existing skills, and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations;</p>	<p>d) the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.</p>
6	<p>i) a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline;</p> <p>ii) an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline;</p> <p>iii) conceptual understanding that enables the student: to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline; and to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline;</p> <p>iv) an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge;</p> <p>v) the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).</p>	<p>a) apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects;</p> <p>b) critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem;</p> <p>c) communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;</p>	<p>d) the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility; decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; and the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.</p>

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Level	Qualifications at the level indicated are awarded to students who have demonstrated:	Typically, holders of a qualification at the level indicated will be able to:	And will have:
7	<p>i) a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice;</p> <p>ii) a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;</p> <p>iii) originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;</p> <p>iv) conceptual understanding that enables the student: to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; and to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses</p>	<p>a) deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;</p> <p>b) demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;</p> <p>c) continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level;</p>	<p>d) the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility; decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; and the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.</p>
8	<p>i) the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;</p> <p>ii) a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;</p> <p>iii) the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;</p> <p>iv) a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.</p>	<p>a) make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences;</p> <p>b) continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches;</p>	<p>d) the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.</p>

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Up until Summer Term 2015 the University used letter-based indicators in referring to the level descriptors. These have now been replaced with the numeric indicators, which are to be used in all cases where levels are referred to. The numeric indicators map on to the previous alpha indicators as shown in Table B below:

Table B

Previous Alpha-based Level Descriptors (to 2014/15)	FHEQ Numerical Level Descriptors (2015/16 onwards)	Typical HE Qualifications
F	3	Pre-certificate level
C	4	HNC Certificate of HE
I	5	HND Foundation Degree Diploma of HE
H	6	Bachelor's Degree with Hons Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate
M	7	Master's Degree Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate
D	8	Doctorates