



This document is published
in English and Welsh.



The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

2nd edition

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Contents

About this edition	1
Definitions	2
How the Frameworks are used	4
About The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies.....	4
How this document links with the Quality Code.....	5
The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies	6
1 Introduction.....	6
2 Main features of The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies	6
3 The Frameworks and their levels	10
4 The qualification descriptors.....	14
5 Using UK qualification descriptors.....	29
6 Responsibilities for implementing an outcomes-based approach to the award of qualifications	30
Annex A: Advisory group (for 2014 version).....	34
Annex B: Dublin descriptors.....	36
Annex C: Illustrative table of credit	40
Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees	44

About this edition

This second edition of *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* has amended references to the Quality Code for Higher Education and the way that institutions are reviewed. These updates are intended to take account of the many changes made to the UK's quality arrangements, particularly in England, since the Frameworks document was first published in 2014.

Defined terms have been updated, and the descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours, formerly published as a separate annex to this document, have been included. These represent minor updates and the main elements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS) remain unchanged.

Definitions

Compensation

The practice of allowing marginal failure (for example, not more than 5-10% below the nominal pass mark) of one or more modules and awarding credit for them, often on the basis of good overall academic performance.

Condonement

The practice of allowing students to fail and not receive credit for one or more modules within a degree course, yet still qualify for the award of the degree.

Course (of study)

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification. This includes research programmes.

Course learning outcomes

Statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a designated course of study (which leads to a qualification). These are statements of holistic outcomes and not simply the sum of the learning outcomes of individual modules.

CQFW

Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales

Credit

A means of quantifying and recognising learning whenever and wherever it is achieved. Credit is awarded in recognition of achievement of learning outcomes at a specified level.

Cycles

Sequential levels identified by the Bologna process (short cycle within the first cycle, first cycle, second cycle and third cycle) within which all European higher education qualifications are located.

Degree-awarding body

An institution with the power to award degrees conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the *Further and Higher Education Act 1992*, or under Section 48 of the *Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992*, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA, or, in England, granted by the Office for Students under section 42 of the *Higher Education and Research Act 2017*.

EQF

European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

Exit qualification

A qualification which may be awarded on completion of an intermediate point of studies in a longer course of study (when a student leaves the course) but for which the student has not registered at the outset.

FHEQ

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

FQHEIS

The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland

The Frameworks

The combined document that comprises both the FHEQ and FQHEIS (this document).

Framework levels

A range of stages sharing similar levels of attainment that are expressed sequentially, against which institutions can position their qualifications.

Intermediate qualification

A separate qualification which can be awarded at a specific stage or level part of the way through a longer course of study and for which a student can register at the outset of study.

Level descriptor

A statement of the generic characteristics of outcomes of learning at a specific level of a qualifications framework, used as a reference point.

OfS

Office for Students

PSRBs

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

QF-EHEA

Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

Qualification

A degree, diploma or certificate awarded by a competent authority (in this context a degree-awarding body) in recognition that particular course or qualification outcomes have been achieved following the successful completion of a recognised higher education course of study.

Qualification descriptor

Generic statements of the outcomes of study associated with a specific qualification. They provide clear points of reference that describe the main outcomes of a qualification.

Reference points

Reference points are collectively agreed requirements or points of comparison (at international, national and degree-awarding body level) which are used by degree-awarding bodies to ensure consistency in academic standards.

SCQF

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Threshold academic standards

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award. For equivalent qualifications, the threshold level of achievement is agreed across the UK and is described by the qualification descriptors set out in the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications and the Office for Students' Sector-Recognised Standards.

How the Frameworks are used

Within the UK, responsibility for education is devolved to each of the four nations. There are differences between the four nations in the educational systems in place, the qualifications offered, and how these are regulated. The differences are most pronounced in general and secondary education. As a result, there are a number of different qualifications and credit frameworks in use across the UK (see paragraphs 2.23-2.29).

This document focuses solely on higher education frameworks. There are two parallel frameworks for higher education qualifications of UK degree-awarding bodies - one that applies to Scotland and one that operates in the rest of the UK:

- *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*
- *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS).*

Providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are required to adhere to the full framework that applies to their nation. In England, parts of the framework have been adopted as sector-recognised standards. These form part of the regulatory requirements that providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) must adhere to in England through compliance with ongoing condition of registration B5. Providers registered in England should refer to the OfS regulatory framework, including the sector-recognised standards.

About The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

Reference points are collectively agreed requirements or points of comparison (at international, national and degree-awarding body level) which are used by degree-awarding bodies to ensure consistency in academic standards. National qualification frameworks are formal structures which are adopted by countries to define their qualification systems. Generally, they identify a hierarchy of qualification levels in ascending order and state the generic requirements for qualifications to be awarded at each of these levels.

The Frameworks show what qualifications are at the same level and indicate how one qualification may lead to another, either at the same or a higher level. They describe a continuum of learning which allows any new qualifications to be placed within the educational system. Assigning levels to qualifications promotes the accurate and consistent description and marketing of qualifications by those who award them. National qualification frameworks provide a context for the articulation, review and development of qualifications.

Each framework sets out a hierarchy of qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification type at each of the levels. In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, degree-awarding bodies are required to use the relevant framework(s) in setting and maintaining academic standards. When awarding qualifications, they are expected to ensure that the requirements of the Frameworks are met. Providers in England are free to make use of the frameworks, but providers registered with the OfS are required to comply with ongoing condition of registration B5 that sets out the OfS sector-recognised standards.

The Frameworks are an important tool for professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in defining and using qualifications in the context of their professional recognition and accreditation processes. The Frameworks also inform international comparability of

academic standards, especially in the European context, support international competitiveness, and facilitate student and graduate mobility.

How this document links with the Quality Code

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) represents a shared understanding of quality practice across the UK higher education sector. It protects the public and student interest, and champions UK higher education's world-leading reputation for quality.

The Quality Code articulates sector-agreed principles for higher education quality across the UK. These include emphasising the role of providers in assuring the quality of the experience they offer to students, supporting student engagement, and ensuring external referencing is used to support the integrity of awards and the quality of provision.

The 2018 edition of the [Quality Code](#) was developed by QAA on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA). It applies to higher education providers based in all four nations of the UK. It is a key reference point for the quality arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, the Quality Code principles and practices are not regulatory requirements, but providers may use them to inform their approach to quality, as a way of providing comparability across the UK and to aid international visibility.

At the time of publication, the Quality Code is undergoing revision through consultation with the UK higher education sector in order for it to continue being of value to students and staff across the UK.

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document is aimed at academic and professional staff working in higher education to support their professional responsibilities for:
- establishing degree-awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations which govern how they award qualifications
 - setting and maintaining academic standards, both within their own organisations and when acting as external examiners
 - formal referencing of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications to European or other international qualifications frameworks.

2 Main features of The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

The status and remit

2.1 The UK frameworks for higher education qualifications apply to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic qualifications at Level 4 and above in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and at Level 7 and above on the SCQF in Scotland, granted by degree-awarding bodies in the exercise of their degree awarding powers. The Frameworks apply irrespective of where the educational provision is delivered or what organisation provides it. They do not apply to honorary degrees or other honorary awards, which are not academic qualifications.

2.2 UK degree-awarding bodies award their own qualifications. This autonomy means that degree-awarding bodies are responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards and quality of their qualifications. All degree-awarding bodies in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales ensure that their qualifications are awarded in accordance with the relevant framework. In England, providers may also make use of the Frameworks but providers registered with the OfS are required to comply with the OfS ongoing condition of registration B5 that sets out the OfS sector-recognised standards. Neither the FHEQ nor the FQHEIS functions as a register of qualifications.

2.3 Education providers are entitled to claim that their qualifications are assigned to a level of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications only if those qualifications are awarded by an approved degree-awarding body.

The purposes

- 2.4 The main purposes of the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications are to:
- provide the principal national points of reference for higher education providers and their external examiners when setting and assessing academic standards
 - promote a shared understanding of the demands and outcomes associated with typical qualifications by promoting a consistent use of qualification titles across the higher education sector

- assist in the identification of potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning.

2.5 As a result, the UK frameworks enable higher education providers to communicate the achievements and attributes represented by typical higher education qualification titles to employers, schools, parents, prospective and current students, PSRBs and other stakeholders.

The approach

2.6 The fundamental premise of the UK frameworks is that qualifications are awarded on the basis of demonstrated achievement of outcomes (expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding and abilities) and attainment rather than years of study. This is known as an outcomes-based approach to qualifications.

2.7 Qualification descriptors are key to this premise. A qualification descriptor sets out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a particular type of qualification (for example, a bachelor's degree with honours). The qualification descriptors contained in the UK frameworks describe the threshold academic standards for those qualification types in terms of the levels of knowledge and understanding and the types of abilities that holders of the relevant qualification are expected to have.

2.8 In addition to the threshold descriptors, the UK frameworks also outline descriptors for achievement at each level of classification on a bachelor's degree. These descriptors can be found in Annex D of this document.

2.9 The outcomes and attributes described in qualification descriptors result from learning acquired on completion of coherent courses of study. Individual courses of study have course learning outcomes which specify the intended outcomes from that course which must be achieved for the award of a specific qualification from an individual degree-awarding body. The course learning outcomes are required to align with the relevant qualification descriptors.

2.10 Each of the UK frameworks has a number of different stages known as framework levels. These reflect distinct levels of intellectual achievement. Each level generally comprises a band of qualifications that share similar levels of attainment. Framework levels facilitate understanding of how higher education qualifications at different levels within a particular framework relate to each other. They also assist in comparison of different types of qualifications at the same level within a particular framework or in comparison of qualifications at a similar level in different national frameworks for credit and qualifications (see paragraph 2.23).

2.11 The UK frameworks for higher education qualifications are also based on the principle that consistent naming conventions for the main qualification types (for example, degree, postgraduate diploma) conveys trustworthy information about the level, nature and subject of study (see paragraphs 6.8-6.19).

How the Frameworks are used

2.12 The Quality Code asks providers to ensure that the academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.

2.13 Higher education providers that do not have degree awarding powers but which work with degree-awarding bodies to deliver courses leading to higher education qualifications do not carry the same responsibilities for academic standards. However, they need to

understand how threshold academic standards are both set and maintained, and are responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the degree-awarding body.

Quality assurance

2.14 Higher education is devolved across each nation of the UK, and their approaches to quality are set out in the links below:

- England: [Office for Students regulatory framework](#)
- Northern Ireland: [Northern Ireland Quality Assurance of Higher Education](#)
- Scotland: [Quality Enhancement Framework Scotland](#)
- Wales: [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#).

2.15 Degree-awarding bodies set and maintain the academic standards and quality of courses of study through an extensive and sophisticated range of internal quality assurance procedures, underpinned by common principles across the sector.

Status within Europe

2.16 Increasingly, higher education providers, students and employers operate and compete in an international context. The UK frameworks for higher education qualifications meet the expectations of the [Bologna Declaration](#) and thus align with [A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area \(QF-EHEA\)](#). The QF-EHEA provides a mechanism for relating the national qualifications frameworks of different countries to each other. All 49 countries participating in the Bologna Process are required to establish national frameworks for higher education qualifications which are quality assured by a competent body, and to verify the compatibility of their frameworks with the QF-EHEA.

2.17 Within the QF-EHEA, the term 'cycle' is used to describe the three sequential levels identified by the Bologna Process. These are first cycle (which can include short-cycle qualifications - see paragraph 2.19), second cycle and third cycle, within which all European higher education qualifications are located. In broad terms, the first cycle corresponds to undergraduate qualifications (typically, bachelor's degrees) and the second and third cycles correspond to postgraduate qualifications (typically, master's degrees and doctoral degrees, respectively).

2.18 Like the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications, the QF-EHEA has generic qualification descriptors for each cycle, known as the 'Dublin descriptors', which are an international reference point.¹ These illustrate the typical abilities and achievements associated with qualifications that signify the completion of each cycle. The Dublin Descriptors are located in Annex B of this document and may be used by higher education providers as an additional reference point.

2.19 In many other European countries, as in the UK, a range of higher education qualifications are available to students who have undertaken a course of study within the QF-EHEA first cycle, but which do not represent the full extent of achievement for this cycle. These qualifications are referred to as higher education short-cycle qualifications (within or linked only to the first cycle). Such qualifications may prepare students for employment while also providing preparation for, and access to, courses which are located at the level of the end of the first cycle.

¹ The Dublin descriptors were originally developed by the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI) in 2004.

2.20 Table 1 (on page 12) indicates the relationship between the **levels** of the two UK frameworks for higher education qualifications and the **cycles** (short cycle, first cycle, second cycle and third cycle) of the QF-EHEA.

2.21 A [European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning](#) (EQF) was also agreed by the European Parliament in April 2008. Featuring eight levels, the UK frameworks for higher education qualifications are compatible with this framework. Compatibility with the EQF was first verified by QAA in 2006 for the FQHEIS and 2008 for the FHEQ. The latest verification exercise took place in June 2019.

2.22 Summaries of the conclusions and implications of these verification processes and their reports are published in:

- [Referencing the Regulated Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework](#) (England and Northern Ireland)
- [Referencing the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Frameworks \(SCQF\) to the European Qualifications Framework \(EQF\)](#) (Scotland)
- [Referencing the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales to the European Qualifications Framework](#) (Wales).

Relationship with other UK national qualifications frameworks

2.23 Other national qualifications frameworks (which incorporate vocational education and training, and general and secondary education) in the UK include:

- the [Regulated Qualifications Framework \(RQF\)](#), which comprises both general education and vocational qualifications (in England and Northern Ireland)
- the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework \(SCQF\)](#), managed by the SCQF Partnership, is an integrated overarching credit and qualifications framework in Scotland, embracing all educational sectors; the FQHEIS is a constituent part of the SCQF
- the [Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales \(CQFW\)](#), managed by the Welsh Government, is a meta-framework for credit and qualifications in Wales embracing all post-14 education and training; the FHEQ is a constituent part of the CQFW.

2.24 In England and Northern Ireland, the FHEQ is separate from the RQF, but in Wales and Scotland the higher education qualification frameworks are integrated. Both the RQF and the CQFW provide for higher-level qualifications (at Levels 4 to 8) which compare with the corresponding levels of the FHEQ. There are opportunities for progression from qualifications on one framework to qualifications on another framework. HNDs on the RQF, for example, may provide entry to the second or third year of some bachelor's degree courses.

2.25 To demonstrate the links between these various frameworks and how qualifications in the different jurisdictions of the UK and its close neighbour Ireland compare with each other, the authorities responsible for the Frameworks in each nation of the UK and Ireland have produced a guide to the national qualifications frameworks (and the qualifications offered) in each of the countries: [Qualifications Can Cross Boundaries - A Guide to Comparing Qualifications in the UK and Ireland](#). Maintained by QAA on behalf of the UK and Ireland Qualifications Frameworks and Policy Group, this guide enables comparisons to be drawn between qualifications and their levels, rather than direct equivalences.

Relationship with credit

2.26 The SCQF and the CQFW are integrated credit and qualifications frameworks which means that they specify minimum credit volumes and levels for qualifications - the RQF is solely a qualifications framework. As noted in paragraph 2.23, the FQHEIS is a constituent part of the SCQF and therefore refers to credit requirements; the credit arrangements in the FQHEIS/SCQF apply to all degree-awarding bodies in Scotland. All degree-awarding bodies in Wales have agreed to use the credit arrangements stipulated in the CQFW (of which the FHEQ is an integral part, forming the higher education qualifications pillar).

2.27 The FHEQ is a qualifications framework, based on the outcomes represented by the main qualification titles. It is not an integrated credit and qualifications framework, nor is its use dependent on credit. This is because not all degree-awarding bodies in England use credit. Some do not use credit at all and some use the [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System \(ECTS\)](#) to support student mobility within Europe and award ECTS points rather than UK credit. Nevertheless, credit is widely used by most degree-awarding bodies in England and Northern Ireland in the design and management of their taught courses and has been for many years. A revised [higher education credit framework for England](#) was published by QAA in 2021, and all degree-awarding bodies in England and Northern Ireland that award credit are able to reference this framework as it is designed to be complementary to the FHEQ.

2.28 The various credit frameworks used within the UK operate according to the same underpinning principles (for example, one credit equates to 10 notional hours of learning). The guidance in these credit frameworks, therefore, also supports a consistent approach to the award of credit across the higher education sector. The credit frameworks for England/Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland provide guidance on the minimum credit requirements associated with the typical qualifications at each level of the relevant UK framework for higher education qualifications.

2.29 Annex C of this document sets out the minimum credit requirements specified by the relevant credit frameworks for each of the jurisdictions in the UK. In England, the OfS has adopted a version of this table as a component of its [sector-recognised standards](#). Institutions in Scotland and Wales can consult the SCQF and CQFW for detailed information on credit requirements. Further information for providers in England sits within the [Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Advice on Academic Credit Arrangements](#) and [Making Use of Credit: A Companion to the Higher Education Credit Framework for England](#).

3 The Frameworks and their levels

The levels

3.1 The UK frameworks for higher education qualifications have a number of different framework levels. These define the outcomes of progressively more challenging learning (and typical qualifications) in ascending order.

3.2 Each framework level is illustrated by a qualification descriptor for the typical qualification awarded by degree-awarding bodies at that level (see paragraphs 2.7 and section 4). In some cases, courses leading to higher education qualifications, particularly those taken over several years, involve learning that is progressively more challenging across more than one level. For example, integrated master's degrees involve learning across Levels 4-7 of the FHEQ and Levels 7-11 of the FQHEIS. Each higher education qualification has course outcomes that align to the qualification descriptor for that final level.

There are a range of qualifications for each level of the UK frameworks. The framework levels allow for the development of new qualifications - for example, degree apprenticeships.

3.3 The number of levels in the FHEQ is different to the FQHEIS, reflecting the philosophies, structures and approaches to education in Scotland in contrast to the rest of the UK. There are also differences in types of qualifications awarded. Bachelor's degrees with honours are typically four years in Scotland, which relates to the structure of Scottish primary and secondary education, but three years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

3.4 The FHEQ has five framework levels - three of which are undergraduate and two are postgraduate. The levels of the FHEQ are numbered 4-8, succeeding Levels 1-3 which precede higher education on the RQF and the CQFW. The FQHEIS has six framework levels - four of which are undergraduate and two postgraduate. As the FQHEIS is part of the SCQF, the numbering of the levels starts at 7, reflecting the different number of levels in general and secondary education in Scotland (for instance, the level for doctoral qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is 8 but in Scotland it is 12).

3.5 The framework levels of the two UK frameworks for higher education qualifications, with examples of typical qualifications at each level, are represented in Table 1.

About Table 1

3.6 This table shows the FHEQ and FQHEIS levels as well as the ECTS cycles from the Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). It is a table of typical qualifications and levels awarded by higher education providers. It cannot and does not attempt to contain all types and titles of higher education awards. Degree-awarding bodies have the autonomy to determine their own qualification titles, which are typically based on the naming conventions in section 6.8 to 6.21.

3.7 Some cells within the QF-EHEA column are shaded because those qualifications do not meet the expectations for the relevant cycle qualifications. Similarly, the sixth cell down is shaded because graduate diplomas, graduate certificates and the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) do not meet the expectations for end of first cycle qualifications.

Table 1: Examples of the typical higher education qualifications at levels of *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* and their corresponding cycle in the QF-EHEA

Within each level, the various qualifications involve different volumes of learning and hence differences in the range of intended learning outcomes.

Typical higher education qualifications awarded by degree-awarding bodies within each level	FHEQ	FQHEIS	Corresponding QF-EHEA cycle
	FHEQ level	SCQF level	
Doctoral degrees (eg PhD/DPhil, EdD, DBA, DClinPsy) ^a	8	12	Third-cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Master's degrees (eg MPhil, MLitt, MRes, MA, MSc)	7	11	Second-cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Integrated master's degrees (eg MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm) ^b			
Primary qualifications (or first degrees) in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science (eg MB ChB, MB BS, BM BS ^c ; BDS; BVSc, BVMS) ^d			
Postgraduate diplomas			
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) ^e /Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) ^f			
Postgraduate certificates	6	9	First-cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg BA/BSc Hons)			
Bachelor's degrees ^g			
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland ^e			
Graduate diplomas			
Graduate certificates ^h	5	NA	Short-cycle (within or linked to the first cycle) qualifications
Foundation degrees (eg FdA, FdSc)		8	
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)		NA	
Higher National Diplomas (HND) awarded by degree-awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under licence from Pearson ⁱ	4	NA	
Higher National Certificates (HNC) awarded by degree-awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under licence from Pearson ⁱ		NA	
Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)		7	

Notes to Table 1

- a Professional doctorate courses include some taught elements in addition to the research dissertation. Practice varies but typically professional doctorates include postgraduate study equivalent to a minimum of three full-time calendar years with study at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS representing no more than one-third of this.
- b Integrated master's degree courses typically include study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and five in Scotland, of which study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS (that is, at the level of the qualification). Thus, study at bachelor's level is integrated with study at master's level and the courses are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full at Level 6 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS and Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 of the FQHEIS.
- c These are all abbreviated forms for the degrees of Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery.
- d Primary qualifications in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science typically include study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and five in Scotland, of which study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS (that is, at the level of the qualification). Thus, study at bachelor's level is integrated with study at master's level and the courses are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full at Level 6 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS and Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 of the FQHEIS. For historical reasons, the qualifications retain the title 'Bachelor' (see paragraph 4.17 (e)).
- e The title Postgraduate Certificate in Education is reserved for those PGCE qualifications that are set at Level 7 of the FHEQ and align with the qualification descriptor for Level 7. The title Professional Graduate Certificate in Education is used for those PGCE qualifications that are set at Level 6 of the FHEQ and align with the FHEQ qualification descriptor at Level 6. For more information, see the [joint statement on the PGCE qualification title](#).
- f In Scotland, the qualification equivalent to the Postgraduate Certificate in Education is typically the Postgraduate Diploma in Education.
- g A bachelor's degree without honours includes an Ordinary degree or a Pass degree which consist of a smaller volume of credit and so meet the qualification descriptor in part at Level 6.
- h In Scotland, graduate certificates may be either at SCQF Level 9 or Level 10 on the FQHEIS.
- i In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, HNDs and HNCs may either be awarded by degree-awarding bodies under a licence from Pearson (which allows them to devise, deliver and award Higher National qualifications themselves), or they may be awarded directly by [Pearson](#). The majority of these qualifications are awarded by Pearson. Only those HNDs and HNCs that are awarded by degree-awarding bodies are included on the FHEQ (because this framework comprises qualifications awarded by degree-awarding bodies). Pearson is not a degree-awarding body but an awarding organisation regulated by Ofqual. HNDs and HNCs awarded directly by Pearson are regulated qualifications at Level 5 and Level 4 respectively on the RQF and CQFW and are subject to the academic standards and regulations of Pearson, and the requirements of the RQF and the CQFW. In Scotland, HNDs and HNCs are awarded exclusively by the [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#) (SQA) (which is not a degree-awarding body) and are at Levels 8 and 7 respectively of the SCQF.

4 The qualification descriptors

4.1 Qualification descriptors demonstrate the generic outcomes and attributes of the main type of qualification at each framework level. They make clear how the qualification differs from other qualifications, both at that level and at other levels. They are generic because they cover the full range of disciplines rather than a specific subject; QAA [Subject Benchmark Statements](#) fulfil this purpose.

4.2 Qualification descriptors are in two parts. The first part is a statement of outcomes, achievement of which is assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. This is a statement of the national threshold academic standard for the qualification. This part is of particular relevance to degree-awarding bodies in designing, approving, assessing and reviewing academic courses. They need to be satisfied that, for any course, the learning opportunities and assessment provides every student with the opportunity to achieve, and to demonstrate achievement of, the intended course learning outcomes.

4.3 The second part of the descriptor is a statement of the wider abilities that a typical student would be expected to have developed, and supports conversations with employers and other stakeholders about those capabilities.

4.4 At most levels, there is more than one type of qualification that may be achieved (for example, postgraduate diplomas and certificates in addition to master's degrees at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS). Within each level, the various types of qualifications involve different volumes of learning (for example, master's degrees entail more learning than postgraduate certificates). As a consequence of this, there are differences in the range and nature of intended course learning outcomes. Not all of the qualification types at each level therefore meet all of the expectations of the qualification descriptor.

4.5 Where a qualification type other than the main qualification has a smaller volume of learning, the qualification descriptor for the degree is used as a reference point and the sub-degree qualification is expected to meet the descriptor in part. The information beneath each coloured descriptor explains which qualifications meet the descriptor in full, and where the qualification descriptor is used as a reference point for other qualifications at the same framework level.

4.6 Short courses are frequently offered as continuing professional development opportunities. The qualification descriptors provide points of reference that help providers determine which level of the relevant UK framework should be assigned to any qualifications resulting from these courses. Courses use titling conventions set out in paragraphs 6.13-6.19.

4.7 QAA keeps under review the need for any additional qualification descriptors, or amendment to them, in the light of the development of other points of reference, such as Subject Benchmark Statements and Characteristics Statements (see paragraphs 5.2-5.4) or European developments - for example, arising from the Bologna Process, or the 2018 Council of Europe publication of the [Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#).

4.8 Because there are two frameworks, the following descriptors can apply to either the FHEQ, the FQHEIS, or both. The qualification descriptors that relate to the FHEQ are tinted **green** and those that relate to the FQHEIS are tinted **blue**. Those qualification descriptors tinted **purple** are common to both the FHEQ and the FQHEIS. So there are:

- two separate descriptors for the CertHE (one for the FHEQ and one for the FQHEIS)
- a qualification descriptor for the foundation degree on the FHEQ and a qualification descriptor for the DipHE on the FQHEIS
- a qualification descriptor for the bachelor's non-honours degree in Scotland
- two separate descriptors for bachelor's degrees with honours (one for the FHEQ and one for the FQHEIS)
- a single qualification descriptor for bachelor's degrees (FHEQ Level 7/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS), and
- a single descriptor for master's degrees (FHEQ Level 8/SCQF Level 12 on the FQHEIS).

4.9 Providers in England should also refer to the [OfS sector-recognised standards](#) which align with the content of the descriptors appearing here.

4.10 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 4 on the FHEQ

Certificate of Higher Education

The descriptor provided for this level is for any Certificate of Higher Education, which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications aligned with Level 4 of the FHEQ.

Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- 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
- an ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work
- communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments
- undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility.

- a) Holders of a Certificate of Higher Education will have a sound knowledge of the basic concepts of a subject, and will have learned how to take different approaches to solving problems. They will be able to communicate accurately and will have the qualities needed for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility. The Certificate of Higher Education may be a first step towards obtaining higher-level qualifications.

4.11 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 7 on the FQHEIS

Certificate of Higher Education

The Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) is available in a number of Scottish higher education institutions, typically as an exit award after the equivalent of one year of full-time study.

Some CertHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the definitive record for the relevant course.

Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- an outline knowledge of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its links with related subjects, and a more extensive knowledge of some of the key areas
- an understanding of the major theories, principles and concepts
- familiarity with some of the routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject
- skills for the gathering, basic analysis, and presentation of routine information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and qualitative data within a clearly defined context; this will include the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as appropriate to the subject.

Typically, holders of the Certificate of Higher Education will be able to:

- use their knowledge of the subject and its techniques in a routine manner to evaluate and formulate a range of arguments and solutions to problems and issues of a routine nature
- communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably, and within structured and coherent arguments
- undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment
- apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where individuals may have some limited personal responsibility, but the criteria for decisions and the scope of the task are well defined.

4.12 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 5 on the FHEQ

Foundation degree

The descriptor provided for this level of the FHEQ is for any foundation degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 5 of the FHEQ, such as Diplomas of Higher Education and Higher National Diplomas.

Foundation degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- 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
- 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
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis
- 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
- undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

- a) The foundation degree is an example of a qualification that meets, in full, the expectations of the qualification descriptor (see the [Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement](#)).
- b) Holders of qualifications at this level will have developed a sound understanding of the principles in their field of study, and will have learned to apply those principles more widely. Through this, they will have learned to evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems. Their studies may well have had a vocational orientation - for example, HNDs - enabling them to perform effectively in their chosen field. Holders of qualifications at this level will have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

4.13 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 8 on the FQHEIS

Diploma of Higher Education

The Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) is typically offered after the equivalent of the first two years of full-time higher education in Scotland.

Some DipHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas, while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the definitive record for the relevant course.

Diplomas of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a knowledge and understanding of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its interactions with related subjects; detailed knowledge of some key areas which may include some knowledge of current issues in limited specialised areas
- familiarity and understanding of a range of the essential theories, principles and concepts and an awareness of major issues at the forefront of the subject(s)
- familiarity and effective deployment of essential/routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject(s)
- skills for the gathering, critical analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and/or quantitative and qualitative data that is core to the subject(s); this will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use their knowledge, understanding and skills to critically evaluate and formulate evidence-based arguments and identify solutions to clearly-defined problems of a generally routine nature
- communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using a range of specialist techniques
- identify and address their own major learning needs within defined contexts and to undertake guided further learning in new areas
- apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where the scope of the task and the criteria for decisions are generally well defined, but where some personal responsibility and initiative is required.

4.14 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 9 on the FQHEIS

Bachelor's (non-honours) degree in Scotland

The bachelor's (non-honours) degree in Scotland is typically achieved after the equivalent of three years of full-time higher education. In the main, and depending on the subjects or professional area(s) studied, it is awarded as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA). Although all degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth, some degrees will be highly focused while others will develop greater breadth of outcomes. The particular characteristics of each degree will be articulated in the definitive record for the course. Many degrees that have a specific vocational focus carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA' (see paragraph 4.17 (f)). The bachelor's (non-honours) degree in Scotland is a recognised entry requirement to a number of professions across the UK.

Bachelor's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a broad and comparative knowledge of the general scope of the subject, its different areas and applications, and its interactions with related subjects; a detailed knowledge of a defined subject or a more limited coverage of a specialist area balanced by a wider range of study; in each case, specialised study will be informed by current developments in the subject
- a critical understanding of the essential theories, principles and concepts of the subject(s) and of the ways in which these are developed through the main methods of enquiry in the subject; an awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge
- familiarity and competence in the use of routine materials, practices and skills, and of a few that are more specialised, advanced and complex
- well-developed skills for the gathering, evaluation, analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and/or qualitative data, drawing on a wide range of current sources; this will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use their knowledge, understanding and skills, in both identifying and analysing problems and issues and in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments
- communicate the results of their studies and other work accurately and reliably in a range of different contexts using the main specialist concepts, constructs and techniques of the subject(s)
- identify and address their own learning needs, including being able to draw on a range of current research, development and professional materials
- apply their subject-related and transferable skills to contexts where criteria for decisions and the scope of the task may be well defined but where personal responsibility, initiative and decision-making is also required.

4.15 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 6 on the FHEQ

Bachelor's degree with honours

The descriptor provided for this level of the FHEQ is for any bachelor's degree with honours which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 6 of the FHEQ, including bachelor's degrees and graduate diplomas.

Bachelor's degrees with honours are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- 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
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline
- 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
 - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- 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
- 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
- communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
- the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

- a) Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours will have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge, some of it at the current boundaries of an

academic discipline. Through this, the holder will have developed analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment. The holder of such a qualification will be able to evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively.

- b) Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours should have the qualities needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable circumstances.
- c) Bachelor's degrees with honours form the largest group of higher education qualifications. Typically, learning outcomes for these courses would be expected to be achieved on the basis of study equivalent to three or four full-time academic years and lead to qualifications with titles such as Bachelor of Arts, BA (Hons) or Bachelor of Science, BSc (Hons). In addition to bachelor's degrees at this level are short courses and professional 'conversion' courses, based largely on undergraduate material, and taken usually by those who are already graduates in another discipline, leading to, for example, graduate certificates or graduate diplomas.

4.16 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS

Bachelor's degree with honours in Scotland

The bachelor's degree with honours in Scotland is typically offered through the equivalent of four years of full-time higher education. It is awarded mainly as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc Hons) or a Bachelor of Arts (BA Hons). All honours degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth as will be clear from the definitive records for individual courses. Many honours degrees will have a specific vocational focus, and in some cases will carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA (Hons)' (see paragraph 4.17.6 (f)). The honours degree is the recognised 'normal' entry requirement to postgraduate study and to many professions across the UK.

Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge and understanding of the subject(s) as a whole and its links to related subject(s); a detailed knowledge of a few specialisms and developments, some of which are at, or informed by, the forefront of the subject
- a critical understanding of the established theories, principles and concepts, and of a number of advanced and emerging issues at the forefront of the subject(s)
- a critical understanding of the uncertainty and limits of knowledge and how it is developed, and an ability to deploy established techniques of analysis and enquiry within the subject
- a comprehensive knowledge and familiarity with essential and advanced materials, techniques and skills including some at the forefront of the subject
- skills in identifying information needs, and in the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of ideas, concepts, qualitative and quantitative data, and information from a range of evaluated sources including current research, scholarly and/or professional literature.

Typically, holders of the honours degree will be able to:

- use their knowledge, understanding and skills in the systematic and critical assessment of a wide range of concepts, ideas and data (that may be incomplete), and in both identifying and analysing complex problems and issues; demonstrating some originality and creativity in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments
- communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using the full repertoire of the principal concepts and constructs of the subject(s)
- systematically identify and address their own learning needs both in current and new areas, making use of research, development and professional materials as appropriate, including those related to the forefront of developments
- apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts of a professional or equivalent nature where there is a requirement for:
 - the exercise of personal responsibility and initiative
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
 - the ability to undertake further developments of a professional or equivalent nature.

4.17 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 on the FHEQ and SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS

Master's degree

The descriptor provided for this level of the Frameworks is for any master's degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS, including postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas.

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- 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
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- 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
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- 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
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
 - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

- a) Much of the study undertaken for master's degrees is at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Successful students show originality in the application of knowledge, and they understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They are able to deal with complex issues - both systematically and creatively, and they show originality in tackling and solving problems. They have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility

and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

- b) Master's degrees are awarded after completion of taught courses, courses of research or a mixture of both. Longer, research-based courses may lead to the degree of MPhil. The learning outcomes of most master's degree courses are achieved on the basis of study equivalent to at least one full-time calendar year and are taken by graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours (or equivalent achievement).
- c) Master's degrees are often distinguished from other qualifications at this framework level (for example, advanced short courses, which often form parts of continuing professional development courses and lead to postgraduate certificates and/or postgraduate diplomas) by an increased intensity, complexity and density of study. Master's degrees, in comparison to postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas, typically include planned intellectual progression that often includes a synoptic/research or scholarly activity.
- d) Some master's degrees - for example, in science, engineering and mathematics - comprise an integrated course of study spanning several levels. Such courses typically involve study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and five in Scotland. Of this, study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS and the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS in full. Study at bachelor's level is integrated with study at master's level and the courses are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full at Level 6 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS as well as those at Level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 of the FQHEIS. Such qualifications are often termed 'integrated master's' as an acknowledgement of the prior period of study at lower levels (which typically meets the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 6/Level 10).
- e) First degrees in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science comprise an integrated course of study and professional practice spanning several levels. While the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves typically meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7/Level 11, these qualifications may often retain, for historical reasons, titles of Bachelor of Medicine or Bachelor of Surgery; Bachelor of Dental Surgery; Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine or Bachelor of Veterinary Science, and are abbreviated to MBChB or BM BS, BDS, BVetMed and BVSc respectively. The use of the title 'Dr' by medical doctors is a historical abbreviation for the profession; it does not indicate a qualification at doctoral level (Level 8 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 12 on the FQHEIS).
- f) In Scotland, a small number of universities (Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews - the Scottish Ancients) have a long tradition of labelling certain undergraduate academic degrees as Master of Arts 'MA'. This title reflects historic Scottish custom and practice; there is no implication that the outcomes of the courses are at SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS. These courses are at SCQF Level 9 or 10 on the FQHEIS.
- g) The Master of Arts (MA) awards granted by the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge are not academic qualifications. The MA is normally granted, on application, to graduates of these universities with a bachelor's

degree. No further study or assessment is required, but the recipient may be required to pay a fee. At the University of Oxford, the MA may be granted during or after the twenty-first term from matriculation, and at the University of Cambridge, the MA may be granted six years after the end of the first term.

4.18 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 8 on the FHEQ and SCQF Level 12 on the FQHEIS

Doctoral degree

The descriptor provided for this level of the Frameworks is for any doctoral degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other Level 8/Level 12 qualifications.

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- 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
- 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
- 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
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- 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
- 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.

And holders will have:

- 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.

- a) Doctoral degrees are awarded for the creation and interpretation, construction and/or exposition of knowledge which extends the forefront of a discipline, usually through original research.
- b) Holders of doctoral degrees are able to conceptualise, design and implement projects for the generation of significant new knowledge and/or understanding. Holders of doctoral degrees have the qualities needed for employment that require both the ability to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields and an innovative approach to tackling and solving problems.
- c) Doctoral courses that may have a substantial taught element in addition to the research component (for example, professional doctorates), lead usually to awards which include the name of the discipline in their title (for example, EdD for Doctor of Education or DClInPsy for Doctor of Clinical Psychology). Professional doctorates aim to develop an individual's professional practice and to support

them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge.

- d) The titles PhD and DPhil are commonly used for doctoral degrees awarded on the basis of original research.
- e) Achievement of outcomes consistent with the qualification descriptor for the doctoral degree normally requires study equivalent to three full-time calendar years.
- f) Higher doctorates may be awarded in recognition of a substantial body of original research undertaken over the course of many years. Typically, a portfolio of work that has been previously published in a peer-refereed context is submitted for assessment. Most degree-awarding bodies restrict candidacy to graduates or their own academic staff of several years' standing.

5 Using UK qualification descriptors

The relationship between the qualification descriptors and other UK reference points for academic standards

5.1 **Qualification descriptors** are generic statements of the intended outcomes of study which span subjects. Many academic courses aim to develop both general and specific skills. These latter are not explicitly addressed in the qualification descriptors as many skills, and the extent to which they need to be developed, are subject or profession-specific. As such, they are addressed more appropriately in Subject Benchmark Statements and individual course learning outcomes.

5.2 [Subject Benchmark Statements](#) set out what the outcomes (in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills) and attributes identified in the qualification descriptors would look like for specific subject disciplines. They set out threshold and (in some cases) typical and excellent academic standards for bachelor's degrees with honours, and for master's degrees where there is significant taught provision in a subject (for example, in subjects where integrated master's qualifications are widespread).

5.3 The regulatory status of Subject Benchmark Statements differs depending on the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, they are specified as a key reference point, as appropriate, for academic standards in Wales under the [Quality Assessment Framework for Wales](#), and in Scotland as part of the [Quality Enhancement Framework](#). Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality requirements in Northern Ireland.

5.4 Additional guidance on the [characteristics of certain types of qualifications](#) (doctoral degrees, master's degrees, qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body, foundation degrees, micro-credentials and higher education in apprenticeships) is also published by QAA. These Characteristics Statements complement and contextualise the information provided within the Frameworks, giving more detail about the distinctive features of qualifications at particular levels.

The relationship between qualification descriptors and degree-awarding bodies' own reference points

5.5 Degree-awarding bodies (and their delivering partners) are responsible for ensuring that individual course learning outcomes (or award criteria in the case of research degrees) align with the appropriate qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications. Degree-awarding bodies approve the course learning outcomes for each qualification that they award, including separate outcomes for any intermediate or exit qualifications.

5.6 The elements which underpin the outcomes-based approach to qualifications - such as qualification descriptors, individual course learning outcomes, and, where appropriate for each nation, Characteristics Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements - interact with each other. At course level, these elements are linked by the UK frameworks and used by subject communities and individual degree-awarding bodies.

5.7 Students are provided with a detailed record of their studies when they leave their course of study (on completion or earlier), which gives evidence of their achievement. This may be in the form of a transcript, Diploma Supplement and/or Higher Education Achievement Report.

6 Responsibilities for implementing an outcomes-based approach to the award of qualifications

Positioning qualifications at the appropriate levels of The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies

6.1 As autonomous bodies awarding their own qualifications, degree-awarding bodies are responsible for demonstrating that each of their qualifications is assigned the appropriate level of the relevant UK framework. Degree-awarding bodies consider the framework level with which the majority of course outcomes most closely correspond (using the qualification descriptor as a reference point). For example, a course leading to a graduate certificate or graduate diploma might have some outcomes at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS, but positioning it at this level and the use of the 'postgraduate' title for the award would be justified only if most or all of the outcomes were assessed at those levels.

6.2 This assignation process is achieved through course approval. Course approval is the quality assurance process used by degree-awarding bodies to scrutinise a proposed course of study in order to assure that it meets the UK threshold standards for the qualification and the academic standards and quality of the degree-awarding body awarding the qualification. See the Quality Code's advice and guidance theme for [Course design and development](#).

Designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing courses and qualifications

6.3 When designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing courses of study, degree-awarding bodies consider:

- the alignment between the intended learning outcomes of the course and the qualification descriptors of the relevant UK framework for higher education qualifications
- whether there is a sufficient volume of assessed study that will demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved
- whether the design of the curriculum and assessments is such that all students following the course have the opportunity to achieve and demonstrate the intended outcomes
- the regulatory and other requirements of any PSRBs which recognise or accredit specific courses for professional purposes.

6.4 The amount of learning that is necessary to achieve course learning outcomes can be expressed through the volume of study - for example, the length of time it takes to complete the qualification - or through the use of academic credit. Although the FHEQ does not specify minimum or typical volumes of learning for qualifications by reference to units of credit, the table at Annex C does show typical credit volumes for each level. However, a 'degree', for example, can only be awarded when the course learning outcomes, which should have been aligned to the relevant qualification descriptor, have been met or exceeded.

Assessment of learning outcomes

6.5 Effective and appropriate assessment is essential to the operation of a qualifications framework based on learning outcomes. Assessment is used to give students the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the relevant course learning outcomes. Degree-awarding bodies judge student performance against the standards set and ensure that

qualifications are awarded only where the relevant learning outcomes have been achieved in this way (see the Quality Code Advice and Guidance theme on [Assessment](#)).

Awarding qualifications

6.6 A student who has failed to achieve the required course learning outcomes for a qualification at a specific level may be considered for the award of a qualification at a lower level. However, the lower qualification is awarded only if the student has demonstrated the course learning outcomes required (or award criteria in the case of research degrees) for that lower qualification. For example:

- a student who has failed to achieve the required outcomes for a bachelor's degree may only be awarded a DipHE if the student has demonstrated the outcomes specified for a DipHE (at Level 5 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 8 on the FQHEIS) on that course
- a student who has failed to achieve the required outcomes for a doctoral degree (at Level 8 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 12 on the FQHEIS) may only be awarded an MPhil if the student has demonstrated the outcomes and satisfied the award criteria specified for an MPhil (at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS).

6.7 Degree-awarding bodies ensure that:

- the course learning outcomes/award criteria required for each of their courses and qualifications are specified clearly (including those for any intermediate or exit qualifications within them)
- achievement of the relevant course learning outcomes/research criteria is demonstrated before a qualification is awarded
- assessment procedures that permit compensation or condonement are not applied in a way that might allow a qualification to be awarded without achievement, in full, of the course learning outcomes being demonstrated.

See the Quality Code's advice and guidance themes on [Assessment](#) and [Research Degrees](#).

Titling conventions for qualifications

6.8 Public understanding of the achievements represented by higher education qualifications requires transparent and consistent use of qualification titles.

6.9 The title of any qualification accurately and appropriately reflects the level of achievements, the nature, volume and field(s) of study undertaken, and is not misleading.

Level

6.10 In order to ensure that qualification titles accurately convey information about the level of the qualification:

- the titles 'honours' (for example, bachelor's degree with honours), 'master' (for example, Master of Arts) and 'doctor' (for example, Doctor of Philosophy) are used only for qualifications that meet, in full, the expectations of the qualification descriptors at Level 6, 7 and 8 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 10, 11 and 12 on the FQHEIS respectively (but see note to the master's degree qualification descriptor)
- titles with the stem 'graduate' (for example, 'graduate diploma') are used for qualifications from courses of study that typically require graduate entry, or its

equivalent, and have learning outcomes that match relevant parts of the descriptor for a qualification at Level 6 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 9 or 10 on the FQHEIS

- titles with the stem 'postgraduate' (for example, 'postgraduate diploma') are restricted to qualifications where the learning outcomes of the course of study match or exceed relevant parts of the descriptor for a qualification at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS.

6.11 In accordance with the above, the title Postgraduate Certificate in Education is reserved for those PGCE qualifications that are set at Level 7 of the FHEQ and align with the qualification descriptor for Level 7. The title Professional Graduate Certificate in Education is used for those PGCE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that are set at Level 6 of the FHEQ and align with the FHEQ qualification descriptor at Level 6.² Further guidance on the PGCE title is available on the [QAA website](#).

Volume of study

6.12 The award of higher education qualifications is based on the demonstrated achievement of outcomes rather than years of study, but references can be made to volume of study and credit in order to indicate the approximate time expected to achieve the relevant learning outcomes. Volume of study and credit can therefore be used as an indicator of the range and depth of the learning outcomes and can, as a consequence, distinguish between types of qualifications at the same level.

6.13 For example, the title 'diploma' generally indicates a smaller volume of learning than a degree but a larger volume than a certificate (and an associated differentiation in the range of intended learning outcomes). A range of diplomas and certificates are offered by higher education providers:

- Undergraduate diplomas (for example, DipHE) are differentiated from undergraduate certificates (for example, CertHE) by both level and volume of study; the former are at Level 5 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 8 on the FQHEIS, and the latter are at Level 4 of the FHEQ/SCQF Level 7 on the FQHEIS.
- Graduate diplomas and certificates are at the same level (Level 6 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS) but are differentiated from each other by volume of study and learning outcomes. The title 'certificate' normally signifies learning outcomes which would imply study equivalent to at least one-third of a full-time academic year, and the title 'diploma' normally signifies study equivalent to at least two-thirds of a full-time academic year at the relevant level (and, where credit is awarded, the volume of credit specified by the relevant credit framework).
- Postgraduate diplomas and certificates are at the same level (Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS) but are differentiated from each other by volume of study and learning outcomes. The title 'certificate' normally signifies learning outcomes which would imply study equivalent to at least one-third of a full-time academic year, and the title 'diploma' normally signifies study equivalent to at least two-thirds of a full-time academic year at the relevant level (and, where credit is awarded, the volume of credit specified by the relevant credit framework).

² In Scotland, Professional Graduate Diplomas in Education are at the same level as Postgraduate Diplomas in Education (SCQF Level 11) and the use of the title 'Professional' does not imply a difference in level.

Nature of study

6.14 The title of 'degree' is awarded only for achievement in full of the outcomes set out in the relevant qualification descriptor as follows:

- 'foundation degree' is used only in respect of qualifications at Level 5 on the FHEQ
- 'bachelor's (non-honours) degree in Scotland' is used only in respect of qualifications at SCQF Level 9 on the FQHEIS
- 'bachelor's degree with honours' is used only in respect of qualifications at Level 6 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 10 on the FQHEIS
- 'master's degree' is used only in respect of qualifications at Level 7 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 11 on the FQHEIS
- 'doctoral degree' is used only in respect of qualifications at Level 8 on the FHEQ/SCQF Level 12 on the FQHEIS.

For foundation degrees, at Level 5, institutions may wish to consult the [Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement](#).

6.15 The abbreviated titles PhD and DPhil are used for qualifications where assessment is solely by a final thesis or published work; or by artefact, composition or performance that is accompanied by a written commentary placing it in its academic context.

6.16 The abbreviated title MPhil is generally used for qualifications awarded following extended master's courses that typically involve a substantial element of research or equivalent enquiry.

Field of study

6.17 Titles used for doctoral qualifications awarded after courses that include a substantial taught element normally include the name of the discipline in the title (for example, EdD for Doctor of Education).

6.18 Qualification titles that reflect the subject focus of courses of study in two disciplines (for example, a joint honours qualification) use titling conventions based on:

- 'A and B', where there is an approximately equal balance between two components
- 'A with B' for a major/minor combination where the minor subject accounts for at least a quarter of the course.

6.19 Qualification titles do not normally reflect more than three subject components. Where there are more than three significant components, the title 'Combined Studies' is appropriate.

Annex A: Advisory group (for 2014 version)

Details provided below are as published in the 2014 edition of the Frameworks document.

Name	Position	Affiliation
Dr Jack Aitken	Director, Senate Office	University of Glasgow
Wendy Appleby	Registrar and Head of Student & Registry services	University College London
Sarah Butler	Assistant Director, Quality Development Group	QAA (Chair)
Sarah Clark	Dean of Quality and Standards	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Dr Kirsty Conlon	Head of Learning and Teaching and Widening Access	Universities Scotland
Nick Davy	HE Policy Manager	Association of Colleges (AoC)
Lysandre de-la-Haye	Director of Quality, Newman University	GuildHE
Dr Melinda Drowley	Head of Standards, Quality and Enhancement	QAA
Sheila Dunn	Manager	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQF)
Dr Dawn Edwards	Head of Quality Assurance and Enhancement	Royal Northern College of Music
Nick Entwistle	Higher Education Research & Policy Officer	National Union of Students (NUS)
Wilma Fee	Director of Academic and Student Affairs	Queen's University Belfast
Professor John Grattan	Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching & Learning	Aberystwyth University
Jacqui Hare	Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Director of Student Experience, Cardiff Metropolitan University	Higher Education Wales
Stella Heath	Assistant Director	QAA Scotland (Joint Chair)
Professor Ann Holmes	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic	University of Wolverhampton
Valerie Innes	Assistant Director	QAA Scotland
Professor Denise McAlister	Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Learning, Teaching and Student Experience	University of Ulster
John O'Connor	Manager NFQ Development	Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Rowena Pelik	Director (Formerly Director of Academic Strategy and Practice)	QAA Scotland (Edinburgh Napier University)
Alex Proudfoot	Association Manager	Study UK
Julie Swan	Associate Director Regulatory Policy and Vocational Qualification Policy	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)
Greg Wade	Policy Advisor	Universities UK

Corresponding members

Name	Position	Affiliation
Mag. Elisabeth Frank	Directorate General, Universities, Universities of Applied Sciences	Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research Austrian representative on the Bologna NQF national correspondents' network
Trevor Clark	Head of European Alignment and Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)	Welsh Government
Aaron Porter	Director	National Centre for Universities and Businesses (NCUB)

Observers

Name	Position	Affiliation
Philip Lomas	Senior Policy Adviser	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
Martina Brennan	Policy Officer	Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
Natalie Williams-Hunt	Head of NOS and CQFW Policy	Welsh Government

Annex B: Dublin descriptors

Shared Dublin descriptors for short-cycle, first-cycle, second-cycle and third-cycle awards³

The QF-EHEA has generic qualification descriptors for each cycle, known as the 'Dublin descriptors'. These have been developed as a set and are intended to be read with reference to each other.

They are primarily intended for use in the alignment of qualifications and hence national frameworks. National frameworks may themselves have additional elements or outcomes, and may have more detailed and specific functions. The Dublin descriptors are built on the following elements:

- knowledge and understanding
- applying knowledge and understanding
- making judgements
- communication skills
- learning skills.

The Dublin descriptors offer generic statements of typical expectations of achievements and abilities associated with qualifications that represent the end of each Bologna cycle. They are not meant to be prescriptive; they do not represent threshold or minimum requirements and they are not exhaustive; similar or equivalent characteristics may be added or substituted.

The descriptors seek to identify the nature of the whole qualification. The descriptors are not subject specific, nor are they limited to academic, professional or vocational areas. For particular disciplines, the descriptors should be read within the context and use of language of that discipline. Wherever possible, they should be cross-referenced with any expectations/competencies published by the relevant community of scholars and/or practitioners. Further elaboration of the existing elements and/or introduction of new elements will be part of the evolution of them as reference points to the QF-EHEA.

The [Dublin descriptors](#) may be used by higher education providers as an additional reference point.

Qualifications that signify completion of the higher education short cycle (within the first cycle) are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education⁴ and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks; such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development and further studies to complete the first cycle
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts
- have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems
- can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients

³ Previously referred to as bachelor's, master's and doctoral awards.

⁴ General secondary education also includes vocational education with a sufficiently general component.

- have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.

Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, while supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional⁵ approach to their work or vocation, and have competences⁶ typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study
- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues
- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences
- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research⁷ context
- can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study
- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements
- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously
- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.

⁵ The word '**professional**' is used in the descriptors in its broadest sense, relating to those attributes relevant to undertaking work or a vocation and that involves the application of some aspects of advanced learning. It is not used with regard to those specific requirements relating to regulated professions. The latter may be identified with the profile/specification.

⁶ The word '**competence**' is used in the descriptors in its broadest sense, allowing for gradation of abilities or skills. It is not used in the narrower sense identified solely on the basis of a 'yes/no' assessment.

⁷ The word '**research**' is used to cover a wide variety of activities, with the context often related to a field of study; the term is used here to represent a careful study or investigation based on a systematic understanding and critical awareness of knowledge. The word is used in an inclusive way to accommodate the range of activities that support original and innovative work in the whole range of academic, professional and technological fields, including the humanities, and traditional, performing, and other creative arts. It is not used in any limited or restricted sense, or relating solely to a traditional 'scientific method'.

Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field
- have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity
- have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication
- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas
- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise
- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge-based society.

From first cycle (bachelor) to second cycle (master) to doctorates: the differences/'step changes' between the respective Dublin descriptors

The Joint Quality Initiative has also compared the descriptors and identified the step changes found between cycles in each of these elements.

knowledge and understanding...	
[short cycle	...in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks]
1st cycle	[that is] supported by advanced textbooks [with] some aspects informed by knowledge at the forefront of their field of study...
2nd cycle	provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing or applying ideas...often in a research context...
Doctorates	[includes] a systematic understanding of their field of study and mastery of the methods of research associated with that field...
application of knowledge and understanding...	
[short cycle	often in occupational context]
1st cycle	[through] devising and sustaining arguments...
2nd cycle	[through] problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts...
Doctorates	[through the] ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity [that has] made a contribution that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work some of which merits national or international refereed publication...
ability to make judgements...	
[short cycle	to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems]
1st cycle	[through] gathering and interpreting relevant data...
2nd cycle	the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete data...
Doctorates	[through] critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas...

ability to communicate...	
[short cycle	their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients]
1st cycle	information, ideas, problems and solutions...
2nd cycle	their conclusions and the underpinning knowledge and rationale to specialist and non-specialist audiences...
Doctorates	with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise...
learning skills...	
[short cycle	to undertake further studies with some autonomy]
1st cycle	needed to study further with a high level of autonomy...
2nd cycle	to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous...
Doctorates	expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement...

Annex C: Illustrative table of credit

This table is an illustration of credit arrangements across the four jurisdictions of the UK. It sets out the typical credit values associated with the design of courses for the main higher education qualifications awarded by degree-awarding bodies in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For up-to-date and comprehensive information on credit, the relevant credit frameworks themselves should be consulted:

[Higher Education Credit Framework for England](#) (also used in Northern Ireland)

[Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (SCQF)

[Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales](#) (CQFW)

Values shown in columns 4-6 are the minimum that are typically associated with the qualification (plus any permissible minimum or maximum at a specified level shown in parentheses). In many cases, the credits for qualifications will exceed the minimum.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Typical higher education qualifications within each level	FHEQ level ^a	SCQF level ^b	England/ Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	ECTS ^c point ranges from the QF-EHEA		
PhD/DPhil	8	12	Not typically credit-rated			Not typically credit-rated		
Professional doctorates (only if credit-based) (EdD, DBA, DCLinPsy)			540 (360 at FHEQ Level 8)	540 (420 at SCQF Level 12)	540 (360 at FHEQ Level 8 and a max of 30 at FHEQ Level 6)			
Research master's degrees (eg MRes, MPhil)	7	11	Not typically credit-rated		180 (150 at FHEQ Level 7 and a max of 30 at FHEQ Level 6)	The minimum requirement is 60 ECTS points; however, a range of 90-100 ECTS points is more typical at second-cycle level		
Taught master's degrees (eg MA, MSc)			180 (150 at FHEQ Level 7)	180 (150 at SCQF Level 11)	180 (150 at FHEQ Level 7 and a max of 30 at FHEQ Level 6)			
Integrated master's degrees (eg MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm)			480 (120 at FHEQ Level 7)	600 ^c (120 at SCQF Level 11)	480 (120 at FHEQ Level 7 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)			
Primary qualifications (or first degrees) in medicine, (eg BM BS), dentistry (eg BDS) and veterinary science (eg BVSc)			Not typically credit-rated					
Postgraduate diplomas			120 (90 at FHEQ Level 7)	120 (90 at SCQF Level 11)	120 (90 at FHEQ Level 7 and a max of 30 at FHEQ Level 6)			
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in EWNI/ Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in Scotland			60 (40 at FHEQ Level 7)	60 (40 at SCQF Level 11)	120 (40 at FHEQ Level 7 and a max of 80 at FHEQ Level 6)			
Postgraduate certificates			60 (40 at FHEQ Level 7)	60 (40 at SCQF Level 11)	60 (40 at FHEQ Level 7 and a max of 20 at FHEQ Level 6)			

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Typical higher education qualifications within each level	FHEQ level ^a	SCQF level ^b	England/ Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	ECTS ^c point ranges from the QF-EHEA
Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg BA/BSc Hons)	6	10	360 (90 at FHEQ Level 6)	480 ^d (90 at SCQF Level 10)	360 (90 at FHEQ Level 6 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	180-240 ECTS points
Bachelor's degrees		9	300 (60 at FHEQ Level 6)	360 (60 at SCQF Level 9)	300 (60 at FHEQ Level 6 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)		NA	60 (40 at FHEQ Level 6)	NA	120 (90 at FHEQ Level 6 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	
Graduate diplomas		9	80 (80 at FHEQ Level 6)	120 (at SCQF Level 9 or above)	120 (90 at FHEQ Level 6 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	
Graduate certificates			40 (40 at FHEQ Level 6)	60 at SCQF Level 9 or above	60 (40 at FHEQ Level 6 and a max of 20 at CQFW Level 3)	
Foundation degrees (eg FdA, FdSc)	5	8	240 (90 at FHEQ Level 5)	NA	240 (90 at FHEQ Level 5 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	Approximately 120 ECTS points
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)		8	240 (90 at FHEQ Level 5)	240 (90 at SCQF Level 8 or above)	240 (90 at FHEQ Level 5 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	
Higher National Diplomas (HND) awarded by DABs ^e in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under licence from Pearson		NA	240 (90 at FHEQ Level 5)	NA	240 (90 at FHEQ Level 5 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Typical higher education qualifications within each level	FHEQ level ^a	SCQF level ^b	England/ Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	ECTS ^c point ranges from the QF-EHEA
Higher National Certificates (HNC) awarded by DABs ^e in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under licence from Pearson	4	NA	150 (120 at FHEQ Level 4)	NA	150 (30 at FHEQ Level 5 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	
Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)		7	120 (90 at FHEQ Level 4)	120 (90 at SCQF Level 7 or above)	120 (90 at FHEQ Level 4 and a max of 30 at CQFW Level 3)	

Notes to table

- a The levels of the FHEQ are numbered 4-8, succeeding Level 1, 2 and 3 which precede higher education in the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).
- b As the FQHEIS is nested in the SCQF, the numbering of the levels are those of the SCQF.
- c ECTS is the abbreviated term for European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.
- d These qualifications in Scotland are a year longer than their counterparts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- e DAB is the abbreviated term for degree-awarding bodies.

Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees

Introduction

This annex sets out a common description of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours - 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd. These statements build upon the descriptors within *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS), for bachelor's degrees with honours (Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and Level 10 in Scotland).

The Frameworks contain the qualification descriptors, minimum expectations necessary for awarding bachelor's degrees with honours (in other words, a 3rd-class degree) but with some 'typical' features at a higher standard. The statements are generic and can be applied across subjects and modes of learning. For each course of study and qualification, autonomous degree-awarding bodies draw up and approve specific statements about the intended learning outcomes.

The description of degree classifications expresses what all four classifications look like, while also articulating why a student may not have achieved the threshold.

These descriptors have been informed by multiple providers' own criteria and the outcomes from consultations with students, higher education providers, PSRBs and others.

How should these descriptors be used?

These descriptors may be useful for staff development, course design and approval, and external examiner processes. They are designed to include enough detail to support reliable quality assessment across the sector, aiding calibration and peer review.

The classification descriptors signpost student achievement generically - they are neither detailed nor exhaustive. Providers are, as autonomous institutions, free to consider how these may assist in their standards assurance and course development processes.

The descriptors for each classification are not intended to be used as a standardised marking framework by institutions or regulators. Autonomous institutions are responsible for setting their own curricula and assessment criteria. Providers should define their own course-specific learning outcomes which detail the complexity of understanding and skills that students must achieve to gain a degree and classification. Providers may choose to use the descriptors alongside sector-reference points, such as Subject Benchmark Statements, for aligning or informing their criteria for measuring student performance.

An explanation of each classification

Students are assessed against their curricula of study, which should allow them to achieve the required learning outcomes and to develop and demonstrate characteristics associated with the higher level of learning of a bachelor's degree with honours. At the most fundamental level, each classification means that students have achieved the characteristics of Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Level 10 in Scotland of the respective frameworks. Typically, this will include:

- knowledge and understanding
- cognitive skills
- practical skills

- transferable skills
- professional competences, where relevant.

Where a degree award requires an assessment of professional competencies - for instance, in PSRB-accredited courses - no award will be made if the student does not meet them.

A student's classification is determined by their level of attainment referenced to the relevant national Framework, articulated by these descriptors, and their own engagement with the curricula and learning opportunities on offer to enhance their ability to apply the skills, methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects. Students are assessed throughout their degree according to marking criteria set at course level in line with these sector-reference points. Upon awarding of a degree, a graduate can be expected to have demonstrated and possess the skills and attributes attached to their respective classification, as described below.

Not successful	Third-class honours (3rd)	Lower second-class honours (2.2)	Upper second-class honours (2.1)	First-class honours (1st)
Did not achieve the required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:
did not consistently demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	demonstrated knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	demonstrated strong knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	consistently demonstrated advanced knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills
did not consistently demonstrate adequate initiative and personal responsibility	demonstrated initiative and exercised personal responsibility	demonstrated initiative and personal responsibility	demonstrated good initiative and personal responsibility	consistently demonstrated exceptional initiative and personal responsibility
did not consistently demonstrate ability to reflect on their work	demonstrated some ability to reflect on their work	demonstrated an ability to reflect on their work	demonstrated an ability to reflect critically on their work	consistently demonstrated ability to reflect critically and independently on their work
did not consistently demonstrate problem-solving skills	demonstrated problem-solving skills	demonstrated strong problem-solving skills	demonstrated thorough problem-solving skills	consistently demonstrated exceptional problem-solving skills

More detailed applications of these examples are set out below.

Ordinary degrees

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, full-time honours degrees usually take place over three years; in Scotland, they take place over four years. Whichever model is followed, providers may permit students to study slightly fewer credits and achieve an Ordinary degree (Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and Level 10 in Scotland). They can be offered as a qualification in their own right - for example, where a student fails their first year by a small margin they can transfer to an ordinary degree.

Students completing an Ordinary degree are awarded a pass/merit/distinction, or a fail - they are not classified in the same way as honours degrees. Ordinary degrees are structured in a number of ways with typical models including a general degree where the emphasis is on breadth rather than depth of study, or a designated degree where the main subject of study will be identified in the award title and/or student transcript.

Ordinary degrees are also sometimes awarded to students who take the full honours degree but do not succeed in all assessments.

Pass degrees

In England and Wales, students who study the full honours degree but do not achieve all the required credits may be awarded a Pass degree. Pass degrees are not classified, and are not offered as a qualification in their own right as with the Ordinary degree.

Detailed descriptors

The following tables present a detailed articulation of how the broad graduate attributes acquired by students during their course might apply across different skills areas, competences and attributes.

Courses necessarily vary in what and how they assess, according to subject requirements. The different characteristics may not necessarily be assessed equally - providers are free to design courses with assessment weighted towards particular skills as they see appropriate for meeting the required learning outcomes.

The criteria below present a holistic overview of the level a graduate would be expected to have reached during their degree. Not all descriptors will apply to all courses to the same extent: for example, numeracy and digital skills may not be as applicable to some arts courses as creativity skills, while the reverse might be true of some STEM subjects. If some criteria are not applicable to a given course, course designers do not need to reference them.

Knowledge and understanding

A systematic extensive and comparative understanding of key aspects of the field of study, including coherent and detailed knowledge of the subject and critical understanding of theories and concepts, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student's knowledge and understanding of the subject is inadequate, without the required breadth or depth, with deficiencies in key areas.	The student has demonstrated a depth of knowledge and understanding in key aspects of their field of study, sufficient to deal with terminology, facts and concepts.	The student has demonstrated a sound breadth and depth of subject knowledge and understanding, if sometimes balanced towards the descriptive rather than the critical or analytical.	The student has demonstrated sophisticated breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, showing a clear, critical insight.	The student has shown exceptional knowledge and understanding, significantly beyond the threshold expectation of a graduate at this level and beyond what has been taught.
The student has demonstrated inadequate understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, including their limitations and ambiguities.	The student has demonstrated an understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles.	The student has consistently demonstrated an understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles as well as more specialised areas.	The student has demonstrated a thorough understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, and a sound understanding of more specialised areas.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, and in-depth knowledge, if not mastery, of a range of specialised areas.
The student has not produced sufficient evidence of background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study.	The student has conducted general background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques, with the ability to extract relevant points.	The student has conducted background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques accurately, and can critically appraise academic sources.	The student has conducted thorough background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques accurately, and possesses a well-developed ability to critically appraise a wide range of sources.	The student has conducted independent, extensive and appropriate investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study well beyond the usual range, together with critical evaluation, to advance work and/or direct arguments.

Cognitive skills

A conceptual understanding of a level that is necessary to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems and comment on research and scholarship in the discipline, with an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has displayed an overreliance on set sources. They have not demonstrated an adequate ability to select and evaluate reading and research.	The student has demonstrated the ability to select, evaluate and comment on reading, research and primary sources.	The student has selected, evaluated and commented on reading, research and primary sources, sometimes beyond the set range.	The student has thoroughly selected, critically evaluated and commented on reading, research and primary sources, usually beyond the set range.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional ability to select, consider, evaluate, comment on and synthesise a broad range of research, primary sources, views and information and integrate references.
The student's arguments and explanations are weak and/or poorly constructed, and they are not able to critically evaluate the arguments of others or consider alternative views.	The student has shown the ability to devise and sustain an argument, with some consideration of alternative views, and can explain often complex matters and ideas.	The student has argued logically, with supporting evidence, and has demonstrated the ability to consider and evaluate a range of views and information. They have clearly and consistently explained complex matters and ideas.	The student has demonstrated the ability to make coherent, substantiated arguments, as well as the ability to consider, critically evaluate and synthesise a range of views and information. They have demonstrated a thorough, perceptive and thoughtful interpretation of complex matters and ideas.	The student has made consistent, logical, coherently-developed, and substantiated arguments, and demonstrated the ability to systematically consider, critically evaluate and synthesise a wide range of views and information. They have demonstrated sophisticated perception, critical insight and interpretation of complex matters and ideas.
The student has shown a limited ability to solve problems and/or make decisions.	The student has demonstrated an ability to solve problems, applying a range of methods to do so, and the ability to make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances.	The student has consistently solved complex problems, selecting and applying a range of appropriate methods, and can make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances.	The student has demonstrated thorough problem-solving skills, selecting and justifying their use of a wide range of methods, and can make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances with a degree of autonomy.	The student has demonstrated a wide range of extremely well-developed problem-solving skills, as well as a strong aptitude for decision-making with a high degree of autonomy, in the most complex and unpredictable circumstances.
The student has shown little or no real creativity.	The student has some produced creative work.	The student has consistently demonstrated creativity.	The student has shown a high level of creativity and originality throughout their work.	The student has demonstrated exceptional creative flair and originality.

Practical skills

An ability to manage one's individual learning and to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline or as necessary for the discipline.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has not demonstrated sufficient evidence of discipline-specific skills development or application.	The student has demonstrated evidence of developing and applying discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has consistently demonstrated the development and informed application of discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has demonstrated capable and effective performance/demonstration of discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has demonstrated an accomplished and innovative application of discipline-specific specialist skills.
The student has attempted practical tasks/processes but followed a limited, procedural or mechanistic formula, and they contain errors, with little or no independence.	The student has completed practical tasks and/or processes accurately and with a degree of independence.	The student has consistently completed practical tasks/processes mainly independently in an accurate, well-coordinated and proficient way.	The student has performed practical tasks and/or processes autonomously, with accuracy and coordination.	The student has autonomously completed practical tasks and/or processes with a high degree of accuracy, coordination and proficiency.
The student has demonstrated a lack of technical, creative and/or artistic skills in most, or key, areas.	The student has demonstrated technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has consistently demonstrated well-developed technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has a thorough command of highly-developed relevant technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has a full range of exceptional technical, creative and/or artistic skills.
The student has not presented their research findings clearly or effectively, and their gathering, processing and interpretation of data is unsatisfactory.	The student has presented their research findings, in several formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted data effectively.	The student has consistently presented their research findings effectively and appropriately in many formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted data efficiently and effectively.	The student has presented thorough research findings perceptively and appropriately in a wide range of formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted a wide range of complex data efficiently and effectively.	The student has presented research findings perceptively, convincingly and appropriately in a wide range of formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted a wide range of complex data efficiently and effectively.

Transferable skills

Personal and enabling skills appropriate to the discipline, including the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences; exercising initiative and personal responsibility; and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student is not able to sufficiently express ideas and convey clear meaning verbally, electronically and/or in writing, uses inaccurate terminology, with many errors in spelling, vocabulary and syntax. They have been unable to demonstrate consistently basic numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions verbally, electronically and in writing, with clear expression and style. They have also demonstrated numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can consistently and confidently communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions verbally, electronically and in writing. They show a clear, coherent, expressive style, with a range of vocabulary. They have consistently demonstrated strong numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions with a high-degree of proficiency verbally, electronically and in writing. They have a clear, fluent and expressive style with appropriate vocabulary. They have a high standard of numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to an accomplished level verbally, electronically and in writing. They have shown an accurate, fluent, sophisticated style. They possess exceptional numeracy and digital literacy skills.
The student has made infrequent contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has demonstrated a capability of making useful contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has consistently demonstrated the capability to make coherent and constructive contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has demonstrated the capability to make strong, valuable contributions to group discussions and/or project work, with an understanding of team and leadership roles.	The student has demonstrated the capability to make clear, authoritative and valuable contributions to group discussions and/or project work, with exceptional teamwork and leadership skills.
The student has demonstrated little or no ability to manage their learning and/or work without supervision.	The student has shown an ability to manage their learning and work with minimal or no supervision.	The student has consistently shown an ability to systematically manage their learning, and work without supervision.	The student has shown a strong ability to systematically manage their learning, and work without supervision.	The student has shown an exceptional ability to manage their learning on their own initiative, and work without supervision.
The student has not demonstrated adequate initiative or personal responsibility.	The student has demonstrated initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has consistently demonstrated initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has consistently demonstrated well-developed initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has demonstrated exceptional initiative and/or personal responsibility.
The student has shown little or no ability to reflect on their work.	The student has demonstrated the ability to reflect on their work.	The student has consistently demonstrated a well-developed ability to reflect on their work.	The student has demonstrated the ability to reflect critically on their work.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional ability to reflect critically and independently on their work.

Professional competences (to the extent that they are expressed by the course learning outcomes)

The specific professional requirements and learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature. Where a degree award requires an assessment of professional competencies, a PSRB-accredited award will not be made if the student does not meet them.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has not demonstrated achievement of professional competence when assessed against the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB).	The student has demonstrated achievement of professional competence when assessed against the requirements of a PSRB.			
The student has failed to adhere to the appropriate rules and/or conventions set by regulators or the industry.	The student has adhered to the appropriate rules and/or conventions set by regulators or the industry.			

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