

QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

(Extract)

Annex 1

Qualification descriptors

Descriptor for a qualification at Certificate (C) level: Certificate of Higher Education

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

i knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study;

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

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

a evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work;

b communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments;

c undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment;

and will have:

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

Descriptor for a qualification at Intermediate (I) level: Degree (non-Honours)

Non-Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed;

ii ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context;

iii knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in their subject(s), and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study;

iv 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:

a use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis;

b effectively communicate information, arguments, and analysis, in a variety of forms, to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively;

c undertake further training, develop existing skills, and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations;

and will have:

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

Descriptor for a qualification at Honours (H) level: Bachelors degree with Honours

Honours degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline;

ii an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline;

iii conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline; and
- to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline;

iv an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge;

v the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (eg refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

a apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects;

b critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem;

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

and will have:

d qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; and
- the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

Descriptor for a qualification at Masters (M) level: Masters degree

Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice;

ii a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;

iii originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;

iv conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline; and
- to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

a deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;

b demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;

c continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level;

and will have:

d the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; and
- the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Descriptor for qualifications at Doctoral (D) level: Doctoral degree

Doctorates are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

i the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;

ii a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;

iii the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;

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

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

a make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences;

b continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches;

and will have:

c 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.

Annex 2

Qualification nomenclature

Public understanding of the achievements represented by higher education qualifications requires a consistent use of qualification titles. The following guidelines are designed to assist institutions in achieving consistency in the ways in which qualification titles convey information about the level, nature and subjects of study.

Level

- The titles 'Honours', 'Master' and 'Doctor' should be used only for qualifications that meet in full the expectations of the qualification descriptors at H, M and D levels respectively.
- Titles with the stem 'Postgraduate' (eg Postgraduate Diploma) should be restricted to qualifications where the learning outcomes of the programme of study match relevant parts of the descriptor for a qualification at M level or above.
- Titles with the stem 'Graduate' (eg Graduate Diploma) may be used for qualifications from programmes 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 H level.

Nature

- The title 'degree' should be used only for a qualification that meets in full the expectations of a qualification descriptor at levels I, H, M or D.
- Use of the abbreviated titles 'PhD' and 'DPhil' should be restricted to qualifications where assessment is solely by a final thesis or published work; or by artefact or performance that is accompanied by a written commentary placing it in its academic context.
- The abbreviated title 'MPhil' should normally be reserved for qualifications awarded following extended masters courses that typically involve a substantial element of research or equivalent enquiry.
- When used with the stems 'Graduate' or 'Postgraduate', the title 'Certificate' should normally signify study equivalent to at least one-third of an academic year, and the title 'Diploma' should normally signify study equivalent to at least two-thirds of an academic year.

Subject

- Titles used for doctoral qualifications awarded after programmes that include a substantial taught element should normally include the name of the discipline in the title (eg EdD for Doctor of Education).
- Qualification titles that reflect the subject focus of programmes of study in two disciplines (eg a joint Honours award) should consider nomenclatures 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 programme.
- Qualification titles should not normally reflect more than three subject components. Where there are more than three significant components, the title 'Combined Studies' would be appropriate.