



Principles and Guidance for the Design of Foundation Degrees (Updated November 2019)

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Taught Courses Regulatory Framework (TCRF) defines the regulations and requirements for all awards at the University of Worcester. It is consistent with [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\) of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (QAA, 2014) which specifies the level of study required for specific types of awards. It is also consistent with the [Higher education credit framework for England guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England](#) (QAA, 2008) which sets out the minimum credit requirements for HE qualifications.
- 1.2. All University approved Foundation Degrees are subject to the Taught Courses Regulatory Framework (TCRF). Sections 2 and 3 below set out the relevant generic principles and requirements that apply when designing any undergraduate course governed by the TCRF (in accordance with the [Principles and Guidance for Design of Undergraduate Courses Updated September 2019](#)). Sections 4 and 5 outline the specific requirements and guidance for the design of Foundation Degrees. These apply to all University of Worcester approved Foundation Degrees, whether designed solely for delivery at the University or in partnership with Further Education Colleges or other organisations with whom we have formal academic partnerships.

2. General Principles for Course Design

- 2.1. The general principles for course design set out the standard requirements for courses governed by the TCRF. These requirements are regarded as the norm and courses must comply with the common design principles, structures and other requirements set out here. This ensures comparability of opportunity and experience, and consistency of treatment, for all students on undergraduate courses. In specific circumstances, where course teams consider they have a strong case to deviate from some aspect of these requirements, for example on the grounds of meeting professional body requirements, this must be made clear in the proposal put forward to the Academic Planning and Portfolio Group (APPG) for approval. Deviations from the standard TCRF regulations are subject to the agreement of the Academic Registrar and the Director of Quality and Educational Development and must be clearly set out in the Programme Specification for the award or awards.

Principles of modular design

- 2.2. The achievement of an award within the TCRF is based on the principles of **credit accumulation** where credit is gained through the successful achievement of designated learning outcomes at specified level(s). The amount of credit achieved relates to the amount of learning, with each unit of credit representing 10 hours of student learning. Each course is divided into discrete modules, which are credit rated and have specific learning outcomes. As students successfully take and pass modules, they accumulate credit towards specific awards.
- 2.3. Courses within the TCRF are modular in design to provide flexibility and promote efficiency in course structure and delivery, to enable development of inter- and multi-disciplinary

programmes of study, to facilitate student choice and to ensure equity of experience for students in terms of hours of study, assessment, etc. Modular courses also provide opportunities for recognition of prior and/or experiential learning (RPL/RPEL), step on/step off points and intermediate awards for credit achieved.

2.4. All elements of a course which are summatively assessed and contribute to the achievement of the award should be integrated within a module which bears credit. This includes work-based learning which is formally assessed and contributes to the award. Similarly, placements in professional courses should be incorporated within a module which is credit-rated if they are formally assessed against specified learning outcomes and contribute to the final award¹.

Principles of curriculum design

2.5. The design of all courses must take account of the [UK Quality Code in Higher Education](#) (including qualification frameworks, subject benchmark statements, and qualification characteristic statements as well as the Expectations and Core Practices of the Quality Code). Where relevant, professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements must also be taken into account.

2.6. In addition, curriculum design must be informed by the [University Curriculum Design Policy](#) and the [Assessment Policy](#) and other associated quality standards and policies (see documents under [Policy and Regulatory Framework](#) on the AQU webpages).

- i. There should be clear aims for all courses in terms of the intended impact on students and on society more generally, perhaps taking account of local, regional, national and global issues. This should include articulation of who the course is for, what the University of Worcester (and its academic partners) can offer students who take the course, and any unique or distinctive features of the course.
- ii. The curriculum must be based on a clear set of learning outcomes (see separate [guidance on writing of learning outcomes](#)) which communicate what a student who successfully completes the course will be able to do – based on the knowledge, understanding and skills they have developed as part of the programme of study. The course level learning outcomes must be expressed at the exit level of the course and should structure and shape the design of all modules and the learning, teaching and assessment strategy of the course.

2.7. In designing curricula, teams will need to ensure they have given due consideration to, and made explicit:

- the development of higher level cognitive skills, transferable skills and work-related skills, including those related to critical awareness, problem solving, research and enquiry together with (from 2020 onwards) University graduate attributes
- student employability and career management guidance and education
- matters of inclusion, equality and diversity, taking account of the commitments and targets in the University's Access and Participation Plan
- embedding of personal academic tutoring

¹ In exceptional circumstances, approval may be given to the incorporation of placements within 'P modules' which are non-credit rated.

- the research inspired nature of the curriculum
- developing graduates who are socially, ethically and environmentally responsible.

Principles of assessment design

- 2.8. Course teams are expected to take a **strategic approach to the design of assessment**, taking account of the University's Assessment Policy and associated guidance. The Programme Specification requires a brief statement on course assessment strategy (advice is provided in the template).
- 2.9. In designing an assessment strategy, teams will need to ensure they have given due consideration to, and made explicit the:
- approach to formative assessment
 - balance and scheduling of summative assessment across the academic year
 - relationship of assessment to learning and teaching and to course and module learning outcomes (constructive alignment)
 - range of assessment modes (tasks) and progression
 - approach to assessment and grade criteria
 - arrangements for standardisation and moderation
 - arrangements for providing students with feedback on assessments to ensure course team consistency.
- 2.10. As well as the statement of assessment strategy within the programme specification, course teams will be required to provide for approval an **assessment map** showing the assessment modes for each module and an **assessment schedule** of summative assessment hand-in dates.

3. Undergraduate Course Design Requirements

Modules in the Taught Courses Regulatory Framework (TCRF)

- 3.1. **A module** is a discrete unit of study leading to specified learning outcomes which are summatively assessed. Modules are identified by credit value and by level. The level² of a module is an indicator of the relative demand, complexity and depth of learning and learner autonomy and is demonstrated by the learning outcomes and the assessment.
- 3.2. Modules must have a specific code and title and be distinctive overall in terms of their aims, specific learning outcomes, content and assessment. This will be defined for each module in an approved definitive '**module specification**'.
- 3.3. Each module will have defined **learning outcomes** at either level 4, 5 or 6. Where a module is offered at more than one level (e.g. level 5 and 6) each version must be presented in a separate module specification with clearly differentiated learning outcomes and assessment.

² See Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer - SEEC:
<http://www.seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SEEC-descriptors-2016.pdf>

- 3.4. Each unit of credit represents 10 hours of student learning and the **standard size of a module is normally 30 or 15 credits**. 30 credit modules are normally taken over a whole academic year, with 300 total learning hours; 15 credit modules of 150 learning hours are always taken in one semester.
- 3.5. The distribution of student learning hours within a module is a matter for the professional judgement of the module leader/team. However, the **requirements for publication of information on learning and teaching activities**, necessitates that information is provided for each module of the amount of time spent in scheduled activity, etc. The module specification template requires this information.
- 3.6. Modules of multiples of 15/30 credits are *exceptionally* permitted at level 6, as are 30 credit modules delivered in one semester, at level 5 or 6. Courses must establish the educational justification for inclusion of larger credit modules and these are normally only permitted where the subject matter prohibits meaningful use of modules of smaller size. For example, modules requiring practice placements and time for reflection or work-based learning over longer periods, and performance-related areas of curriculum.
- 3.7. Each module will have an assessment strategy which is aligned with the intended learning outcomes and learning activities, and all stated learning outcomes for a module will be summatively assessed at their designated level (for further guidance related to assessment see Appendix 1 Guidance on designing module and course assessment strategies of the UW [Assessment Policy](#)).
- 3.8. Within a course, a module may be specified as **Mandatory** or **Optional**:
- Mandatory modules contain the core knowledge and skills and must be taken and passed (in order to progress to the next level)
 - Optional modules provide choice for students and only have to be passed if they are a pre-requisite for a follow-on module
- 3.9. Each course must have an **Award Map** which lists all modules which are mandatory and optional for the course and any specific requirements for each award. This forms part of the Programme Specification (see the template for [FD Programme Specification](#) which includes the template for the Award Map).
- 3.10. Modules may also have **pre-requisites**, i.e. modules that must be taken and passed before another specified module can be taken. The use of pre-requisites must be educationally justified and specific to the module in which they are included, i.e. the pre-requisite is a requirement for the module and does not differ between awards. No module may be a pre-requisite for another module at the same level and careful consideration should be given to the use of pre-requisites in relation to progression through a course and from one level to the next.
- 3.11. Pre-requisites can take the following forms:
- a specific named module (or exceptionally two or more modules)
 - either module x or module y
 - one of module x, y, z, ...
 - any XXXX coded module.

Generally, where possible pre-requisites should be kept to a minimum. Where a module does not have a pre-requisite it will indicate that it can be taken by a student who has not completed any modules from the preceding level.

- 3.12. Pairs of modules at the same level may exceptionally be specified as **co-requisites**, i.e. a module required to be taken at the same time as another module. Co-requisites must be educationally justified and specific to the module(s) in which they are included, i.e. the co-requisite is a requirement for the module(s) and does not differ between awards. Careful consideration should be given to the use of co-requisites in relation to progression through a course and may have specific implications for part-time students. The use of co-requisites is extremely rare.
- 3.13. Modules may be shared by more than one course, i.e. although offered by a particular subject/discipline they can be identified as part of a course leading to an award in other subjects/disciplines where they are deemed relevant to the overall aims and learning outcomes of that award. Any shared modules will be listed in the award map for a specific course within the programme specification. Modules that are shared across courses in this way must retain the module code designated by their host subject/course.
- 3.14. Modules with substantially similar content should be identified by specifying that they are an **excluded combination**, i.e. a student is not permitted to study both modules as part of their programme of study.
- 3.15. In designing Top-Up degrees as progression routes from Foundation Degrees, it should be noted that there is no requirement for a mandatory Dissertation (from 2020; formerly Independent Study) module in Honours degree programmes. Where a course/subject does include such a module it is normally 30 credits value at level 6 and can be taken over one or two semesters. A student on an Honours Degree course may take only one Dissertation.

4. General Requirements for Foundation Degrees

- 4.1. Foundation Degrees are **Level 5 qualifications** within '[The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\) of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies \(QAA, 2014\)](#)' (see an extract at Annexe 1 of this guidance for the Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 5 on the FHEQ: Foundation Degree). Foundation Degrees have a number of **distinctive features** as outlined in the [QAA Characteristic Statement: Foundation Degree \(QAA, Sept, 2015\)](#). This Characteristic Statement differentiates the Foundation Degree award from other Level 5 qualifications including Diplomas of Higher Education and HNDs³. Additionally, the work-based learning experience of students on Foundation Degrees should be informed by the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance Work-based Learning](#) (QAA, 2018).
- 4.2. Foundation Degrees⁴ are intended to **integrate academic and work-based learning** through close collaboration between employers and higher education providers. They are vocational higher education qualifications designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge relevant to employment and reflect the needs of employees and employers, with a view to

³ HNDs are normally work-related in knowledge and skills but not work-based. Whereas FDs have a requirement for the integration of WBL, either through relevant employment or sustained work experience, which may be through voluntary work or long placements to enable learning through reflection in and on work.

⁴ This definition is informed by the [QAA Characteristic Statement: Foundation Degree \(QAA, Sept, 2015\)](#)

meeting regional and/or sector skills or professional body requirements. Hence significant emphasis is placed on employer involvement and work-based learning integrated throughout the course/curriculum.

- 4.3. Foundation Degrees should also promote inclusion, widening participation and lifelong learning and provide a route into higher education for those that have not considered HE previously or prefer a more applied curriculum and the opportunity to 'earn and learn'.
- 4.4. Foundation Degrees are self-standing higher education qualifications, but also provide opportunities for further study through progression to:
 - Level 6 of an Honours degree
 - Professional body qualifications or higher level National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs).
- 4.5. Foundation Degrees have a range of distinctive characteristics not necessarily present in other qualifications at Level 5 or found in the initial parts of a programme leading directly to an Honours Degree (see Section 5). Foundation Degrees may also be offered as part of a Higher Apprenticeship (subject to approval, see [Guidance and Process for the University Approval of Higher and Degree Apprenticeships](#)).
- 4.6. Foundation Degree programmes must be designed to enable learners to benefit from the interpretation of ideas and the experience of practice within the wider context of employment and the workplace and encourage lifelong learning. Learners must be given sufficient opportunity for self-directed learning and reflection and be encouraged to use reflective learning tools, e.g. personal development plans.
- 4.7. Foundation degrees should be designed to enable graduates to develop the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making. They should be able to undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences.
- 4.8. There is no single model for the modular structure of a Foundation Degree. However, **all programmes have a total credit value of 240 credits** (120 credits at Level 4 and 120 credits at Level 5) and lead to an award of either FdA or FdSc with an exit award of Cert HE (see TCRF).
- 4.9. The number of mandatory modules is discretionary within the confines of the credit requirements for each level of the award. However, as with other undergraduate awards, core knowledge and skills are located in mandatory modules that must be taken and passed. **Typically, Foundation Degrees have a more defined programme of modules**, with few or no optional modules.
- 4.10. Where appropriate, course teams are encouraged to consider a 'framework' approach if developing more than one related Foundation Degree, with the opportunity for the sharing of common 'core' modules and specifying 'pathway' specific modules for individual awards. In this case, each programme of modules must be sufficiently distinct to justify a discrete award title, with **a minimum differentiation of 30 credits at Level 5** (in addition to any 30 credit WBL/placement module).

- 4.11. UW Foundation Degrees must normally be designed to ensure that **at least half of the student's programme of studies at each level is composed of 30 credit modules** delivered over the academic year. However, a case can be made during planning and course approval to deviate from this expectation where there is a clear employer need or professional requirement that requires an alternative structure.
- 4.12. The Foundation Degree curriculum must ensure that students are prepared for progression to Level 6 Honours degree study (or other professional qualification). Thus, the Foundation Degree **must be designed with at least one identified Level 6 Honours/Top-Up degree progression route in mind** during course approval. Consideration should be given to the appropriate alignment of subject content, academic and work-related skills, modes of study, approaches to learning and teaching, types of assessment and professional expectations. In cases where progression will be to Level 6 of an existing Honours degree (rather than a bespoke Top-Up degree), it may be necessary to include a bridging programme (which need not be credit bearing depending on the volume of study required).
- 4.13. Where Foundation Degree programmes include some form of work-based or long project module this must **not** be referred to as an 'Independent Study'. Use of the term 'Independent Study' (or Dissertation from 2020) in the TCRF is reserved specifically and exclusively for the purpose of Honours Degree programmes.

5. Key Characteristics of University of Worcester Approved Foundation Degrees

- 5.1. The distinctiveness of Foundation Degrees depends upon the clear and planned integration of the following **key characteristics**, underpinned by work-based learning, as set out in the [QAA Characteristic Statement: Foundation Degree \(QAA, Sept, 2015\)](#): **employer involvement; accessibility; articulation and progression; flexibility; and partnership**. The University expectations related to each are identified below.

Employer Involvement

- 5.2 Foundation Degrees should be developed to meet the **employment needs of a particular sector** and should equip students with the combination of academic knowledge, understanding and vocational and transferable skills and competences. Thus, employer involvement is fundamental to ensure that courses deliver an appropriate mix of academic, generic, work-based and technical or sector-specific skills for the relevant sector, workforce or niche market.
- 5.3 Course Teams should involve employers, local organisations, service users or stakeholders (where appropriate), relevant professional bodies and/or sector skills councils during the development and approval of the course. Consultation should be used to establish the demand for the course and to shape the curriculum and delivery of the award. Employers should, where possible, be involved in the delivery and assessment of the course, in monitoring student performance in the workplace and in on-going development and review of the award.
- 5.4 Course approval documentation must make clear the ways in which employers have been involved in the design of the Foundation Degree and the arrangements for their continued involvement through the delivery and review of the course.

Work-Based Learning (WBL)

5.5 The University draws on the definition of work-based learning (WBL) provided in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Advice and Guidance Work-based Learning](#) (QAA, 2018) (see also the [UW Policy on the Management of Placement and Work-based Learning](#) and associated documentation for further explanation and a definition of placement learning):

Work-based learning is learning that is integral to a higher education programme, and which is based in the workplace and assessed and credited as part of the University programme. It is achieved and demonstrated through engagement with a workplace environment, and normally includes the assessment of reflective practice and of professional competencies and skills associated with employability.

5.6 Foundation Degrees are designed to enable learners to benefit from the interpretation of ideas and the experience of practice within the context of work, underpinned by both technical and academic understanding. Thus, **authentic work-based learning (WBL)** must be integral to the Foundation Degree course design and delivery and uses the work environment as a vehicle for the achievement of learning. The work-based elements of the course must be defined in the aims and learning outcomes of the course and be assessed.

5.7 **WBL** should be appropriate to the specific needs of an employment sector or type of employer and courses should provide opportunities for learners to develop and demonstrate their knowledge, skills and behaviours both in the workplace and through reflection in and on the real world of work and to gain credit for doing so. In contrast, **work-related learning** uses work as a focus for learning but this is removed from the physical location of the workplace and may employ a range of college or university based activities such as practical or technical skills development, case studies, scenario or problem based learning, simulation and guest speakers from industry.

5.8 University Foundation Degrees have a requirement for the **integration of WBL** throughout the curriculum, achieved either through **relevant employment or sustained work experience**, which may be through voluntary work or long placements. This may include the use of 'real work' environments within the teaching institution (e.g. travel agency, salon). WBL can be supplemented (but not replaced) by the use of a variety of work-related activities, including work-based projects and simulation.

5.9 **Work-based learning outcomes** may be delivered both through discrete work-based learning modules or integrated throughout a number of modules. Typically, specific practice or WBL modules take the form of 30 credit modules delivered across an academic year and are undertaken primarily in the workplace. It is expected that **a minimum of 30 credits at both Level 4 and Level 5 will be work-based**. Additional simulated, work-related and learning for work activities must be over and above these 30 credit modules.

5.10 Approaches to WBL, placements, supporting students in their WBL, related WBL assessment, and relative roles and responsibilities of the University, partners, students, mentors, and employers are normally outlined in a course specific **WBL Handbook** or specific section of the course handbook (see the [UW Policy on the Management of Placement and](#)

[Work-based Learning](#) and associated documentation for the risk assessment and approval of placements).

- 5.11 The completion of a **WBL/Placement audit record** is also required for each Foundation Degree (see the [Placement and Work-based Learning - Audit Record](#) and the [Placement and Work-based Learning - Audit Record - for courses where students are required to be in work and their workplace is the setting for work-based learning](#)). This Audit Record will be considered as part of course approval and periodic review. It is recommended that the team considers the risk assessment tool before completing the WBL audit record.

Accessibility

- 5.12 Foundation Degrees are intended to attract a range of learners from different starting points, to encourage **widening participation and access** into higher education and to provide learners with the opportunity to 'earn, learn and study'.
- 5.13 Given the nature and intention of Foundation Degrees, applicants may come from diverse backgrounds and with varying qualifications and experience. Admissions procedures must be designed to allow students to demonstrate their capacity to benefit from the Foundation Degree while also providing information, advice and guidance for students who may need further preparation. For further guidance see the University's [Admissions Policy](#).
- 5.14 Recognition should be given to the knowledge, skills and understanding an applicant may already have developed by learning through work. Programme Specifications should provide clear details of the admissions policy and procedures, entry criteria and admissions criteria for the Foundation Degree and how the University's policy and principles for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL and RPEL) will be implemented.
- 5.15 Consideration must be given to providing an **equitable student experience** and to meeting the challenges in curriculum design and programme management, especially **in achieving the WBL**. This is particularly relevant when students may be either already in appropriate employment when they enter the Foundation Degree or who progress directly from Level 3 study and require assistance in establishing appropriate placements/work experience for the duration of the Foundation Degree.

Progression

- 5.16 Clear routes for **successful progression from Foundation Degrees to another qualification are a key feature and should be established when the Foundation Degree is approved**.
- 5.17 Progression to **at least one linked bachelor degree with honours programme or bespoke Top-Up Degree** is normally guaranteed, with the time required for completion of the Honours degree being comparable to that of the typical full Honours Degree.
- 5.18 Progression from a Foundation Degree to another qualification may require a bridging programme to ensure adequate preparation.

- 5.19 All such arrangements should be established at approval of the Foundation Degree to ensure that learners progressing onto the next programme are adequately prepared and informed. The key **arrangements to support transition** to the linked Honours Degree/Top-Up route(s) and any bridging programme necessary for progression must also be identified.
- 5.20 **Information for students about progression arrangements** must be available in the programme specifications, course handbooks and prospectuses.
- 5.21 The **Linked Honours Degree progression route/s** must be identified in Section 6 of the Programme Specification. The **admission arrangements**, procedures for application and any approved specific requirements for progression from the Foundation Degree to each identified Honours Top-Up/Level 6 Honours Degree must be clearly outlined in Section 20 of the Foundation Degree Programme Specification (see the Programme Specification template for [Foundation Degree - Level 4 & 5](#)).
- 5.22 **Prospectus entries** for Foundation Degrees (and web-based course pages) must identify the approved linked Honours progression route(s) and their associated entry criteria/admissions arrangements for progression to the Top-Up degree and/or direct entry to L6 of an Honours degree.
- 5.23 The **arrangements to support the transition of students** to the linked Honours/Top-Up degree must be set out in the Course Handbook (see [Course Handbook guidance](#)). This could include, planned study skills development, visits from staff and/or students from the Honours degree, preparation and advice for choice of progression route and subsequent module choices, Independent Study (Dissertation from 2020) preparation, specific induction arrangements for the Honours/Top-Up degree. This should be scrutinised through the approval process.
- 5.24 Foundation Degrees should enable students to be versatile and adaptable in progressing to and within work. **Employability and careers guidance** is therefore a key feature to equip learners to enhance their employment opportunities or prepare for a career change.

Flexibility

- 5.25 Foundation Degrees should provide **flexibility in the student experience**, and may include:
- flexible delivery modes and study patterns, including full time, part-time, distance, work-based, and web-based learning;
 - flexible admissions requirements;
 - flexible progression routes, including links with other professional awards and with at least one identified honours degree programmes.
- 5.26 Where **flexible, blended or distributed learning approaches** are employed, particular attention must be paid to the provision of student information and guidance and the planning of support arrangements (see the University [Quality standards for flexible and distributed learning including distance and e-learning](#)).

Partnerships

- 5.27 Partnerships, both formal and informal, are central to the successful development and delivery of Foundation Degrees and may include the University, Further Education Colleges, students, employers and employers' organisations, Sector Skills Councils and/or professional bodies. Partnerships of this kind are vital in providing programmes which are relevant, valid and responsive to the needs of learners and employers and include the appropriate mix of academic and vocational outcomes.
- 5.28 Within these 'partnerships', **the University as the degree awarding body has primary responsibility for the academic standards and quality of any awards** granted in its name and for the quality of learning opportunities delivered wherever these take place and whoever provides them, including those associated with WBL. Thus Foundation Degrees are subject to the University's academic regulations and quality processes. Where the Foundation Degree is to be delivered in whole or in part by a partner organisation (typically but not exclusively a further education college) the relative roles and responsibilities will be outlined in the **formal partnership agreements**.
- 5.29 Course approval documentation should evidence the ways in which partners have been involved in the design of the programme and the collaborative arrangements for the on-going delivery and operational management of the course. Additional information will be required where a course is approved for delivery by more than one partner, for example, the arrangements to support consistency in the student experience, for the standardisation of assessment practice and for external examining.
- 5.30 For further guidance on working in partnership see [UK Quality Code, Advice And Guidance: Partnerships Nov 2018](#)

Associated Documents

[Assessment Policy](#)

[Curriculum Design Policy](#)

[Foundation Degree Programme Specification template](#)

[Module Specification Template including guidance](#)

[Policy on the Management of Placement and Work-based Learning and associated documentation](#)

[Principles for course design: Guide to writing learning outcomes and developing assessment criteria](#)

[Taught Courses Regulatory Framework](#)

Approval/Review Table	
Item	Notes
Version Number	v1.0 (Approved); v2 (Nov 2019 – Reviewed and amended)
Date of Approval	21 st November 2012
Approved by	ASQEC for Academic Board
Effective from	Immediate
Contact	Head of Collaborative Programmes
Department	DQED
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	Quality Code in Higher Education (2018) and associated QAA Characteristic Statement: Foundation Degree (QAA, Sept, 2015)
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Annexe 1 – Extract from The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (QAA, 2014)at:

4.12 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 5 on the FHEQ: foundation degree (p.23)

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, including Diplomas of Higher Education, Higher National Diplomas, etc.

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.

4.12.1 The foundation degree is an example of a qualification that meets, in full, the expectations of the qualification descriptor (and the [Foundation Degree Characteristic Statement](#))⁵

4.12.2 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.

⁵ Previously the Foundation Degree Benchmark Statement, now the [QAA Characteristic Statement: Foundation Degree \(QAA, Sept, 2015\)](#)