

Requirements for foundation degrees

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Quality Handbook Supplement (QHS) explains the University's requirements for foundation degree (FD) courses. Sections 2, 5, 10 and 11 of the Quality Handbook (QH) also provide further context and guidance. Specifically, see QHS PS3 for requirements for Foundation Degree progression.

A foundation degree is a vocationally-based level 5 award (normally 120 credits at level 4 and 120 credits at level 5) that is characteristically developed in close liaison with employers. It is a recognised award of the University. The interim award (120 credits at level 4) for an FD is a Higher Certificate.

2. Principles

- 2.1 The underlying principles of the award are outlined below (see Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement).
- a. An FD integrates academic and work-based learning through close collaboration between employers and course providers.
 - b. FDs equip students with the skills and knowledge relevant to their employment, career aspirations and the needs of employers.
 - c. An FD takes account of the need for academic rigour and develops students' academic knowledge and skills such as critical enquiry, analysis and evaluation, and supports them to apply these in the workplace.
 - d. An FD is a stand-alone award; however, they are designed to provide opportunities for students to progress to further academic study.
 - e. Admissions criteria must take account of the certified and non-certified knowledge, skills and understanding that an applicant for a foundation degree has already developed and rigorous arrangements should be put in place for the accreditation of prior experiential and certified learning.
 - f. Work-based learning is central to an FD and therefore flexibility of mode and delivery underpins development of all FD courses.

- g. FDs are distinctive and normally encompass: accessibility; articulation and progression; employer involvement; flexibility; and partnership.

3. Types of FD provision

- 3.1 The University is involved in the academic approval and delivery of a number of FDs (as collaborations and within NTU Schools) – whilst most collaborative FDs are delivered through validated centres, a small number are offered on a franchise basis (see QH Sections 10B and 10C for further information on these categories of collaborative provision).
- 3.2 A list of approved FDs can be obtained from the Centre for Academic Development and Quality (CADQ) or from the NTU Course Finder on the NTU web site (for non-collaborative courses). FD awards offered by the University are:
 - FdA – Foundation Degree in Arts;
 - FdSc – Foundation Degree in Science;
 - FdEng – Foundation Degree in Engineering.
- 3.3 FDs can be offered part-time and full-time, through distance delivery and blended learning with flexibility to study, within reasonable limits, when and where best suits the learner. It is also possible to offer an FD as a sandwich award.
- 3.4 Where an FD is designed for students already in employment, it may be possible for those students to complete an entire level in one calendar year even where their formal attendance at the University might conventionally be described as 'part-time'.

4. Course design

- 4.1 Course design is important to ensure that FD courses are consistently offered at the appropriate level and meet NTU requirements. The design and planning of a new FD is likely to involve a number of stakeholders. Sections 5 and 12 of the Quality Handbook provide detail on planning, design and specification of new courses. Additional guidance for collaborative provision is contained in Section 10.
- 4.2 There is also external guidance to be considered, namely the QAA Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement (see QAA website). This places a particular focus on work-based learning and the involvement of employers in all aspects of the development, design, delivery and assessment of FDs. It is not designed to be prescriptive but offers valuable, additional information and a framework for FD courses.
- 4.3 FDs may also be accredited by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB). This may entail an additional accreditation process or approval, articulation with the PRSB standards or bespoke arrangements for articulation and progression to a related Honours degree course. It may be possible for NTU approval and PSRB accreditation to take place at the same approval event with the agreement of CADQ and the PSRB.
- 4.4 With a growing number of FDs approved by the University there is a range of examples of FD course design, many of which draw on internal and external

reference points. For example, it may be possible for an FD to be delivered in partnership, with a Further Education College (FEC) delivering level 4 and NTU delivering level 5.

5. Level descriptors

5.1 The University does not have a set of specific level descriptors for the FD. Instead, course teams are asked to ensure that the University's generic level descriptors are contextualised to meet the focus and needs of FD courses. When writing outcomes it is likely that course teams would wish to include specific reference to the application of skills and knowledge in the world of work and the opportunity to progress to other qualifications as well as lifelong learning. The level descriptors are contained in QH Section 3.

6. Classification criteria

6.1 An FD and Higher Certificate can be awarded with the following classifications:

- Distinction
- Commendation
- Pass

6.2 The University's grading descriptors set out the characteristics expected for each classification (see QHS 15A).

7. Learning outcomes

7.1 When writing module and course learning outcomes, consideration should be given to incorporating the work-based context of the award.

8. Articulation and Progression

8.1 All FDs must have an articulated progression route to an Honours degree with the time required to complete the qualification being comparable to that involved in a traditional bachelor's degree programme. If the proposed progression route is into a lower level than the final year of study (level 6), there must be clear justification as to why this is deemed to be necessary. This justification must be approved as part of the academic approval process. There should be no informal or unintended impediments to progression from FDs to Honours degrees (see QHS PS3).

9. Employer involvement

9.1 Given the vocational focus of FDs, one key characteristic of an FD course is the involvement of employers. Course teams must engage with employers at all stages of the development, delivery and review of an FD course. It is possible that a new FD development could also be initiated by existing contact with, or direct approach from, an employer or organisation.

- 9.2 The curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment and modes of delivery are designed so that they are relevant to employment, work and professional needs. Employers must be involved in the development of new FDs and in the annual review of the courses that they are involved in. They should be involved in the assessment of students through work-based learning activities (with the support of the course team). Course teams should consider how best to support employers in these roles and detail this in the course documentation.
- 9.3 The learning and teaching strategy for the programme identifies appropriate teaching styles and learning opportunities for foundation degree learners, as well as elements that may require additional resources, for example the management of work-based learning.

10. Work-based learning (WBL) (and placement learning)

- 10.1 Work-based learning is an integral part of the teaching, learning and assessment strategy for the course and makes it possible for students to 'earn and learn'.
- 10.2 Work-based learning can be achieved through many forms, including full-time or part-time work, integrated work placements, and real work environments.
- 10.3 Assessment must include elements of work-based learning and work-based and work-related learning should be reflected in the outcomes for the course.
- 10.4 Assessment of work-based learning should include the employer where possible. In cases where employers are involved in the support of the learner and in their assessment it may be necessary to provide support in the form of mentoring or other types of professional development.
- 10.5 In addition an FD may be offered in a sandwich mode, leading to additional certification.
- 10.6 Course teams should normally consider the following:
- a. issues for students undertaking WBL;
 - b. support for students undertaking WBL;
 - c. the quality assurance of WBL;
 - d. employer involvement (and continued involvement) in WBL;
 - e. whether it might be appropriate to offer a WBL module as part of the course (credit rating the WBL as part of the course rather than as an additional work placement award);
 - f. how the WBL will be linked to or integrated with the rest of the course;
 - g. finding WBL providers;
 - h. support for employers offering WBL;
 - i. gaining support from employers for work-related learning (this may be linked to the taught elements of the course – visiting lecturers or speakers for example);

- j. integration of work-related learning in the teaching, learning and assessment strategy.

11. Flexibility

- 11.1 It is important when designing FDs to ensure that they provide a stand-alone qualification as well as opportunities for further study and progression.
- 11.2 Consideration should be given to the methods of teaching, learning and assessment and course teams should take account of the needs of likely student groups. FDs may be delivered through full-time, part-time, distance, work-based, web-based learning or sandwich modes. Careful consideration should be given to the intended mode(s) of study to ensure a match to the needs of the potential student group(s). Delivery of part-time FD courses is particularly important as students are likely to be in employment.

12. Accessibility

- 12.1 Learners should be able to access FDs from a range of starting points and with different entry qualifications.
- 12.2 Consideration should be given to developing flexible admissions criteria, including arrangements for the recognition of prior experiential learning, to assist applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds to demonstrate their suitability for the FD in a range of ways.
- 12.3 Course teams should consider how work-based learning could be included to allow students to 'earn and learn' which helps to widen access to higher education for those already in employment.
- 12.4 FDs should promote lifelong learning and widen participation in HE.

13. Partnership

- 13.1 Partnerships between higher education providers, professional bodies, employers, FECs and other external bodies such as Sector Skills Councils or the National Skills Academy are central to the concept of FDs, and vital in providing programmes that are relevant, valid and responsive to the needs of learners and employers. Course teams are therefore encouraged to explore possible partnerships with these bodies.

14. Award descriptors

- 14.1 Award descriptors are provided in Section 3 of the Quality Handbook for all undergraduate awards.

15. Characteristics of an FD student

- 15.1 As with any course, FDs will attract a wide range of students with a variety of backgrounds and qualifications. Experience gained from delivering FD courses suggests that there are a number of considerations that should be given when developing new FDs. For example, students may:

- be mature and highly qualified but looking for a change in their career path;
- be returning to study after a long break and require additional academic support;
- be working full-time and taking the course as it is linked to their employment;
- not have any formal academic qualifications but have relevant vocational experience;
- not have achieved the grades needed to enrol in their choice of degree course and be looking for progression opportunities;
- have missed the opportunity to study at higher education level in the past.

16. Admission requirements for entry onto an FD

16.1 See Quality Handbook Section 13 for information on admissions (also, see paragraph 12.2 above).

17. Course specification

17.1 When writing a course specification for an FD, the template and guidance is the same as for all NTU courses. FDs offered by collaborative partners should also use this template when preparing documentation for approval.

17.2 The most up-to-date course specification template and guidance can be obtained from the CADQ website.

17.3 Course teams should ensure that the course specification reflects the nature of an FD course. When writing the course specification, course teams could highlight the following:

- work-based learning and work-related learning opportunities available to students on the course (including placements);
- employer involvement in the design, development, delivery and assessment of the course – this could also be linked to the section on employability;
- the relevance of the course to the world of work, in particular, the vocational nature of an FD;
- progression opportunities to level 6 study for students completing the FD;
- support for learning – course teams should consider the different types of student who may apply for FD courses;
- PSRB requirements and industry links.

18. FD Common assessment regulations

18.1 The University has developed a set of Common Assessment Regulations for FD courses. These can be found in Section 16B of the QH.

19. Course academic approval and modifications

19.1 CADQ Officers will normally include a copy of the QAA Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement for information when circulating documentation to an academic approval panel. The course approval and modification processes are detailed in QH Section 5 (and Section 10 for collaborative provision) and include guidance for panels and chairs. CADQ officers endeavour to ensure that the expertise of the panel members reflects the type and nature of the course(s) being considered at the approval event. The progression route should be agreed before the academic approval event. Details of the progression requirements, ensuring that there are no barriers to progression, should be included in the course documentation and signed off as part of the academic approval. Related documentation should also be updated (e.g. course specification for the linked honours degree).

19.2 DAG Panels or Design Sprint teams for Foundation Degrees should include at least one member from the relevant industry, or someone with recent industry experience.

Policy owner
CADQ

Change history			
<i>Version:</i>	<i>Approval date:</i>	<i>Implementation date:</i>	<i>Nature of significant revisions:</i>
Sept 2016	30.09.16	01.10.16	Updates to align policy with the QAA Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement 2015. Changes focus on strengthening employer involvement and ensuring admissions criteria and course design reflect the core principle of widening participation.
Sept 2017	12.09.17	01.10.17	Removal of references to CPO and duplication of information covered elsewhere in the QH.
Sept 2018	12.09.18	01.10.18	None
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Sept 2020	08.09.20	01.10.20	None
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Equality Analysis		
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