

Nottingham Trent University

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## **Quality Handbook**

### **Part B: Award frameworks**

#### **Section 4: Postgraduate taught & research awards**

# Section 4

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## 1. Postgraduate award framework

**The University distinguishes between postgraduate taught awards (primarily master's courses) and postgraduate research awards (primarily doctorates). Postgraduate master's awards are offered at level 7, while postgraduate research doctorates are assessed at level 8.**

**A University postgraduate course will reflect, and be approved, monitored and reviewed against the [UK Framework for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\)](#).**

**All University postgraduate courses must meet the level and credit criteria (if applicable) set out for that award in the requirements that follow in this Quality Handbook Section.**

**For each award there is also an award descriptor.**

**All University awards reflect positive achievements.**

## Awards and levels

### 2. Postgraduate taught awards

2.1 The following table locates each University award within the level and states their credit tariff. Where an award includes several levels, it is located in the table at its highest level. In addition to the credit tariff, each postgraduate taught award has an award descriptor (as described in paras. 7 - 11).

- Each of the University's academic awards is referenced to the appropriate level in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).
- Course teams are also asked to take cognisance of Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Master's Characteristics and Doctoral Degree Characteristics.

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## Level 7

Level	Award	Minimum credit volume	Notional learning hours	Award designation
7	Master's Degree	180 (with at least 150 at level 7)	1800	MA, MBA, MFA, MSc, LLM, MPA, MRes, MSc (Res)
	Postgraduate Diploma	120 (with at least 90 at level 7)	1200	PG Dip, DMS
	Postgraduate Diploma in Education	120 (with at least 90 at level 7)	1200	PGDE
	Postgraduate Certificate	60 (with at least 40 at level 7)	600	PG Cert, CM
	Postgraduate Certificate in Education	120 (with at least 60 at level 7, the rest at level 6)	1200	PGCE

### Explanatory notes

- A master's degree may be offered in a sandwich mode. The University will award a Placement Diploma or Placement Certificate to a student who has completed a requisite number of placement weeks – these are supplementary certificates available to students on sandwich courses and are awarded on the basis of 'P' credits. The credit level will have a pre-fix 'P' to indicate that the credits are not part of the credits required for the degree award but are for the additional placement learning. International Placement awards are also available (see Quality Handbook Supplement (QHS) PL1: Certification of placements).
- The University offers integrated master's and exempting degree awards which include level 7 learning; however, such awards are predominantly undergraduate and therefore

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located in Quality Handbook (QH) Section 3:  
Undergraduate awards.

## 3. Credits from a lower level

- 3.1 For postgraduate awards, a proportion of credits from a lower level may be included. This flexibility recognises that some postgraduate courses will commence with introductory material that may not itself be at postgraduate level.

## 4. Level 7 descriptors

**Postgraduate awards at level 7 are aligned to the FHEQ level 7 descriptor. This describes the learning expected at postgraduate level and is intended to act as a guide in the processes of course development and approval and assessment.**

- 4.1 At this level there is more than one type of qualification that may be achieved (for example, postgraduate diplomas and certificates in addition to master's degrees). 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 likely to be 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. 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.
- 4.2 Course teams may contextualise the descriptors to particular subjects but must ensure congruence with the FHEQ level descriptors.
- 4.3 The FHEQ descriptors are provided below for level 7:

	<b>Students learning at this level will demonstrate:</b>	<b>Students will typically be able to:</b>	<b>Students will also have:</b>
<b>Level 7</b>  <b>The descriptor provided for this is for any master's degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification</b>	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	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	the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:  - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility  - decision-making in complex and

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<b>descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at level 7.</b>	of professional practice	demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level	unpredictable situations
	a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship		- the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.
	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	continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.	
	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.		

## 5. Postgraduate research awards

- 5.1 The table below locates each University research award within a level and states their credit tariff (or its equivalent if not credit rated). In addition, each postgraduate research award has an award descriptor (as described in paras. 12 - 15).

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Level	Award	Minimum credit volume	Notional learning hours	Award designation
8	Doctor of Philosophy	Not typically credit rated (540 credits equivalent)	5400	PhD
	Professional Doctorate	540 (with at least 360 at level 8)	5400	DProf, DProf (Est Work), DArch, DBA, DDes, DDM, DEng, DFA, DFI, DLegalPrac, DMedSci, DPA, DPsych, DRealEst, DSocPrac, EdD
7	Research Master's	360 (MPhil is not typically credit rated)	3600	MPhil, MProf

## 6. Level 8 descriptors

**Postgraduate research awards at level 8 are aligned to the FHEQ level 8 descriptor.**

- 6.1 Supervisory teams may contextualise the descriptors to particular subjects but must ensure congruence with the FHEQ level 8 descriptor.
- 6.2 The FHEQ descriptors are provided below for level 8:

	Students learning at this level will demonstrate:	Students will typically be able to:	Students will also have:
<b>Level 8</b> <b>The descriptor provided for this level of the frameworks is for any doctoral degree</b>	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	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	the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable

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<b>which should meet the descriptor in full.</b>	<p>discipline, and merit publication</p> <p>a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice</p> <p>the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems</p> <p>a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.</p>	<p>specialist and non-specialist audiences</p> <p>continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.</p>	<p>situations, in professional or equivalent environments.</p>
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## Award descriptors

### 7. Master's Degree

- 7.1 Holders of a Master's Degree will have 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. Graduates will know how research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge, and will understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research or advanced scholarship. Holders will be able to bring their own perspective (demonstrating self-direction) and originality to bear upon an unfamiliar and complex problem and have an ability to apply, refine and develop concepts and to interrelate theory and practice (often in creative ways and making sound judgements in the absence of complete data). Graduates will be able to evaluate critically, develop critiques and propose new hypotheses; they will



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be prepared for continuing advancement and development through their professional career.

## 8. Postgraduate Diploma

- 8.1 Holders of a Postgraduate Diploma will be capable of taking an informed position in relation to their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice. Holders will be able to identify and apply appropriate research methodologies, and demonstrate personal skills in critical analysis, reflection and contextual awareness.

## 9. Postgraduate Diploma in Education

- 9.1 Holders of a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) will have developed knowledge, understanding and skills in the field of teaching and will have met the requirements for entry to, or for endorsement for entry to, the teaching profession in relation to those requirements for which the University has assessment responsibility. The definitive course information in CourseLoop will determine the precise level of academic and professional achievement. Candidates will systematically evaluate theories of teaching and learning to develop their practice. They will show critical understanding of current issues and specialist fields of study and exercise independent judgement and accountability in applying this understanding in a range of contexts. In professional situations, they will be able to use advanced research methodology to engage with the complexities of the educational process, to demonstrate a clear vision for innovation and to communicate and promote their values and leadership.

## 10. Postgraduate Certificate

- 10.1 Holders of a Postgraduate Certificate will be able to engage with advanced levels of theories and practice in relation to their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice. They will be able to explore appropriate research methodologies. Holders will be able to demonstrate personal skills in critical analysis, reflection and contextual awareness.

## 11. Postgraduate Certificate in Education

- 11.1 Holders of a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) will have developed knowledge, understanding and skills in the field of teaching and will have met the requirements for entry to, or for endorsement for entry to, the teaching profession in relation to those requirements for which the University has assessment responsibility. The definitive course information in CourseLoop will determine the precise level of academic and professional achievement. Candidates will engage in systematic analysis of the theory of learning and teaching in relation to practice. They will display a critical awareness of current issues and articulate a comprehensive understanding of the field, displaying expertise in the use of subject and professional knowledge within the context for which they have been trained. In professional situations, they will be able to use appropriate research methodology to critically evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements, and to communicate effectively.

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## 12. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

- 12.1 Holders of a PhD will 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. They will systematically acquire and understand a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline. Holders will be able 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. They have a detailed understanding of applicable methods and techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.
- 12.2 Holders of a PhD are able to make informed judgements on complex issues in a specialist field, often in the absence of complete data. They are able to communicate ideas and conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and to defend their thesis orally to the satisfaction of the examiners.

## 13. Professional Doctorate

- 13.1 Holders of a Professional Doctorate award will have demonstrated the creation and interpretation of new knowledge in a particular professional field, and that will contribute to the enhancement of professional practice and practitioners, through original research or advanced scholarship. They will systematically acquire and understand a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of a professional discipline. Holders will be able to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new professional knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of practice, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems. They have a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.
- 13.2 Holders of a Professional Doctorate are able to make informed judgements on complex issues in a professional field, often in the absence of complete data. They are able to communicate ideas and conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences. They will have undertaken research that has direct relevance to their own professional interest, working life or that of an organisation. They are able to defend their thesis orally to the satisfaction of the examiners.

## 14. Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

- 14.1 Holders of an MPhil will have in-depth knowledge and understanding of their discipline informed by current scholarship and research, including a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject. A graduate will have the ability to study independently and an ability to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to advanced scholarship in the subject. In addition, a graduate will possess a range of generic abilities and skills that include the ability to use initiative and take responsibility, to solve problems in creative and innovative ways and to make decisions in challenging situations. Graduates will be able to communicate effectively, with colleagues and a wider audience, in a variety of media.

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## 15. Master of Professional Research (MProf)

- 15.1 Holders of an MProf will have in-depth knowledge and understanding of their discipline informed by current scholarship and study, including a critical awareness of current issues and developments in their professional discipline. A graduate will have the ability to study independently and an ability to use techniques and research methods applicable to advanced scholarship and professional practice. In addition, a graduate will possess a range of generic abilities and skills that include the ability to use initiative and take responsibility, to solve problems in creative and innovative ways and to make decisions in challenging situations. Graduates will be able to communicate effectively, with colleagues and a wider audience, in a variety of media.

### Explanatory note

- An MProf is not a course in its own right, but is a stage within a Professional Doctorate.

## Designation of awards

### 16. Master's awards

- 16.1 Courses of study at master's level may lead to a Master of Arts (MA) or a Master of Science (MSc), or to a more closely defined award restricted to certain specific areas of study. A course team will need to present a justification for the award designation as part of the approval process (see QH Section 5).
- 16.2 The University has not adopted standard criteria to distinguish between MA and MSc awards. It would be extremely difficult to achieve agreement on such criteria given the different traditions and epistemological approaches within our academic disciplines. Instead a course team will need to present a justification for the award designation as part of the planning and approval process:
- a. In subject fields where there is a sector convention that courses lead to only one designation – and the course is following such convention – a simple note to this effect is all that is required.
  - b. In subject fields where a course is veering from the sector convention, a thorough justification is required highlighting the special features of the course.
  - c. In subject fields where courses can conventionally lead to either a MA or MSc, a short justification is required for the chosen designation. Where the subject field has its own custom on the curriculum differences between a MA and MSc, the course team will be expected to agree with this.
  - d. When drafting a 'justification', any guidance contained in the relevant QAA Subject Benchmarking statements should be used.
  - e. Additionally, in a course in which students can follow two pathways – one leading to MA and one to MSc – there should be sufficient difference in the

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curriculum followed by the two groups of students to justify the separate awards.

16.3 The following 'specific' award designations are available at level 7 for courses that are geared towards the achievement of outcomes in a specific professional or discipline area, both at staged and full master's level:

- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE);
- Postgraduate Certificate in Management (CM);
- Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE);
- Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies (DMS);
- Master of Business Administration (MBA);
- Master of Fine Art (MFA);
- Master of Laws (LLM);
- Master of Public Administration (MPA);
- Master of Research (MRes);
- Master of Science by Research (MSc (Res)).

16.4 The University will restrict master's and postgraduate award designations to courses where the assessment is predominantly at level 7. Courses that are offered to graduates but which do not lead to a majority of assessed outcomes at master's level cannot use master's or postgraduate in the award designation.

16.5 Course titles are subject to the rules set out in the QHS 3C on Course Titling.

16.6 The designations used by the University for Honorary Awards will make clear their honorary status.

## 17. Professional Doctorate awards

17.1 The Professional Doctorate designation is (DProf). The following 'specific' award designations are also available for Professional Doctorates that are geared towards the achievement of outcomes in a specific professional or discipline area:

- Doctor of Architecture (DArch);
- Doctor of Business Administration (DBA);
- Doctor of Design (DDes);
- Doctor of Digital Media (DDM);
- Doctor of Education (EdD);
- Doctor of Engineering (DEng);
- Doctor of Fashion Industry (DFI);
- Doctor of Fine Art (DFA);
- Doctor of Legal Practice (DLegalPrac);
- Doctor of Medical Science (DMedSci);
- Doctor of Psychology (DPsych);
- Doctor of Public Administration (DPA);
- Doctor of Real Estate (DRealEst);

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- Doctor of Social Practice (DSocPrac);
- Professional Doctorate by Established Work (DProf (Est Work)).

## Supplementary note

- A Professional Doctorate may have a 'subject' title after the award designation, e.g. Doctor of Engineering in Civil Engineering, Doctor of Engineering in Construction Management, Doctor of Psychology in Forensic Psychology, etc.

17.2 Proposed new Professional Doctorate designations are subject to Academic Board approval before they can be offered to students.

## 18. General grading descriptors

18.1 Postgraduate taught awards are available with one of the following classifications:

- a. Distinction
- b. Commendation
- c. Pass.

18.2 The University's grading descriptors set out the characteristics expected for each classification.

<b>Policy owner</b>
CADQ

Change history			
Version:	Approval date:	Implementation date:	Nature of significant revisions:
Sept 2016	30.09.16	01.10.16	Amendments to master's degree award descriptors Removal of generic NTU level descriptors and replacement with FHEQ Nov 2015
Sept 2017	12.09.17	01.10.17	Clarification of "P" credits
Sept 2018	12.09.18	01.10.18	None
Sept 2019	11.09.19	01.10.19	Added award of Professional Doctorate by Established Work
Sept 2020	16.09.20	01.10.20	None
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Equality Analysis		
Version:	EA date:	Completed by:
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