



# QH Supplement 3A: Guidance for foundation degrees

## 1. Introduction

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1.1 This Quality Handbook Supplement (QHS) provides guidance and context for foundation degree (FD) courses. [Sections 2, 5, 10, 11, 12](#) and [16B](#) of the Quality Handbook (QH) explain the requirements. Also see [QHS PS3](#) for requirements for Foundation Degree progression.

### Further information

- 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

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- 2.1 The underlying principles of the award are outlined below (see Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement).
- a. A 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. A 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. A 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

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- 3.1 The University is involved in the academic approval and delivery of a number of FDs (as collaborations and within NTU Schools). See [QH Section 10B](#) for further information on 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:
  - a. FdA – Foundation Degree in Arts;
  - b. FdSc – Foundation Degree in Science;
  - c. 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

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- 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.

## 5. Level descriptors

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 9.1 Employer involvement is a defining characteristic of foundation degrees.
- 9.2 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.

- 9.3 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 and review of FDs. 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.
- 9.4 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)

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- 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 of work-based learning must follow the University's assessed work-like experience (AWLE) requirements (see [Section 12](#) of the Quality Handbook) and include the employer and be reflected in the outcomes for the course.
- 10.4 In addition, an FD may be offered in a sandwich mode, leading to additional certification.

## 11. Accessibility

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- 11.1 Learners should be able to access FDs from a range of starting points and with different entry qualifications.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 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. Award descriptors

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- 12.1 Award descriptors are provided in [Section 3](#) of the Quality Handbook for all undergraduate awards.

## 13. Admission requirements for entry onto an FD

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13.1 See [Quality Handbook Section 13](#) for information on admissions. (Also, see paragraph 11.2 above).

## 14. Definitive Course Information

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14.1 Definitive course information for Foundation Degrees should be recorded on CourseLoop, as for all NTU courses.

14.2 When using CourseLoop, course teams could reference the following:

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

<b>Policy owner</b>
CADQ

<b>Change history</b>			
<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
Sept 2019	11.09.19	01.10.19	None
Sept 2020	08.09.20	01.10.20	None
Sept 2021	07.09.21	01.10.21	Minor updates to reference design sprints
Sept 2022	22.09.22	01.10.22	None
Sept 2023	14.09.23	01.10.23	None
Sept 2024	19.09.24	01.10.24	None
Sept 2025	25.09.25	01.10.25	Name and focus of the supplement changed from requirements to guidance. Requirements are now incorporated in QH Section 12.