



**Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff:  
Expectations for Foundation  
Degree-awarding powers and for  
taught degree-awarding powers**

January 2013

## Introduction

Under current arrangements, further education colleges in England and Wales may apply for Foundation Degree-awarding powers<sup>1</sup> or for taught degree-awarding powers,<sup>2</sup> subject to meeting any conditions specified in the relevant government-owned guidance and criteria (the **Guidance**).

The **Guidance** that applies to Foundation Degree-awarding powers should be read in conjunction with QAA's *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (FDQB),<sup>3</sup> which sets out the defining characteristics of Foundation Degrees. For bachelor's degrees with honours and master's degrees, it should be read in conjunction with the subject benchmark statement(s) appropriate to the degrees delivered. These benchmark statements define academic standards and set out the expectations of the relevant subject community - and, by extension, the wider higher education academic community.

While higher education qualifications may vary in design, purpose and scope, the need to safeguard academic standards and to provide meaningful learning opportunities to students remains constant. In light of this, and as the **Guidance** makes clear, teaching for degree-level qualifications is expected to reflect 'in a careful, conscious and intellectually demanding manner, the latest developments in the subject of study'. An applicant seeking Foundation Degree-awarding powers will need to provide evidence commensurate with the expectations of the Foundation Degree (level 5 in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)). Since taught degree-awarding powers include the power to award bachelor's degrees, bachelor's degrees with honours (level 6) and taught master's degrees (level 7), applicants are required to provide evidence of capacity to meet the highest level of award they would be permitted to make, in the event of a successful application.

QAA's scrutiny of applications for Foundation Degree-awarding powers or for taught degree-awarding powers is based on the **Guidance** which requires QAA to consider evidence under four broad headings: governance and academic management; academic standards and quality assurance arrangements; scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff; and the environment supporting the delivery of programmes of study leading to degree awards. Our scrutiny activity enables us to form a view as to whether an applicant has demonstrated that its higher education activity is rooted in, and supported by, a well established higher education ethos and culture, providing QAA with reassurance that the applicant will be able to contribute to the collective security of UK degree qualifications. In coming to a view about an applicant, and taking account of the **Guidance**, we are mindful of the need for there to be public confidence in the recommendations we make to Government on individual applications.

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<sup>1</sup> *Applications for the Grant of Foundation Degree-awarding powers: Guidance and Criteria for Applicant Further Education Institutions in England and Wales* (1 October 2010), [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/a/11-782-applications-for-foundation-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/a/11-782-applications-for-foundation-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *Applications for the Grant of Taught Degree Awarding Powers, Research Degree Awarding Powers and University Title: Guidance for Applicant Organisations in England and Wales* (August 2004), [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/a/11-781-applications-for-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/a/11-781-applications-for-degree-awarding-powers-guidance.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *The Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* can be accessed at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Foundation-Degree-qualification-benchmark-May-2010.aspx)

This guidance focuses on the scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness of staff, and on the expectations of staff teaching at Foundation Degree level and above. In so doing, it takes account of *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), which sets out the expectation that:

Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.<sup>4</sup>

Common to both Foundation Degree and taught degree-awarding powers is the need for an applicant to demonstrate:

- the existence of 'a well founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards'
- that staff are 'competent to teach, facilitate learning and undertake assessment to the level of the qualifications being awarded'.

The focus of the **Guidance** on academic community and academic strength reflects the need to ensure that higher education qualifications continue to develop graduates with high-level analytical skills and a broad range of competences, distinguishing higher education from training or the acquisition of skills alone.

In the scrutiny of a Foundation Degree-awarding powers application we consider the evidence presented by an applicant that indicates:

- how it discharges its 'responsibility for ensuring that staff maintain a close and professional understanding of current developments in scholarship in their subjects and that structured opportunities for them to do so are both readily available and widely taken up'
- how it ensures that all teaching staff engaged with the delivery of their higher education programmes have relevant 'knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline area and at a level appropriate to a Foundation Degree and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching'.

For taught degree-awarding powers, we consider the evidence presented by an applicant that indicates:

- how it discharges its 'responsibility for ensuring that staff maintain a close and professional understanding of current developments in research and scholarship in their subjects and that structured opportunities for them to do so are widely taken up'
- how it ensures that all teaching staff engaged in the delivery of higher education programmes have relevant 'knowledge and understanding of current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area and that such knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance their teaching'
- for any member of staff teaching on doctoral programmes (where relevant), active personal engagement with research and/or advanced scholarship at a level commensurate with the degrees on which they teach.

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<sup>4</sup> Further information about the Quality Code can be found here: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode).

There are significant qualitative and quantitative differences between Foundation Degrees and higher level degrees. The Quality Code is a key reference point in outlining expectations of Foundation Degree qualifications (level 5 in the FHEQ), bachelor's degrees and bachelor's degrees with honours (level 6) and taught master's degrees (level 7).

One fundamental difference is that bachelor's degrees typically represent the end of 'first cycle' higher education qualifications, whereas the Foundation Degree does not.<sup>5</sup>

## **Qualification descriptors: Foundation Degree, bachelor's and master's degrees**

Qualification descriptors in the Quality Code explain the outcomes and attributes expected of learning at higher education levels 5, 6 and 7 (full details in the Annex). These descriptors provide a helpful starting point in determining the staffing implications for different degree levels.

The Quality Code states that holders of level 5 qualifications:

will have developed a sound understanding of the principles in their field of study, and will have learned to apply those principles more widely...they will have learned to evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems...Their studies may well have had a vocational orientation...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.

Holders of a level 6 qualification are expected to:

have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge, some of it at the current boundaries of an academic discipline...the holder will have developed analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment...[and] will be able to evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively.

They are also expected to:

have the qualities needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable circumstances.

With regard to level 7 awards, much of the study undertaken is expected to:

have been at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Students will have shown originality in the application of knowledge...they will understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively...they will show originality in tackling and solving problems...[and] have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances

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<sup>5</sup> This description of bachelor's degrees is set out for Europe in the Bologna declaration, a link to which can be found here: [www.ehea.info](http://www.ehea.info).

requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility, and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

Applicants are required to demonstrate the existence of an appropriately qualified and resourced staffing base to enable students to achieve, as a minimum, threshold academic standards that should not vary from one higher education provider to another. In coming to a view on the academic qualifications of staff, QAA will take account of the expectations set out in the Quality Code and good practice in the higher education sector. For example, staff would normally be expected to hold qualifications at a higher level than the higher education courses on which they teach. If this is not the case, and recognising the contribution to be made by professionally qualified staff to courses with a vocational/professional orientation, an applicant will need to make clear the means by which it establishes, and subsequently monitors, that its academic staffing base is appropriate and enables students to achieve the academic standards expected of them. The applicant will also need to demonstrate the means by which its academic staff (full-time, part-time, sessional, visiting) contribute to its academic community and engage students as members of that community.

## **Benchmark statements**

The Foundation Degree is unique in that it has its own generic qualification benchmark which highlights the distinctive characteristics of Foundation Degrees, which are brought together in a clear and planned way within a single award, underpinned by work-based learning. These characteristics are employer involvement, accessibility, articulation and progression, flexibility, and partnership.

The *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* (FDQB) sets out the expectations of the Foundation Degree in general terms, whereas level 6 and 7 degree qualifications are supported by subject benchmark statements produced by subject communities working with QAA. Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject or subject area, in addition to setting out the general expectations associated with bachelor's degree and master's degree level study of different subjects.

The Quality Code notes that 'Scholarship and research lie at the heart of higher education', while acknowledging that the precise nature of these scholarly activities is determined by subject differences as well as by differences in focus, level, scope and provider context. The differences between the Foundation Degree and higher level degree provision have implications for the staffing base. For example, scholarship in support of the Foundation Degree is likely to involve an employer-driven focus and a tightly structured approach to learning, reflecting the vocational orientation of the qualification. Bachelor's and taught master's degrees may also have a vocational orientation, as in the case of business, law and nursing for example, but they are also likely to have a greater subject focus and academic orientation, reflected in more open-ended enquiry and the development of students as independent learners.

In determining the level of powers to be sought, an applicant should therefore consider very carefully the information provided in the Quality Code, the FDQB and in subject benchmark statements in the subject areas it offers.

## **Distinguishing features of Foundation Degrees and higher level degrees**

*Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code draws attention to the range of purposes fulfilled by academic programmes, including 'the provision of personal academic development, preparation for knowledge creation and research, preparation for specific (often professional) employment or for general employment, or as preparation for lifelong learning'.

It also provides a helpful starting point in thinking about the different expectations associated with Foundation Degree awards and bachelor's and master's degrees.

The very nature of Foundation Degrees means that they have a clear vocational orientation which is based on the presumption of close interaction with employers to establish their wants and needs. Given the distinctive nature of the Foundation Degree, keeping up with employer trends is an important form of professional development. However, the positioning of the Foundation Degree as a higher education qualification calls for staff to have the necessary knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in their discipline area. This reflects a concern to integrate academic and work-based learning and to ensure an appropriate balance between intellectual and practical skills. The evidence submitted by an applicant needs to provide confidence that the staffing base is appropriate to support Foundation Degree students and enable them to demonstrate integration of, and balance between, theory and practice as part of their learning experience.

In the case of bachelor's and master's degrees, the presumption that subject knowledge is to be acquired and extended leads to an expectation that teaching will be informed, if not led, by the research/scholarship interests of staff working in the field. Consequently, for taught degree-awarding powers, the majority of staff are expected to be actively engaged in scholarly activity (leading to scholarly output, for example) that informs their teaching and contributes to the development and enhancement of students' understanding of their subject. Such activity does not necessarily mean doing original research but it does mean doing more than simply professional development. An applicant for taught degree-awarding powers is required to provide evidence of productive scholarly activity by its staff, demonstrating active involvement in the generation or reformulation of academic knowledge and the dissemination of understanding or ideas to both internal and external audiences.

## **Scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff**

It is recognised that the UK higher education sector accommodates considerable diversity, reflecting different emphases in terms of mission, programmes and student profile. These differences notwithstanding, the Quality Code sets out a number of expectations relating to academic standards and quality which are common to all higher education providers.

Respecting this diversity and the academic autonomy vested in those providers granted degree-awarding powers, applicants are required to demonstrate (a) that their staff have knowledge and understanding of research and advanced scholarship in a discipline (for taught degree-awarding powers), and knowledge and understanding of current scholarly developments in a discipline (for Foundation Degree-awarding powers); and (b) that this knowledge and understanding directly inform and enhance teaching. In thinking about how they can provide the demonstrable evidence required,

applicants may find it helpful to consider how their own review of teaching and learning, including observation of classes and possibly independent external verification of the evidence, might be used in support of an application.

The outcomes of activity undertaken by staff may take a variety of forms, including:

- academic (for example, publications or conference presentations)
- professional (for example, exhibitions, reports about developments in a subject or particular field of study, contributions to practice-related or trade journals, speaking at events linked to a profession)
- commercial (for example, consultancy, patents)
- personal (for example, the development of new skills or improved understanding of a subject or area).

In framing their own working definitions of scholarship/scholarly activity in relation to the subjects of study provided and the level of degree-awarding powers that are being sought, applicants should reflect on the purposes of such activity. Internally, this would include impact on the curriculum, the quality of the learning opportunities provided for students, and the student experience of higher education. Externally, this would include engagement with external stakeholders and communities, including other academics who form part of a wider subject community, as well as employers, policy-makers, special interest groups and so on, which would contribute to the further development, academic health and currency of a subject.

At an early stage in their self-evaluation of scholarship and pedagogical effectiveness, applicants will find it useful to distinguish between the different order of activities in which staff are engaged (for example, updating information technology skills or reading allied to a subject or field of study to inform the continued currency of a curriculum), determining which activities are primarily of personal benefit to the member of staff concerned and which have wider applicability and benefit. Where attendance at conferences or external workshops, or membership of professional organisations, is cited as evidence, for example, applicants should demonstrate the extent to which such activity contributes to the development and enhancement of their academic community.

## Questions to bear in mind

In preparing an application for degree-awarding powers, the onus is on applicants to demonstrate strength and depth in the staffing base appropriate to the degree awarding powers being sought. In preparing an application, whether for Foundation Degree or for taught degree-awarding powers, applicants should take due account of this guidance and the government-owned **Guidance** referred to in the introduction.

Applicants should ask themselves the following questions:

- What is our strategy for ensuring the development and maintenance of 'a well-founded, cohesive and self-critical academic community that can demonstrate firm guardianship of its standards'?
- How is this expressed in our strategic mission or vision?
- Who is responsible for this strategy and to what extent is it devolved through the organisation?
- What is our strategy for addressing the expectations referred to in this guidance, as appropriate to our application?

- What is the balance between full and part-time staff supporting higher education at levels 5, 6 and 7, and what implications does this have for the organisation?
- How inclusive is the academic community?
- What use is made of external partners in developing our academic community?
- Are members of staff involved in research networks?
- What qualifications do we expect staff to have?
- What targets and aspirations have we set for ourselves with regard to the qualifications held by staff?
- Is there a clear organisation-wide view of what constitutes scholarship and scholarly activity?
- What criteria do we use to define scholarship and scholarly activity - for example, the level of participation, the outputs of scholarship, the extent of dissemination internally and externally?
- Do we differentiate between scholarly activity and continuing professional development?
- Are scholarly activity and its outputs audited and subject to external verification?
- What are the mechanisms for planning and allocating resources for scholarly activity to individuals and schools/departments?
- How do we know and ensure that the activity undertaken is relevant to the subject and the programmes delivered?
- How do we promote a shared understanding of scholarship across subjects and disciplines?
- How do we record and evaluate the impact of scholarship on:
  - a. individual members of staff?
  - b. curriculum design?
  - c. teaching and learning?
  - d. the students' transition to the next level of qualification?
  - e. the local and wider community?
- What mechanisms do we use to coordinate, promote and monitor all scholarly activity undertaken and its cumulative effect across the organisation?
- How are the outcomes of scholarly activity disseminated and used for future development?



## Useful references

Applicants may find the following sources of information helpful in reflecting on their response to the criterion and evidence requirements that apply to scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff.

- [UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part A: Setting and maintaining threshold academic standards](#) (QAA, 2012).
- [UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality](#) (QAA, 2012).
- [Outcomes from IQER: 2008-10 Staff development](#) (QAA, 2011).
- [The UK Professional Standards Framework](#) (HEA, 2011).

## Annex - Qualification descriptors: Foundation Degree, bachelor's and master's degrees

Level 5 Descriptor: Foundation Degree	Level 6 Descriptor: Bachelor's degree with honours	Level 7 Descriptor: Master's degree
<b>Foundation Degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:</b>	<b>Bachelor's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:</b>	<b>Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conceptual understanding that enables the student:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline</li> <li>– to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conceptual understanding that enables the student:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline</li> <li>- to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline)</li> </ul>	
<b>Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:</b>	<b>Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:</b>	<b>Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level</li> </ul>
<b>And holders will have:</b>	<b>And holders will have:</b>	<b>And holders will have:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility</li> <li>decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts</li> <li>the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility</li> <li>decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations</li> <li>the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**QAA 509 01/13**

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