

# Annex D: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 and FQHEIS Level 10 degrees

## Introduction

This annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours - 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd. These statements build upon the descriptors within *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS), for bachelor's degrees with honours (Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and Level 10 in Scotland). These are published together in [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (the Frameworks).

The Frameworks contain the qualification descriptors, minimum expectations necessary for awarding bachelor's degrees with honours (in other words, a 3rd-class degree) but with some 'typical' features at a higher standard. The statements are generic and can be applied across subjects and modes of learning. For each course of study and qualification, autonomous degree-awarding bodies draw up and approve specific statements about the intended learning outcomes.

The description of degree classifications below goes beyond the 3rd-class degree threshold and expresses what all four classifications look like.

This guidance has been informed by multiple providers' own criteria and the outcomes from consultations with students; HE providers; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs); and others.

## How should these descriptors be used?

These descriptors may be useful for staff development, course design and approval, and external examiner processes. They are designed to include enough detail to support reliable quality assessment across the sector, aiding calibration and peer review.

The classification descriptors signpost student achievement generically - they are neither detailed nor exhaustive. Providers are, as autonomous institutions, free to consider how these may assist in their standards assurance and course development processes.

The descriptions for each classification are intended to be sufficiently generic in order to be able to sit alongside providers' own course-specific learning outcomes which, combined, detail the complexity of understanding and skills that students must achieve to gain a degree and classification. Providers may choose to use the descriptors alongside sector-reference points, such as Subject Benchmark Statements, for aligning or informing their criteria for measuring student performance.

Autonomous institutions are responsible for setting their own curricula and assessment criteria. Providers must ensure that, as they are undertaking these responsibilities, they are meeting the expectations for quality and standards as they are set out in the Quality Code and assessed in line with the requirements set out for each UK nation.

The descriptors are intended to be applicable across the UK. However, the four nations have differing regulatory and quality architectures and the descriptors' usages within those architectures will vary. In Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, the descriptors do not form part of the regulatory or quality assurance systems and function as advice only. Providers regulated in England and registered with the Office for Students (OfS) must ensure that their courses meet the sector-recognised standards set out in the OfS's [regulatory framework for higher education in England](#).

## **An explanation of each classification**

Students are assessed against their curricula of study, which should allow them to achieve the required learning outcomes and to develop and demonstrate characteristics associated with the higher level of learning of a bachelor's degree with honours. At the most fundamental level, each classification means that students have achieved the characteristics of Level 6 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and Level 10 in Scotland of the respective frameworks. Typically, this will include:

- knowledge and understanding
- cognitive skills
- practical skills
- transferable skills
- professional competences, where relevant.

Certain professional courses may include specific professional competence requirements set by PSRBs. PSRBs may also specify the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature. In some PSRB-approved courses, professional accreditation may be conferred on the student as part of successful completion; in others, students may need to apply separately to a PSRB following successful completion.

A student's classification is determined by their level of attainment within this basic structure and their own engagement with the curricula and learning opportunities on offer to enhance their ability to apply the skills, methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects. Students are assessed throughout their degree according to marking criteria set at either an institutional, faculty, or course level in line with these sector reference points. Upon awarding a degree, a graduate can be expected to have demonstrated and possess the skills and attributes attached to their respective classification, as described below.

<b>Not successful</b>	<b>Third-class honours</b> (3rd)	<b>Lower second-class honours</b> (2.2)	<b>Upper second-class honours</b> (2.1)	<b>First-class honours</b> (1st)
<p><b>The student did not achieve the required course learning outcomes and:</b></p> <p>did not consistently demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills</p> <p>did not consistently demonstrate adequate initiative and personal responsibility</p> <p>did not consistently demonstrate ability to reflect on their work</p> <p>did not consistently demonstrate problem-solving skills</p>	<p><b>The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:</b></p> <p>demonstrated knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills</p> <p>demonstrated initiative and exercised personal responsibility</p> <p>demonstrated some ability to reflect on their work</p> <p>demonstrated problem-solving skills</p>	<p><b>The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:</b></p> <p>demonstrated strong knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills</p> <p>demonstrated initiative and personal responsibility</p> <p>demonstrated an ability to reflect on their work</p> <p>demonstrated strong problem-solving skills</p>	<p><b>The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:</b></p> <p>demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills</p> <p>demonstrated good initiative and personal responsibility</p> <p>demonstrated an ability to reflect critically on their work</p> <p>demonstrated thorough problem-solving skills</p>	<p><b>The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:</b></p> <p>consistently demonstrated advanced knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills</p> <p>consistently demonstrated exceptional initiative and personal responsibility</p> <p>consistently demonstrated ability to reflect critically and independently on their work</p> <p>consistently demonstrated exceptional problem-solving skills</p>

Two conventions typically used in awarding degrees where threshold FHEQ Level 6/FQHEIS Level 10 standards may not have been met are summarised below.

## **Ordinary degrees**

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, full-time honours degrees usually take place over three years; in Scotland, they take place over four years. Whichever model is followed, providers may permit students to study slightly fewer credits and achieve an ordinary degree - an award which is still set at Level 6 FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland but is at Level 9 FQHEIS in Scotland.

Students completing an ordinary degree are awarded a pass/merit/distinction or a fail - they are not classified in the same way as honours degrees. Ordinary degrees are structured in a number of ways with typical models including a general degree where the emphasis is on breadth rather than depth of study, or a designated degree where the main subject of study will be identified in the award title and/or student transcript.

Ordinary degrees are also sometimes awarded to students who take the full honours degree but do not succeed in all assessments.

## **Pass degrees**

In England and Wales, students who study the full honours degree but do not achieve all the required credits, may be awarded a pass degree. Pass degrees are not classified.

## **Detailed descriptors**

The following tables present a detailed articulation of how the broad graduate attributes acquired by students during their course might apply across different skills areas, competences and attributes.

Courses necessarily vary in what and how they assess, according to subject requirements. The different characteristics may not necessarily be assessed equally - providers are free to design courses with assessment weighted towards particular skills as they deem appropriate for meeting the required learning outcomes.

The criteria below present a holistic overview of the level a graduate would be expected to have reached during their degree. Not all descriptors will apply to all courses to the same extent: for example, numeracy and digital skills may not be as applicable to some arts courses as creativity skills, while the reverse might be true of some STEM subjects. If some criteria are not applicable to a given course, they may not need to be referenced.

## Knowledge and understanding

A systematic extensive and comparative understanding of key aspects of the field of study, including coherent and detailed knowledge of the subject and critical understanding of theories and concepts, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student's knowledge and understanding of the subject is inadequate, without the required breadth or depth, with deficiencies in key areas.	The student has demonstrated a depth of knowledge and understanding in key aspects of their field of study, sufficient to deal with terminology, facts and concepts.	The student has demonstrated a sound breadth and depth of subject knowledge and understanding, if sometimes balanced towards the descriptive rather than the critical or analytical.	The student has demonstrated sophisticated breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, showing a clear, critical insight.	The student has shown exceptional knowledge and understanding, significantly beyond the threshold expectation of a graduate at this level and beyond what has been taught.
The student has demonstrated inadequate understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, including their limitations and ambiguities.	The student has demonstrated an understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles.	The student has consistently demonstrated an understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles as well as more specialised areas.	The student has demonstrated a thorough understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, and a sound understanding of more specialised areas.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, and in-depth knowledge, if not mastery of a range of specialised areas.
The student has not produced sufficient evidence of background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study.	The student has conducted general background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques, with the ability to extract relevant points.	The student has conducted background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques accurately, and can critically appraise academic sources.	The student has conducted thorough background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques accurately, and possesses a well-developed ability to critically appraise a wide range of sources.	The student has conducted independent, extensive and appropriate investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study well beyond the usual range, together with critical evaluation, to advance work and/or direct arguments.

## Cognitive skills

A conceptual understanding of a level that is necessary to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems and comment on research and scholarship in the discipline, with an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has displayed an over-reliance on set sources. They have not demonstrated an adequate ability to select and evaluate reading and research.	The student has demonstrated the ability to select, evaluate and comment on reading, research and primary sources.	The student has selected, evaluated and commented on reading, research and primary sources, sometimes beyond the set range.	The student has thoroughly selected, critically evaluated and commented on reading, research and primary sources, usually beyond the set range.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional ability to select, consider, evaluate, comment on and synthesise a broad range of research, primary sources, views and information and integrate references.
The student's arguments and explanations are weak and/or poorly constructed, and they are not able to critically evaluate the arguments of others or consider alternative views.	The student has shown the ability to devise and sustain an argument, with some consideration of alternative views, and can explain often complex matters and ideas.	The student has argued logically, with supporting evidence, and has demonstrated the ability to consider and evaluate a range of views and information. They have clearly and consistently explained complex matters and ideas.	The student has demonstrated the ability to make coherent, substantiated arguments, as well as the ability to consider, critically evaluate and synthesise a range of views and information. They have demonstrated a thorough, perceptive and thoughtful interpretation of complex matters and ideas.	The student has made consistent, logical, coherently developed, and substantiated arguments, and demonstrated the ability to systematically consider, critically evaluate and synthesise a wide range of views and information. They have demonstrated sophisticated perception, critical insight and interpretation of complex matters and ideas.
The student has shown a limited ability to solve problems and/or make decisions.	The student has demonstrated an ability to solve problems, applying a range of methods to do so, and the ability to make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances.	The student has consistently solved complex problems, selecting and applying a range of appropriate methods, and can make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances.	The student has demonstrated thorough problem-solving skills, selecting and justifying their use of a wide-range of methods, and can make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances with a degree of autonomy.	The student has demonstrated a wide range of extremely well-developed problem-solving skills, as well as a strong aptitude for decision-making with a high degree of autonomy, in the most complex and unpredictable circumstances.
The student has shown little or no real creativity.	The student has produced some creative work.	The student has consistently demonstrated creativity.	The student has shown a high level of creativity and originality throughout their work.	The student has demonstrated exceptional creative flair and originality.

## Practical skills

An ability to manage one's individual learning and to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline or as necessary for the discipline.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has not demonstrated sufficient evidence of discipline-specific skills development or application.	The student has demonstrated evidence of developing and applying discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has consistently demonstrated the development and informed application of discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has demonstrated a capable and effective application of discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has demonstrated an accomplished and innovative application of discipline-specific specialist skills.
The student has attempted practical tasks/processes but followed a limited, procedural or mechanistic formula, and they contain errors, with little or no independence.	The student has completed practical tasks and/or processes accurately and with a degree of independence.	The student has consistently completed practical tasks/processes mainly independently in an accurate, well-coordinated and proficient way.	The student has performed practical tasks and/or processes autonomously, with accuracy and coordination.	The student has autonomously completed practical tasks and/or processes with a high degree of accuracy, coordination and proficiency.
The student has demonstrated a lack of technical, creative and/or artistic skills in most, or key, areas.	The student has demonstrated technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has consistently demonstrated well-developed technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has a thorough command of highly-developed relevant technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has a full range of exceptional technical, creative and/or artistic skills.
The student has not presented their research findings clearly or effectively, and their gathering, processing and interpretation of data is unsatisfactory.	The student has presented their research findings, in several formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted data effectively.	The student has consistently presented their research findings effectively and appropriately in many formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted data efficiently and effectively.	The student has presented thorough research findings perceptively and appropriately in a wide range of formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted a wide range of complex data efficiently and effectively.	The student has presented research findings perceptively, convincingly and appropriately in a wide range of formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted a wide range of complex data efficiently and effectively.

## Transferable skills

Personal and enabling skills appropriate to the discipline, including the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences, the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student is not able to sufficiently express ideas and convey clear meaning verbally, electronically and/or in writing, uses inaccurate terminology, with many errors in spelling, vocabulary and syntax. They have been unable to demonstrate consistently basic numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions verbally, electronically and in writing, with clear expression and style. They have also demonstrated numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can consistently and confidently communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions verbally, electronically and in writing. They show a clear, coherent, expressive style, with a range of vocabulary. They have consistently demonstrated strong numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions with a high-degree of proficiency verbally, electronically and in writing. They have a clear, fluent and expressive style with appropriate vocabulary. They have a high standard of numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to an accomplished level verbally, electronically and in writing. They have shown an accurate, fluent, sophisticated style. They possess exceptional numeracy and digital literacy skills.
The student has made infrequent contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has demonstrated a capability of making useful contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has consistently demonstrated the capability to make coherent and constructive contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has demonstrated the capability to make strong, valuable contributions to group discussions and/or project work, with an understanding of team and leadership roles.	The student has demonstrated the capability to make clear, authoritative and valuable contributions to group discussions and/or project work, with exceptional teamwork and leadership skills.
The student has demonstrated little or no ability to manage their learning and/or work without supervision.	The student has shown an ability to manage their learning and work with minimal or no supervision.	The student has consistently shown an ability to systematically manage their learning and work without supervision.	The student has shown a strong ability to systematically manage their learning and work without supervision.	The student has shown an exceptional ability to manage their learning on their own initiative, and work without supervision.
The student has not demonstrated adequate initiative or personal responsibility.	The student has demonstrated initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has consistently demonstrated initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has consistently demonstrated well-developed initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has demonstrated exceptional initiative and/or personal responsibility.
The student has shown little or no ability to reflect on their work.	The student has demonstrated the ability to reflect on their work.	The student has consistently demonstrated a well-developed ability to reflect on their work.	The student has demonstrated the ability to reflect critically on their work.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional ability to reflect critically and independently on their work.

## Professional competences (to the extent that they are expressed by the course learning outcomes)

Typically, where a degree award requires an assessment of professional competencies, no award will be made if the student does not meet them. Providers remain free to set course learning outcomes above the threshold and classify students accordingly.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has not demonstrated achievement of professional competence when assessed against the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB).	The student has demonstrated achievement of professional competence when assessed against the requirements of a PSRB.			
The student has failed to adhere to the appropriate rules and/or conventions set by regulators or the industry.	The student has adhered to the appropriate rules and/or conventions set by regulators or the industry.			

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 Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
 Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557000  
 Web: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)