

Teesside University Credit Level Descriptors

Introduction and Guidance Notes

What are Credit Level Descriptors?

Credit level descriptors define the level of complexity, relative demand and autonomy expected of a student on completion of a module or course. They provide a description of learning through a hierarchy of knowledge and skills (see [SEEC 2021](#))

Why do we need them?

Credit level descriptors provide a framework to aid course and module development. They help us to develop learning outcomes that reflect the level expected. This means the level expected in our courses and modules is broadly comparable across the University and the Sector.

How do we know what is expected for each level?

The [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications \[FHEQ\]](#) in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland (QAA) defines the expectations of awards within FHEQ through qualification descriptors. For example, the FHEQ tells us what typical students will demonstrate at honours level (level 6) and what types of qualities and transferable skills they will acquire. The University is expected to demonstrate how its awards meet the requirements of the Higher Education sector.

How do I demonstrate that my course meets the FHEQ?

You don't need to worry about directly linking your learning outcomes to the FHEQ. The University's Credit Level Descriptors are informed by the sector's Qualification Frameworks, which include the FHEQ and the Outcome Classification Descriptions for Level 6, both of which are published by the Quality Assurance Agency on the link above. So, as long as you use the University's Credit Level Descriptors, your course will meet the requirements of FHEQ.

What is the difference between the Credit Level Descriptors and learning outcomes?

The Credit Level Descriptors provide general statements about the level of skills and abilities developed in the course in relation to the context in which students are working or studying. This context is not defined in the Credit Level Descriptor which is why they are not meant to be used as learning outcomes. If we did this, all our courses would be the same. When you design your course outcomes, you need to consider how the Credit Level Descriptors apply to the context of your course or module and write specific learning outcomes that reflect that context.

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Do I have to demonstrate how the Credit Level Descriptors are assessed?

No! The Credit Level Descriptors are used to develop learning outcomes. It is the learning outcomes that are assessed not the Credit Level Descriptors.

Should an award at a particular level cover all the Credit Level Descriptors for that level?

The Credit Level Descriptors are an indicative framework and not intended to be all encompassing or prescriptive. At the module level you should consider which aspects of the Credit Level Descriptors are applicable and develop your learning outcomes accordingly. Not all categories will be relevant for each module and the emphasis will depend on the context and focus of the module. At the level of the award, there is an expectation that all categories of the Credit Level Descriptors are used to develop your outcomes in a holistic way.

Do I have to have a learning outcome for each level of the course?

No. Higher levels subsume the Credit Level Descriptors and the learning outcomes at the lower level.

I have some learning outcomes that could fit under more than one heading. Do I include them in more than one category?

Depending on the focus of the course, learning outcomes can be relevant to more than one category. For example, team working can occur in the context of a research team, as part of professional practice or in an academic module. Use your judgement in terms of where it is most relevant and just include it in that category.

What else do I need to consider when developing learning outcomes?

If your course is accredited by a Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) you will need to incorporate their requirements in your learning outcomes. The QAA also publishes a comprehensive range of subject benchmark statements at honours level and also has some statements for masters' level. These must also be considered when writing learning outcomes - see [Subject Benchmark Statements](#). Additionally, the QAA has published [Qualification Characteristics Statements](#) that describe the distinctive features of qualifications at a particular level within the Qualifications Frameworks.

If your course is a Higher & Degree Apprenticeship you will need to incorporate the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) expressed within the relevant [Apprenticeship Standard](#) and/or the End Point Assessment (EPA) Plan for Integrated Apprenticeships (in some instances KSBs may be expressed as learning outcomes within the EPA Plan) within your learning outcomes. In addition, the QAA has published an [Apprenticeship Characteristic Statement](#) which must also be considered when writing learning outcomes.

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Learning activities at the respective level of study are designed to enable students to demonstrate:

Personal and Transferrable Skills Development						
Domain	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
<p>Personal responsibility, evaluation, and development</p> <p>Linked AEF Theme: - <i>Student Success</i></p>	<p>Articulate their individual capabilities using pre-defined criteria in familiar contexts and engage in guided personal development.</p>	<p>Take responsibility for the evaluation of own capabilities and development using established criteria in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.</p>	<p>Take responsibility for the evaluation of own and/or others' capabilities and development using wide-ranging approaches and criteria in contexts of varying complexity.</p>	<p>Take responsibility for the critical evaluation of own and others' capabilities and development using selected management approaches in complex and interrelated contexts.</p>	<p>Take responsibility for leading the systematic and critical evaluation of own and others' capabilities, performance, and development, applying strategic management approaches in unpredictably complex contexts.</p>	<p>Lead and is accountable for the comprehensive and critical evaluation of own and others' capabilities, performance, and development, applying innovative and transformative leadership approaches in highly complex contexts.</p>
<p>Organisational and communication skills</p>	<p>Use organisational and communication skills to clarify and arrange tasks, identify problems, and communicate outcomes in narrowly defined contexts.</p>	<p>Use organisational and communication skills to clarify and arrange tasks, as well as identify and rectify issues in a range of contexts.</p>	<p>Adapt organisational and communication skills to a range of situations, audiences, and degrees of complexity.</p>	<p>Set criteria for and be effective in professional and interpersonal communication in a wide range of situations.</p>	<p>Identify, evaluate, and maintain capabilities and qualities to support effective communication in a range of complex and specialised contexts.</p>	<p>Select relevant communication tools to communicate complex or contentious information that is relevant to the target audience.</p>

Domain	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Project and activity design and development	Designs and develops projects and/or activities using predefined criteria to support own and/ or others learning, work or practice in familiar contexts.	Designs and develops projects and/ or activities using established criteria to inform own and/ or others learning. Work or practice in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	Designs and develops a range of relevant projects and/or activities to improve areas of own and/ or others learning, work or practice of varying complexity.	Designs and develops specialist projects and/or activities to enhance inter-related areas of own and/ or others learning, work or practice in complex contexts.	Designs and develops advanced specialist projects and/or activities to strategically enhance own and/ or others learning, work or practice within unpredictably complex contexts.	Designs and develops highly advanced, specialist and innovative projects and/or activities to transform own and/ or others learning, work or practice in highly complex contexts.
Interpersonal, team-based, and networking skills Linked AEF Theme: <i>- Globally Connected</i>	Applies pre-defined interpersonal, team and networking skills to support team performance in familiar contexts.	Applies established interpersonal, team and networking skills to recognise factors that affect team performance in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	Applies a range of relevant interpersonal, team and networking skills to contribute to the enhancement of team performance in contexts of varying complexity.	Applies and develops selected interpersonal, team and networking skills to enhance team performance in complex and interrelated contexts and engages with relevant professional communities.	Applies and develops advanced interpersonal, team and networking skills to strategically enhance team performance in unpredictably complex contexts and contributes to specialist professional communities.	Applies and develops highly advanced interpersonal, team and networking skills to transformatively enhance team performance in highly complex contexts and innovatively contributes to specialist professional communities.
Working in digital environments Linked AEF Theme: <i>- Digital Empowerment</i>	Understands and has a practical appreciation for digital environments and works effectively and responsibly with digital media.	Operates competently and responsibly in digital environments and uses a range of digital media effectively.	Selects appropriate digital tools to achieve outcomes and operates competently and responsibly within digital environments.	Selects from a wide range of digital media appropriate to the task and operates competently and responsibly within digital environments of varying complexity.	Demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of a range of complex digital environments and the ability to operate competently and responsibly within them.	Demonstrates advanced understanding of a range of complex digital environments and model responsible use of digital environments.

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Decision making skills	Makes sound decisions in defined contexts and articulates the basis for that decision.	Understands different perspectives that can inform decisions and articulates sound reasoning for own decisions.	Weighs different perspectives and justifies decisions and judgements with sound reasoning.	Makes evidence-based decisions in more complex situations and takes accountability for the outcome and impact of those decisions.	Uses sound judgement to make evidence-based decisions within complex academic and/or professional contexts, and takes accountability for the outcome and impact of those decisions.	Operates as a decision maker in complex and unpredictable contexts and develops a strategic, evidence-based, approaches to delivering outcomes.

Research, Knowledge and Cognitive Skills						
Domain	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
<p>Conceptualisation and critical thinking</p> <p>Linked AEF Theme: <i>- Future Ready</i></p>	Identifies, understands, and applies pre-defined principles, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and approaches in familiar contexts.	Identifies, understands, and applies established principles, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and approaches, recognising their relative strengths in familiar and unfamiliar of contexts.	Identifies, understands at a deeper level, and applies a range of relevant principles, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and approaches recognising competing perspectives in contexts of varying complexity.	Works with, articulates, and applies relevant specialist principles concepts, theoretical frameworks and approaches from competing perspectives and critically identifies the possibility of new ideas in complex and inter-related contexts.	Works with, articulates, applies advanced principles, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and approaches to critically develop systematic responses to existing discourses and methodologies, suggesting new ideas in unpredictably complex contexts.	Develops and applies innovative and highly advanced principles, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and approaches to critically produce a comprehensive and coherent discourse and methodology to underpin new knowledge in highly abstract and complex contexts.
Problem-solving and enquiry	Applies pre-defined problem-solving techniques to investigate given problems using information and data in familiar contexts.	Applies established problem-solving methods and techniques to recognise and investigate problems, using information and data in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	Applies a range of relevant problem-solving methods and techniques to define and investigate problems, patterns and relationships using information and data in contexts of varying complexity.	Selects and applies specialist problem-solving strategies, methods, and techniques to define, investigate and critically evaluate problems using information and data in complex and interrelated contexts.	Selects and adapts appropriate advanced problem-solving strategies, methods, and techniques to design systematic investigations that define and critically evaluate problems, using specialist information and data in unpredictable and complex contexts.	Develops innovative and highly advanced problem-solving strategies, methods, and techniques to design comprehensive investigations that critically evaluate problems to generate new and information and data in highly abstract and complex contexts.

Domain	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Synthesis and creativity	Synthesises information and ideas and formulates creative proposals to address pre-defined issues or opportunities in familiar contexts.	Synthesises information and ideas and formulates creative proposals to address established issues or opportunities in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	Synthesises Information and ideas and formulates creative proposals to address a range of issues or opportunities in contexts of varying complexity.	Synthesises specialist and inter-related information and ideas and formulates creative and coherent proposals to address selected issues or opportunities in complex contexts.	Systematically synthesises advanced and specialist information and ideas and formulates innovative proposals to address strategic issues or opportunities in and unpredictably complex contexts.	Comprehensively synthesises highly advanced and specialist information and ideas and formulates and develops new and transformative proposals to address and challenge issues or opportunities at the forefront of knowledge, in highly abstract and complex contexts.
Analysis and Evaluation Linked AEF Theme: - Research Active	Collates and articulates a range of information using pre-defined principles, techniques, frameworks and/or criteria.	Analyses a range of information evaluates the reliability of data and information using pre-defined techniques and/or criteria.	Analyses and evaluates a range of information using appropriate subject-specific techniques and to discriminate between the relative relevance and significance of data/evidence collected.	Critically analyses and evaluates the reliability, validity and significance of in-depth data and evidence, selecting effective principles, frameworks, criteria, and techniques to support conclusions in complex and interrelated contexts.	Systematically and critically analyses complex, incomplete, or contradictory evidence/data and justify the enquiry methodologies used and recognise and argue for alternative approaches.	Undertakes comprehensive independent critical analysis or evaluation, managing complexity, incompleteness of data or contradictions in areas of knowledge.

Professional Skills, Values and Behaviours						
Domain	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
<p>For courses with PSRB accreditation and/or other professional and/or regulatory requirements, level descriptors and outcomes under this heading should primarily be focused on meeting PSRB requirements and QAA subject benchmark statements. For example, a key descriptor could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet the professional requirements/competencies that enable registration. <p>Credit level descriptors can assist with identifying the level of learning derived from the workplace as part of a formal work-based or work-integrated learning course/programme of study, including degree apprenticeships. Work-based learning is concurrent and integrated with study. Assessment is normally derived from evidence of learning generated from involvement in work-based practices. The credit level descriptors in this section can inform judgements about the level of the learning achievement demonstrated.</p> <p>There may be other / additional skills that are developed within the course or programme of work that need to be evidenced at an appropriate level. For example:</p> <p>Adapting to Operational Context(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to adapt to different operational contexts with different levels of autonomy and direction. <p>Performance Autonomy and Responsibility for Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to perform tasks, techniques, and processes with different levels of familiarity and complexity. • Taking on different levels of responsibility for synthesising, analysing, and evaluating the performance of self (and others) based on different ranges and sources of information / evidence. <p>Ethical Awareness and Application</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and demonstrating different levels of awareness of professional ethical issues and professional codes of conduct. • Developing and demonstrating different levels of ability to manage ethical dilemmas and formulate appropriate solutions working with others. 						

Professional Skills, Values and Behaviours						
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Adapting to Operational Context(s)	Operates in familiar learning, work or practice roles/contexts that require the use of predefined techniques and information sources.	Operates in familiar and unfamiliar learning, work or practice roles/contexts that require the use of established techniques and information sources.	Operates in learning, work or practice roles/contexts of varying complexity requiring the application of a wide range of techniques and information sources.	Operates in and adapts to complex and inter-related learning, work, or practice roles/contexts, requiring selection and application of relevant specialist techniques and information sources.	Operates in and adapts to abstract and unpredictably complex learning, work, or practice roles/contexts, requiring selection and application of advanced and specialist techniques and information sources.	Operates in and adapts to highly abstract and complex learning, work, or practice roles/contexts at the forefront of knowledge requiring selection, development and innovative application of highly advanced and specialist techniques and information sources.
Performance Autonomy and Responsibility for Actions	Acts largely under direction, within predefined guidelines, taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures in familiar contexts.	Acts with support within established guidelines and takes responsibility for and reflects on the nature and quality of outputs in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	Acts with partial self-direction within relevant guidelines and accepts personal responsibility for achieving personal and/or group outcomes/outputs in wide-ranging contexts of varying complexity.	Acts autonomously within relevant self-selected guidelines, taking personal responsibility for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes in complex and interrelated contexts.	Acts autonomously to make strategic decisions and develops appropriate practice guidelines, taking personal responsibility for outcomes in abstract and unpredictably complex contexts.	Acts autonomously to drive and develop transformative initiatives and guidelines, often in a professional capacity, with full accountability for self and others in highly abstract and complex contexts at the forefront of knowledge, work, and practice.

<p>Ethical Awareness and Application</p> <p>Linked AEF Theme: - <i>Socially and Ethically Engaged.</i></p>	<p>Applies an awareness of pre-defined ethical values and issues to personal decisions and actions in familiar contexts.</p>	<p>Applies an awareness of established ethical values and issues to personal decisions, actions, and responsibilities in familiar and unfamiliar contexts.</p>	<p>Applies an awareness of a range of relevant ethical and professional values and codes of conduct to personal and/ or group decisions, actions, responsibilities, and outcomes in contexts of varying complexity.</p>	<p>Applies an in-depth awareness of specialist ethical and professional values and codes of conduct to personal and/ or group decisions, actions, responsibilities, and outcomes within complex and interrelated contexts.</p>	<p>Systematically applies an advanced awareness of ethical and professional values and codes of conduct, to personal and strategic decisions, actions, responsibilities, outcomes, and dilemmas, whilst working proactively with others to suggest and advocate appropriate solutions in unpredictably complex contexts.</p>	<p>Comprehensively applies a highly advanced awareness of ethical and professional values and codes of conduct, as an accountable aspect of own professional practice and works transformatively with others to formulate and implement innovative solutions and value frameworks in highly complex contexts.</p>
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