Academic Regulations for the Award of Foundation Degrees

Section B
Design, Approval, Validation, Monitoring and Review of

Foundation Degree

2023/2024 Edition

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Contents

B1 Principles Governing the Design, Validation, Approval, and Review of a Foundation Degree

B1.1 The Corporation of New College Durham (the College) under its authority of Foundation Degree Awarding Powers is responsible for setting the standards of its degrees within the context of common guidelines (such as subject benchmark statements, professional body requirements) and is subject to internal quality assurance procedures.

B1.2 All proposed awards of the College are required to undergo formal academic approval prior to delivery. The regulations governing the design, validation, approval and review of foundation degrees are supplemented by a series of processes and procedures and should be read in conjunction with them.

B1.3 All approved awards of the College are required to undergo a continual monitoring and review process. This will include the views of all key stakeholders.

B1.4 Staff engaged in the design, validation, approval, and periodic review of New College Durham Foundation Degrees must be fully informed and conversant of the regulations, processes and procedures associated with such activities.

B2 Definitions of Key Processes for Design, Approval, Validation, Monitoring and Review

The definitions adopted by the College for the purpose of these Regulations are as follows:

B2.1 Design is the process of constructing a programme that meets the requirements for a specific award of the College. The design must facilitate the delivery of the intended learning outcomes and required standards as specified by such external bodies as Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and the Designated Quality Body for Higher Education (DQB). Development teams should ensure that the design of a programme of study is integrated with the processes of approval, monitoring and review.

B2.2 Validation is the process whereby a judgement is reached by a panel of peers about whether or not a programme of study designed to lead to a New College Durham validated award meets the principles and requirements for that award. The validated award must be equivalent in standard to comparable awards delivered by other higher education

institutions in the United Kingdom.

B2.3   Approval is the process whereby the Principal authorises an award to proceed to delivery based on a judgement having been reached through peer review on whether a programme designed or modified meets, or through periodic review continues to meet, the principles and requirements for that award as determined by the College.

B2.4   Periodic Review is the process which provides an in-depth assessment of the development of a programme (or group of programmes), over a period of time, together with an appraisal of its continued relevance and standing, leading to formal recommendations concerning the future of the programme and which may lead to revalidation of the programme(s). Periodic review is based on the evidence generated by the annual reports produced by teaching teams for their programmes.

B2.5   Programme: a programme is a complete study route with its own aims and learning outcomes consisting of combinations of modules and leading to a specific named academic award. The programmes included in the academic regulations of New College Durham are those leading to the validated award of Foundation Degree, and to the Certificate of Higher Education (in their chosen subject). This is available to students who have enrolled on a foundation degree and have successfully completed 120 credits at Level 4.

B2.6   Academic Award: an academic award is an award granted to a student on successfully completing a designated programme at the appropriate level(s), with a specific title. Where an award is a nationally recognised qualification the standards of the award align with the DQB Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). A record of awards validated by the College is held on a central College register. A student who is awarded a Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) is said to have achieved a conditional award i.e. they have successfully completed 120 credits at Level 4. (Students who commenced their studies prior to 25th July 2017 would be awarded the New College Durham Higher Education Certificate (NCDHECA) conditional award).

B2.7   Credit: this is a measure of the volume of student learning time required to achieve defined learning outcomes at a given level. A full-time undergraduate workload is normally 120 credits per year representing 1200 hours of notional learning time.

B2.8   Credit rating: the process of assigning to a module a number of credits at a specific level, and the result of that process.

B2.9   Notional learning time: the length of learning time which it is estimated will be taken on average by a typical student to achieve a given volume of credit. Quality Assurance Agency guidance is that 1 HE credit is normally equivalent to 10 notional learning hours.

B2.10   Level: the indicator of challenge, complexity, depth of study and student autonomy. All modules are attributed to an academic level and an individual module cannot span more than 1 level. There are eight credit levels used in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and of these Levels 4 to 8 represent the types of work undertaken in HE as described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the related national credit guidelines. Foundation degrees sit within Levels 4 and 5 of the FHEQ.

B2.11   Stage: an indication of the structure of a programme such that each stage normally equates to one academic year of study irrespective of the level(s) of the modules taken within that stage.

B2.12   Year: an indication of the progress of study of a student defined by the number of years (usually academic years) for which they have been registered for a programme. This is irrespective of the stage of study and of the level(s) of the modules involved.

B2.13   Semesterisation: The division of a normal year of study into two study periods of equal length.

B2.14   Learning outcomes: statements of what the successful student will know, understand and/or be able to do. Achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated through summative assessments.

B2.15   Threshold Standards are the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award. The threshold level of achievement should be the same as similar or equivalent awards across the UK. Threshold standards may incorporate both academic and practice-based standards, where relevant.

B3   Programme Design

B3.1   The principles underpinning the design of a new programme, or major modification to existing provision, are such that programme teams must:

a.   take due account of external reference points such as subject benchmark statements, national frameworks for higher education qualifications, national occupational standards and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), employers and any relevant national legislation or commitments to European and international processes;

b.   ensure the programme design takes account of student views;

c.   ensure compatibility of the programme design with the College mission and strategy and any cross-college approach adopted for the provision;

d.   ensure that the proposed design facilitates the delivery of the intended aims and learning outcomes of the programme; and

e.   establish the necessary resource planning and identify the level of risk involved in any new proposal.

B3.2   The FHEQ determines how many credits have to be achieved in order to complete a level (or stage, as it is sometimes called). 120 credits must be achieved at Level 4, and 120 at Level 5.

B3.3   A Foundation degree consists of two levels, Level 4 and Level 5. Modules are designated as either Level 4 or Level 5 modules. The first half of a programme is made up of Level 4 modules, and the second half of Level 5 modules. What is broadly expected of students studying at Level 4 and Level 5 is nationally determined by the Designated Quality Body for Higher Education DQB within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Level 5 is higher than Level 4, and this is reflected in what the FHEQ states a student who has completed Level 4 studies will be expected to demonstrate at Level 5.

B3.4   The standard College structure for foundation degrees consists of six modules at each level, each made up of 20 credits. However, any of the following module sizes are permissible with approval:

Size	Credit rating	Notional learning hours
Half	10	100
Single (standard)	20	200
One and a half	30	300
Double	40	400

B3.5   All College foundation degrees must embed the principles of personal and professional development and work-related learning. The recommended College structure is 20 credits of each at each level.

B3.6   An award title incorporating 'and' to connect 2 subject disciplines must have equally weighted subject components to be a true reflection of the award title. An award structure would normally contain, as a minimum, 40 credits of mandatory subject components of each discipline area at each level. Work related learning must enable a student to experience both subject disciplines. The award structure may utilise either or both core and designated options only.

Level 4	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject B	20 credits subject B	20 credits PPD	20 credits WRL
Level 5	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject B	20 credits subject B	20 credits PPD	20 credits WRL

B3.7   An award title incorporating 'with', to connect 2 subject disciplines must have sufficient ancillary component to allow both subject titles to be a true reflection of the award structure. An award structure would normally contain, as a minimum, 60 credits of mandatory components of the principal specialist discipline area and 20 credits of mandatory components of the subsidiary specialist discipline at each level. Work Related Learning must enable a student to experience the principal specialist discipline and may also incorporate an experience of the minor subject discipline. The award structure may utilise either or both core and designated options only.

Level 4	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject B	20 credits PPD	20 credits WRL
Level 5	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject A	20 credits subject B	20 credits PPD	20 credits WRL

B3.8 Types of modules are as follows:

a. Core: a mandatory module.

b. Option: a module that a student must choose from a group offered within the programme.

c. Designated Option: A programme may determine the options to be studied in order to inform the specific award title that the student is seeking. Such options are referred to as designated options.
For example, a student must choose;

- one module from either of the 2 designated options listed;
- two modules from a group of the 3 designated options listed, etc.

d. Pre-requisite: a module which a student must pass, or be credited with, before progressing to the next level. Pre-requisites are not permitted within a level.

e. Co-requisite: a module which students must take in conjunction with another specific module at the same level.

f. Generic: a module which is core for more than one programme. There may only be one version of the module in use at any one time.

g. Common: a module which is core for more than one programme but which may have various editions. The module will have an identical title, level, credit size, aims, and normally the same learning outcomes, however these, as well as the assessment methods, may vary slightly to allow contextualisation to the programme sector.

B3.9   All programmes share a common structure. For each level of the programme there is a set of learning outcomes which are expressed in general terms. These programme level learning outcomes summarise what a student who has successfully completed each stage will know, understand, and be able to. Programme learning outcomes represent a combination of subject knowledge and skills.

B3.10   Programme learning outcomes are achieved through the study of individual modules at each level. A student must be able to achieve a programme level learning outcome through the study of more than one module.

B3.11   Modules are discrete units of assessed learning with specific aims and learning outcomes. Module outcomes are expressed in a language that is compatible with the FHEQ level that is being assessed. They can be categorised in the same way as programme learning outcomes i.e. knowledge and understanding, and skills. Each module is given a credit rating which indicates the amount of notional learning time which the typical student is expected to spend to achieve the learning outcomes.

B3.12   Credit is awarded for the achievement of the specified learning outcomes of the module. Credit is accumulated sequentially, by level. This means that as students progress through a programme they build up credits as and when they successfully complete modules. These credits cannot be taken away once confirmed by an Assessment Board. Credits are nationally recognised and may be transferable and accredited towards another similar or equivalent programme of study at the discretion of the relevant awarding body through recognition of prior learning and confirmation from the External Examiner.

B3.13   It is recommended that a 20-credit module will normally have four learning outcomes. Modules with a lower credit value may have proportionately fewer learning outcomes and those with a higher credit value may have proportionately more.

B3.14   Learning time includes both contact time and independent learning, including assessment and independent learning. A 20-credit module represents at least 200 hours of student learning activity (10 learning hours per single credit). An example for full time delivery may include contact time, directed learning, assessed work and private study. There is no minimum specified contact time required under the terms of these Regulations. The contact time allocated to modules should be based upon judgments about the nature and complexity of the learning outcomes for the module and the learning needs of the students who will be undertaking the modules.

B3.15 For the purposes of these Regulations: contact time is defined as any study undertaken under the direct supervision of a module tutor and includes but is not limited to lectures, seminars, and workshops; directed learning is learning activity which a module tutor has instructed students to undertake but which is not subject to direct supervision; assessed work is the time devoted to preparing for and carrying out any form of assessment used in the module; and independent study is work a student carries out to support their learning which has not been directed by the module tutor and is therefore independent learning.

B3.16 Each approved module is expressed within a module specification. The module specification must specify:

   a. the module title;
   b. the number of credits attached to it and the level of those credits;
   c. the learning outcomes;
   d. the indicative content;
   e. assessment details of the teaching and learning strategy used in its delivery;
   f. the resources used to support it including a reading list;
   g. and the person responsible for leading the module.

B3.17 The College delivery model is normally using a semesterised structure, in which each year of study is divided into two study periods of equal length. These are semesters. On an award completed over two years, the standard delivery arrangement is that in each of the four semesters making up the award there will be three 20 credit modules, or equivalent credit value.

Thereby students complete 60 credits within each semester. This standard delivery arrangement may be varied where an alternative model better supports the learning needs of the students. A variation to this model is permissible with approval carried out in accordance with the published procedure. A change or addition to an approved model of delivery must be approved in accordance with the College's major modification procedure.

B3.18 Each module should be supported by a module guide, which is designed to provide students with the information they require to be able to study it successfully. The guide will be available on the College VLE.

B4   Approval of an Award

B4.1   The formal system adopted under these Regulations to govern the approval, including validation of all new awards and the revalidation of existing awards, is designed:

a.   to secure and promote planned and managed growth and development within the context of the College's Higher Education Strategy;

b.   to stimulate thinking about programme development and content in order to ensure the provision of high quality programmes for students;

c.   to ensure that programme teams collaborate widely in the design of programmes;

d.   to secure and promote the contribution of peers to programme development; and

e.   to ensure that new programme proposals address themselves to any relevant policies and requirements as laid down by the College, PSRBs and the DQB.

B4.2   The nature of programme validation is associated with judgments about the validity of proposals. Programme documentation submitted for consideration is in essence a collection of statements of intent. The validation process is centrally concerned with ensuring that such statements of intent are clear and well thought out, educationally sound, coherent, consistent, responsive, and matched to identified needs.

B4.3   Foundation degree awards of the College acquire their validity by completing the procedure set out by the College for programme approval. The approval procedure is described in the supplementary processes and procedures of these Regulations. No award can be approved that has not successfully completed all the stages in this procedure.

B4.4   The record of each stage in the procedure must be minuted and the full record of the progression of a proposed award is required to be maintained electronically for the period of validation of the programme as evidence that the award has been formally approved and validated.

B4.5   No award may proceed to delivery without final approval by the Principal.

B5   Review of an Award

B5.1   Each programme is subject to annual review. This is a process of self-evaluation carried out annually by programme teams to consider the effectiveness of their programme in achieving its stated aims and the success of students in attaining the intended learning outcomes. It enables a team to ensure they are maintaining the academic, and where relevant, practice based threshold standards as well as providing trend analysis of key performance measures.

B5.2   The annual review draws upon feedback on the standards and quality of provision from external examiners, students, stakeholders, and staff. The annual review process is described in the supplementary processes and procedures of these Regulations.

B5.3   An External Examiner will be appointed to each programme of study to provide confirmation that the standards of performance being achieved by students and the appropriateness of the assessments being undertaken by students at all levels are of a comparable minimum standard to those found in other higher education institutions in the United Kingdom.

B5.4   Students will be surveyed annually for their opinion of their experience whilst undertaking their programme of study. As a minimum they should be asked to provide feedback on the quality of their experience of teaching, learning, assessment, support and guidance, resources, and where relevant work placement and personal development.

B5.5   Each programme is subject to periodic review. An award will be subject to periodic review one year before its validation date. (Refer Section A4.9) It will enable a programme of study to be critically appraised by a panel of peers, and through which plans for change are considered and their validity confirmed. This is in order to enhance programme development and delivery and to confirm that the programme continues to meet the requirements for validated awards of the College.

B5.6   Subject to regulation B3.5 no award can be re-approved for a further period of approval that has not successfully completed the stages of periodic review process.

B6   Award Study Framework

B6.1   The mode of study will usually determine the load a student may complete in a single stage. This would normally be 120 credits per year. However, if a student is undertaking work related learning through blended study then part time or full time may be determined by the amount of contact time they receive. The load(s) and mode(s) of study for each programme will be determined at the time of programme approval.

B6.2   The normal duration period of study a student can take to complete their studies will be determined by their mode of study i.e. full time or part time. However, the duration of a student's studies may be affected and become longer than originally planned for. For example, a student may apply for an interruption to their studies if they have relevant extenuating circumstances (known as a suspension of study), or a student may due to academic failure or extenuating circumstances be required to repeat some elements of the programme. To ensure currency of the knowledge and skills a student gains whilst studying the following definitive duration periods for a student to complete their programme of study has been determined.

Normal duration period	Definitive duration period
18 months	3 years
2 years	4 years
3 years	5 years
4 years	6 years

B6.3   In addition to taught /contact time, students are expected to undertake sufficient independent/private study to meet the Notional Learning Time associated with modules.

B6.4   Other than in approved cases, students are expected to undertake all elements of assessment associated with individual modules.

B6.5   Other than in the case of specialist language modules, the language of tuition and assessment for all College foundation degrees is English.

B7   Student Registration

B7.1   Students are required to conform to the College's processes and schedules for programme registration. Module change or late registration is not permitted unless agreed by Programme and Module Leaders having given due regard to specified, exceptional and individual circumstances.

B7.2   Each student must be registered in each academic year of study for the programme to which they have been admitted and for the modules within that programme structure which they are to take.

B7.3   A student may not register on a foundation degree for more than 120 credits in one academic year.

B7.4   At each stage students must register for modules in line with any programme -specific regulations which specify compulsory modules and option modules.

B7.5   The maximum number of credits which may be awarded at each level of a programme under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) procedures to enable a student to be eligible for an award at that level, is 70 per cent of the total credits.

This equates to a student being awarded up to 120 credits at Level 4 and 60 credits at Level 5.

B7.6   A student may apply for direct entry to Level 5 where they can evidence that they fully meet all Level 4 learning outcomes through recognition of prior learning. In this circumstance RPL of 120 Level 4 credits would be approved. (Refer to Section E: Regulatory Principles Governing Recruitment and Admissions to Programmes.