SEEC Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education

SEEC

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Contents

4 Introducing the descriptors
4 Background
4 Developing the new Guidelines
5 What are credit level descriptors?
5 Relationship to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
5 How are credit level descriptors used?
5 A. The assignment of credit and the writing of learning outcomes
6 B. Curriculum design
6 C. Assessment criteria and the setting of standards
6 D. The accreditation of prior learning
6 E. Communicating expectations to learners
6 F. Staff development
7 The SEEC Descriptors
7 Format and structure
7 Principles underpinning the use of the descriptors
8 Further information
9 SEEC descriptors: By level
10 Level 3
11 Level 4
12 Level 5
13 Level 6
14 Level 7
15 Level 8
16 SEEC descriptors: Comparative Summary
23 Glossary
23 Abbreviations

Introducing the Descriptors

Background

The original SEEC credit level descriptors were published in 1996 (Credit Guidelines, Models and Protocols; DfEE 1996). They had been developed, over two years, by colleagues from SEEC institutions in collaboration with representatives from member institutions of the Higher Education Credit Initiative Wales (HECIW). In 2001/2 these descriptors were revised to reflect the four categories adopted the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) for subject review and building on the areas identified in the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing Report, 1997):

- Development of Knowledge and Understanding
- Cognitive/Intellectual skills
- Key/transferable skills
- Practical skills

Much of the work for that revision was undertaken by colleagues at the, then, Anglia Polytechnic University and further revised by a SEEC working group. This edition of the credit level descriptors builds on this previous work and we are indebted to all those who contributed to earlier versions.

Developing the new Guidelines

Since 2001, a number of developments in credit and its use prompted the SEEC General Council to undertake a further review and revision of the level descriptors. These included:

- The revision of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (August 2008, available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/default.asp)

- The issuing of guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England (August 2008, available at www.qaa.ac.uk/england/credit)

- Moves towards the harmonisation of definitions and the use of credit across Europe (see A Framework for Qualification in the European Higher Education Area; available at www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf) and through revisions to the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System www.ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/ects/guide_en.pdf)

- The development of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) by the QCA to cover vocational education up to level 8 (available at http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qualifications/60.aspx)

- Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales available at http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/creditqualificationsframework/?lang=en

- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications (see SCQF Handbook, volumes 1 and 2, available at www.scqf.org.uk)

In 2009 SEEC undertook a review of the use made by member institutions of the existing credit level descriptors which showed that they had often become embedded within institutional frameworks and provided a useful reference source. However, extended experience of the use of credit, particularly in relation to work-based learning and accreditation, suggested the need to review the descriptors to more clearly reference higher-level learning in these contexts and to ensure that they remained appropriate for likely future developments. A SEEC working group produced revised descriptors which were further reviewed though consultation with members and their representatives. The descriptors in this document represent the outcome of this process.

What are credit level descriptors?

Credit level descriptors define the level of complexity, relative demand and autonomy expected of a learner on completion of a module or programme of learning. They provide a description of levels of learning through a hierarchy of knowledge and skills.

Credit level descriptors are a useful reference point for anyone with a responsibility for contextualising and credit-rating learning whether this learning derives from within or without the formal curriculum. Their considered use aids consistency and transparency of expectations and outcomes for all parties: academics, employers, professional bodies and learners.

Relationship to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (QAA, 2008) defines the expectations of awards within the FHEQ through qualification descriptors. Whereas the more detailed SEEC credit level descriptors describe the characteristics and context of learning expected at each level and against which specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria can be derived in order to develop modules and assign credit for the achievement of learning.

The essential difference between qualification descriptors and credit level descriptors is that the former relate to whole qualifications and encompass all qualifications at a particular level. Any specific qualification is likely, however, to consist of a range of modules at different credit levels and credit volumes appropriate to the qualification. Individual institutions may define the volume and nature of the credit required at each level within the overall expectations of the FHEQ. Thus, for example, some institutions allow the use of a limited amount of level 6 credit (final year undergraduate) towards a level 7 (Master's) award.

In summary, credit level descriptors are essentially aids to programme development by describing broad outcomes whilst qualification descriptors are aids to the quality assurance of programmes and terminal qualifications.

How are credit level descriptors used?

The six principal uses of the level descriptors are: (a) to guide the assignment of credit through the writing of learning outcomes, (b) in curriculum design, (c) to assist in writing assessment criteria and the setting of standards, (d) to support the recognition of prior learning, (e) to aid the communication to learners of expectations, and (f) for the purposes of staff development. Their use in these contexts is amplified in the following sections and further details and guidance can be found on the SEEC web site at www.seec.org.uk.

A. The assignment of credit and the writing of learning outcomes.

The main purpose of credit level descriptors is to help assign the correct level of credit to a module. This is usually achieved through the credit level descriptors being used by module designers to help write learning outcomes which clearly

articulate the level of learning expected. Individual learning outcomes within a module may span a range of related levels but, overall, the outcomes should clearly locate the module at a particular level. Only one level can be assigned to any given module. When the module forms part of a larger programme of learning it should be located at the appropriate level for that module irrespective of the overall level of the ultimate award.

Since the credit level descriptors are 'generic'; course teams need to translate the generic descriptors, or those adapted by their own institution, into learning outcomes which identify the subject specific requirements of a programme of study.

B. Curriculum design

Credit level descriptors can be used in a number of ways to help aid effective curriculum design. They can:

- Provide a means by which each subject area can check that the level of demand, complexity, depth of study and degree of learner autonomy expected at each level of a programme of study are appropriately established.
- Provide a means of establishing that there is broad coverage of the various aspects of the level descriptors across a programme of study. Whilst programmes are not necessarily expected to cover all aspects of the level descriptors, there is often a need to ensure that a breadth and balance of skills development is demonstrated.
- Help write learning outcomes in a way which supports learner progression through a course of study.
- Help establish broad comparisons across subject areas facilitating credit accumulation and transfer schemes, the design of joint and combined awards and the sharing of modules between programmes.

C. Assessment criteria and the setting of standards

Although the credit level descriptors are not 'standards', they provide useful indicators of the learning outcomes expected at any stage and therefore may be used as the basis for judgements about the standard of work required for particular modules and their associated assessment. Thus they can assist tutors, external examiners and validation and approval panels in their various roles in the standard setting process.

D. The accreditation of prior learning

Credit level descriptors are useful in the accreditation of prior learning (APL) processes. They provide a reference point for ascribing credit to certificated learning (APCL) which has not been credit rated and enable learners and tutors to identify the appropriate level at which prior or concurrent experiential learning (APEL) can be recognised for the award of credit.

E. Communicating expectations to learners

Whilst level descriptors have been primarily designed to help module designers and quality assurance processes, they can be used to help articulate to learners the outcomes expected of their learning and how this should develop as they progress with their studies. Learners will need help and guidance in interpreting what is intended by the language of the descriptors.

F. Staff development

The credit level descriptors can be used for different types of staff development related to the functions described above, including course and module design, writing learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and the accreditation of prior experiential learning.

The Seec Descriptors

Format and structure

There are many ways in which learning can be described and categorised. The format adopted by the SEEC credit level descriptors reflects the nature of learning commonly recognised by SEEC members in a variety of learning situations and across a range of subjects.

The SEEC credit level descriptors are not meant to be prescriptive or limiting, or to devalue aspects which are not strongly reflected but which might be relevant to particular subjects or contexts. Rather the intention is to define a set of skills and attributes which can act as a guide for academics and others seeking to define or recognise learning and ascribe it to a particular academic level.

The descriptors are grouped under five headings. The level descriptors are generally used to assign credit to taught HE-level work: however, to provide a context and demonstrate development, we have included level 3 (sub-degree level) and level 8 (doctoral level) descriptors for comparative purposes.

In order to support their use in a variety of contexts, the descriptors are set out in two different formats; by level and by heading showing comparative development across levels. The descriptors themselves are identical in both formats.

Setting

Operational context
Autonomy and responsibility for actions

The context in which learning takes place and the autonomy expected of the learner is an important aspect of defining the level at which learning is taking place. These two descriptors describe how complexity and autonomy increase with level. The setting in which a learner is operating is particularly important in interpreting other descriptors thus this dimension is highlighted first.

Knowledge and Understanding

Knowledge and Understanding

These descriptors describe the growing factual and/or conceptual base of the subject or field of study and the degree of complexity expected as the learner progresses. Knowledge and understanding provide the basis for the development of many of the other skills and attributes in the descriptors.

Cognitive skills

Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking
Problem Solving, Research and Enquiry
Synthesis and Creativity
Analysis and evaluation

These descriptors capture the developing cognitive skills which are expected of learners as they progress towards higher-level work. There are many cognitive skills and possible groupings which might have been included in this area. Those indicated are the ones which SEEC members believed to be most generally relevant. They have been grouped to prevent excessive fragmentation of the descriptors but it is recognised that such groupings are contestable and that subject contexts can lead to different nomenclature, groupings and prioritisation. Users may wish to develop their own categorisation using those provided as a reference point.

Performance and practice
Adaptation to Context
Performance
Team and organisational working
Ethical awareness and application

These skills have been restructured, revised and extended from previous versions. SEEC members requested additional support with the definition of levels in a range of circumstances, and particularly in applied areas.

The descriptors use the term 'team' rather than 'group' to reflect the growing professional nature of expectations in this area. These two terms, whilst related and often inter-changeable, are not synonymous and their use may be context dependent. Those using the descriptors should identify the terminology most appropriate to their circumstances.

Personal and Enabling skills.
Personal evaluation and development
Interpersonal and communication skills

These credit level descriptors have been amended to reflect the increased emphasis being placed on personal development planning since the previous descriptors were written. Interpersonal and communication skills are located here because they 'enable' the demonstration of the outcomes of many of the other descriptors.

Principles underpinning the use of the descriptors

The following general principles underpin the intended use of the credit level descriptors:

i.The descriptors remain credit level descriptors and are not intended to replace qualifications descriptors but to assist with the assignment of credit to elements of learning and the structuring of learning opportunities towards qualifications.

ii. The descriptors provide an indicative framework for credit-rating and level-setting and are not intended to be all encompassing or prescriptive in nature.

iii. The descriptors represent a benchmarking of members' existing practice; institutions are encouraged to select and adapt the descriptors to suit their own purposes.

iv. Higher-level descriptors subsume the descriptors at lower levels.

v.The language of the descriptors has been kept simple wherever possible.

vi. It is not the intention that all of the descriptors at a particular level need to be demonstrated in order for the learning to be ascribed to that level. Thus they should not be seen as threshold descriptors but as broad indicators of the level at which a learner is operating.

vii. Most forms of learning, with the possible exception of languages, can be encompassed by the level descriptors. Language learning is not covered explicitly, as institutions will have their own arrangements, but elements of the descriptors will apply to all learning in all subjects and contexts.

viii. The descriptors imply that learners demonstrate that they can undertake the actions 'effectively' in relation to the context in which they are working or studying.

ix. Modules which focus on the academic, applied, professional or vocational aspects of the curriculum will emphasise different aspects of the descriptors.

Further information

Further information on level descriptors and their use can be found on the SEEC web site (www.seec.org.uk)

The SEEC Descriptors: by Level

Level 3

Setting	
Operational context	Operates in predictable and defined contexts that require the use of given techniques and information sources.
Autonomy and responsibility for actions	Acts largely under direction or supervision, within defined guidelines. Takes responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures.
Knowledge and Understanding	
Knowledge & Understanding	Has an understanding of defined areas of the knowledge base. Demonstrates an awareness of current areas of debate in the field of study
Cognitive skills	
Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking	Relates principles and concepts to underlying theoretical frameworks and approaches.
Problem Solving, Research & Enquiry	Carries out defined investigative strategies and communicates results effectively in a given format.
Synthesis and Creativity	Collects information to inform a choice of solutions to standard problems in familiar contexts.
Analysis and evaluation	Analyses a range of information using pre-defined principles, frameworks or criteria.
Performance and practice	
Adaptation to Context	Undertakes a given and clearly defined role.
Performance	Undertakes given performance tasks that may be complex.
Team and organisational working	Adapts own behaviour to meet obligations to others.
Ethical awareness & application	Has an awareness of the ethical issues in the main areas of study.
Personal and enabling skills	
Personal evaluation and development	Assesses own capabilities against given criteria. Engages in guided development activity.
Interpersonal and communication skills	Uses interpersonal and communication skills to clarify tasks and communicate outcomes in narrowly defined contexts.

Level 4

Setting	
Operational context	Operates in a range of varied but predictable contexts that require the use of a specified range of techniques and information sources.
Autonomy and responsibility for actions	Acts with limited autonomy, under direction or supervision, within defined guidelines. Takes responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.
Knowledge and Understanding	
Knowledge & Understanding	Has a broad understanding of the knowledge base and its terminology or discourse. Demonstrates awareness that areas of this knowledge base are open to ongoing debate and reformulation.
Cognitive skills	
Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking	Identifies principles and concepts underlying theoretical frameworks and begins to identify their strengths and weaknesses.
Problem Solving, Research & Enquiry	Identifies a well-defined focus for enquiry, plans and undertakes investigative strategies using a limited and defined range of methods, collects data from a variety of sources, and communicates results effectively in an appropriate format
Synthesis and Creativity	Collects information from a variety of authoritative sources to inform a choice of solutions to standard problems in familiar contexts.
Analysis and evaluation	Judges the reliability of data and information using pre-defined techniques and/or criteria.
Performance and practice	
Adaptation to Context	Relates own role to specified and externally defined parameters.
Performance	Undertakes performance tasks that may be complex and non-routine engaging in self-reflection.
Team and organisational working	Works effectively with others and recognises the factors that affect team performance.
Ethical awareness & application	Demonstrates awareness of ethical issues and is able to discuss these in relation to personal beliefs and values.
Personal and enabling skills	
Personal evaluation and development	Is aware of own capabilities in key areas and engages in development activity through guided self-direction.
Interpersonal and communication skills	Uses interpersonal and communication skills to clarify tasks and identify and rectify issues in a range of contexts.

Level 5

Setting	
Operational context	Operates in situations of varying complexity and predictability requiring the application of a wide range of techniques and information sources.
Autonomy and responsibility for actions	Acts with limited supervision and direction, within defined guidelines accepting responsibility for achieving personal and/or group outcomes and/or outputs.
Knowledge and Understanding	
Knowledge & Understanding	Has detailed knowledge of well-established theories and concepts. Demonstrates an awareness of different ideas, contexts and frameworks and recognises those areas where the knowledge base is most/least secure.
Cognitive skills	
Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking	Identifies, analyses and communicates principles and concepts recognising competing perspectives.
Problem Solving, Research & Enquiry	Undertakes research to provide new information and/or explores new or existing data to identify patterns and relationships. Uses appropriate theoretical models to judge the significance of the data collected recognising the limitations of the enquiry.
Synthesis and Creativity	Collects and synthesises information to inform a choice of solutions to problems in unfamiliar contexts.
Analysis and evaluation	Analyses a range of information comparing alternative methods and techniques. Selects appropriate techniques/criteria for evaluation and discriminates between the relative relevance and significance of data/evidence collected.
Performance and practice	
Adaptation to Context	Identifies external expectations and adapts own performance accordingly.
Performance	Undertakes complex and non-routine performance tasks. Analyses performance of self and others and suggests improvements.
Team and organisational working	Interacts effectively within a team, giving and receiving information and ideas and modifying responses where appropriate. Recognises and ameliorates situations likely to lead to conflict.
Ethical awareness & application	Is aware of personal responsibility and professional codes of conduct.
Personal and enabling skills	
Personal evaluation and development	Assesses own capabilities using justifiable criteria set by self and others taking the wider needs of the context into account. Uses feedback to adapt own actions to reach a desired aim and reviews impact.
Interpersonal and communication skills	Adapts interpersonal and communication skills to a range of situations, audiences and degrees of complexity.

Level 6

Setting	
Operational context	Operates in complex and unpredictable contexts, requiring selection and application from a range of largely standard techniques and information sources.
Autonomy and responsibility for actions	Acts with minimal supervision or direction, within agreed guidelines taking responsibility for accessing support and accepts accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.
Knowledge and Understanding	
Knowledge & Understanding	Has a systematic understanding of the knowledge base and its inter-relationship with other fields of study. Demonstrates current understanding of some specialist areas in depth.
Cognitive skills	
Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking	Works with ideas at a level of abstraction, arguing from competing perspectives. Identifies the possibility of new concepts within existing knowledge frameworks and approaches.
Problem Solving, Research & Enquiry	Demonstrates confidence and flexibility in identifying and defining complex problems. Identifies, selects and uses investigative strategies and techniques to undertake a critical analysis, evaluating the outcomes.
Synthesis and Creativity	Applies knowledge in unfamiliar contexts, synthesising ideas or information to generate novel solutions. Achieves a body of work or practice that is coherent and resolved.
Analysis and evaluation	Analyses new, novel and/or abstract data using an appropriate range of established subject-specific techniques. Judges the reliability, validity and significance of evidence to support conclusions and/or recommendations suggests reasons for contradictory data/results.
Performance and practice	
Adaptation to Context	Locates own role within poorly defined and/or flexible contexts requiring a level of autonomy.
Performance	Seeks and applies new techniques and processes to own performance and identifies how these might be evaluated.
Team and organisational working	Works effectively within a team, supports or is proactive in leadership, negotiates in a professional context and manages conflict. Proactively seeks to resolve conflict.
Ethical awareness & application	Is aware of personal responsibility and professional codes of conduct and incorporates this into their practice.
Personal and enabling skills	
Personal evaluation and development	Takes responsibility for own learning and development using reflection and feedback to analyse own capabilities, appraises alternatives and plans and implements actions.
Interpersonal and communication skills	Sets criteria for, and is effective in, professional and interpersonal communication in a wide range of situations.

Level 7

Setting	
Operational context	Operates in complex and unpredictable and/or specialised contexts, requiring selection and application from a wide range of advanced techniques and information sources.
Autonomy and responsibility for actions	Acts with initiative in decision-making and accessing support, within professonal or given guidelines, accepting full accountability for outcomes.
Knowledge and Understanding	
Knowledge & Understanding	Has a deep and systematic understanding within a specialised field of study and its interrelationship with other relevant disciplines. Demonstrates an understanding of current theoretical and methodological approaches and how these affect the way the knowledge base is interpreted.
Cognitive skills	
Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking	Uses ideas at a high level of abstraction. Develops critical responses to existing theoretical discourses, methodologies or practices and suggests new concepts or approaches
Problem Solving, Research & Enquiry	Designs and undertakes substantial investigations to address significant areas of theory and/or practice. Selects appropriate advanced methodological approaches and critically evaluates their effectiveness.
Synthesis and Creativity	Flexibly and creatively applies knowledge in unfamiliar contexts, synthesises ideas or information in innovative ways, and generates transformative solutions.
Analysis and evaluation	Undertakes analysis of complex, incomplete or contradictory evidence/data and judges the appropriateness of the enquiry methodologies used. Recognises and argues for alternative approaches.
Performance and practice	
Adaptation to Context	Autonomously adapts performance to multiple contexts.
Performance	Autonomously implements and evaluates improvements to performance drawing on innovative or sectoral best practice.
Team and organisational working	Works effectively with multiple teams as leader or member. Clarifies tasks and make appropriate use of the capacities of team members resolving likely conflict situations before they arise.
Ethical awareness & application	Incorporates a critical ethical dimension to their practice, managing the implications of ethical dilemmas and works proactively with others to formulate solutions.
Personal and enabling skills	
Personal evaluation and development	Uses personal reflection to analyse self and own actions. Makes connections between known and unknown areas, to allow for adaptation and change.
Interpersonal and communication skills	Identifies, evaluates and maintains capabilities and qualities to support effective communication in a range of complex and specialised contexts.

Level 8

Setting	
Operational context	Operates in complex and unpredictable and/or specialised contexts at the forefront of knowledge.
Autonomy and responsibility for actions	Acts autonomously and with initiative, often in a professional capacity with responsibility for self and often others.
Knowledge and Understanding	
Knowledge & Understanding	Works with theoretical/research knowledge at the forefront of the discipline. Demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of techniques and methodologies applicable to the discipline
Cognitive skills	
Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking	Develops ideas at a high level of abstraction. Develops theoretical discourses, methodologies or practices critically analysing their development and application.
Problem Solving, Research & Enquiry	Acts independently and with originality in problem solving. Develops or adapts appropriate advanced methodological approaches and critically evaluates their effectiveness.
Synthesis and Creativity	Synthesises and applies new approaches, in a manner that can contribute to the development of methodology or understanding in that discipline or practice.
Analysis and evaluation	Undertakes independent analysis or evaluation, managing complexity, incompleteness of data or contradictions in areas of knowledge.
Performance and practice	
Adaptation to Context	Autonomously adapts performance to contexts requiring professional outputs.
Performance	Has technical mastery, performs smoothly with precision and effectiveness, can adapt or develop skills and procedures for new situations
Team and organisational working	Leads and/or works effectively with often multiple teams in multiple roles. Manages the capacities of members to achieve outcomes handling conflict with confidence.
Ethical awareness & application	Analyses and manages ethical dilemmas and works pro-actively with others to formulate and implement solutions.
Personal and enabling skills	
Personal evaluation and development	Reflects on own and others' functioning in order to improve practice. Is independent and self-critical as a learner, guides and supports the learning of others and manages own professional development
Interpersonal and communication skills	Displays consultancy skills. Communicates complex or contentious information clearly and effectively to the target audience.

SEEC Descriptors: Comparative Study

The Burgess Group (see www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI) recommended that the well-known and widely used England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) summary credit level descriptors should be a point of reference in any guidance. These were known previously as the NICATS descriptors and are provided below. They have been used as a reference point in developing the more detailed descriptors set out in the full SEEC descriptors.

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Setting						
Operational context	Operates in predictable and defined contexts that require the use of given techniques and information sources.	Operates in a range of varied but predictable contexts that require the use of a specified range of techniques and information sources.	Operates in situations of varying complexity and predictability requiring the application of a wide range of techniques and information sources.	Operates in complex and unpredictable contexts, requiring selection and application from a range of largely standard techniques and information sources.	Operates in complex and unpredictable and/or specialised contexts, requiring selection and application from a wide range of advanced techniques and information sources.	Operates in complex and unpredictable and/or specialised contexts at the forefront of knowledge.
Autonomy and responsibility for actions	Acts largely under direction or supervision, within defined guidelines. Takes responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures.	Acts with limited autonomy, under direction or supervision, within defined guidelines. Takes responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.	Acts with limited supervision and direction, within defined guidelines accepting responsibility for achieving personal and/or group outcomes and/or outputs.	Acts with minimal supervision or direction, within agreed guidelines taking responsibility for accessing support and accepts accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.	Acts with initiative in decision-making and accessing support, within professional or given guidelines, accepting full accountability for outcomes.	Acts autonomously and with initiative, often in a professional capacity with responsibility for self and often others.

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Knowledge & Understanding						
Knowledge & Understanding	Understanding Has an understanding of defined areas of the knowledge base. Demonstrates an awareness of current areas of debate in the field of study	Has a broad understanding of the knowledge base and its terminology or discourse. Demonstrates awareness that areas of this knowledge base are open to ongoing debate and reformulation.	Has detailed knowledge of well-established theories and concepts. Demonstrates an awareness of different ideas, contexts and frameworks and recognises those areas where the knowledge base is most/least secure.	Has a systematic understanding of the knowledge base and its inter-relationship with other fields of study. Demonstrates current understanding of some specialist areas in depth.	Has a deep and systematic understanding within a specialised field of study and its interrelationship with other relevant disciplines. Demonstrates an understanding of current theoretical and methodological approaches and how these affect the way the knowledge base is interpreted.	Works with theoretical/research knowledge at the forefront of the discipline. Demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of techniques and methodologies applicable to the discipline

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Cognitive Skills						
Conceptualisation and Critical Thinking	Relates principles and concepts to underlying theoretical frameworks and approaches.	Identifies principles and concepts underlying theoretical frameworks and begins to identify their strengths and weaknesses.	Identifies, analyses and communicates principles and concepts recognising competing perspectives.	Works with ideas at a level of abstraction, arguing from competing perspectives. Identifies the possibility of new concepts within existing knowledge frameworks and approaches.	Uses ideas at a high level of abstraction. Develops critical responses to existing theoretical discourses, methodologies or practices and suggests new concepts or approaches	Develops ideas at a high level of abstraction. Develops theoretical discourses, methodologies or practices critically analysing their development and application.
Problem solving, research & enquiry	Carries out defined investigative strategies and communicates results effectively in a given format.	Identifies a well-defined focus for enquiry, plans and undertakes investigative strategies using a limited and defined range of methods, collects data from a variety of sources, and communicates results effectively in an appropriate format	Undertakes research to provide new information and/or explores new or existing data to identify patterns and relationships. Uses appropriate theoretical models to judge the significance of the data collected recognising the limitations of the enquiry.	Demonstrates confidence and flexibility in identifying and defining complex problems. Identifies, selects and uses investigative strategies and techniques to undertake a critical analysis, evaluating the outcomes.	Designs and undertakes substantial investigations to address significant areas of theory and/or practice. Selects appropriate advanced methodological approaches and critically evaluates their effectiveness.	Acts independently and with originality in problem solving. Develops or adapts appropriate advanced methodological approaches and critically evaluates their effectiveness.
Synthesis and Creativity	Collects information to inform a choice of solutions to standard problems in familiar contexts.	Collects information from a variety of authoritative sources to inform a choice of solutions to standard problems in familiar contexts.	Collects and synthesises information to inform a choice of solutions to problems in unfamiliar contexts.	Applies knowledge in unfamiliar contexts, synthesising ideas or information to generate novel solutions. Achieves a body of work or practice that is coherent and resolved.	Flexibly and creatively applies knowledge in unfamiliar contexts, synthesises ideas or information in innovative ways, and generates transformative solutions.	Synthesises and applies new approaches, in a manner that can contribute to the development of methodology or understanding in that discipline or practice.

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Analysis and evaluation	Analyses a range of information using pre-defined principles, frameworks or criteria.	Judges the reliability of data and information using pre-defined techniques and/or criteria.	Analyses a range of information comparing alternative methods and techniques. Selects appropriate techniques/criteria for evaluation and discriminates between the relative relevance and significance of data/evidence collected.	Analyses new, novel and/or abstract data using an appropriate range of established subject-specific techniques. Judges the reliability, validity and significance of evidence to support conclusions and/or recommendations suggests reasons for contradictory data/results.	Undertakes analysis of complex, incomplete or contradictory evidence/data and judges the appropriateness of the enquiry methodologies used. Recognises and argues for alternative approaches.	Undertakes independent analysis or evaluation, managing complexity, incompleteness of data or contradictions in areas of knowledge.

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Performance & Practice						
Adaptation to Context	Undertakes a given and clearly defined role.	Relates own role to specified and externally defined parameters.	Identifies external expectations & adapts own performance accordingly.	Locates own role within poorly defined and/or flexible contexts requiring a level of autonomy.	Autonomously adapts performance to multiple contexts.	Autonomously adapts performance to contexts requiring professional outputs.
Performance	Undertakes given performance tasks that may be complex.	Undertakes performance tasks that may be complex and non-routine engaging in self-reflection.	Undertakes complex and non-routine performance tasks. Analyses performance of self and others and suggests improvements.	Seeks and applies new techniques and processes to own performance and identifies how these might be evaluated.	Autonomously implements and evaluates improvements to performance drawing on innovative or sectoral best practice.	Has technical mastery, performs smoothly with precision and effectiveness, can adapt or develop skills and procedures for new situations
Team and organisational working	Adapts own behaviour to meet obligations to others.	Works effectively with others and recognises the factors that affect team performance	Interacts effectively within a team, giving and receiving information and ideas and modifying responses where appropriate. Recognises and ameliorates situations likely to lead to conflict.	Works effectively within a team, supports or is proactive in leadership, negotiates in a professional context and manages conflict. Proactively seeks to resolve conflict.	Works effectively with multiple teams as leader or member. Clarifies tasks and make appropriate use of the capacities of team members resolving likely conflict situations before they arise.	Leads and/or works effectively with often multiple teams in multiple roles. Manages the capacities of members to achieve outcomes handling conflict with confidence.
Ethical awareness and application	Has an awareness of the ethical issues in the main areas of study.	Demonstrates awareness of ethical issues and is able to discuss these in relation to personal beliefs and values.	Is aware of personal responsibility and professional codes of conduct.	Is aware of personal responsibility and professional codes of conduct and incorporates this into their practice.	Incorporates a critical ethical dimension to their practice, managing the implications of ethical dilemmas and works proactively with others to formulate solutions.	Analyses and manages ethical dilemmas and works pro-actively with others to formulate and implement solutions.

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Personal enabling skills						
Personal evaluation and development	Assesses own capabilities against given criteria. Engages in guided development activity.	Is aware of own capabilities in key areas and engages in development activity through guided self-direction.	Assesses own capabilities using justifiable criteria set by self and others taking the wider needs of the context into account. Uses feedback to adapt own actions to reach a desired aim and reviews impact.	Takes responsibility for own learning and development using reflection and feedback to analyse own capabilities, appraises alternatives and plans and implements actions.	Uses personal reflection to analyse self and own actions. Makes connections between known and unknown areas, to allow for adaptation and change.	Reflects on own and others' functioning in order to improve practice. Is independent and self-critical as a learner, guides & supports the learning of others and manages own professional development
Interpersonal & communication skills	Uses interpersonal and communication skills to clarify tasks and communicate outcomes in narrowly defined contexts.	Uses interpersonal and communication skills to clarify tasks and identify and rectify issues in a range of contexts.	Adapts interpersonal and communication skills to a range of situations, audiences and degrees of complexity.	Sets criteria for, and is effective in, professional and interpersonal communication in a wide range of situations.	Identifies, evaluates and maintains capabilities & qualities to support effective communication in a range of complex and specialised contexts.	Displays consultancy skills. Communicates complex or contentious information clearly & effectively to the target audience.

	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
EWNI (formally NICCATS) Summary credit level descriptors		Develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base; employ a range of specialised skills; evaluate information, using it to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems; and operate in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.	Generate ideas through the analysis of concepts at an abstract level with a command of specialised skills and the formulation of responses to well-defined and abstract problems; analyse and evaluate information; exercise significant judgement across a broad range of functions; and accept responsibility for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes	Critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge, utilising specialised skills across an area of study; critically evaluate concepts and evidence from a range of sources; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills and exercise significant judgement in a range of situations; and accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes	Display mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge and skills, employing advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for related decision making, including use of supervision	Make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of inquiry, demonstrating a command of methodological issues and engaging in critical dialogue with peers and accepting full accountability for outcomes

Glossary

Accreditation of prior learning
The identification, assessment and formal acknowledgement of prior learning and achievement (APL). This may either be certificated learning (APCL) or prior experiential learning (APEL), where learning achieved outside education or training systems is assessed and recognised for academic purposes.

Assessment regulations
The rules governing assessment of a programme of study including marking scheme, pass mark, requirements for progression to subsequent levels or stages of a programme and award and classification requirements (for instance in terms of credits to be achieved and specific marks to be attained).

Credit
Credit is awarded to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level.

Credit accumulation
A process of achieving credits over time in relation to a planned programme of study

Credit level
An indicator of the relative complexity, demand and/or depth of learning and of learner autonomy.

Credit transfer
A mechanism which allows credit awarded by a higher education (HE) awarding body to be recognised, quantified and included towards the credit requirements for a programme delivered by another HE provider and/or between programmes offered by an HE provider. Each HE awarding body determines what credit it will accept in relation to its individual programmes.

Credit value
The number of credits, at a particular level, assigned to a body of learning. The number of credits is based on the estimated notional learning hours (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).

Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)
A system which enables learners to accumulate credit, and which facilitates the transfer of that credit within and between education providers.

Learning outcomes
Statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning.

Credit level descriptors
The generic characteristics of learning at a specific level, used as reference points.

Module/unit
A self-contained, formally structured, learning experience with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Notional hours of learning
The number of hours which it is expected that a learner will spend, on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at that level.

Qualification descriptors
Generic statements of the outcomes of study for the main qualification at each level which exemplify the nature and characteristics of that qualification.

Abbreviations

APL	Accreditation of prior learning
APCL	Accreditation of prior certificated learning
APEL	Accreditation of prior experiential learning
CIDG	Credit Issues Development Group
CQFW	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EWNI	England, Wales and Northern Ireland
FQ-EHEA	Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
HEI	Higher education institution
NICATS	Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
NUCCAT	Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
PSRBs	Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
RLTW	Recognition of learning through work
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SEEC	Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer
WHECC	Welsh Higher Education Credit Consortium

The Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) is a membership association of providers of higher education and training in the south of England and is a registered charity. SEEC aims to advance education for the public benefit by developing credit accumulation and transfer and promoting continuing education at Higher Education level. For further details see www.seec.org.uk

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