

University Grade Descriptor (Level 4 and new Level 7 enrolled students for 2021/22)

This revised document defines the Sheffield Hallam University generic grade and level descriptors for application to undergraduate and postgraduate assessment, including Foundation degree (FdA / FdSC / FdEng) and other provision using non-standard grade bands (including indicative guidance for Level 0 – [Foundation Year](#)). The document also shows the relationship between classification and grade point, as applicable to assessment at task and module level. The purpose of defining these descriptors is to determine the University standard against which Departments can develop their own courses, modules and marking schemes. As we are currently using a degree algorithm based on an overall average (rather than a majority model), the categorical grades within the UGD have been re-designed to remove the skewing effect of the highest and lowest categories. This approach is an interim stage as the University develops its strategy to implement full grade-based assessment and reviews its degree algorithm. For further guidance / advice contact your College Head of Teaching and Learning Enhancement.

[Generic grade descriptors](#)

The generic grade descriptors define, for each level, the standards of performance expected across classification categories. These are aligned with the generic level descriptors identified above. The descriptors define common characteristics expected of work at each of the different marking bands, at each level of study. The descriptors also include (**bold text**) elements of the [Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes](#) (SOLO) taxonomy. These define different levels of understanding across the grades in terms of the structural complexity of students' responses. Departments and Course Teams may choose to contextualise the general grade descriptors to suit specific discipline areas; however, it is important to retain the Solo Taxonomy features of the descriptors.

[Generic level descriptors](#)

The generic level descriptors provide a guide to the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and degree of learner autonomy expected of a learner at different stages of study irrespective of the subject and context. The University generic level descriptor is consistent with the Ofqual (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) National Qualifications Framework Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7. They reference the [QAA Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (2018).

[Guidance on use \(see also FAQs available on the \[Academic Services\]\(#\) webpage\)](#)

Colleagues should use the University level and grade descriptor as follows:

- **From September 2021, the revised University Grade Descriptors (UGD) should be used with all level 4 and new level 7 enrolled students for assessments that use percentage marks.** The revised UGD can be used alongside existing assessment grids (rubrics) so there is no need (unless desired) for re-design of feedback tools.
- The UGD is normally applied at **overall task** level (see FAQs for more detail).
- **New provision** - in designing courses, course teams should ensure that course and module learning outcomes at each level are appropriate to the generic level descriptor. It should be used to design course and module outcomes and write pass descriptors. The grade descriptors should form part of or be used alongside marking grids (rubrics) and feedback reports for assessment tasks.
- **Annual review and modifications** - as part of standard annual review processes, course teams should review existing provision in light of the generic level descriptor to see if developments are needed in the wording of aims, outcomes and assessment criteria.

Level 4 - Generic grade descriptor: relationship of degree classification to Grade Point and equivalent percentage

Class	Category	Grade	%	General Characteristics
1 st (Exceptional)	Exceptional 1st	16	82	Exceptional knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts significantly beyond what has been taught in all areas ; critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis and of reading/research; evidence of breadth and depth of reading/research to inform development of work; excellent communication; performance in all areas deemed beyond expectation of the level. The ability to make decisions and carry out tasks/processes with autonomy; creative flair and the ability to (re)interpret predefined rules/conventions to select and justify individual working practice; highly developed problem-solving skills to complete work with accuracy and fluency. Meets expectations of industry/employment context.
1 st (Excellent)	High 1st	15	78	Excellent knowledge of the subject as the student is typically able to go beyond what has been taught (particularly for a high 1st) ; evidence of breadth of reading/research to inform development of work; demonstrates strong communication skills. Autonomy in the completion of practical tasks/processes; the ability to adapt in response to change or unexpected experiences; excellent technical/artistic decision making; a clear and authoritative grasp of the task/process. Broadly meets expectations of industry/employment context.
	Mid 1st	14	75	
	Low 1st	13	72	
2.1 (Very good)	High 2.1	12	68	Very good work characterised by evidence of wider understanding of the subject as the student is typically able to relate facts/concepts together with some ability to apply to known/taught contexts ; identification and selection of material to inform development of work; demonstrates good communication skills. A confident approach to practical tasks; solid grasp of the related processes, tools, technology; creativity in the completion of the task; proficiency is demonstrated in an accurate and highly coordinated performance. Approaches standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 2.1	11	65	
	Low 2.1	10	62	
2.2 (Good)	High 2.2	9	58	Good breadth of knowledge and understanding of the taught content balanced towards the descriptive rather than analytical ; uses set material to inform development of work; addresses all aspects of the given brief; communication shows clarity, but structure may lack coherence. Competence in technical/artistic skills; tasks/processes are completed with a degree of proficiency and confidence; effective judgements have been made when completing tasks/processes; process/workflow is broadly accurate, and most aspects are completed with autonomy. General adherence to rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 2.2	8	55	
	Low 2.2	7	52	
3 rd (Sufficient)	High 3rd	6	48	Knowledge and understanding sufficient to deal with terminology, basic facts and concepts but fails to make meaningful synthesis; relies on set material to inform development of work; generally addresses most of the requirements of the given brief; communication/presentation is generally competent but with some weaknesses. An ability to reproduce learned aspects of practical tasks/processes and apply them in the same or similar scenarios; tasks/processes are attempted but follow a largely procedural and/or mechanistic formula. Errors in workflow or completion of the task; general adherence to appropriate rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 3rd	5	45	
	Low 3rd	4	42	
FAIL (Insufficient)	Borderline Fail	3	38	Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts; some ability to evaluate given reading/research however work is more generally descriptive; naively follows or may ignore set material in development of work ; given brief may be only tangentially addressed or may ignore key aspects of the brief; communication shows limited clarity, poor presentation, structure may not be coherent. Practical tasks are attempted; skill displayed in some areas; there are a significant number of errors; a lack of proficiency in most areas; guidance may be needed to reproduce aspects of the task and/or apply learned skills. Tasks may be incomplete; failure to adhere to some of the rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Fail	2	35	
	Low Fail	1	32	
FAIL (Incompetent)	Very Low Fail	0	28	No evidence of knowledge or understanding of the subject; no understanding of taught concepts, with facts being reproduced in a disjointed or decontextualised manner ; ignores set material in development of work; fails to address the requirements of the brief; lacks basic communication skills. A general level of incompetency in practical tasks; an evident lack of practice; set tasks are not completed; few or no skills relating to tasks are evident. No adherence to rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
ZERO	Zero	0	0	Work not submitted, work of no merit, penalty in some misconduct cases.

Level 5 - Generic grade descriptor: relationship of degree classification to Grade Point and equivalent percentage

Class	Category	Grade	%	General Characteristics
1 st (Exceptional)	Exceptional 1st	16	82	Exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the area of study, significantly beyond what has been taught in all areas ; evidence of extensive and appropriate selection and critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis and of reading/research beyond the prescribed range, in both breadth and depth, to advance work/direct arguments; excellent communication; performance beyond expectation. The ability to make decisions and carry out tasks/processes with autonomy; excellent leadership skills in group contexts; creative flair; extremely well-developed problem-solving skills; the ability to carry out sustained critical reflection on practical work within the wider context of industry/workplace. Fully meets expectations set by the industry/employment context.
1 st (Excellent)	High 1st	15	78	Outstanding/excellent knowledge and understanding of the area of study as the student is typically able to go beyond what has been taught (particularly for a mid/high 1st) ; evidence of extensive and appropriate selection and critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis of reading/research beyond the prescribed range , to advance work/direct arguments; excellent communication; performance deemed beyond expectation of the level. The ability to make decisions and carry out tasks/processes with autonomy; creative flair and the ability to (re)interpret predefined rules/conventions to select and justify individual working practice; highly developed problem-solving skills; accuracy and fluency; excellent command of skills appropriate to the task; the ability to reflect critically on practical work within the wider context of industry/workplace. Broadly meets expectations set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 1st	14	75	
	Low 1st	13	72	
2.1 (Very good)	High 2.1	12	68	Very good knowledge and understanding of the area of study as the student is typically able to relate facts/concepts together with some ability to apply to known/taught contexts ; evidence of appropriate selection and evaluation of reading/research, some beyond the prescribed range, may rely on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; demonstrates autonomy in approach to learning; strong communication skills. Broadly autonomous completion of practical tasks/processes; ability to adapt in response to change or unexpected experiences; technical/artistic decision making is highly developed; a clear command of the skills relevant to the task/process; ability to reflect on practical work and set future goals within the wider context of industry/workplace. Adherence to standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 2.1	11	65	
	Low 2.1	10	62	
2.2 (Good)	High 2.2	9	58	Good knowledge and understanding of the area of study balanced towards the descriptive rather than analytical ; evidence of appropriate selection and evaluation of reading/research but generally reliant on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; communication shows clarity, but structure may not always be coherent. A confident approach to practical tasks; a solid grasp of the related processes, tools, technology; creativity in the completion of the task; proficiency is demonstrated by an accurate and coordinated performance; tasks are completed with a good level of independent thought; some autonomy is evident; an ability to reflect on practical work and set future goals. General adherence to standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 2.2	8	55	
	Low 2.2	7	52	
3 rd (Sufficient)	High 3rd	6	48	Knowledge and understanding sufficient to deal with terminology, basic facts and concepts but fails to make meaningful synthesis; some ability to select and evaluate reading/research however work may be more generally descriptive; strong reliance on available support set sources to advance work; arguments may be weak or poorly constructed; communication/presentation is generally competent but with some weaknesses. Competence in technical/artistic skills; tasks/processes are completed with a degree of proficiency and confidence; tasks are completed with a basic level of independent thought; effective judgements have been made; basic evaluation and analysis of performance in practical tasks is evident. Errors in workflow or completion of the task; general adherence to appropriate rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 3rd	5	45	
	Low 3rd	4	42	
FAIL (Insufficient)	Borderline Fail	3	38	Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts; some ability to evaluate given reading/research however work is more generally descriptive; naively follows or may ignore set material in development of work ; given brief may be only tangentially addressed or may ignore key aspects of the brief; communication shows limited clarity, poor presentation, structure may not be coherent. Practical tasks are attempted; skill displayed in some areas; there are a significant number of errors; a lack of proficiency in most areas; guidance may be needed to reproduce aspects of the task and/or apply learned skills. Tasks may be incomplete; failure to adhere to some of the rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Fail	2	35	
	Low Fail	1	32	
FAIL (Incompetent)	Very Low Fail	0	28	No evidence of knowledge or understanding of the subject; no understanding of taught concepts, with facts being reproduced in a disjointed or decontextualised manner ; ignores set material in development of work; fails to address the requirements of the brief; lacks basic communication skills. A general level of incompetency in practical tasks; an evident lack of practice; set tasks are not completed; few or no skills relating to tasks are evident. No adherence to rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
ZERO	Zero	0	0	Work not submitted, work of no merit, penalty in some misconduct cases.

Level 6 - Generic grade descriptor: relationship of degree classification to Grade Point and equivalent percentage

Class	Category	Grade	%	General Characteristics
1 st (Exceptional)	Exceptional 1st	16	82	Exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the area of study, significantly beyond what has been taught in all areas ; evidence of extensive and appropriate selection and critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis and of reading/research beyond the prescribed range, in both breadth and depth, to advance work/direct arguments; excellent communication; performance deemed to be beyond expectation. Work at publishable or commercial standard. The ability to make decisions and systematically carry out tasks/processes with autonomy in unpredictable situations; exercise of initiative in the completion of practical tasks; exceptional leadership skills and evidence of personal responsibility in group contexts; creative flair; extremely well-developed problem-solving skills; the ability to carry out sustained critical reflection on practical work within the wider context of industry/workplace. Exceeds expectations set by the industry/employment context.
1 st (Excellent)	High 1st	15	78	Excellent knowledge and understanding of the area of study as the student is typically able to go beyond what has been taught (particularly for a mid/high 1st) ; evidence of extensive and appropriate selection and critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis of reading/research beyond the prescribed range, to advance work/direct arguments; excellent communication; performance deemed beyond expectation of the level. The ability to make decisions and carry out tasks/processes with a high level of autonomy; creative flair and the ability to (re)interpret predefined rules/conventions to select and justify individual working practice; excellent problem-solving skills; accuracy and fluency; excellent command of skills appropriate to the task; the ability to reflect critically on practical work within the wider context of industry/workplace. Meets expectations set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 1st	14	75	
	Low 1st	13	72	
2.1 (Very good)	High 2.1	12	68	Very good knowledge and understanding of the area of study as the student is typically able to relate facts/concepts together with some ability to apply to known/taught contexts ; evidence of appropriate selection and critical evaluation of reading/research, some beyond the prescribed range, may rely on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; demonstrates autonomy in approach to learning; strong communication skills. Broadly autonomous completion of practical tasks/processes; ability to adapt in response to change or unexpected experiences; technical/artistic decision making is very highly developed; a clear command of the skills relevant to the task/process; ability to reflect on practical work and set future goals within the wider context of industry/workplace. Adherence to standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 2.1	11	65	
	Low 2.1	10	62	
2.2 (Good)	High 2.2	9	58	Good knowledge and understanding of the area of study balanced towards the descriptive rather than critical or analytical ; evidence of appropriate selection and evaluation of reading/research, some may be beyond the prescribed range, but generally reliant on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; communication shows clarity, but structure may not always be coherent. A confident approach to practical tasks; a solid grasp of the related processes, tools, technology; creativity in the completion of the task; proficiency is demonstrated by an accurate and well-coordinated performance; tasks are completed with a good level of independent thought and autonomy; an ability to reflect on practical work and set future goals. General adherence to standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 2.2	8	55	
	Low 2.2	7	52	
3 rd (Sufficient)	High 3rd	6	48	Knowledge and understanding sufficient to deal with terminology, basic facts and concepts but fails to make meaningful synthesis; some ability to select and evaluate reading/research however work may be more generally descriptive; general reliance on set sources to advance work; arguments may be weak or poorly constructed; communication/presentation is generally competent but with some weaknesses. Competence in technical/artistic skills; tasks/processes are completed with a degree of proficiency and confidence; tasks are completed with a sufficient level of independent thought; effective judgements have been made; evaluation and analysis of performance in practical tasks is evident. Errors in workflow or completion of the task; general adherence to appropriate rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid 3rd	5	45	
	Low 3rd	4	42	
FAIL (Insufficient)	Borderline Fail	3	38	Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts; some ability to evaluate given reading/research however work is more generally descriptive; naively follows or may ignore set material in development of work ; given brief may be only tangentially addressed or may ignore key aspects of the brief; communication shows limited clarity, poor presentation, structure may not be coherent. Practical tasks are attempted; skill displayed in some areas; there are a significant number of errors; a lack of proficiency in most areas; guidance may be needed to reproduce aspects of the task and/or apply learned skills. Tasks may be incomplete; failure to adhere to some of the rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Fail	2	35	
	Low Fail	1	32	
FAIL (Incompetent)	Very Low Fail	0	28	No evidence of knowledge or understanding of the subject; no understanding of taught concepts, with facts being reproduced in a disjointed or decontextualised manner ; ignores set material in development of work; fails to address the requirements of the brief; lacks basic communication skills. A general level of incompetency in practical tasks; an evident lack of practice; set tasks are not completed; few or no skills relating to tasks are evident. No adherence to rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
ZERO	Zero	0	0	Work not submitted, work of no merit, penalty in some misconduct cases.

Level 7: Generic grade descriptor: relationship of grades of achievement to percentage mark ranges and categorical grades (CG)

Class	Category	Grade	%	General Characteristics
Distinction (Exceptional)	Exceptional Distinction	16	82	Exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding evidenced by own independent insight and critical awareness of relevant literature and concepts at the forefront of the discipline; evidence of extensive and appropriate independent inquiry operating with advanced concepts, methods and techniques to solve problems in unfamiliar contexts; Cogent arguments and explanations are consistently provided using a range of media demonstrating an ability to communicate effectively in a variety of formats using a sophisticated level of the English language in an eloquent and professional manner to both technical and non-technical audiences; a sustained academic approach to all aspects of the tasks is evidenced; academic work extends boundaries of the disciplines and is beyond expectation of the level and may achieve publishable or commercial standard .
Distinction (Excellent)	High Distinction	15	78	Excellent knowledge and understanding evidenced by some clear independent insight and critical awareness of relevant concepts some of which are at the forefront of the discipline ; evidence of appropriate independent inquiry operating with core concepts, methods and techniques to solve complex problems in mostly familiar contexts; Arguments and explanations are provided that is well-supported by the literature and in some cases uses a range of media demonstrating an ability to communicate effectively in a limited number of formats using own style that is suited to both technical and non-technical audiences; a sustained academic approach to most aspects of the tasks is evidenced; one or more aspects of the academic work is beyond the prescribed range and evidences a competent understanding of all of the relevant taught content.
	Mid Distinction	14	75	
	Low Distinction	13	72	
Merit (Good)	High Merit	12	68	Very good knowledge and understanding is evidenced as the student is typically able to independently relate taught facts/concepts together some of which are at the forefront of the discipline ; evidence of some competent independent inquiry operating with core concepts, methods and techniques to solve familiar problems; Arguments and explanations are provided that are typically supported by the literature and in some cases may challenge some received wisdoms; competently uses all taught media and communication methods to communicate effectively in a familiar settings; an academically rigorous approach applied to some aspects of the tasks is evidenced; some beyond the prescribed range, may rely on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; demonstrates autonomy in approach to learning.
	Mid Merit	11	65	
	Low Merit	10	62	
Pass (Sufficient)	High Pass	9	58	Satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the area of study balanced towards the descriptive rather than critical or analytical and mostly confined to concepts that are not at the forefront of the discipline ; evidence of some independent reading and research to advance work and inform arguments and approaches; Arguments and explanations are limited in range and depth although some are adequately supported by the literature albeit descriptively rather than critically; competently uses at least one taught media and communication method to communicate appropriately in familiar settings; although the approach applied to some aspects of the tasks may lack academic rigour, there are some clear areas of competence within the prescribed range. Relies on set sources to advance work/direct arguments and communicated in a way which shows clarity but structure may not always be coherent.
	Mid Pass	8	55	
	Low Pass	7	52	
FAIL (Insufficient)	Borderline Fail	6	48	Knowledge and understanding is insufficient as the student only evidences an understanding of small subset of the taught concepts and techniques; fails to make sufficient links between known concepts and facts to adequately solve relevant aspects of the brief/problem; little ability to independently select and evaluate reading/research with almost total reliance on set sources and unsubstantiated arguments/methods; communication/presentation may be competent in places but fails to demonstrate structure, clarity and/or focus; inability to adequately define problems and make reasoned judgements; the general approach to tasks lacks rigor and competence.
	Mid Fail	4	45	
	Low Fail	2	42	
FAIL (Incompetent)	Very Low Fail	1	38	Knowledge and understanding is highly insufficient as the student is unable to evidence any meaningful understanding of taught concepts or methods ; very limited evidence of reading and research to advance work; inadequate technical and practical skills as the student is unable to use and apply such skills to address problems or make judgements; limited or lack of understanding of the boundaries of the discipline and does not question received wisdom; approach to learning lacks autonomy and approach to tasks is not sustained; inability to communicate coherently.
ZERO	Zero	0	0	Work not submitted, work of no merit, penalty in some misconduct cases.

*** the grade points associated with the postgraduate fail grades are nonlinear to accommodate the necessary integration of the undergraduate and postgraduate scales for some courses.**

Level 4: Foundation Degree FdA / FdSc / FdEng: Generic grade descriptor

(also: University Cert of HE; BTEC HNC; University Cert in Education (Cert Ed); University Dip of HE; BTEC HND; Advanced Dip of HE; Graduate Cert; Graduate Dip)

Class	Category	Grade	%	General Characteristics
DISTINCTION (Excellent)	Exceptional Distinction	16	82	Exceptional knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts significantly beyond what has been taught in all areas ; critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis and of reading/research; evidence of breadth and depth of reading/research to inform development of work; excellent communication; performance in all areas deemed beyond expectation of the level. The ability to make decisions and carry out tasks/processes with autonomy; creative flair and the ability to (re)interpret predefined rules/conventions to select and justify individual working practice; highly developed problem-solving skills to complete work with accuracy and fluency. Meets expectations of industry/employment context.
	High Distinction	15	78	Excellent knowledge of the subject as the student is typically able to go beyond what has been taught (particularly for a high Distinction) ; evidence of breadth of reading/research to inform development of work; demonstrates strong communication skills. Autonomy in the completion of practical tasks/processes; the ability to adapt in response to change or unexpected experiences; excellent technical/artistic decision making; a clear and authoritative grasp of the task/process. Broadly meets expectations of industry/employment context.
	Mid Distinction	14	75	
	Low Distinction	13	72	
MERIT (Good)	High Merit	12	67	Very good to good knowledge and understanding of the area of study as the student is typically able to relate facts/concepts together with some ability to apply to known/taught contexts ; evidence of appropriate selection and evaluation of reading/research, some beyond the prescribed range, may rely on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; demonstrates autonomy in approach to learning; strong communication skills. Broadly autonomous completion of practical tasks/processes; ability to adapt in response to change or unexpected experiences; technical/artistic decision making is highly developed; a clear command of the skills relevant to the task/process; ability to reflect on practical work and set future goals within the wider context of industry/workplace. Adherence to standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Merit	11	63	
	Low Merit	10	58	
PASS (Satisfactory)	High Pass	9	53	Good breadth of knowledge and understanding of the taught content balanced towards the descriptive rather than analytical ; uses set material to inform development of work; addresses all aspects of the given brief; communication shows clarity, but structure may lack coherence. Competence in technical/artistic skills; tasks/processes are completed with a degree of proficiency and confidence; effective judgements have been made when completing tasks/processes; process/workflow is broadly accurate, and most aspects are completed with autonomy. General adherence to rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Pass	7	48	Knowledge and understanding sufficient to deal with terminology, basic facts and concepts but fails to make meaningful synthesis; some ability to select and evaluate reading/research however work may be more generally descriptive ; strong reliance on available support set sources to advance work; arguments may be weak or poorly constructed; communication/presentation is generally competent but with some weaknesses. Competence in technical/artistic skills; tasks/processes are completed with a degree of proficiency and confidence; tasks are completed with a basic level of independent thought; effective judgements have been made; basic evaluation and analysis of performance in practical tasks is evident. Errors in workflow or completion of the task; general adherence to appropriate rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Low Pass	5	42	
FAIL (Insufficient)	Borderline Fail	4	38	Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts; some ability to evaluate given reading/research however work is more generally descriptive; naively follows or may ignore set material in development of work ; given brief may be only tangentially addressed or may ignore key aspects of the brief; communication shows limited clarity, poor presentation, structure may not be coherent. Practical tasks are attempted; skill displayed in some areas; there are a significant number of errors; a lack of proficiency in most areas; guidance may be needed to reproduce aspects of the task and/or apply learned skills. Tasks may be incomplete; failure to adhere to some of the rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Fail	3	35	
	Low Fail	2	32	
	Very Low Fail	1	28	No evidence of knowledge or understanding of the subject; no understanding of taught concepts, with facts being reproduced in a disjointed or decontextualised manner ; ignores set material in development of work; fails to address the requirements of the brief; lacks basic communication skills. A general level of incompetency in practical tasks; an evident lack of practice; set tasks are not completed; few or no skills relating to tasks are evident. No adherence to rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
ZERO	Zero	0	0	Work not submitted, work of no merit, penalty in some misconduct cases.

** the grade points associated with the FdA Pass grades are nonlinear to accommodate the necessary integration of the scales for some courses.*

Level 5: Foundation Degree FdA / FdSc / FdEng: Generic grade descriptor

(also: University Cert of HE; BTEC HNC; University Cert in Education (Cert Ed); University Dip of HE; BTEC HND; Advanced Dip of HE; Grad Cert; Grad Dip)

Class	Category	Grade	%	General Characteristics
DISTINCTION (Excellent)	Exceptional Distinction	16	82	Exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of the area of study, significantly beyond what has been taught in all areas ; evidence of extensive and appropriate selection and critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis and of reading/research beyond the prescribed range, in both breadth and depth, to advance work/direct arguments; excellent communication; performance beyond expectation. The ability to make decisions and carry out tasks/processes with autonomy; excellent leadership skills in group contexts; creative flair; extremely well-developed problem-solving skills; the ability to carry out sustained critical reflection on practical work within the wider context of industry/workplace. Fully meets expectations set by the industry/employment context.
	High Distinction	15	78	Outstanding/excellent knowledge and understanding of the area of study as the student is typically able to go beyond what has been taught (particularly for a mid/high Distinction) ; evidence of extensive and appropriate selection and critical evaluation/synthesis/analysis of reading/research beyond the prescribed range , to advance work/direct arguments; excellent communication; performance deemed beyond expectation of the level. The ability to make decisions and carry out tasks/processes with autonomy; creative flair and the ability to (re)interpret predefined rules/conventions to select and justify individual working practice; highly developed problem-solving skills; accuracy and fluency; excellent command of skills appropriate to the task; the ability to reflect critically on practical work within the wider context of industry/workplace. Broadly meets expectations set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Distinction	14	75	
	Low Distinction	13	72	
MERIT (Good)	High Merit	12	67	Very good / good knowledge and understanding of the area of study as the student is typically able to relate facts/concepts together with some ability to apply to known/taught contexts ; evidence of appropriate selection and evaluation of reading/research, some beyond the prescribed range, may rely on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; demonstrates autonomy in approach to learning; strong communication skills. Broadly autonomous completion of practical tasks/processes; ability to adapt in response to change or unexpected experiences; technical/artistic decision making is highly developed; a clear command of the skills relevant to the task/process; ability to reflect on practical work and set future goals within the wider context of industry/workplace. Adherence to standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Merit	11	63	
	Low Merit	10	58	
PASS (Satisfactory)	High Pass	9	53	Good knowledge and understanding of the area of study balanced towards the descriptive rather than analytical ; evidence of appropriate selection and evaluation of reading/research but generally reliant on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; communication shows clarity, but structure may not always be coherent. A confident approach to practical tasks; a solid grasp of the related processes, tools, technology; creativity in the completion of the task; proficiency is demonstrated by an accurate and coordinated performance; tasks are completed with a good level of independent thought; some autonomy is evident; an ability to reflect on practical work and set future goals. General adherence to standards set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Pass	7	48	Knowledge and understanding sufficient to deal with terminology, basic facts and concepts but fails to make meaningful synthesis; some ability to select and evaluate reading/research however work may be more generally descriptive ; strong reliance on available support set sources to advance work; arguments may be weak or poorly constructed; communication/presentation is generally competent but with some weaknesses. Competence in technical/artistic skills; tasks/processes are completed with a degree of proficiency and confidence; tasks are completed with a basic level of independent thought; effective judgements have been made; basic evaluation and analysis of performance in practical tasks is evident. Errors in workflow or completion of the task; general adherence to appropriate rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Low Pass	5	42	
FAIL (Insufficient)	Borderline Fail	4	38	Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts; some ability to evaluate given reading/research however work is more generally descriptive; naively follows or may ignore set material in development of work ; given brief may be only tangentially addressed or may ignore key aspects of the brief; communication shows limited clarity, poor presentation, structure may not be coherent. Practical tasks are attempted; skill displayed in some areas; there are a significant number of errors; a lack of proficiency in most areas; guidance may be needed to reproduce aspects of the task and/or apply learned skills. Tasks may be incomplete; failure to adhere to some of the rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
	Mid Fail	3	35	
	Low Fail	2	32	
	Very Low Fail	1	28	No evidence of knowledge or understanding of the subject; no understanding of taught concepts, with facts being reproduced in a disjointed or decontextualised manner ; ignores set material in development of work; fails to address the requirements of the brief; lacks basic communication skills. A general level of incompetency in practical tasks; an evident lack of practice; set tasks are not completed; few or no skills relating to tasks are evident. No adherence to rules/conventions set by the industry/employment context.
ZERO	Zero	0	0	Work not submitted, work of no merit, penalty in some misconduct cases.

** the grade points associated with the FdA Pass grades are nonlinear to accommodate the necessary integration of the scales for some courses.*

Generic level descriptor – for reference in course / module design and development of pass descriptors

Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	level 7
<p><i>the student has:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sound knowledge of basic underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study ▪ the qualities needed for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility ▪ the ability to develop new skills within a structured and managed environment 	<p><i>the student has:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and how those principles have developed ▪ knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s), and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study ▪ an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations ▪ the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making ▪ the ability to develop existing skills and acquire new competences 	<p><i>the student has:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of complex, coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline ▪ conceptual understanding in order to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline - to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline ▪ an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge ▪ the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts 	<p><i>the student has:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice ▪ a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship ▪ originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline ▪ the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts ▪ the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development
<p><i>the student can:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ apply underlying concepts and principles within the context of the area of study ▪ present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study ▪ communicate accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments ▪ use different approaches to solving problems ▪ manage their own learning 	<p><i>the student can:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied ▪ use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis ▪ effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences ▪ deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively ▪ evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems ▪ manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary source 	<p><i>the student can:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ apply methods and techniques to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects ▪ critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), make judgements, and frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution - or identify a range of solutions - to a problem ▪ evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively ▪ communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences ▪ deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline ▪ use analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in different situations ▪ manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline 	<p><i>the student can:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline ▪ evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses. ▪ deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences ▪ demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level ▪ continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

Foundation Years

Foundation years represent a transitional year into higher education. They are distinct from and should not be confused with Level 4 undergraduate study or a Level 4 of a foundation degree.

Students successfully completing a foundation year are able to progress to Level 4. They do so without being awarded any credit or award.

Significant consideration should be given to the design of FY modules and their assessment. They should not replicate modules at level 4 but be designed for the distinct purpose of preparing students for level 4 study and transition into higher education, providing the scaffolding needed to support progression into degree level study.

Formative assessment and feedback should be an explicit part of the assessment strategy, as should the opportunity for in module retrieval.

The following has been developed to support the development of the transparent expectations of foundation year students.

Module tutors should align module learning outcomes and marking criteria to ensure level appropriateness and consistency.

Level 0 - Generic Learning Outcomes

(at the end of the foundation year we would expect a PASS student to have demonstrated the following outcomes in preparation for entry / to access undergraduate study)

Knowledge and Understanding	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Describe- facts / principles / concepts / theories / values / beliefs / aesthetics
Cognitive Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explain, give reasons for essential – facts / principles / concepts / theories / values / beliefs / aesthetics2. Organise essential aspects of information / situations / objects / artefacts which are : specified3. Complete an action or process using given procedures / formats4. Present aspects of the subject in an order and style which demonstrates and enables understanding using given procedures / formats
Subject – Specific Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Carry out specified methods of enquiry and production with guidance2. Carry out specified techniques / processes / applications with guidance
Professional / Practice Skills or Key Skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Access and gather sources2. Use and explain information / materials / data for a given purpose3. Develop core skills pertinent to area of study4. Solve given, defined problems / briefs, carry out specific approaches and check the solution is fit for purpose5. Accurately present ideas / information / arguments / results and do so in an format appropriate for a given purpose / situation6. Work with others to meet given objectives and own responsibilities7. Reflect on own strengths, limitations and performance using given approaches / techniques

Level 0 (Foundation Year) - Generic Grade Descriptor: relationship between indicative outcome to Grade Point and equivalent percentage

Outcome	Grade	%	General Characteristics
PASS (Excellent)	16	82	Exceptional knowledge, understanding and confidence to deal with advanced terminology, principles and concepts; worked autonomously whilst also evidencing a much broader breadth and depth of reading/research than was required; has used additional material to go beyond the requirements of the given brief; exceptional demonstration of relevant skills in preparation for undergraduate study; applied knowledge to critically evaluate/synthesis/analyse in the pursuit to solve complex problems; exceptional communication/presentation; performance in all areas beyond expectation.
	15	78	Excellent knowledge, understanding and confidence to deal with terminology, (and more advanced) basic principles and concepts; taken direction very well whilst also evidencing a broader breadth and depth of reading/research; has used set material and additional material to address all of the requirements of the given brief; excellent demonstration of relevant skills in preparation for undergraduate study; applied knowledge and attempted to solve basic and complex problems set; excellent communication/presentation.
	14	75	
	13	72	
PASS (Very good)	12	68	Very good knowledge and understanding to deal with terminology, basic principles and concepts; taken direction well; used set material and additional material to address almost all of the requirements of the given brief; very good demonstration of relevant core skills in preparation for undergraduate study; applied knowledge and attempted to solve basic problems with some complexity; very good communication/presentation.
	11	65	
	10	62	
PASS (Good)	9	58	Good knowledge and understanding to deal with terminology, basic principles and concepts; taken direction; used set material and limited additional material to address almost all of the requirements of the given brief; competent demonstration of relevant core skills in preparation for undergraduate study; applied basic knowledge and attempted to solve basic problems; good communication/presentation.
	8	55	
	7	52	
PASS (Sufficient)	6	48	Basic knowledge and understanding to deal with terminology, basic principles and concepts; taken some direction; used set material and addressed the basic requirements of the given brief; adequate demonstration of relevant core skills in preparation for undergraduate study; applied some basic knowledge and attempted to solve basic problems; basic communication/presentation.
	5	45	
	4	42	
FAIL (Insufficient)	3	38	Very basic knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts; taken little direction naively follows or does not engage with set material; largely fails to address any requirements of the brief; insufficient demonstration of relevant skills in preparation for undergraduate study; limited knowledge applied in attempt to solve basic problems; communication shows limited clarity, poor presentation.
	2	35	
	1	32	
FAIL (Incompetent)	0	28	Insufficient or no evidence of knowledge and understanding of the subject and its underlying concepts; taken little direction, naively follows or does not engage with set material; largely fails to address any requirements of the brief; little or no demonstration of relevant skills in preparation for undergraduate study; no knowledge applied and or attempt to solve basic problems; communication shows no clarity, poor presentation, structure not coherent.
ZERO	0	0	Work absent, work not submitted, penalty in some misconduct cases.