

DESIGN OF FOUNDATION DEGREES AND  
HONOURS TOP-UP YEARS  
GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION

**Academic Quality Standards and Conduct**

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# DESIGN OF FOUNDATION DEGREES AND HONOURS TOP-UP YEARS GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION

## INTRODUCTION

A Foundation Degree (FD) is a vocationally focused higher education qualification that integrates academic and work-based learning (WBL) through close collaboration between employers and programme providers. It is designed with employer involvement and is intended to equip learners with the skills and knowledge relevant to their employment. It is located at Intermediate level (5) in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

The following guidelines are intended to provide a framework for the use of proposing teams and validation panels in the design and approval of Lancaster University validated FDs. The guidelines have been developed in light of the QAA's Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark.

## PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Programmes can be structured using core, core option and elective modules as appropriate. Work Based Learning must be included, this can take the form of bespoke work-based learning modules or work-based projects. Subject content should be at the appropriate level and provide a balance between the practical/vocational/technical and academic aspects of the programme.

### *Module Sizes and Delivery*

The FD should consist of 240 credits overall (120 credits level 4, 120 credits level 5). Most modules should be 15, 20 or 30 credits, although there may be programmes for which larger modules of 45 credits are appropriate. Individual modules should not fall below 10 credits, with no more than 25% of the total modules per year being at 10 credits. Programme teams should give a rationale for the size of modules and pattern of delivery.

### *Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes*

Learning outcomes should show an appropriate balance between intellectual and practical skills and be set within level 4 of the FHEQ for year 1 and level 5 of the FHEQ for year 2.

## LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

The Assessment Strategy for FDs should be clearly defined and have work-based learning as a central characteristic with a balance between academic and vocational skills. By the end of the FD student must have been tested on their capacity to undertake critical analysis. This would typically be tested towards the end of the second year. There should also be at least one substantial assessment task which may take the form of an evaluation/research project which provides learners with the opportunity to be tested within the framework of published work or empirical research. It is expected that the evaluation/research project (plus any associated research methods preparation modules) would equate to at least 30 credits. As this type of assessment task is often appropriate for the measurement of critical analysis, this will often be the means by which it is measured. Where the significant assessment and/or measuring of critical analysis appears in the second year and is worth less than 30 credits, it is expected that the deployment of critical analysis will also be tested within other level 5 modules.

The inclusion of examinations may not always be appropriate for FDs, but a rationale must be provided where no examination is included. 15 credit modules should be assessed at between 2,500 and 4,500 words or equivalent, with no piece of work being less than 500 words. Employers should, where possible, be involved in the assessment of work-based learning. The engagement of employers in the assessment process should be considered at the design stage of a FD.

## **EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT AND WORK-BASED LEARNING**

Partnerships between employers, HEIs and Sector Skills Councils are central to the concept of FD's and vital in providing programmes that are relevant, valid and responsive to the needs of learners and employers. Programme teams should specifically indicate which employers are going to be involved in the programme and what that involvement may be. Any employers involved should be evidenced in the appendix of the validation document, i.e. questionnaires, letters of support. Programme teams must demonstrate that they have consulted employers and/or employers' organisations about the curriculum, structure and review of the proposed course. Evidence of the consultation process, the outcomes of consultations and responses to employers comments should be included in the validation document. Where possible employers should be involved in the delivery and assessment of the programme, particularly in the workplace.

## **WORK BASED LEARNING**

Work-based Learning (WBL) is a fundamental defining characteristic of FDs. It may involve learners going on placements or engaging in consultancy or project work for employers, or it may use the learner's own workplace as a source of learning. As a threshold minimum WBL should be fully embedded into the design, delivery and assessment of all programmes.

It is important that consideration is given to the ways in which the WBL is appropriate to the particular needs of the relevant employment sector or type of employer, and how the programme helps to provide the knowledge and transferable skills needed for employment. Providers need to consider WBL in relation to: time allocation to modules; number of credits as a proportion of the award; the design of assessment to ensure it is relevant to the workplace and current practice. There may be sector-specific expectations for WBL in some instances and providers should ensure that programmes are developed to take account of these requirements.

WBL should be fully integrated into the whole programme, with defined and assessable learning outcomes, which may be tied in with the assessment of individual modules. The WBL element of the programme must be of sufficient duration and suitably structured to enable the learner to demonstrate all the agreed WBL outcomes. Learning outcomes for WBL should relate to technical skills, vocationally relevant knowledge, personal and interpersonal skills. WBL should be designed to support staff to contribute to the business objectives of the employer. The key factor is the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical work in the workplace.

Employers are expected to support learners as they learn in the workplace and sign up to a tripartite learning agreement between themselves, the learner and the College which outlines the work that will be undertaken and the Learning Outcomes that will be assessed. If employers are to be involved in the assessment of learners in the workplace, providers need to ensure they understand the Learning Outcomes and assessment criteria so that assessment is reliable and consistent across workplaces.

### ***Mentor/Supervisors***

Work-based mentors or supervisors must be appointed to provide support for students during WBL. Mentors/supervisors should be members of the organisation who are equipped with the skills and experience to facilitate learning and development and will provide support. Mentors/supervisors have an important part to play in facilitating the delivery of FD programmes, with good support increasing the chance of a successful learning experience for the learner.

As mentors will be expected to work alongside the tutor in supporting the learner in the workplace it is important that programme providers consider the development and training needs of this role in order to underpin quality and consistency of provision. In all cases judgement should be made by College staff as well as the assigned mentor. Guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of learner, employer and work-based mentor should be provided at the beginning of the programme and mentors should be offered continuing support.

### **HONOURS TOP-UP YEAR**

#### **ENTRY REQUIREMENTS**

Programme teams must designate at least one route to an appropriate Honours degree onto which FD graduates can progress. Where the intention is that students would progress onto a Top-up Year somewhere other than Lancaster University, it is up to the institution to gain an agreement of progression.

**Only those students who have completed a Lancaster-validated Foundation Degree will be eligible for admission onto a Lancaster-validated Honours top-up year. \***

- 1) Applicants with a Lancaster University validated Foundation Degree approved as part of a 2+1 articulation arrangement will be eligible for admission to the associated one-year Lancaster University validated Honours top-up provided they have met the specified entry criteria.
- 2) Applicants who hold a Foundation Degree not validated by Lancaster University will only be eligible for admission to a one-year Lancaster University validated Honours top-up if that Foundation Degree was designed and delivered in accordance with the requirements for a sector endorsed qualification and Lancaster University must be consulted about all cases. There will be no other exceptions.
- 3) An applicant with a Lancaster University validated Foundation Degree from the same institution not approved as part of the 2+1 articulation arrangement, or with a Lancaster University validated Foundation Degree from a different institution, may be eligible for admission to a Lancaster University validated Honours top-up provided they have met the specified criteria and the curriculum matching exercise (conducted in line with approved procedures) indicates that the student will be able to cope with the one-year Honours top-up. A bridging course may be deemed necessary in such cases.

\* *Applicants with a Blackpool & The Fylde College validated Foundation Degree approved as part of a 2 + 1 articulation agreement will be eligible for admission to the associated one-*

*year Lancaster University validated Honours top-up provided they have met the specified entry criteria.*

## **PROGRAMME DESIGN AND STRUCTURE**

Given that the Foundation Degree and the Honours top-up will have been designed as an integrated package it is envisaged that only a small number of Lancaster University Foundation Degree programmes should require a specific bridging course to articulate with the Honours top-up degree and these programmes will often be sector and/or professional body endorsed ones. The bridging course would typically aim to fill a knowledge or skill gap which may be required for the necessary articulation of the two programmes. Where a bridging course is required between the Foundation Degree and named Honours degree, the details must be clearly specified.

The characteristics of the Honours top-up year should include all attributes within the Honours level required within the Level 6 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The links between the FD and the Honours Top-up Year should be made clear.

### ***Aims and Learning Outcomes***

Employability should be a key factor of the Honours year top-up, with students expected to apply vocational skills within a higher level context and to tackle problem-solving with a greater degree of academic knowledge. The Honours top-up programme should focus on the provision of Vocational Higher Education with the incorporation of creative problem solving and opportunities for learners to use, apply and test knowledge by utilizing evaluation and synthesis skills in the creation of new knowledge and understanding. As such, these Honours graduates should have the ability to extend the knowledge and understanding of the underpinning academic disciplines relevant to their vocational area. Students should develop the ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources; to apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding and to initiate and carry out projects.

## **LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

The Honours top-up year should develop Level 6 research skills, these may be embedded within all modules or included as a stand-alone research module. These advanced research skills should not be solely academic but should be linked to work-based learning /industry within the employment context of the work of the last two years of the Foundation Degree. The research module or dissertation in the top-up year should be research embedded, practice informed and contextually analysed, applied and evaluated. On completion of the Honours top-up year, candidates should be in a position to undertake further study beyond level 6 or progress into employment with a higher-level skill set.