Level 6 Descriptors for Bachelor's Degree Programmes

This document sets out the Southern Regional College's approach to generic level 6 descriptors.

1. Introduction

Southern Regional College offers a wide range of degree-level courses and professional qualifications to focus on both the academic qualifications and practical employability skills needed to gain employment.

The College works in partnership with several universities to offer a variety of degrees, these include:

- The Open University
- Ulster University
- Queen's University Belfast

2. Understanding Degree Classifications at Level 6

When students start a Level 6-degree programme, their final award will be classified into one of four categories:

- First Class (1st)
- Upper Second Class (2:1)
- Lower Second Class (2:2)
- Third Class (3rd)

These classifications are based on national standards set by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The QAA provides clear descriptions of what each classification represents in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills. These descriptions help ensure that degrees across the UK meet the same high standards, further information can be found here: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 (annexe D) and in section 6 of this document.

SRC uses these QAA descriptors alongside the learning outcomes level 6 programmes.

This means assessments are designed to measure the skills and understanding expected at Level 6. The classification a student achieves reflects both on their performance and the national expectations for an honour's degree.

This guidance is here to help students understand what each classification means and how it relates to their learning journey.

The classification descriptors go beyond the 3rd class degree threshold (as established in the QAA qualification descriptor for Honours degrees), to express what all four classifications look like (1st, 2:1, 2:2, and 3rd). The descriptions for each classification are intended to be sufficiently generic to align with course-specific learning outcomes which, combined, detail the complexity of understanding and skills that students must achieve to gain a degree and respective classification.

Frameworks for higher education programmes including definitions can be found here: The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ),

3. Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 6 Bachelor's degree with honours

The descriptor provided for this level of the FHEQ is for any Bachelor's Degree with honours which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at level 6 of the FHEQ, including Bachelor's degrees and graduate diplomas.

Bachelor's degrees with honours are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

1. A systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline.
2. An ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline.
3. Conceptual understanding that enables the student:
    a) To create and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline.
    b) To describe and comment upon aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline.
    c) An appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge.
4. The ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, referenced research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

1. 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.
2. Critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution, or identify a range of solutions, to a problem.
3. Communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Holders will also have:

The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

a) The exercise of initiative and personal responsibility.

b) Decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts.

c) The learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

Holders of the Bachelor's Degree with honours or Ordinary Degree (without Honours) will have developed an understanding of a multifaceted body of knowledge, some of it at the current boundaries of an academic discipline. Through this, the holder will have developed analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment. The

holder of the qualification will be able to evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively.

Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours should have the qualities needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable circumstances.

4. Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6

Extract from: Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 (annexe D),
Published by the QAA in 2024.

An explanation of each classification

Students are assessed against the learning outcomes of their course and modules, with the curriculum providing opportunities to develop, practice and achieve the outcomes and demonstrate the characteristics associated with the level of learning of the stage of study and/or qualification.

Learning outcomes include:

a) knowledge and understanding
b) cognitive and intellectual skills
c) skills and capabilities related to employability
d) transferable or key skills
e) professional competences, where relevant.

Certain professional courses may include specific professional competence requirements set by PSRB's.

A student's grade or classification is determined by their level of attainment within this basic structure and their own engagement with the curricula and learning opportunities on offer to enhance their ability to apply the skills, methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects. Students are assessed throughout their course according to assessment criteria set at course or module level in line with generic institutional and sector descriptors and reference points.

Ordinary Degrees (without honours)

Extract from Outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6 (annex D)
Published by QAA in 2024

Ordinary degrees In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, full-time honours degrees usually take place over three years; in Scotland, they take place over four years.

Whichever model is followed, providers may permit students to study slightly fewer credits and achieve an ordinary degree - an award which is still set at Level 6 FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland but is at Level 9 FQHEIS in Scotland.

Students completing an ordinary degree are awarded a pass/merit/distinction or a fail - they are not classified in the same way as honours degrees.

Ordinary degrees are structured in several ways with typical models including a general degree where the emphasis is on breadth rather than depth of study, or a designated degree where the main subject of study will be identified in the award title and/or student transcript.

Ordinary degrees are also sometimes awarded to students who take the full honours degree but do not succeed in all assessments.

Classification is then determined by Degree Awarding Organisation guidelines and judged against designated bands. These bands are standard for degree classification within the higher education sector in the UK.

The tables below show final grades in the UK and their corresponding equivalent in the ECTS system.

Degree Class	Percentage Score	ECTS Grade
First-Class Degree	70% -100%	A
Upper Second-Class Degree	60% – 69%	B
Lower Second-Class Degree	50% -59%	C
Third Class Degree	40% -49%	D
Fail	0-39%	E/F

https://universitycompare.com/advice/student/ects

5. Degree classifications

SRC, in partnership with the local university and in alignment with FHEQ Level 6 descriptors , will upon awarding a degree, expect a graduate to have demonstrated and possess the skills and attributes attached to their respective classification, as described below:

Not successful	Third-class honours (3rd)	Lower second-class honours (2.2)	Upper second-class honours (2.1)	First-class honours (1st)

The student did not achieve the required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:	The student achieved all their required course learning outcomes and:
did not consistently demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	demonstrated knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	demonstrated strong knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	demonstrated thorough knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills	consistently demonstrated advanced knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and transferable skills
did not consistently demonstrate adequate initiative and personal responsibility	demonstrated initiative and exercised personal responsibility	demonstrated initiative and personal responsibility	demonstrated good initiative and personal responsibility	consistently demonstrated exceptional initiative and personal responsibility
did not consistently demonstrate ability to reflect on their work	demonstrated some ability to reflect on their work	demonstrated an ability to reflect on their work	demonstrated an ability to reflect critically on their work	consistently demonstrated ability to reflect critically and independently on their work
did not consistently demonstrate problem-solving skills	demonstrated problem- solving skills	demonstrated strong problem-solving skills	demonstrated thorough problem-solving skills	consistently demonstrated exceptional problem-solving skills

Annex D, [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (qaa.ac.uk)]

6. Detailed descriptors

The following QAA descriptor tables present a detailed enunciation of how the broad graduate attributes acquired by students during their course might apply across different skills areas, competences and attributes.

Courses necessarily vary in what and how they assess, according to subject requirements. The different characteristics may not necessarily be assessed equally – programme teams are free to design courses with assessment weighted towards skills as they deem appropriate for meeting the required learning outcomes (subject to approval by the University during validation/ revalidation).

The criteria below present a holistic overview of the level a graduate would be expected to have reached during their degree.

Not all descriptors will apply to all courses to the same extent: for example, numeracy and digital skills may not be as applicable to some arts courses as creativity skills, while the reverse might be true of some STEM subjects.

If some criteria are not applicable to a given course, they may not need to be referenced.

7. Knowledge and understanding

A systematic extensive and comparative understanding of key aspects of the field of study, including coherent and detailed knowledge of the subject and critical understanding of theories and concepts, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student's knowledge and understanding of the subject is inadequate, without the required breadth or depth, with deficiencies in key areas.	The student has demonstrated a depth of knowledge and understanding in key aspects of their field of study, sufficient to deal with terminology, facts and concepts.	The student has demonstrated a sound breadth and depth of subject knowledge and understanding, if sometimes balanced towards the descriptive rather than the critical or analytical.	The student has demonstrated sophisticated breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding, showing a clear, critical insight.	The student has shown exceptional knowledge and understanding, significantly beyond the threshold expectation of a graduate at this level and beyond what has been taught.
The student has demonstrated inadequate understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, including their limitations and ambiguities.	The student has demonstrated an understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles.	The student has consistently demonstrated an understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles as well as more specialised areas.	The student has demonstrated a thorough understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, and a sound understanding of more specialised areas.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional understanding of subject-specific theories, paradigms, concepts and principles, and in-depth knowledge, if not mastery of a range of specialised areas.
The student has not produced sufficient evidence of background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study.	The student has conducted general background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques, with the ability to extract relevant points.	The student has conducted background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques accurately, and can critically appraise academic sources.	The student has conducted thorough background investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study using established techniques accurately, and possesses a well-developed ability to critically appraise a wide range of sources.	The student has conducted independent, extensive and appropriate investigation, analysis, research, enquiry and/or study well beyond the usual range, together with critical evaluation, to advance work and/or direct arguments.

Annex D, [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (qaa.ac.uk)]

8. Cognitive skills

A conceptual understanding of a level that is necessary to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems and comment on research and scholarship in the discipline, with an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has displayed an over-reliance on set sources. They have not demonstrated an adequate ability to select and evaluate reading and research.	The student has demonstrated the ability to select, evaluate and comment on reading, research and primary sources.	The student has selected, evaluated and commented on reading, research and primary sources, sometimes beyond the set range.	The student has thoroughly selected, critically evaluated and commented on reading, research and primary sources, usually beyond the set range.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional ability to select, consider, evaluate, comment on and synthesise a broad range of research, primary sources, views and information and integrate references.
The student's arguments and explanations are weak and/or poorly constructed, and they are not able to critically evaluate the arguments of others or consider alternative views.	The student has shown the ability to devise and sustain an argument, with some consideration of alternative views, and can explain often complex matters and ideas.	The student has argued logically, with supporting evidence, and has demonstrated the ability to consider and evaluate a range of views and information. They have clearly and consistently explained complex matters and ideas.	The student has demonstrated the ability to make coherent, substantiated arguments, as well as the ability to consider, critically evaluate and synthesise a range of views and information. They have demonstrated a thorough, perceptive and thoughtful interpretation of complex matters and ideas.	The student has made consistent, logical, coherently developed, and substantiated arguments, and demonstrated the ability to systematically consider, critically evaluate and synthesise a wide range of views and information. They have demonstrated sophisticated perception, critical insight and interpretation of complex matters and ideas.
The student has shown a limited ability to solve problems and/or make decisions.	The student has demonstrated an ability to solve problems, applying a range of methods to do so, and the ability to make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances.	The student has consistently solved complex problems, selecting and applying a range of appropriate methods, and can make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances.	The student has demonstrated thorough problem-solving skills, selecting and justifying their use of a wide-range of methods, and can make decisions in complex and unpredictable circumstances with a degree of autonomy.	The student has demonstrated a wide range of extremely well-developed problem-solving skills, as well as a strong aptitude for decision-making with a high degree of autonomy, in the most complex and unpredictable circumstances.
The student has shown little or no real creativity.	The student has produced some creative work.	The student has consistently demonstrated creativity.	The student has shown a high level of creativity and	The student has demonstrated exceptional creative flair and originality.

			originality throughout their work.	

Annex D, [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (qaa.ac.uk)]

9. Practical skills

An ability to manage one's individual learning and to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline or as necessary for the discipline.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has not demonstrated sufficient evidence of discipline-specific skills development or application.	The student has demonstrated evidence of developing and applying discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has consistently demonstrated the development and informed application of discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has demonstrated a capable and effective application of discipline-specific specialist skills.	The student has demonstrated an accomplished and innovative application of discipline-specific specialist skills.
The student has attempted practical tasks/processes but followed a limited, procedural or mechanistic formula, and they contain errors, with little or no independence.	The student has completed practical tasks and/or processes accurately and with a degree of independence.	The student has consistently completed practical tasks/processes mainly independently in an accurate, well-coordinated and proficient way.	The student has performed practical tasks and/or processes autonomously, with accuracy and coordination.	The student has autonomously completed practical tasks and/or processes with a high degree of accuracy, coordination and proficiency.
The student has demonstrated a lack of technical, creative and/or artistic skills in most, or key, areas.	The student has demonstrated technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has consistently demonstrated well-developed technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has a thorough command of highly-developed relevant technical, creative and/or artistic skills.	The student has a full range of exceptional technical, creative and/or artistic skills.
The student has not presented their research findings clearly or effectively, and their gathering, processing and interpretation of data is unsatisfactory.	The student has presented their research findings, in several formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted data effectively.	The student has consistently presented their research findings effectively and appropriately in many formats, and has gathered, processed and interpreted	The student has presented thorough research findings perceptively and appropriately in a wide range of formats, and has gathered, processed and	The student has presented research findings perceptively, convincingly and appropriately in a wide range of formats, and has gathered, processed and

		data efficiently and effectively.	interpreted a wide range of complex data efficiently and effectively.	interpreted a wide range of complex data efficiently and effectively.

Annex D, [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (qaa.ac.uk)]

10. Transferable skills

Personal and enabling skills appropriate to the discipline, including the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences, the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student is not able to sufficiently express ideas and convey clear meaning verbally, electronically and/or in writing, uses inaccurate terminology, with many errors in spelling, vocabulary and syntax. They have been unable to demonstrate consistently basic numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions verbally, electronically and in writing, with clear expression and style. They have also demonstrated numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can consistently and confidently communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions verbally, electronically and in writing. They show a clear, coherent, expressive style, with a range of vocabulary. They have consistently demonstrated strong numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions with a high-degree of proficiency verbally, electronically and in writing. They have a clear, fluent and expressive style with appropriate vocabulary. They have a high standard of numeracy and digital literacy skills.	The student can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to an accomplished level verbally, electronically and in writing. They have shown an accurate, fluent, sophisticated style. They possess exceptional numeracy and digital literacy skills.
The student has made infrequent contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has demonstrated a capability of making useful contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has consistently demonstrated the capability to make coherent and constructive contributions to group discussions and/or project work.	The student has demonstrated the capability to make strong, valuable contributions to group discussions and/or project work, with an understanding of team and leadership roles.	The student has demonstrated the capability to make clear, authoritative and valuable contributions to group discussions and/or project work, with exceptional teamwork and leadership skills.

The student has demonstrated little or no ability to manage their learning and/or work without supervision.	The student has shown an ability to manage their learning and work with minimal or no supervision.	The student has consistently shown an ability to systematically manage their learning and work without supervision.	The student has shown a strong ability to systematically manage their learning and work without supervision.	The student has shown an exceptional ability to manage their learning on their own initiative, and work without supervision.
The student has not demonstrated adequate initiative or personal responsibility.	The student has demonstrated initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has consistently demonstrated initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has consistently demonstrated well-developed initiative and/or personal responsibility.	The student has demonstrated exceptional initiative and/or personal responsibility.
The student has shown little or no ability to reflect on their work.	The student has demonstrated the ability to reflect on their work.	The student has consistently demonstrated a well-developed ability to reflect on their work.	The student has demonstrated the ability to reflect critically on their work.	The student has demonstrated an exceptional ability to reflect critically and independently on their work.

Annex D, [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (qaa.ac.uk)]

11. Professional competences (to the extent that they are expressed by the course learning outcomes)

Typically, where a degree award requires an assessment of professional competencies, no award will be made if the student does not meet them. Providers remain free to set course learning outcomes above the threshold and classify students accordingly.

Not successful	3rd (pass or threshold)	2.2	2.1	1st
The student has not demonstrated achievement of professional competence when assessed against the requirements of a professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB).	The student has demonstrated achievement of professional competence when assessed against the requirements of a PSRB.			

The student has failed to adhere to the appropriate rules and/or conventions set by regulators or the industry.	The student has adhered to the appropriate rules and/or conventions set by regulators or the industry.

Annex D, The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (qaa.ac.uk)