

**ACADEMIC GUIDANCE 3:  
Postgraduate Level Descriptors**

**2011-2012**

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# POSTGRADUATE LEVEL DESCRIPTORS - (adapted from SEEC/HECIW Levels Descriptors)

## LEVEL 7

### Operational Context:

The context of the learning will have the following characteristics:

- complex with elements of unpredictability, demanding innovative work which may involve exploring the current limits of knowledge (either theoretical or applied)
- containing a high level of responsibility for self and possibly for others
- requiring an awareness of ethical dilemmas likely to arise in research/professional practice

### Cognitive/Intellectual Skills (generic)

The learner will demonstrate:

- depth of knowledge in a complex and specialised area and/or a considerable breadth of knowledge across specialised and applied areas
- an ability to deal with complexity, lacunae and contradictions in a complex knowledge base using appropriate methods
- independent evaluation of alternative approaches (including their own) together with the ability to accurately report this
- a confident response to problems by autonomously synthesising information/ideas to provide solutions

### Key/Transferable Skills (generic)

The learner will demonstrate:

- engagement with a critical community, including reflection on own and others' practice
  - the ability to work with and within a group towards defined outcomes and can take the role of recognised leader or consultant
  - the ability to motivate others and to negotiate conflict effectively
  - the ability to engage in full professional and academic communication with peers
- The demonstration of the above skills will normally be embedded in a specific subject base.

The extent to which these qualities were expected would be indicated to the learner and not all aspects would be present in each element of work undertaken.

## **LEVEL 8**

### **Operational Context:**

The context of the learning will have the following characteristics:

- Complex and specialised involving unpredictability and requiring exploration at the forefront of knowledge/practice
- containing a high level of professional responsibility for self and possibly for others
- requiring an ability to engage with ethical and value conflicts within the practice/discipline and the assumptions underlying them

### **Cognitive/Intellectual Skills (generic)**

The learner will demonstrate:

- the ability to work systematically with theoretical/applied knowledge at the forefront of a discipline/practice
- a level of conceptual understanding allowing independent evaluation of advanced scholarship and methodologies
- the ability to manage contradictions or uncertainty with autonomy, including incompleteness of data
- the ability to generate substantial new understandings and approaches which extend or redefine existing knowledge/practice

### **Key/Transferable Skills (generic)**

The learner will demonstrate:

- the ability to undertake innovative research reflectively and independently
- technical mastery of a range of methodologies and their appropriate applications
- the ability to engage with and influence perceptions of a discipline/practice
- high level communication skills, including the ability to communicate complex or contentious information effectively in a range of contexts

The demonstration of the above skills will normally be embedded in one or more disciplines.

The extent to which these qualities are expected will be indicated to the learner and not all aspects would be present in each element of work undertaken.

## NOTES ON LEVELS DESCRIPTORS AT POSTGRADUATE LEVEL

1. These descriptors have been adapted from the more detailed Level Descriptors developed by the Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) in 2001.
2. They are generic statements describing the characteristics and context of learning expected at each level of postgraduate study. They make explicit expectations of learning at different levels of study and facilitate consistency across Kingston University awards.
3. The learning outlined in the descriptors may be integrated at module level through use of learning outcomes that are award specific. However, not all aspects of the descriptors must be demonstrated in every module.
4. The level descriptors should be read in conjunction with the generic award descriptors published by the Quality Assurance Agency ([the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#)).
5. The level 8 descriptors have been developed in the context of clear equivalence between professional doctorates and traditional doctorates.
6. The University recognises that professional doctorates have some particular characteristics common to doctoral study with a professional bias. The level 8 descriptors do not reflect these particular characteristics; rather they concentrate on the generic level of study. Learning outcomes may reflect the particular context. When the attached credit level descriptors are used in the context of the professional doctorate the following points should be considered:
  - Professional doctorates are designed for professionals who are immersed within their workplace environment, and for whom a 'traditional' doctorate may not be appropriate
  - The award is designed to meet the needs of professional practice, which often requires students to work as a group.
  - It is intended to facilitate theoretically-informed enquiry into professional practice, so that new knowledge/practice can be generated
  - In this award issues of high levels of theory and practice are blended to provide an appropriate response to professional needs.

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