

Academic Framework

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Purpose

1. The purpose of this Academic Framework is to define the standard structure for taught courses at the University of Buckingham.

Scope

2. Except as noted, this framework applies to all taught courses at the University of Buckingham, whether at foundation, undergraduate or postgraduate level.
3. This framework should be reviewed in conjunction with the University's policies and procedures concerned with the approval, review, and alteration of courses as well as those academic regulations concerned with student progression and completion.

Regulatory Considerations

4. This framework aligns with the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies and, therefore, supports compliance with the Office for Students' Condition of Registration B5 (alignment of awards with national standards).

Exceptions and Exemptions

5. Exceptions to this framework will normally only be accepted where necessary to meet professional, statutory, and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements, normally for accreditation purposes.
6. Any requests to deviate from this framework will need to be accompanied by a business case / rationale submitted to a panel comprising the Interim Chief Academic Officer and the Registrar & Chief Administrative Officer for approval.
7. Clinical courses (including, but not limited to, the MBChB, MMed and MSurg) are exempt from this framework in alignment with their known PSRB requirements.
8. For the avoidance of doubt, the University's research provisions contain no unit carrying taught modules.

Study Hours

8. The University's academic year comprises three terms (terms) each of thirteen weeks' duration.
9. In accordance with national standards, the University considers that one unit equates to ten hours of study.
10. Each term is the equivalent of 600 hours of study; this equates to an average of roughly 46 hours per week.
11. Modules will normally carry a unit value of 30. Modules with 15 or 45 units may be possible providing there is sufficient academic justification, and they can be paired with another 15-unit module delivered in the same term, thus ensuring the balance of overall unit volume is maintained. Approval will need to be sought from the Interim Chief Academic Officer and/or the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer.
12. The minimum contact hours per 30 units per term should normally be **5 hours** per week.

13. One module equates to the equivalent of 300 hours of study, and each term is the equivalent of 600 hours of study, this equates to an average of roughly 40 hours per week.

Unit Framework for England

Typical higher education qualifications within each level	FHEQ Level	Minimum credit	
PhD/DPhil	8	Not typically credit-rated	
Professional doctorates (eg DProf, EdD, DBA, DClinPsy)		540 (360 at FHEQ level 8)	
Research master's degrees (eg MRes, MPhil)	7	Not typically credit-rated	
Taught master's degrees (eg MA, MSc)		180 (150 at FHEQ level 7)	
Integrated master's degrees (eg MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm)		480 (120 at FHEQ level 7)	
Primary (or first) qualifications in medicine, (eg BM BS) and dentistry (eg BDS)		Not typically credit-rated	
Postgraduate diplomas		120 (90 at FHEQ level 7)	
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)		60 (40 at FHEQ level 7)	
Postgraduate certificates		60 (40 at FHEQ level 7)	
Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg BA/BSc Hons)		6	360 (90 at FHEQ level 6)
Bachelor's degrees			300 (60 at FHEQ level 6)
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (ProfGCE/sometimes referred to as PGCE)	60 (40 at FHEQ level 6)		
Graduate diplomas	80 (80 at FHEQ level 6)		
Graduate certificates	40 (40 at FHEQ level 6)		
Foundation degrees (eg FdA, FdSc)	5		240 (90 at FHEQ level 5)
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)		240 (90 at FHEQ level 5)	
Higher National Diplomas (HND awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Pearson)		240 (90 at FHEQ level 5)	
Higher National Certificates (HNC awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Pearson)		4	120 (60 at FHEQ level 4)
Certificates of Higher Education (Cert HE)	120 (90 at FHEQ level 4)		

14. The Unit Framework for England articulates the minimum levels of unit required for higher education courses at each level of study.
15. The expected educational aims of all Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications are laid out in the [Assessment Framework – FHEQ Level Characteristics](#) section below.

Foundation Course Structure

16. Certificated foundation-level courses will comprise 120 units at level 3 structured as 6 * 20-unit modules. A standard foundation course is delivered over 3 terms, with students studying the equivalent of 40 units per term.

17. International foundation provision is available as a 2-term course, structured as an 80-unit, online-delivered, non-certificated provision.

Undergraduate Course Structure

18. The University's undergraduate courses will consist of 360 units comprising 120 units at each of levels 4, 5 and 6.
19. The expected educational aims of all undergraduate level provision is laid out in the [Assessment Framework – FHEQ Level Characteristics](#)
20. All undergraduate courses will consist of 3 blocks comprising 2 terms each. This means that a full undergraduate degree is made up of 6 terms of the following structure:
 - a. Block 1, 2 terms made up of 4 level 4, 30- unit modules.
 - b. Block 2, 2 terms made up of 4 level 5, 30- unit modules.
 - c. Block 3, made up of 4 level 6, 30- unit modules; or 2 Level 6 30-unit modules, and 1 Level 6 60-unit module.
 - d. Note: Modules with 15 or 45 units may be possible providing there is sufficient academic justification, and they can be paired with another 15-unit module delivered in the same term. The Interim Chief Academic Officer and the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer must approve the use of 15- or 45-unit modules.
21. Undergraduate courses may be structured as:
 - e. Single honours
 - f. Major/minor
 - g. Joint honours
 - h. Combined honours
22. The framework for the structure of courses as approved by Senate is as follows:
 - i. a minor in a subject should comprise a minimum of 90 units and a maximum of 150 units.
 - j. a major in a subject should comprise a minimum of 210 units and a maximum of 270 units.
 - k. a joint honours course should comprise a minimum of 150 units in each of two subjects.
 - l. a combined honours courses should comprise three subjects with a minimum of 90 units in any individual subject.

Postgraduate Course Structures

23. All the Postgraduate Courses are comprised of Level 7 Modules. On standard Postgraduate provision this structure will normally be made up of combination of 30-unit modules. Master's Degrees will also typically contain a 60-unit Dissertation/ Research Project.
24. The expected educational aims of all postgraduate provisions are laid out in the [Assessment Framework – FHEQ Level Characteristics](#)
25. Postgraduate provision must follow the following structure:
 - m. Master's degree courses must consist of 180 units, with a minimum of 150-units at level 7.

- n. Postgraduate diplomas must consist of 120 units.
 - o. Postgraduate certificates must consist of 60 units.
26. All courses that have unit value assigned to taught provision at level 7 will be classified as taught degree courses. Research courses must be compiled of 180 units of research project, and no unit carrying taught modules.
27. Any research course which historically had unit bearing taught content can either be reclassified as a taught provision or have any of the unit bearing content reclassified as non-credit carrying provision.

Degree Course Titles

28. Degree course titles should be written in alignment with the University of Buckingham naming conventions.
29. Wherever possible, the word “with” should be used to link a major/minor combination/ to demonstrate instances in which 2 or more subjects are studied without equal weighting. The word “and” should be used to link two subjects which have an equal weighting across the award

Study and Contact Hours

30. The university operates a three-term structure. An academic year is made up of 3 terms each with a standard duration of 13 weeks including 1 week designated for assessment at the end of the term , and 1 reading week.
31. Modules will normally carry a unit value of 30 or multiple thereof. The standard adopted by the University of Buckingham is that **one unit = 10 hours of study**.
32. The minimum contact hours per 30 units per term should normally be **5 hours** per week based on 11 weeks of teaching.
33. One module equates to the equivalent to 300 hours of study, and each term is the equivalent of 600 hours of study, this equates to an average of roughly 46 hours per week.

Assessment Framework – FHEQ Level Characteristics

Below are the requirements for an award at each level as defined by QAA in the 2024 Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications.

These demonstrate the main generic outcomes which are expected from each level of study. This means that they are applicable to all subject disciplines. For subject specific criteria this can be reviewed in conjunction with the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements.

Level 4:

Awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study.
- an ability to 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.

Typically, holders of the qualification at level 4 will be able to:

- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work.
- communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments.
- undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility.

Level 5:

Awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed.
- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context • knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, 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 based on that knowledge.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- 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 and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively.
- undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

Level 6:

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

- 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.
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline.
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
- 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 aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline.
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity, and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able 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.
- 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
- communicate information, ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts
- the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

Level 7:

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- 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.
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - o to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - o to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- 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.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations of the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Level 8:

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication.
- a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice.
- the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems.
- a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.
- continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.