

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM QUALIFICATION DESCRIPTORS  
FOR POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES

QUALIFICATION DESCRIPTORS FOR THE FOLLOWING QUALIFICATIONS:

Graduate Certificate  
Graduate Diploma  
Postgraduate Certificate  
Postgraduate Diploma  
Taught Masters Degree  
Doctorate with Integrated Studies  
Professional Doctorate

GRADUATE CERTIFICATE

1. The holder of a Durham Graduate Certificate or Diploma will have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge, some of it at or close to current boundaries of an academic discipline or disciplines. He/she will be able to evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements, and to communicate effectively.
2. A Durham Graduate Certificate is awarded to a student who has demonstrated:
  - (a) a systematic understanding of selected aspects of their field of study, based upon coherent knowledge of core areas, and advanced knowledge of defined topics that is informed by research at, or close to, the current forefront of the subject(s);
  - (b) the ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within the subject(s);
  - (c) conceptual understanding that enables the student:
    - (i) to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline;
    - (ii) to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in defined areas of their programme of study;
    - (iii) to use appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks to order and/or interpret new data or kinds of evidence;
    - (iv) to critically evaluate the reliability, validity and significance of data, evidence or interpretations within the field of study;
  - (d) an awareness of current disciplinary boundaries and an appreciation of the uncertainty, limits and contested nature of knowledge within their programme of study;
  - (e) the ability to direct and manage their own learning effectively across a range of topics;
  - (f) the ability to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (eg refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).
3. Typically, a holder of the qualification will be able to:
  - (a) 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 or further enquiry within areas of their programme of study;
  - (b) critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete); to formulate judgements, and to frame appropriate strategies to investigate topics within defined aspects of their programme of study;
  - (c) communicate relevant information, concepts, ideas and, where appropriate, problems and solutions, within their programme of study to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;and will have:
  - (d) academic qualities such as flexibility and discrimination, together with personal qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:

- (i) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
- (ii) decision making in complex and unpredictable contexts;
- (iii) the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further education and training of professional or equivalent nature and standard.

## GRADUATE DIPLOMA

1. A Durham Graduate Diploma is awarded to a student who has demonstrated:
  - (a) a systematic understanding of their field of study, based upon coherent knowledge of core areas, and advanced knowledge of selected aspects that is informed by research at, or close to, the current forefront of the subject(s);
  - (b) the ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within the subject(s);
  - (c) conceptual understanding that enables the student:
    - (i) to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline;
    - (ii) to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in defined areas of their programme of study;
    - (iii) to use appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks to order and/or interpret new data or kinds of evidence;
    - (iv) to critically evaluate the reliability, validity and significance of data, evidence or interpretations within the field of study;
  - (d) an awareness of current disciplinary boundaries and an appreciation of the uncertainty, limits and contested nature of knowledge within their programme of study;
  - (e) the ability to direct and manage their own learning effectively across a range of topics;
  - (f) the ability to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).
2. Typically, a holder of the qualification will be able to:
  - (a) 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 or further enquiry within areas of their programme of study;
  - (b) critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete); to formulate judgements, and to frame appropriate strategies to investigate topics within defined aspects of their programme of study;
  - (c) communicate relevant information, concepts, ideas and, where appropriate, problems and solutions, within their programme of study to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
 and will have:
  - (d) academic qualities such as flexibility and discrimination, together with personal qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
    - (i) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
    - (ii) decision making in complex and unpredictable contexts;
    - (iii) the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further education and training of a professional or equivalent nature and standard.

## POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE

1. A Durham graduate at Postgraduate Certificate level will have developed an understanding of a complex and specialised body of knowledge which may be informed by research and original thinking at current boundaries of theoretical knowledge. The graduate will be able to evaluate evidence according to rigorous academic criteria, and to communicate effectively.

2. A Durham Postgraduate Certificate is awarded to a student who has demonstrated one or more of the following:
  - (a) knowledge across one or more specialized or applied areas which may be informed by research at the current limits of understanding;
  - (b) the high-level skills needed to understand research findings;
  - (c) the ability to decide on appropriate advanced techniques of analysis and inquiry within their specialist field, including the ability to modify established techniques where appropriate;
  - (d) conceptual understanding that enables the student:
    - (i) to absorb and evaluate a complex literature and/or body of research results;
    - (ii) to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of competing methods of inquiry and conceptual frameworks in the discipline;
    - (iii) to identify and solve problems, using appropriate, and sometimes innovative, techniques and methods;
  - (e) a recognition of apparent contradictions and ambiguities in the field of knowledge and of the areas in which further research is necessary;
  - (f) the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning, including the ability:
    - (i) to direct their own study and manage time effectively;
    - (ii) to make critical and discriminating use of primary research literature in the discipline.
  
3. Typically, a holder of the qualification will, across a defined range of topics, be able to:
  - (a) apply knowledge so as to make supportable judgements when confronted by new problems within their own specialised or applied area;
  - (b) communicate complex information and detailed argument in a clear and orderly way to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
  - (c) work autonomously, taking a high level of responsibility for their work, and, where appropriate, for the work of others;
  - (d) make professional or academic judgements which may involve others and which recognize the limits of their own competence;
  - (e) observe professional and academic codes of conduct and confront ethical issues with due respect
 and will have:
  - (f) academic qualities such as flexibility, discrimination and resourcefulness, together with personal qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
    - (i) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
    - (ii) decision making in complex and unpredictable contexts;
    - (iii) problem posing and problem solving;
    - (iv) identification of and respect for empirical data.

#### POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA

1. A Durham graduate at Postgraduate Diploma level will have developed a thorough understanding of a complex and specialised body of knowledge which may be informed by research and original thinking at current boundaries of theoretical knowledge. The graduate will be able to evaluate evidence according to rigorous academic criteria, and to communicate effectively.
  
2. A Durham Postgraduate Diploma is awarded to a student who has demonstrated:
  - (a) a depth of knowledge across one or more specialized or applied areas which may be informed by research at the current limits of understanding;
  - (b) the high-level skills needed to understand research findings;
  - (c) the ability to decide on appropriate advanced techniques of analysis and inquiry within their specialist field, including the ability to modify established techniques where appropriate;
  - (d) conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- (i) to absorb and evaluate a complex literature and/or body of research results;
  - (ii) to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of competing methods of inquiry and conceptual frameworks in the discipline;
  - (iii) to identify and solve problems, using appropriate, and sometimes innovative, techniques and methods;
- (e) a recognition of apparent contradictions and ambiguities in the field of knowledge and of the areas in which further research is necessary;
  - (f) the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning, including the ability:
    - (i) to direct their own study and manage time effectively;
    - (ii) to make critical and discriminating use of primary research literature in the discipline.
3. Typically, a holder of the qualification will be able to:
- (a) apply a depth of knowledge so as to make supportable judgements when confronted by new problems within their own specialised or applied area;
  - (b) communicate complex information and detailed argument in a clear and orderly way to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
  - (c) work autonomously, taking a high level of responsibility for their work, and, where appropriate, for the work of others;
  - (d) make professional or academic judgements which may involve others and which recognize the limits of their own competence;
  - (e) observe professional and academic codes of conduct and confront ethical issues with due respect;
- and will have:
- (f) academic qualities such as flexibility, discrimination and resourcefulness, together with personal qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
    - (i) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
    - (ii) decision making in complex and unpredictable contexts;
    - (iii) problem posing and problem solving;
    - (iv) identification of and respect for empirical data.

#### TAUGHT MASTERS DEGREE

1. A Durham graduate at Masters level will have developed a thorough understanding of a complex and specialised body of knowledge which may be informed by research and original thinking at current boundaries of theoretical knowledge. The graduate will be able to evaluate evidence according to rigorous academic criteria, to contribute to debate at the frontiers of knowledge, and to communicate effectively.
2. A Durham Masters Degree will be awarded to a student who has demonstrated:
  - (a) a depth of knowledge across one or more specialised or applied areas which may be informed by research at the current limits of understanding;
  - (b) the high-level skills needed to understand research findings and contribute to debate at the current frontiers of knowledge;
  - (c) the ability to decide on appropriate advanced techniques of analysis and inquiry within their specialist field, including the ability to modify established techniques where appropriate;
  - (d) conceptual understanding that enables the student:
    - (i) to absorb and evaluate a complex literature and/or body of research results;
    - (ii) to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of competing methods of inquiry and conceptual frameworks in the discipline;
    - (iii) to identify and solve problems, using appropriate, and sometimes innovative, techniques and methods;
  - (e) a recognition of apparent contradictions and ambiguities in the field of knowledge and of the areas in which further research is necessary;
  - (f) the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning, including the ability;

- (i) to direct their own study and manage time effectively;
- (ii) to make critical and discriminating use of primary research literature in the discipline;
- (iii) to undertake independent investigation of a defined topic in order to reach valid conclusions, some of which may be original, and which are worthy of note by peers; and to report these findings effectively and within the conventions of the academic community to which they belong.

3. Typically, a holder of the qualification will be able to:

- (a) conduct original research either independently or in a team as the next stage in their career; and in particular to identify appropriate fields of inquiry, determine an appropriate investigative methodology and pursue their research to a conclusion;
- (b) apply advanced methods and techniques of inquiry to new problems in their field;
- (c) apply a depth of knowledge so as to make supportable judgements when confronted by new problems within their own specialised or applied area;
- (d) communicate complex information and detailed argument in a clear and orderly way to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- (e) work autonomously, taking a high level of responsibility for their work, and, where appropriate, for the work of others;
- (f) make professional or academic judgements which may involve others and which recognise the limits of their own competence;
- (g) observe professional and academic codes of conduct and confront ethical issues with due respect;

and will have:

- (h) academic qualities such as flexibility, discrimination and resourcefulness, together with personal qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  - (i) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
  - (ii) decision making in complex and unpredictable contexts;
  - (iii) problem posing and problem solving;
  - (iv) identification of and respect for empirical data;
- (i) academic training and the learning skills needed to undertake original research.

#### DOCTORATE WITH INTEGRATED STUDIES

1. A Durham graduate at Doctorate with Integrated Studies level will have developed the ability to conduct an original investigation based on a detailed and extensive knowledge of a specific area of their discipline, including an understanding of its place in the wider field of learning to which it is related and a recognition of areas in which further research is required. The results of this investigation will constitute an original contribution to knowledge and include matter worthy of publication presented in a form which is clear, orderly and in accordance with the conventions for reporting primary research in the relevant academic community.
2. A Durham Doctorate with Integrated Studies is awarded to a student who has demonstrated:
  - (a) a detailed knowledge in a specific area of their discipline based on a wide-ranging, critical study of the relevant literature and research results;
  - (b) the ability to identify areas in which further research is required and to frame testable hypotheses and/or other appropriate research questions;
  - (c) the ability to decide on appropriate methods of enquiry suitable for the investigation of particular cases and contexts within their specialist field, including the ability, where appropriate, to modify established techniques and introduce innovative methods;
  - (d) the ability to undertake independent investigation within a defined area leading to valid, original conclusions worthy of publication (although not necessarily presented in a form suitable for publication) and to report their findings in a clear, concise, orderly way;

- (e) conceptual understanding that enables them to understand and evaluate a wide-ranging and complex literature and body of research results as well as the advantages and disadvantages of competing methods of inquiry and conceptual frameworks;
  - (f) the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning, including the ability to direct their own study and manage time effectively.
3. Typically a holder of the qualification will be able to:
- (a) conduct original research; in particular to identify appropriate fields of inquiry, determine an appropriate investigative methodology and pursue their research to a conclusion which makes an original contribution to knowledge;
  - (b) identify problems in their field based on a depth of knowledge and apply advanced methods and techniques of data collection and analysis;
  - (c) communicate research findings that include complex information and detailed argument in a clear and orderly way;
  - (d) work autonomously, taking a high level of responsibility for their work, and, where appropriate, for the work of others;
  - (e) make professional or academic judgements which may involve others and which recognise the limits of their own competence and the rights of informants;
  - (f) observe professional and academic codes of conduct and confront ethical issues with due respect.
- and will have:
- (g) academic qualities such as flexibility, discrimination, and resourcefulness together with personal qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
    - (i) understanding of a range of complex phenomena;
    - (ii) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
    - (iii) decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts;
    - (iv) problem-posing and problem-solving;
    - (v) identification of and respect for empirical data;
  - (h) academic training and the learning skills needed to undertake original research;
  - (i) the subject knowledge, research training and academic experience necessary to guide colleagues with less experience.

## PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE

1. A Durham graduate at Professional Doctorate level will have developed the ability to conduct an original investigation based on a detailed and extensive knowledge of a specific area of their discipline, including an understanding of its place in the wider field of learning to which it is related and a recognition of areas in which further research is required. The results of this investigation will constitute an original contribution to knowledge, will have the potential to enhance an area of professional practice and will include matter worthy of publication presented in a form which is clear, orderly and in accordance with the conventions for reporting primary research in the relevant academic community.
2. A Durham Professional Doctorate is awarded to a student who has demonstrated:
  - (a) a detailed knowledge in a specific area of their discipline based on a wide-ranging, critical study of the relevant literature and research results;
  - (b) the ability to identify areas in which further research is required and to frame testable hypotheses and/or other appropriate research questions;
  - (c) the ability to decide on appropriate methods of enquiry suitable for the investigation of particular cases and contexts within their specialist field, including the ability, where appropriate, to modify established techniques and introduce innovative methods;
  - (d) the ability to undertake independent investigation within a defined area leading to valid, original conclusions worthy of publication (although not necessarily presented in a form suitable for publication) and to report their findings in a clear, concise, orderly way;

- (e) conceptual understanding that enables them to understand and evaluate a wide-ranging and complex literature and body of research results as well as the advantages and disadvantages of competing methods of inquiry and conceptual frameworks;
- (f) the capacity to take responsibility for their own learning, including the ability to direct their own study and manage time effectively.

3. Typically a holder of the qualification will be able to:

- (a) conduct original research; in particular to identify appropriate fields of inquiry, determine an appropriate investigative methodology and pursue their research to a conclusion which makes an original contribution to knowledge;
- (b) identify problems in their field based on a depth of knowledge and apply advanced methods and techniques of data collection and analysis;
- (c) communicate research findings that include complex information and detailed argument in a clear and orderly way;
- (d) work autonomously, taking a high level of responsibility for their work, and, where appropriate, for the work of others;
- (e) make professional or academic judgements which may involve others and which recognise the limits of their own competence and the rights of informants;
- (f) observe professional and academic codes of conduct and confront ethical issues with due respect.

and will have:

- (g) academic and professional qualities such as flexibility, discrimination, and resourcefulness together with personal qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  - (i) understanding of a range of complex phenomena;
  - (ii) the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility;
  - (iii) decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts;
  - (iv) problem-posing and problem-solving;
  - (v) identification of and respect for empirical data;
- (h) academic training and the learning skills needed to undertake original research;
- (i) the subject knowledge, research training and academic experience necessary to guide professional colleagues with less experience.

These qualification descriptors are generic and apply to all subject areas at the relevant level across the University. Each department supplements these with its own subject-specific descriptors in line with the relevant benchmarks and other requirements appropriate to the discipline.