

Guidance on Professional Certificates and Professional Diplomas

The University's Professional Certificate and Professional Diploma awards are consistent with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), wherein Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may offer awards that are of less volume than degrees, that are highly accessible and that are undertaken by learners seeking professional or vocational competence (particularly in the context of work based learning). Furthermore, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) recognises the value that employers, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and students place on the employment, professional and vocational relevance of such courses.

- 1.1 The above principles have informed the definition of the University's Professional Certificate and Professional Diploma awards. Although part of NTU's award framework (see Quality Handbook (QH) Sections 3 and 4), they are intended to be free from some of the constraints that would govern entire degree courses – in particular, rules governing modular structures, specific Common Assessment Regulations (CAR) and aspects of assessment and admission requirements (although the University's level descriptors do apply).
- 1.2 Students enrolling on Professional Certificate and Professional Diploma courses are normally sponsored by their employers or are undertaking training or updating for PSRB accreditation. Such students are typically working towards specific Continuing Professional Development (CPD) outcomes, which are often defined in competence terms and will have practice elements. Students are almost always concerned with the enhancement of their vocational or professional skills, and ultimately with the employment avenues opened up to them by the course, rather than with the academic 'badge'.
- 1.3 Since Professional Certificate and Professional Diploma students are enrolling on courses that are not governed by the University Degree CAR, course teams are required to use a set of standard requirements when drafting assessment regulations for their course(s) (see QH Section 16G). These regulations may

contain features not necessarily included in Degree CAR – for example, clauses on failure on non-academic grounds, standards of professional behaviour or absolute attendance requirements. By enrolling on a Professional Certificate or Professional Diploma, a student must be made aware that they are accepting the provisions of that course’s specific regulations.

- 1.4 All Professional Certificate and Professional Diploma courses are subject to peer review and approval. However, a Development and Approval Group (DAG) needs to be mindful that the awards do not need to conform to all aspects of the University’s regulatory framework as set out in the Quality Handbook. DAG scrutiny should be rooted in confidence that the course team’s chosen structure and design will be based upon its intimate understanding of the professional area and the outcomes to be achieved. The DAG’s prime concern will be on whether the proposal is rational and defensive, and a DAG should not seek to re-design a course or make it conform to degree requirements.

Policy owner
CADQ

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