Nottingham Trent University

Grading Scheme for Postgraduate Taught Courses

2013

The NTU Grading Scheme

This document defines the NTU generic level and grading descriptors for application to assessment on postgraduate taught courses. The document also shows the relation between degree classes, the fourteen grades of the NTU system, and the numerical equivalents and mark ranges applicable to assessment at the element and module level.

The purpose of defining these descriptors is to provide the NTU standard against which Schools can develop their own grading schemes.

Notes on the generic level descriptors

The generic level descriptors provide a guide to the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and degree of learner autonomy expected of a learner at different stages of study irrespective of the subject and context.

The University generic level descriptors for postgraduate study are consistent with the Ofqual[1] National Qualifications Framework Level 7.

In designing or revising courses, course teams and module convenors should ensure that course outcomes are appropriate to the level descriptors.[2]

Notes on the general grading descriptors

The general grading descriptors define, for each postgraduate level, the standards of performance expected across the NTU fourteen point grading scale. These are aligned with the generic level descriptors identified above.

The descriptors define common characteristics expected of work at each of the different grade bands, at postgraduate level.

The descriptors also include (bold text) elements of the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy. These define different levels of understanding across the grades in terms of the structural complexity of students' responses.

Schools and Academic Teams may choose to refine the general grading descriptors to suit specific discipline areas, however, it is important to retain the Solo Taxonomy features of the descriptors.

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[1] Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

[2] Academic Standards and Quality Handbook, October 2011. Section 13, 'Postgraduate award framework', Section C, pages 4-5

Taught Masters (Level 7 NQF)

Generic level descriptors

Knowledge/Skills	Tasks/Procedures	Autonomy/ Responsibilities
Displays a comprehensive understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which will be the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study or field of professional practice; demonstrates expertise in highly specialised and advanced research, technical, communication and professional skills as appropriate.	Conducts advanced research or equivalent, technical or professional enquiry; comprehensively understands, designs and applies appropriate research methodologies and techniques; communicates results of research to peers in an appropriate manner.	Accepts accountability and performs independently with a level of responsibility.

General grading descriptors – Taught Masters (Level 7 NQF)

Class	Scale	General Characteristics
DISTINCTION (Excellent)	Exceptional Dist. 93-100%	Exceptional breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding evidenced by own independent insight and critical awareness of relevant literature and concepts at the forefront of the discipline; evidence of extensive and appropriate independent inquiry operating with advanced concepts, methods and techniques to solve problems in unfamiliar contexts; Cogent arguments and explanations are consistently provided using a range of media demonstrating an ability to communicate effectively in a variety of formats using a sophisticated level of the English language in an eloquent and professional manner to both technical and non-technical audiences; a sustained academic approach to all aspects of the tasks is evidenced; academic work extends boundaries of the disciplines and is beyond expectation of the level and **may achieve or be very close to publishable or commercial standard**.
	High Dist. 85-92%	Excellent knowledge and understanding **evidenced by some clear independent insight and critical awareness of relevant concepts some of which are at the forefront of the discipline**; evidence of appropriate independent inquiry operating with core concepts, methods and techniques to solve complex problems in mostly familiar contexts; Arguments and explanations are provided that is well-supported by the literature and in some cases uses a range of media demonstrating an ability to communicate effectively in a limited number of formats using own style that is suited to both technical and non-technical audiences; a sustained academic approach to most aspects of the tasks is evidenced; **one or more aspects of the academic work is beyond the prescribed range** and evidences a competent understanding of all of the relevant taught content.
	Mid Dist. 78-84%	
	Dist. 70-77%	
COMMENDAT[N] (Very good)	High Comm. 67-69%	Very good knowledge and understanding is evidenced as the student **is typically able to independently relate taught facts/concepts together some of which are at the forefront of the discipline**; evidence of some competent independent inquiry operating with core concepts, methods and techniques to solve familiar problems; Arguments and explanations are provided that are typically supported by the literature and in some cases may challenge some received wisdoms; competently uses all taught media and communication methods to communicate effectively in a familiar settings; an academically rigorous approach applied to some aspects of the tasks is evidenced; some beyond the prescribed range, may rely on set sources to advance work/direct arguments; demonstrates autonomy in approach to learning.
	Mid Comm. 64-66%	
	Comm. 60-63%	
PASS (Good)	High Pass 57-59%	Good knowledge and understanding of the area of study **balanced towards the descriptive rather than critical or analytical and mostly confined to concepts that are not at the forefront of the discipline**; evidence of some independent reading and research to advance work and inform arguments and approaches; Arguments and explanations are limited in range and depth although some are adequately supported by the literature albeit descriptively rather than critically; competently uses at least one taught media and communication method to communicate appropriately in familiar settings; although the approach applied to some aspects of the tasks may lack academic rigour, there are some clear areas of competence within the prescribed range. Relies on set sources to advance work/direct arguments and communicated in a way which shows clarity but structure may not always be coherent.
	Mid Pass 54-56%	
	Pass 50-53%	

Class	Scale	General Characteristics
FAIL (Insufficient)	Marginal fail 45-49%	**Knowledge and understanding is marginally insufficient as the student is typically only able to deal with terminology, basic facts and concepts**; Adequate knowledge of concepts within the prescribed range but fails to add meaningful detail or make sufficient links between concepts and facts to adequately solve problems posed by the assessment; some ability to independently select and evaluate reading/research however there is a strong reliance on set sources and to provide descriptive and unsubstantiated arguments/methods; communication/presentation is competent in places and at a threshold level as it fails to demonstrate clarity and focus; inability to adequately define problems and make reasoned judgements; The general approach to tasks lacks rigor and where there is competence and rigor, it is not sustained.
	Mid fail 40-44%	**Knowledge and understanding is insufficient as the student only evidences an understanding of small subset of the taught concepts and techniques**; fails to make sufficient links between known concepts and facts to adequately solve relevant aspects of the brief/problem; little ability to independently select and evaluate reading/research with almost total reliance on set sources and unsubstantiated arguments/methods; communication/presentation may be competent in places but fails to demonstrate structure, clarity and/or focus; inability to adequately define problems and make reasoned judgements; The general approach to tasks lacks rigor and competence.
	Low fail 1-39%	**Knowledge and understanding is highly insufficient as the student is unable to evidence any meaningful understanding of two or more taught concepts or methods**; very limited evidence of reading and research to advance work; inadequate technical and practical skills as the student is unable to use and apply such skills to address problems or make judgements; limited or lack of understanding of the boundaries of the discipline and does not question received wisdom; approach to learning lacks autonomy and approach to tasks is not sustained; inability to communicate coherently.
ZERO		Work of no merit OR absent, work not submitted, penalty in some misconduct cases.

Relation of grades, mark ranges and numerical equivalents to degree classes

Class	Grade	Mark range	Numerical equivalent
DISTINCTION (Excellent)	Exceptional Distinction	93 - 100	96
	High Distinction	85 - 92	89
	Mid Distinction	78 - 84	81
	Distinction	70 - 77	74
COMMENDATION (Very good)	High Commendation	67 - 69	68
	Mid Commendation	64 - 66	65
	Commendation	60 - 63	62
PASS (Good)	High Pass	57 - 59	58
	Mid Pass	54 - 56	55
	Pass	50 - 53	52
FAIL (Insufficient)	Marginal Fail	45 - 49	47
	Mid Fail	40 - 44	42
	Low Fail	1 - 39	24
ZERO	Zero	0	0

Centre for Academic Development and Quality
Nottingham Trent University
Dryden Centre 202
Dryden Street
Nottingham
NG1 4FZ