

Cycle Descriptors

The learning outcomes common to all qualifications of the same cycle are described by a set of general descriptors, which must reflect the wide range of disciplines and profiles and must be able to summarize the variety of features of each National Higher Education System. After the Ministerial Conference in Prague (2001), a group of experts from different countries drafted a series of descriptors for the three Bologna Process cycles, which will later become known as the Dublin Descriptors.

The Dublin Descriptors

The Dublin Descriptors are general statements about the ordinary outcomes that are achieved by students after completing a curriculum of studies and obtaining a qualification. They are neither meant to be prescriptive rules, nor they represent benchmarks or minimal requirements, since they are not comprehensive. The descriptors are conceived to describe the overall nature of the qualification. Furthermore, they are not to be considered disciplines and they are not limited to specific academic or professional areas.

The Dublin Descriptors consist of the following elements:

- Knowledge and understanding;
- Applying knowledge and understanding;
- Making judgements;
- Communication skills;
- Learning skills.

1st cycle

Qualifications that signify completion of the **first cycle** are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge of the forefront of their field of study;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study;
- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues;
- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy.

2nd cycle

Qualifications that signify completion of the **second cycle** are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments;
- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;
- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely selfdirected or autonomous.

3rd cycle

Qualifications that signify completion of the **third cycle** are awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field;
- have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity;
- have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication;
- are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise;
- can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society.