

For guidance on setting entry requirements and making conditional offers, see

- *Access to HE Diploma: entry requirements and conditional offers. Guidelines for HE admissions staff*, available at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk/hestaff.

Also available on the Access to HE website (www.accesstohe.ac.uk)

- *Grading implementation handbook* (full details of the grading system), available at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas.
- Access to HE courses database (complete list of all courses leading to the Access to HE Diploma).

- 1 A **common grading system** was introduced on all Access to HE Diploma courses in 2009-10.
- 2 All Access to HE courses are made up of units. Students are awarded a grade for each **level 3** unit that they complete satisfactorily. (Level 2 units are not graded.)
- 3 The grades available are **Pass, Merit or Distinction**. No other grades or intermediate grades are used. The grades are not converted from percentages or other numerical marks, and have no numerical equivalents. (Some limited use of numerical marking can be used to contribute to the final unit grade with certain kinds of assessment.)
- 4 There is **no overall**, average or single aggregate grade.
- 5 Grades are derived from the use of seven generic **grade descriptors**:
 - Understanding of the subject
 - Application of knowledge
 - Application of skills
 - Use of information
 - Communication and presentation
 - Autonomy and/or independence
 - Quality.
- 6 The grade descriptors, in appropriate combinations, are used as the basis for grading judgements on all units and with all assessment methods, **on all courses**.
- 7 The **combination of descriptors** to be used with any particular unit are confirmed when the unit is validated. At least two descriptors must be used for each unit. Grade descriptor 7 (Quality) is used for all units.
- 8 Each of the seven grade descriptors comprises a set of related **components**. Each component is made up of two statements, one of which describes characteristics or qualities that are typical of academic performance at Merit (for example, work 'is structured in a way that is **generally** logical and fluent') and a complementary statement for the same component that describes academic performance at Distinction (for example, work is 'structured in a way that is **consistently** logical and fluent').

9 Each unit is defined by a set of learning outcomes which are specific to the unit's particular knowledge and skills requirements. A student's work must reach the standard needed to Pass (that is, all the learning outcomes must be achieved) before it can be considered for grading. A Pass grade is awarded when a student achieves the learning outcomes for the unit but does not meet the requirements defined by the relevant Merit descriptors: there are **no separate grade descriptors for Pass**.

10 In order to ensure that the grade descriptors are used appropriately for the particular subject and assignment requirements, **tutors identify the components** from a unit's descriptors which are relevant to the assignment when they specify the assignment requirements. For example, there is a component within the Communication and presentation descriptor that relates to 'the use of images'. This component would not be included in the assignment brief if the use of images was not relevant for the assessment of the particular assignment and would not contribute to the tutor's considerations in assessing the quality of the student's performance.

11 Some units are assessed by more than one assignment. The **grading process** (see *Grading implementation handbook*) generates a grade indicator for each of the grade descriptors used in each assignment, producing a unit grade profile, on the basis of which a decision about the final grade for a unit is made. Each unit is given an overall grade in this way: individual assignments are not given overall grades.

12 As well as specifying details of the grading model and process, QAA specifies the **assessment regulations** that apply on Access to HE courses. Regulations are detailed in the *Grading implementation handbook* and include:

- **Resubmissions** - when the learning outcomes for the assessed work have been met, a grading decision is made. Grades cannot be adjusted by resubmission of all or part of the assessed work for a unit. If a student's work does not meet all the learning outcomes (and, therefore, does not meet the requirements for Pass), there is one opportunity for resubmission, according to a regulated process.
- **Late submission** - if work is submitted after the formal submission deadline has passed, and where no extension has been granted, grades are capped at Pass.
- **Drafts** - particular restrictions apply to the submission of drafts.
- **Moderation** - grades are subject to internal moderation and to external moderation by moderators who are appointed and trained by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs).
- **Grades confirmation** - following moderation, the award of grades is confirmed at course awards boards, conducted according to a process specified by QAA.

13 The unit grades are recorded on the student's **achievement transcript**, which is issued with the Access to HE Diploma by the AVAs.

14 AVAs are responsible for the design and operation of **standardisation** mechanisms, including standardisation within and between centres, and moderator training for standardisation.



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