

This document updates and replaces previous guidelines for admissions staff (*Access to HE Diploma: a new qualification*), published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in January 2007.

1 What has changed?

The Access to HE Diploma (the Diploma) has replaced the QAA-recognised Access to HE certificate. The Diploma has a standard specification, and student achievement is described in the same way for all Access to HE courses in England and Wales.

2 When will the changes affect HE admissions?

Any institution considering applications from Access to HE students from 2008-09 onwards will need to take account of these changes. **2008-09 is a transitional year for the Access to HE Diploma:** the qualification will be awarded with a standard number of credits for Access to HE courses in England and Wales, but grading has not yet been introduced (see below).

3 What are the main changes?

The title

The generic title for the qualification is the Access to HE Diploma. Individual award names have a common format which defines the subject or general area of study: Access to HE Diploma (subject/area). Some Diplomas indicate a specific progression route, for example, Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) or Access to HE Diploma (Law). Diplomas which carry more general titles such as Access to HE Diploma (Combined Studies) may also include subject-specific preparation for HE.

Requirements for achieving the qualification

The Diploma is a credit-based qualification, with common credit requirements for all Diplomas: students are required to achieve **60 credits, including at least 45 at level 3** on a planned, coherent programme of study. Courses which previously required the achievement of more credits have been recalibrated to ensure this is a standard credit value for the qualification. There has been no change to the minimum standard expected for the award of the Access to HE qualification. Full details of the specifications for the Diploma are available on the Access to HE website: www.accesstohe.ac.uk

4 What about grades?

A new common grading system for the Access to HE Diploma will be introduced on all Access to HE courses in 2009-10. QAA is currently piloting the model that has been developed, which involves a system of unit grading leading to the award of a pass, merit or distinction grade for each level 3 unit that is successfully completed by a student. (Level 2 units will not be graded.) Grading decisions will be made with reference to a standard set of grade descriptors, approved by QAA for use on all Access to HE courses.

The number and size of units on different courses varies. The number of grades awarded to different students will therefore also vary, reflecting the number of units on particular courses. Grades will be provided on grade profiles, showing the grade awarded for each unit. Grade profiles will be issued at the same time as Diplomas. There will be no final or aggregate grade. Further guidance relating to grading and grades-based offers will be issued at the end of the pilot year, in summer 2009.

5 How will recent changes affect HE admissions?

For 2009 entry most applicants from Access to HE courses will be offering the ungraded Access to HE Diploma. No Diploma in 2009 will be awarded with grades. Exceptions in 2009 may include:

- students who completed an Access to HE course before summer 2009, who may continue to present Access to HE certificates
- students who started an Access to HE course with certificate specifications before 2008, who complete the course in 2009, may qualify with an Access to HE certificate with the specifications which were particular to that individual course.

For 2010 entry most applicants from Access to HE courses will be offering the Access to HE Diploma with grades. Exceptions in 2010 may include:

- students who completed an Access to HE course before summer 2009 may continue to present Access to HE certificates
- students who started an Access to HE course before 2009 may complete the course in 2010 with an Access to HE certificate or Diploma without grades.

Note on exceptions: the award of earlier versions of the Access to HE qualification is not invalidated by the introduction of subsequent versions. It is important that offers should not disadvantage applicants who achieved qualifications before recent changes were implemented.

6 How can I tell which kind of Access to HE qualification an applicant has?

The UCAS APPLY system differentiates between Access to HE certificates, Access to HE Diplomas and other (non QAA-recognised) access qualifications. Students on Access to HE courses have been asked to use the formal title of their Diploma in their UCAS applications. Applicants should also provide the title, credit value and level for each unit studied on their particular Diploma course.

Diplomas carry the title of the particular award and the certification version of the Access to HE logo (which includes the words 'recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education').

7 What sort of offers can be made in 2009?

The achievement of an Access to HE Diploma signifies that a student has successfully completed a programme of study designed as a preparation for HE study in the area named in the Diploma title. So an offer that requires achievement of the Access to HE Diploma, or achievement of the particular named Diploma identified in the student's application, would be a valid and meaningful offer. Where it is important that particular units (from those listed on the application) are achieved at level 3, it would be possible to specify this within an offer.

The QAA-recognised Access to HE Diploma has a credit specification of 60 credits. An offer which requires a student to achieve more than 60 credits is not consistent with this national specification, and additional credits form no part of QAA's framework for course approval. Requirements for additional credits are also unachievable for most students, as funding constraints do not allow most providers to deliver the volume of learning that would be required to achieve more than 60 credits.

Qualitative information about individual students' performance can be requested from course tutors. Any grades which may be offered by individual course tutors in 2009 are not recognised by QAA and do not relate to the national system of grading that will be introduced in 2009-10.

8 Where can I find out more?

A new Access courses database provides a complete, searchable list of all QAA-recognised courses. Access Validating Agency contact details and database links are available at www.accesstohe.ac.uk. Individual enquiries may be emailed to access@qaa.ac.uk



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