

Arrangements for the Award and Assessment of the Access to HE Diploma 2020-2021

Information for students

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Introduction

1 The Access to HE Diploma (the Diploma) is a nationally-recognised qualification which is designed to provide preparation for study in higher education for adults returning to education. Individual Diplomas are validated and awarded by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), according to regulations and specifications set by QAA.

2 For each Diploma there is an approved set of units of assessment in a number of different areas which are appropriate for the subject of the Diploma. Access to HE Diplomas are made up of 60 credits.

3 The COVID-19 outbreak is the most significant challenge we have all faced in at least a generation and our priority is to ensure that we continue to support our students during this time of uncertainty.

4 The following information is relevant to all full and part-time students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland who will be studying a QAA-recognised Access to HE Diploma in 2020-21. This includes:

- students who have or will start their courses this academic year, that is, they start on or after 1 August 2020
- students who are continuing their studies, that is, they started their courses before 1 August 2020.

5 The information in this guidance is provided in the context of the most up-to-date advice for educational settings provided by the Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England. Students and providers will be supported if advice from the DfE or Public Health England means that adaptations need to be continued beyond 31 July 2021.

6 This year, students will be supported to complete their studies through possible changes to the delivery of teaching and assessment of their course. Students may study for their course face-to-face, online or a blended approach which may include face-to-face and online delivery of teaching and assessment. QAA will work closely with your course provider and your Access Validating Agency (AVA) to ensure that quality, standards and student outcomes can be maintained.

7 Our priorities are to:

- work in collaboration with AVAs, providers, the DfE, Welsh Government and other organisations to build on the strategy for Access to HE during and after the pandemic, focusing on sustainability and protection of the Access to HE Diploma
- support AVAs, students and providers meeting challenges to learning and delivery presented by the pandemic.

QAA grading scheme: Grading the Access to HE Diploma

8 The QAA grading scheme applies to all assessments (that is, assessed work) that are completed as part of the Diploma. This grading scheme will be applied to the Access to HE Diploma you are studying this year. The following information outlines how assessment grades will be awarded.

9 A grade is awarded for every graded Level 3 unit that a student completes successfully as part of an Access to HE Diploma. All Diplomas comprise 45 credits from graded Level 3 units, and 15 credits from Level 2 or Level 3 units that are not graded. There is no overall grade for the Access to HE Diploma.

10 The number of grades awarded to a student depends on the number of graded Level 3 units required for the particular Access to HE Diploma. This number can vary because, although all Diplomas contain 45 credits from graded Level 3 units, these units can have a value of 3, 6 or 9 credits. So, for example, some Diplomas have a small number of 9-credit units, while others have a larger number of 3-credit units.

11 The grade awarded for each unit is shown on the achievement transcript that is issued with Access to HE Diplomas. The transcript also shows how many credits were awarded for each successfully completed graded or ungraded unit.

The grades

12 A grade of pass, merit or distinction can be assigned to each graded unit. There are no separate grade descriptors for 'not achieved'. A student may not achieve a unit if the specified learning outcomes for a unit are not met.

13 Where all learning outcomes are met on an ungraded unit, such units will receive 'achieved'.

The grade descriptors

14 There is a common set of broad, generic grade descriptors which are used as the basis for all grading judgements on all courses. The seven descriptors relate to different aspects of performance which are relevant to the assessment of a student's readiness for higher study. They are presented under the following headings:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Understanding of the subject | 5. Communication and presentation |
| 2. Application of knowledge | 6. Autonomy/independence |
| 3. Application of skills | 7. Quality |
| 4. Use of information | |

Using the QAA grading scheme

15 The assigned descriptors for a unit are made clear to students and are included in the assignment briefs provided to students by course tutors for each assignment.

16 Units are assessed in different ways - some are assessed through a single assessment (assignment); others involve more than one assessment. Integrated assessments may also be used to assess the learning outcomes of two or more different units through one piece of work. Irrespective of the nature or number of separate assessments or individual tasks used to assess the unit, the final outcome is a single unit grade which indicates the overall standard of performance for the unit.

17 When the tutor grades student assessments, they give assessment grades (of pass, merit or distinction) for each of the grade descriptors selected for use with the particular assignment(s) that have been designed to assess the unit.

18 Practices for managing the submission of student work, including drafts, late submissions and opportunities for resubmission or reassessment are governed by the regulations of the QAA grading scheme.

Quality assuring graded Access to HE Diplomas

19 In an environment where adaptation of assessment and delivery are possible, your Access Validating Agency (AVA) will put effective arrangements in place to support your provider in implementing robust quality assurance mechanisms that will ensure consistency is applied across all Access to HE Diplomas awarded.

20 To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by the current situation, AVAs and providers will ensure that assessment grades go through a process of internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation. These processes will also be applied where assessments are adapted.

21 The AVA's operation of moderation ensures that consistent assessment standards are applied in all instances where Access to HE Diplomas or common units are delivered on more than one course or more than one occasion.

22 The AVA ensures that its providers operate rigorous internal moderation procedures which meet the AVA's requirements and which facilitate:

- 21.1 the application of consistent standards of demand in assessment
- 21.2 assessment design that maximises reliability and validity in assessment outcomes
- 21.3 the consistent and accurate application of QAA assessment regulations.

23 The standardisation procedure provides opportunities for tutors, internal moderators and external moderators to share, discuss and, where necessary, recalibrate their expectations relating to the standards of work expected by:

- 23.1 the requirements of any work at Level 2 or Level 3
- 23.2 the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the specific units that they work with
- 23.3 the grade descriptors.

24 If you have any further questions that are not addressed, please contact either your provider or AVA.

We have provided below some of the questions that you might have about the award of your Diploma. The questions will be updated regularly on our [FAQs page](#).

Will I receive calculated grades?

There will be **no provision** for the issue of estimated assessment grades (calculated grades) this academic year. The award of your Access to HE Diploma will be made only on the work you complete during your course of study.

I am finding it difficult to study where lessons, materials and/or assessments have been adapted and am worried it will affect my grades and completing the Diploma, what should I do?

You should contact your course provider if you are concerned about any adaptations made to your course in year. You may be able to get access to additional support or tools to help you study.

Providers can adapt assessments and delivery, where necessary and appropriate, to:

- support teaching and learning, and assist in mitigating any possible effects of previous or future disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment relating to the pandemic
- make assessments as manageable and flexible as possible, for example, to address the impact of compliance with social distancing or other public health guidance
- safeguard against any future disruptions relating to the pandemic, such as local lockdowns or closure of facilities.

To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by any adaptations, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

If there is a further lockdown (local or national) and I feel the work I produce during the lockdown does not reflect my previous performance, what do I do?

If you feel that the work produced during a local or national lockdown does not reflect your previous performance, please speak to your provider. Providers have arrangements in place to deal with such extenuating circumstances.

To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by any adaptations, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

I am a continuing student who started my course before 1 August 2020. What do I do if I feel the work I produced during the national lockdown (March to July 2020) does not reflect my current or previous performance?

If you feel that the work produced during the national lockdown does not reflect your current or previous performance, please speak to your provider. Providers have arrangements in place to deal with such extenuating circumstances.

To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by issues relating to the national lockdown, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

I am a continuing student who started my course before 1 August 2020 and I was unable to study and submit assessments during the national lockdown (March to July 2020). What should I do?

If you were unable to study and complete your assessments during national lockdown, please talk to your course provider about the best way to continue.

Options include:

- a making an application for extenuating circumstances
- b applying for an extension to assessment submission dates
- c a short pause¹ of less than four weeks - for example, if you are in self-isolation - this will not necessarily affect the planned end date of your course
- d a formal break or suspension in learning.

If your course is not publicly funded, your course provider will be able to discuss other options that may be available to you.

You should contact your course provider to agree the appropriate steps taken that will be based on both you and your course provider's circumstances.

I am a continuing student who started my course before 1 August 2020 and my provider rescheduled my assessments to be submitted at a later date because of the national lockdown (March to July 2020). What do I do if I feel my performance is affected by these changes?

If the work was rescheduled and the volume of work is unmanageable, your provider will be able to advise you about the options available to you, for example, making an application for extenuating circumstances. To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by the rescheduling of your assessments, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

If there is a further lockdown which means I am unable to study because I am a key worker/carer or now have additional commitments, what should I do?

Access to HE Diplomas have been designed to be responsive to changes in circumstances, for example, during a period of illness. If you are unable to study, please talk to your course provider about the best way to continue with your Diploma.

Options include:

- a making an application for extenuating circumstances
- b applying for an extension to assessment submission dates
- c a short pause² of less than four weeks - for example, if you are in self-isolation - this will not necessarily affect the planned end date of your course
- d a formal break or suspension in learning.

¹ relates to publicly funded provision in England

² relates to publicly funded provision in England

If your course is not publicly funded, your course provider will be able to discuss other options that may be available to you.

You should contact your course provider to agree the appropriate steps taken that will be based on both you and your course provider's circumstances.

Can I apply for extenuating circumstances?

Yes. Access to HE providers and AVAs already have in place procedures to allow you to identify extenuating circumstances that may affect your academic performance, should the current situation make studying difficult.

To discuss your specific circumstances, please speak directly to your course tutor.

How do I apply for extenuating circumstances?

Please contact your course tutor who will explain how to apply.

Can I apply for an extension to an assessment submission deadline?

Yes. Access to HE providers and AVAs already have procedures in place to allow you to apply for an extension, should the current situation make studying difficult.

To discuss your specific circumstances, please speak directly to your course tutor.

How do I apply for an extension to an assessment submission deadline?

Please contact your course tutor who will explain how to apply.

Can I apply for a break in learning?

Yes. Access to HE providers and AVAs already have procedures in place to allow you to take a break in learning should the current situation make studying difficult. You and your course provider can agree to suspend learning while you take a break. This allows you to continue later with the same eligibility that applied when you first started their learning.

Publicly-funded courses in England and Wales already have provision for 'breaks/suspension in learning' or for a range of circumstances.

Guidance from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (for providers in England) and Welsh Government (for providers in Wales) has information about the options available.

To discuss your specific circumstances, please speak directly to your course tutor.

How do I apply for a break in learning?

Please contact your course provider who will explain how to apply.

I am unable to access the online lessons and materials, what should I do?

If you are unable to access online lessons and materials, you should contact your course provider.

How will you ensure my grades will be fair?

To make sure that grades are fair, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied. Your grades go through a process of internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation. These quality assurance processes will take into account any extenuating circumstances identified. As part of the moderation process AVAs may adjust the assessment grades of some assessments upwards or downwards accordingly to ensure that no student is advantaged or disadvantaged.

Can I appeal my grades?

Your provider will have processes in place to support you in appealing your grades. Please speak to your course tutor.

When do I get my results?

Confirmed results will be released to students after the Final Awards Board. The results will be released to you no later than the deadline for results to be uploaded to UCAS (it is estimated this will be around 26 July 2021). Please speak to your provider regarding the specific date you will receive your results.

I wasn't due to finish my Diploma until after 31 July 2021, but my circumstances have changed which means I have more time to study - can I finish earlier?

You should speak to your course provider to find out if it is possible for you to complete earlier. In some cases, it may be possible to complete some units of study earlier than planned which may mean you can complete your Diploma before your original end date.

Your Diploma will be awarded and quality assured as noted on pages 1-3.

I am not due to complete my studies until after 31 July 2021. What are the arrangements for the award and assessment of the Access to HE Diploma for me?

This year, the current guidance also applies to all students due to complete after 31 July 2021. Students and providers will be supported if advice from DfE or Public Health England means that adaptations need to be continued beyond 31 July 2021.

Further advice and information

If you need further information, please take a look at our [frequently-asked questions](#)³ and/or contact your provider.

³ [www.accesstohe.ac.uk/en/contact-us/faqs/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/en/contact-us/faqs/coronavirus-(covid-19))

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QAA manages the national framework for the recognition and regulation of Access to HE
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