



Access to HE Grading Scheme Toolkit

Understanding Assessment and Grading for the Access to HE Diploma: A Brief Guide

Applicable for students registering from 1 August 2024 onwards

The approach to assessment and grading of student work within the Access to HE Diploma is different to other approaches, and this has been the case since grading was introduced into the Access to HE Diploma in 2009.

As an example, in higher education, units (also referred to as modules) are assessed against a pre-determined set of learning outcomes using specified assessment criteria. Student work may be marked numerically with either actual marks, percentages or banded grades being awarded. Eventually, the total marks awarded will be put into an algorithm to determine whether a student has passed their programme and what classification of degree they have achieved. The grading of such student work is fully integrated into the assessment of the learning outcomes. Students commonly receive grades for each piece of assessment they undertake, irrespective of the number of assessments in an individual unit.

How the Access to HE Diploma is assessed

Assessment and grading within the Access to HE Diploma uses a dualistic system. Assessment of the specified learning outcomes for a unit (using the specified assessment criteria) is undertaken to determine if a student can be awarded the credits assigned to each unit - that is, they have effectively achieved a pass in that unit. Once that threshold has been met, grading takes place, holistically, based on a set of Grading Standards that are used to determine how well a student has applied themselves to the unit assessment(s). Three grades are available for a graded unit; these are Pass, Merit and Distinction. Numerical marking is **not** a feature of assessment or grading within the Access to HE Diploma.

The unit specification contains the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the unit, and describes the knowledge and skills that a student needs to demonstrate in order to achieve credit. It does not determine the assessment method or link the learning outcomes and assessment criteria to the Grading Standards. Assessment methods are determined separately to allow flexibility for assessors year to year. However, all assessments must provide students with the opportunity to evidence that they have met **all** learning outcomes by meeting **all** the assessment criteria. This may be through a single assessment, or multiple assessments within a unit.

An assignment brief is provided to students for each assessment. The assignment brief will provide the full details of the assignment, the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the unit, and details of how the Grading Standards will be applied to the unit.

Another significant difference between the grading of the Access to HE Diploma compared to many other qualifications is that assessment of the Diploma **does not** result in one overall grade. This is due to differences in the credit values and assessment of units such that an overall grade cannot be meaningfully calculated. When a Diploma is successfully achieved the grades for the individual (graded) units are provided on the student's transcript, along with a certificate of achievement for the Diploma.

The new Grading Standards

From 1 August 2024, there will be three Grading Standards only (Knowledge and Understanding; Subject Specific Skills; Transferable Skills) all of which must be applied equally to each unit and to each piece of assessment within a unit. As all three Grading Standards are now applied to all units, it is no longer necessary to identify the Grading Standards to be used at the point of unit validation (see below) and this will be reflected in Unit Specification documents.

The three Grading Standards give tutors a choice of sub-components in order to tailor grading to the requirements of individual subjects and/or assessment types. As with the previous Grade Descriptors, the choice of sub-components will not be required as part of the unit validation process. This allows tutors and course teams to refine their assessments and grading year on year, without the need to revalidate units.

Grading only takes place once a student has successfully completed **all** pieces of assessment for a given unit. The student performance in **all** pieces of assessment for that unit are considered holistically (together) before arriving at an overall unit grade. Unit specifications will therefore contain details of the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria, along with other standard information. Students will be informed about the criteria on which their work will be graded in the assignment brief.

Note on the validation of units and Diplomas

While sub-components of the Grading Standards are not required (by QAA) to be stipulated at the unit level at validation, approaches to the assessment and grading of individual Diplomas will be determined between Access Validating Agencies and providers/centres. In particular, consideration of Grading Standard 3 (Transferable Skills) will be required as part of the validation process. There are three components in this standard, of which at least two must be used in the grading of each unit, and all three components **must** be used at least once in order for a student to be awarded a Diploma. Providers/Centres should therefore expect to be asked to provide evidence of how all three components for Grading Standard 3 will be assessed.

Further details

Full details of the revised Grading Scheme and the Diploma Specification applicable from 1 August 2024 can be found on the [Access to HE resources webpage](#) and tutors are advised to familiarise themselves with these documents.

Queries in relation to this document can be directed to ahe@qaa.ac.uk

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