

Access to HE Diploma: Toolkit for HE Admissions Staff

**Part A: Setting Entry Requirements
and Making Offers**

**Part B: Assessment and Grading
of the Access to HE Diploma**

December 2023



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Introduction and context

This toolkit has been revised to take account of the changes to the Access to HE Diploma which take effect for Diploma students registered from 1 August 2024. The first applications for entry to higher education from students following the revised Diploma will be for academic year September 2025.

Diploma students who achieved a Diploma prior to September 2025 will continue to apply for entry to higher education. Details of all former versions of the Diploma are provided in Appendix 1 for reference.

The Access to HE Diploma

The Access to HE Diploma is a qualification regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It is a Level 3 qualification that makes academic demands that are at an equivalent level to those of other level 3 qualifications such as A-levels and is primarily focused on adult learners who wish to enter higher education but do not have the necessary qualifications in the subject area they wish to follow. When taken as a full-time course, it can be completed in one year. On completion of an Access to HE Diploma, students may go on to study at a higher level, which could be a degree, or other higher-level qualification at Level 4 or above.

The Access to HE Diploma is an academic, credit-based qualification, comprising units of assessment expressed as learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The credit requirement for the achievement of any Access to HE Diploma is 60 credits, with 45 of these credits coming from units which are concerned with academic subject content at Level 3 and graded; the remaining 15 credits come from ungraded Level 2 or Level 3 units.

While all Diplomas must comply with the overall structural requirements of the Diploma Specification, there is flexibility within these requirements for the awarding bodies (known as Access Validating Agencies or AVAs) to approve Diplomas with a variety of structures and with a different range of content.

The key features of the specification from 1 August 2024 are:

- the **total** credit requirement is **60 credits**
- of these 60 credits, all Diplomas must contain **45 credits from graded Level 3 units** that are concerned with **academic subject content**
- the remaining 15 credits must consist of **ungraded Level 2 or Level 3 units**
- the grades available for graded units are Pass, Merit or Distinction but no overall grade is awarded for the Diploma
- unit values may be of three, six or nine credits
- there is at least one unit in each diploma that is greater than 3 credits (therefore, either a 6 or 9-credit unit); this can be a graded or ungraded unit
- the total number of credits that can be made up of 6 or 9-credit units is limited to 30 credits; the total is derived from a combination of graded and ungraded units
- the maximum number of credits that can be transferred under a credit transfer scheme is 30 credits
- 1 credit represents 10 notional learning hours.

Details of the full Diploma Specification and Grading Scheme are available on the [QAA website](#).

Awards, registration and certification

Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), licensed by QAA, are the awarding bodies for the Diploma. All current AVAs are listed on the [QAA website](#).¹ All approved Access to HE providers and courses recognised as leading to the achievement of the Diploma are listed on QAA's Access to HE courses database. A list of all current Access to HE courses is available at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk

Students must be registered for units to the value of 60 credits (including their choice of optional units where these are available) within 12 weeks of the start of their course, or before they apply to higher education - whichever is the sooner; opportunities to make changes to this registration are only allowed under defined, limited circumstances.

Successful Access to HE students are awarded a Diploma. The certificates of achievement issued by different AVAs vary in appearance, but all include QAA's Access to HE logo and the words 'recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education'. All students are also issued with an achievement transcript, which lists all the units achieved, and, for each unit, the level and number of credits awarded, in addition to, where relevant, the grade. To ensure that the distinction between the Level 3 units that are graded and those that are ungraded remains clear, the achievement of the ungraded units is recorded as achieved/not achieved on achievement transcripts. Any concerns about the legitimacy of evidence of certification should be referred to QAA by emailing: AHE@qaa.ac.uk

¹ Access Validating Agency profiles, available at: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/regulation-and-licensing/avas/ava-profiles

Part A: Setting entry requirements and making offers

1 UCAS tariff

The Access to HE Diploma has been included in the UCAS [tariff tables](#) for entry to higher education from September 2017 onwards.

The methodology used to calculate the UCAS tariff points for the Access to HE Diploma is aligned with that used for the calculation of tariff points for A-level grades.

For example:

- 45 Access credits at Distinction are positioned at the same tariff points as three A grades at A-level (144 tariff points)
- 45 Access credits at Merit are positioned at the same tariff points as three C grades at A-level (96 tariff points)
- 45 Access credits at Pass are positioned at the same tariff points as three E grades at A-level (48 tariff points).

The UCAS tariff tables detail points for the full range of unit grades and credit up to the 45 credits that are graded within the Diploma. Tariff points can be gained through different Access to HE Diploma grade combinations. As an example, 128 tariff points could be made up as follows:

Grade credit profile: number of credits at each phase			Tariff points
Distinction	Merit	Pass	
36	3	6	128
33	9	3	128
30	15	0	128

2 Framing entry requirements

2.1 Expressing qualification requirements: The Access to HE Diploma

The name of the national qualification regulated by QAA is the Access to HE Diploma (the Diploma). If a qualification has this name, it is QAA recognised. All current and archived recognised Diplomas are listed on QAA's Access to HE courses database. A list of current Access to HE courses is available at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk. QAA does not use the term kitemarked to refer to recognised Diplomas.

2.2 Referring to particular Diplomas

Diplomas with the same title can have different content (analogous to A-levels offering optional units as part of the syllabus or offering context-led and content-led variants for the same subject title). Also, Diplomas with very similar content can have slightly different titles.

This is because:

- individual Diplomas are approved and named by subject at AVA level, using a common titling format - for example, Access to HE Diploma (Psychology) or Access to HE Diploma (Law) - which must be adhered to, but which allows the subject title to be determined by the AVA
- there is no national statement of the range of expected content relating to Diplomas with the same title but see note below on the availability of Subject Descriptors²

This means that entry requirements for the achievement of Diplomas in particular disciplines are best expressed generically. It is preferable, for example, to refer to an 'Access to HE Diploma in art and design or creative arts subject' rather than 'Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design)'. Over-specification can also cause difficulties, because a Diploma with a general title, such as 'Access to HE Diploma (Combined Sciences)', could contain as many credits in subjects specified in entry requirements (for example, human biology) as a Diploma with a more tightly specified title, such as 'Access to HE Diploma (Nursing)'.

2.3 Requirements for achievement in particular subjects

To achieve a Diploma, students must register for, and achieve, a particular approved set of units to a total credit value of 60 credits. These units should be listed on students' application, specifying the unit title, Level (2 or 3), credit value (3, 6 or 9 credits) and status of the unit (graded or ungraded).

Some units are used on more than one named Diploma approved by the same AVA, but other units are unique to a named Diploma. AVAs do not share units. Requirements for achievement in particular subjects are therefore best expressed in generic terms, as specific units are not available to all students taking different Diplomas in the same, or similar, discipline areas.

2.4 Requirements for specific amounts of achievement in particular subjects

The total volume of learning required for a Diploma is always the same (60 credits, with a minimum of 45 at Level 3), but different sized units can be combined in different ways to realise that standard total.

² The two subject descriptors for Medicine and for Nursing and Health Professions bring greater standardisation to Diplomas titled Access to HE Diploma (Medicine), Access to HE Diploma (Nursing), and Access to HE Diploma (Health Professions) and define the minimum requirement of content for a Diploma that is designed and publicly claims to provide the preparation needed for progression to undergraduate study in the specified subject areas.

For example:

Diploma Y	Diploma Z
60 credits to be gained through the completion of: 18 x 3-credit units 1 x 6-credit unit 45 graded credits to be gained from: 15 x 3-credit units	60 credits to be gained through the completion of: 2 x 9-credit units 2 x 6-credit units 10 x 3-credit units 45 graded credits to be gained from: 2 x 9-credit units 2 x 6-credit units 5 x 3-credit units

These potential differences in unit size should be considered when making offers to prospective students. An entry requirement that specified, for example, '3 units in mathematics' would not make consistent demands on students taking different Diplomas, as this could represent a requirement for anything from nine credits (3 x 3-credit units) to 27 credits (3 x 9-credit units).

It is therefore preferable in entry requirements to refer to subjects in generic terms and to the total number of credits to be achieved in those subjects - for example, 18 Level 3 credits from mathematics units.

2.5 Requirements relating to overall credit achievement

The Diploma has a standard credit value of 60 credits, with 45 graded credits at Level 3. The remaining credits can be at Level 2 or 3 and therefore students may have more than 45 credits at Level 3 (up to a maximum of 60 credits) but only 45 credits will be graded - the remainder will be ungraded. **Students cannot be awarded a Diploma without achieving 60 credits overall with 45 graded credits at Level 3.** Students cannot register for, or achieve, more than 60 credits. Differentiation of students' academic performance is achieved through the application of grading. Any applications that offer units with a combined value of more than 60 credits should be queried with the applicant.

2.6 Requirements relating to academic performance (grades)

A common system of unit grading applies to all Diplomas. All Diplomas include a fixed volume of 45 credits that must be derived from graded Level 3 units concerned with academic subject content. Differentiated achievement in these units is recorded as Pass, Merit or Distinction. The details and operation of the Grading Scheme are described in Part B of this document: Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma.

Students' differentiated achievement on the 45 credits from graded Level 3 units is recorded on the student's achievement transcript, issued with the certificate of achievement of the Diploma. **No overall grade is given as this cannot be meaningfully calculated because of the differences in credit value, subject and assessment of units.** A requirement for an overall grade is therefore not appropriate, and may lead to informal calculations being made, based on varying assumptions about what is intended.

As a grade is awarded for each unit, the total number of grades that a student can achieve is determined by the total number of graded units that make up the required 45 credits: for example, a student taking 45 graded units made up of 2 x 9-credit units, 2 x 6-credit units and 5 x 3-credit units will achieve 9 grades, while another taking 15 x 3-credit units will achieve 15 grades. An entry requirement that specifies a certain number of grades (or units) to be achieved at a particular grade would therefore require students on different courses to achieve different proportions of the Diploma at that grade. The examples in section 3 (Part A) suggest that graded entry requirements should specify a certain number of credits to be achieved from units awarded at a certain grade - for example, 18 credits achieved at Merit.

2.7 Assessing academic potential (predicted grades)

Diplomas are designed to prepare adults who may have been out of education for a number of years to progress into higher education. Diploma courses are typically delivered in one year, and students have to make rapid progress to meet the standards of the Diploma. Grades awarded at different stages of the course often reflect the trajectory of the steep learning curve followed by many students; grades awarded for units completed early in the course may not reflect students' full potential.

When UCAS applications are being prepared in the early months of a course, referees may find it difficult to provide reliable predicted grades for units that are delivered and assessed towards the end of the course. Tutors should, however, be able to give an indication of the standard of performance in completed units, although grades are not confirmed until they are externally moderated and presented to a final Awards Board. A request for a second reference, to be provided later in the course, may be helpful in gathering fuller information about a student's potential. **As the qualification does not result in a single grade, an overall grade cannot be predicted.**

2.8 Additional requirements

To ensure that the curriculum and assessment of Diplomas are appropriate to support progression to higher education, QAA's criteria for Diploma approval require the involvement of higher education staff in the development and validation of every Diploma. It is recognised, however, that particular higher education courses may have other admissions requirements. Where this is the case, the following points may be relevant.

- **Additional Level 3 qualifications**
Entry requirements that ask for additional Level 3 qualifications are likely to be regarded as unrealistic for most Access to HE students (unless they already hold the additional qualification). This is because of substantial practical and financial barriers to undertaking the study necessary for such achievement. Access to HE providers/centres may be willing to be flexible with individual students' timetables but allowing an Access to HE student to study for an additional Level 3 qualification, as well as the Diploma, may not be feasible or fundable, even if the two qualifications were undertaken consecutively.
- **Non-academic experience**
If a course requires students to have certain types and/or durations of practical or work experience, it would be helpful to students and Access to HE providers/centres if this is made clear in the entry requirements, including the date or timing for completion (for example, before or after application/interview/confirmation).
- **GCSE requirements**
Where a higher education provider requires applicants to have achieved GCSEs in

one or more subjects, it would be helpful if this is clearly specified in terms of the subject of the GCSE(s), and the grade(s) required.

2.9 Making offers

Higher education providers, who specify clear entry requirements for Access to HE students, provide useful information to help AVAs and providers/centres structure their Diplomas to meet those requirements. Where higher education providers have not provided detailed entry requirements for Access to HE applicants, the guidance in sections 2.1 to 2.8 above should be helpful in framing conditional offers. In either instance, the following further points should be taken into consideration.

In **conditional offers** it is helpful to name the Diploma title given on the application. If the title of the Diploma, as provided by the applicant, is not specified, an applicant may not be aware that their offer could be jeopardised if they transferred to a course leading to a different Diploma.

While it is suggested that references to specific units in framing entry requirements are avoided, it may sometimes be helpful, when making conditional offers, to name particular units listed by the applicant to clarify which of the units (for example, science units) are regarded as acceptable.

Because of their life circumstances, if **unconditional offers** are made to Access to HE students by higher education providers it is common for them to withdraw from the course and therefore not complete their Diploma. While it is recognised that, in making an unconditional offer, a higher education provider has made a judgement that the applicant has the capability to succeed in the course for which they have applied, completing the Diploma will ensure that the applicant is well prepared to progress to higher education. However, for students who have taken out an Advanced Learner Loan there may be personal financial implications of non-completion, with students being liable to repay the loan for the Access to HE Diploma that would otherwise be written off upon completion of a higher education programme. If an unconditional offer is thought appropriate because a higher education provider is confident that the student will be suitably prepared for higher education by completing the Access course, irrespective of what grades are achieved, then Approach 1 in section 3 below is recommended.

3 Examples of approaches to setting entry requirements and conditional offers

Examples of several approaches are provided to enable higher education providers to specify appropriate course entry requirements in prospectuses and for Qualification Information Profiles (QIPs), and to make offers to Access to HE applicants that are in line with their broader admissions policies.

The credits and particular grades in the examples provided are illustrative only. Note that under the current specification, units can only be of 3, 6 or 9 credits.

Approach 1: Achievement of the Diploma (in a general, named subject discipline area)

This approach is appropriate when institutions require applicants to achieve:

- the total volume and level of the Access to HE Diploma, with no additional requirements in terms of performance beyond the threshold (achievement of all units, with Pass grades for graded units, positioned at 48 tariff points)

- no specific requirements in terms of subjects studied (or with requirements that relate only to the general discipline area of the Access to HE Diploma as a whole).

Entry requirements 1 (examples):	Conditional offers 1 (examples):
a the Access to HE Diploma in any subject	a the Access to HE Diploma (title as given on application)
b the Access to HE Diploma with 48 tariff points	b the Access to HE Diploma (title as on application) with 48 tariff points
c the Access to HE Diploma in a health-related or science subject	c the Access to HE Diploma (Health Studies)
d the Access to HE Diploma in Art and Design or creative arts subject	d the Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design)

Approach 2: Achievement of the Diploma with a specific number of UCAS tariff points (in a general, named subject discipline area)

This approach is appropriate when institutions require applicants to achieve:

- the total volume and level of the Access to HE Diploma with a specific number of UCAS tariff points, but with no additional requirements in terms of how the total might be reached
- no specific requirements in terms of subjects studied (or with requirements that relate only to the general discipline area of the Access to HE Diploma as a whole).

Entry requirements 2 (examples):	Conditional offers 2 (examples):
a the Access to HE Diploma in any subject, with 128 tariff points	a the Access to HE Diploma, with 128 tariff points (title as given on application)
b the Access to HE Diploma, with 128 tariff points in a health-related or science subject	b the Access to HE Diploma, with 128 tariff points (Health Studies)

Approach 3: Achievement of the Diploma (in a general, named subject discipline area), with a certain volume of the whole achieved in specific subjects

This approach is appropriate when institutions require applicants to achieve:

- the Access to HE Diploma in a general, named discipline area (or with no requirements relating to the discipline area of the Diploma as a whole)
- a certain amount of credit in specific subject area(s), but with no additional requirements in terms of performance beyond the threshold (that is, Pass grades on all units).

Entry requirements 3 (examples):	Conditional offers 3 (examples):
<p>a the Access to HE Diploma in any subject, with 30 Level 3 credits from units in arts or humanities, of which at least six credits are from units in English literature</p> <p>b the Access to HE Diploma in a science or engineering subject, with 12 Level 3 credits from units in mathematics</p>	<p>a the Access to HE Diploma (Combined Arts), with 30 Level 3 credits from English literature, history or philosophy units, of which at least six credits are from units in English literature</p> <p>b the Access to HE Diploma (Engineering), with 12 Level 3 credits from units in mathematics</p>

Approach 4: Achievement of a certain volume of the total Diploma at a standard above Pass

This approach is appropriate when institutions require applicants to achieve:

- the Access to HE Diploma (whether in a named discipline area or not)
- a standard of performance beyond Pass for a certain amount of the 45 credits from graded units
- no requirements in terms of the performance in any particular subject area
- a specific tariff point requirement and a standard of performance beyond Pass for a certain amount of the 45 credits from graded units.

Entry requirements 4 (examples):	Conditional offers 4 (examples):
<p>a the Access to HE Diploma (specify discipline area, if required), with 12 credits at Merit or Distinction (61 tariff points and above)</p> <p>b the Access to HE Diploma (specify discipline area, if required), with 18 credits at Merit or Distinction, of which at least nine credits must be at Distinction (77 tariff points and above)</p> <p>c the Access to HE Diploma (specify discipline area, if required), with 45 credits at Level 3, of which 30 must be awarded at Distinction, and 15 at Merit or higher (128 tariff points and above)</p>	<p>a the Access to HE Diploma (Social Studies), with 12 credits at Merit or Distinction (61 tariff points and above)</p> <p>b the Access to HE Diploma (Education), with 18 credits at Merit or Distinction, of which at least nine credits must be at Distinction (77 tariff points and above)</p> <p>c the Access to HE Diploma (Law), with 45 credits from graded units awarded at Level 3, of which 30 must be awarded at Distinction, and 15 at Merit or higher (128 tariff points and above)</p>

Approach 5: Achievement in certain subjects within the Diploma at a standard above Pass

This approach is appropriate when institutions require applicants to achieve:

- the Access to HE Diploma (whether in a named discipline area or not)
- a certain amount of credit in specific subject area(s)
- a standard of performance beyond Pass in specific subjects or subject area(s)
- a specific tariff point requirement and a standard of performance beyond Pass in specific subjects or subject area(s).

Entry requirements 5 (examples):	Conditional offers 5 (examples):
<p>a Access to HE Diploma (specify discipline area, if required), with 12 credits from science units awarded at Merit or Distinction (61 tariff points and above)</p> <p>b Access to HE Diploma (specify discipline area, if required) with 30 credits at Distinction from biology and chemistry units, and the remaining 15 credits at Merit or higher (128 tariff points and above)</p>	<p>a the Access to HE Diploma (Environmental Science), with 12 credits from science units awarded at Merit or Distinction (61 tariff points and above)</p> <p>b Access to HE Diploma (Science), with 30 credits awarded at Distinction from biology and chemistry units, and 15 credits from other science units awarded at Merit or higher (128 tariff points and above)</p>

4 Good practice recommendations

Recommendation	
1	Refer to 'the Access to HE Diploma'
2a	In entry requirements, refer to generic disciplines for Diplomas, not particular titles
2b	In conditional offers, refer to the title of the Diploma named on the application
3a	To ensure consistency in requirements about the amount of achievement in a particular subject, refer to the number of credits to be achieved (not the number of units) in that subject
3b	In conditional offers, ensure that any specification of requirements does not exceed 60 credits
3c	In conditional offers, consider whether more detailed specifications about particular subject requirements might be necessary or helpful
3d	If tariff points are included in conditional offers, any additional requirements relating to the required grade profile or subject areas should also be specified
4	When making requirements and offers based on achievement of grades, specify the number of credits (not units) that must be achieved at Merit or Distinction (within the maximum total available of 45 credits)
5	Consider asking for a second reference to gain more information about students' academic potential later in the academic year
6	Consider alternative approaches to making unconditional offers (see Part A: section 2.9: Making offers and section 3:

	Approach 1)
7	If any additional qualifications or other requirements (such as work experience) are a prerequisite, ensure that such requirements are made clear in published entry requirements
8	Review offer libraries on admissions IT systems to ensure that titles and unit requirements are up-to-date, as results and grades are now available via UCAS Awarding Body Linkage scheme (for higher education providers that are UCAS members)

5 Results confirmation

To support the admissions process, UCAS's Awarding Body Linkage (ABL) scheme systematically transfers information about student achievement from awarding bodies such as AVAs, via UCAS, to higher education providers that are UCAS members. UCAS now processes individual unit results to institutions via the ABL process. There is no restriction regarding the timing of the communication of offers from higher education providers to Access to HE Diploma students, as the Access to HE Diploma is not covered by the UCAS embargo period.

Part B: Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma

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 (or 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.

1 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 (Pass, Merit or Distinction) for the individual (graded) units are provided on the student's transcript, along with a certificate of achievement for the Diploma.

2 The Grading Standards

From 1 August 2024, there will be three Grading Standards (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.

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.

Grading only takes place once a student has successfully completed **all** pieces of assessment for a given unit. Student performance in **all** pieces of assessment for that unit are considered holistically (together) before arriving at an overall unit grade. Students will be informed about the criteria on which their work will be graded in the assignment brief.

3 Assessment regulations

As well as specifying details of the grading model and process, QAA specifies the assessment regulations that apply on Access to HE courses. Assessment regulations are detailed in the Grading Scheme Handbook and cover the following aspects of assessment.

- **Resubmissions**
One resubmission opportunity may be provided for any individual assignment (unless mitigating circumstances have been accepted).
- **Successful resubmissions must be graded following the same process as used for successful submissions and grades are given accordingly**
If a student's resubmitted work does not meet all the learning outcomes (and, therefore, does not meet the requirements for Pass), the only means by which a further opportunity for resubmission can be provided within the same registration period is through referral. Grades for work resubmitted through referral are capped at Pass.
- **Late submission**
If any piece of assessment is submitted after the formal submission deadline has passed, and where no extension has been granted, the unit grade is capped at Pass. If work is submitted after the formal submission deadline, without an extension having been granted and the work does not meet the learning outcomes, there is no opportunity for resubmission except via the referrals process.
- **Drafts**
Particular restrictions apply to the submission of drafts. Opportunities to submit assignments (or parts of assignments) in draft for comment and feedback by tutors before the formal submission date are permitted only for the particular assignments where the tutor has decided that this is appropriate and has specified this in advance.
- **Grades confirmation**
Moderation of grades are subject to internal moderation and to external moderation by external moderators, who are appointed and trained by AVAs.
- **Following moderation, the award of grades is confirmed at awards boards, conducted according to a process specified by QAA**
AVAs are responsible for the design and operation of standardisation mechanisms, including standardisation within and between centres and over time, and moderator training for standardisation.

4 Further details

Full details of the revised Diploma Specification and Grading Scheme plus information on Subject Descriptors can be found on the [QAA website](#).

Appendix 1: Legacy qualifications

Access to HE has been part of the UK qualifications landscape for over 40 years and during that period has undergone several reviews and changes. As a result, the structure and grading of the qualification and the level of detail that is presented on certificates and transcripts has changed over time.

A legacy qualification should not necessarily preclude an applicant from securing a place at a university. Universities in the UK set their own entry requirements for higher education courses, and these vary depending on the subject, the specific course, and the course provider. This autonomy extends to the specification of arrangements for the admission of 'mature students' – that is, students going to university or college after a period of time out of full-time education. Many universities operate admissions processes which take account of prior learning and/or experience in considering the applications of mature students. It would not be unreasonable for a university, acting within the parameters of its admissions policy, to request that an applicant demonstrates their suitability to undertake a course of higher education by more recent means. The decision to accept qualifications as suitable for admitting applicants, and the extent and recency of the qualification that successful candidates are required to hold, rests solely at the discretion of the admitting university.

Access to HE qualification development

The diagram below represents the development of the Access to HE qualification over time. In one form or another, the Access to HE qualification has existed for over 40 years.

QAA has records of Access of HE qualifications from 1994 onwards. Prior to this, Access qualifications were determined locally and independently of any single regulatory body, although there was a national framework for Access agreed between the former Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) from 1989.

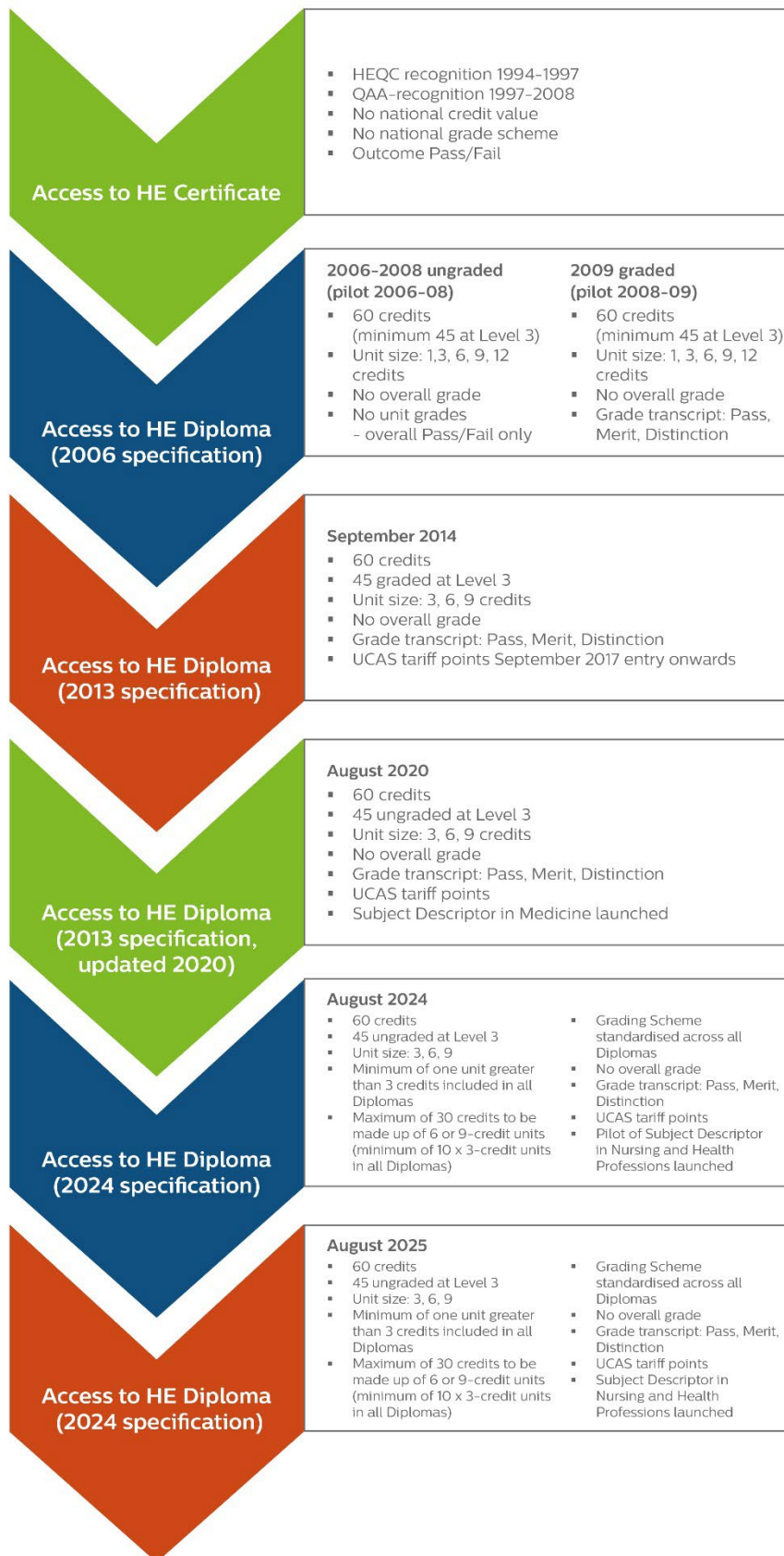
Dates and chronology

A note on dates

All dates quoted (unless otherwise stated) refer to the first possible date of registration for a student on a new variant of the Access to HE Diploma. First entry to higher education for these students would generally be from the academic year following this registration.

Access to HE Diploma students have a maximum registration period of five years in which to complete their Diploma. In addition, Access to HE Diploma students do not always progress to higher education in the year immediately following completion of their Diploma. As a result, higher education providers will continue to receive applications from students who have successfully completed Diplomas with different structures for several years after the structure has changed for new Diploma students.

The development of the Access to HE qualification



Chronology of the Access to HE Diploma

Prior to 2009, Access to Higher Education Certificates were awarded. No common format was applied to titles and there were no national agreements about credit (so different numbers of credits were required on different courses). Grades awarded before September 2009 were made on the basis of local agreements only. Therefore, there is no relationship between grades that may have been awarded before September 2009 and grades awarded as part of the current national Access to HE Grading Scheme. Consequently, these students are not able to meet any entry requirements that include merit or distinction grades and may have an all-pass credit profile, as this was the only outcome available at the time they completed their Diploma.

Between 1 September 2006 and 31 August 2008, the pilot Access to HE Diploma was awarded on a pass/fail basis. Individual units did not have grades. Unit sizes of 1, 3, 6, 9 and 12 credits were available.

Between 1 September 2008 and 31 August 2009, the pilot Access to HE Diploma allowed for grading of individual units.

From 1 September 2009, Access to HE Diplomas have been awarded with unit grades of Pass, Merit or Distinction, based on achievement of a standard 60-credit requirement. Unit sizes available were 1, 3, 6, 9 and 12 credits.

The last ungraded Access to HE Diploma was awarded in 2011.

From 1 September 2014, Access to HE Diplomas have been awarded with unit grades of Pass, Merit or Distinction, based on achievement of a standard 60-credit requirement. The credit values available for units was reduced to 3, 6 or 9 credits.

From 1 September 2014, for the purposes of consistency and equity for students, the maximum number of credits for which a student can register has been limited to 60 credits. Prior to this it was possible for students to achieve more than 60 credits.

From 1 September 2014, for the purposes of consistency and equity for students, the maximum number of graded Level 3 credits for which a student can register is limited to 45. The remaining 15 ungraded credits (at Level 2 or Level 3) are listed as 'achieved' or 'not achieved' on student transcripts. Prior to this, it was possible for students to achieve a Diploma with between 45 and 60 credits from Level 3 units, all of which were graded.

From 1 September 2014, GCSE equivalent units in English, maths or science, which were previously regulated by QAA through the process of Diploma validation, have not been regulated by QAA. Claims to GCSE equivalence since this date are not supported by QAA.

From 1 September 2014, Access to HE Diploma students must be registered for named units within 12 weeks of the start of their course, or before they apply to higher education - whichever is the sooner. Admissions officers can therefore expect to see the full details of the programme that an applicant is following, at point of application, and if this appears to show more or less than 60 credits, this should be queried directly with the applicant.

From 1 September 2017 higher education entry, the Access to HE Diploma has been included in the UCAS Tariff tables.

From 1 September 2020, the pilot Subject Descriptor for Medicine was available.

From 1 September 2021, the Subject Descriptor for Medicine was fully implemented.

From August 2024, the Diploma Specification includes the minimum of one unit larger than 3 credits (this can be either a 6 or 9-credit unit and can be either a graded or ungraded unit).

From 1 August 2024, the Diploma Specification includes a maximum of 30 credits that can be made up of 6 and/or 9-credit units. Prior to this, there was no limit on the use of larger units.

From 1 August 2024, the Grading Scheme is further standardised so that all units are graded on three the Grading Standards of Knowledge and Understanding, Subject Specific Skills, and Transferable Skills, and units are graded holistically. Prior to this, the Grading Scheme allowed a choice of between 2 and 7 grading criteria for each unit.

From 1 August 2024, there will be a pilot of a new (single) Subject Descriptor in Nursing and Health Professions. The same Subject Descriptor will be used for all Diplomas offering the titles of either Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) or Access to HE Diploma (Health Professions).

From 1 August 2025, the Subject Descriptor in Nursing and Health Professions will be fully implemented by all providers offering Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) or Access to HE Diploma (Health Professions).

Queries about the content and validity of an Access to HE qualification

Higher education providers with specific queries regarding the content or validity of an Access to HE qualification are advised to contact the relevant Access Validating Agency (awarding body). Alternatively, if you have any questions or concerns about legacy qualifications, please contact QAA by emailing: AHE@qaa.ac.uk

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