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Dear UCAS Correspondent

Changes to the QAA Access to HE Diploma with effect from 1 August 2024, affecting applicants to HE for the academic year 2024-25

I am writing to notify you of changes to the Access to HE Diploma for implementation from 1 August 2024 (except where indicated below) **which will first impact on admissions to HE for the academic year 2024-25.**

These changes were approved by QAA's Board following extensive consultations, follow-up meetings and testing that have taken place since March 2022. We would like to thank everyone in HE who dedicated time in responding to the two consultations as well as those higher education providers who have been on our advisory groups, participated in online consultation briefings, gave feedback at the meeting of the Academic Registrar's Council: Admissions Practitioners Group in November 2022, and have participated in follow-up meetings. Your input has helped shape the future of the Access to HE Diploma.

What isn't changing

We are not introducing any change to the overall size of the Diploma. The Diploma will remain a credit-based qualification of 60 credits, of which 45 credits will be at Level 3 and will be graded as Pass, Merit or Distinction with the remaining ungraded credits at either Level 2 or 3. The maximum number of credits which can be transferred under Credit Transfer will remain at 30 credits (half the total available) and can be made up of either graded or ungraded credits. Unit size will continue to be 3, 6 or 9 credits where 1 credit represents 10 notional learning hours.

We believe this structure and overall grading of the qualification is widely understood by Access to HE providers, higher education providers and AVAs. Ungraded Level 2 and Level 3 credits provide an 'easing in' for students who have not studied for a number of years and it allows students to 'step on and step off' where necessary; it allows some flexibility in course design to play to existing strengths within providers; it has the potential to facilitate credit accumulation and transfer (CATS) and, as funding of other qualifications moves towards micro-credentials, keeping the credits may further allow flexible learning.

However, one of the intended outcomes of the review was to ensure greater parity of learning experience and equity of opportunity and achievement for our students through some standardisation of the Diploma Specification and Grading Scheme. The changes to each of these are outlined below.



What is changing

Diploma Specification

- A minimum of 1 unit of either 6 credits or 9 credits to be included in each Diploma.
- A maximum of 30 credits that can be made up of 6 or 9-credit units (offered as ungraded and/or graded credits provided the maximum of 30 credits is not exceeded).
- The introduction of a Subject Descriptor for Nursing and Health Professions (available as a pilot for 2024 for implementation in 2025).

A revised copy of the full Diploma Specification will be released in July 2023.

Grading Scheme

- There will be three Grading Standards which will be applied equally to all units and all assessments.
- A grade can only be determined upon completion of all unit learning outcomes.

A full copy of the three Grading Standards is available now on request by email to ahe@qaa.ac.uk, and a full revision of the Grading Scheme Handbook will now be completed and released no later than August 2023.

QAA support throughout implementation

We recognise there will be an impact from these changes to the Diploma, particularly for the purposes of publishing entry qualifications and also for training of admissions officers and tutors. Our aim is to support HE providers throughout the period to implementation through a variety of means, including:

- offering a number of online briefings for HE providers throughout the 2023-24 academic year (these will be publicised via the UCAS weekly bulletin and on the QAA website)
- attending national admissions officers and schools liaison officers events as appropriate
- providing articles for national sectoral groups' publications as appropriate.

If you do have any queries, my colleague Anne Granger is continuing to work on the arrangements as set out above and can be contacted via ahe@qaa.ac.uk.

Yours faithfully



Rob Stroud

Director – Assessment Services and Access to HE
QAA