



Access to HE Diploma: Guidance on Grading

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Access to HE Diploma: Guidance on grading

Introduction

These guidance notes aim to summarise the main points of the QAA Access Grading Implementation Handbook, and to provide a reference tool for tutors, Access coordinators and moderators.

However these notes should be always read in conjunction with the QAA Implementation Handbook, which provides the details of the current QAA regulations governing grading of the Access qualification. All Access tutors should be sure to familiarise themselves with all parts of the QAA guidance.

The complete QAA Implementation Handbook can be downloaded from the QAA website: <http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas/default.asp>

or from the OCN's website:

<http://www.ocner.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-document-downloads>

All parts of the QAA Implementation handbook (Parts A-K) are now available:

Part A	Introduction and principles
Part B	Key features
Part C	The grade descriptors (also available in Word)
Part D	Assigning grade descriptors
Part E	Grade descriptors and assessment
Part F	Arriving at the final grade for units
Part G	Record keeping
Part H	Moderation
Part I	Assessment and reassessment
Part J	Award and certification of the Access Diploma
Part K	Standardisation



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The Access to HE Diploma grading model:

Background

The Access to HE Diploma is a nationally recognised qualification with common requirements relating to the description of student achievement. The Diploma is a credit-based, graded qualification, and requirements relate to both the award of credit and to the award of grades.

From September 2009 providers and AVAs must implement grading of the Access Diploma and only Access courses which are able to award grades for units will be permitted to run. Universities will make offers of admission based upon grades for students commencing Access courses after September 2009.

1. Key features of the grading model

Refer to **Parts A and B** of the *QAA Grading Implementation Handbook*.

Only **Level 3** units which contribute towards the achievement of the Access Diploma will be graded, Level 2 units are not graded.

The graded element of any Diploma may therefore be between 45 and 60 credits.

Grades awarded to Level 3 units can be **Pass, Merit or Distinction**, where:

- Pass = achieving the Learning Outcomes for the unit, and assessment criteria at Level 3
- Merit or Distinction = a recognition of higher level of performance than that required by the learning outcomes and assessment criteria
- Grades are awarded following the consideration of a learner's work against generic criteria, called Grade Descriptors

Grade Descriptors indicate what skills or level of performance a learner must demonstrate to be awarded Merit or Distinction in 7 key areas (see below).

There are no Grade Descriptors for 'Pass' – a pass is equivalent to achieving the learning outcomes at Level 3.

Each Grade Descriptor contains within it a number of **grading components or elements**, which give specific detail of the performance to be measured in order to gain merit or distinction. Not all elements are used, and tutors must choose which element to use for each assignment to be graded.

Each Level 3 unit must have a minimum of 2 and maximum of 7 Grade Descriptors assigned to it.

The **'Quality' descriptor** (No. 7) must be assigned to all Level 3 units and used in the assessment of all assignments to be graded.



Once assigned, the Grade Descriptors will apply to that unit, wherever delivered and however assessed, for the life of the unit.

Grade Descriptors have been assigned to each Level 3 unit currently used in the OCN's Access unit databank, and have been formally approved by the AVA.

Each Level 3 unit in the Access unit databank will show the Grade Descriptors to be used for that unit.

Following the initial grading implementation phase (Jan – June 2009), the process for approving Grade Descriptors will form part of the AVA's formal Access unit development and approval process.

2. The grade descriptors:

Seven key areas for measuring performance (merit and distinction)

Refer to **Part C** of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

- 1 Understanding the subject
- 2 Application of knowledge
- 3 Application of skills
- 4 Using information
- 5 Communication and presentation
- 6 Autonomy and / or Independence
- 7 Quality

Assigning grade descriptors to units

Refer to **Parts C and D** of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook.

When developing a new Level 3 unit, providers should propose the grade descriptors for the unit on the Access unit template. OCN Eastern Region will make the final decision on the grade descriptors to be used as part of the unit approval process.

(Important note: approval to develop a new Access Diploma unit must be gained from the OCN in advance – please refer any requests to your OCN Development Manager)

When developing a new unit providers should note the following:

- All seven grade descriptors should be considered as being potentially appropriate for use
- Some grade descriptors will be more appropriate to use than others, depending upon the Learning Outcomes of the unit.



- The appropriateness of grade descriptors will relate specifically to the skills and performance to be captured by the learning outcomes in the unit.
- All units will offer a variety of grading opportunities. The grade descriptors should allow tutors to consider the full range of student performance demonstrated in the achievement of the learning outcomes for the unit
- The variety of assessment methods to be used is not usually relevant to the decision about which grade descriptors to use and may actually be misleading. (And remember that these methods may differ depending on where and how the unit is delivered)
- Most learning outcomes begin with the word 'Understand'. This does not mean that Grade Descriptor 1 (Understanding the subject) will be appropriate for all units.
- Any combination of grade descriptors may be used (minimum 2, maximum 7) and the 'Quality' descriptor must be used in all units.
- It is expected that, in order to cover all grading opportunities, the majority of units will have more than 2 grade descriptors
- The use of one or more of the individual components, or 'grading elements' within a grade descriptor will be decided by tutors at the point of delivery and assessment. This is not decided during the unit development and approval process.

3. Using the grade descriptors in assessment – a step-by-step guide

Refer to **Parts E and F** of the *QAA Grading Implementation Handbook*

Overview

- Each Level 3 unit will be awarded a **single grade**, either Pass, Merit or Distinction (P, M, D), regardless of the number of assignments required to achieve the learning outcomes for the unit.
- Where a unit is assessed through one assignment, all of the grade descriptors for that unit are used to measure performance in the assessment.
- Where a unit is assessed through more than one assignment, the grade descriptors can be individually allocated to the different assignments as appropriate:
 - All the grade descriptors for the units must be used.
 - All assignments for the units should be graded.
 - A grade descriptor can be used more than once if it is relevant to more than one assignment.
 - Grade Descriptor 7 ('Quality') must be used in all assignments.

Step 1: Design an Assessment Plan for the unit

The Assessment Plan will determine which Grade Descriptors and which **individual grading elements** will be used in each assignment used for the unit



The assignment brief for the unit can then be written to include the grade descriptors for the unit, information on specific grading components to be used and information for the student on the performance expected to gain a merit or distinction

Units with only one assignment

If the unit is assessed using only one assignment, all the descriptors chosen for the unit will also apply to the assignment.

Units with more than one assignment

If the unit is assessed using more than one assignment, the chosen grade descriptors will be applied across the group of assignments, using them in different combinations for each assignment as appropriate. Grade descriptor 7 must be considered when grading all assignments

For example,

Unit has been assigned grade descriptors **2, 4, 5 and 7**

The unit has three assignments:

First assignment: Grade Descriptors **2, 5 and 7** are appropriate

Second assignment: Grade Descriptors **4 and 7**

Third assignment: Grade Descriptors **5 and 7**

This does mean that a grade descriptor may be used more than once within a unit, but this could be entirely appropriate if the same sort of performance is required in both assignments (e.g. Presentation and Communication skills), and could give more confidence about the reliability of the final grade awarded to the student for this descriptor across the unit. Any combination is acceptable.

Example A: Unit using three assignments

Grade Descriptors	Assignment One Essay	Assignment Two Report	Assignment Three Presentation
2	✓		
4		✓	
5	✓		✓
7	✓	✓	✓

Grade Descriptor 7 is used for all **units**, and must be used for all **assignments**.

Step 2: Decide which elements of the chosen grade descriptors to use

Tutors will decide which elements of each chosen grade descriptor are appropriate to the unit and the work being assessed. This will depend on the method of assessment being used. Tutors can choose to use the elements within a descriptor that they feel will work best for that assignment, within those permitted for that grade descriptor.

For example, Grade Descriptor 5 may be assigned to the unit because the unit will measure performance in communication and presentation skills. In Assignment one students will write



an essay and are not required to include images. A tutor might therefore choose to use the items underlined, as shown in Example B below.

Example B: Grade Descriptor 5, with items to be used underlined

Indicative content for Merit : The student, student’s work or performance demonstrates	Indicative content for Distinction: The student, student’s work or performance demonstrates
Using this descriptor Any items (one or more) from the list	Using this descriptor Any items (one or more) from the list
a. Very good command of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ format ▪ <u>structure</u> ▪ use of images ▪ <u>language (including technical or specialist language)</u> ▪ syntax ▪ register ▪ <u>spelling</u> ▪ <u>punctuation</u> ▪ <u>referencing</u> 	a. Excellent command of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ format ▪ <u>structure</u> ▪ use of images ▪ <u>language (including technical or specialist language)</u> ▪ syntax ▪ register ▪ <u>spelling</u> ▪ <u>punctuation</u> ▪ <u>referencing</u>

Step 3: Provide information for students – the assignment brief

Information given to students is critically important for the success of grading. It will be helpful to students to include the full grade descriptors within a student handbook, or separate grading guidance for students, so that they can see what levels of performance are expected at each grade for each of the grade descriptors.

So that students are clear about what is expected of them, it is essential that tutors will need to incorporate information about which grade descriptors are being used, and which grading elements are being used, into the relevant assignment brief.

It is essential that this information should be as clear as possible, in order to make grading decisions completely transparent and understandable to students and to minimise any necessity for students to make representations to contest grading decisions.

OCN Eastern Region exemplar documents, including assignment briefing sheet, feedback sheet and IV form are available to download from the OCN website:

<http://www.ocner.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-document-downloads>

As a minimum it is required that tutors:

- List the grading descriptors assigned to the unit (See Example C, which shows just one descriptor. Repeat the process for additional descriptors).
- List the grading components to be used for the assignment



- Tutors may also choose to add some information that explains to the student how they would expect the grade descriptor requirements to be shown in the student's work (i.e. contextualising the grade descriptors).
- Create a space for recording the grades awarded and comments for feedback to the student. (See Example D)
- Contextualising the grade descriptors is not mandatory. However many tutors in the pilot centres did find it helpful to give this additional information to students.

Tips on assignment briefs

- It may be useful to devise one single assignment brief for the unit even when there are several assignments. In this way information can be given on the grade descriptors and grading components to be used across the assignments for the whole unit, and this can be recorded on a single brief, which allows the same form to be used for all assignments in the unit
- Tutors may also find it useful to separate the briefing sheet which relates to Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria, from that which relates to grading criteria.
- Only when the unit has been achieved at Level 3 will it go forward for grading, and it may be helpful to separate these two assessment processes by using separate forms – i.e. one for judgement and feedback related to achievement of Level and one for judgement and feedback related to achievement of Grade
- Assignment briefs may ask students to indicate themselves where they have met the criteria for grading, against each of the grading components in the grade descriptors.

Example C: Grading information for use on Assignment briefs

NB: grading elements being used are underlined.

Grading descriptor/theme	Merit :	Distinction:
	The student, student's work or performance	The student, student's work or performance
1. Understanding of the subject	a. <u>demonstrates a very good grasp of the relevant knowledge base</u> b. is generally informed by the major conventions and practices of the area of study c. <u>demonstrates very good understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study</u>	a. <u>demonstrates an excellent grasp of the relevant knowledge base</u> b. is consistently informed by the major conventions and practices of the area of study c. <u>demonstrates excellent understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study</u>



Grading descriptor/theme	Merit :	Distinction:
	The student, student’s work or performance	The student, student’s work or performance
What this means for your assignment	<i>Tutors may add some information about their expectations of how such performance will be evident in the work for the assignment.</i>	<i>Tutors may add some information about their expectations of how such performance will be evident in the work for the assignment.</i>

Example D:

A possible way of giving grading information and feedback to students: in this example, the assignment is using Grade Descriptors 2,4,5 and 7. Such a box could be added to the assignment brief/assessment record sheet, as appropriate to the practice in your centre.

	Tutor Comments **	Performance against descriptor (P*/M/ D)
2. Application of knowledge		
4. Use of Information		
5. Communication and presentation		
7. Quality		

* NB. There are no descriptor statements for “Pass”. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit at Level 3.

** NB. Comments should relate to the type of performance described by the chosen elements of the descriptor, so that students clearly understand the grade given

Step 4: Internal Moderation

Refer to **Part H** of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

Internal verification (IV) and internal moderation are critical to the success of grading and processes and outcomes will be monitored by OCN Eastern Region External moderators (i.e. Access Centre Moderators and subject moderators).

Once tutors have completed the assessment plan (i.e. decided which grade descriptors to use for the unit, which grading elements to use for assignments and presented this information in assignment briefs) they should put them forward for internal verification (IV).

All assignments and assignment briefs must be internally verified before being given to students and this will be especially important with the implementation of grading.

In addition decisions on grading will need to be submitted for internal moderation, as part of your usual process for sampling and moderating students’ assessed work. Feedback from



internal moderators should be sure to address grading decisions and feedback given to learners on performance against grade descriptors, as well as achievement of learning outcomes and credit level.

The External Moderator is responsible for overseeing the assessment and internal moderation process to ensure that all requirements for grading have been met. External moderators will want to see evidence that internal moderation processes have been adapted to incorporate decisions and feedback on grading.

Providers will need to include samples of graded work (at pass, merit and distinction) in all subject moderation samples provided to the OCN annually.

Step 5: Grade Students' work

*Refer to **Parts E and F** of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook*

By providing students with clear information about how their work will be graded, it should be relatively straightforward for tutors to make grading decisions and give useful feedback to students about how they achieved the grades awarded, and how they might improve their performance. Grades given for individual assignments will be formative and indicative ('Grade indicators') and should be distinguished from the final grade for the unit. This is particularly the case where more than one assignment is used to assess a unit.

Grades awarded should be recorded in a way that allows for a review of all the grades given for a unit

Feedback to students

- Feedback on performance should relate to the grade descriptors and specific grade components
- Care is needed with language used in feedback to students, especially the terms 'very good' and 'excellent'. In grade descriptors 'very good' usually indicates a merit-level performance, and 'excellent' a distinction. It may therefore be confusing for a student to receive a comment such as 'excellent essay' and be awarded a merit.
- As stated above, 'Grade indicators' may be given to students when returning individual assignments for developmental purposes. However it should be made clear that where the assignment forms one of several for the unit, that the grade is merely an indication at this stage and should not be understood as the final grade for the unit.
- Tutors should wait until all assignments for unit have been submitted and assessed, before giving the final grade for the unit to the student
- Pilot centres have reported that feedback to students is much simpler with grading – tutors can cut and paste the relevant comments directly from the grade descriptors



Step 6: Decide on the final grade for a unit

Refer to **Part F** in the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

Grading occurs only when a unit has been achieved at Level 3. Tutors decide for each assignment, which grade has been achieved: either Pass, Merit or Distinction. **The grades for individual assignments are the ‘grade indicators’ which are not formal or final unit grades.**

Each grade descriptor used for a unit will generate at least one grade indicator, more if the grade descriptor has been used more than once in more than one assignment.

The list of all grade indicators form the ‘grade profile’ e.g. PPMDD, which is used to determine final grade for unit. It is the **mid-point** of the list of grade indicators (when placed in order of grade) that determines the grade, e.g. PPMDD = Merit.

Only the mid-point of the list of grade indicators may be used to determine the final grade - no other form of average or other calculation is permitted.

NB. Where the grade profile = PPDD, a tutor can decide that the midpoint (and final grade for the unit) is Merit.

There is no weighting of individual assignments – all grade indicators produced by assessing student work count equally towards the final grade for the unit.

Example E: Arriving at the final grade for the unit - single assignment:

Grade descriptors for unit = 2, 4, 5 and 7	
ASSIGNMENT 1: ESSAY	
Grade descriptor	Performance against descriptor P*, M, D
2	P
4	D
5	M
7	M
Unit grade profile (list of grades from low to high)	P, M, M, D ↑ midpoint
Final grade for unit	Merit

*NB. There are no descriptor statements for “Pass”. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit at Level 3.



Example F: Arriving at the final grade for the unit - where there are several assignments for the unit:

Grade descriptors for unit = 2, 4, 5 and 7

- All grade descriptors must be used
- All assignments must be graded
- Grade descriptor 7 ('Quality') must be used in all assignments

ASSIGNMENT 1: ESSAY		ASSIGNMENT 2: CASE STUDY		ASSIGNMENT 3: PRESENTATION	
Grade descriptor for assignment	Performance against descriptor: P*, M, D	Grade descriptor for assignment	Performance against descriptor: P*, M, D	Grade descriptor for assignment	Performance against descriptor: P*, M, D
2	P				
		4	P		
5	D			5	M
7	M	7	P	7	M
Grade indicators for assignment	P, M, D	Grade indicators for assignment	P, P	Grade indicators for assignment	M, M
Unit grade profile	P, P, P, M, M, M, D ↑ midpoint				
Final grade for unit	Merit				

*NB. There are no descriptor statements for "Pass". Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit at level 3.

When grading units:

- Grade is based on a holistic review of all assessed work for the unit
- Tutor judgement may be used in cases where no overall grade is produced by the grade profile, e.g. M, M, D, D
- **Grade Descriptor 7** ('Quality'), which looks at the level of overall performance in responding the brief, may be used as the deciding factor when determining the final grade for the unit
- **No weighting of assignments is permitted**, all grade indicators have equal value
- Students should be able to clearly understand how the final grade has been arrived at, and this should be reflected in the feedback given to the student. This will minimise cases of representation or contested grades. (see Representations, below)



Step 7: Track grades and keep records

Refer to **Part G** of the QAA Grading Implementation handbook

Records of assessment outcomes, including all unit grades, kept by the Tutor should be:

- **reliable** - information about grades should be accurate and complete
- **authentic** - records should specify when and by whom grading decisions were made
- **accessible** - records about assessment outcomes, including grades, should be able to be located and retrieved. Good practice would suggest that records should be kept centrally
- **secure** - student records should only be accessible by those who are entitled to see them
- **sufficient** - records should clearly indicate the unit grades proposed by the Tutor for achievement on each of the units in each student's programme of study and how those grades relate to assessed work
- **auditable** - records should be able to be reviewed by external moderators and others acting on the AVA's behalf to confirm the security of the grading process
- **current** - records should be kept up-to-date and maintained, as a minimum, for the period that the student is studying on the Access to HE course and until such time as awards have been made by the AVA.

All providers are permitted to use their own methods to track and record grades for Level 3 units. An example from the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook has been given below and these may be used or adapted for use by Tutors.

Exemplar documents are also available to download from the OCN's website:

<http://www.ocner.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-document-downloads>

Example G: Access unit grading profile: tutor record for 5 units

Student name:

Unit Title	A		B	C	D			E	
Assignment	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	1	2
Grade descriptor									
1 – Understanding of the Subject	P		P		M		P		P
2 – Application of Knowledge		M				P		M	
3 – Application of Skills					P				
4 – Use of Information	P		M						
5 – Communication and presentation	M			D		M			
6 – Autonomy and Independence				M				D	M
7 – Quality	M	M	M	M	P	P	M	M	P
Unit Grade Profile	PPMMMM		PMM	MMD	PPPPMMM			PPMMMD	
Unit Grade	Merit		Merit	Merit	Pass			Merit	



4. Assessment Regulations

Refer to **Parts I and J** of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook and the OCN Eastern Region 'Access to HE Diploma: Assessment Principles'.

Overview

- The assessment process should be undertaken in the usual way for all units, in order to determine whether or not all the learning outcomes for the unit have been achieved.
- If all learning outcomes for a unit have been achieved at level 3, the student is judged to have gained the number of credits assigned to that unit and the student's work for that unit is eligible for grading. (Refer to **Part F** for details)
- If the student is unsuccessful in achieving all the learning outcomes at Level 3, they may have **one** opportunity to resubmit. *
- If a resubmission is successful their work is eligible for grading. Resubmissions are **not capped at a Pass**.
- Once a grade has been awarded for a unit, assessed work cannot be resubmitted in order to improve that grade. No 'grade polishing' is permitted.
- If a resubmission is unsuccessful the student will not achieve the unit at Level 3 (but may achieve Level 2) and their work will not be given a grade
- If resubmission is unsuccessful, the only way that a further submission can be made, and credit can awarded for the unit at Level 3 is through Referral (see Referrals, below)
- All referrals are capped at a **Pass**.
- If the student is not successful at this final stage, there are no further opportunities to resubmit.
- Late submission of work - all work submitted after the agreed deadline (where there is no agreed extension, or extenuating circumstances) is capped at a **Pass**

* Clarification on resubmission

QAA guidance states that students are allowed one opportunity to resubmit (in order to achieve Level 3). However a provider's assessment regulations, approved by the AVA at the point of validation, may not permit students the opportunity to resubmit **all** assignments for **all** units. You should therefore refer to your own Centre's Access submission document for the approved assessment regulations for your Access courses.

Some centres have set a limit on the total number of resubmissions allowed on their course. Although this varies, a general rule of thumb is for resubmission to be permitted for a maximum of 25% of units.



Successful submission

For the purposes of this grading guidance, a successful submission is one where all the learning outcomes for the assessed work have been achieved at Level 3. When a submission is successful it is eligible for grading.

Unsuccessful submission

If a submission is unsuccessful (where one or more of the learning outcomes has not been achieved at Level 3) the following apply:

- the original submission is returned to the student, with written feedback which explains which learning outcome(s) has/have not been achieved, and why
- the opportunity for resubmission is explained to the student
- the original submission is retained (by the student or Tutor) for moderation purposes
- the particular requirements for resubmission are specified to the student.

Draft submissions

- Draft submissions are permitted, in accordance with the provider's assessment regulations agreed at the point of programme validation.
- Arrangements for submitting drafts must be specified to all students in writing (for example in student handbooks, assignments briefs.)
- Drafts must be submitted for a tutors' consideration before the formal submission date.
- The student and tutor should clearly indicate that it is a draft piece of work
- Any feedback given to a student on a draft must not include predicted grade indicators, or other detailed information about possible grading judgements
- Once a formal submission has been made, neither the student nor tutor can later declare it to be a draft.

Resubmission

Refer to **Part I** of the *QAA Grading Implementation Handbook*

The purpose of the resubmission process is only to provide a means by which student work can become eligible for grading, i.e. to achieve the learning outcomes at Level 3, **not to provide a mechanism for revising grades.**

Only when the unit has been achieved at Level 3, will it be eligible for grading

Resubmission must

- clearly specify the type of resubmission required
- be proportionate to the degree of non-achievement
- have regard to the method by which the learning outcome(s) were originally assessed
- have regard to the pattern of assessment of the learning outcomes
- specify a deadline for resubmission
- be careful not to confer any undue advantage to students who may achieve through reassessment
- be applied consistently across assessment situations.

Resubmission can involve:

- a) revision of the original assignment, and/or



- b) addition to the original assignment.

If this is not practicable (for example for test or examination situations), the resubmission may involve a new task assessing:

- c) the same set of learning outcomes or
- d) a sub-set or individual learning outcomes

Partial resubmission is permitted. In general, this will mean:

- where non-achievement at Level 3 is the result of omission, resubmission of additional material to achieve the learning outcomes is permitted
- where a single learning outcome has not been achieved, the resubmitted work will only address that one learning outcome.
- assessment criteria are assessed through assessment of the learning outcome(s) to which they relate: resubmission of work for individual assessment criteria will not usually be used in isolation.
- Where a number of learning outcomes have not been achieved, resubmission is likely to require a major reworking of the assignment.

Extensions and late submissions

- All extensions and late submissions must be agreed with the tutor in line with assessment regulations approved at the point of programme validation and providers' published guidance, for example in the Course or Student Handbook.
- If work is submitted after the agreed deadline, grade indicators for those assignment(s) are capped at Pass, unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- If an assignment is late and is unsuccessful, there is no opportunity for resubmission except via the referrals process (see Referrals below).

Representation – contesting a grade

Refer to **Part I** of the *QAA Grading Implementation Handbook*

A student wishing to contest an informal grade or grade indicator for an individual assignment may do so by making a representation within a week of being informed of the informal grade.

In the first instance, it is important that the student is able to receive a clear explanation from the tutor of how a grade for an assignment has been reached.

If a student still wishes to contest a grade after receiving further explanation, representation must be considered by the internal moderator. The External Moderator (Access Centre Moderator) is not required to make the final decision on representations but is required to confirm that the process for dealing with representations (including internal moderation) is robust.

Information to enable a representation to be considered would include:

- The assignment brief
- Any draft submissions



- The formal submission
- The relevant unit
- Tutor feedback with final grade identified
- Internal moderation records
- Explanation of the reason for the representation

If the internal moderator concludes there is no case for regrading, the grade indicators are included in the unit grade profile and the decision is recorded.

If the internal moderator concludes that there is a case for regrading, the new grade indicator is included in the unit grade profile and the decision is recorded. **Under no circumstances may a tutor make any change to grade indicators or unit grades without the involvement of the internal moderator and without a formal record being made.**

Records of any representations and subsequent decisions made must be kept and made available to the subject moderator and Final Awards Board as required. The formal records of all representations will be considered by the external moderator, who will a) confirm that the representations process has been properly operated and b) may sample and review individual cases.

Tutors may refer a representation to the External Moderator for advice or to make a final decision about whether or not to approve a change to the grade. In these instances, the External Moderator's judgement is final.

Administrative errors made when calculating grades

If an error is identified by a student after graded work has been returned, a student is expected to draw attention to it within one week. If an administrative error has been made (for example, in the calculation of the unit grade profile), the tutor will correct the error on the student's record (for example, assignment feedback sheet), indicating the nature of the error.

The course leader (or Access coordinator) will provide formal authorisation for the change before the amended record is returned to the student. The correction of an administrative error and authorisation for any change will be formally recorded. **Under no circumstances may a tutor make any change to grade indicators or unit grades, without the course leader (or Access coordinator) being involved and without a formal record being made.**

Referrals

Refer to **Part J** of the *QAA Grading Implementation Handbook*

There is only one opportunity for resubmission, except in extenuating circumstances. If the resubmission is unsuccessful, the only way that credit for the unit can be awarded at Level 3 is through referral to the External Moderator at the Final Awards Board.

- The purpose of referral is to allow the Final Awards Board to decide whether or not to allow a student another opportunity to resubmit one or more assignments, in order to achieve sufficient credits to be awarded the Access Diploma.
- Referrals will only be considered where the resubmission process has already been completed.



- Referrals will not be considered where the total credit value of the units not achieved is greater than 15 credits.
- Referrals are made by the tutor, Access Coordinator or Course Team Leader following consultation with the course team and Internal Moderators.
- Decisions about referrals will need to allow time for the student to complete the resubmission, the tutor to assess the work and the External Moderator to confirm the achievement.
- **Grades for any successful referred submissions are capped at a Pass**
- The External Moderator's decision on referrals is final

Appeals

Providers will have their own Appeals and Complaints Policies and processes, which may be Centre-wide, or may be devised specifically for Access to HE programmes. Providers should make sure that this policy is robust and can be used in any instances of appeals against grading decisions. It may be necessary to revise the policy to include information on the processes for dealing with Representations and Referrals (see above)

In relation to grading the Access to HE Diploma, appeals are restricted to;

- Evidence of administrative error in the assessment process
- Extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the Final Awards Board.



5. The Final Awards Board

Refer to **Part J** of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook and the OCN Eastern Region 'Guidance on the conduct of Final Awards Boards'.

Formerly called 'Final Assessment Meetings', Final Awards Boards must be held before 15th July each year in order to approve the award of credit, grades and the Access to HE Diploma to students.

The Final Awards Board will

- follow a standard agenda provided by OCN Eastern Region
- confirm that the rules of combination have been met, for those students who have achieved the Access Diploma, and credit and grade profiles are accurate.
- Make decisions about referrals and extenuating circumstances and review decisions on any representations.
- Complete and sign mitigating circumstances forms and /or NR Forms (for deferral, referral or extension of learning agreement)
- receive **no information about university offers** made to individual students. This information should not play a part in considering whether a student has or has not achieved the Access Diploma

6. Certification

Refer to **Part J** of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook and guidance provided by the OCN's Registration and Awards Team

Following the Final Awards Board, all completed **Recommendation for the Award of Credit Forms** (RACs) are presented to the External Moderator for signing.

The RACs are then submitted to OCN Eastern Region Registration and Awards Team who will then issue Access to HE Diplomas, with a transcript for each Diploma which lists the units, credits and grades achieved.

The Access to HE Diploma can only be awarded where the specific approved rules of combination for that Access award have been met.

If the student did not achieve the Access to HE Diploma, a transcript of unit achievement only will be issued.

Any achievement beyond the 60 credits required for the Access to HE Diploma is separately certificated and is not graded.

7. Standardisation

Refer to **Part K** in the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

OCN Eastern Region will work with providers, External Centre moderators and Access subject moderators to ensure that a common overall approach to grading and consistent standards are secured in the award of grades on the Access to HE Diploma.



Standardisation in relation to grading refers both to:

1. **Process**, in terms of the consistent use of standard systems and procedures by tutors and External Moderators
2. **Judgement**, in terms grading decisions and the way in which these are confirmed to ensure that common student performance is rewarded by common grades.

Process

The *QAA Grading Implementation Handbook* specifies a number of common processes and other features designed to ensure consistency in the overall approach to grading the Access to HE Diploma. The common application of these features provides the essential foundations for consistency of outcomes.

Judgement

It is as important to examine **how** judgements are made as it is to know **what** judgements are made. Standardisation processes should be designed to ensure that assessment (including grading) judgements are valid and reliable; consistent and fair:

All Providers must adopt a common approach to grading the Access to HE Diploma, through the application of the QAA regulations for grading and internal standardisation processes. These processes must be followed by all those who are involved in the assessment, delivery, quality assurance and management of the Access to HE Diploma.

External Moderators are responsible for monitoring Providers' internal standardisation processes and reporting the outcomes to the OCN.

The Director of Quality and Access to HE Quality Reviewer monitor Access standardisation activity and report any matters arising to the Access to HE Committee. Providers and moderators are notified of Access standardisation events held during the year by OCN Eastern Region.

For more information and further details about grading the Access to HE Diploma:

The QAA Grading Implementation Handbook and 'Quick Guide to Grading'
<http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas/default.asp>

OCN Eastern Region

<https://www.ocner.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/for-access-providers>



Access grading checklist for tutors

This checklist is designed to be used by Tutors and Access Co-ordinators throughout the first year of the implementation of grading. It is intended to provide a prompt and can be adapted for your own use. The list is by no means exhaustive

What and when?	Tick ✓
Before the start of the programme	Done
Obtain copies of all programme documentation including unit list <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rules of combination for Diploma • units with grade descriptors • Additional unit information 	
Obtain copy of QAA Implementation Handbook Parts A-K	
Obtain copy of OCN Access Guide to Grading	
Ensure that the following policies are in place, in accordance with the submission approved at the point of validation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals • Assessment regulations • Plagiarism • Drafts and Resubmission • Extensions and late submissions • Representations • Referrals • Extenuating / mitigating circumstances • Academic misconduct • APL/APEL 	
Plan assessment strategy for all Access units, including timetable for assessment and internal moderation	
Write assessment plan for each unit delivered	
Make sure this is IV'd	
Write assignment briefs: including choice of grade descriptors and grading elements	
Make sure this is IV'd	
Define deadlines for submission and resubmission	
Provide guidance for students – may be in the form of a Course Handbook, grading handbook or similar	
Prepare tracking forms for recording: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment decisions for individual assignments • grade profile for a unit • grade profile for the Diploma • grade profile for cohort of students • grade profile for all students on programme 	



Prepare feedback forms if separate from the assignment brief	
During the programme	
Explain grading process to students, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grade descriptors • requirements Pass, Merit and Distinction • assessment regulations e.g. deadlines for submission, resubmissions 	
State whether drafts are permitted and the submission date when assignments are set	
Provide process to deal with resubmission, representation and referral as appropriate	
Ensure all processes and decisions recorded and made available to External Moderator	
If student's work is assessed as being successful, grade the assignment and record the result.	
Attend OCN standardisation events	
Use all opportunities to review the grading process and to highlight any issues as they arise.	
Bring all information and records in relation to grading to meetings with External Moderator, including assessment plans, sampling strategy for subject moderation etc.	
Provide samples to the OCN in February for external subject moderation	
Once all assignments for a unit have been successfully achieved, record the final grade for the unit.	
Once all units have been successfully achieved and grades assigned, record them on the student's grade profile tracking sheet (noting the rules of combination for the Access award)	
Provide feedback to students throughout the programme as appropriate and following the published guidance.	
Internal moderation to take place, as planned, to ensure the requirements for grading are met.	
Internal standardisation also takes place to ensure assessment judgements are fair and consistent across the programme.	
After the programme	
Ensure all student work is ready for External Moderation and assessment and tracking records are accurate and complete.	
Complete the Recommendation for the Award of Credit forms (RACs) for the students and	
Obtain standard agenda for Final Awards Board from the OCN	
Prepare for the Final Awards Board as requested by the External Moderator in their visit plan	
Highlight any samples of work from students who have been subject to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APL/APEL • Mitigating Circumstances 	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals – provide full details • Resubmissions - provide full details including drafts • Referrals • Representations should have already been resolved however the External Moderator will want to review and discuss 	
<p>Attend the Final Awards Board, if appropriate, and report on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of the Award of Credit – partial achievers • Confirmation of students achieving the Diploma • Confirmation of student referrals (NR Form) • Confirmation of students being deferred until a later moderation date (NR Form completed) • Cases of representations and appeals • Names of students carrying on to the next academic year • Cases of mitigating circumstances 	
<p>After the Final Awards Board, ensure the External Moderator has completed the RACs</p>	
<p>Post-Certification</p>	
<p>Review the programme, reflecting on comments in moderation reports, student feedback and own experiences</p>	
<p>Make improvements to programme for the following year as required</p>	
<p>Discuss any issues, concerns or Programme Amendment requirements with the External Moderator, or with the OCN Development Manager at any time as required.</p>	



Glossary of Terms

Access to HE Diploma	The Qualification awarded to students who successfully complete an Access to HE Diploma Programme
Assessment	Assessment is the way in which a tutor can measure what a student has achieved. Assessment is done through a range of assessment activities and provides a framework for feedback and the recognition of student achievement.
Assessment strategy	A strategy for the assessment and reassessment of student work across the Access programme which is approved at the point of programme validation. It will provide the optimum opportunity for all students to achieve the Access to HE Diploma, including consideration of equality and diversity, resources and timescales.
Assessment plan	A plan for the assessment of performance across a whole unit, including assessment methods, assessment tasks, evidence of achievement, grade descriptors and grading elements to be used for each assignment
Assessment criteria	The criteria used by all parties (learner, tutor, moderator) to inform, share and make explicit the judgment made by the assessor of whether a learner has achieved a set of learning outcomes.
Assessor	The person with responsibility for the assessment of student work, often this person is also the tutor
Assignment	The student's work which will be assessed in order to measure whether a student has achieved all or some of the learning outcomes in the unit. An assignment may consist of several smaller tasks.
AVA	Access Validating Agency. OCN Eastern Region is licensed as an AVA by the Quality Assurance Agency.
Credit	Credit is awarded to students for the successful achievement of the learning outcomes in a unit. One credit is awarded for those outcomes which the average learner, adequately supported under optimum conditions, might reasonably be expected to achieve in 10 hours of learning. (1 credit = 10 hours)
Credit Value	Ascribed to a unit to describe the number of credits a learner can achieve through successful completion of a unit. The credit value for a unit is related to the notional hours of learning, including guided learning hours and self study hours, required to complete the learning outcomes in the unit.
External moderation	External Moderators undertake quality assurance activities on behalf of the OCN to ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Access Programme operates according to the submission agreed through the validation process. • Students who are being recommended for the award of credit have



	<p>achieved the specified outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evidence of achievement is appropriate. • The assessment judgements are consistent and reliable with due regard to equity and fairness and national standards. <p>External moderators for Access programmes are Access Centre Moderators and subject moderators.</p>
Grade	<p>The indication of performance for each unit successfully achieved at Level 3. Grades can be pass, merit or distinction.</p> <p>Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit at level 3. Students achieve merit or distinction by demonstrating higher levels of performance described in the grade descriptors for the unit.</p>
Grade descriptor	<p>These describe the levels of performance in 7 key areas which are required in order for a student to achieve a merit or distinction.</p> <p>There are no descriptor statements for “Pass”. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit at level 3.</p>
Grade descriptor element / component	<p>List of indicated performance criteria within each grade descriptor which are used to make a judgement about the grade achieved for an assignment</p>
Grade indicator	<p>This is an informal grade awarded for an individual assignment, which makes up part of the assessment for the unit. Students should be aware that this is not the final or formal grade for the unit.</p>
Grade profile	<p>This is the list of grades a student has achieved for the Access programme; one grade for each unit successfully completed at Level 3. A grade profile will contain between 45 and 60 credits.</p> <p>For Unit grade profile, see below</p>
Internal moderation (IM)	<p>A process by which assessment decisions and practices are regularly sampled and evaluated, and findings are acted upon, to ensure consistency, equity and fitness for purpose across Access courses or pathways and Access curriculum areas.</p>
Internal verification (IV)	<p>Although this may form part of IM processes, and the term is often used interchangeably with IM, the OCN usually refers to IV as the process of verification of assignment tasks and assignment briefs by another tutor, internal moderator etc. prior to being given to students.</p>
Learning outcomes	<p>Statements which clearly identify what a learner will be able to know, understand or be able to do as a result of successfully completing a unit of assessment.</p>
Level, Credit Level	<p>A description of the complexity of learning involved in a unit. Access courses use two credit levels, Two and Three. The level is assigned to each unit and determined by referencing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria against a set of level descriptors</p>



	Level 2 units are not graded.
Provider / Centre	The organisation responsible for the delivery, assessment and internal moderation of the Access to HE Diploma.
RACs	Recommendation for the Award of Credit Forms; once completed by the Tutor and signed by the External Moderator, they enable certification to take place.
Referral	The process by which a tutor can request an additional opportunity for a student to resubmit work in order to achieve credit for a unit, if the first resubmission has been unsuccessful. This can only be agreed by an External Moderator at the Final Awards Board.
Representation	The process by which an individual grade for an assignment (grade indicator, or informal grade) may be contested by a student. This is primarily dealt with according to providers' internal processes but will be monitored by the External Moderator and Final Awards Board as appropriate.
Resubmission	The process whereby a student can submit additional work, or reproduce work in order to achieve all the learning outcomes for a unit.
Rules of combination	This describes the combination of mandatory and optional units and number of credits which must be achieved by a student in order to be awarded an Access to HE Diploma. Rules of combination are approved by the AVA at the point of programme validation.
Standardisation	A process undertaken to ensure that there is a common approach to assessment and grading and that consistent standards are secured in the award of credit and grades.
Submission	A finished piece of student work which is given to a Tutor to be formally assessed.
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QAA Grading Implementation Handbook	QAA's regulations and requirements for the implementation of grading for Providers and AVAs. www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas/default.asp
Unit	A coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes which defines key areas to be studied and assessed in a specific subject area. Units can have a credit value of 1, 2, 3, 6, 9 or 12 credits. Each should have a title, learning outcomes, assessment criteria, credit value and credit level.
Unit grade profile	List of grade indicators from all graded assignments for a unit; used to determine the final grade for the unit (i.e. midpoint of unit grade profile)

