

# Calculating grades for the award of the Access to HE Diploma

Information for students  
completing the Access to HE  
Diploma by 31 July 2020

# Contents

Introduction .....	1
QAA Grading Scheme: Grading the Access to HE Diploma.....	1
The Grades.....	1
The Grade Descriptors.....	2
Using the QAA grading scheme .....	2
Extraordinary Grading Scheme .....	2
Estimated assessment grades .....	2
Calculated unit grades .....	3
Tutor reference .....	3
Will I receive calculated grades? .....	4
Which Access to HE Diplomas are included? .....	4
Are Access to HE distance learning Diplomas included?.....	4
Do I need to apply for calculated grades?.....	4
What if I am due to complete after 31 July 2020? .....	4
Will estimated assessment grades just be applied to exams or all assessments after 20 March 2020? 5	
How will estimated assessment grades work for graded units? .....	5
How will I achieve ungraded units?.....	5
What about students who have an agreed reasonable adjustment or access arrangement? .....	5
Will I see the estimated assessment grades that my provider submits?.....	5
Do I have to continue to complete assessments to inform the estimated assessment grades submitted by providers? .....	5
Can I continue to complete my assessments?.....	6
When and how will estimated assessment grades be submitted to AVAs? .....	6
Will my course tutors need to submit the evidence they have used for estimating my grades?.....	7
Will my estimated assessment grades be accurate? .....	7
How will my estimated assessment grades be quality assured and standardised? .....	7
When will my results be released? .....	7
Will my estimated assessment grades carry the same weight as grades issued in previous or future years? .....	7
Can I appeal my grades? .....	8
If I felt that my calculated grade(s) did not reflect my performance and I chose to sit assessment(s) at the earliest reasonable opportunity will I still be able to go to university this year? .....	8
If I take an assessment at the earliest reasonable opportunity, which will stand – the actual or estimated assessment grade? .....	8
Will I be able to progress to the next stage of education or employment with these grades? .....	8
Further advice and information .....	8
Key terms .....	9

## Introduction

1. The COVID-19 outbreak is the most significant challenge we have all faced in at least a generation and our priority is to ensure that we continue to support our students during the time of uncertainty.
2. On 3 April 2020, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) announced that students who are due to complete their Access to HE Diploma **by 31 July 2020** would now receive calculated grades for all remaining assessments with submission dates after 20 March 2020.
3. The Access to HE Diploma (the Diploma) is a nationally recognised qualification which is designed to provide a preparation for study in higher education for adults returning to education. Individual Diplomas are validated and awarded by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), according to regulations and specifications set by QAA.
4. For each Diploma there is an approved set of units of assessment in a number of different areas which are appropriate for the subject of the Diploma. Access to HE Diplomas awarded in summer 2020 will still be made up of 60 credits. Some credits will be awarded based on successful completion of units and some calculated for assessments due after 20 March 2020.

## QAA Grading Scheme: Grading the Access to HE Diploma

5. The QAA grading scheme will be applied to all assessments (ie assessed work) with a planned submission date on or before 20 March 2020. The following information outlines how assessment grades have been awarded.
6. A grade is awarded for every graded level 3 unit that a student completes successfully as part of an Access to HE Diploma. All Diplomas comprise 45 credits from graded level 3 units, and 15 credits from level 2 or level 3 units that are not graded. There is no overall grade for the Access to HE Diploma.
7. The number of grades awarded to a student depends on the number of graded level 3 units required for the particular Access to HE Diploma. This number can vary because, although all Diplomas contain 45 credits from graded level 3 units, these units can have a value of 3, 6 or 9 credits. So, for example, some Diplomas have a small number of 9 credit units, while others have a larger number of 3 credit units.
8. The grade awarded for each unit is shown on the achievement transcript that is issued with Access to HE Diplomas. The transcript also shows how many credits were awarded for each successfully completed graded or ungraded unit.

## The Grades

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

## The Grade Descriptors

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

1. Understanding of the subject
2. Application of Knowledge
3. Application of Skills
4. Use of information
5. Communication and presentation
6. Autonomy/Independence
7. Quality

## Using the QAA grading scheme

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

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

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

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

## Extraordinary Grading Scheme

15. Due to the measures implemented by the Government in these extraordinary times, we will be applying an extraordinary grading scheme to support students completing their studies by 31 July 2020. This grading scheme will be applied to all remaining assessments due to be submitted after 20 March 2020. It is our expectation that students will have completed a minimum of 50% of planned assessed work by 20 March 2020. If you have any questions about the amount of planned assessed work you have completed you should contact your provider.

The scheme will include:

### 16. Estimated assessment grades

16.1 The course tutor will estimate the assessment grades (of pass, merit or distinction) for each of the grade descriptors assigned to each assessment that was planned for after 20 March 2020.

16.2 Estimated assessment grades will be based on a range of evidence:

- 16.2.1. including prior attainment on course;
- 16.2.2. formative assessments (assessment **for** learning); and
- 16.2.3. any other records of student performance over the course of study.

- 16.3 Prior attainment on course is defined by all assessments completed by 20 March 2020. This will include both formative (assessments **for** learning) and summative assessments (assessments **of** learning).
- 16.4 Estimated assessment grades can be based on a range of evidence but will not include summative assessments. Therefore, any assessments completed after 20 March 2020 will be treated as formative assessments (assessments **for** learning).
- 16.5 Your course tutor may hold other records of your performance over the course of study. If you have questions, please speak to your provider.
- 16.6 The estimated assessment grades submitted by your tutor will reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the most **likely** grades you would have achieved if you had completed your assessments.

## 17. Calculated unit grades

- 17.1 The course tutor will review all the assessment grades that have been given for a unit and will determine the final grade for the unit. This may include actual and estimated assessment grades for units partially completed.
- 17.2 The final grade for each unit is arrived at by establishing the midpoint of grades in the unit grade profile.
- 17.3 Course tutors are best placed to judge the likely performance of their students on course. QAA and AVAs will do everything we can to make sure grades awarded this year follow a similar pattern to the grades received in previous years, so that students do not face a disadvantage as a consequence of these extraordinary circumstances. This will include putting all assessment grades through internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation processes to better ensure that grades are comparable between AVAs, providers and subject areas.

## 18. Tutor reference

- 18.1 In addition to estimating grades, course tutors will be asked to produce a reference for each student to support applications to higher education or employment during these exceptional times, now and in the future. It is expected that students will receive the tutor reference no later than 27 July 2020, to align with the upload of results to UCAS. **Tutor references will not be included in the range of evidence to inform estimated assessment grades.**
- 18.2 The following information aims to provide students with answers to some common questions about grades to be awarded to students who planned to complete their Access to HE Diploma **by 31 July 2020.**

**Where a student feels their case has not been addressed by this guidance they should speak to either their course tutor or AVA**

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

## **Will I receive calculated grades?**

All students due to complete their QAA-recognised Access to HE Diploma by 31 July 2020 will receive calculated grades.

It does not include students that have:

- withdrawn
- an expected completion date after 31 July 2020.

## **Which Access to HE Diplomas are included?**

It will include all QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas that have students who are due to complete by 31 July 2020. For a list of all Diplomas please go to the course search on our [website](#).

## **Are Access to HE distance learning Diplomas included?**

Yes. It will include all QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas that have students who are due to complete by 31 July 2020. The type of the course, for example online, fast track, day release, full-time and part-time will be included. For a list of all Diplomas please go to the course search on our [website](#).

## **Do I need to apply for calculated grades?**

No. If you are due to complete by 31 July 2020 you will automatically receive calculated grades for all remaining assessments with submission dates after 20 March 2020.

## **What if I am due to complete after 31 July 2020?**

Students who plan to complete their Access to HE Diplomas after 31 July 2020 will be supported to complete their studies through changes to the delivery of teaching and assessment of the course.

Access to HE course tutors are working hard to adapt to new ways of delivery and assessment and are developing materials to help students get the most out of their learning in order to prepare them for higher study.

We know that the current environment is a really challenging one, and we want all students to be supported as effectively as possible during this time. Access to HE providers and AVAs already have in place procedures to allow such students to request extensions to deadlines and to identify where extenuating circumstances may affect their academic performance, should the current situation make studying difficult. These procedures will certainly be available to all students. It is also possible that some assessments may be rescheduled.

The [current QAA grading scheme](#) will apply to students who are due to complete after 31 July 2020. Where a student feels their case has not been addressed by this guidance they should speak to their course tutor.

Further guidance will follow in due course.

## **Will estimated assessment grades just be applied to exams or all assessments after 20 March 2020?**

A student completing their Diploma by 31 July 2020 will now receive estimated assessment grades for **all remaining assessments** with submission dates after 20 March 2020. The assessment may include exams, or other forms of assessments, for example essays, practical work and presentations.

## **How will estimated assessment grades work for graded units?**

We are asking course tutors to use their professional experience to make a fair and objective judgement of the grades assigned to each assessment they believe a student would have been likely to have achieved.

Course tutors should draw on existing records and **available evidence** as far as possible in the context of current public health advice.

The course tutor will then review all the assessment grades that have been given for a unit and will determine the final grade for the unit using a standard method. The final grade for the unit is arrived at by establishing the midpoint of grades in the unit grade profile.

## **How will I achieve ungraded units?**

As stated above, we are asking course tutors to use their professional experience to make fair and objective judgements of the achievement on each assessment they believe a student would have been **likely** to have achieved.

Course tutors should draw on existing records and **available evidence** as far as possible in the context of current public health advice.

## **What about students who have an agreed reasonable adjustment or access arrangement?**

Providers will judge the grades that these students would most likely have achieved if they had been able to complete their assessments with the intended reasonable adjustment or access arrangement in place.

## **Will I see the estimated assessment grades that my provider submits?**

No. Providers will not share estimated assessment grades with students until final results have been confirmed. This is to protect the integrity of the tutors' judgements, and to avoid tutors feeling under pressure to submit grades that are not supported by the evidence.

## **Do I have to continue to complete assessments to inform the estimated assessment grades submitted by providers?**

No. There is no requirement for providers to set assessments for the purposes of determining your estimated assessment grade. In addition, providers do not need to ask students to complete any unfinished assessment work and work expected to be resubmitted after 20 March 2020, for the purposes of estimating grades. If you have any questions about late submissions you should speak to your course tutor.

No student should be disadvantaged if they were unable to complete any work set after many providers

closed on 20 March 2020.

Where assessments have been completed after 20 March 2020, course tutors and senior course managers will be expected to exercise caution where that evidence suggests a change in performance. In many cases this is likely to reflect the circumstances and context in which the work is done.

We encourage students to continue learning wherever they can and this may include the completion of formative assessments (a piece of work that supports **your learning**). You should talk to your course provider if you experience difficulties continuing with your learning.

Please note that all assessments completed after 20 March 2020 will not include **summative assessments**.

## Can I continue to complete my assessments?

We know that many Access to HE students are engaged in a tricky balance between work, family responsibilities and studies. However, it is important that all students are as well prepared as they can be for their transition into higher education, so making use of the resources prepared by Access to HE tutors and participating in continuing virtual teaching and tutorials, where possible, is key to ensure you have covered all the subject knowledge required of your Diploma.

Continuing with learning will help all Access to HE students feel more confident that they are ready to take the next step in their education or career pathway. We expect Access to HE course tutors to continue to deliver teaching and support. Therefore, we encourage you to continue your learning wherever you can. You may wish to continue to complete **formative assessments**, where possible. Please contact your course provider. Please note that all assessments completed after 20 March 2020 will be considered to be **formative assessments**. Your tutor may provide you with development feedback on these formative assessments.

**Formative assessment** refers to a wide variety of methods that course tutors use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or Diploma. In other words:

- formative assessments are **for** learning
- summative assessments are **of** learning.

In terms of estimating assessment grades, there is **no requirement** for course tutors to set assessments for the **purposes of determining an estimated assessment grade**.

If you need help or further support, you should contact your course provider.

## When and how will estimated assessment grades be submitted to AVAs<sup>1</sup>?

AVAs will provide detailed instructions to course providers on how to submit **assessment grades and unit grades**. In terms of what will be submitted, it will include:

- **record of prior attainment on course (up to and including 20 March 2020)**
- **record of estimated grades (21 March 2020 to 31 July 2020).**

---

<sup>1</sup> AVAs are the awarding bodies for Access to HE Diplomas

## **Will my course tutors need to submit the evidence they have used for estimating my grades?**

Course tutors will retain all the evidence for the purposes of moderation and standardisation exercises. AVAs will contact providers with sample lists to be externally moderated. The senior course manager will be asked to confirm that the estimated assessment grades are a true representation of student performance.

## **Will my estimated assessment grades be accurate?**

In an extraordinary situation such as this, course tutors are best placed to judge the likely performance of their students had the courses been completed as normal. In the interests of fairness to students, judgements made by course tutors should be consistent. AVAs will therefore quality assure and standardise the judgements once estimated assessment grades have been submitted to ensure grades are fair.

## **How will my estimated assessment grades be quality assured and standardised?**

To make sure that grades are fair, AVAs and providers will ensure estimated assessment grades go through a process of internal moderation, external moderation, and standardisation.

As part of the moderation process, if grading judgements in some providers appear to be more severe or generous compared to national grade outcomes in recent years, AVAs will adjust the assessment grades of some or all of those students upwards or downwards accordingly.

In terms of national standardisation, QAA will consult on the principles of this model shortly, but we expect it will look at evidence such as the:

- prior attainment on course of students at each provider, AVA and by subject
- expected national grade outcomes for this year's students
- national grade outcomes of the provider, AVA and subject in recent years.

## **When will my results be released?**

Results will be released about the same time as in previous years to allow timely transfer to UCAS and higher education providers.

## **Will my estimated assessment grades carry the same weight as grades issued in previous or future years?**

The estimated assessment grades awarded to students will have equal status to the grades awarded prior to 20 March 2020 and also in other years and should be treated in this way by universities, colleges and employers.

The grades awarded for each unit will be shown on the achievement transcript that is issued with Access to HE Diplomas. The transcript also shows how many credits were awarded for each successfully completed graded or ungraded unit. Grades will be reported in the same way as in previous years.

## **Can I appeal my grades?**

**We recognise that some students may feel disappointed that they haven't been able to complete their assessments.**

We are all focused on making sure students are not disadvantaged by these unprecedented circumstances including to allow for an appeal where appropriate. Under the circumstances, the normal arrangements for appeals will not apply. We are considering what arrangements might be put in place to allow an effective appeal and will consult shortly with AVAs and providers on proposals.

If a student does not feel their calculated grades reflect their expected performance, they will have the opportunity to appeal or they may choose to sit their assessments at the earliest reasonable opportunity (when all providers are operating normally). Students should be made aware that taking their assessments later may impact their progression to university in September. In addition, if a student does not believe the correct process of assessment for the award of the Access to HE Diploma has been followed in their case, they will be able to appeal.

## **If I felt that my calculated grade(s) did not reflect my performance and I chose to sit assessment(s) at the earliest reasonable opportunity will I still be able to go to university this year?**

When all providers are operating normally, students may still choose to take an assessment or assessments even where their university or college place has been confirmed. However, it will take time for the results of these assessments to be issued, so you will need to discuss with your higher and further education institution whether to start your course as planned or to delay your entry.

QAA has spoken to UCAS and was reassured to hear that institutions intend to be flexible wherever possible and will do all they can to support students to progress.

## **If I take an assessment at the earliest reasonable opportunity, which will stand – the actual or estimated assessment grade?**

Where students choose to take an assessment or assessments when all providers are operating normally, the actual assessment grade will stand. Please note that your actual assessment grade may be lower than the estimated assessment grade.

## **Will I be able to progress to the next stage of education or employment with these grades?**

This approach will enable students to move onto the next stage of their education or employment in the autumn as planned, subject to meeting the requirements set by the receiving institution or employer.

## **Further advice and information**

19. If you need further information, please take a look at our [frequently-asked questions](#)<sup>2</sup> and/or contact your provider.

---

<sup>2</sup> [www.accesstohe.ac.uk/en/contact-us/faqs/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/en/contact-us/faqs/coronavirus-(covid-19))

## Key terms

**Access Validating Agencies** – awarding bodies licensed by QAA to award Access to HE Diplomas

**Assessment grades** – grade indicators of pass, merit or distinction, for each of the grade descriptors assigned to each assessment that was planned for submission after 20 March 2020

**Calculated unit grade** – the final grade for a unit calculated using the standard method ([Grade Scheme Handbook Section C<sup>3</sup>](#)). This may be based:

- on actual and estimated assessment grades
- solely on actual assessment grades, where all summative assessments for a unit have been completed
- solely on estimated assessment grades, where no summative assessments have been completed

**Extraordinary grading scheme** – regulations to be applied to assessments on QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas with a planned submission date after 20 March 2020, for students who planned to complete their Access to HE course by 31 July 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

**Estimated assessment grade** – a course tutor's holistic professional judgement of the assessment grades the student would have been most likely to get if they had taken the assessments; they are based on evidence and take into account the student's performance over the course of study

**Formative assessment** – refers to a wide variety of methods that course tutors use to conduct in-process evaluations of student comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or Diploma. They are pieces of work that support learning, or assessments **for** learning. They are not graded

**Planned assessed work** – work planned for submission in the schedule of assessments; this may include formative as well as summative assessments

**Prior attainment on course** – is defined by all assessments completed by 20 March 2020. This will include both formative (assessments **for** learning) and summative assessments (assessments **of** learning). It can include grades and/or grade indicators in the unit grade profile

**QAA Grading Scheme** – regulations for the application of grading to QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas

**Record of prior attainment** – details of assessment grades and unit grades for assessed work completed on or before 20 March 2020

**Record of estimated grades** – details of estimated assessment and unit grades determined by the professional judgement of course tutors under the terms of the extraordinary grading scheme

**Standardisation (processes)** – for the purposes of the extraordinary grading scheme, standardisation processes are statistical checks to ensure that graded outcomes are comparable, for example between AVAs, providers and subject areas

**Summative assessment** – assessments **of** learning which are graded

**Unit grades** – final grade for the unit arrived at by establishing the midpoint of grades in the unit grade profile.

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/access-to-he-resources](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/access-to-he-resources)

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2020  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786  
[www.accesstohe.ac.uk](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk)

*QAA manages the national framework for the recognition and regulation of Access to HE Diplomas.*  
[www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)