

The Access to HE Grading Scheme

Section E: Student Results and Awards Boards

August 2023

Applicable to new students registering from 1 August 2024

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1 Introduction

This section summarises the actions that Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) must take to ensure that student awards and results are properly managed and processed.

Formal authority for the award of the Access to HE Diploma must be located with an appropriate body within an AVA's governance structure. For operational purposes, the AVA delegates this authority to an awards board (or awards boards, where this function is undertaken at provider or centre level). The lead moderator, or other person appointed by the AVA, acts as the AVA's representative at this board.

2 Membership and conduct of the awards board

- The constitution of awards boards is specified by the AVA.
- The AVA's specification may allow awards boards to differ in size and composition to reflect the size, range and organisation of the course(s) being considered, but the specification must ensure that boards will be able to consider all students' achievement and performance on all units which contribute to the awards being made.
- Membership specifications must include the lead moderator (or equivalent), one other representative from the AVA (which could be an AVA officer or another external moderator), as well as at least one provider/centre representative. If more than one course is to be considered at the same meeting, moderators and providers/centres who can represent each course must be present.
- The awards board must be conducted according to a standard agenda provided by the AVA and must be minuted according to the requirements of the AVA.
- Awards board meetings must be held as soon as possible after the related final moderation meeting(s). AVAs should ensure that there is sufficient time between a final moderation and an awards board to allow for any actions (such as providing additional information) that result from decisions made by the final moderation to be completed.

3 Responsibilities of the awards board

- The main responsibility of the awards board is the approval of the award of credits, grades and Access to HE Diplomas.
- The lead moderator is responsible for confirming assessment judgements. The chair of the awards board is responsible for ensuring that due process is followed.
- The awards board will confirm that, for each student for whom the award of the Access to HE Diploma is approved, the rules of combination for the named Access to HE Diploma have been met and the credit and grade profiles are accurate and complete.
- The awards board **must not receive any information about offers for progression to higher education** which may have been made to any student, and such information must not play any part in its considerations. (The meeting of the awards board will be formally closed before any such information is shared.)
- The awards board also takes decisions about:
 - referrals
 - extenuating circumstances
 - aegrotat and posthumous awards
 - cases of academic misconduct
 - appeals.

- AVAs must also have procedures for dealing with appeals that arise as a consequence of an awards board's decision.

4 Referrals

Normally, a student is permitted only one opportunity to resubmit work which fails to meet all requirements of the associated learning outcomes (see Section C). The referral process allows the course team to recommend that a student should be permitted a second resubmission opportunity. Where this occurs during the course, the recommendation must be made to the lead/external moderator and must follow the processes and evidence requirements described in Section C, Annex C1. Where this occurs at the end of a course, the recommendation must be taken to the awards board, and must follow the processes and evidence requirements described below. The awards board is responsible for deciding whether a second resubmission opportunity should be allowed and, if so, what the particular resubmission requirements should be. The AVA must ensure that students are informed of this decision as soon as possible after the meeting (see Annex E1).

a) Before referral

Before considering a referral, the awards board must confirm:

- the student completed the resubmission process and failed to achieve all the learning outcomes for the work being referred
- the student has not achieved sufficient credits to qualify for the award of the Access to HE Diploma
- the course team has consulted with those involved in assessing and moderating the student's work, and the external moderator supports the referral
- tutors have discussed with the student the best way for the student to progress
- the student has been informed that referral does not automatically result in approval for a second resubmission
- the student has been informed that the decision to allow a further opportunity to submit one or more assignments is made by the awards board, based on the evidence put before it.

b) Evidence

Evidence to support the case for referrals must make reference to:

- any special circumstances affecting the individual student
- the particular assignments and number of units in which it is recommended to the board that a student is referred
- details of the achievement in the original submissions and resubmissions for the unit(s) in question (including any other assignments that contribute to the assessment of the unit which have been achieved)
- the student's total achievement profile up to the point on the Access to HE course that the referral is requested (including the title of units, credit values and indicative grades, and which, if any, units were achieved as a result of a successful second resubmission after referral). Referrals will not normally be considered where the total credit value of the units which have already been achieved through referral, or might be achieved as an outcome of a further referral, is more than 15.

c) Decisions

Decisions about referrals made by the awards board must include:

- whether a second resubmission opportunity should be offered
- the nature and extent of the requirements for resubmission. This must take into account all the factors listed in the regulations for first resubmission (see Section C, Annex C2, Resubmissions)
- the deadline for a second resubmission. The deadline will take into account:
 - the need to inform the student of the awards board's decisions, which should be at the earliest opportunity following the awards board meeting
 - the need to allow a limited but reasonable time for the student to complete the resubmission
 - the need to assess the resubmitted assignment(s)
 - the preferred position that, wherever possible, re-assessment will take place and achievement confirmed within a timescale that will allow the student's results to be certificated by the AVA at the same time - or as soon as possible thereafter - as other students' results are certificated.
- where responsibility will lie for confirming the result of resubmission, and the process for confirmation. Normally, responsibility for assessment of the referred resubmission will lie with the original tutor, and responsibility for confirming achievement will lie with the lead moderator, acting on behalf of the awards board. The lead moderator may consult another external moderator with relevant subject expertise, if they consider it necessary to do so.

The awards board may propose alternative arrangements, if necessary, to avoid unreasonable delay. Decisions will be notified to the AVA.

The awards board's decisions in relation to recommended referrals must be made known to the student as soon as possible after the meeting.

d) Assessment of referred resubmissions

The approach to the assessment of referred resubmissions described in Section C (Annex C2, Assessment of referrals) may also be used for the assessment of referred resubmissions undertaken at the end of a course.

e) Possible outcomes from a referred resubmission granted at the end of a course

- **If a referred resubmission is successful** (that is, the work resubmitted after referral demonstrates the achievement of the learning outcomes), approval can be given for the award of credit. Approval will normally be given by the lead moderator, acting on behalf of the awards board, although if there are a large number of referrals it may be appropriate to convene a further meeting of the awards board.
- If the referred resubmission is successful and has been allowed as a result of a late first submission (that is, without an agreed extension or extenuating circumstances) followed by an unsuccessful resubmission the **unit** grade will be capped at pass (consistent with the penalty applied for a late submission).

- If the referred resubmission is successful and has been allowed as a third attempt (with no previous late submission) the assignment can be used in the grading of the unit (that is, the unit grade is not capped and should be graded accordingly).
- **If a referred resubmission is unsuccessful** (that is, the work resubmitted after referral does not demonstrate that the student has achieved the learning outcome(s)), no credits or grades for the unit can be awarded.
- Students whose achievements do not meet the rules of combination for the course on which they are registered or to which they have transferred (including those whose second resubmission after referral is unsuccessful and those who have achieved too few credits to be eligible for referral) cannot be awarded the Access to HE Diploma. Such students will be awarded credits, and grades for any level 3 (graded) units achieved.

5 Extenuating circumstances

- AVAs are required to ensure that providers/centres have appropriate procedures for dealing with cases of extenuating circumstances. These procedures should be clear and available to all Access to HE students. Providers'/centres' procedures must include:
 - a clear definition of extenuating circumstances
 - procedures that must be followed by students to notify providers/centres of extenuating circumstances that affect the completion or submission of work for assessment
 - procedures followed by providers/centres when they have been notified of extenuating circumstances affecting a student's assessed work.
 - procedures relating to special needs and processes for reasonable adjustments.
- In most cases, extenuating circumstances that affect achievement on individual units (for example, in relation to requests for extended deadlines) are handled at course level, and appropriate action and decisions taken according to the provider's/centre's approved procedures. Course teams must document cases of extenuating circumstances and the action taken. This will not only provide auditable evidence of decisions taken, but will help providers/centres to develop 'case law' over time about appropriate actions in particular situations, thereby supporting consistency of practice in providers'/centres' handling of cases of extenuating circumstances. The external moderator must confirm that providers/centres have appropriate procedures in place and that these are operated consistently.
- The awards board will consider cases where extenuating circumstances have affected performance in more than one area or in any other way that falls outside the provider's/centre's normal processes and is not dealt with elsewhere in this documentation.
- Where no prior action has been taken, cases of extenuating circumstances that are brought to the awards board must have been considered by the course team and external moderator prior to the meeting. Cases must be fully documented and include evidence that is presented in a standardised manner and with a recommendation to the awards board on whether each individual claim for extenuating circumstances should be supported and to what degree.

6 Aegrotat and posthumous awards

- Aegrotat awards may be approved by the awards board where there are exceptional **extenuating certified medical circumstances** which have resulted in the student being unable to complete the course requirements **and** the student has achieved **at least 30 of the credits** required for the Access to HE Diploma. In such cases, the Access to HE Diploma can be awarded without full credits and the unit and grade profile will be incomplete. The Diploma awarded must state that it is an aegrotat award.
- Posthumous awards may be made at the discretion of the awards board.

7 Academic misconduct

- Each provider/centre will operate its own procedures for dealing with academic misconduct, and these must be endorsed by the AVA where they relate to achievement on the Access to HE Diploma. Such procedures will specify a variety of penalties to be applied where a student is found to be guilty of academic misconduct, depending on the nature, extent and seriousness of the offence. Penalties may include disqualification for all or part of the award, or requirements for resubmission: they may not include alteration to grades. Serious and/or repeated offences may result in the suspension or exclusion of the student. In these circumstances, the student will be considered at the awards board in respect of the award of credit only for those units not affected by the misconduct.
- The penalty for lesser offences, affecting one or more assignments, may be a recommendation for those assignments affected to be regarded in the same way as assignments which were unsuccessful after resubmission. The awards board must treat such cases in the same way as others where a student has not reached the threshold for credit to be awarded and follow the procedure for referral. In cases of academic misconduct which have affected a student's achievement, the report on the provider's/centre's investigation of the case, and the provider's/centre's judgement, must be considered as evidence.

8 Appeals

a) Appeals that can be taken to the awards board

- The grounds for appeal about the award of credits or grades on the Access to HE Diploma are restricted to:
 - evidence of administrative or procedural error
 - extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the awards board.
- **The awards board cannot receive new representations about academic judgements.** If a student has concerns about assessment decisions relating to the achievement of credits or grades, they should discuss these with the relevant member of the course team when the assessed work is first returned to them. They may subsequently make a representation through the formal procedure described in Section C. A student may, however, appeal the grading decision that results as a consequence of a representation, but only on the grounds detailed above. The awards board must receive a report on any cases where representations have led to changes being made to grades.

- Where judgements made by the awards board lead to a student being allowed further time for the submission of work, the final assessment decisions about that work and the resulting student record must be signed off by someone from the AVA with appropriate authority, such as the lead moderator or chair of the awards board.

b) Appeals as a consequence of decisions made by awards boards

- AVAs must have procedures for dealing with any appeals that are raised by students as a consequence of an awards board's decisions. This procedure must ensure that any such appeals are considered by a body that has the appropriate authority, and which has a different membership to the original awards board.
- In these circumstances the grounds for appeal are still restricted to:
 - evidence of administrative or procedural error in the assessment process
 - extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the awards board.
- Where judgements made by such a body lead to a student being allowed further time for the submission of work, the final assessment decisions about that work and the resulting student record must be signed off by someone from the AVA with appropriate authority, such as the lead moderator or chair of the awards board.

9 Complaints

AVAs must have procedures for dealing with complaints. Complaints are distinct from appeals and must be considered separately from appeals. Where complaints relate to actions taken by the AVA, they should be dealt with through the AVA's own procedures. Where complaints relate to the quality or management of provision, they should be dealt with by the provider's/centre's own complaints procedures.

If an appellant believes the appeals process has not been followed by the AVA, they should make a written complaint to QAA within 15 working days of receipt of the outcome of their appeal from the AVA.

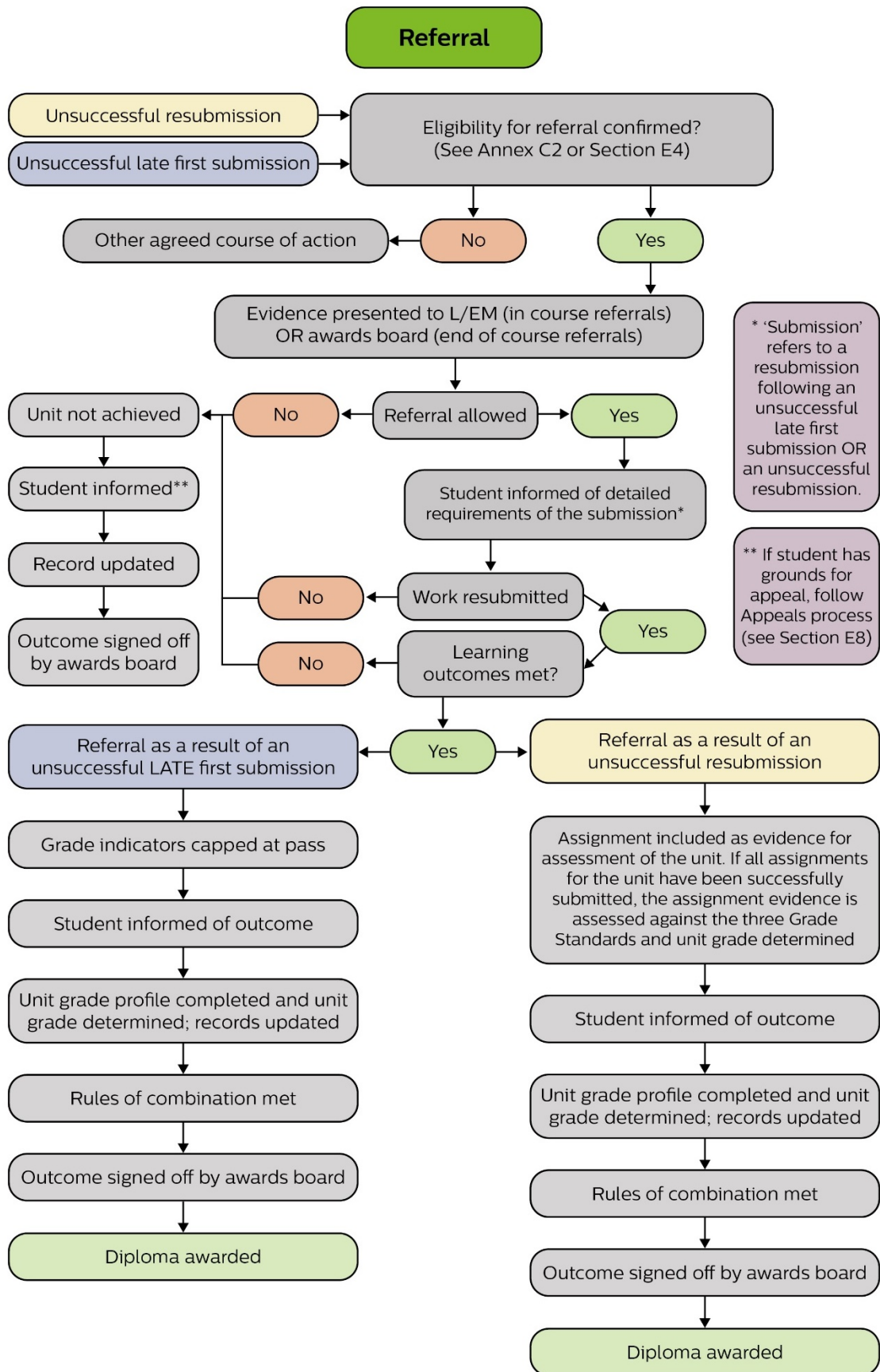
10 Documentation

- All decisions made by awards boards must be formally recorded.
- Where any alterations or additions to the provider's/centre's recommendations are agreed by the awards board, these are normally recorded as amendments on the AVA's documentation.
- The lead moderator signs the AVA's documentation to confirm the awards board's approval of all awards and any other decisions made by the board.
- The signed documentation is returned to the AVA, by the specified deadline and in accordance with any other AVA reporting requirements.
- The AVA's procedures must ensure that decisions taken by the awards board form the basis of awards issued and results notified to students.

11 AVA certification

- AVAs must check the documentation received from the awards board to confirm that the awards documentation is complete and meets its specified requirements, including confirmation that the lead moderator's signature is present and that the rules of combination for the named Access to HE Diploma have been met by each student to whom the award of a Diploma has been approved.
- To provide evidence of their achievement of the Access to HE Diploma, AVAs must then issue students with individually numbered certificates and a transcript of achievement. The transcript records all the units achieved, with the credits and grades awarded for each graded unit achieved at level 3, and the credits for each unit achieved at ungraded level 2 or 3. Where a student achieves less than the 60 credits required for the Access to HE Diploma, the AVA issues a transcript only, which records the units, credits and, where appropriate, grades achieved.
- Where the achievement of the Access to HE Diploma includes credits transferred from another Access to HE course, the transcript issued by the awarding AVA must only indicate the credits and grades achieved on the course most recently completed. The student will already hold a transcript(s) for credits and grades previously awarded.
- Where recognition of prior learning (RPL) has led to credit being remitted for any level 3 units, the number of credits to be achieved for the Access to HE Diploma will have been reduced proportionately and fewer units will have been completed. Grades are only awarded for the level 3 graded units completed on the Access to HE course itself. The transcript issued by the awarding AVA indicates the credits and grades achieved on the Access to HE course and, separately, the prior learning that has been recognised by the AVA. Where this recognition takes the form of the accreditation of prior certificated learning, the standard of the student's performance on the qualification put forward for RPL, and for which credit has been remitted, is indicated as part of the award of that qualification. The AVA must not attempt to provide a further Access to HE grade for work which was completed for the qualification(s) put forward for RPL. No grade is recorded for remitted units on the Access to HE transcript of achievement.
- AVAs are required to ensure that certification is complete and results made available to students by the AVA's published certification date for all provision where the provider/centre has met the AVA's deadline for receipt of awards documentation. The main publication of the AVA's results must not be delayed because of provider/centre delays or exceptional individual cases.
- AVAs must have procedures for dealing with appeals that result from the inaccurate reporting of grades or credit achievement on student transcripts due to administrative error (see Section 8, Appeals).

Annex E1



This section of the Grading Scheme replaces the equivalent section in *The Access to Higher Education Diploma Grading Scheme, September 2020*. It applies to all new students registering on Diplomas from 1 August 2024. The Access to HE Diploma Specification has also been updated to apply to all new students registering on Diplomas from 1 August 2024.

For students registered before 1 August 2024, please visit www.qaa.ac.uk/access-to-he for details of *The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification, January 2020* and *The Grading Scheme, September 2020*.

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