

# Arrangements for the Award and Assessment of the Access to HE Diploma 2020-2021

**Information for Access to HE  
course tutors and senior  
course managers**

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## 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 providers and students during this time of uncertainty.

2 QAA will work closely with you and your Access Validating Agency (AVA) to ensure that quality, standards and student outcomes can be maintained.

3 Our priorities this academic year are to:

- work in collaboration with AVAs, providers, the Department for Education (DfE), Welsh Government and other organisations to build on the strategy for Access to HE during and after the pandemic, focusing on sustainability and protection of the Access to HE Diploma
- support AVAs, students and providers meeting challenges to learning and delivery presented by the pandemic.

4 The following information is relevant to all providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that offer the QAA recognised Access to HE Diploma, regulated by QAA and awarded by the following Access Validating Agencies:

- Agored Cymru
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- Ascentis
- The Cambridge Access Validating Agency
- Certa
- Gateway Qualifications
- LASER Learning Awards
- One Awards
- Open Awards
- OCN London
- Open College Network West Midlands.

5 The information in this guidance is provided in the context of the most up-to-date advice for educational settings provided by the DfE and Public Health England. If that advice changes, senior course managers and course tutors should consider this information in the light of any updated guidance.

## The Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) 2020-21

6 This year, students will be supported to complete their studies through possible adaptations to the delivery of teaching, assessment of their course and/or changes to units delivered on the Diploma.

7 The ERF in 2020-21 will build on the framework that was implemented in April 2020, which had a high degree of success and enabled over 22,000 students to receive the Access to HE Diploma and support progression into education, training or employment.

8 Where adaptations to the assessments, delivery and/or changes to units delivered on the Access to HE Diploma are required, the principles of the ERF to be followed by providers are as follows:

- There will be no provision for the issue of estimated assessment grades (calculated grades). The QAA grading scheme will apply.

- Providers can adapt assessments, delivery and/or changes to units delivered, **where necessary and appropriate**, to:
  - support teaching and learning, and assist in mitigating any possible effects of previous or future disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment relating to the pandemic
  - make assessments as manageable and flexible as possible, for example, to address the impact of compliance with social distancing or other public health guidance
  - safeguard against any future disruptions relating to the pandemic, such as local lockdowns or closure of facilities.
- Providers will notify their AVA of any changes to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma, together with the rationales for these adaptations. Your AVAs will ensure any changes proposed are necessary and appropriate.
- AVAs will support providers in continuing to implement robust quality assurance mechanisms that ensure consistency across all Access to HE Diplomas awarded. AVAs will have in place effective arrangements for quality assuring the Diploma where there are adaptations to assessment(s), delivery and/or changes to units delivered.
- Providers will continue to collect grading data information and store such data in an accessible way. Presentation of grading data information should be made available to AVAs upon their request.
- Confirmed results will be released by AVAs to providers no later than the deadline for results to be uploaded to UCAS, (it is estimated this will be around 26 July 2021). AVAs will confirm with each of their providers the exact date that confirmed results will be released to them.
- The procedures for student appeals as detailed in [Grading Scheme Handbook Section C: Using the Grade Descriptors in Assessment](#) apply.

9 QAA will maintain overall oversight of the framework and will undertake additional monitoring activities, where necessary, to assure ourselves and stakeholders that students' results continue to be accurate, fair and robust.

## QAA grading scheme: Grading the Access to HE Diploma

10 The [QAA grading scheme](#)<sup>1</sup> will continue to be applied to all assessments (that is, assessed work).

### Using the QAA grading scheme

11 Tutors will continue to grade student assessments; they will 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.

12 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</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)

## Quality assuring graded Access to HE Diplomas

13 To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by the current situation, AVAs and providers will ensure that assessment grades go through a process of internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation.

14 The AVA's operation of moderation ensures that consistent assessment standards are applied in all instances where Access to HE Diplomas, or common units are delivered on more than one course or more than one occasion.

15 The AVA will ensure that its providers operate rigorous internal moderation procedures which meet the AVA's requirements, and which facilitate:

- 15.1 the application of consistent standards of demand in assessment
- 15.2 assessment design that maximises reliability and validity in assessment outcomes
- 15.3 the consistent and accurate application of QAA assessment regulations.

16 The standardisation procedure will provide opportunities for course tutors, internal moderators and external moderators to share, discuss and, where necessary, recalibrate their expectations relating to the standards of work expected by:

- 16.1 the requirements of any work at Level 2 or Level 3
- 16.2 the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the specific units that they work with
- 16.3 the grade descriptors.

17 In addition to the principles of quality assurance aligned to the [QAA grading scheme](#), other quality assurance measures may also be applied to ensure the national distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to previous years.

18 If you have any further questions that are not addressed, please contact your AVA.

**We have provided below some frequently asked questions about the award of the Access to HE Diploma. The questions will be updated regularly on our [FAQs page](#).**

## Frequently asked questions

### Will students receive calculated grades?

There will be no provision for estimated assessment grades (calculated grades) this academic year. The award of the Access to HE Diploma will be made only on the work a student completes during their course of study.

### Students who are finding it difficult to study where lessons, materials and/or assessments have been adapted and are worried it will affect their grades and/or completing the Diploma, what should they do?

Students have been advised to contact their course provider if they are concerned about any adaptations made to their course in year. As the course provider you may be able to offer additional support or tools to help them study.

Providers can adapt assessments and delivery, where necessary and appropriate, to:

- support teaching and learning, and assist in mitigating any possible effects of previous or future disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment relating to the pandemic
- make assessments as manageable and flexible as possible, for example, to address the impact of compliance with social distancing or other public health guidance
- safeguard against any future disruptions relating to the pandemic, such as local lockdowns or closure of facilities.

To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by any adaptations, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

### If there is a further lockdown (local or national) and a student feels the work they produce during the lockdown does not reflect their previous performance, what should they do?

Students have been advised that if they feel that the work produced during a local or national lockdown does not reflect their previous performance, to speak to their course provider. AVAs and providers will have in place arrangements to deal with such extenuating circumstances.

To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by any adaptations, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

### A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2020 feels the work that they produced during the national lockdown (March to July 2020) does not reflect their current or previous performance, what should they do?

Students have been advised that if the work produced during the national lockdown does not reflect their current or previous performance, to speak to their course provider. AVAs and providers will have arrangements in place to deal with such extenuating circumstances.

To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by issues relating to the national lockdown, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

## **A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2020 and was unable to study and submit assessments during the national lockdown (March to July 2020), what should they do?**

Students have been advised that if they were unable to study and complete their assessments during national lockdown, to talk to their course provider about the best way to continue.

Options include:

- a making an application for extenuating circumstances
- b applying for an extension to assessment submission dates
- c a short pause<sup>2</sup> of less than four weeks - for example, if you are in self-isolation  
- this will not necessarily affect the planned end date of your course
- d a formal break or suspension in learning.

If the course is not publicly funded, the provider should discuss other options that may be available to the student.

Course providers should agree with their students the appropriate steps to be taken that will be based on both your and your student's circumstances.

## **A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2020 had their assessments rescheduled by their course provider to be submitted at a later date because of the national lockdown (March to July 2020). What should they do if they feel their performance is affected by these changes?**

Students have been advised that if the work was rescheduled and the volume of work is unmanageable, to seek advice from their course provider who will be able to advise them about the options available to them. For example, this may include making an application for extenuating circumstances. To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by the rescheduling of assessments, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied.

## **If there is a further lockdown which means a student is unable to study because they are a key worker/carer or now have additional commitments, what should they do?**

Students have been advised to speak to their course provider about the best way to continue with their Diploma if they are unable to study.

Options include:

- a making an application for extenuating circumstances
- b applying for an extension to assessment submission dates

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<sup>2</sup> relates to publicly funded provision in England.

- c a short pause<sup>3</sup> of less than four weeks - for example, if you are in self-isolation  
- this will not necessarily affect the planned end date of your course
- d a formal break or suspension in learning.

If the course is not publicly funded, the provider should discuss other options that may be available to the student.

Course providers should agree with their students the appropriate steps to be taken that will be based on both your and your student's circumstances.

## **Can students apply for extenuating circumstances?**

Yes. Course providers and AVAs already have in place procedures to allow students to identify extenuating circumstances that may affect their academic performance should the current situation make studying difficult.

A student should discuss their specific circumstances directly with their course tutor.

Course tutors will be able to explain how to apply for extenuating circumstances.

## **Do I have to notify my AVA each time an application for extenuating circumstances is made?**

You should speak to your AVA to agree the processes for extenuating circumstances during this time.

## **Can I apply for extenuating circumstances on behalf of my students?**

If, as a course provider, you consider the academic performance of a whole cohort of students has been adversely affected and you are unable to manage the issues through your own extenuating circumstances processes/measures, your senior managers should speak to your AVA.

## **Can students apply for an extension to an assessment submission deadline?**

Yes. Course providers and AVAs already have procedures in place to allow students to apply for an extension should the current situation make studying difficult.

A student should discuss their specific circumstances directly with their course tutor.

Tutors will be able to explain how to apply for an extension.

## **As a centre if it is not viable for us to reschedule assessments, what should we do?**

You should speak to your AVA to discuss the options available to your students.

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<sup>3</sup> relates to publicly funded provision in England.

## **If is not viable for us to adapt the delivery of learning and assessment, what should we do?**

You should speak to your AVA to discuss the options available to your students.

## **Can students apply for a break in learning?**

Yes. Course providers and AVAs already have procedures in place to allow students to take a break in learning should the current situation make studying difficult. Course providers and students can agree to suspend learning. This allows a student to continue later with the same eligibility that applied when they first started their learning.

Publicly-funded courses in England and Wales already have provision for 'breaks/suspension in learning' or for a range of circumstances.

Guidance from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (for providers in England) and Welsh Government (for providers in Wales) has information about the options available.

Students have been advised to speak directly to their course tutor to discuss their individual circumstances. Course providers will be able to explain to students how to apply for a break in learning.

## **Students are unable to access the online lessons and materials, what should they do?**

Students are advised to contact their course provider if they are unable to access online lessons and materials so that they can discuss the options available to them.

## **How will students' grades be quality assured and standardised?**

To make sure that grades are fair, AVAs and providers have processes in place to ensure grades go through internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation. These quality assurance processes will take into account any extenuating circumstances identified. As part of the moderation process, AVAs may adjust the assessment grades of some assessments, upwards or downwards accordingly, to ensure that no student is advantaged or disadvantaged.

In addition to the principles of quality assurance aligned to the [QAA grading scheme](#), other quality assurance measures may also be applied.

## **Can students appeal their grades?**

AVAs and providers have processes in place to support students who feel their grades during this period do not reflect their previous performance. Students have been advised to speak to their course tutor.

Your procedures to address representations and appeals will apply. Your AVA will be able to provide more information.

## **A student is currently studying GCSE's or functional skills alongside their Access to HE Diploma, what happens about these qualifications?**

GCSEs and functional skills are regulated by Ofqual and we recommend that students speak to their course tutor or refer to the information produced by [Ofqual](#).

## **A student was not due to finish their Diploma until after 31 July 2021, but their circumstances have changed which means they have more time to study - can they finish earlier?**

Students have been advised to speak to their course provider to find out if it is possible for them to complete earlier. In some cases, it may be possible to complete some units of study earlier than planned which may mean students can complete their Diploma before their original end date.

In these cases Access to HE Diploma will continue to be awarded and quality assured according to the [QAA grading scheme](#). In addition to the principles of quality assurance aligned to the QAA grading scheme, other quality assurance measures may also be applied.

## **When will course providers receive confirmed results from their AVA?**

Confirmed results will be released to course providers after the Final Awards Board. The results will be released to you no later than the deadline for results to be uploaded to UCAS (it is estimated this will be around 26 July 2021). Providers will have arrangements in place to notify students of their confirmed results.

## **A student is not due to complete their studies until after 31 July 2021. What are the arrangements for the award and assessment of the Access to HE Diploma for them?**

This year, the current guidance also applies to all students due to complete after 31 July 2021. Students and providers will be supported if advice from DfE or Public Health England means that adaptations need to be continued beyond 31 July 2021.

## **Further advice and information**

If you need further information, please take a look at our [frequently asked questions](#) and/or [contact your AVA](#).

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