



The Access to HE Diploma specification

The Access to HE specification: Clarity of aims and purpose

The current specification was introduced in 2013 in order to:

- ensure **equity** for students
- improve **consistency, clarity** and **transparency**
- underpin the assurance of **standards**
- maintain some degree of **local determination** of details of content, delivery and assessment.

The Access to HE delivery infrastructure

- Eleven awarding bodies - Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) - licensed by QAA
- AVAs approve providers (mainly in further education, but some in community colleges, adult education centres, universities and private providers) to offer the Access to HE Diploma, and quality assure the provision

2013 specification: Key changes

45 credits from
graded level 3 units
concerned with **academic
subject content**

15 credits from
level 2 or **ungraded
level 3 units**

60
credits total

Amendment
to regulation on
referrals

GCSE-equivalents
withdrawn

Diploma = 60 credits total

- Students are registered and certificated for specified units to the value of 60 credits; this provides the basis for a planned, coherent programme of study
- Rules of combination identify the units (including mandatory and optional units), which define the required achievement for students = 60 credits
- Registration for named units by students must be completed with the AVA no later than 12 weeks from the planned start date of the Access to HE course - or before the student applies to HE

Unit credit values

- All Diplomas made up of units of three, six or nine credits
- All Diplomas will contain 45 credits from graded level 3 units concerned with academic subject content
- These units can be of any of the permitted credit values (three, six or nine), so the number of units taken and grades reported will vary



Criteria for academic subject content

- a. The unit content (as expressed in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria) must relate to knowledge and skills of subjects identified in the title of the Diploma
- b. Students must be supported and assessed for the work of such units by subject experts

Academic subject content (continued)

- c. The definition includes knowledge and skills related to all Access to HE Diploma subjects – for example, Multimedia as well as History
- d. Not study skills, personal development, or generic English or mathematics units, but can include specialist (for example, Maths for engineering) and technical (for example, laboratory skills)

Academic subject content (continued)

For units that focus on a large scale research project or major final project:

- e. Units have learning outcomes and assessment criteria relating to students' command of the knowledge domain and conventions of the subject (not just generic research skills)
- f. Student work must be original work for the unit only (not just 'cross-referenced' from work produced to demonstrate achievement of other units' learning outcomes)

Ungraded units at level 2 or level 3

- For use in the 15 credits of non-graded content
- Decision about the balance between ungraded level 2 or level 3 units is determined according to the requirements of the intended progression route and approved through the validation process
- Units must be identified as level 2 or level 3 in the rules of combination for a named Diploma

Ungraded units at level 2 or level 3 (continued)

- Level 3 ungraded units may also be concerned with academic subject content
- If level 3 units are required as graded in some Diplomas and ungraded in others, these must be separately validated units

Referrals

Amendments to regulations for the 2013 specification mean that:

- a request for a referral is allowed at any point in the course
- the decision process to allow the request must involve the external moderator
- students are limited to referrals for assessments to a maximum of 15 credits.

Referrals (continued)

- If the referral is for a graded unit, the grade for the resubmitted work is capped at Pass
- Guidance on the changes is provided in the full specification:

www.accesstohe.ac.uk/AboutUs/Publications/Pages/diploma-specification-2013.aspx

GCSE equivalents from 2014

- In September 2014 QAA withdrew the GCSE equivalence scheme and no longer regulates or endorses the claim of GCSE equivalence for groups of Access to HE units
- There may, however, be some students who completed the previous versions of the qualification that have GCSE equivalence results

GCSE equivalents from 2014

The changes were in response to:

- varying acceptance by HEIs (growing need for full GCSE and 'Grade B' equivalence)
- lack of recognition by employers
- changing perception of value of 'equivalents'
- policy and funding of GCSEs for adults
- increasing numbers of students with GCSEs
- impact on Diploma structures.

Possibilities and alternatives to GCSE equivalents

- Up to 15 credits at level 2
- Potential for AVAs and providers to maintain local arrangements with local higher education providers (HEPs) or courses, where units within their Diplomas are accepted as adequate to satisfy the HEP's GCSE requirement(s)
- Funded GCSE achievement before or alongside Access to HE
- Additional 'space' in Diploma for other units

The implementation timeline

New specification developed and published: 2012-13

Outline: June 2013

Full specification: Sept 2013

Development year for AVAs and providers: 2013-14

Diplomas redeveloped and revalidated, where necessary

Full implementation: From 2014-15

All Diplomas compliant; students applying to HE

First students entering HE with new specification: 2015-16

What stayed the same?

- Level and size of qualification: level 3, 60 credits
- The Grading Scheme
- Credit and unit technical definitions etc. and:

what it's for: preparation for higher education

who it's for: adults who left school with insufficient formal qualifications to progress to higher education



The Access to HE Diploma (2013)

All students who have achieved the full Diploma will offer:

- exactly 60 credits
- exactly 45 credits from graded level 3 units concerned with academic subject content.

Further information relating to the Diploma and higher education admissions is available in the Access to HE Diploma: Toolkit for Higher Education Admissions Staff

Access to HE: Continuing to help students to change their lives





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QAA manages the national framework for the recognition and regulation of Access to HE Diplomas.

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