

# Access to HE Diploma Subject Descriptor for Nursing and Health Professions

## Frequently Asked Questions

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**Q: To which Access to Higher Education Diploma titles does the Subject Descriptor apply?**

**A: Access to HE Diplomas with the specific titles of Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) or Access to HE Diploma (Health Professions) must meet the essential requirements of the Subject Descriptor in order to use those titles. Compliance will be determined through the validation of the Diploma by an Access Validating Agency (AVA).**

**Q: We have a Diploma called 'Health and Science Professions', would this be included as a Diploma which must meet the Subject Descriptor requirements?**

**A: Only the specific Diploma title names noted in the Subject Descriptor need to comply. These are:**

- Access to HE Diploma (Nursing)
- Access to HE Diploma (Health Professions)

Therefore, a Diploma with the title Access to HE Diploma (Health and Science Professions) would not need to meet the requirements of the Subject Descriptor.

**Q: What is the difference between a Subject Descriptor compliant Diploma and another Diploma with a similar or same progression route that is not compliant?**

**A: All Access to HE Diplomas must meet the requirements of the Diploma Specification. The credit requirement for the achievement of any Access to HE Diploma is 60 credits, with 45 of these credits coming from units which are concerned with academic subject content at Level 3 and graded. The remaining 15 credits come from ungraded Level 2 or Level 3 units. While all Diplomas must comply with the overall structural requirements of the Diploma specification, there is flexibility within these requirements for AVAs to approve Diplomas with a variety of structures and with a different range of content.**

**Subject Descriptors offer guidance and provide a reference point for the design, delivery, validation, and review of programmes across the range of Access to HE Diplomas designed for progression to higher level study in specific progression routes. In order for a Diploma to be described as compliant with the Subject Descriptor, it must meet the essential requirements set out in the Subject Descriptor.**

The difference between those Diplomas that are compliant and those that are not will relate to the inclusion of the essential requirements. Compliance will be determined through the validation of the Diploma by an Access Validating Agency (AVA).

AVAs and course providers may choose to develop Access to HE Diplomas to provide progression onto nursing and allied health professions that do not meet the requirements of the Subject Descriptor. While these may have similar subject content to compliant Diplomas, they are not required to include the essential requirements detailed in the Subject Descriptor, particularly with regard to numeracy and professional behaviours, and are not permitted to

use the title Access to Higher Education Diploma (Nursing) or Access to Higher Education Diploma (Health Professions).

### **Q: What are the advantages/disadvantages for students?**

**A: The development of a Subject Descriptor provides:**

- **clarity to prospective students and their advisers about the minimum requirements for Access to HE Diplomas to support informed decision making and provide reassurance that a Diploma will meet minimum entry requirements for progression to nursing and health professions**
- **clarity and reassurance for higher education admissions staff that all Access to HE Diploma students studying a Subject Descriptor compliant Diploma will have covered the same minimum level of subject content.**

Therefore, the development of a Subject Descriptor allows for there to be a better shared understanding of subject content for named Diplomas between students, providers and higher education receiving institutions.

Through the development of more consistent subject content for named Diplomas students may potentially increase the range of progression routes available to them.

Through the process of validation of an Access to HE Diploma, AVAs will confirm that named Diplomas meet the requirements of the Subject Descriptor and can be identified as Subject Descriptor compliant on QAA's course database and visually signalled for students and HE admissions staff on the course search on the [QAA's website](#).

A possible disadvantage for students may include circumstances where higher education providers change the entry requirements in future, meaning a currently accepted Diploma is no longer accepted for progression. However, QAA will be working with higher education providers to ensure that it is clear that other Diploma titles will continue to offer preparation for health-related progression routes.

### **Q: What are the advantages/disadvantages for providers?**

**A: Development of a Subject Descriptor allows for there to be a better shared understanding of subject content for named Diplomas in specific progression routes.**

The advantages for providers arise through the opportunities to include within their marketing materials the QAA Subject Descriptor Mark. Through development of more consistent subject content, providers have greater opportunities to demonstrate to higher education receiving institutions that their Diplomas provide a suitable and robust progression route into higher level study, thereby potentially increasing the range of progression routes available to their students.

Possible disadvantages for providers may include challenges relating to the inclusion of subject content detailed in the essential requirements. This may cause challenges for some providers, either through identification of staff or reconfiguring their unit delivery plan. We recognise there may also be challenges for some providers who currently teach mixed cohorts within a single group. It may also be necessary for current provision to be reconfigured to align to the Subject Descriptor.

### **Q: What does the term ‘essential’ mean in this Subject Descriptor?**

**A: In this Subject Descriptor, we use the term ‘essential’ to define content that needs to be included, in its entirety, in a Diploma in order to be Subject Descriptor compliant, and to a minimum number of credits and a minimum level of unit.**

The Subject Descriptors provide a framework to develop Diplomas for specific progression routes that are structured in ways that are consistent with the Diploma Specification while maintaining the capacity for individual approaches in terms of unit credit values and programme design and delivery.

Through processes of Diploma development and validation, AVAs ensure that:

- a named Diploma meets the essential requirements set out in the Subject Descriptor
- the required content can be delivered and assessed
- students have the opportunity to successfully complete the learning outcomes for each unit of study on the named Diploma and can be awarded credits for each unit.

### **Q: What does the term ‘recommended’ mean in this Subject Descriptor?**

**A: In this Subject Descriptor, we use the term ‘recommended’ where it is not necessary to follow the Subject Descriptor, but through the development of the Subject Descriptor we have determined that it would be useful to consider those areas identified as ‘recommended’ in Diploma development. In order for a Diploma to be described as compliant with the Subject Descriptor, it must meet the essential requirements set out in the Subject Descriptor.**

The Subject Descriptors provide a framework to develop Diplomas for specific progression routes that are structured in ways that are consistent with the Diploma Specification while maintaining the capacity for individual approaches in terms of unit credit values and programme design and delivery. Therefore, the Subject Descriptor makes reference to recommended content.

Through processes of Diploma development and validation, AVAs ensure that:

- a named Diploma meets the essential requirements set out in the Subject Descriptor
- the required content can be delivered and assessed
- students have the opportunity to successfully complete the learning outcomes for each unit of study on the named Diploma and can be awarded credits for each unit.

### **Q: Our nursing and health professions Diplomas currently have more credits assigned to health-related units or sociology, is it possible to include more than the maximum recommended credit value for the optional subjects?**

**A: The Subject Descriptors provide a framework to develop Diplomas for specific progression routes that are structured in ways that are consistent with the Diploma Specification while maintaining the capacity for individual approaches in terms of unit credit values, and programme design and delivery.**

In this Descriptor we use the term ‘recommended’ where it is not necessary to follow the Subject Descriptor, but through the development of the Subject Descriptor we have determined that it would be useful to consider those areas in Diploma development. In order for a Diploma to be described as compliant with the Subject Descriptor, it must meet the essential requirements set out in the Subject Descriptor.

Therefore, through the process of Diploma validation an Access Validating Agency can determine, with its providers, the most appropriate credit values for the optional subject area.

**Q: We would like to use the Subject Descriptor for other Diploma titles for example, midwifery, but they need to have 21 credits in Biology. Can we do this?**

**A: Yes, Access to HE Diplomas with other titles that contain essential requirements of the Subject Descriptor may also be approved as meeting the requirements of the descriptor. This will be determined through the validation of the Diploma by the Access Validating Agency.**

Using midwifery as an example, it would be possible to approve an Access to HE Diploma (Midwifery) as Subject Descriptor compliant with 21 credits of biology as long the essential requirements of the Subject Descriptor, a **minimum** of 15 credits of biology, together with numeracy in a health context and professional behaviours, was included.

**Q: What is your response to concerns that some Diplomas may cease to run due to learner demand moving to Subject Descriptor compliant ones?**

**A: The principles behind the development of a Subject Descriptor are:**

- It should specify the minimum content requirements for the adequate preparation of Access to HE students for progression to and success in undergraduate courses in nursing and health professions.
- The requirements should establish consistency across all Access to HE Diplomas that are designed to support progression to undergraduate nursing and health profession courses, while allowing sufficient flexibility for AVAs and providers to determine how the content should be structured and delivered, and what additional content is included.
- The preparation needed for this progression route resides in a sound understanding and knowledge in key subjects, the development of skills in academic study, and an introduction to the higher education learning and assessment context. It should not seek to directly address the skills and competencies of a practising nurse.

Ensuring students are well prepared for their higher level studies and are able to progress is of paramount importance to QAA. We recognise the impact the introduction of the Subject Descriptor will have for AVAs and providers. However, we consider that the opportunities to secure clarity and common understanding with respect to the content of Diplomas covered by the Subject Descriptor will benefit students. The associated opportunity of raising the profile of the Diploma as a robust progression qualification is also recognised.



Our communications with higher education receiving institutions will be key in this area and we shall ensure that these are clear that other Diploma titles will continue to offer preparation for health-related progression routes.

We shall be working with a range of groups to communicate the intention of the Subject Descriptor and developing FAQs specifically for higher education providers to support the implementation of the Subject Descriptor.

As with all qualification developments, QAA will monitor the impact of the introduction of the Subject Descriptor, specifically where there is a reduction in the number of Diploma titles available.

### **Q: What is QAA communicating to higher education receiving institutions about the Subject Descriptor?**

**A: We recognise that the communication received by higher education receiving institutions is vital to the success of the Subject Descriptor. The working group that has been consulted during the development of the Subject Descriptor includes a range of higher education providers, all of whom have been positive about the introduction of the Subject Descriptor.**

We shall be clear in our communications of the principles for the content of the Subject Descriptor, that existing progression routes remain valid and our anticipation that the Subject Descriptor can be used to facilitate progression to the benefit of students and receiving institutions.

We shall also be working with a range of groups to communicate the intention of the Subject Descriptor and developing FAQs specifically for higher education providers to support the implementation of the Subject Descriptor.

### **Q: What will higher education receiving institutions do with this information? Will they refuse applicants from a non-compliant route or other Diplomas, for example, science?**

**A: Higher education providers are autonomous organisations and as such will determine the entry requirements in accordance with their academic regulations and admissions policies to demonstrate implementation of equitable fair and transparent admissions processes.**

Nevertheless, this is a question that will continue to be considered and addressed through information provided in our regular communications with receiving institutions throughout the implementation period.

### **Q: Will all higher education receiving institutions accept the Subject Descriptor?**

**A: In the same way that not all undergraduate programmes accept Access to HE Diplomas for entry now, higher education providers - which are autonomous organisations - will determine the entry requirements in accordance with their academic regulations and admissions policies to demonstrate implementation of equitable fair and transparent admissions processes.**

The research undertaken into entry requirements by QAA suggests that the proposed subject content should not limit progression opportunities, and this was endorsed by members of the Working Group representing higher education providers.

Nevertheless, this is a question that will continue to be considered and addressed through information provided in our regular communications with higher education receiving institutions throughout the implementation period.

**Q: Could there be any implications for progression if a student chose a Diploma which does not meet the Subject Descriptor as opposed to one which does?**

**A: As is the case now, it is a student's responsibility to check that the Diploma they have selected will meet the entry requirements of the university they wish to study at.**

However, QAA will be providing information about the Subject Descriptor to higher education receiving institutions to ensure they are clear that existing Diplomas offering progression to nursing and health professions continue to be valid options for students also and, as with all developments, any implications for progression will be monitored carefully.

**Q: What information is QAA sending to higher education receiving institutions about students who will still be completing under the current Diploma specification, but will be applying alongside those holding a Subject Descriptor compliant qualification.**

**A: We recognise that the communication received by higher education receiving institutions is vital to the success of the Subject Descriptor. The working group that has been consulted during the development of the Subject Descriptor includes a range of higher education providers, all of whom have been positive about the introduction of the Subject Descriptor.**

The implications of all qualification developments on continuing students are an important consideration. QAA will ensure that its communications to higher education receiving institutions includes information relating to students continuing with Diplomas that cannot meet the requirements of the Subject Descriptor. This information will also apply to students who completed their Diplomas prior to the introduction of the Subject Descriptor but who were not able, or did not wish, to apply to university or higher level study immediately.

We recognise that higher education providers are autonomous organisations and as such will determine the entry requirements in accordance with their academic regulations and admissions policies to demonstrate equitable fair and transparent admissions processes.

**Q: The Subject Descriptor includes information on assessment methods which references 'a practical laboratory-based report (using research, mathematical, statistical and writing skills)'. Does this need to be undertaken in a science laboratory?**

**A: To be well prepared for higher education courses in nursing and health professions, it is strongly recommended that Access to HE students should experience a range of assessment methods as part of their work for their Diploma.**

While it would be advantageous to students to have experience of working in a science laboratory, preparation of a practical laboratory-based report (using research mathematical statistical and writing skills) could be completed by other means, for example through scenario-based assessment or through provision of data and other information to the students.

**Q: Examinations are no longer seen as essential for preparing nursing students for higher level study, so why have examinations been included in the recommended assessment methods?**

**A: It is recommended that, in order for Access to HE students to be well prepared for successful study on higher education courses in nursing and health professions, they should experience similar assessment methods as part of their work for their Diploma to those they are likely to encounter in higher education.**

The importance of ensuring that students are prepared for the rigour of professional training and assessment they will face as a student and as a health professional was confirmed through advice from the Working Group for the following reasons:

- Throughout their higher level studies students would be subject to examination, including being observed for practical elements of their degree courses.
- Their inclusion allowed Access to HE course providers to put in place relevant teaching and support to build students' confidence and resilience in what may be an unfamiliar and stressful situation.

**Q: Do students need to be in a setting where professional practice skills are being applied to succeed in the essential elements of the Professional Behaviours unit?**

**A: QAA officers and Working Group members are of the view that it should be possible for individual students to reflect on and assess skills and professional practice through their own experience of healthcare activities so they can address the learning outcomes of the Professional Behaviours unit.**

This experience will be similar to how applicants to higher education courses are able to reflect on care relating to everyday conversations or a prior experience outside of a healthcare setting at interview.

In teaching the unit, tutors may wish to draw on a range of case studies that are publicly available.

**Q: The Professional Behaviours unit contains a lot of content for a three-credit unit. Why is so much required?**

**A: The essential unit content for professional behaviours aligns to that of the similar unit in the Subject Descriptor for Medicine. Advice from Working Group members was that professional behaviours are required of all health professionals, regardless of qualification and level of seniority.**

QAA officers are of the view that it would not be helpful to remove elements of the Professional Behaviours unit for nursing and health professions and risk the introduction of

actual or perceived hierarchy of Subject Descriptors or units if the units were not the same size and content.

It is hoped that, now that a Subject Descriptor compliant Diploma must include the relevant learning outcomes that are covered by this unit, these can be incorporated into units that AVAs have already developed. This will give AVAs additional flexibility in the development of Diplomas, but without compromising the need to ensure the essential content is covered in order to market a Diploma as Subject Descriptor compliant.

**Q: To reflect an understanding that the minimum requirement for progression to a nursing degree in Wales is 6 credits in numeracy at Level 2, some provision in Wales currently has up to 9 credits of numeracy in health professions Diplomas. How does the Subject Descriptor relate to requirements in Wales?**

**A: QAA sought clarification from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW), and the Council of Deans Health.**

NMC has confirmed that while they insist through their standards that applicants are proficient in maths as part of the application process for joining NMC approved pre-registration nursing degree courses, they do not stipulate how that proficiency is to be evidenced. It is for the universities delivering NMC programmes to decide what they require to satisfy them that the requirement has been met. This may be by way of an academic qualification such as a GCSE/O level, but could also be done by way of prior educational or work experience that has made use of maths skills, or by a test as part of the application process.

HEIW noted that professional, statutory and regulatory body standards on entry tariff should be met.

The Council of Deans Health has noted the normal requirement is GCSE mathematics/ numeracy at Grade C or Grade 4 or above, or their equivalent. Equivalent qualifications considered are Essential Skills Level Two in Communication and Application of Number, or Functional Skills Level Two in English and mathematics.

There is an All Wales Values Based Recruitment Document and this states: 'Attainment of numeracy qualification at Level 2 to include GCSE or recognised alternative'.

**Q: We currently have Level 3 units in numeracy and professional behaviours as part of our health Diploma offer, would it be possible to continue to offer these Level 3 numeracy and professional behaviours units?**

**A: In order to describe the Diploma as Subject Descriptor compliant, an AVA should ensure its unit(s) cover all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria set out in QAA's Numeracy and Health Context and Professional Behaviours units.**

Where AVAs incorporate the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in another unit, this may be as part of a graded or ungraded Level 3 unit.

## **Q: Will QAA develop the Numeracy and Professional Behaviours units and issue these for use by AVAs and course providers?**

**A:** In order to support AVAs and providers, QAA has produced a specification for units that meet the essential elements of the numeracy in a health context and the professional behaviours. The units have been developed using information received from AVAs in response to an information gathering request.

To give AVAs additional flexibility in the development of Diplomas, the essential elements of the Numeracy in a Health Context and the Professional Behaviours units can be incorporated into units that AVAs have developed if preferred without compromising the need to ensure the essential content is covered in order to market a Diploma as Subject Descriptor compliant.

## **Q: Why is there no exemption from the numeracy element of the Diploma for students who have completed a GCSE in mathematics?**

**A:** While recognising that in some cases GCSEs may have been completed recently, the inclusion of these essential requirements is seen to be of benefit to Access to HE students by allowing them to demonstrate numeracy skills with reference to specific content within their Diploma and healthcare contexts.

**Clarification about GCSEs from NMC notes:** The position is that while we insist through our standards that applicants are proficient in maths as part of the application process for joining NMC approved pre-registration nursing degree courses, we do not stipulate how that proficiency is to be evidenced.

We are also keen to maintain equality of opportunity for all students; exempting some students has the potential to create an inequality.

## **Q: My AVA offers pathways through our Diplomas such that, at the unit level the student could be compliant with the Subject Descriptor, but their overall Diploma is unlikely to be presented as compliant. How might this work and what would be the impact?**

**A:** In order to describe a Diploma as Subject Descriptor compliant, an AVA should ensure its unit(s) cover all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria set out in QAA's Numeracy and Health Context and Professional Behaviours units. Where AVAs incorporate the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in another unit, this may be as part of a graded or ungraded Level 3 unit.

AVAs may wish to consider including a statement within the rules of combination to clarify how students will be able to achieve the essential subject content in numeracy and professional behaviours where Subject Descriptor compliance is preferred.

Please email QAA ([ahe@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:ahe@qaa.ac.uk)) for an informal conversation about the situation.

## **Q: What goes on the Diploma certificate if a student has done a Subject Descriptor compliant Diploma?**

**A: Under the current licensing criteria, AVA's issue an Access to HE Diploma certificate to all students who have been awarded the Access to HE Diploma. This certificate has a standard format that includes:**

- the specific title of the Diploma (in the standard format for Access to HE Diploma titles, as stipulated in The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specifications) and no other title
- the name and logo of the AVA
- the authorised Access to HE logo (including the words 'recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education')
- no name or logo of any other organisation
- the signature of the chair and/or chief executive and no other signature
- the unique issue number.

**An AVA will issue students with a transcript of unit achievement that has a standard format and records achievement for all units completed.**

No other information is included on the Diploma certificate.

AVAs and course providers offering Subject Descriptor compliant Diplomas will be able to use the Subject Descriptor Mark in marketing materials and on their websites.

Conditions of use will be issued together with the Subject Descriptor Mark. Use of the Mark will help students and higher education admissions staff to find Subject Descriptor compliant Diplomas. AVAs will also be able to mark Diplomas as compliant on QAA's course search through the AVA admin area of the database. Guidance will be issued on this shortly.

QAA will review the information provided for students completing a Subject Descriptor compliant Diploma as part its review of the Descriptor.

## **Q: It would be useful to have some standard guidance on the status of the 'badging' for students, providers, AVAs and higher education receiving institutions and what it means, will this be available?**

**A: QAA is working with its Marketing team to provide information and guidance about the badging for students, providers, AVAs and higher education providers and this will be circulated to AVAs in due course.**

AVAs and course providers offering Subject Descriptor compliant Diplomas will be able to use the Subject Descriptor Mark in marketing materials and on their websites. Conditions of use will be issued together with the Subject Descriptor Mark. Use of the Mark will help students and higher education admissions staff to find Subject Descriptor compliant Diplomas. AVAs will also be able to mark Diplomas as compliant on QAA's course search through the AVA admin area of the database. Guidance will be issued on this shortly.

**Q: As an AVA we would prefer not to implement the Subject Descriptor until 2025. Our current Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) is due for revalidation in 2023-24. We are aware that we will need to make the other changes to Diploma Specification and Grading Scheme for 1 August 2024. Can we extend the current validation by one year so that we do not have to revalidate the Diploma two years running?**

**A: Under the current licensing criteria, AVAs are required to have a standard validation period for Diplomas, which is no more than five years from the date of initial approval, and a forward schedule of revalidation for Diplomas. Where exceptional circumstances require an extension to the standard period, the validation period will be endorsed/approved by the designated body and will not normally be extended by more than one year.**

QAA considers the implementation of regulatory changes to the qualification to be an exceptional circumstance. Extensions to periods of validation can therefore be endorsed/approved by the AVA's designated body without reference to QAA.

AVAs will need to ensure the courses database is updated with changes to the last date for new starts so that this can be reported to funding bodies to secure continuation of funding.

## **New questions - added February 2024**

**Q. Can we rewrite the Professional Behaviours/Numeracy units, as long as it results in learners achieving the same learning outcomes and assessment criteria, but just written differently, or do we need to use the units as they stand?**

**A. As noted in the Subject Descriptor, AVAs may rewrite the units or use existing units that incorporate the essential elements (the content and the context of delivery). Where AVAs incorporate the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in another unit, this may be as part of a graded or ungraded Level 3 unit.**

If AVAs choose to devise their own units, in order to describe a Diploma as Subject Descriptor compliant they should ensure the unit(s) cover all of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria set out in the units.

**Q. We have a Diploma where one of the progression routes is nursing but has a different title. If we were to include a sub rule of combination for those progressing to nursing to include the mandatory requirements of the Subject Descriptor, can we still market this Diploma as being Subject Descriptor compliant for progression to nursing?**

**A. Access to HE Diplomas, with other titles that meet the essential requirements of the Subject Descriptor, may also be approved as compliant**

**with the Descriptor. This will be determined through the validation of the Diploma by the AVA.**

All Diplomas where the rules of combination include content which meets the essential requirements of the Subject Descriptor can be marketed as compliant. It would be important to ensure that information available to students and receiving higher education institutions was clear about the status of relevant pathways. It may also be helpful to provide information for students to support their applications to higher education.

### **Q. Please can you explain why students would need to use fractions in nursing?**

**A. It is important that nursing students are well prepared for the numeracy elements of their higher level studies and confident in the use of numbers, including fractions, to meet the requirements of the regulatory body when they graduate their undergraduate studies. Working Group members explained the importance of being able to use fractions and recognise their percentage equivalents.**

They also noted that in their working life, health professionals may be required to identify, for example, drug doses where a patient is given half of the dose at one point in the day, a quarter at another point and a quarter later still. The inclusion of fractions in the numeracy unit allows students to build confidence in their use and therefore prepares them for their higher level studies.

### **Q. How does the inclusion of the Professional Behaviours unit align to bitesize learning, one of the drivers for changes to the Diploma Specification being implemented from August 2024?**

**A. The Diploma development works were undertaken for a number of reasons, preparing the Diploma for any potential changes related to micro-credentials was just one. We note that development of bitesize elements and longitudinal study are not mutually exclusive, and the Professional Behaviours unit was seen by all Working Group members as a key element of success for students in higher education and into their professional careers.**

Within the health professions, professional reflection is an integral part of activities and continues throughout the lifetime of an individual's career. It is therefore appropriate to be included in these specific Diplomas and to be conducted over a period of time. We would note that while AC 4.4 states throughout the duration of the Access to HE Diploma, information about the portfolio of reflective learning states that 'Assessment must be proportionate and not place excessive burden on students or staff (both in volume and timing of submissions)'. This would allow for practice in higher education to be replicated, whereby assessment of reflective practice is undertaken over the first two semesters and could ensure that marking of journals was not backloaded to the end of a course of study.

Providers will work with their AVAs to develop the rules of combination for the Diplomas they deliver to meet their needs - both now and in future. Providers should discuss with their AVA(s) any changes they may wish to make to their Diploma offer.



**Q. Under the required content for biology, the last bullet point states ‘additional content MAY include immunity/defence against disease, reproduction, thermoregulation’. Am I correct in interpreting this to mean that a Diploma would still be Subject Descriptor compliant if these three elements were not included in the 15 credits of biology?**

**A. Yes, to be compliant biology content must include:**

- cell structure
- cell function
- transport - for example, osmosis, homeostasis
- human anatomy and physiology to include a minimum of THREE systems from the following: cardiovascular; respiratory; digestion and nutrition; muscular-skeletal; excretion; endocrine; nervous system; and genetics

Subject Descriptor compliant Diplomas may also include immunity/defence against disease, reproduction, thermoregulation where decisions are taken to include these topics.

**Q. Does all of the essential subject content need to be covered via graded units?**

**A. The Subject Descriptor requires that a minimum of 15 credits in biology at Level 3 are graded. The Subject Descriptor also details a range of essential subject content for biology to be included in these minimum 15 credits in biology.**

- If a Diploma includes only 15 credits of biology at Level 3 then all of the essential subject content would need to be graded.
- If a Diploma comprises more than 15 credits of biology an AVA may determine how best to award the essential subject content. They may decide that this is best made up of a mix of mandatory graded and ungraded units at Level 3.

The Subject Descriptor also notes that ungraded Level 3 units may be used to introduce students to new subject content or to increase the volume of subject content in essential subject areas to meet local and individual needs.:

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