Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the QAA Access to HE Diploma

Version 7 – August 2020

Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the QAA Access to HE Diploma

Contents

Version 7.0		Page 0 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the QAA Access to HE Diploma

Version 7.0		Page 1 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the guidance document

All One Awards recognised Access to HE providers must have clear assessment procedures for each diploma they offer. The purpose of this document is to:-

- give guidance on how each provider's assessment practice can meet the criteria set down by QAA and One Awards
- meet the needs of the diverse range of students studying on Access to HE Diploma courses.

It is also intended as a document which will promote discussion and lead to improvements in the assessment guidance we can offer. All those involved in assessment in Access to HE Diploma programmes are invited to contribute to the on-going development of these guidelines.

1.2 Intended benefits

It is envisaged that this assessment guide will offer a wide range of benefits to both tutors and other staff and to students. It is intended to:-

- provide comprehensive guidance on assessment practice, which will be a guide and point of reference for all those involved in assessing on Access to HE diplomas
- enable all those involved to have standard terms of reference
- develop a common understanding of the requirements to encourage good practice
- support a standardised approach to assessment, within and between providers
- encourage assessment practice, which not only adheres to QAA and One Awards requirements, but also meets the needs of students
- provide the information and guidance which tutors need to write their own assignments, which make best use of learning outcomes and grade descriptors
- provide the means by which tutors and course teams can put together a comprehensive, valid and reliable set of assessments

1.3 Intended audience

This document offers guidance and support for all tutors, assessors, others who are responsible for the preparation and application of the assessment process and those responsible for moderating quality standards for One Awards.

Version 7.0		Page 2 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

1.4 Mapping to other documents

Throughout this document references are made to a number of other publications which include important information in relation to the assessment and grading of the Access to HE Diploma:

- QAA Access to Higher Education specification 2013

- QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Sections A - E

- Form AP1 - Diploma Assessment Plan template AP1 (with dates)

- Form AP1 - Diploma Assessment Plan template AP1 (without dates)

- Access to HE Assessment Timetable 2019-20 Template with Guidance

- Form AP2 - Unit Assessment Plan Template

- Form AP3 - Assignment Brief Template

- Form AP4 - Assignment Feedback Sheet

- Guide to the Internal Moderation and Standardisation of the QAA Access to HE Diploma

Go to the Guidance and Resources sections of the One Awards Access to HE website for an extensive bank of further information, completed examples, policies and application forms:
Information for Providers - Guidance and Resources

Version 7.0		Page 3 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

2. One Awards Access to HE Diplomas

Access to HE diplomas must all comply with criteria set by QAA, which are applied nationally. The individual diploma title indicates the academic area of study of the award and may indicate the intended progression route. The diploma is a 60 credit qualification, made up of 45 graded credits at level 3 from units which are concerned with academic subject content and 15 ungraded credits, at either level 2 or level 3, from ungraded units. The content of the academic units should be directly related to the diploma title/intended progression route. The ungraded units are intended to develop skills and knowledge which will support the study of the level 3, graded units.

The table below shows the criteria characterising level 3 and level 2 skills and examples of their equivalents.

One Awards Credit Levels	Skills Level	Broadly equivalent to the level of study required for the following examples
Level Three	The development and independent application of a range of critical, reflective, creative and problem solving skills and competencies	AS/A Level Advanced GNVQ/VCE Level 3 NVQ/SVQ National Diploma
Level Two	The extension and application of basic skills and competencies and the introduction of independent learning techniques	GCSE Grade A* - C Intermediate GNVQ/VCE Level 2 NVQ/SVQ First Diploma

All One Awards Access to HE diplomas are constructed from units of assessment. Each unit is made up of a specific number of learning outcomes and assessment criteria with a specified level and credit value. The unit gives details of what the student should know, understand or be able to do after a specific period of learning. To achieve the unit, students must provide evidence for each of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. There is no award of credit for partial achievement of a unit. Units which are eligible for grading have specific grade descriptors attached.

The Access to HE Diploma Programme Submission document and the Rules of Combination for each approved diploma must be made available to all tutors, assessors and internal moderators who are involved in the delivery and assessment of a course. Reference must be made to these documents to check for any additional assessment requirements.

The definitive unit specifications are available on the One Awards website Access Unit Bank
[Access to HE unit bank](#)

The unit bank is password protected; please contact One Awards for details.

Version 7.0		Page 4 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

3. Purpose and Principles of Assessment

3.1 Purpose of assessment
Assessment is the consideration of evidence in order to make a judgement about what learning has taken place and the standard of student achievement.

The main forms of assessment are:-

Pre course assessment: this is undertaken before a course begins and includes initial assessment to ensure the course is suitable for the student and to establish whether or not the student requires any additional support.

Formative assessment: this assessment is undertaken during the course and will provide developmental feedback, support and guidance to each student prior to the summative assessments in the unit.

Summative assessment: this assessment occurs during the delivery of each unit to assess the achievement of learning outcomes and assessment criteria by the students.

The purpose of the assessment process is to:
- demonstrate that learning has taken place and to agree individual achievement
- help the student recognise how they are changing and chart their progress
- identify ways in which the student can improve and develop their work
- motivate, encourage and give the student a sense of achievement
- confirm that the student is on the appropriate course
- allow the tutor to make necessary changes in their delivery and assessment practice to meet the needs of all students

3.2 Fundamental principles of assessment
The principles of assessment are that all assessment decisions and evidence produced for assessment of learning achievement should be:
- valid
- reliable and consistent
- fit for purpose
- inclusive
- authentic
- sufficient
- current

(See section 5.3.1)

Version 7.0		Page 5 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

4. The Assessment Strategy

The provider, through the course team, must agree an appropriate strategy which details the principles underpinning how the assessment will be undertaken for each diploma in a fair and equitable manner.

Appropriate assessment methods are chosen to give all students opportunities to demonstrate achievement, for example a presentation or an essay. Tasks or activities are then designed to enable students to produce evidence of their achievement. Those involved in the assessment planning process must consider the needs of all the students within their target group.

The demands of assessment should be increased incrementally, as students develop new skills and understanding of the assessment process. Access students do not usually arrive with all of the skills necessary to complete assignments successfully. The assessment strategy should allow for the learning and development of academic skills, to move from a descriptive approach to one which requires explanation, analysis and evaluation. Without these skills, students will be more likely to resort to "copy and paste" and expose themselves to the accusation of plagiarism.

Amongst the academic skills required are:

- note taking by selecting and prioritising information
- summarising by identifying the main points, the main themes, tone and structure of text or data and reproducing it in a concise form.
- reading skills, understanding what is implicit in a text
- academic citation
- writing skills e.g. essay and report writing, adhering to accepted structure

In addition the development of the following skills is also important:

- people skills e.g. working with tutors, staff and peers
- task management skills e.g. planning and organising
- self-management skills e.g. self-motivation and self-reliance (Stella Cottrell 2013)

The Assessment Strategy could include:

- the assessment timetable for each diploma
- how to assess the students in ways appropriate to their needs
- how to develop academic knowledge and skills required in preparation for their HE courses
- how to respond to different types of learning
- details of pre-course, formative and summative assessment
- any differences in approach related to the level being assessed
- how to ensure authenticity of the student's assessed work
- policy on draft assignments

Version 7.0		Page 6 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

5. Assessment planning

For effective assessment planning the following documents should be used:
- Form AP1 - Diploma Assessment Plan template AP1 (with dates)
- Form AP1 - Diploma Assessment Plan template AP1 (without dates)
- Access to HE Assessment Timetable 2019-20 Template with Guidance
- Form AP2 - Unit Assessment Plan Template
- Current Access to HE unit specifications (see One Awards Access Unit Bank)
- QAA Access to Higher Education specification 2013
- Form IM1 - Internal Moderation Record, Diploma Assessment Plan
- Form IM2 - Internal Moderation Record, Unit Assessment Plan

For a flow chart of the assessment planning process see the end of this section, page 13.

5.1 At the diploma level

The assessment strategy for each diploma must be carefully planned and fully explained so that all students are aware of what is expected of them to achieve the qualification and units for which they are registered.

The assessment strategy for each diploma is recorded on the Diploma Assessment Plan (AP1). The purpose of producing this plan is to ensure that the assessment methods are:
- appropriate for the units being delivered
- consistent with the skills required for study in HE
- provide a balanced assessment load for the student in terms of assessment styles and the quantity of evidence expected

The last point allows the first stage of standardisation to be established and involves all tutors, assessors and internal moderators. Standardising assessment loads between units ensures that there is a generally agreed assessment load, recognisable by staff and students alike.

There are two versions of AP1 available:
- AP1 (with dates) which enables providers to indicate the hand-out and hand-in dates for each assignment
- AP1 (without dates) this form does not include the facility to indicate the timings of assessments

Whichever version is used separate assessment timetable must also be developed

Further guidance for the development of a Diploma Assessment Strategy and examples of completed AP1 forms are available on the website.

Version 7.0		Page 7 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

5.2 At the unit level

- Assessment for each unit is planned by the tutor responsible for teaching and assessing the unit. The unit assessment plan should be recorded on the appropriate form, AP2.

- This will enable the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptor components to be identified for each assessment, in addition to a brief description of the assessment methods and tasks. It is important to follow the guidance in the QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Section C, for the use of grade descriptors in assignments.

- Assessment methods, tasks and the evidence produced by a student will be determined by the level of the unit (see Section 6). This should be taken into account when planning the assessment strategy for each diploma and unit.

- It is also essential that due consideration is given to the choice of components within the grade descriptor criteria (see QAA Grading scheme handbook Section B; section 5.2.2 of this guide).

- The completion of an AP2 for each unit will allow confirmation that all learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptors are covered, the latter in line with QAA requirements (see QAA Grading scheme handbook 2013 Section B). It will also allow cross referencing back to the AP1 to ensure that agreements reached in the first stage of planning are carried through to the second stage, unit assessment planning.

- These components of the process will, together, all ensure that the assessment plan is fit for purpose.

Further guidance for the development of a Unit Assessment Strategy and examples of completed AP2 forms are available on the website.

5.2.1 Use of learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Tutors must provide students with an assignment brief for each assessment, which explains what they have to do to achieve the learning outcomes and assessment criteria and how the work will be assessed.

Each learning outcome and assessment criteria should only be assessed once.

When writing the tasks for the assignment brief, each task should be linked to the relevant learning outcome(s) and assessment criteria. It should always be clear to the student what they are aiming to achieve in any task.

Version 7.0		Page 8 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

5.2.2 Use of grade descriptors

Use of grade descriptors
The grade descriptors for use with each unit are listed on the unit specification. The use of grade descriptors should follow the QAA guidelines (QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, Section B). In each assignment grade descriptor 7, plus at least one other, must be used. Except for grade descriptor 7, other grade descriptors need only be used once in the assessment of the unit. They can, of course, be used several times, if it is felt that this will give a more valid overall grade for the unit.

Use of grade descriptor components
Although a grade descriptor may be used more than once, the grade descriptor components chosen in each case can vary. So for example in one assignment grade descriptor 7a may be used, while in the next assignment grade descriptor 7b might be considered more appropriate. In the next assignment 7a, 7b and 7c may all be used.

Contextualisation
Objective criteria, which are clear and unambiguous, should always be established and included as contextualisation, to ensure the student knows how the grading decision is going to be made. These criteria will form part of the assignment brief. Further guidance on the contextualisation of grade descriptors is available on the website.

Forms AP1 (with dates) or AP1 (without dates) plus an assessment timetable and the AP2s should be moderated by the appointed internal moderator and the outcome recorded on the appropriate forms, IM1 and IM2.

5.3 Assessment Practice Guidance

5.3.1 The principles of assessment are that all assessment decisions and evidence produced for assessment of learning achievement should be:

valid	the assessment measures what it claims to measure; there should be a close fit between assessment and the learning outcomes and assessment criteria
reliable and consistent	the assessment outcome should be replicable under different circumstances or with a different assessor
fit for purpose	assessment should be appropriate for the curriculum and the students
inclusive	assessment should be equitable and should be designed to allow all students to achieve and none to feel excluded or marginalised
authentic	that work submitted is clearly the student's own work
sufficient	enough evidence for the level and credit value of the unit being assessed should be provided
current	the assessment should, wherever possible, relate to current thinking, ideas and events

Version 7.0		Page 9 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

5.3.2 A variety of approaches to assessment, which can include a wide range of assessment methods, is encouraged by One Awards. The table below gives some examples of assessment methods, assessment tasks and the type of evidence which would be appropriate.

Assessment method and task	Evidence could include
Demonstration of skills, observed by tutor. A practical demonstration of a skill/situation selected by the tutor or by students, to enable students to practise and apply skills and knowledge.	Observation checklist/write up Tutor feedback and tracking documents Student's reflection
Group discussion observed by tutor or group member. Discussion of a topic or situation selected by the tutor, or by students, to enable students to share knowledge and thoughts and to assess their learning.	Student's commentary and reflection/Student log Tutor feedback and tracking documents for each individual student Tutor record of observation/Tutorial notes for each individual student Student notes Audio/video/photographic record
Oral Question and Answer. Specific open or closed questions for immediate response. Can range from quite formal questions, for example, an oral test, to a quick, fun way of finding out where students are up to, for example, a quiz. Allows response and questioning from students and immediate feedback from tutor.	Tutor record/notes Student notes or log/completed quiz Audio / video record
Personal tutorial with structured question and answer.	Tutorial record Action plan with student commentary Tutor feedback and tracking documents
Structured written task - report, project, essay **Report:** A record of an activity and/or a summary of research which presents information in a structured way. Does not include opinion, but may include analysis or evaluation. **Project:** A specific task involving private study and research for individuals or groups. Normally involves selection of a	Task /report/project/essay plans Final report/essay Tutorial record Tutor feedback and tracking documents

Version 7.0		Page 10 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

topic, planning, finding information and presenting results orally or in writing. **Essay:** A discursive, written response to a question or statement which involves the student in finding and presenting information and opinion in a structured way, which normally includes an introduction, the information /opinions /evaluation / analysis and a conclusion.	
Academic poster, addressing a specific task. An opportunity for students to process information and present it in a visual way relating the information to a set task.	Poster, in academic language and referenced Tutor feedback and tracking documents
Set exercises marked by tutor. Specific open and closed questions for immediate response. Can range from formal exams and tests, to a quick, fun way of finding out where students are up to, for example, a quiz. Allows response and questioning from students and feedback from tutor.	Marked exercises with tutor feedback Tutor feedback and tracking documents
Role play/simulation observed by tutor/peers. Use of a situation selected by the tutor or by students, to enable students to practice and apply skills and to explore attitudes.	Tutor record of observation Student notes Tutor lesson plan Tutorial notes Audio/video/photographic Observer checklist
Case studies discussed in small groups and assessed through class discussion, written accounts etc. Consideration of a particular, relevant situation or example, selected by the tutor or by students, which enables students to apply knowledge to specific situations. May be used as a collective/group activity and discussed in a group of students or by an individual students, **or** may be used with individual students as a written activity through case study materials and student responses.	Student notes on task sheet and reflection Tutor record Tutor feedback and tracking documents

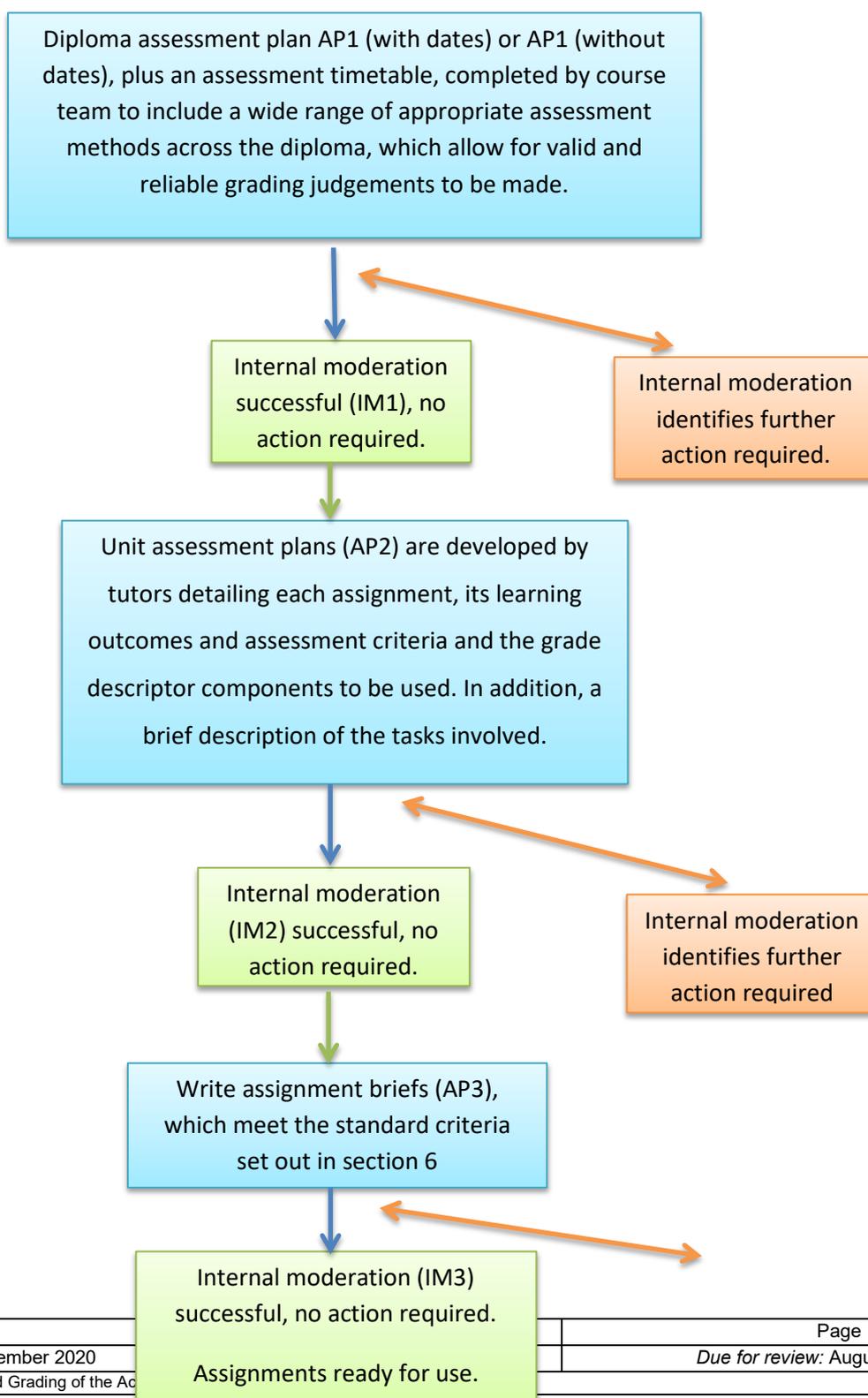| Version 7.0		Page 11 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

Reflection on own learning A description, normally in writing but may be oral, by the student reflecting on how and what they have learned. Often completed at regular intervals during the learning process, thus allowing discussion on individual progress and how further learning could be supported.	Completed learning log or diary Reflection and commentary Tutor feedback
Witness Statement/Tutor Observation	Formal written testimony Tutor observation checklist/observation record
Practice file A structured collection of documents from real situations such as work or voluntary activity, which evidence the application of knowledge and/or skills. The documents should be mapped to specific learning outcome/s in a unit of assessment. May need a short explanation of how the particular document evidences achievement of a specific learning outcome.	Discussion with the tutor Form mapping to learning outcomes, plus explanation if necessary and the documents, for example, minutes, reports, brochures, plans, witness statements, letters or e-mails
Performance or exhibition A performance or exhibition of music or drama or art with an audience, or a rehearsal or student demonstration for individuals or groups.	Tutor, student or peers, at end of performance through discussion and observation Plans Audio/video/photographic record of performance/exhibition. Tutor records Peer reviews Student log, worksheets, mood boards, sketchbooks, plans etc.
Written account Consideration of a particular subject, situation or example selected by the tutor or by students, which enables students to apply knowledge to specific situations and to present them in written format.	Tutor, one to one tutorial, discussion Tutor record of observation Student notes Tutorial notes Completed report Charts Plans

5.3.3 Integrated assignments
All providers must apply to One Awards before developing integrated assignments.

Version 7.0		Page 12 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

There is guidance about cross referencing evidence of achievement and the production of integrated assignments on the website, but if you are considering the use of integrated assignments please contact your One Awards Lead Moderator as soon as possible.

Assessment Planning Process

Diploma assessment plan AP1 (with dates) or AP1 (without dates), plus an assessment timetable, completed by course team to include a wide range of appropriate assessment methods across the diploma, which allow for valid and reliable grading judgements to be made.

Internal moderation successful (IM1), no action required.

Internal moderation identifies further action required.

Unit assessment plans (AP2) are developed by tutors detailing each assignment, its learning outcomes and assessment criteria and the grade descriptor components to be used. In addition, a brief description of the tasks involved.

Internal moderation (IM2) successful, no action required.

Internal moderation identifies further action required

Write assignment briefs (AP3), which meet the standard criteria set out in section 6

Internal moderation (IM3) successful, no action required.

Assignments ready for use.

Version 7.0	Page 13 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Ac	

6. Assignment writing

6.1 Introduction
Tutors must provide students with an assignment brief for each assessment, which explains what the student has to do and how the work will be assessed.

6.2 Assignment Brief
Information given to students is critically important. It must be clear to them what they have to do, how it will be assessed and how grades can be achieved.

The following information must be included in all assignment briefs:
- Access Diploma title
- Unit title and code
- Assignment title and number
- Assignment briefing (assessment task information)
- Assignment hand out date
- Assignment hand in date
- Drafts permitted (See One Awards Drafts Policy)
- Mapping to unit (Learning outcomes and assessment criteria)
- Grading information i.e. grade descriptors for the assignment, wording of the chosen components and any additional guidance (for graded units only)
- Section for declaration by student (confirming authenticity)

It is strongly recommended that the One Awards Assignment Brief template (AP3) is used (go to the One Awards website for templates and completed examples), as it has been designed to ensure that all the required information is included. Most of the information required to complete this form is already available in your assessment plan and assessment strategy (see Section 4).

6.2.1 Effective assignment briefs are essential. In addition to the above criteria an effective brief will:
- be specifically designed to meet the assessment criteria and QAA grading system and not be recycled from other sources
- enable the student to meet all of the assessment criteria allocated to that assignment
- enable the student to demonstrate the requirements of the grade descriptor components allocated to that assignment
- contextualise the assessment criteria by setting a task or tasks which allow the student to demonstrate their learning of the relevant topics
- encourage engagement and developmental activities
- be current and involve the students in recent and relevant initiatives and events
- include clear and unambiguous descriptions of the responses required of the students (see Section 5.3.2)
- give clear guidance on word counts and the acceptable range

Version 7.0		Page 14 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

**Guide to the Assessment and
Grading of the QAA Access to
HE Diploma**

6.2.2 Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

It is essential that the intentions of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria are understood and followed. Remember that learning outcomes and assessment criteria should only be assessed once in the assessment of any unit.

It is also recommended that the assessment criteria of a learning outcome should not be split between assignments. The separation of assessment criteria from their parent learning outcome may reduce the educational value of the learning outcome to the student. In the design and approval of a unit by One Awards, the assessment criteria were allocated to a learning outcome intentionally and with a sound rationale.

In section 5.3.1 definitions are given for the principles of assessment. It is essential that the assignment brief, and its tasks, conform to the requirements of validity and reliability. To ensure that this is the case, a sound understanding of the meaning of verbs commonly used in the assessment criteria is required. To assist tutors and internal moderators in this, the following table lists the most commonly used verbs and their meanings.

ANALYSE	Break the topic down into separate parts and examine each part. Show how the main ideas are related and why they are important
COMPARE	Examine the subjects in detail looking at similarities and differences
EVALUATE	Review evidence from different sources and perspectives and come to valid conclusions or reasoned judgements
EXAMINE	Look at carefully in detail, to scrutinize
EXPLAIN	Make clear, provide detailed information giving reasons, and showing how or why
INVESTIGATE	Examine, study or inquire systematically
JUDGE	Form an opinion or make a decision based on evidence
JUSTIFY	Give a satisfactory explanation for actions or decisions
PERFORM	Carry out, accomplish, or fulfil an action, task, or function Present to an audience
PLAN	Organise information in a logical way using an appropriate format.
REFLECT	Consider previous experiences and how these inform future actions, learning or practices
RESPOND TO	Take action Reply or answer
REVIEW AND REVISE	Revisit a topic or activity and make or identify adjustments, changes or additions that would lead to improvements
SUMMARISE	Give the main ideas or facts in a concise way

Version 7.0		Page 15 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

Tutors must ensure, therefore, that the tasks track against the assessment criteria and these and the assessment methods allow the students to provide adequate evidence for achievement at all levels. Section 5.3.2, gives a range of methods which might be used. Again it is essential that there is consistency in the use of, and expectations of, each method. Careful thought should go into deciding whether for example, an essay or a report is required. Or is it more appropriate to ask for a piece of written work, avoiding the very specific essay and report criteria?

6.2.3 Grade descriptors.

All units will have been allocated grade descriptors, which will be clearly stated on the definitive unit specification. (See QAA Grading Scheme Handbook – Section B). These are approved by the AVA following consultation with subject specialists. These are the only grade descriptors which can be used in the grading of that unit.

Each grade descriptor includes a list of components which are selected by the tutor for making grading judgements. The selection of grade descriptor components is crucial to effective grading, ensuring that the resulting grades reflect the standard of work expected at Merit and Distinction in relation to the assessment criteria and the requirements of the assignment.

The number of grade components used

It is also important that the impact of the number of components chosen is considered in relation to whether a student could be expected to address them all. For example, in grade descriptor 1 the invitation is to choose "one or more" of the components. Choose one, and it may be "grasp of the relevant knowledge base"; choose two and it may also be "informed by the major conventions and practices of the area of study"; choose three and "understanding of the different perspectives or approaches associated with the area of study" must also be added. If all three are chosen the grading judgement will have to take all three into account. The student will also, of course, have to attempt to address all three.

Grade components and the assessment method

It is also essential that the most appropriate grade descriptor components are selected for the assessment method. For example, grade descriptor 7a (The student's work is structured in a way that is consistently logical and fluent) would not be appropriate if the expected responses from the student were simply either right or wrong, one word answers or short phrases.

Contextualisation

- While the grade descriptor components must initially be stated exactly as they are written in the QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, Section B, they should also be interpreted in language which the students will understand. It must be absolutely clear to the students how they should approach the assignment and what they should do in order to achieve at Merit and Distinction level. The inclusion of subject specific content may enhance this understanding.

- However, QAA have very specific guidance for what should not be written, covering the wording and punctuation of the grade descriptors and their components or adding anything which might reduce the level of challenge of the assignment (see QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, section C).

Version 7.0		Page 16 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

- If, for example, grade descriptor 7c is used (Taken as a whole, demonstrates a very good/excellent response to the demands of the assignment) objective criteria should be established and included as contextualisation, to ensure the student knows how the grading decision is going to be made. The words 'very good' and 'excellent' have little meaning in isolation and to students who have little or nothing with which to relate them. The demands of the assignment may relate to the following of instructions, the style and quality of presentation, the student's engagement with the topic, the overall effort and enthusiasm put into planning and completion. Which of these it is, or others not listed, will depend on the topic and the nature of the assignment. The terms should also be considered in relation to the academic level of the assignment, level 3.

- In grade descriptor 2 (Application of knowledge) the terms 'breadth' and 'depth' are used. Again, some explanation will be required. Breadth may relate to the number of examples, sources and references used. It may relate to the range of ideas, suggestions or interpretations given. Whereas depth will relate to the amount of detail and explanation given to the detailed evaluation or exploration of the topic.

Go to the One Awards website for further guidance on the contextualisation of grade descriptors and examples of assignment briefs which include contextualisation. Guidance on contextualisation and examples of assignment briefs

Version 7.0		Page 17 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

6.2.4 Numerical marking

Numerical marking MUST NOT be used at any point within the assessment and grading process for the Access to HE Diploma.

It was permitted for use by providers between 2009 and 2016. However, due to the complexity and difficulty it presents for providers in implementing it within the regulations, a decision was approved by the Access to HE Committee in November 2016 to discontinue its use from September 2017. QAA were consulted in the summer of 2016 and endorsed the decision. Providers and moderators were also surveyed and widespread support was received. Providers were informed of the decision in March 2017.

Further to this, and as a result of full consultation with Access Validating Agencies, QAA have subsequently made the decision to remove numerical marking from the Grading Scheme. This will come into effect from September 2020

Examples of graded Maths and Physics assignments are available on the One Awards website demonstrating good practice in the contextualisation of grade descriptors without the use of numerical marking. For further guidance providers should contact their Lead and Diploma Moderators.

Version 7.0		Page 18 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

7. Assessment decisions

7.1 Making the initial assessment decision and grading judgements.
The next stage of the process is to assess the level of performance of the student in the assessment task(s). Initially this is to determine whether the assessment criteria have been met at the appropriate level. If they have, and it is a graded piece of work, judgements are then required as to whether the work meets the standard of Merit or Distinction in relation to the grade descriptors, or whether the work is at pass level only (QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, Section C:5 Assessing student work).

7.2 The initial assessment decision
- The first assessment decision to make is whether or not the student has demonstrated their achievement of the learning outcomes which were allocated to that assignment. This decision will confirm the student's achievement at the level of the unit.

- The evidence must be consistent with the expectations of the assessment criteria. It is essential that the verbs used in the assessment criteria have been addressed, in addition to the subject content. Tutors must ensure that evidence contains analysis, evaluation explanation etc. as required by the assessment criteria.

- If the learning outcomes have all been achieved in the assignment, it can be considered as being a successful submission and is now eligible for grading. If the learning outcomes have not all been achieved in the assignment, it is considered to be an unsuccessful submission and is not eligible for grading. The resubmission process will then apply. (see Section 10.3)

7.3 Grading judgements
- Grading judgements should be based on the grade descriptor components which were stated on the relevant assignment brief.

- The grading judgement is based on the evidence provided in the assignment as a whole. Grading judgements should not be made on parts of the assignment and should not be specific to individual learning outcomes or assessment criteria.

- Whichever grading descriptor components are being used, they must be viewed as being an integral part of the assignment, not as a separate component. For example, in grade descriptor 5 (Communication and presentation) with regard to visual communication, it is concerned with the use of forms and structures which aid understanding, but does not extend to the visual appeal or design quality of such forms, unless these are explicitly required by the unit (QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013, Section B)

- If several components of the grade descriptor have been identified e.g. 7a and 7b, or 5, format, punctuation and referencing, all must be considered in the grading judgement, but only one grade indicator is assigned per grade descriptor.

Version 7.0		Page 19 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

8. Giving feedback to students

Feedback will be provided to students at various times during their course. Some will be formative, some summative (see section 3.1). Some may be verbal, some may be written. In all cases feedback should be primarily seen as a learning tool.

- It should, therefore, be timely. Students must be able to apply the feedback to subsequent learning and assessment.

- It should relate to the specific criteria which were included in the assessment brief. In the first instance it will relate to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Secondly it will relate to the grading judgements. These categories of feedback should be kept separate.

- It should be constructive. It should highlight what has been done well and what can be improved; this applies to work of all standards, including work at distinction level.

- Feedback should be written in clear, unambiguous language. The words used should be carefully chosen. Wherever possible, avoid weak words such as "adequate" or "limited", use strong words such as "comprehensive" or "outstanding". It should be structured and logical, not confused and vague. (see end of this section on page 18 for further examples)

- It is recommended that for feedback on completed assignments, not drafts, the One Awards Assignment Feedback template should be used. (see One Awards website)

Students learn in different ways and therefore feedback should reflect this. The feedback should be tailored to their needs.

Consideration could be given to alternative methods of giving feedback, using modern technologies. Students are often more comfortable with electronic communication and more with the spoken than they are with the written word. If new methods are used, though, ensure that they follow the principles outlined above and all summative feedback must always be provided in a written form, so that the assessment process can be tracked by students, tutors, internal and external moderators.

If drafts are used then the formative feedback given to students must not refer specifically to grade descriptors. The feedback should be generic in nature (see One Awards Drafts Policy).

Summative feedback on completed assignments which have achieved the assessment criteria and been graded should be comprehensive and follow the guidelines above.

Summative feedback on a completed assignment which does not achieve all of the learning outcomes available, and is therefore not graded, should not make any reference to how the assignment may be improved in relation to the grade descriptors. The feedback should be restricted to summative statements on the learning outcomes and assessment criteria which have been achieved, and formative statements on how the student can be successful in the resubmission of those not achieved. For example, 'provide an evaluation of the topic, as stated in the assessment criteria, rather than an explanation'. (See QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Section C: 6 Providing feedback on grading to students)

Version 7.0		Page 20 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

Words associated with strengths	Neutral words	Words associated with weaknesses
Accurate	Acceptable	Destructive
Best	Adequate	Fail
Challenged	Appropriate	Inadequate
Committed	Fair	Inconsistent
Competent	Required	Inappropriate
Comprehensive	Satisfactory	Ineffective
Constructive	Sound	Insufficient
Enhance	Standard	Lacking
Enthusiastic	Sufficient	Limited
Exceeding	Suitable	Low
Excellent	Varied	Minimal
Exemplary		Narrow
Good		Negative
Imaginative		Not
Impressive		Partial
Inspire		Poor
Innovative		Slow
Motivational		Unacceptable
Outstanding		Undemanding
Productive		Unhelpful
Relevant		Unimaginative
Significant		Unsatisfactory
Stimulating		Unsuccessful
Strong		Weak
Successful		
Supportive		
Sustained		
Thorough		
Enhancers		**Enhancers**
Completely		Extremely
Consistently		Failed to
Extremely		Inconsistent
Highly		Lacked
Very		Very

Version 7.0	Page 21 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma	

9. Tracking assessment decisions

The tutor must maintain auditable records of achievement which will enable unit grade profiles and the final unit grade to be determined. These records can be used by the tutor, internal and external moderators and for the award of the Diploma.

The trackers should also show when a grade has been achieved on a resubmission, or if grading has not been possible and the provider considers that there is to be a case for referral for a second resubmission.

There are templates and examples of completed Assessment Trackers for providers to use on the One Awards website.

Example: grading judgments for three assignments, the grade profile for each student and the students overall unit grade.

	Unit title:								
	Assignment 1		**Assignment 2**		**Assignment 3**			**Unit grade profile**	**Unit grade**
Student	GD 5	GD7	GD1	GD7	GD1	GD5	GD7		
1	P	M	M	D	D	D	M	PMMMDDD	M
2	M	P	P	P	P	M	M	PPPPMMM	P
3	M®	M®	P	M	Ref	Ref	Ref		

Key

® Resubmission

Ref – referral submission to be made

(See QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Section C: Annex C3. Unit assessment plans, unit grade profiles and unit grades.)

Version 7.0		Page 22 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

10. Assessment regulations

10.1 Drafts

Opportunities to submit assignments in draft for comment and feedback by tutors may be allowed before the formal submission date, only where their use is considered appropriate. For example in a unit's first assignment, when students may require additional support to boost their confidence, drafts may be used. However, tutors are not allowed to make detailed corrections to the draft submission, nor provide information about predicted grade indicators, or other detailed information about possible grading judgements.

Providers are required to develop a policy for managing draft assignments. Whatever the policy is it must be consistently applied by all tutors and ensure fairness for students. (QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Section C: 4b Draft Submissions). Also see the One Awards Drafts Policy on the One Awards website.

10.2 Late submissions and extensions

Providers should have a policy for late submissions and extensions and accompanying forms on which to apply for the latter.

Students may request, in writing and with explanation, an extension to an assignment deadline. This is a request and not a right. Circumstances justifying an extension should be explained to students at the course induction and should be included in the course handbook or equivalent. An assignment submitted after the deadline, but with an extension granted, is not penalised and can be fully graded. It is not capped at a Pass (One Awards Access to HE Application for Extension of Deadlines form).

A late submission, with no approved extension or extenuating circumstances is capped at a Pass. Non-achievement of the learning outcomes in these circumstances results in the student being referred (see section 10.4 below).

(QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Section C: 4c; Late submissions and extensions)

10.3 Resubmissions

- If a submission is not successful at the first attempt of achieving all of the learning outcomes, the student should be offered the possibility of a resubmission.
- The resubmission opportunity should conform to the QAA guidelines. It should follow feedback from the tutor explaining which learning outcomes have been achieved and which have not. No advice on grading judgements should be given. The demands of the resubmission should be proportional to the extent of non-achievement. Clear instructions on the specific requirements of the resubmission should be provided.
- Resubmissions should not afford the student an unfair advantage, must not disadvantage other students, but must give the student a genuine attempt to achieve the assessment criteria.
- The resubmission should be in a form which is clearly distinguishable from the original submission.
- Only those parts of the work resubmitted in response to the non-achievement should be re-assessed. Learning outcomes achieved in the first submission must not be re-assessed. If the resubmission is successful, then the whole assignment is eligible for grading.
- The original piece of work, the resubmitted sections and the original feedback form should be retained together for the purposes of assessment and moderation.

Version 7.0		Page 23 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		

- The outcome of the resubmission, with feedback to the student, should be entered on the original assignment feedback form.
- Resubmissions should be recorded in the documents which track assessment decisions. (section 7.4 above)

(QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Section C: 4e. Resubmissions; Annex C2, regulations relating to resubmission and representations; Annex C5, flow chart of the resubmission process; Guidance on managing resubmissions)

10.4 Referrals

Where a student has not achieved all of the learning outcomes for a unit after two attempts (initial submission and a resubmission) there may be a case for referral, although this is not an automatic right. The course team has the opportunity to recommend that a student should be permitted a second resubmission either during the course or at the end.

(QAA Grading Scheme Handbook 2013 Section C: Annex C2; Section E: 4 Referrals; Annex E1, flow chart of the referral process)

10.5 Representations

Representations apply when a student is not satisfied with a tutor's explanation for unconfirmed grade indicators awarded and asks for them to be formally reconsidered. The student should make a formal application for the representation, giving reasons. These are reviewed in turn by the assessor and then the internal moderator before a decision on the representation is made. A record of these reviews and the final decision can be made on the One Awards Access to HE Contesting a grading decision (Representation) form. (QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, 2014 Section C, Annex C2.)

11.   References

Cottrell, S. (2013) Study Skills handbook (3rd edition) Palgrave, McMillan

Cottrell, S. (2014), QAA Conference 9 April 2014. Skills for Success

Version 7.0		Page 24 of 25
Original created: 07 September 2020	*Last edited:* 24 August 2020	*Due for review:* August 2021
Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma		