

# Guidance on making assessment judgements about student work at Level 2 and Level 3



## **Aim of this guide**

To ensure validity in the assessment process and fairness to students it is important that those involved in the assessment and moderation of the Access to HE Diploma understand the difference between expectations of work produced for Level 2 and Level 3 units. The aim of this guide is therefore to provide some clarity in this area and to make some suggestions regarding the writing of assignment briefs at different levels.

## **Background to this guide**

During standardisation meetings and training sessions held with Access to HE Diploma provider staff and One Awards moderators in 2016-17, discussions have taken place regarding what might be expected when assessing student work at Level 2 and Level 3. This guide is a compilation of those views. At each event the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) Generic Level Descriptors were used as a central point of reference and have also been referred to throughout the guide.<sup>1</sup>

## **Intended audience**

Assessors, internal moderators, external moderators, course leaders and managers with responsibility for the Access to HE Diploma.

## **Mapping to other documents**

- One Awards Guide to the Assessment and Grading of the Access to HE Diploma
- One Awards Guide to the Internal Moderation and Standardisation of the Access to HE Diploma

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<sup>1</sup> NICATS Generic Level Descriptors: [http://www.oneawards.org.uk/site\\_assets/files/The%20NICATS%20%20level%20descriptors.pdf](http://www.oneawards.org.uk/site_assets/files/The%20NICATS%20%20level%20descriptors.pdf)

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## Level 2: The NICATS Generic Level Descriptors specify the following:

Apply knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas and employ a range of skills within a number of contexts, including working with others under direct supervision but with a limited degree of discretion and judgement about possible action.

Intellectual skills and attributes	Processes	Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas</li> <li>Make comparisons</li> <li>Interpret available information</li> <li>Demonstrate a range of skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose from a range of procedures performed in a number of contexts some of which may be non-routine.</li> <li>Co-ordinate with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake directed activity with a degree of autonomy</li> <li>Achieve outcomes within time constraints</li> <li>Accept increased responsibility for quantity and quality of output subject to external quality checking</li> </ul>

## Interpretation of these descriptors in terms of Access to HE Diplomas

Level 2 can be seen as preparatory work leading to Level 3 graded or ungraded units. The skills required can be divided into the following:

- academic skills
- subject knowledge

Academic skills can be seen as the required foundation for successfully developing and demonstrating skills and knowledge in subject specific or graded units.

## Examples of academic skills at Level 2

- An understanding of the command verbs used in units and assessments i.e., explain, describe, compare, understand, identify and outline.
- An ability to follow instructions, particularly in assignment briefs, and present work in the required format e.g. essay, report, presentation, etc.
- Knowledge and application of correct grammar to produce comprehensible assignments.
- Some mathematical skills.
- Descriptive rather than analytical work produced with minimal evaluation e.g. in essay or report writing a summative conclusion rather than an evaluative one.
- Interpretation of available information and a knowledge of sources used.
- An attempt at referencing and the production of a bibliography.

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## Examples of subject knowledge at Level 2

- The accumulation of a specific body of knowledge which is more than general knowledge.
- The ability to apply that knowledge with underpinning comprehension e.g. the selection of the correct factual information for a given question.
- Sufficiency of knowledge to meet the requirements of the assignment briefs.
- Solving of well-defined problems.
- The beginning of understanding concepts.

## Level 3: The NICATS Generic Level Descriptors specify the following:

Apply knowledge and skills in a range of complex activities demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories; access and analyse information independently and make reasoned judgements, selecting from a considerable choice of procedures in familiar and unfamiliar contexts; and direct own activities, with some responsibility for the output of others.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply knowledge and skills in a range of complex activities, demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories.</li> <li>• Access and evaluate information independently.</li> <li>• Analyse information and make reasoned judgements.</li> <li>• Employ a range of responses to well defined but often unfamiliar or unpredictable problems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operate in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar contexts using a range of technical or learning skills.</li> <li>• Select from a considerable choice of procedures.</li> <li>• Give presentations to an audience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in self-directed activity with guidance/evaluation</li> <li>• Accept responsibility for quantity and quality of output.</li> <li>• Accept limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of output.</li> <li>• Accept limited responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others.</li> </ul>
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## Interpretation of these descriptors in terms of Access to HE Diplomas

Level 3 can be seen as building on the academic skills and subject knowledge acquired at Level 2, for example developing the higher-level skills of analysis and evaluation and working more independently.

## Examples of academic skills at Level 3

- An ability to address the Level 3 command verbs e.g. analyse, evaluate, justify, and reflect.
- Effective use of grammar to produce academically well written work.
- Fluent, logical and concise writing with the development of clear explanations with some examples and quotations.
- Comparisons, analysis, arguments, strengths and weaknesses clearly delineated.

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- Skill in evaluation with judgements made from evidence throughout the assignment and an evaluative conclusion.
- Use of research to make arguments and provide evidence.
- Range of referenced academic sources and use of bibliographies.
- Autonomy and independence in responding to the assignment brief.

## **Examples of subject knowledge at Level 3**

- Use of an appropriate body of knowledge and the use of correct terminology
- Understanding of a range of theories.
- Ability to synthesise information.
- Selection of relevant information to meet the demands of the assignment brief.
- Greater detail, depth and accuracy than level 2 work.
- Greater confidence in applying knowledge and skills than level 2 work.
- Use of correct techniques in academic investigations.

## **General Guidance on writing assignment briefs**

- The quantity of evidence required per Learning Outcome (LO) could be different e.g. if only one Assessment Criteria (AC) is linked to an LO compared to where there are four.
- LOs should be considered as well as the ACs when looking at sufficiency of evidence.
- Ensure that parity in the amount of work required by the student is established between different 9 credit units, both within and across Diplomas.
- Refer to the indicative content provided on the unit specification when designing the assignment brief.
- Ensure that the design of the brief allows for the LOs and ACs to be covered.
- As a guide, each 9 credit unit can be covered by 2 - 4 assignments with a word count of 4-5000 words overall, although other models may be justified depending on the chosen assessment method
- If a word count is suggested, students should indicate on their assignment submission how many words they have used. Word counts are not mandatory for all assignments, but it is important that students develop skills in working within word count guidance as part of their preparation for Higher Education. Where word counts are allocated, they should allow for full achievement of the ACs and should be carefully considered in the light of the tasks.
- For graded units, grade descriptor 7c could be used to differentiate the assessment judgement if more or fewer words than suggested are used. For example, if the student has used a considerable number of words more than or less than the suggested word count.

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## Writing Level 2 assignment briefs

- The assignment brief should give clear and detailed instructions to students on how the tasks are to be completed, but some autonomy and responsibility should be given.
- The assignment brief should allow students to apply the knowledge they have been taught in straight forward activities. The use of simple scenarios is an example.
- Students may work with others in a group work situation, but the final submission must be their own work.
- The method chosen to assess the LOs and ACs must be appropriate for Level 2 units. For example, work sheets, short essays, reports and presentations may be used but academic posters would not be appropriate.
- Word counts may not be expected, and the use of referencing and bibliographies would be rudimentary and only designed to introduce techniques. The ability to use the full Harvard referencing system should not be expected.

## Writing Level 3 assignment briefs

- While the instructions in the assignment brief should be clear the students should be given more independence and autonomy in terms of the information they use. They should be expected to act more independently in accessing and evaluating information.
- The assignment briefs should allow the application of knowledge in a range of complex activities demonstrating comprehension and, if appropriate, analysis of relevant theories. More complex scenarios could be used so that the students can make a range of responses to well defined but unfamiliar or unpredictable problems. Where the LOs and ACs require evaluation, this should be explicit in the assignment brief.
- The chosen assessment methods should be appropriate for the level. For example, work sheets would not be expected but the use of academic posters could be introduced.
- The use of word counts for essays and reports and the use of Harvard referencing and bibliographies would be expected, although it must be emphasised that students would not be expected to have mastered these techniques which will be further developed at Higher Education.

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- In the case of presentations, preparation should include the selection of information from a body of knowledge and the consideration of questions which may be asked and the responses which could be given.
- Presentations as a method of assessment should only be used if the students are going to actually present their work. The assignment briefs should clearly state that when making presentations, speaker notes should be included. Students will need to understand how to present information clearly, for example, by ensuring that slides are not too crowded and can be read easily. Assessor observations and possibly peer testimonies are to be expected. Students should be prepared to answer questions and the answers noted by the assessor on the observation form.

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