



# The 2013 Access to HE Diploma and admissions to higher education

# The 2013 specification: clarity of aims and purpose

## Aims:

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

# Access to HE delivery infrastructure

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

# 2013 specification: key changes

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

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

**60**

**credits total**

amendment to  
regulation on **referrals**

**GCSE-equivalents** no  
longer regulated

# Diploma = 60 credits total

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

# Unit credit values: 3, 6 or 9 credits

- All Diplomas made up of units of 3, 6 or 9 credits

# 45 credits from graded level 3 units with academic subject content

- All Diplomas will contain 45 credits from graded level 3 units concerned with academic subject content
- These units can be of any of the permitted credit values (3, 6 or 9), so the number of units taken and grades reported will vary

# Criteria for academic subject content

- a. the unit content (as expressed in the learning outcomes) must relate to knowledge and skills of subjects identified in the title of the Diploma
- b. students must be supported and assessed for the work of such units by subject experts
- c. the definition includes knowledge and skills related to all Access to HE Diploma subjects - eg Multimedia as well as History
- d. not study skills, personal development, or generic English or mathematics units, but can include specialist (eg Maths for engineering) and technical (eg lab skills)

# Criteria for academic subject content (2)

And also, for units that focus on a large scale research project or major final project:

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



# Ungraded units at level 2 or level 3

- for use in the 15 credits of non-graded content
- decision about the balance between ungraded level 2 or level 3 units is determined according to the requirements of the intended progression route and approved through the validation process
- units must be identified as level 2 or level 3 in the rules of combination for a named Diploma
- level 3 ungraded units may also be concerned with academic subject content
- if level 3 units are required as graded in some Diplomas and ungraded in others, these must be separately validated units

# Referrals

## **Current situation:**

- the opportunities for referrals is limited to the end of the course

## **Amendment to regulations** in response to these concerns:

- a request for a referral is allowed at any point in the course
- the decision process to allow the request must involve the external moderator
- students are limited to referrals for assessments to a maximum of 15 credits
- if the referral is for a graded unit, the grade for the resubmitted work is capped at Pass
- guidance on the changes is provided in the full specification

# GCSE equivalents from 2014

From 2014-15 QAA will no longer regulate or endorse the claim of GCSE equivalence for groups of Access to HE units

## Response to:

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

# Possibilities and alternatives to GCSE equivalents

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

# The implementation timeline

**New specification developed and published: 2012-13**

**Outline: June 2013**

**Full specification: Sept 2013**

**Development year for AVAs and providers: 2013-14**

**Diplomas redeveloped and revalidated, where necessary**

**Full implementation: from 2014-15**

**All Diplomas compliant; students applying to HE**

**First students entering HE with new specification: 2015-16**

# What stays the same?

- level and size of qualification: level 3, 60 credits
- the Grading Scheme
- credit and unit technical definitions etc

and

**what it's for:** preparation for HE

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



# The new Diploma and admissions to higher education

All students who have achieved the full Diploma will offer:

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

# QAA guidance to HE admissions staff - Recommended good practice in setting requirements and making offers

- R1: refer to **'the Access to HE Diploma'**.
- R2a: in entry requirements, **refer to generic disciplines** for Diplomas, not particular titles.
- R2b: in conditional offers, refer to **the title of the Diploma named on the application**.



# How that might look

<b>Entry requirements (examples):</b>	<b>Conditional offers (examples):</b>
a the AHE Diploma in any subject	a the AHE Diploma [title given on application]
b the AHE Diploma in a health-related or science subject	b the AHE Diploma (Health Studies)
c the AHE Diploma in art and design or creative arts subject	c the AHE Diploma (Art and Design)

# Setting requirements and making offers

- R3a: to ensure consistency in requirements about the amount of achievement in a particular subject, **refer to the number of credits to be achieved** (not the number of units) in that subject.

**Credits**



**Units**



# Setting requirements and making offers

- R3b: in conditional offers, ensure that any specification of requirements **does not exceed 60 credits**
- R3c: in conditional offers, consider whether **more detailed specifications about particular unit** requirements, citing units offered by a particular student, might be necessary or helpful

# How that might look

<b>Entry requirements (examples):</b>	<b>Conditional offers (examples):</b>
a the AHE Diploma in any subject, with 30 level 3 credits in arts or humanities units, of which at least 6 credits are from units in English literature	a the AHE Diploma (Combined Arts), with 30 level 3 credits from English literature, history or philosophy units, of which at least 6 credits are from units in English literature
b the AHE Diploma in a science or engineering subject, with 12 level 3 credits from units in mathematics	b the AHE Diploma (Engineering), with 12 level 3 credits from units in mathematics

# Setting requirements and making offers

- R4: when making requirements and offers based on achievement of grades **specify the number of credits (not units)** which must be achieved at **Merit or Distinction** (within the maximum total available of 45 credits).

# How that might look (3)

<b>Entry requirements (examples):</b>	<b>Conditional offers (examples):</b>
a the AHE Diploma [specify discipline area, if required], with 12 credits from science units at Merit or Distinction	a the AHE Diploma (Environmental Science), with 12 level 3 credits from science units at Merit or Distinction
b the AHE Diploma [specify discipline area, if required], with 12 credits from science units at Merit or Distinction	b the AHE Diploma (Environmental Science), with 12 credits from science units at Merit or Distinction

# Setting requirements and making offers

- R5: consider asking for a **second reference** to gain more information about students' academic potential.
- R6: consider **alternative approaches** to making **unconditional** offers
- R7: if any **additional qualifications or other requirements** (such as work experience) are a prerequisite, ensure that such requirements are made clear in published entry requirements.

# Support for admissions

- Guidance documents available from Access to HE website [www.accesstohe.ac.uk](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk)
- QAA will respond to enquiries [access@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:access@qaa.ac.uk)





# Access to HE: continuing to help students to change their lives



[www.accesstohe.ac.uk](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk)