



# Access to HE Diploma Guide

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# OCN LONDON

## WHO WE ARE

OCN London is a national not-for-profit organisation that creates and awards qualifications. We are one of the UK's leading Access Validating Agencies. This means we are licensed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to develop and award Access to HE Diplomas.

Our mission is to help create a fairer society where everyone, whatever their educational background, has an opportunity to benefit from learning, realise their potential and fulfil their goals.

## CONTACT US

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This qualification guide contains details of everything you need to know about the OCN London Level 3 Access to HE Diploma. It makes reference to the curriculum areas covered, identifies the learners for whom the qualification has been developed and specifies the Rules of Combination for achievement of the qualification. This guidance is applicable until August 2024, when QAA are introducing changes to the Diploma specification and Grading Scheme Handbook.

The guide also covers any important aspects of assessment and moderation that are particular to this qualification.

The guide should be used by all of those involved in the delivery and assessment of these qualifications and can be adapted for learners to help them understand the structure of their Diploma.

This guide is intended as an overview. The [OCN London website](#) contains a wide range of resources and guidance on specific topics to help OCN London centres deliver the Access to HE Diploma.

## QUALIFICATION OVERVIEW

The Level 3 Access to HE Diploma is a nationally recognised qualification which is designed to provide a preparation for study in higher education (HE) for adults returning to education.

Individual Diplomas are validated and awarded by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), according to [regulations and specifications](#) set by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

There are over 1,000 different courses leading to the Access to HE Diploma and courses are available in most further education colleges in England and Wales.

Access to HE Diplomas are available for a range of different progression routes, such as Access to HE Diploma (Nursing), Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design), Access to HE Diploma (Business Studies) – OCN London offers over 40 such titles.

## QUALIFICATION LEVEL

The Access to HE Diploma is a Level 3 qualification, although some units within it may be set at Level 2.

It has a qualification credit value of 60 credits:

- 45 credits graded at Level 3 in academic subject specific units and
- 15 credits ungraded at Level 2 or Level 3 (mainly in study skills units)

A credit is equivalent to a 'notional' 10 hours of learning, which includes time spent in class and private study.

## ASSESSMENT MECHANISM

The Access to HE Diploma assessment mechanism incorporates:

- assessment tasks which are designed and set by the centre
- internal assessment of learner work
- internal and external moderation of assessment.

## WHO THE QUALIFICATION IS FOR

The Access to HE Diploma is a qualification which prepares learners for study at university. It is designed for adults who would like to study in UK Higher Education but who do not have the necessary entry qualifications, such as A Levels.

It offers a general introduction to study skills and key areas of knowledge within the subject(s) taken, helping adults to become independent, self-directed learners and prepare them for the demands of undergraduate studies. It offers a positive and supportive learning experience where adults can build their skills and confidence.

The qualification is well established, widely accepted by universities and included in the UCAS tariff system. A large majority of those who enrol on Access to HE Diplomas with OCN London make successful applications to university degree courses. Learners who study the Access to HE Diploma find they are well prepared for study at university.

## ENTRY GUIDANCE

There are no centrally specified formal requirements for qualifications on entry; however there is usually the expectation that the learner will have literacy, communication skills and numeracy at Level 2 or above.

In some Diplomas – particularly Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Teacher Training – it is likely that learners will need to hold GCSEs at grade 9–4 (A\*–C) in English and Maths, as these qualifications usually form part of the entry requirements for the degree courses that learners progress to.

# QUALIFICATION STRUCTURE

## UNITS AND RULES OF COMBINATION

In order to gain the Award, the learner must achieve a total of 60 credits. Of these 60 credits, 45 credits must be achieved at Level 3 from graded units which are concerned with academic subject content. Graded units can be awarded at Pass, Merit or Distinction. The remaining 15 credits must be achieved at Level 2 or Level 3 from units which are ungraded. Some Diplomas do not have any level 2 units available.

Units described as having academic subject content will contain learning outcomes which draw from the knowledge and skills of subjects directly related to the subject of the named Diploma. For example, academic subject units in the Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) will contain knowledge and skills which directly relate to Nursing (e.g. Biology).

The Rules of Combination are set at the time of validation. At validation, OCN London convenes a panel of subject specialists from HE and FE. A set of units will be validated for each Diploma and only units which form part of the Rules of Combination document may be selected and delivered by an approved centre as part of their Access to HE Diploma course. Diplomas are revalidated every 5 years.

The Diploma is awarded upon successful completion of the specific units which meet the Rules of Combination and the required 60 credits.

The set of units and Rules of Combination approved for any named Diploma are designed in such a way as to constitute the foundation for a clearly structured and coherent programme of study for learners, with a range and balance of content that ensures learners are prepared for successful study in Higher Education.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Within each unit there are learning outcomes which are statements of what a learner may reasonably be expected to know, understand or do. The Learning Outcomes will be appropriate to assessment at either Level 2 or Level 3.

Each learning outcome has a set of assessment criteria which describe the requirements a learner is expected to meet in order to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved. All the assessment criteria must be met for a learner to achieve a unit.

## GRADES, GRADE DESCRIPTORS AND GRADE DESCRIPTOR COMPONENTS

The graded units in an Access to HE Diploma are graded using a scheme which has been designed to accommodate the flexibility of the qualification (it can be applied to all Access to HE Diploma graded units, whatever their subject or structure). Grade descriptors are assigned to each Level 3 graded unit at the point of approval and each Centre will choose the grade descriptor components that best suit the tasks that have been set to enable a grade to be determined by the tutor.

The wording set by QAA for the grade descriptor components can be found in the [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section B](#).

A grade of Pass, Merit or Distinction is awarded for every graded Level 3 unit that a learner completes successfully as part of an Access to HE Diploma.

The grade descriptors make use of a number of general terms such as 'very good' and 'excellent' which are commonly used in assessment situations as a shorthand to summarise a standard of performance. The precise meaning of these terms varies slightly between different subject areas and assignments, but some general principles should be observed.

- All of the Merit descriptors relate to performance that is 'significantly better than pass (learning outcomes have been achieved), but not as good as Distinction'.
- The word 'generally' often features in the components for Merit, and the word 'consistently' for Distinction. Tutors using the descriptors containing this language should take 'generally' to mean 'in most cases / instances' and 'consistently' to mean 'all the time / in almost every case / reliably'.
- The word 'excellent' is used a number of times within the descriptors to denote 'Distinction'. This should not be interpreted to suggest that absolute perfection is required in a learner's work before a Distinction grade can be awarded. It would be more appropriate to look for work that is outstanding, even though it contains some small mistakes, omissions or imperfections.

It is not expected that learners will understand the language used in the grade descriptors and grade descriptor components as these are written to assist the tutor when they are looking at the assessment strategy, designing an assessment task, assessing the learner's work and deciding on a grade. It is therefore important that tutors write a relevant explanation ('grade guidance'), which helps the learner to understand what they are expected to do in order to achieve the higher grades. This guidance should be linked to the tasks set, and the grade guidance and should not be a repetition of the grade components and should form part of the assignment brief.

There is [tutor guidance](#) on how to write effective assignment briefs and examples of grade guidance in the [OCN London devised assignment briefs](#). (These resources are available to approved centres through the centre log-in). Learners do not normally complete different tasks in order to be graded at Merit or Distinction, instead grading considers how well they have completed the task(s) on the assignment brief.

A grade indicator (P, M or D) is given for each grade descriptor used to assess that assignment. No intermediate or modified grade indicators can be given (e.g. P/M). The grade indicators together provide the grade profile for a unit for each learner (e.g. PMM) and the grade for the unit is calculated from this grade profile (e.g. M).

Grades are applied to learner work when it is assessed; once applied they cannot be changed unless it is through the internal or external moderation process.

At the end of the year a learner will have a number of assignments that are graded at Pass; others may be at Merit or Distinction. Each of these will be identified on the final transcript.

Grades can only be awarded for graded units which are part of the Diploma (and conform to the Rules of Combination). There is no overall grade for the Diploma..

## STAFFING

### ACCESS COORDINATOR

It is an OCN London requirement that a staff member is designated as the centre's Access Coordinator. The Access Coordinator is the main contact for OCN London regarding the centre's Access to HE provision. For example, they will be responsible for disseminating information to relevant staff at the centre and for organising and sending in documentation to ensure that the courses remain compliant with QAA and OCN London requirements regarding quality assurance and Diploma revalidation.

At centres running Diplomas in different departments or subject areas, it is important that the person appointed to the Access Coordinator role has sufficient seniority over staff teaching and course leading on the Access to HE Diploma to ensure that the tasks that need to take place in order to ensure that the course remains compliant with QAA and OCN London requirements take place in a robust and timely manner. Consequently, the Coordinator role is often taken by a Head of Department/School or Quality Manager. At centres where Diplomas are run in the same department or subject area then the Access Coordinator may have a less senior role at the provider as will not be required to work across departments.

OCN London runs training for new Access Coordinators in the autumn term.

Where another member of staff or learner from the centre contacts OCN London regarding Access to HE queries, then OCN London staff members will normally copy the Coordinator into their response or redirect the query to the Coordinator to be resolved internally.

### TUTORS AND INTERNAL MODERATORS

Tutors on the Access to HE Diploma must have the professional competence and skills to teach and assess necessary for the mode(s) of delivery to be used, and the level of subject expertise necessary to teach and assess the units available on the Diploma(s). It is expected that the tutor will be qualified to the level above (i.e. Level 4) the unit they are teaching.

OCN London does not set any requirements for the qualifications and experience of internal moderators. The outcome of internal moderation is that it has been reviewed with regards to the subject content and standard of the work, and with regards to compliance with the assessment regulations on the Access to HE Diploma. The normal arrangement is that each unit has one internal moderator who is able to provide this full review, but a centre can involve multiple staff if a single person does not have the sufficient subject and Access to HE experience to be able to make a well-informed judgement about the validity, reliability and fairness of the assessment. The Access Coordinator or a lead internal moderator may take an overview of internal moderation activity at the centre to ensure that it is conducted in line with QAA and OCN London requirements.

Tutors and internal moderators must be allowed to participate in AVA events and activities that are essential for maintaining the quality and academic standards of the Access to HE Diploma, such as training and standardisation.

## OTHER STAFF MEMBERS

The provider approval process means that the following other staff members will also be involved with Access to HE delivery:

- A named quality assurance contact
- A named senior management contact
- Learning support staff, including for those with special learning needs
- Exams office staff or those responsible for systems for maintaining secure records of individual students' registration and achievement
- Information, advice and guidance staff or those with expertise to provide information, advice and guidance on HE applications and progression opportunities
- Staff involved in the processes for handling appeals and complaints
- Staff involved in providing the public information about Access to HE (e.g. marketing teams)
- Finance staff

The size of the centre may determine how many staff are involved in each area and whether there is crossover of roles. It is expected that the Access Coordinator will know who holds each of these roles at the centre and will be able to ensure that they have access to the relevant information that allows them to undertake their role effectively. Where contact details for particular staff members are held by OCN London then it is expected that these will be updated each year through the Annual Review process and changes in-year will be communicated when necessary.

# REGISTERING LEARNERS

## REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Learners must be registered on the course with OCN London within 6 weeks of the course start date using the [QuartzWeb system](#).

Within 12 weeks of the course start date, or before learners submit their UCAS application, learners on a one year course must be registered against units amounting to 60 credits within the Diploma's specified Rules of Combination and the centre's course unit list.

There are charges for late registration.

Once registered on a set of units, changes cannot be made unless there are exceptional circumstances. Requests made to OCN London on the required documentation will be considered on a case by case basis. A learner's non-achievement of a unit that they are



registered on will not be considered as an exceptional circumstance. Any such requests cannot be made for more than a total of 9 credits and cannot be considered after more than 26 weeks from the start date of the course.

Learners on a two year course can be registered for 30 credits in their first year and for the remaining 30 credits at the start of the second year of their course. In this case, credits registered in the first year cannot be changed unless evidence for exceptional circumstances is provided and accepted by OCN London. Alternatively, learners may be registered for all 60 credits at the start of the first year.

## ASSESSMENT AND MODERATION

### THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Learners are assessed through activities that are internally set by teaching staff and which enable the assessment criteria for a unit to be met. Tutors mark the work to check it is:

- authentic – the result of the learner’s own performance or activity;
- sufficient – enabling assessors to make a consistent and reliable judgement;
- adequate – appropriate to the level.

Achievement is not confirmed until the work has been through the internal moderation and external moderation processes and the recommended result has been confirmed by the OCN London Final Awards Board.

The Final Awards Board deliberates on the recommendations made and approves the award of credits, grades and Access to HE Diplomas to learners who have met the relevant requirements.

The Final Awards Board also makes decisions about referrals and special cases. OCN London issues Access to HE Diplomas and transcripts of achievement to the Centre for distribution to learners following confirmation at the Final Awards Board.

### THE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Assessment strategy for Access to HE Diplomas will differ from centre to centre according to local traditions and strengths and the precise subject specific content of their courses. However, it is recommended that the certain principles should underpin the design of a written assessment strategy which should be constructed by the team responsible for delivering the course. This should be regarded as a key teaching, learning and assessment planning document which is regularly consulted and adjusted in response to the experience of delivering the programme. It should be reviewed as part of quality assurance processes.

#### **Diagnostic testing and individual learning goals:**

Once an individual learner has been diagnosed as possessing the skills required to succeed on a full Level 3 Access to HE Diploma, precise individual learning goals should be adopted to form the basis of regular review in academic tutorials. These goals should refer to an individual’s specific academic skills and development needs related to the requirements of the learning outcomes in the Diploma units.

#### **Study skills:**

Teaching, learning and assessment activities in study skills should be explicitly linked to the subject specific content of the Diploma. Subject specific assignment briefs should, in

part, explore subject content through study skills activities such as note taking, summary writing, reading and comprehension exercises, referencing, citation etc.

**Problem-solving:**

All assignment briefs should challenge learners with problem-solving tasks, and not simply require learners to recycle source materials. This app

**Processing sources:**

There should be a strong focus on teaching and learning activities that help learners develop the ability to think critically, to investigate, interrogate, question, compare and contrast source materials.

**Academic writing:**

Assignment briefs across the course should be constructed in a sequence of incremental difficulty, especially in the first term. In particular, academic writing skills should be developed through using a range of tasks designed to prepare learners gradually to manage more substantial pieces of writing in the second and third terms. This should include academic conventions of citation, referencing and bibliography.

**Formative and summative assessment:**

The assessment strategy should include formative assessment activities, not all of which necessarily contribute towards the evidence submitted for final graded units. There should be an explicit link between formative assessment activities and summative assessment so that they are related.

**Coherent sequencing:**

There should be coherent sequencing of formative assessment within units and across units so that tasks and assignments show an explicit developmental curve in academic skills required and depth of subject knowledge expected.

**In-class and out-of-class:**

Formative activities should be devised that require work from learners outside of class time, but which are explicitly linked to in-class activity. Investigatory tasks, including reading challenges, should be set for learners to tackle outside of class time, but which are carefully guided by tutors, the outcomes of which are monitored by tutors and which form part of assessments both formative and summative.

**Grade descriptors:**

Close attention should be paid to the use of the grade descriptors in the design of assignment briefs. Tasks should be set that enable learners to show:

- GD1 understanding of subject through problem-solving activities
- GD2 application of knowledge in subject specific contexts
- GD3 application of subject specific skills in context
- GD4 use of information to solve subject specific problems and not just recycling of blocks of information
- GD5 command of communication and presentation skills consistent with subject specific conventions

In addition, expectations of learner autonomy, GD6, should increase in level of challenge during the programme. This should include tutors supporting learners in portfolio building in order to help learners to take increasing responsibility for the management of their own learning.

The final descriptor, GD7, is about quality and must be used with all units. It is of a different nature and character to the other descriptors and allows for professional judgement about quality across the whole of a learner's work.

### **Tutorial reviews:**

There should be regular tutorial reviews of learner progress against the 60 credit target and individual goals determined in the initial ILP discussions.

The use of VLE and blended learning approaches to assessment should be included where possible and where it is applicable.

## **ASSESSMENTS AND ASSIGNMENT BRIEFS**

Tutors develop unit assessment tasks that indicate how assessment criteria will be covered for both graded and ungraded Level 3 units and Level 2 units. For graded Level 3 units, grade descriptors will be applied across the assessment of the unit. There should be clear links between the assessment criteria, the tasks set and the grade components selected for the grade descriptors.

The assignment brief is made up of these assessment tasks and it should be internally moderated by the Centre before being set by tutors. It is recommended that all briefs are developed and internally moderated in the autumn term. This allows all assessment materials for the year to be ready and to be reviewed by the external moderator at the mid-year moderation in the second term.

All assignments must have a specific deadline date which learners are notified of in advance (for example on the assignment brief, or in a formal assessment plan provided to learners). Learners must submit by the deadline specified and the submission date should be clearly recorded.

For further information, see the [OCN London Tutor Guidance on Designing Effective Assignment Briefs](#) (centre log-in required).

## **SUBMITTING ASSESSMENTS**

In order to ensure all learners have the same opportunity to achieve, the regulations for submitting assessments, as specified below, must be followed by all centres. Further guidance can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance on Submission Processes](#) (centre log-in required).

### **Draft submissions**

Opportunities to submit assignments (or parts of assignments) in draft for comment and feedback by tutors before the formal submission date are permitted only for the particular assignments where the tutor has decided that this is appropriate and has specified this in advance. It may be appropriate in the first term or the first time an assessment method with specific requirements, such as an essay or a report, are used. Such opportunities will not be the norm.

Where the opportunity for the submission of drafts exists, this is specified to all learners in writing before they begin work on the assignment. It should be clear to learners what they can submit as a draft and how feedback will be provided. A deadline should be set and there is space on the OCN London assignment brief template to do this.

Teaching staff may provide written or verbal feedback on drafts and engage in dialogue of a general kind which allows learners to see how they might develop their response to the assignment brief. In responding to draft submissions, tutors are not permitted to:

- make detailed corrections to a draft submission;
- provide information about predicted grade indicators, or other detailed information about possible grading judgements.

Once a formal submission has been made, neither the learner nor the tutor may later declare it to be a draft.

### **Late submissions and agreed extensions**

If work is submitted after the formal deadline has passed, and no extension has been granted (and there are no exceptional extenuating circumstances which explain the failure to request an extension), all grade indicators (see below) relating to that assignment must be capped at Pass. There is no opportunity for resubmission except via the referrals process (see [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section E](#)).

Providers must state their formal procedures for application for an extension to a deadline, and grounds for approval of an extension, in the standard course documentation. The implications for grading if an assignment is submitted late without an extension being granted must also be stated in the standard course documentation (for example, in a course handbook).

The provider's standard written procedures for approval of extensions must be applied on all occasions when a learner requests an extension to the deadline given on the assignment brief sheet.

### **Successful and unsuccessful submissions**

If a submission is not successful at the first attempt (that is, one or more of the assessment criteria for the assignment has not been achieved), the assignment is regarded as an unsuccessful submission.

When a submission is unsuccessful, no credit can be awarded, it is not eligible for grading and (in the case of graded units) the grading process should not be applied. In these circumstances, the learner should be offered the possibility of resubmission.

### **Resubmissions**

Resubmissions must be managed in accordance with the detailed QAA regulations for resubmissions (see [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section C](#)). In particular:

- the original submission must be returned to the learner, with written feedback which explains which learning outcome(s) has / have not been achieved;
- no feedback about the standard of the work in relation to grades may be given at this stage;
- the specific requirements of a resubmission opportunity must be made clear to the learner;
- resubmission must be consistent with the way in which the learning outcomes(s) were originally assessed (for example, an assessment conducted under exam conditions must be reassessed under the same conditions; the exception to this would be if it is not possible or practical for resubmission requirements to replicate the original assignment or assessment task, such as with group work, in which case

the learning outcome(s) should be reassessed through an assignment which makes comparable demands to those of the original assignment);

- only one resubmission opportunity may be provided for any individual assignment (unless mitigating circumstances have been accepted).

Resubmission requirements must be proportionate to the degree of non-achievement. Normally this will mean that a new task has to be set that covers the assessment criterion that has not been met:

- a particular skill has not been fully demonstrated so a single assessment criterion has not been achieved; the resubmission requirements may address that one criterion and assess it in isolation;
- a number of assessment criteria have not been achieved or the non-achievement is deemed substantial in some other way; resubmission requirements are likely to involve a full reconsideration and reworking of the assignment as a whole.

Clear deadlines should be given for resubmission and these must be met by the learner.

Resubmissions should be subject to moderation. The learner's portfolio should include the original submission and the resubmitted work.

Learners cannot resubmit work to achieve a higher grade for a graded unit. The purpose of a resubmission is to give learners an additional opportunity to meet all the assessment criteria for a unit if they failed to do so in their original submission.

## **Referrals**

If the resubmission is unsuccessful (that is, the resubmitted work still does not meet the learning outcome(s) in full), the only means by which a further opportunity for resubmission can be provided within the same registration period is through a referral. If considering a referral, teaching staff must ensure that key steps are taken and items of evidence provided, and in particular that the learner's situation and the best way for the learner to progress have been fully discussed with the learner.

When a learner has not achieved one or more of the assessment criteria of an assessment on first resubmission, or when work has been submitted late without an agreed extension, the learner may be referred for permission to make a second resubmission. When this occurs within the duration of the course, process A described below must be used. Where this occurs at the end of the course (for example, in final assessments), use process B.

### **A: Referrals during the course**

Before referral, the tutor raises the possibility of a referral with the internal moderator. The internal moderator ensures that the following requirements are complied with:

- the learner completed the resubmission process and failed to achieve all the assessment criteria for the work being referred;
- tutors have discussed with the learner the best way for them to progress;
- the learner has been informed that referral does not automatically result in approval for a second resubmission;
- the learner has been informed that the decision to allow a further opportunity to submit one or more assignments at this stage of the course is made by the external Centre Moderator on the basis of evidence presented.

Evidence to support the case for referrals must make reference to:

- any special circumstances affecting the individual learner;
- the particular assignment in which it is recommended to the Centre Moderator that a learner is referred;
- details of the achievement in the original submissions and resubmissions for the unit(s) in question (including any other assignments that contribute to the assessment of the unit which have been achieved);
- the learner's total achievement profile up to the point on the Access to HE course that the referral is requested (including the title of units, credit value and indicative grades, and whether or not they were achieved on the basis of a second resubmission of work as a consequence of referral).

Requests for referrals will not normally be considered where the total credit value of the units which have already been achieved through referral, or might be achieved as an outcome of a further referral, is more than 15.

The records of this process and the request for a referral are forwarded to the Centre Moderator using the required form for a decision:

- LRef1 – Request for learner referral during the academic year
- LRef2 – form that accompanies successfully referred work that has been assessed and moderated.

These forms can be downloaded from the [OCN London website](#) or requested from the Centre Moderator.

Decisions about referrals made by the Centre Moderator must include:

- whether a second resubmission opportunity should be offered.
- the nature and extent of the requirements for resubmission, which must comply with the relevant requirements for first resubmissions.
- the deadline for the second resubmission; for referrals during the year, the deadline will take into account:
  - the need to inform the learner of the decision(s), which should be at the earliest opportunity following the request for referral being sent to the Centre Moderator;
  - the need to allow a limited but reasonable time for the learner to complete the resubmission;
  - the need to assess the resubmitted assignment(s).

### **B: Referrals at the end of the course**

Referrals that are required at the end of the course need to be requested through the Centre Moderator at final moderation. All evidence must be presented and the referral form must be completed and given to the Centre Moderator.

The Centre Moderator will make a decision as to whether to present the request to the Final Awards Board. The decision on allowing a referral at this stage is made by the AVA Final Awards Board.

# ACHIEVING CREDITS AND GRADES

## MARKING LEARNER EVIDENCE

In all units learners must demonstrate the achievement of the required standard identified in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in all formal assessment activities set by the tutor. The usual quality assurance requirements also apply (including internal and external moderation).

- In ungraded Level 3 units and Level 2 units, the unit will be 'achieved' or 'not achieved'. All assessment criteria must be met in order for the unit to be achieved.
- For graded Level 3 units, the unit will be recorded as Pass, Merit or Distinction when all assessment criteria have been met.
- The tutors use their professional judgement to make decisions about grade indicators, assessing the extent to which either the Merit or Distinction components used for each grade descriptor best describe the standard of work presented by the learner. The decisions are based only the evidence provided by the learner and must not be influenced by any other aspect of the work. Numerical marks are not allowed to be used to determine grades.
- A Pass grade indicator is used where it is judged that the learning outcomes for the assignment have been met, but the work does not achieve the standard required for Merit.
- The grading decisions for each grade descriptor are recorded as grade indicators, which together will create a profile of grades for a complete unit. The overall grade for the unit is based on this profile.
- Grade indicators are recorded only as Pass, Merit or Distinction (they are never combined or intermediate grades, such as Pass / Merit or Merit+)

Further guidance can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance](#).

## FEEDBACK

Written feedback on the Access to HE Diploma fulfils several purposes:

First of all, the feedback confirms the outcome of the assessment. Each assessment criteria must be clearly indicated as 'met' or 'not met'. Feedback on work which has not met the requirements of one or more assessment criterion, and therefore has not achieved the standard for graded achievement, must confirm only which aspect of an assessment criterion has not been achieved. It must not provide information on grading.

Where all assessment criteria are met, a grade should be awarded against each grade descriptor allocated to the unit/assignment. The overall grade must be clearly recorded.

Secondly, written feedback justifies the assessment decisions. For the assessment criteria, the written feedback should indicate where the assessor found the evidence to support the award of the assessment criterion. This may be done by annotating the work with where the AC are judged to be met, providing the location of the evidence on the feedback sheet or providing a narrative assessment decision that explains where each AC was judged to be met. The form of this feedback may depend on how the evidence is presented and how the



AC are distributed between tasks. Where the achievement of the AC is borderline, it is important that the written feedback explains the decision that the assessor has made regarding awarding the AC.

For the grade descriptors, the written feedback should justify the grade awarded with reference to how the learner's work demonstrates what is set out in the grade descriptor components and grade guidance. The feedback should be consistent with the language of the grade descriptor components and it should be clear how the assessor has made their decision. The assessor may make reference to aspects of the grade guidance for the grade awarded demonstrated by the work as well as, for Pass or Merit work, what was not demonstrated that meant that a higher grade could not be awarded.

Finally, written feedback is developmental. Clear justification of assessment decisions allows the learner to understand why they achieved (or did not achieve) the unit. However, the unit may have allowed the learner to develop skills and practices that will be important in their further studies but are not clearly reflected in the assessment and grading decisions. Therefore, written feedback also provides the opportunity to help the learner to set goals for future units or their further study to help them to develop their knowledge or skills. This may be done through annotation on their work – for example, correction of spelling mistakes, use of incorrect terminology or not conforming to subject-specific conventions, and through a summative comment or short list of areas for development on their feedback sheet. It may also be appropriate to give additional feedback verbally or in the context of a tutorial or all-class feedback session.

Feedback in the context of large, developmental units needs special consideration. Some large credit units focus on development of skills and critical abilities which may be completed over a term or more and may involve significant amounts of discussion between tutors and learners as part of the teaching and learning process. (Such units are often found in art and design or creative arts programmes, or to support extended projects). This may or may not result in a record of the outcomes of the discussions and the subsequent changes a learner makes to their work. Whatever the subject or method of assessment, tutors must not provide feedback during the development of learner work which is so detailed that it becomes, in effect, coaching.

It is necessary to differentiate between supportive guidance and tutor intervention during the progress of work that leads learners to match specific learning outcomes and grade descriptors. This kind of intervention is not permitted.

Further guidance can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance](#).

## REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

A reasonable adjustment is any action that helps to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty that places the learner at a substantial disadvantage in the assessment situation.

It is expected that the reasonable adjustments will be made in line with the centre's own relevant policies and procedures (e.g. fair assessment policy, equality and diversity policy, disability statement). The centre should keep a record of the process followed in order to decide to make a reasonable adjustment.

Reasonable adjustments are approved or set in place before the assessment activity takes place; they constitute an arrangement to give the learner access to the units and qualification. The work produced by the learner will be marked in the same way as the work of other assessed learners.



Awarding organisations and centres are only required by law to do what is ‘reasonable’ in terms of giving access. What is reasonable will depend on the individual circumstances, the impact of the disability on the individual, cost implications and the practicality and effectiveness of the adjustment. Other factors, such as the need to maintain competence should be taken into consideration.

On the Access to HE Diploma, it is expected that the centre will have asked the learner to identify any access needs when they are inducted onto the course and, in line with the centre’s policy on supporting learners, the reasonable adjustments that the learner is eligible for should be agreed. Tutors on the course should be made aware where a reasonable adjustment may impact on how they intend to assess a learner.

Learners should also be aware (e.g. the procedure provided in their course handbook) how to apply for reasonable adjustments during the academic year. This will include the process for applying for an extension due to mitigating circumstances, as an extension is a type of reasonable adjustment.

In some cases, it may be necessary to devise a different task for the learner to ensure the validity of assessment (for example, if a learner is permitted to sit a test on a different day, the validity of the assessment may be reduced if other learners have already sat the test). The task must be internally moderated before it is set.

Permission does not need to be sought from OCN London for in-year reasonable adjustments to assessment methods on the Access to HE Diploma but a record of the process taken to agree the reasonable adjustment must be kept and available for consultation, upon request, by the Centre Moderator if there are concerns about the validity of assessment. It should be clear from the assignment brief, learner work or feedback when a reasonable adjustment has been applied. Where the reasonable adjustment takes the form of an extension, then the new deadline date must be clearly recorded on the assignment brief.

The [OCN London Access to Fair Assessment Policy and Procedure](#) goes into further detail about reasonable adjustments. (NB: Sections 11-17 provide useful information but the process for applying to OCN London for a reasonable adjustment does not apply to the Access to HE Diploma unless the adjustment means that the learner will not complete their Diploma by final moderation).

[Disability Rights UK](#) provides examples of the types of adjustments that can be made for learners with specific impairments.

## INTERNAL MODERATION

All work submitted by learners and marked by tutors is subject to internal moderation. It is recommended that an internal moderation schedule is constructed at the beginning of the academic year to ensure that internal moderation takes place in a timely fashion. Internal moderation takes two main forms:

### INTERNAL MODERATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT BRIEF

Internal moderation of the assignment briefs is the process through which all assignments must pass before they are set for learners. Each assignment should be checked for its appropriateness and relevance to the unit assessment criteria, the selected grade descriptors, the selected grade descriptor components and its general fitness for learners moving from Level 2 towards Level 3 achievement.

An effective assignment brief will:

- enable the learner to meet all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the units;
- enable the learner to demonstrate the abilities identified in the selected grade descriptor components (for Level 3 graded units) and clearly explain in learner-friendly language how this will be demonstrated in the grade guidance;
- not simply repeat the assessment criteria, but set a task or tasks to enable the learner to explore the assessment criteria;
- be innovative and stimulating and enable the learner to demonstrate their own subject specific skills and knowledge;
- draw on current materials in the subject area and not simply repeat exercises from dated text books or assessments designed for other qualifications;
- have careful consideration of whether assessment criteria need to be covered in separate tasks or in the same task, in order for learners to be able to produce coherent assessment evidence.

Tasks should include a rich range of assessment challenges – oral, practical, investigatory, problem-solving and written. Consideration should be made about the assessment methods that learners are being prepared for at HE – for most subject areas, this means that essay writing, report writing and examinations are likely to be used, but these modes should not be used to the exclusion of all others.

The form of response required from learners should be precise. If the task requires an essay, that should be stated explicitly. Essay tasks should be supported with guidance that an essay is an elaboration of an argument, not just work that is written. If the task requires a report, the type of report needs to be specified – for example business, journalistic, court, health and safety. Briefs should avoid vague tasks such as ‘write an assignment’ or ‘write an analysis’ without specifying the precise format required.

Word limits appropriate to a Level 3 course should be specified. It would not normally be appropriate for any single task on an Access to HE course to require more than 1,500 words. For a three credit unit at Level 3, it is recommended that the total word count is around 1500–1800 words.

Tasks should be designed to challenge learners to interrogate sources, not simply recycle them as ‘correct’ answers. In Science tasks, for example, recycling correct factual information in copied form does not support achievement at Level 3. In these cases it is best to provide learners with the factual data and then set a task for them to use that data in some way to test their understanding.

There should be very careful use of the word ‘research’. This should not be used as shorthand for collating data, or as a euphemism for submitting downloaded text and images. Research tasks must have explicit goals that test learners’ ability to process what they find, not simply locate relevant material.

Tasks should not be lifted from other qualifications such as A Levels or BTEC without careful modification to make them suitable for an Access to HE course. This is especially important in the marking and grading system. Numerical systems imported from other qualifications will not be consistent with the assessment criteria and grade descriptor system of the Access to HE Diploma.

The Access to HE Diploma allows considerable flexibility in assessment design, however, the internal moderator must ensure that the brief also conforms with the requirements of the assessment and grading framework. Further information can be found in the [OCN](#)

## INTERNAL MODERATION OF ASSESSED WORK

Internal moderation of assessed work is the process through which the fairness, accuracy and consistency of achievement is checked within a Centre. This should be an ongoing process during the course of an academic year. It is a process in which all tutors involved in assessment should take part.

The process should check the fairness, accuracy and consistency of the assessment:

- of each tutor teaching on any of the courses within a centre
- of each unit within each course
- between units and courses.

In order to do this effectively a sample of assessment from each tutor and each unit from across all courses needs to be identified to be moderated. This kind of moderation can be conducted in moderation meetings in which tutors from across units and across Diplomas moderate fairness, accuracy and consistency. However, in all cases someone must have overall responsibility for moderation decisions. A record of internal moderation should be produced.

By the end of a year, each tutor should have had some of their grading internally moderated and each unit should have been subjected to some internal moderation. Each centre is obliged to maintain up to date tracking sheets that record all grades given by tutors. Regularly reading these tracking sheets enables centres to identify unusual patterns that might suggest inconsistency in grading and therefore what might need some moderation attention.

Further information can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance on Internal Moderation of Assessed Work, Submission Processes and Grading and Feedback](#)

## INTERNAL MODERATION RECORDS

Records of internal moderation should be recorded on the OCN London templates – Internal Moderation of Assignment Briefs form and Internal Moderation of Assessed Work form – and kept in the internal moderation file for each course. The forms can be downloaded from the [OCN London website](#).

All used on the course must be approved by an internal moderator before it is set for learners. Where an [OCN London devised assignment brief](#) is used (with the tasks and grade guidance written by OCN London rather than the tutor) then this should be internally moderated using the Internal Moderation of OCN London Devised Brief form.

Good practice on these forms includes supportive developmental remarks, such as suggestions for improvement and refinement, not simply praise for peers' work. A sign of healthy internal moderation is the confidence to make constructive criticism and to action any issues which have been identified.

# STANDARDISATION

Standardisation is a key exercise to ensure that all tutors are working to common standard. Internal standardisation must take place at the centre to ensure consistency in the application of level and credit within and across Diploma course teams. It is expected that this will be organised by the Access Coordinator, quality assurance staff or by course leaders. Forms for standardisation can be found on the [OCN London website](#) and materials for standardisation are also available on the website or can be requested from OCN London if they are not available locally. It is expected that centres will keep a record of standardisation activities and any actions resulting from standardisation, and these will be available to view at external moderation visits.

OCN London will also run standardisation events in which centres are expected to participate when Diplomas that they offer are included. These events will focus on different Diplomas in different years.

Centres are required to report on the standardisation activity that has taken place at the centre in the Centre Self-Evaluation Report (which reflects on the previous year). Evidence of standardisation should be provided at mid-year and final moderation – a Report on Standardisation Activities template is available if the evidence of standardisation is not available in a form that can easily be shared with external moderators.

# TRACKING LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Learner achievement should be recorded for each learner and must be available at mid-year and final external moderation. This is an important process for monitoring learners' progress and enabling effective and robust internal moderation to take place.

OCN London produces the tracking sheet template from the learner registrations. This will be sent to the Access Coordinator at the end of the first term. This tracking sheet is then used for claiming learner achievement at the end of the academic year.

Centres are welcome to use their own tracking and monitoring systems alongside the OCN London tracking sheet.

# EXTERNAL MODERATION

## CENTRE MODERATOR

Each centre is allocated an external Centre Moderator by OCN London. The Centre Moderator will coordinate external moderation activity for the centre throughout the year and lead the moderation team at mid-year and final moderation.

Centre Moderators will normally be a subject specialist in at least one of the Diplomas delivered at the centre, so will moderate this Diploma at mid-year or final moderation. If the centre is delivering multiple Diplomas or Diplomas outside of the Centre Moderator's subject specialism, then subject specialist moderators will be appointed by OCN London to review specific Diplomas at mid-year and final moderation.

All centres are given a day (about 7 hours) of support from the Centre Moderator as part of the membership fee. This can take the form of:

- Training (e.g. for new tutors, on assignment brief design, on internal moderation, general question and answer session).
- Facilitating a standardisation event.

- Reviewing assignment briefs.
- Drop-in session for tutors with queries.

If the centre requires training or support in addition to the day, then this can be requested from OCN London for an additional fee.

The centre will be provided with the Centre Moderator's OCN London email address. However, any emails to the Centre Moderator should copy in the Access to HE Standards Coordinator ([sarah@ocnlondon.org.uk](mailto:sarah@ocnlondon.org.uk)) – this is a full time staff member who may be able to respond to queries more promptly.

## ANNUAL REVIEW

The Annual Review meeting takes place at the beginning of the autumn term between the Centre Moderator, Access Coordinator, Quality Manager and, if applicable, heads of department and other OCN London staff. Before the meeting, the Access Coordinator will complete the Centre Self-Evaluation Report and produce a Quality Improvement Plan, identifying how areas identified in the previous year's moderation reports will be addressed.

The Annual Review meeting provides an opportunity to reflect on the previous year and discuss the Centre Self-Evaluation Report and Quality Improvement Plan. The centre's plans for the forthcoming academic year will also be discussed, including the delivery and assessment plan and the dates for the mid-year and final moderation visits will be set.

It is recommended that some of the Centre Moderator support day (e.g. training for new tutors) is used on the same day as the Annual Review meeting.

## AUTUMN SUPPORT MEETING

The autumn support meeting takes place late in the first term. This meeting takes place between the Access Coordinator and an OCN London officer (usually Head of Access, Deputy Chief Executive or Access to HE Standards Coordinator) to discuss progress through the term, confirm arrangements for the year, follow-up any actions from the annual review and put in place any support. The Centre Moderator may also be asked to attend this meeting.

## TRACKING SHEET CHECK

The tracking sheet check takes place early in the second term (usually the first week of February). Centres are asked to send in the current version of the tracking sheet as a check to ensure that:

- The OCN London tracking sheet is being used
- The tracking sheet is being completed in line with instructions so that results will be readable by the OCN London systems at final moderation
- The centre is on track to have a sufficient sample assessed by mid-year moderation

## MID-YEAR MODERATION

Around the mid-point of the course (usually in February or March), mid-year moderation takes place. The purpose of mid-year moderation is to confirm the robustness of assessment and quality assurance decisions on the course thus far, to set actions where decisions and processes are judged not to be robust and will need addressing prior to final moderation or provide advice on how to improve the course further. These judgements are made through reviewing a sample of assessed work and quality assurance documentation, and through the Centre Moderator receiving feedback on the courses through a meeting with learner representatives.

By mid-year moderation, it is expected that:

- 15–21 credits of work has been assessed and internally moderated
- All assignment briefs have been prepared and internally moderated
- Tutors have had the opportunity to participate in standardisation activities with OCN London or at the centre

Though mid-year moderation may take place when this is not the case, it is likely to be less effective and may result in issues not being detected until final moderation. Where a centre is not meeting the OCN London expectations by the scheduled mid-year moderation date then the Centre Moderator should be contacted by the Access Coordinator to decide whether mid-year moderation should go ahead as planned or be rescheduled.

Mid-year moderation normally takes place online. Access to samples can be provided through the OCN London eportfolio site or the centre's own digital platform.

Tracking sheets for all courses should be sent to the Centre Moderator prior to Mid-Year Moderation (either through the tracking sheet check or a later version). The Centre Moderator identifies samples of work from the tracking sheets for scrutiny. In all cases, the sample is selected by the Centre Moderator not the centre. The Centre Moderator will make a decision about the size of the sample in line with their judgement about possible risks to quality at the centre – such risks can include size of cohort, new staff, new units, the same course delivered to multiple groups or at multiple sites, actions from previous moderation reports or unusual trends on the tracking sheet. The minimum sample for an ungraded unit is normally two learners and for a graded unit is normally three learners (one of each grade). If access to all learner work is being provided at mid-year moderation (e.g. through an eportfolio) then the Centre Moderator will still communicate to the centre which learners have been selected for initial sampling though further learners may be sampled during the course of the moderation to help moderators make decisions.

Subject Specialist Moderators (SSM) may be involved in Mid-Year Moderation. The SSMs will be appointed to moderate each Diploma or subject area that cannot be moderated by the Centre Moderator.

The SSMs will feed back to the Centre Moderator on their findings. A summary of the outcomes from moderation, including any actions that need to be taken before final moderation, will be provided to the Access Coordinator by the Centre Moderator in a feedback meeting. The Centre Moderator will also provide feedback from their meeting with the learner representatives.

A centre moderation report and a report for each Diploma or subject area will be produced after the moderation and sent to the centre by the end of the second term (e.g. late March/April). This will clarify the actions and areas where attention is needed before final moderation. This can occasionally include additional actions not discussed at the feedback meeting, if further issues were identified during the report writing and editing process. If such issues are considered urgent then the Centre Moderator or Access to HE Standards Coordinator will contact the Access Coordinator before the moderation reports are sent out. Normally, all moderation reports for a centre are sent at the same time.

## **FOLLOW UP TO MID-YEAR MODERATION**

Centres will be asked to produce a quality improvement plan for each course for any actions identified in the mid-year external moderation reports. The plan should identify in particular how issues identified as for required action before final external moderation are being addressed.



The Centre Moderator may arrange a follow-up meeting with the Access Coordinator to discuss the moderation reports if there are a significant number of actions or to discuss the Quality Improvement Plan if the plan does not address the actions set correctly.

## SUMMER TERM SUPPORT MEETING

The summer term support meeting takes place in the first half of the third term (normally May) prior to final moderation. It involves the Centre Moderator, a member of the OCN London Access staff team and Access Coordinator. Other staff from the centre can attend as relevant. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure that the centre is on track for final moderation. The following topics are normally discussed:

- Quality improvement plan and follow-up from mid-year moderation
- Concerns with any groups of learners which may result in the group not being ready for final moderation or other issues requiring advice from the Centre Moderator
- Any individual learners who may require an extension beyond final moderation, award through extenuation or referral in order to complete the course
- Arrangements for final moderation and final awards board
- Plans for the following academic year

## FINAL MODERATION

At the end of the course (usually in June or July), the claim for the award of credit and grades for the units completed by the learners is made by uploading the OCN London tracking sheet into [Quartzweb](#). Instructions about how to complete the upload will be sent to the Access Coordinator in term two.

Final moderation will take place to check that all credits and grades recommended by tutors are fully supported by appropriate evidence. This normally takes place as a visit to the centre. The portfolios of all learners are presented where claims are being made. The portfolio contains the assessed work evidence for each unit. Moderators will not approve credits and grades for learners whose portfolios are not available at final moderation. The quality assurance documentation (internal moderation of assignment briefs, assessed work, quality improvement plan and standardisation evidence) is also presented.

The moderators usually spend all day in the centre looking at work. The normal outcomes from final moderation are:

- All credits and grades claimed are agreed for award at the final awards board
- Credits and grades are agreed to go forward to the final awards board with some actions needing to take place at the board (e.g. correction of data entry errors). No further action is required by the centre or moderator.
- Further action required before credits and grades can be agreed but it is expected that this can be completed by the centre and agreed by moderators prior to the scheduled final awards board date.
- Further action required before credits and grades can be agreed. The final awards board is rescheduled to allow additional time for the actions to be completed and additional moderation to take place.

The further action before credits and grades can take awarded will be discussed between the Centre Moderator and Access Coordinator. This may take the form of additional assessment, re-grading or internal moderation to be completed by tutors; additional work needing to be completed by learners; or the provision of evidence that was missing for external moderation. The Centre Moderator and Access Coordinator will agree a suitable way forward that is likely to allow learner results to be agreed before university deadlines and address the issues that have been detected. Where the further action results from not

responding to an action set at a previous moderation then the centre will be charged for the additional moderation.

It is crucial that all learners, tutors and curriculum managers understand that all grades are provisional and are subject to change until the Final Awards Board has confirmed final grade decisions.

Any requests for Extenuating Circumstances, Referral, Award through Extenuation or Appeal to be considered by the Final Awards Board must be presented to the Centre Moderator at final moderation. The Centre Moderator will decide whether there is sufficient basis to support the request and evidence for such requests for them to be put to the Final Awards Board. Further guidance about extenuating circumstances arrangements on the Access to HE Diploma can be found on the [OCN London website](#).

At the end of the moderation day, the Centre Moderator will hold a feedback meeting with the Access Coordinator to confirm the outcome from moderation and provide supportive feedback from by the moderation team regarding good practice and areas to improve in the next academic year. Depending on how final moderation has been arranged, the subject specialist moderators may also give feedback to the Access Coordinator or course team directly. Reports are produced by the Centre Moderator and for each Diploma or subject area and are sent to the Access Coordinator by the end of August. As at mid-year moderation, this may include additional feedback not provided verbally but included to clarify an action or determined during the report writing and editing process.

## FINAL AWARDS BOARDS

Credits and grades awarded to any learner will not be confirmed until the AVA Final Awards Board has met. The Final Awards Board usually occurs around one week after the final moderation.

The Board does the following:

- confirms the award (or not) of all credits and grades for all learners on all courses within a Centre;
- receives and considers requests for Extenuating Circumstances, Award through Extenuation, Referral and Appeal (more information can be found in the [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section E: Student results and awards boards](#) and on the [OCN London website](#)).

After the conclusion of the Final Awards Board, there is normally a short meeting to confirm the arrangements for the summer and following year.

Once the Awards Board has confirmed final grades, OCN London prints the Access to HE Diploma certificate for each learner. Learners who have not achieved 60 credits can receive a unit transcript if their work was available for moderation at final moderation. Certificates are sent to the centre, usually to the centre's exams department within a week of the awards board. Once certificates are received at the centre they can be sent to the learners – they do not need to be held back until a specific results day. Learner results can also be downloaded in spreadsheet form from the Quartzweb site and sent to learners by email.

Learner results are sent to UCAS by the last Monday in July so that they can be made available to universities to confirm if learners have met their offer conditions.

E-certificates can be produced on request to the OCN London Business Support team. There is an additional charge per certificate for e-certificates.



# FURTHER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

## OCN LONDON ACCESS TO HE TEAM

**Marisa Castellini** – Head of Access to HE – [marisa@ocnlondon.org.uk](mailto:marisa@ocnlondon.org.uk) (Tues–Thurs)

**Sarah Francis** – Access to HE Standards Coordinator – [sarah@ocnlondon.org.uk](mailto:sarah@ocnlondon.org.uk)

**Michelle Wood** – Access to HE Development Coordinator – [michelle@ocnlondon.org.uk](mailto:michelle@ocnlondon.org.uk)  
(Mon, Wed, Thurs, Fri am)

Your centre will also have an allocated Centre Support Officer to help you with registration and certification (020 7278 5511).

## OCN LONDON WEBSITE

[Centre Area](#) – Access to HE Diploma Guide, QAA documentation, forms and templates, funding information, awards board documentation

[Learner Area](#) – information for learners on studying Access to HE Diploma, including the Guide for Learners (downloadable resource) and guidance written by Linking London about applying the HE as an adult

[Access to HE Diploma titles](#) – rules of combination and approved unit lists.

*For Approved OCN London Centres, using the centre log-in:*

**Units and indicative content** (accessed via the rules of combination)

[Resources and Guidance](#) – checklists, marketing materials, forms and templates for specific assessment methods, tutor guidance documents covering:

- Designing Effective Assignment Briefs
- Internal Moderation of the Assignment Brief
- Submission Process
- Assessment, Grading and Giving Feedback
- Internal Moderation of Assessed Work
- External Moderation
- Standardisation
- Ten step guides to delivering Access to HE

[OCN London devised assignment briefs](#) – briefs, assessment materials and tutor guidance for study skills and a range of subject-specific units. Can be used as written or as an example of how to write effective briefs.

[Online learning materials](#) – online courses for study skills and subject-specific units.

## QAA WEBSITE

[Support and information for providers](#) – information about QAA's role in Access to HE, resources including the QAA Grading Scheme Handbook and statistics

[Learner area](#) – information about the Diploma, national course search, Career coach

# APPENDIX 1: USEFUL DEFINITIONS

**QAA** – The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, which develops the specification for the Access to HE Diploma – a nationally recognised qualification which is designed to provide a preparation for study in higher education for adults returning to education – and the regulations under which it is operated.

**AVA** – Access Validation Agencies, which are licensed by QAA to validate individual Access to HE Diplomas and to quality assure their provision through approved Centres. (The term ‘AVA’ is used instead of awarding body, awarding organisation or exam board).

**OCN London** – the AVA that learners are registered with and which will issue learner certificates after the Final Awards Board at the end of the course.

**Level** – the level of difficulty of a Unit. Most Access to HE Diploma units are at Level 3, but some are at Level 2 (see below).

**Level 2** – broadly the same as GCSE grade A to C work. Learners can only ‘achieve’ Level 2 units.

**Level 3** – broadly equivalent to studying at A level standard. Level 3 qualifications provide the knowledge and skills that learners need to progress to a degree or diploma course in higher education and roughly cover the same amount of information as a learner studying for three A levels. Pass, Merit or Distinction is awarded for Level 3 graded units. Level 3 ungraded units are listed as ‘achieved’. Generic descriptions of what learners are expected to be able to do at Level 2 and Level 3 can be found on page 17 of the [Access to HE Diploma Specification](#).

**Units** – each unit has assessment criteria, a credit value and a Level. The programme of study will include mandatory units that learners must complete, and subject units relevant to the pathway the learner is taking. The credit value of the unit indicates how much learning is involved. One credit is equivalent to a ‘notional’ ten hours of learning – which includes time spent in class and private study. Most units carry three credits (thirty notional hours of learning), but some are larger.

**Assignment brief** – outlines what learners need to do to achieve the assessment criteria for a unit. For Level 3 graded units, the grade descriptors and their components will also be listed. In addition, guidance regarding how to achieve the higher grades (Merit and Distinction) is also included. A specific submission deadline is shown on the assignment brief which learners must meet.

**Learner declaration** – this statement must be signed when learners are handing in their work. It is a confirmation that the work that the learner has handed in has been produced by them alone. False declaration of authenticity (for example, by claiming that something that the learner has downloaded was written by them) is academic malpractice.

**Assessment criteria** – each unit has a set of assessment criteria (AC); these describe what learners must demonstrate to show they have achieved the learning outcome. For Level 2 written assignments learners will produce work which is descriptive. For Level 3 written assignments learners will produce work which is broadly analytical. Not all assessment criteria will be covered by written work – learners may be expected to deliver a presentation or conduct an experiment to meet them. Assessment criteria are listed on the assignment brief so that learners can see how the tasks relate to the AC.

**Grade descriptors** – for each Level 3 graded unit there are grade descriptors attached which indicate how learners can demonstrate that their work has exceeded that required to gain a Pass. The learner may be awarded a grade at either Merit or Distinction. Grade descriptors vary across the different graded Level 3 units and link to the subject being assessed.

**Grade descriptor component** – each grade descriptor is made up of grade descriptor components which identify what needs to be achieved in order to be awarded the higher grades. From the assigned grade descriptor components tutors will choose the most appropriate combinations when they are writing the assignment briefs for the graded Level 3 units, and these will link to the tasks set.

**Grade guidance** – the grade descriptor components are a guide for the tutor and should not be repeated in the grade guidance to the learner. Grade guidance links the grade descriptor components to the tasks set in the assignment brief and helps learners to understand how to achieve the higher grades.

**Credit** – the credit value of a unit indicates how much learning is involved. A credit is equivalent to a ‘notional’ 10 hours of learning, which includes time spent in class and private study. Most units will give learners three credits at either Level 2 or Level 3, but some may give them more.

## APPENDIX 2: USE OF AI IN ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

Responding to the use of generative artificial intelligence in educational assessment,  
specifically in Access to HE Diplomas

### *A statement of principles shared by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs)*

This statement was developed by representatives from five Access Validating Agencies in August 2023 as these AVAs shared response to the development of generative AI in assessment.

1. AVAs welcome and encourage the responsible use of AI within education to improve teaching and learning practice and to enhance the learning experience for students. Furthermore, AVAs recognise that AI skills will increasingly represent an essential tool for students in ultimately engaging within the modern workplace.
2. However, AVAs recognise that AI also has the potential for misuse, and therefore it is necessary that all those involved in the provision of Access to HE Diplomas, as far as is reasonably practicable, ensure that AI use remains consistent with the norms and expectations of good practice and does not enable student malpractice. To this end, AVAs expect providers to implement a range of safeguards which are set out below.
3. Access to HE providers already have established guidance, policies and procedures to ensure that students are aware of the importance of submitting their own independent work for assessment and to identify potential malpractice. Providers must ensure that their guidance, policies and procedures relating to the authenticity of assessments also address the risks associated with AI misuse, including provision for the investigation of alleged malpractice and any possible sanctions when malpractice is found to have occurred, and remain compliant in relation to legal requirements, national regulatory guidance from the QAA and also individual AVA level regulatory expectations.
4. Providers must continue to make students aware of their approach to plagiarism and the consequences of malpractice. They must also make students aware at the earliest possible opportunity of the appropriate and inappropriate use of AI, the risks of using AI, and the possible consequences of using AI inappropriately in Access to HE Diploma assessments.
5. Students' work submitted for assessment must be demonstrably their own. If any sections of their work are reproduced directly from AI generated responses, those elements must be identified by the student. Students who misuse AI such that the work they submit for assessment is not their own will have committed malpractice and may attract severe sanctions.
6. AVAs also expect that providers will give clear guidance in relation to common / standardised protocols for appropriate referencing of AI generated content within student assessments, and that this will be regularly reviewed and updated to take account of developments in the field of referencing the use of AI generated content.
7. Providers must also explicitly include confirmatory statements in assessment declarations to declare that AI has not been used inappropriately in terms of the assessment evidence submitted.

8. Providers must review and enhance their assessment models and practice regularly to, as far as is reasonably practicable, limit the potential for malpractice via the misuse of AI by developing tasks that are less susceptible to such misuse.
9. Where tutors have doubts about the authenticity of student work submitted for assessment – for example, they suspect that parts of it have been generated by AI, but this has not been acknowledged – they must investigate and take appropriate action.
10. Investigation into the potential misuse of AI generated content may include the use of detection tools, but these should form only one part of a holistic approach to considering the authenticity of students' work and should not be solely relied upon to identify AI misuse. All available information should be considered when reviewing any malpractice concerns, including the systemic checking of grade profiles and comparing of student achievement across different units and assessment models to satisfy quality assurers that assessment evidence represents the student's own work.
11. Where assessment evidence is identified as being potentially based on AI generated content, providers will have clear and transparent systems in place to allow for impartial and rigorous formal investigation of any alleged malpractice. These systems will remain compliant with the national regulations as set out within the QAA Regulatory Framework as well as local level requirements in terms of malpractice policies at individual AVA level.
12. Where malpractice in relation to the use of AI is identified as a result of formal investigation, subject to the approval of External Moderators / Quality Assurers and/or AVA officers, providers will enact clear and transparent published sanctions which remain commensurate with the identified malpractice.

## APPENDIX 3: SUBMISSION PROCESS FLOWCHART

