

Qualification overview

The 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 Diploma titles are validated and awarded by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), according to Access to HE Diploma Specification and Grading Scheme set by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It is a Level 3 qualification that makes academic demands that are at an equivalent level to those of other level 3 qualifications such as A-levels and is primarily focused on adults who wish to enter higher education but do not have the necessary qualifications in the subject area they wish to follow.

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.

Key features

- Total credit requirement is 60 credits
- Of these 60 credits, 45 credits must be achieved at Level 3 from graded subject specific units
- Remaining 15 credits must be achieved at Level 2 or Level 3 from study skills units which are ungraded.
- Grades available for graded units are Pass, Merit or Distinction
- No overall grade awarded for the Diploma
- Unit values may be 3, 6 or 9 credits
- 1 credit represents 10 notional learning hours.
- Within the 60 credits, students must achieve a minimum of one unit of either 6 or 9 credits
- Maximum of 30 credits can be made up of 6 or 9 credit units.
- No results day like A-levels – certificates can be released to students once results have been confirmed through final awards boards.

Who the qualification is for

The Access to HE Diploma is a qualification which prepares students for study at a higher level, this could be a degree, or other higher-level qualification at level 4 or above. It is designed for adults who would like to study in UK Higher Education but do not have the necessary qualifications in the subject area they wish to follow.

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 students 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. Students who study the Access to HE Diploma find they are well prepared for study at university.

Entry requirements

There are no centrally specified formal requirements for qualifications on entry to an Access to HE course; however, there is usually the expectation that the learner will have literacy, communication skills and numeracy at Level 2 or above upon entry. It is expected that providers will ask the student to complete an appropriate diagnostic assessment as part of the application process.

The specification for a Diploma title may provide further guidance about any additional qualifications that the students will need to hold to gain entry to the main progression route for that particular Diploma. For example, the entry requirements for Nursing degrees normally require students to hold GCSEs at grade 9-5/4 or A*-C in English and Maths therefore it is advised that students have these upon entry to the Access to HE course.

Assessment

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

Grading Standards

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). 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. 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.

There are 3 grading standards which are applied to **all** graded units:

GS1: Knowledge and Understanding

GS2: Subject Specific Skills

GS3: Transferable Skills

Each grading standard comprises of a set of components and sub-components which describe types of performance associated with the standard. For each component, there are parallel statements at merit and distinction, which describe increasingly demanding standards of achievement. The most appropriate sub-components of the standards are selected when grading the unit.

For Grading Standard 3: Transferable Skills, all three of the components (a, b and c) must be used at least once across the Diploma.

Further information on the grading scheme can be found [here](#) on the QAA website.

Awards, registration and certification

Students must be registered for units to the value of 60 credits within 12 weeks of the start of their course, or before they apply to higher education – whichever is the sooner; opportunities to make changes to this registration are only allowed under defined, limited circumstances.

Successful Access to HE students are awarded a Diploma. The certificates of achievement issued by different AVAs vary in appearance, but all include QAA's Access to HE logo and the words 'recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education'. All students are also issued with an achievement transcript, which lists all the units achieved, and, for each unit, the level and number of credits awarded, in addition to, where relevant, the grade. To ensure that the distinction between the Level 3 units that are graded and those that are ungraded remains clear, the achievement of the ungraded units is recorded as achieved/not achieved on achievement transcripts.

Diploma validation

Individual Diploma titles are validated by AVAs, according to [Access to HE Diploma Specification and Grading Scheme](#) set by QAA.

Access to HE Diplomas are validated through a Diploma validation panel. The panel consists of subject specialists from HE and FE. As part of the panel process, they are tasked with scrutinising the Diploma to ensure coherency that is underpinned by equal opportunities and widening participation. They must ensure that the Diploma is fit for purpose as preparation for study at higher education, with particular reference to the Diploma's intended progression route(s).

The panel then makes a recommendation for Diploma approval to the to the AVA's Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), which is the designated body within its governance structure for giving formal approval.

A Diploma is usually validated for a 5-year period. At the end of this period, a Diploma is considered for revalidation. A Diploma is revalidated through the validation panel process to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose.

Setting entry requirements and making offers

The Access to HE Diploma has been included in the [UCAS tariff tables](#) for entry to higher education from September 2017 onwards. The methodology used to calculate the UCAS tariff points for the Access to HE Diploma is aligned with that used for the calculation of tariff points for A-level grades.

For example:

- 45 credits at Distinction are positioned at the same tariff points as AAA at A-level (144 tariff points)
- 30 credits at Distinction and 15 credits at Merit are positioned at the same tariff points as ABB at A-level (128 tariff points)
- 45 Access credits at Merit are positioned at the same tariff points as CCC at A-level (96 tariff points)
- 30 Access credits at Merit and 15 credits at Pass are positioned at the same tariff points as CDD at A-level (80 tariff points)
- 45 Access credits at Pass are positioned at the same tariff points as EEE at A-level (48 tariff points).

Please see the [QAA Access to HE Diploma: Toolkit for Admissions Staff](#) for guidance and further information on setting entry requirements and making offers for Access to HE students.

QAA Access to HE Subject Descriptors

QAA have produced the subject descriptors for the following Diploma titles:

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



The subject descriptors define the minimum requirements of content for a Diploma that is designed and publicly claimed to provide the preparation needed for progression to undergraduate study in the given subject area.

To find out if a course is compliant with a subject descriptor, please check on the [QAA course search](#). Providers can also identify their courses as compliant by using the above QAA subject descriptor compliance mark on their website and promotional materials.

For more information on the QAA Access to HE Diploma subject descriptors, please visit the dedicated [page](#) on their website.