



# **Access to HE Provider Handbook - Assessment Design**

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## 1. Assessment Design

- 1.1 From 1 August 2023 the Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) will no longer apply to continuing students on the Access to HE Diploma. This means it will no longer be permissible for AVAs to approve adaptations to the method of delivery, units delivered or assessment tasks in response to the pandemic.
- 1.2 Award through Extenuation is available in exceptional cases where a student cannot be assessed due to no fault of their own. The student may be awarded units that make up the Diploma. Evidence for the achievement of learning outcomes for the units not achieved through the usual completion of assessments will need to be provided. Prior to considering the application of award through extenuation, the Provider will need to have explored and discussed with the student other avenues such as break in learning, extensions to deadlines and or programme end dates, or deferral to another year. Further information will be accessible on the [Access to HE Centre Support page](#)
- 1.3 Access to HE Diplomas must follow the validated rules of combination and be delivered and assessed in accordance with the method and schedule for which a Provider has been approved. Providers should work with their Access Validating Agency (AVA) to ensure that activities undertaken for the development, quality assurance and award of Access to HE Diplomas continue in accordance with the requirements of the QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education (the Recognition Scheme).

## 2. Key Principles

- 2.1 The AVA expect all elements of assessment practice such as activities and their timing, evidence, or feedback meet the following key principles of assessment as outlined below:
- Authenticity
  - Fitness for Purpose
  - Inclusivity
  - Sufficiency, reliability, and consistency
  - Validity

## 3. Planning Assessments

- 3.1 Providers are encouraged to consider using a variety of assessment methods to support students' preparation for higher education. Providers are to keep all elements of their assessment practice under constant review so as to ensure that the key principles are met.
- 3.2 Providers are required to produce their assessment plan prior to the commencement of the course and submit to the AVA by 15th September 2023. In developing a unit assessment plan, tutors should plan an assessment programme that meets the development needs of students and the demands of the unit in as few assignments as possible.
- 3.3 When planning assessment for a unit Providers need to be aware of the:
- Level and Credit Value of the unit

- Status of the unit – graded or ungraded
- Learning Outcomes (LO) & Assessment criteria (AC)
- Grade Descriptors (GD) allocated to the unit when the unit is graded
- The word count - this is expected to be between 1500-2000 words for a three-credit unit and 3000 words for a six-credit unit.

3.4 All assignments must include a clearly explained task matched to the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria. All assignment briefs must clearly state:

- learning outcomes to be assessed
- allocated grade descriptors to be applied.

3.5 Any assessment requiring students to present or verbally participate must be recorded and made available for the Internal Moderator and the Moderator. The students must be made aware of how the recording will be made on the assessment brief e.g., audio or video. It should be clear to both Internal Moderator and Diploma Moderator who the students are in the recording.

## 4. Assessing a unit using more than one assignment.

4.1 If more than one assignment is used to assess the unit, the unit assessment plan will map the learning outcomes and grade descriptors to the assignments. It is important to note that:

- The learning outcomes for a unit should only be assessed once, so the different assignments will be used to assess different learning outcomes or groups of learning outcomes
- All of the grade descriptors allocated to the unit must be used in its assessment plan
- At least two grade descriptors must be used in each assignment. One of these must be GD7 – Quality
- The same descriptor may be used for more than one assignment in a unit. The relative significance of the grade descriptors used with a unit (and the selection of particular components) can be reflected in the extent to which each descriptor is used.

## 5. Grade Descriptors and Grade Components

5.1 Each grade descriptor contains a number of components which reflect different types of performance and should be selected as appropriate for the subject and the demands of each assignment. The components available for use are documented in the [QAA Access to HE Grading Handbook Section B.](#)

5.2 Each descriptor has a specific rule governing the selection of components. Some key points regarding the use of components include:

- A minimum of one component, from each grade descriptor allocated to the unit, must be used.
- The selected components must ensure that students can be rewarded for performance which exceeds the standard for pass (in graded units)
- Where descriptors are used more than once to assess a unit, different components from that descriptor may be used
- The components used at merit and distinction must be the same set

- There can be no deviation from the wording provided in the handbook for each grade descriptor and components.
- Contextualisation of grade descriptor components is permitted and can be useful to help inform the students about how the components are expected to be evident within their assignment. It can also enhance the students understanding of the expected levels of performance for a merit or distinction.

### 6. Assessing more than one unit in one assessment

6.1 Where more than one unit is integrated into one assessment the students should be advised to submit a fresh copy of the assessment for each unit / assessor. This will allow for the achievement of assessment criteria for each unit to be clearly identifiable to student, Internal Moderator, and Moderator.

### 7. Internal Moderation of Assessment Briefs

7.1 All assessment briefs must be internally verified before being made available to students. Evidence of this must be made available to Moderators on request.

### 8. AVA Templates

8.1 Providers may choose to use the AVA's templates for Assessment Brief and Feedback forms but may use their own providing that they meet with AIM Assessment and Qualification Group requirements approval. Templates will be available via the [Access to HE Provider Support](#) page on the website.

### 9. Further Information

9.1 Further information about the Grading Descriptors and how to use them in assessments can be found in the following documents accessible here:

[QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education Grading scheme handbook Section B: The grade descriptors September 2020](#)

[QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education Grading scheme handbook Section C: Using the grade descriptors in assessment December 2020](#)