



Access to HE Provider Handbook
2024-2025
Assessment Practice

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1. Assessing Graded Units

Key Principles and Processes

1.1 When student work which contributes to the award of the Access to HE Diploma is assessed; two processes are involved:

- award of credit (made with reference to the unit's learning outcomes and assessment criteria)
- award of grades (made with reference to the unit's grade descriptors).

1.2 Student work is awarded credit and only considered for grading once it has been confirmed that the student has achieved all Level 3 learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the unit.

*** Please note that this is a change from the previous Diploma specification where grade indicators were awarded for each individual assignment. With the new Diploma specification grading can only take place once all learning outcomes have been achieved.**

***Please note that Numerical Marking has been removed from the grading scheme since 1 September 2020 and is therefore no longer permitted under any circumstances.**

1.3 When grading student work, make sure that:

- Decisions about the grades a student has achieved are based only on consideration of the grading standards and selected grade components and not influenced by any other aspect of the work.
- The grade indicators are recorded only as Pass, Merit or Distinction (combined or intermediate grades, such as Pass/Merit or Merit+) are not used.

1.4 Professional judgment is used to make decisions about grades, assessing the extent to which either the Merit or Distinction statement for each grading standard best describes the standard of work presented by a student.

2. Creating a Unit Grade Profile and Establishing the Overall Unit Grade

2.1 Once all learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been achieved the unit can be graded. Tutors should record grade indicators for each grading standard to create a unit grade profile. All grade indicators have equal value.

2.2 The overall grade for a unit is established by reviewing the three grade indicators in the unit grade profile, ordering them from Pass to Distinction, and identifying the midpoint grade. (For example, if the grade indicators are MDD, the unit grade is D, if the grade indicators are PPD the unit grade is P)

2.3 Examples of determining final grades are given on the next page.

Table 1: Calculating unit grades from unit grade profiles

Unit grade profiles			Unit grade
P	P	P	P
P	P	M	P
P	P	D	P
P	M	M	M
P	M	D	M
M	M	M	M
M	M	D	M
P	D	D	D
M	D	D	D
D	D	D	D

3. Assessing Ungraded Units

3.1 The same principles of assessment as for graded units are applied to ungraded units in that credit is awarded when all learning outcomes and assessment criteria are achieved. A successful ungraded unit will be said to be ‘achieved’ (as a ‘pass’ is a ‘grade;’ the word ‘pass’ is not to be used in describing achievement in ungraded work).

3.2 There must be no reference to grade indicators, i.e. merit or distinction in the feedback for ungraded units.

4. Student Submissions

Draft Submissions

4.1 Opportunities for students to submit assignments or parts of assignments, in draft for feedback before the formal submission date will not be the norm and are typically just provided for the first assessments. Such opportunities may only be given if:

- the opportunity for the submission and discussion of drafts is available to all students and is specified in writing (for example, on assignment briefing sheets) before they begin work on the assignment.
- feedback is concerned with how students may develop their response to the assignment brief and does not include information about predicted grade indicators, or other detailed information about possible grading judgements.
- detailed corrections are not made to the submission.

4.2 Once a formal submission has been made, neither the student nor tutor can later declare it to be a draft.

First Submission

4.3 Providers must provide a formal approach to the submission of student work for assessment, and this should be clearly specified in the course documentation eg course handbook. Particular requirements for the submission of all assessments must be provided in writing, for example, on assignment brief sheets and include:

- set and submission dates
- method(s) of submission eg via Turnitin or in class
- time of submission
- learning outcomes and assessment criteria to be assessed
- grading standards and grading components where a graded unit is being assessed
- advisory word count
- student declaration (where submission of assessments is electronic, it is possible with some platforms to capture the student declaration as part of the submission process).
- providers must ensure that each of the learning outcomes for each unit is formally assessed only **once** in that unit. For graded units, all set tasks must be included in the overall grading of the unit.

Resubmission

4.4 This is only permissible when a student fails to achieve all the learning outcomes at the point of submission. All students have an entitlement to a 'first resubmission' at any time during the course and for any assignment formally assessed, **if submitted on time or by an agreed extension**.

4.5 This first resubmission, is eligible for the full spectrum of grades if the unit is graded, providing it was an approved late submission. If the first resubmission was an unapproved late submission, a graded unit would be capped at a pass.

4.6 The provider is responsible for the handling and recording of first resubmissions; normally, an unapproved late first submission, if unsuccessful in achieving learning outcomes, will not be eligible for a first resubmission.

Referral (Second Resubmission)

4.7 If a first resubmission is unsuccessful, ie learning outcome(s) have still not been achieved; the course team may choose to request a referral. If this occurs within the duration of a course, the recommendation is referred to the AVA. The provider must use the referral (Second Resubmission) Form (RF1) available on the [Access to HE Centre Support](#) page on the website and submit to acesstohe@aimgroup.org.uk when complete with all required evidence.

4.8 Following processing, the AVA will notify the provider of the outcome. Referrals required at the end of the course (for example, as the consequence of assessments that have been taken in the last four weeks of a course), will be decided, and reported at the final awards board at the end of the course. A referral (second resubmission) must be capped at a 'Pass' grade.

Late Submission

4.9 There are two types of late submission:

- **Approved:** the student has informed the tutor and agreed a deferred submission date or has acceptable mitigating circumstances to explain the failure to request a deferment.
- **Unapproved:** no deadline extension has been agreed and there is no mitigation to explain the failure to request deferment.

4.10 Approved late submissions which:

- do not meet all Level 3 (or Level 2) learning outcomes, are given a resubmission opportunity
- meet all Level 3 learning outcomes, may be awarded any of the three possible grades (or be awarded 'Achieved' in the case of Level 2 or ungraded Level 3 units)

4.11 Unapproved late submissions which:

- do not meet all Level 3 (or Level 2) learning outcomes are not eligible for a resubmission but may be considered for a referral.
- meet all Level 3 learning outcomes, are capped at Pass on graded units.

Note that work completed under timed and/or an examination condition is also counted as a submission.

Extenuating Circumstances - Extensions to Deadlines

4.12 Extenuating circumstances can be experienced by learners at any point in a given year. Centres must have appropriate procedures in place for dealing with extenuating circumstances cases. As stated in Grading Scheme Handbook Section E: Student Results and Awards Boards (December 2018) these procedures should be clear and available to all Access to HE students. Procedures must include:

- A clear definition of extenuating circumstances.
- Procedures that must be followed by student to notify providers of extenuating circumstances that affect completion or submission of work for assessment.
- Procedures followed by providers when they have been notified of extenuating circumstances affecting a student's assessed work.
- Procedures relating to special needs and processes for reasonable adjustments.

4.13 Providers are to apply their extenuating circumstances policy and procedures with regards to individual learner cases. For most, it will be a discussion regarding an extension to an assessment deadline.

As always, records are to be kept, updated regularly, accessible and supported with appropriate evidence where possible. This should include recording attempts to contact a learner even if a response is not received.

4.14 Learners may feel that the outcome of their assessment has been impacted by the extenuating circumstances experienced. If this is the case, the learner could choose to appeal the outcome following the Centre's Appeal Policy and Procedure, with extenuating circumstances being the grounds for the appeal. If the extenuating circumstances are only reported after confirmation of the outcome of the assessment, then the learner may still appeal but the provider will need to establish if there was an acceptable reason the extenuating circumstances were not revealed before submission of assessment.

4.15 It is possible that a learner may report extenuating circumstances at the time of submission or during the marking of the assessment. In such situations, the provider can apply their extenuating circumstances policy and consider if an extension is appropriate ie more time to work on the assessment. Again, there would need to be consideration as to whether there is an acceptable reason the extenuating circumstances were not revealed before submission. If an extension is agreed, the learner cannot receive any feedback for the assessment submitted. This ensures that the learner is not unfairly advantaged.

4.16 Learners with extenuating circumstances may complete assessments after the internal moderation window for that particular unit. To ensure that learners are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged, it is important to ensure that assessments from learners with extenuating circumstances are still internally moderated. Therefore, a second window of internal moderation may need to be scheduled to cater for this inclusion allowing for the internal moderation and feedback to other learners not to be disrupted.

4.17 Just as it is important for inclusion in internal moderation, assessments completed by learners with extenuating circumstances should also be included in the Diploma moderator's sample.

5. Retention of Students' Assessed Work and Data

5.1 Providers must retain students work for up to 30 days following the FAB, in case of appeals. Providers must also retain a sample of work for at least three years following the completion of the course. This may be a copy of the assessed work should students wish to collect their completed assessments.

5.2 Providers must keep the following learner records for the period specified and make these available to the AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group on request.

Registration and award records (seven years)

1. Name of learner, date of birth and contact address
2. Title and accreditation number of each qualification and unit studied.
3. Qualification and / or units achieved

Assessment and internal verification records (five years)

1. Name(s) of assessor(s.)
2. Assessment records, including assessment decision and reason for decision
3. Name(s) of internal verifier(s)
4. Internal verification reports

6. Feedback

Key Principles

6.1 Special attention should be given to assessor feedback to students so as to ensure that it is clear and constructive in that it refers to the learning outcomes/assessment criteria and advises how students may achieve at the highest level possible. It is advised that all student work is clearly annotated with assessment criteria achievement.

6.2 Following successful achievement of all learning outcomes for a unit, tutors should provide feedback to students on their performance with reference to the selected components of the grading standards applied, using the grading components to identify particular strengths or areas for development. The judgement that must be made by tutors when they use the grade components for assessment are necessary in order to provide full feedback to students about their performance and progress.

6.3 The Access to HE grading scheme recognises that students benefit from receiving detailed feedback of this kind.

6.2 Although good quality feedback on assessment performance is crucial for student development, equally important is good quality feedforward advice. This provides students with academic improvement points highlighted by the tutor. This is something that students would work on and demonstrate perhaps in their next assessment, so students are stretched and challenged. Feedback, feedforward together with effective annotations on the student's work is considered best practice. Where units are assessed by more than one assignment feedforward advice should be provided to enable the learners to improve their performance in subsequent assignments.

7. Grade Polishing

7.1 Whilst it is vital to provide supportive and constructive feedback and feedforward, there are times when these need to be carefully considered. This is especially true when it relates to instances where students are in a resubmission scenario. It is critical that in cases of resubmissions there should be no comments at all regarding grades or grade potential within the work specifically or as a whole. The student should not be able to ascertain the likely grade to be awarded at this stage from the assessor's comments. To provide comments about performance, potential grades or advice on how to make the resubmission better in these cases will be construed as attempts to provide students with unfair and unequal advantage via 'grade polishing.' It is strictly **forbidden** under QAA and AVA requirements to engage in any form of grade polishing.

7.2 Fortunately, it is easy to avoid grade polishing. The first thing assessors should do is lightly mark the student's work to ensure that all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been met. If they have, then good quality annotations, feedback and feedforward can be given. Where learning outcomes have not been met, then only comments relating to what needs to be reattempted should be provided. In

this way, assessors are not making any comments as to the performance level of the student, the potential grades or advice on how the work could be improved to receive higher grades.

7.3 Where a unit is assessed by means of more than one assessment annotations and feedback can be provided regarding achievement of assessment criteria and learning outcomes and to identify strengths and weaknesses in different areas to enable them to improve their performance, but no grade should be applied or implied to the individual assignments.

8. Annotation Guidance

8.1 Annotation on learners' assessments is more an expectation rather than good practice. This should be meaningful to the learner and adhere to QAA and AVA requirements. Annotation should be used to identify:

- spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors. Please be mindful of the volume of corrections if a resubmission is required for a graded unit where grade descriptor 5 is to be assessed with reference to spelling and punctuation.
- achievement of learning outcomes and assessment criteria should be annotated, but no indication of grade descriptors being achieved should be annotated.
- strengths or weaknesses within the assessment eg to identify a strong explanation provided by the learner, misunderstanding or irrelevant information included by the learner.

8.2 Annotation should not be excessive in that it discourages the learner, nor should it act as a replacement to feedback provided at the end of the assessment.

9. AVA Templates

9.1 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 Qualification and Assessment Group requirements. Templates are available via the [Access to HE Centre Support](#) page on the website.

10. Student Appeal and Complaints

10.1 Appeals and complaints should always be considered in the first instance by the provider in accordance with their own appeals and complaints procedures.

10.2 If the student is still unhappy following completion of the provider's process, representation may then be made to AVA on the following grounds.

- evidence of administrative or procedural error

extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the awards board.

10.3 Appeals and complaints about any other aspect of the provider's operation may also be made to the AVA however students must provide evidence they have followed the providers appeals and complaints process as per the AIM policy and procedure. Appeals will be submitted to and processed by the compliance team.

10.4 Further information regarding AIM's Enquiries and Appeals Policy and Compliments, Complaints and Whistleblowing Policy can be found at [Policies, Forms and Guidance - AIM \(aim-group.org.uk\)](https://aim-group.org.uk)

11. Management of Academic Misconduct

11.1 This is always considered, in the first instance, by the provider in line with its own policies and procedures and should refer acts in addition to plagiarism such as cheating in exams, impersonation and submitting collaborative work.

11.2 Where credit is withdrawn from a student, their case will be considered by the final award board and an opportunity for referral given as long as their academic misconduct, as defined within the grading regulations, has not led to suspension or exclusion and is, therefore, lesser even though it may affect one or more assignments.

11.3 Where a student has been suspended or excluded, the final award board will consider only the award of credits for those units not affected by the serious academic misconduct.

12. Further Information

12.1 Further information and guidance regarding the submission of assessments and the feedback to provide can be found in the documents listed below.

[Grading Scheme Handbook 2023, Section C: Using the Grading Standards in Assessment \(qaa.ac.uk\)](https://qaa.ac.uk)