

Arrangements for the Award and Assessment of the Access to HE Diploma 2021-22

**Information for Access to HE
course tutors and senior
course managers**

September 2021

Contents

Introduction	1
The Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) 2021-22	2
QAA grading scheme: Grading the Access to HE Diploma	6
Using the QAA grading scheme	6
Quality assuring graded Access to HE Diplomas	7
Frequently asked questions	8
Why are the arrangements designed as they are?.....	8
How are you ensuring parity between Access to HE students and A level students and other Level 3 qualifications?	8
How much flexibility are providers allowed?	9
We have confirmed our assessment strategy with our Access Validating Agency and now need to adapt assessments in response to local or national lockdown requirements. What do we do?	10
Our proposed adaptations do not meet the requirements of the Diploma's rules of combination. What do we do?.....	10
How do I know which processes should be applied, for example for quality assurance or appeals, where there are centre and AVA processes?	10
What do the arrangements look like for units where a student cannot submit all of the evidence required for the award of such units?	10
Why can't the credit volume be reduced?.....	11
Students who are finding it difficult to study where lessons, materials and/or assessments have been adapted and are worried it will affect their grades and/or completing the Diploma, what should they do?	11
Students who are finding it difficult to study because the additional support they received in college to help with their specific learning needs is not available now they are working from home, and they are worried it will affect their grades and completing the Diploma, what should they do?	12
If there is a further lockdown (local or national) and a student feels the work they produce during the lockdown does not reflect their previous performance, what should they do?	12
If there is a further lockdown which means a student is unable to study because they are a key worker/carer or now have additional commitments, what should they do?	12
A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2021 feels the work that they produced during a previous lockdown (local or national) does not reflect their current or previous performance, what should they do?.....	13
A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2021 and was unable to study and submit assessments during a lockdown (local or national), what should they do?.....	13
A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2021 had their assessments rescheduled by their course provider to be submitted at a later date because of a lockdown (local or national). What should they do if they feel their performance is affected by these changes?	13

What are extenuating circumstances and how are they evidenced?.....	14
Can students apply for extenuating circumstances?	15
Do I have to notify my AVA each time an application for extenuating circumstances is made?...	15
Can I apply for extenuating circumstances for a whole cohort of students?.....	15
Can I apply for extenuating circumstances on behalf of my students?.....	15
Can students apply for an extension to an assessment submission deadline?.....	15
As a centre if it is not viable for us to reschedule assessments, what should we do?.....	16
If it is not viable for us to adapt the delivery of learning and assessment, what should we do?.....	16
Can students apply for a break in learning?	16
Students are unable to access the online lessons and materials, what should they do?.....	16
Students have concerns about the support available to them, what should they do?	16
Students feel their well-being and mental health are being affected, what should they do?	17
Students are worried about their progression to university, what should they do?.....	17
When will course providers receive confirmed results from their AVA?	17
How will students' grades be quality assured and standardised?	17
Can students appeal their grades?.....	18
A student is currently studying GCSE's or functional skills alongside their Access to HE Diploma, what happens about these qualifications?.....	18
A student is not due to complete their studies until after 31 July 2022. What are the arrangements for the award and assessment of the Access to HE Diploma for them?	18
Further advice and information.....	18

Introduction

1 The COVID pandemic has caused significant disruption for us all and as we approach the new academic year, QAA is determined to ensure that we continue to support Access to HE providers and their students. Despite the rollout of the vaccination programme and the easing of restrictions across the UK, continuing uncertainty means that we still need to make sure we have safeguards in place to support students and providers in the form of an Extraordinary Regulatory Framework in 2021-22.

2 We have consulted with our key stakeholders including AVAs, providers, DfE, Ofqual, Qualification Wales, UCAS and other organisations, for example the Association of Colleges (AOC), Colegau Cymru and the Black Further Education and Leadership Group (BFELG), and the feedback we have had is in support of continuing with the existing arrangements, with some additional support measures.

3 The arrangements in place for the 2021-22 academic year will:

- ensure that students have the opportunity to achieve their Diploma by being taught and assessed so that they are prepared for the transition to higher education
- continue to safeguard against any potential future disruption as a result of the pandemic, building upon the arrangements implemented in the 2020-21 academic year.

4 We know that the current environment continues to pose challenges for many students, and that Access to HE students often balance significant additional responsibilities alongside their studies. The arrangements in place will provide flexibility so that providers can work with their Access Validating Agency (AVA) to put in place arrangements that fit local needs, and that meet the individual needs of their learners. By doing so, QAA aims to ensure equity for all students.

5 QAA's priority is to ensure that students receive fair and robust results, and that the distribution of grades this year follows a similar pattern to the grades received in previous years. With guidance from QAA, AVAs will continue to support course providers in implementing robust quality assurance mechanisms to ensure consistency is applied across all Access to HE Diplomas awarded. This will also ensure that grades are as robust as those in previous years so that all stakeholders can have confidence in them.

6 QAA will work closely with you and your Access Validating Agency (AVA) to ensure that quality, standards and student outcomes can be maintained.

7 Our priorities this academic year are to:

- support AVAs, students and providers meeting challenges to learning and delivery presented by the pandemic
- continue the application of an Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF), including publicly facing communications
- work in collaboration with AVAs, providers, DfE, Welsh Government and other regulatory bodies to build on the strategy for Access to HE during and after the pandemic, focusing on sustainability and protection of the Access to HE Diploma.

8 The following information is relevant to all providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that offer the QAA recognised Access to HE Diploma, regulated by QAA and awarded by the following Access Validating Agencies:

- Agored Cymru
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- Ascentis
- The Cambridge Access Validating Agency
- Gateway Qualifications

- LASER Learning Awards
- One Awards
- Open Awards
- OCN London
- Open College Network West Midlands
- Skills and Education Group Access

9 The information in this guidance is provided in the context of the most up-to-date advice for educational settings provided by DfE and Public Health England. If that advice changes, senior course managers and course tutors should consider this information in the light of any updated guidance.

The Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) 2021-22

10 This year, students will be supported to complete their studies through possible adaptations to the delivery of teaching, assessment of their course and/or changes to units delivered on the Diploma.

11 The ERF in 2021-22 will build on the framework that was implemented in September 2020.

12 The table below summarises the arrangements. Each stage is considered in detail on the pages 3-6.

Teach	Teaching the content of the Diploma should continue to ensure every student has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to progress to higher education.
Assess	Assessments should continue where possible. If a student can be assessed, they should be assessed.
Adapt	Assessments, delivery and/or units can be adapted, where necessary and appropriate, to support students to continue learning.
Support	Support is available for students from their providers if a student is finding it difficult to learn or be assessed this academic year. In addition, further adaptations may be available. Students should discuss the options with their provider. Support may be available where providers are finding it difficult to deliver and assess the Access to HE Diploma this academic year. Providers should discuss the options with their AVA.
Quality assure	To ensure grades are fair, equitable and robust, effective quality assurance arrangements will be applied. These can take account of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ adaptations to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma ○ extenuating circumstances that may have affected student performance in assessment. <p>Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.</p>

Award	<p>If a student can be assessed, they should be assessed and awarded, based on planned assessments.</p> <p>In those exceptional cases where a student cannot be assessed, the student may still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded.</p>
Results	Confirmed results will be released by AVAs to providers no later than the deadline for results to be uploaded to UCAS. Providers should check with their AVA when confirmed results will be released to them.
Appeal	If a student is not satisfied with their grades they can appeal.

Teach	Teaching the content of the Diploma should continue to ensure every student has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to progress to higher education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers to ensure every student has the opportunity to be taught and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to progress into HE. • Providers may need to adapt the delivery, assessment and/or units delivered to ensure that the full content of the Diploma can be taught. • Providers to inform students at the beginning of their academic year of any adaptations to support the teaching of their Diploma. • Provider to notify students throughout the year of additional adaptations to their Diploma. • Providers to notify their AVA immediately if there are any difficulties in teaching the content of a Diploma. 	

Assess	Assessments should continue where possible. If a student can be assessed, they should be assessed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers to ensure every student has the opportunity to be assessed. • Providers may need to adapt the delivery, assessment and/or units delivered to ensure that students can be assessed. • Providers to inform students at the beginning of their studies of any adaptations to their Diploma that will support the continuation of assessment. • Provider to notify students throughout the year of additional adaptations to their Diploma. • Providers to notify their AVA immediately if there are any difficulties in the assessment of a Diploma. 	

Adapt	Assessments, delivery and/or units can be adapted, where necessary and appropriate, to support students to continue learning.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers to adapt assessments, delivery and/or changes to units delivered to ensure every student has every opportunity to be taught and assessed on the Access to HE Diploma. • Providers to consider how making adaptations early in the course could make their Diplomas more resilient to any further disruption as a result of a changing public health situation, so that assessments can continue as planned as far as possible. • Providers to review existing adaptations that they wish to apply in 2021-22 with their AVAs to ensure they continue to be necessary and appropriate. • Providers to notify and seek approval from their AVA for any new adaptations prior to applying the adaptation. • Providers to actively engage with AVAs to review and adapt provision as necessary throughout the year. • Providers to inform students at the beginning of their studies of any adaptations to support the award of their Diploma. • Provider to notify students throughout the year of additional adaptations to their Diploma. • Providers to notify their AVA immediately if there are any difficulties in the adaptation of a Diploma.

Support	<p>Support is available for students from their providers if a student is finding it difficult to learn or be assessed this academic year. In addition, further adaptations may be available. Students should discuss the options with their provider.</p> <p>Support may be available where providers are finding it difficult to deliver and assess the Access to HE Diploma this academic year. Providers should discuss the options with their AVA.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers to ensure that all students have information on, and access to, support available to them. • Providers to review regularly with students the application of the arrangements to provide additional information and support where needed. • Providers to notify their AVA immediately: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ if there are any difficulties in support measures available to their students, or ○ the provider is experiencing difficulties in the delivery and assessment of the Diploma.

Quality assure	<p>To ensure grades are fair, equitable and robust, effective quality assurance arrangements will be applied. These can take account of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ adaptations to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma ○ extenuating circumstances that may have affected student performance in assessment. <p>Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.</p>
-----------------------	--

- Providers to effectively apply AVA processes relating to internal quality assurance where:
 - extenuating circumstances may impact student **performance**
 - there have been adaptations to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma made in response to the pandemic.
- Providers to ensure the application of these internal quality assurance arrangements are robust, consistent and meet the requirements set by their AVA.
- Providers to inform students at the beginning of their course of the quality assurance arrangements that support the award of the Diploma.
- Providers to notify their AVA immediately if there are any difficulties in the internal quality assurance of their provision.

Award	<p>If a student can be assessed, they should be assessed and awarded, based on planned assessments.</p> <p>In those exceptional cases where a student cannot be assessed, the student may still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded.</p>
--------------	---

- Providers to effectively apply AVA award processes to ensure that awards can be made where the requirements for the:
 - award are met
 - award through extenuation are met (exceptional cases).
- Providers to inform students at the beginning of their studies of the arrangements for the award of the Diploma, including the award through extenuation.

Results	Confirmed results will be released by AVAs to providers no later than the deadline for results to be uploaded to UCAS. Providers should check with their AVA when confirmed results will be released to them.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers should notify students when confirmed results will be released by AVAs. • Providers to continue to collect grading data information and store such data in an accessible way. • Presentation of results (that is, student outcomes and grading data information) should be made available to AVAs, or QAA, upon request.

Appeal	If a student is not satisfied with their grades they can appeal.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers to ensure that all students have information on, and access to, their appeal process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If a student has concerns about assessment decisions relating to the achievement of credits or grades, they should discuss these with the relevant member of the course team when the assessed work is first returned to them. They may subsequently make a representation through the provider's formal procedures ○ A student may, however, appeal the grading decision that results as a consequence of a representation to the AVA, but only on the grounds of evidence of administrative or procedural error (Grade Scheme Handbook Section E: Student Results and Awards Boards).

13 QAA will maintain overall oversight of the Framework and will undertake additional monitoring activities, where necessary, to assure ourselves and stakeholders that students' results continue to be accurate, fair and robust.

QAA grading scheme: Grading the Access to HE Diploma

14 The [QAA grading scheme](#)¹ will continue to be applied to all assessments (that is, assessed work).

Using the QAA grading scheme

15 Tutors will continue to grade student assessments; they will give assessment grades (of pass, merit or distinction) for each of the grade descriptors selected for use with the particular assignment(s) that have been designed to assess the unit.

16 Practices for managing the submission of student work, including drafts, late submissions and opportunities for resubmission or reassessment are governed by the regulations of the QAA grading scheme.

¹ www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/access-to-he-resources

Quality assuring graded Access to HE Diplomas

17 To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by the current situation, AVAs and providers will ensure that assessment grades go through a process of internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation.

18 The AVA's operation of moderation ensures that consistent assessment standards are applied in all instances where Access to HE Diplomas, or common units, are delivered on more than one course or more than one occasion.

19 The AVA will ensure that its providers operate rigorous internal moderation procedures which meet the AVA's requirements, and which facilitate:

- 19.1 the application of consistent standards of demand in assessment
- 19.2 assessment design that maximises reliability and validity in assessment outcomes
- 19.3 the consistent and accurate application of QAA assessment regulations.

20 The standardisation procedure will provide opportunities for course tutors, internal moderators and external moderators to share, discuss and, where necessary, recalibrate their expectations relating to the standards of work expected by:

- 20.1 the requirements of any work at Level 2 or Level 3
- 20.2 the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the specific units that they work with
- 20.3 the grade descriptors.

21 In addition to the principles of quality assurance aligned to the [QAA grading scheme](#), other quality assurance measures may also be applied to ensure the national distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to previous years.

22 If you have any further questions that are not addressed, please contact your AVA.

We have provided below some frequently asked questions about the award of the Access to HE Diploma. The questions will be updated regularly on our [FAQs page](#).

Frequently asked questions

Why are the arrangements designed as they are?

The arrangements for the award of the Access to HE Diploma in 2021-22 were designed to ensure that students studying an Access to HE Diploma during the pandemic had every opportunity to be assessed and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate their progression into HE, building upon the arrangements for the 2020-21 academic year.

The Access to HE Diploma is not only intended to demonstrate that a student has achieved the necessary academic qualification to progress into HE, but it is also designed to prepare students fully for their experience of higher study. Giving students every opportunity to be assessed will help them build confidence that they have the necessary tools to succeed. It will also provide assurance to higher education providers that a student is prepared for higher education.

Many Access to HE students have been out of study for several years, and the teaching and learning model used on the Diploma is designed to provide them with the best possible foundation for the discipline of higher education study.

This is why it is important that teaching and assessment continue whenever possible. However, during the pandemic it is possible that in some exceptional circumstances not all assessments will be able to take place. For students, the additional pressures of work, caring responsibilities or illness may affect their ability to engage with teaching, learning and assessment.

For providers, the current circumstances may make the delivery and/or assessment of the Diploma challenging. To ensure fairness, tutors can adapt assessments where these situations arise.

The key points are listed below.

- 1 Where all assessments for the qualification have taken place as normal or in an adapted form, they will determine the student's level of attainment.
- 2 To ensure grades are fair, equitable and robust, effective quality assurance arrangements will be applied. These can take account of:
 - adaptations to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma
 - extenuating circumstances that may have affected student **performance** in assessment.

Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.

- 3 In those exceptional cases where a student cannot be assessed, the student may still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to satisfy the award of unit.

We believe that the approach being taken is fair and ensures students have the best preparation possible to help them transition into higher education, whilst also providing additional support measures for students in recognition of the challenges of the pandemic.

How are you ensuring parity between Access to HE students and A level students and other Level 3 qualifications?

The arrangements for the award of the Access to HE Diploma provide as much parity as we are able to give within the different cohorts of students studying courses which are intrinsically very different.

There are necessary differences in the arrangements between Access to HE Diplomas and other Level 3 qualifications that facilitate progression to HE (that is, quality assurance processes and in those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation). These differences recognise the variations in the qualifications themselves and the students that study them.

The Access to HE Diploma is:

- a credit-based qualification designed for adults wishing to enter higher education. Therefore, in order to achieve the award of the Diploma the student must complete the units that make up the programme of study
- usually completed by the majority of students over the course of one academic year
- assessed through continuous assessment - this means students complete assessments throughout their course of study.

The Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) that was introduced in response to the pandemic allows for providers to adapt the course to meet the needs of students to give them the best opportunity to complete. Adaptations are proposed at provider level because they know their students best in addition to any local issues caused by the pandemic, and courses can be designed to meet related needs.

The ERF in 2021-22 has also been designed to allow for adaptations to be made according to students' personal circumstances. To ensure grades are fair and robust, effective quality assurance arrangements will be applied. These can take account of extenuating circumstances that may have affected student performance in assessment. Based on the evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.

How much flexibility are providers allowed?

The ERF in 2021-22 gives providers considerable flexibility to adapt the Diploma so it can be taught and assessed during the pandemic. It sets out the parameters under which AVAs can operate which allows them to discuss and approve with providers adaptations for the award of the Diploma.

Providers can adapt assessments, delivery and/or changes to units delivered, where necessary and appropriate, to:

- support teaching and learning, and assist in mitigating any possible effects of previous or future disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment relating to the pandemic
- make assessments as manageable and flexible as possible, for example, to address the impact of public health guidance
- safeguard against any future disruptions relating to the pandemic, such as local lockdowns or closure of facilities.

In addition, there are provider flexibilities in place to support students who are finding it difficult to learn or be assessed at this present time.

These may include:

- further adaptations to assessment schedule/tasks, delivery and/or units delivered
- additional study support where there are extenuating circumstances (for example, counselling support)
- breaks in learning
- extensions to length of learning programme or assignment deadlines
- continuing into the next academic year.

It is important to appreciate that providers are given flexibility of approach in individual circumstances. It is also important that providers and AVAs are able to discuss and agree how these approaches might operate in different circumstances.

We have confirmed our assessment strategy with our Access Validating Agency and now need to adapt assessments in response to local or national lockdown requirements. What do we do?

Providers can adapt assessments and delivery, where necessary and appropriate, to:

- support teaching and learning, and assist in mitigating any possible effects of previous or future disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment relating to the pandemic
- make assessments as manageable and flexible as possible, for example, to address the impact of compliance with social distancing or other public health guidance
- safeguard against any future disruptions relating to the pandemic, such as local lockdowns or closure of facilities.

You should speak to your AVA to discuss how you can do this.

Our proposed adaptations do not meet the requirements of the Diploma's rules of combination. What do we do?

We recognise that some adaptations will affect the rules of combination for some Diplomas. This would ordinarily require AVAs to follow their major modifications processes. However, under the ERF 2021-22, AVAs may adapt the rules of combination for a named Diploma where, if changes were not made, it would be impossible for students to complete their Access to HE Diploma, where this is necessary and appropriate to:

- support teaching and learning, and assist in mitigating any possible effects of previous or future disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment relating to the pandemic
- make assessments as manageable and flexible as possible, for example, to address the impact of compliance with social distancing or other public health guidance
- safeguard against any future disruptions relating to the pandemic, such as local lockdowns or closure of facilities.

Your AVA will have received information from QAA about how to deal with this type of situation and you should speak to your AVA to find out more/discuss how you can do this.

How do I know which processes should be applied, for example for quality assurance or appeals, where there are centre and AVA processes?

You should speak to your AVA to confirm the processes that apply in your circumstances.

What do the arrangements look like for units where a student cannot submit all of the evidence required for the award of such units?

In those exceptional cases where a student has been unable to submit all of the assessments required for the achievement of each unit, through no fault of their own, the tutor/provider can draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded.

Sufficient evidence will need to be available for tutors/providers to make a judgement on the award of a unit. This means that tutors/providers may map to existing evidence or may need to ensure additional student assessment or alternative evidence is generated. The available evidence must

relate to the learning outcomes of each unit being assessed. For graded units, the available evidence must relate to the learning outcomes of each unit being assessed **and** the grade descriptors assigned to the unit.

Continued teaching of the Diploma will be vital to ensure that the most complete sources of evidence are available on which the tutor/provider can base their judgement.

Tutor/provider judgements can only be based on evidence of what the student can do, not what a student has the potential to achieve.

To ensure students have confidence in the results awarded this year, the evidence submitted to support the award of a unit will be subject to quality assurance arrangements.

On completion of the Diploma, students will continue to receive a unit transcript and it will not be possible to identify from the transcript units awarded through extenuation.

Why can't the credit volume be reduced?

The Diploma is a credit-based award and, in order for the Diploma to be awarded, evidence must therefore be presented to demonstrate that all credit required for the award of the Diploma has been achieved. There is no overall grade for the Access to HE Diploma as is the case for A levels. Access to HE students will receive a unit transcript that outlines the unit grades awarded. If the credit volume was reduced, it would not be possible to make the award of the Diploma needed to support progression into higher education.

While it is not possible to reduce the number of credits, other adaptations, such as reducing the volume of assessment needed, are possible. In those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded.

Students who are finding it difficult to study where lessons, materials and/or assessments have been adapted and are worried it will affect their grades and/or completing the Diploma, what should they do?

Students have been advised to contact their course provider if they are concerned about any adaptations made to their course. As the course provider you may be able to offer additional support or tools to help them study.

Providers can adapt assessments and delivery, where necessary and appropriate, to:

- support teaching and learning, and assist in mitigating any possible effects of previous or future disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment relating to the pandemic
- make assessments as manageable and flexible as possible, for example, to address the impact of compliance with social distancing or other public health guidance
- safeguard against any future disruptions relating to the pandemic, such as local lockdowns or closure of facilities.

To ensure grades are fair, equitable and robust, effective quality assurance arrangements will be applied. These will take account of:

- **adaptations to the delivery, assessment or units** delivered on the Diploma.

Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.

Students who are finding it difficult to study because the additional support they received in college to help with their specific learning needs is not available now they are working from home, what should they do?

Students have been advised to contact their course provider if they are concerned about the additional support they are receiving to discuss what additional support or tools are available to help them.

If there is a further lockdown (local or national) and a student feels the work they produce during the lockdown does not reflect their previous performance, what should they do?

Students have been advised that if they feel that the work produced during a local or national lockdown does not reflect their previous performance, to speak to their course provider. AVAs and providers will have in place arrangements to deal with such extenuating circumstances.

To ensure grades are fair, equitable and robust, effective quality assurance arrangements will be applied. These will take account of:

- extenuating circumstances that may have affected student **performance** in assessment.

Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.

If there is a further lockdown which means a student is unable to study because they are a key worker/carer or now have additional commitments, what should they do?

Students have been advised to speak to their course provider about the best way to continue with their Diploma if they are unable to study.

Options include:

- a making an application for extenuating circumstances
- b applying for an extension to assessment submission dates
- c a short pause² of less than four weeks - for example, if you are in self-isolation
- this will not necessarily affect the planned end date of your course
- d a formal break or suspension in learning.

If the course is not publicly funded, the provider should discuss other options that may be available to the student.

Course providers should agree with their students the appropriate steps to be taken that will be based on both your and your student's circumstances.

In those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded. Course providers should speak to their AVAs regarding the circumstances under which an award through extenuation can take place.

² relates to publicly funded provision in England.

A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2021 feels the work that they produced during a previous lockdown (local or national) does not reflect their current or previous performance, what should they do?

Students have been advised that if the work produced during a lockdown (local or national) does not reflect their current or previous performance, to speak to their course provider. AVAs and providers will have arrangements in place to deal with such extenuating circumstances.

To ensure grades are fair, equitable and robust, effective quality assurance arrangements will be applied. These will take account of:

- extenuating circumstances that may have affected student **performance** in assessment.

Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.

A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2021 and was unable to study and submit assessments during a lockdown (local or national), what should they do?

Students have been advised that if they were unable to study and complete their assessments during a lockdown, to talk to their course provider about the best way to continue.

Options include:

- a making an application for extenuating circumstances
- b applying for an extension to assessment submission dates
- c a short pause³ of less than four weeks - for example, if you are in self-isolation
- this will not necessarily affect the planned end date of your course
- d a formal break or suspension in learning.

If the course is not publicly funded, the provider should discuss other options that may be available to the student.

Course providers should agree with their students the appropriate steps to be taken that will be based on both your and your student's circumstances.

In those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded. Course providers should speak to their AVAs regarding the circumstances under which an award through extenuation can take place.

A continuing student who started their course before 1 August 2021 had their assessments rescheduled by their course provider to be submitted at a later date because of a lockdown (local or national). What should they do if they feel their performance is affected by these changes?

Students have been advised that if the work was rescheduled and the volume of work is unmanageable, to seek advice from their course provider who will be able to advise them about the options available to them. For example, this may include making an application for extenuating circumstances.

³ relates to publicly funded provision in England.

To make sure that grades are fair and not unduly affected by the rescheduling of assessments, AVAs and providers will ensure that effective arrangements for quality assurance will be applied. These will take account of:

- adaptations to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma
- extenuating circumstances that may have affected student **performance** in assessment.

Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.

What are extenuating circumstances and how are they evidenced?

Any circumstances or factors likely to impact adversely on student achievement and progression. These circumstances or factors are usually either unforeseen or unpreventable and outside the control of the student.

Examples⁴ of extenuating circumstances arising from the last two years of the pandemic have included:

- students suffering from COVID and any associated after-effects of the infection
- students having limited study time because of key worker commitments, or having to work to support family members as a result of the illness or redundancy of their partner/parents
- students having limited, or no, access to equipment to complete their studies (including computers and broadband connectivity)
- students having to home-school children during national lockdowns.

For many students, the pandemic will have impacted their learning experience. The exact nature and severity of that impact will be dependent on a complex interaction of factors at provider (centre), Diploma and student (individual and/or cohort) level.

Providers will have procedures for dealing with cases of extenuating circumstances. In most cases, extenuating circumstances that affect achievement on individual units (for example, in relation to requests for extended deadlines) are handled at course level, and appropriate action and decisions taken according to the provider's approved procedures.

AVAs will have processes in place to also consider cases where extenuating circumstances have affected performance in more than one area, or in any other way that falls outside the provider's normal processes. This will also include exceptional cases where extenuating circumstances have affected the completion or submission of work for assessment.

If extenuating circumstances impact student performance, such circumstances will be taken into account when quality assuring grades, through the process of moderation and standardisation. Tutors, Internal Moderators and External Moderators will ensure decisions are fair, robust and equitable based upon careful consideration of the extenuating circumstances and student overall performance across their programme of learning.

These procedures have been developed through collaboration with our key stakeholders including Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), the Department for Education (DfE), Ofqual, Qualifications Wales, UCAS and other organisations, and based on the experiences of students and providers during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years.

⁴ The list of examples provided is not exhaustive and is shared to assist course providers.

Can students apply for extenuating circumstances?

Yes. Course providers and AVAs already have in place procedures to allow students to identify extenuating circumstances that may affect their academic **performance** should the current situation make studying difficult.

A student should discuss their specific circumstances directly with their course tutor.

Course tutors will be able to explain how to apply for extenuating circumstances.

Do I have to notify my AVA each time an application for extenuating circumstances is made?

You should speak to your AVA to determine their processes under the ERF 2021-22.

Can I apply for extenuating circumstances for a whole cohort of students?

Yes, if, as a course provider, you consider the academic performance of a whole cohort of students has been adversely affected and you are unable to manage the issues through your own extenuating circumstances processes/measures, your senior managers should speak to your AVA.

Can I apply for extenuating circumstances on behalf of my students?

You should speak to your AVA to determine their processes under the ERF 2021-22.

Can students apply for an extension to an assessment submission deadline?

Yes. Course providers and AVAs already have procedures in place to allow students to apply for an extension should the current situation make studying difficult.

A student should discuss their specific circumstances directly with their course tutor.

Tutors will be able to explain how to apply for an extension.

Course providers should be mindful of the potential implications for students when offering multiple extensions across their Diploma, to avoid placing unnecessary pressure on students at the end of their course. You may also wish to consider the impact of managing extensions on staff workloads, for example, related to marking and quality assurance.

It may be possible to offer alternative solutions in these cases and you should speak to your AVA to discuss what options may be available.

In those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded. Course providers should speak to their AVAs regarding the circumstances under which an award through extenuation can take place.

As a centre if it is not viable for us to reschedule assessments, what should we do?

You should speak to your AVA to discuss the options available to your students.

In those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded. Course providers should speak to their AVAs regarding the circumstances under which an award through extenuation can take place.

If it is not viable for us to adapt the delivery of learning and assessment, what should we do?

You should speak to your AVA to discuss the options available to your students.

In those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded. Course providers should speak to their AVAs regarding the circumstances under which an award through extenuation can take place.

Can students apply for a break in learning?

Yes. Course providers and AVAs already have procedures in place to allow students to take a break in learning should the current situation make studying difficult. Course providers and students can agree to suspend learning. This allows a student to continue later with the same eligibility that applied when they first started their learning.

Publicly funded courses in England and Wales already have provision for 'breaks/suspension in learning' or for a range of circumstances.

Guidance from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (for providers in England) and Welsh Government (for providers in Wales) has information about the options available.

Students have been advised to speak directly to their course tutor to discuss their individual circumstances. Course providers will be able to explain to students how to apply for a break in learning.

Students are unable to access the online lessons and materials, what should they do?

Students are advised to contact their course provider if they are unable to access online lessons and materials so that they can discuss the options available to them.

Students have concerns about the support available to them, what should they do?

Students have been advised that if they have concerns about the delivery of their course, they need to follow their course provider's complaints process in the first instance. They have also been advised that details of this will be on provider's website and should be included in the student handbook. Students can also contact the Access Validating Agency that will issue their Diploma if they are still not satisfied with the outcomes of the complaint investigation.

Students feel their well-being and mental health are being affected, what should they do?

We recognise the impact of the continued pandemic on the mental health of students, providers and AVA staff. While it is not possible for this to be addressed directly through our arrangements, the health and well-being of students, teachers and AVA staff has been considered in the development of the arrangements. We are aiming to reduce the impact where we can by allowing AVAs and providers to adapt the Diploma as necessary and appropriate to their local situation, and by providing clear and timely communications.

The challenges faced by adult students during the pandemic are varied and different to those faced by students studying other Level 3 qualifications, and we want to assure students that all comments, views and feedback received on course experiences are considered as part of our continual assessment of the arrangements.

Colleges may make adjustments to aspects of teaching and assessment to account for the impact of the pandemic and will have in place mechanisms and services to support students.

In those exceptional cases where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through extenuation. The tutor/provider will draw upon either further adaptations to assessments or alternate lines of evidence to determine whether the unit can be awarded. Course providers should speak to their AVAs regarding the circumstances under which an award through extenuation can take place.

Students are worried about their progression to university, what should they do?

If students have any concerns about their progression to university, they have been advised to speak to their course provider and the universities they have applied to.

Our priority is to support students to meet the challenges to learning and delivery presented by the pandemic and ensure that all Access to HE students are as well prepared as they can be for their transition to higher education and minimise lost learning as far as possible.

When will course providers receive confirmed results from their AVA?

Confirmed results will be released to course providers after the Final Awards Board. The results will be released to you no later than the deadline for results to be uploaded to UCAS. Providers will have arrangements in place to notify students of their confirmed results.

How will students' grades be quality assured and standardised?

In addition to the principles of quality assurance aligned to the [QAA grading scheme](#), other quality assurance measures may also be applied. Your AVAs will ensure that information and communications are made available to you (including internal moderators) on the quality assurance arrangements.

To make sure grades are fair, equitable and robust, AVAs and providers have processes in place to ensure grades go through internal moderation, external moderation and standardisation. These effective quality assurance arrangements will take into account:

- adaptations to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma
- extenuating circumstances that may have affected student **performance** in assessment.

Based on evidence presented, a moderator may adjust grades either upwards or downwards to ensure no student is advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to their peers.

Can students appeal their grades?

AVAs and providers have processes in place to support students who feel their grades during this period do not reflect their performance.

Students have been advised to speak to their course tutor and if they have concerns about assessment decisions relating to the achievement of credits or grades, they should discuss these with the relevant member of the course team when the assessed work is first returned to them. A student may subsequently make a representation through the provider's formal procedures. They may appeal the grading decision that results as a consequence of a representation, but only on the grounds of evidence of administrative or procedural error

Your procedures to address representations and appeals will apply. Your AVA will be able to provide more information.

A student is currently studying GCSE's or functional skills alongside their Access to HE Diploma, what happens about these qualifications?

GCSEs and functional skills are regulated by [Ofqual](#) and we recommend that students speak to their course tutor or refer to the information produced by [Ofqual](#).

A student is not due to complete their studies until after 31 July 2022. What are the arrangements for the award and assessment of the Access to HE Diploma for them?

This year, the current guidance also applies to all students due to complete after 31 July 2022. Students and providers will be supported if advice from DfE or Public Health England means that adaptations need to be continued beyond 31 July 2022.

Further advice and information

If you need further information, please take a look at our [frequently asked questions](#) and/or [contact your AVA](#).

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2021
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786
www.accesstohe.ac.uk

QAA manages the national framework for the recognition and regulation of Access to HE Diplomas. www.qaa.ac.uk