

Access to HE Diploma awarded 2020

**Information for providers
- students sitting assessments
autumn 2020**

Introduction

1 On 3 April 2020, QAA announced that students who planned to complete their Access to HE course **by 31 July 2020** would receive estimated grades for all remaining assessments with submission dates after 20 March 2020.

2 We are all focused on making sure students are not disadvantaged by these unprecedented circumstances including to allow for an appeal where appropriate. Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) produced [guidance](#) on the appeals process.

3 If a student did not feel their estimated grades reflect their expected performance, there was an opportunity to appeal **or** they may choose to sit their assessments at the earliest reasonable opportunity (when all providers are operating normally). Students should be made aware that taking their assessments later may impact their progression to university in September.

4 The following information on sitting assessments 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 AVAs¹:

- Agored Cymru
- AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group
- Ascentis
- The Cambridge Access Validating Agency
- Certa
- Gateway Qualifications
- LASER Learning Awards
- One Awards
- Open Awards
- OCN London
- Open College Network West Midlands.

5 As far as was practical in the current circumstances, AVAs have consulted with course tutors and senior course managers across the sector as the guidance was developed.

6 The following information is provided in the context of the most up-to-date advice for educational settings provided by the Department for Education (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.

7 The following documentation may be relevant to Access to HE Diploma providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland offering the QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas that fell under the extraordinary grading scheme.

¹ AVAs are awarding bodies licensed by QAA to award Access to HE Diplomas.

Conditions for sitting assessments

8 Students will be allowed to sit only assessments that received estimated grades in the 2019-20 academic year. This information does not apply to assessments that received actual grades prior to 20 March 2020.

9 Sitting assessments will be allowed where a student can improve the grade shown on their transcript. Therefore, a student with an estimated Achieved on an ungraded unit and/or an estimated Distinction on a graded unit will not be allowed to sit assessments within those units.

10 Students have the opportunity to sit any or all of the assessments that received estimated grades.

11 Providers may refuse a request for sitting assessments where the outcome will have no material effect. For example, if a student received a Pass for a unit comprised of three assessments, with actual grade indicators PPP for assessment 1, actual grade indicators PPP for assessment 2, and estimated grade indicators PPP for assessment 3, sitting assessment 3 will not result in an improved overall unit grade, regardless of improved assessment grade indicators.

12 Sitting assessments must be requested by the provider; AVAs will not permit requests from students unless there is no other way for the student to sit assessments (ie their provider has ceased trading). Providers are expected to only request an assessment sit where a student has a realistic chance of improving their grade.

Timeline for sitting assessments

13 By **2 October 2020**, students must register with their provider to sit assessments and confirm which assessments will be undertaken.

14 By **2 October 2020**, providers must inform their AVA of:

- 14.1. names of students due to sit assessments
- 14.2. Access to HE Diploma title and specific assessments of the sits
- 14.3. assessment schedules for the sits.

15 Sitting assessments will take place between **5 October 2020 and 23 November 2020**. It will be the responsibility of the providers to manage the sits and internal moderation process during this time. Providers must provide their AVA with the updated results and evidence for quality assurance processes within this timeline.

16 AVAs will undertake external moderation processes by **7 December 2020**. This will be in line with QAA's extraordinary regulatory framework.

17 AVAs will hold Awards Boards by **15 December 2020** to finalise grades.

18 AVAs will confirm finalised grades with providers by **16 December 2020**.

19 Grades will be published by providers to students on **17 December 2020**.

Managing sitting assessments

20 Students must not be charged for sitting assessments. AVAs will not charge providers for students registered to sit assessments.

21 No additional teaching should take place alongside the sitting of assessments.

22 Providers that provide the opportunity for students to sit Access to HE Diploma assessments in England may be eligible for support through the [Department for Education Exam Support Service](#).

23 Where a provider cannot provide the opportunity for students to sit assessments during the aforementioned time period, they must inform their AVA immediately. The AVA will arrange an alternative provider to manage the assessments sits in their place.

Guidance for providers

24 For each assessment, students should be given the timeframe set within the Access to HE Diploma's original assessment plan. Where units are usually delivered and assessed in a long and thin format, providers should consider adapting the assessments so that they can fit within the timeframe.

25 Providers can set their original assessments only where this assessment has not previously been set for the 2019-20 cohort. Where original assessments have been presented to a cohort as a formative assessment, regardless of whether the student completed it or not, it must not be used as an assessment during this process.

26 Where an original assessment is no longer possible due to COVID-19 related safety concerns, providers should set adapted assessments.

27 If a new assessment has to be set, the usual process for the development of assessments should be applied.

28 Providers must send to their AVA each student's registration details, new actual assessment grades, new actual unit grades, actual assessments, and evidence of internal moderation by 23 November 2020. Providers are advised to retain a copy of the student's work.

Guidance for AVAs

29 Instead of arranging external moderators for all providers requesting assessment sits, AVAs will arrange a panel of subject specialists across the sectors to undertake external moderation across providers.

30 Where the external moderation process results in a grade adjustment, this will be presented to the provider at the Awards Board, which will approve the credits, grades and Diplomas.

31 AVAs will hold Awards Boards with representatives of each provider that has registered students to sit assessments.

32 AVAs will electronically release final actual grades to providers by 16 December 2020, which must be electronically issued to students on 17 December 2020.

33 AVAs will issue updated certificates and transcripts in accordance with their usual processes following the results day.

Actual grades

34 Where a student has chosen to sit an assessment, the actual grade will stand and will take precedence over any estimated grade. Please note that an actual assessment grade may be lower, the same, or higher than the estimated assessment grade. It should be noted that there is an element of risk involved in requesting to sit assessments.

35 Only one attempt will be permitted per assessment. Students may not sit assessments multiple times in the hope of eventually getting their desired grade.

36 Resubmissions for assessments will not be permitted. Where a student has not achieved all learning outcomes, their estimated grade will stand.

37 Students will have the opportunity to appeal their new actual grades in January 2021. The usual appeals process will be followed, as outlined in the QAA Grading Scheme Handbook (2018): Section E. Appeals will be permitted on grounds of administrative error or procedural error.

FAQs

Which Access to HE Diplomas are included?

This guidance relates to all QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas and students that were due to complete by 31 July 2020. For a list of all Diplomas, please go to the course search² on our [website](#).

Are Access to HE distance-learning Diplomas included?

Yes. This guidance related to all QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas and students that were due to complete by 31 July 2020. The type of the course, for example online, fast track, day release, full-time and part-time will be included. For a list of all Diplomas, please go to the course search² on our [website](#).

Can students choose to sit any assessment?

Students can only sit assessments that received estimated grades and where there is a possibility for an overall unit grade to be improved. Students can choose to sit as many of these assessments as they like. Students can only sit each assessment once.

Examples where a student could sit an assessment:

- Unit grade of Pass (P), with one assessment that received estimated grade indicators of PPP. The student could sit the assessment as they could improve their unit grade to Merit or Distinction.
- Unit grade of Merit (M), with two assessments that received estimated grade indicators of MMMM and MDDD. The student could choose to sit one or both assessments to try to improve their unit grade to Distinction.

Examples where a student could not sit an assessment:

- Unit grade of Distinction (D), with three assessments that received estimated grade indicators of MMMM, DDD, and DDDDD. The student cannot receive a higher grade than a Distinction.
- Unit grade of Pass (P), with one assessment that received actual grade indicators PPPPP. These grades were achieved prior to 20 March 2020 and so cannot undergo a resit.

² The course search is updated regularly and it is possible that some Diplomas awarded in 2020 are no longer included.

- Unit grade of Merit (M), with two assessments of which one had actual grade indicators MMM and one which had estimated grade indicators PP. Sitting the second assessment would not change the overall unit grade. Even if the student received DD, the overall unit grade indicators would be MMMDD and so their grade would remain a Merit overall.

If a student submitted assessments as formative work after 20 March 2020, can these formative assessments now receive actual marks?

No. Students cannot sit an assessment that they have already seen and/or submitted. Where a student completed formative assessments after 20 March 2020 for a unit and they now wish to receive an actual assessment grade, the tutor must set a new assessment. This is to ensure that no Access to HE students are unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged based on their ability to complete work between 20 March and 31 July 2020.

Can drafts be submitted for assessment?

No. Opportunities to submit assessments (or parts of assessments) in draft for comment and feedback by tutors before the formal submission date are not permitted.

Can an extension be agreed for the submission of assessments?

Extensions can only be granted in exceptional circumstances. All extensions must be agreed with the AVA prior to confirming with students. The extension date must fall within the submission timeframe.

Can students withdraw from receiving actual grades?

Students can withdraw from sitting assessments at any time until they submit their assessments. Once the work has been formally submitted, it will be marked and quality assured. The actual grade awarded will then supersede their estimated grade.

What happens if a provider's subject specialist is not available to mark the work within the timeframe?

Providers should notify their AVA immediately and AVAs should make arrangements for the assessment to be marked by a subject specialist. Providers should be aware that this may incur a cost.

Will students get feedback and provisional grades as usual prior to the release of final grades?

In line with usual practice for Access to HE Diplomas, students can receive developmental feedback and provisional grades following the submission of assessments. Students must be advised that the provision grades will be subject to quality assurance processes and may be adjusted. Final grades will be released on 17 December 2020.

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