

Arrangements for the award of the Access to HE Diploma in 2020-21: Adaptations

In September 2020, the arrangements for the Award of the access to HE Diploma in 2020-21 were released to AVAs, providers, students and other stakeholders.

The key priorities relating to the arrangements for the award of the Access to HE Diploma were as follows:

- Work in collaboration with AVAs, DfE, Welsh Government and other regulatory bodies to build on the strategy for Access to HE during and after the pandemic, focussing on sustainability and protection of the Access to HE Diploma.
- Continued implementation of the extraordinary regulatory framework, including publicly facing communications
- To support AVAs, students and providers meeting challenges to learning and delivery presented by COVID-19.

The Extraordinary Regulatory Framework (ERF) 2020-21

AVAs were advised that activities undertaken for the development, quality assurance and award of Access to HE Diplomas should continue in accordance with the requirements of the Licensing Criteria and Recognition Scheme documentation (including Grading Handbook).

Where adaptations have been made to the assessments, delivery and/or changes to units delivered on the Access to HE Diploma the principles of the ERF to be followed by AVAs included the following:

- AVAs to permit providers to 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 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
- AVAs to request from providers details of any changes to the delivery, assessment or units delivered on the Diploma, together with the rationales for these adaptations

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- AVAs to maintain records of any adaptations and to make them available to QAA upon their request
- AVAs to ensure any changes proposed by providers are necessary and appropriate, do not undermine the validity of the qualification, and risks around malpractice have been considered and addressed

Licensing Criteria

Adaptation

LC29	It operates a documented procedure for systematically monitoring and regularly reviewing and updating its operational procedures for Access to HE to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose and consistent with QAA requirements.
LC36	It ensures that the Access to HE courses database is kept up-to-date, with any necessary amendments made promptly
LC44	It has a range of appropriate and effective mechanisms through which it communicates with organisations providing Access to HE Diploma courses and higher education institutions about matters relating to Access to HE, including regulatory matters.
LC50	The AVA's procedure and criteria for provider approval ensure that a provider that is approved to deliver Access to HE Diplomas and courses has: d clear arrangements for the day-to-day operational management and coordination of Access to HE courses e appropriate facilities and resources at each site, and for each mode of delivery, for the delivery of its approved Access to HE courses f learning support resources and facilities for Access to HE students, including those with special learning needs g staff to teach who have the professional competence and skills to teach and assess necessary for the mode(s) of delivery to be used, and the level of subject expertise necessary to teach and assess the units available on the Diploma(s) it is approved to offer h arrangements for providing pre-course guidance to applicants and criteria for selection and admission to Access to HE courses, which are consistent with QAA's requirements with respect to admissions k internal moderation arrangements that meet the AVA's requirements n quality assurance procedures relating to the delivery of provision, including transparent processes for handling appeals and complaints.
LC51	The AVA's procedure and criteria for provider approval ensure that a provider makes an explicit commitment to cooperate with QAA requirements and the AVA's moderation, standardisation and monitoring procedures and that, in particular, it: a will deliver recognised Access to HE Diplomas and courses in accordance with the requirements of the definitive Diploma documentation d will allow staff to participate in AVA events and activities that are essential for maintaining the quality and academic standards of the Access to HE Diploma e will ensure that its public information about Access to HE is accurate and reliable and that any use it makes of the Access to HE logo and wordmark is consistent with QAA's guidance

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LC52	In addition to its normal quality assurance requirements, the AVA has a documented procedure for approving and monitoring the delivery and quality of teaching of Access to HE Diplomas offered by providers that are not subject to external inspection
LC54	The AVA monitors providers' performance and compliance with the terms of provider approval through the analysis of: a moderation reports b provider course evaluations c the analysis of relevant data on student achievement and retention data d any other data or information that is relevant, including student feedback e the nature and incidence of any appeals and complaints received by the AVA.
LC59	The AVA ensures that the content and structure of Access to HE Diplomas: a meet QAA requirements c provide students with a planned and coherent programme of study.
LC82	The AVA provides mechanisms through which relevant parties (such as providers and moderators) can suggest modifications to units or Diplomas and for those suggestions to be systematically considered.

Please see below a list of the adaptations permitted by AVAs since September 2020. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and the adaptations to delivery, assessment and/or units delivered will continue during the academic year.

Delivery

As part of monitoring, AVAs will have assessed providers to ensure appropriate facilities, resources and staff skills are in place to deliver alternate modes of delivery to all students, including students with specific learning needs.

In terms of delivery, the following adaptations have been permitted by AVAS:

- Use of on-line strategies to deliver teaching and learning.

Assessment

As part of monitoring, AVAs will have assessed providers to ensure that any changes to assessments are necessary and appropriate and do not undermine the validity of the qualification.

In terms of assessment, the following adaptations have been permitted by AVAS:

- Reduce volume of assessments.
 - In cases where it is appropriate, assessment tasks have been integrated to address the content of more than a single unit
 - Reduce number of study skills assignments via integrated assessment within academic content.
- Changing assessment schedule to deliver units in a different order
- Change to alternative model of assessment (eg a shift from a presentation to a report to assess a unit or a shift from examination to essay).
- Amend assessments

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Please see below adaptations to specific assessment types:

Practical work

- Practical work undertaken using online simulators (heart dissection, virtual microscope, PC building simulator)
- Practical work replaced with learners viewing videos of the practical tasks and learners given results from the practical to produce a laboratory report
- Adapted assessment criteria that would normally rely on practical or real-life observation using alternative methods, such as teaching, videos, simulations.
- Postpone practical assessment until later in academic year.
- Tutors demonstrating science experiments
- Tutor undertakes the science experiment under the direction of the learner. The learner would direct the tutor to perform the tasks after having submitted a methodology and risk assessment.

Tests/Exams

- Delay the delivery/assessment of units which are assessed by in-class test.
- Tests/Designated Core Units (DCUs) assessed by centrally devised, unseen, timetabled examination replaced with other assessment methods that are not conducted in controlled conditions
- The Rules of Combination have been temporarily adjusted such that learners no longer need to sit a formal unseen exam as part of the Diploma in order to achieve the qualification.
- In-person tests replaced with online tests, supervised over a video call. For example, online maths exams where students have their camera on during the assessment and students photograph their handwritten responses and submit to tutors
- Any units assessed by an in-class test (exam conditions/time constrained) can be supported by the development of in-class test support sheets (subject to approval). In-Class Test Support Sheets are permitted to offer additional support for learners sitting In-Class Tests in STEM subjects.
- Timed constrained assessments (TCAs) carried out as open book:
 - Where GD 5 is allocated to a unit, the TCA to be adapted to open book must include referencing from the listed items in the grade descriptor component.
 - Where learners are registered against units that together amount to more than the four specified TCAs, centres can apply a centre level adaptation and, for example, change the assessment method(s).
- Assessment brief adapted

Presentations

- Online rather than in-person presentations
- Learners submit PowerPoint slides and speaker notes but do not give presentation
- Adaptation to assessment criteria to accommodate presentations in cases where they will be delivered or recorded remotely.

Other methods

- Unit assessment requirements are attached to all graded units and prescribes the methods to be used against assessment criteria and specifies how centres are to apply the grade descriptor components. Centres have proposed alternative assessment

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methods where those prescribed by UARs cannot be accommodated under the circumstances brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. This has been applied in relation to various assessment methods including timed constrained assessments (open and closed book), oral presentations and practical demonstrations.

Units

As part of monitoring, AVAs will have assessed providers to ensure that any changes to units are necessary and appropriate and do not undermine the validity of the qualification.

In terms of changes to units delivered, the following adaptations have been permitted by AVAS:

- Swap unit for an alternative that is more suited to online delivery or cannot be appropriately assessed under the circumstances brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic
- Amended assessment criteria
- Amended learning outcome
- Additional optional ungraded units added to the Rules of Combination to support co-teaching across diplomas

AVA support activities

AVAs have put in place a series of activities to support providers in developing and implementing adaptations to the diploma in 2020-21. Such activities include:

Initial Adaptation Discussions

Standardised provider meetings held at the start of the academic year to identify any concerns and to review contingency planning and QA arrangements. Standardised discussion points below:

- Overall approach to delivery and assessment
- Confirmation of any contingencies the centre has in place
- Any changes to assessment materials / assignment briefs (will also be addressed by Development)
- Consideration of approach to exams / contingencies
- Any concerns you have with the centre's approach / preparedness
- Any requirements for Ascentis intervention (Quality meeting, additional evidence requirements, planned communication touch points, etc.)
- Any additional external moderation requirements

Teach-Meets

Webinars to facilitate shared best practice and to pool centre resources for the subjects most difficult to adapt to remote delivery.

Provider Webinars

Regular provider webinars have been delivered to introduce and discuss all adaptations.