

Part A: Introduction, purposes and principles

1 Introduction

The Access to HE Diploma (the Diploma) is a nationally recognised qualification with common requirements relating to the description of student achievement. The Diploma is a credit-based, graded qualification, and requirements relate to both the award of credit and to the award of grades. Details of the credit framework and requirements relating to the award of credit are provided, with the general specifications for the qualification, in *The Access to Higher Education Diploma and credit specifications*¹.

Individual, named Diplomas are identified by separate titles and are validated at local level by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs). Each Diploma has its own approved set of units of assessment, governed by rules of combination, which are appropriate to the subject of the particular Diploma. The common grading requirements apply to all individual Diplomas.

The common grading requirements for Diplomas are based on a standard model of unit grading. The core principles and key features of the model are described in this document. More detailed guidance about the use of grades and related quality assurance mechanisms is provided separately.

2 Purposes

Grades have a role and a value both in giving feedback to students about their performance and progress during the course, and in providing information to others at the end of the course, as an indicator of students' standard of performance. However, grading is only one aspect of the assessment process, and grades are just part of the feedback given to students in response to assessed work. More detailed feedback provides comment on individual strengths and the particular progress shown in assessed work, as well as indicating specific areas for improvement.

Grading should involve assessment for learning as well as assessment of learning and grading is therefore considered in the development of wider assessment strategies for courses. Particular consideration is given to how assessment can be planned and managed to ensure that grading contributes to the overall learning experience of Access to HE students, taking account both of the kinds of learning and assessment experiences which they may have encountered in the past and the kinds of assessment they are likely to encounter when they progress to higher education.

3 Core principles

In order to meet the purposes of the common grading system, grades awarded on Access to HE courses will be:

- **fair and equitable** - grades accurately reflect the standard of performance of assessed student work, using a standard measure of performance
- **clear and transparent** - grades given, and why particular grades have been given, is clear. The grading scheme and the significance of grades is provided in an open and readily accessible manner
- **reliable and valid** - the award of grades is moderated and assured through secure and robust quality assurance procedures
- **consistent** - grades awarded signify comparable standards of performance on different courses, at different providers, and across AVAs.

¹ Available at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/creditspecificationsdraft06

4 Further information

Full details of the Access to HE grading scheme, and all associated guidance documents for AVAs, course providers and HE admissions staff, are available on the Access to HE website (www.accesstohe.ac.uk).



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