

Grading the QAA Access to HE Diploma Quick Reference Guide



National Strength North East Service



Grading the QAA Access to HE Diploma

Quick Reference Guide

Background

The QAA has specified that Providers and AVAs must implement grading of the Access to HE Diploma from September 2009. This is a quick reference guide to the main requirements; please see the following documents for further guidance and the definitive rules and regulations for grading.

The complete **QAA Implementation Handbook** can be downloaded from the QAA website:
<http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas/default.asp>

The Guide to Grading the Access to HE Diploma can be downloaded from the Open College North East Region website: **www.ocnner.org.uk**

Key features

Refer to Part B of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

- Only **Level 3 units** which contribute to the achievement of the Access to HE Diploma will be graded. **Level 2 units are not graded**

Grades awarded to Level 3 units can be Pass, Merit or Distinction, where:

- **Pass** = achieving the learning outcomes for the unit, and assessment criteria at Level 3.
- **Merit or Distinction** = a recognition of higher level of performance than that required by the learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Grade Descriptors indicate what level of performance a student must demonstrate to be awarded Merit or Distinction in 7 key areas (see below). These can be included in the Students' Course Handbook.

These are explained in full in Part C of the QAA Implementation Handbook

- 1 Understanding the subject
- 2 Application of knowledge
- 3 Application of skills
- 5 Communication and presentation
- 4 Using Information
- 6 Autonomy/ independence
- 7 Quality

Each unit must have a **minimum of 2** and maximum of 7 Grade Descriptors assigned to it. **The Quality descriptor (No. 7) must be assigned to all units and used in all assignments.**

Grade descriptors should be relevant to the individual unit and provide the best opportunities to capture the full range of student performance.

The OCN North East Region is responsible for assigning the grade descriptors to units. The assigned grade descriptors are identified at the top of each unit.

Using the grade descriptors in assessment – a step-by-step guide

Refer to Parts E and F of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

Each **Level 3 unit** will be awarded a single grade, Pass, Merit or Distinction (P, M, D)

Any grade descriptor can be used more than once within the assessment for a unit if it is relevant to more than one assignment. **Grade descriptor 7 (Quality) must be used for all assignments in all units.**

Step 1: Design an Assessment Plan for the unit

The assessment plan describes which grade descriptors and individual components will be used in each assignment for the unit.

Units with only one assignment

If the unit is assessed using only one assignment, all the grade descriptors chosen for the unit will also apply to the assignment.

Units with more than one assignment

If the unit is assessed using more than one assignment, the chosen descriptors will be applied across the group of assignments, using them in different combinations for each assignment as appropriate. **Grade descriptor 7 must be considered when grading all assignments.**

For example,

Unit has been assigned grade descriptors 2, 4, 5 and 7

The unit has three assignments:

- First assignment: Grade Descriptors 2, 5 and 7 are appropriate
- Second assignment: Grade Descriptors 4 and 7
- Third assignment: Grade Descriptors 5 and 7

Step 2: Deciding which components of the grade descriptors to use

Tutors will decide which components or elements of each chosen grade descriptor are appropriate to the unit and the work being assessed. This will depend on the method of assessment being used for each assignment.

For example, Grade Descriptor 5 may be assigned to the unit because the unit will measure performance in communication and presentation skills. In the assignment for the unit the students will prepare essays and are not required to include images.

A Tutor might therefore choose to use the items underlined; below is a suggested method for highlighting the chosen components for all assignments.

Example: Grade Descriptor 5, with items to be used underlined

Indicative content for Merit: The student, student's work or performance demonstrates	Indicative content for Distinction: The student, student's work or performance demonstrates
Using this descriptor Any items (one or more) from the list	Using this descriptor Any items (one or more) from the list
a. Very good command of <ul style="list-style-type: none">• format• <u>structure</u>• use of images• <u>language (including technical or specialist language)</u>• syntax• register• <u>spelling</u>• <u>punctuation</u>• <u>referencing</u>	a. Excellent command of <ul style="list-style-type: none">• format• <u>structure</u>• use of images• <u>language (including technical or specialist language)</u>• syntax• register• <u>spelling</u>• <u>punctuation</u>• <u>referencing</u>

Step 3: Providing information for students – the assignment brief

Information given to students is critically important for the success of grading. It is essential that this information should be as clear as possible, in order to make grading decisions completely transparent and understandable to students and to minimise challenges to grading decisions made by Tutors.

Checklist for Graded Assignments	Tick
Assignments which are eligible for grading should include:	
The title of the assignment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Detailed description of the task and any specific requirements, for example word counts	<input type="checkbox"/>
The unit it relates to	<input type="checkbox"/>
The learning outcomes and assessment criteria that will be achieved	<input type="checkbox"/>
The grade descriptors assigned to the unit which have been chosen to grade the assignment	<input type="checkbox"/>
The chosen components from each grade descriptor, for each grade (Pass, Merit and Distinction). These can be contextualised NB. GD7 must always be used	<input type="checkbox"/>
Date assignment set	<input type="checkbox"/>
Submission date	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whether or not drafts are permitted, how many and the deadline for submission	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other uses:	
Assignment briefs may also be used for other purposes, for example to record assessment decisions, tutor feedback, student comments and authenticity statement and internal moderation comments	<input type="checkbox"/>
These functions can also be completed in other ways so it is not mandatory that the assignment brief is used	<input type="checkbox"/>

Tips on assignment briefs

It may be useful to devise one single assignment brief for the unit even when there are several assignments – with individual assignments for the unit listed as separate ‘tasks’. In this way information can be given on the grade descriptors and grading components to be used across the assignments for the whole unit, and this can be recorded on a single brief, which allows the same form to be used for all assignments in the unit.

Step 4: Involving Internal Moderators

Refer to Part H of the Grading Implementation Handbook.

- 1 All assignment briefs will be internally moderated before being given to students
- 2 Tutors’ decisions on grading will be submitted for internal moderation, as part of the usual processes for sampling and moderating students’ assessed work
- 3 The External Moderator is responsible for overseeing the assessment and internal moderation process to ensure that all requirements for grading have been met

Step 5: Grading Student work - assignments

Refer to Part F of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

- For each assignment, components will be chosen from at least one (7 - Quality) or more grade descriptors
- **For each grade descriptor chosen for the assignment a grade indicator is awarded (Pass, Merit or Distinction)**

Feedback to students

- Feedback on performance should relate to the grade descriptors and specific grade components
- **Be careful with language**, especially the terms 'very good' and 'excellent'. In grade descriptors 'very good' usually indicates a merit-level performance, and 'excellent' a distinction. It may therefore be confusing for a student to receive a comment such as 'excellent essay' and be awarded a merit
- It should be made clear that where the assignment forms one of several for the unit, that the grade is **merely an indicator and does not form the final grade for the unit**

Example: Grading information for use on assignment briefs

A possible way of giving grading information and feedback to students; in this example, the assignment is using Grade Descriptors 2, 4, 5 and 7. Such a box could be added to the assignment brief/assessment record sheet, as appropriate to the practice in your centre.

	Tutor Comments	Performance against descriptor (P*/M/D)
2. Application of knowledge		
4. Use of Information		
5. Communication and presentation		
7. Quality		

** NB – There are no descriptor statements for "Pass". Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.*

Step 6: Deciding on the final grade for a unit

Refer to Part F in the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook

- **Grading a unit occurs only when all learning outcomes have been achieved at Level 3**
- The list of all grade indicators form the 'grade profile' e.g. PPMDD, which is used to determine final grade for unit
- It is the mid-point of the list of grade indicators (when placed in order of grade) that determines the grade, e.g. PPMDD = Merit
- **There is no weighting of individual assignments** - all grade indicators produced by assessing student work count equally towards the final grade for the unit

Example: Arriving at the final grade for the unit - where there is a single assignment for the unit:

Grade descriptors for unit = 2, 4, 5 and 7

ASSIGNMENT 1: ESSAY	
Grade descriptor	Performance against descriptor: P, M, D
2	P
4	D
5	M
7	M
Grade profile	P, M, M, D ↑ Midpoint
Final Grade for Unit	Merit

Example: Arriving at the final grade for the unit - where there are several assignments for the unit:

Grade descriptors for unit = 2, 4, 5 and 7

- All grade descriptors must be used
- All assignments must be graded
- Grade descriptor 7 ('Quality') must be used in all assignments

ASSIGNMENT 1: ESSAY		ASSIGNMENT 2: CASE STUDY		ASSIGNMENT 3: PRESENTATION	
Grade descriptor for assignment	Performance against descriptor: P*, M, D	Grade descriptor for assignment	Performance against descriptor: P*, M, D	Grade descriptor for assignment	Performance against descriptor: P*, M, D
2	P				
		4	P		
5	D			5	M
7	M	7	P	7	M
Grade indicators for assignment	P, M, D	Grade indicators for assignment	P, P	Grade indicators for assignment	M, M
Grade Profile	P, P, P, M, M, M, D ↑ Midpoint				
Final Grade for Unit	Merit				

* NB – There are no descriptor statements for “Pass”. Students achieve a Pass by meeting the requirements of all the assessment criteria of a unit.

When grading units:

- Tutor judgement may be used in cases where no overall grade is produced by the grade profile, e.g. M, M, D, D
- Grade Descriptor 7 ('Quality'), which looks at the level of overall performance in responding to the brief, may be used as the deciding factor when determining the final grade for the unit
- No weighting of assignments is permitted, all grade indicators have equal value
- All assignments will be given at least 1 grade indicator (7 - Quality)

Numerical marking

Refer to Part F of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook, Annex 1

- The use of numerical marking is limited to assessments where the only possible response is either right or wrong
- The only grade descriptors eligible for numerical marking are 1 and 3
- No unit can be assessed entirely through numerical marking; 7 must also be used

Tracking and record keeping

Refer to Part G of the QAA Implementation Handbook

All Providers are permitted to use their own methods to track and record grades for Level 3 units, however some examples from the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook have been given below and these may be used or adapted for use by Tutors.

Example: ACCESS UNIT GRADING PROFILE: TUTOR RECORD

Student name:

Unit Title	A		B	C	D			E	
Assignment	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	1	2
Grade descriptor									
1 – Understanding of the Subject	P		P		M		P		P
2 – Application of Knowledge		M				P		M	
3 – Application of Skills					P				
4 – Use of Information	P		M						
5 – Communication and presentation	M			D		M			
6 – Autonomy and Independence				M				D	M
7 – Quality	M	M	M	M	P	P	M	M	P
Unit Grade Profile	PPMMMM		PMM	MMD	PPPPMMM			PPMMMD	
Unit Grade	Merit		Merit	Merit	Pass			Merit	

Example: Access to HE Grades for Student Group

Group name:

Choice of either C or D and E or F								
Unit title	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Student name								
1	Merit	Merit	Distinction		Merit		Distinction	Merit
2	Merit	Merit	Pass		Pass		Merit	Merit
3	Pass	Pass		Merit		Pass	Merit	Pass
4	Distinction	Merit	Merit			Merit	Distinction	Merit
5	Pass	Pass	Pass		Merit		Merit	Pass
6	Merit	Merit	Distinction			APL	Merit	Merit
7	Distinction	Distinction	Distinction			Distinction	Distinction	Distinction
8	Merit	Merit		Merit	Pass		Merit	Pass

Assessment and reassessment regulations

Refer to Part I of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook.

Formal submission of assignments

- Tutors must provide any particular requirements which relate to the submission of individual assignments in writing on assignment briefs, for example the use of drafts
- Agree deadlines for work to be submitted for formal assessment, and notify these to students in writing before the assignment is undertaken (for example, on assignment briefing sheets)
- Ensure that each of the learning outcomes for each unit is formally assessed only once in that unit

Draft submissions

- The Tutor decides whether drafts are permitted and specifies this on the assignment brief
- Drafts are to be submitted for Tutors' consideration before the formal submission date
- The student indicates that it is a draft on the piece of work
- Any written feedback that is given to a student after a draft has been considered **will not include predicted grade indicators**, or other detailed information about possible grading judgements
- Once a formal submission has been made, neither the student nor Tutor can later declare it to be a draft

Representations - contesting a grade

- If a student wishes to contest a grade given for an assignment they must do so at the earliest opportunity
- Tutors should discuss the work with the student to explain the decision
- If the student wishes to pursue a **representation** it will be considered by the Internal Moderator or other qualified person
- If the internal process concludes there may be a case for regrading, the case is referred to the External Moderator. In these cases the External Moderator and the Access to HE Manager must be informed as soon as possible

The following information must be sent to the External Moderator within 3 working days of the internal consideration:

- 1 The assignment brief
- 2 Any draft submissions
- 3 The formal submission
- 4 The relevant unit, with specific learning outcomes highlighted
- 5 Tutor feedback with final grade identified
- 6 Internal moderation records related to the resubmission
- 7 Explanation of the reason for the representation and process which has taken place to date

- The External Moderator will make a decision about whether or not to approve a change to the grade within 5 working days
- No adjustment to recorded Tutor grades can be made without the written agreement of the External Moderator
- The External Moderator's judgement is final

Resubmissions

The purpose of the resubmission process is only to provide a means by which student work can become eligible for grading, i.e. to achieve the learning outcomes at Level 3, **not to provide a mechanism for revising grades.**

- Only when the unit has been achieved at Level 3, will it be eligible for grading
- The type of resubmission required must be clearly specified
- There must be a clear deadline date
- Resubmissions must be applied consistently across assessment situations
- All resubmissions are subject to moderation, so all original submission and drafts should be retained

Resubmission can involve: a) revision of the original assignment, b) addition to the original assignment.

If this is not practicable (for example for test or examination situations), the resubmission may involve a new task assessing: a) the same set of learning outcomes or b) individual learning outcomes.

Partial resubmission is permitted.

Extensions and late submissions

- 1 All extensions and late submissions must be agreed with the Tutor in line with published guidance, for example, in the Student Course Handbook
- 2 If work is submitted after the agreed deadline has passed, grade indicators for those assignment(s) are capped at 'pass', unless there are extenuating circumstances to explain why an agreed extension was not fixed
- 3 If an assignment is late and is unsuccessful, there is no opportunity for resubmission except via the referrals process (see Part J)

Referrals

Refer to Part J of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook.

There is **only one opportunity for resubmission** for a learning outcome, or set of learning outcomes, except in extenuating circumstances. If the resubmission is unsuccessful, the only way that the credits can be achieved is through **referral to the awards board at the Final Award Meeting.**

The purpose of referral is to allow the award board to decide whether or not to allow the student another opportunity to resubmit one or more assignments.

Referrals will not normally be considered where the total credit value of the units for which the learning outcomes have **not been successfully achieved is greater than 15.**

Referrals are made by the Programme Leader following consultation with the Programme Team, Internal and External Moderators.

If a referral results in a second resubmission, any resulting grade indicator is **capped at PASS**.

Appeals

Providers will have their own appeals policy and process. In relation to grading the Access to HE Diploma, appeals are restricted to;

- Evidence of administrative error in the assessment process
- Extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the Final Awards Meeting

The Award Board and the Final Award Meeting

The Final Award Meetings are held in order to approve the award of credit, grades and the Access to HE Diploma to students. The Award Board will confirm that the rules of combination have been met, for those students who have achieved The Diploma, and that credit and grade profiles are accurate.

Certification

Refer to Part J of the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook;

- If students are successful in achieving all the units they will receive a **Qualification Certificate** for the Access to HE Diploma and a transcript which will list all the units, with the grade identified for Level 3 units
- If students do not achieve all the units for the Access to HE Diploma, they will still receive a transcript listing all the units achieved, with the grade identified for Level 3 units

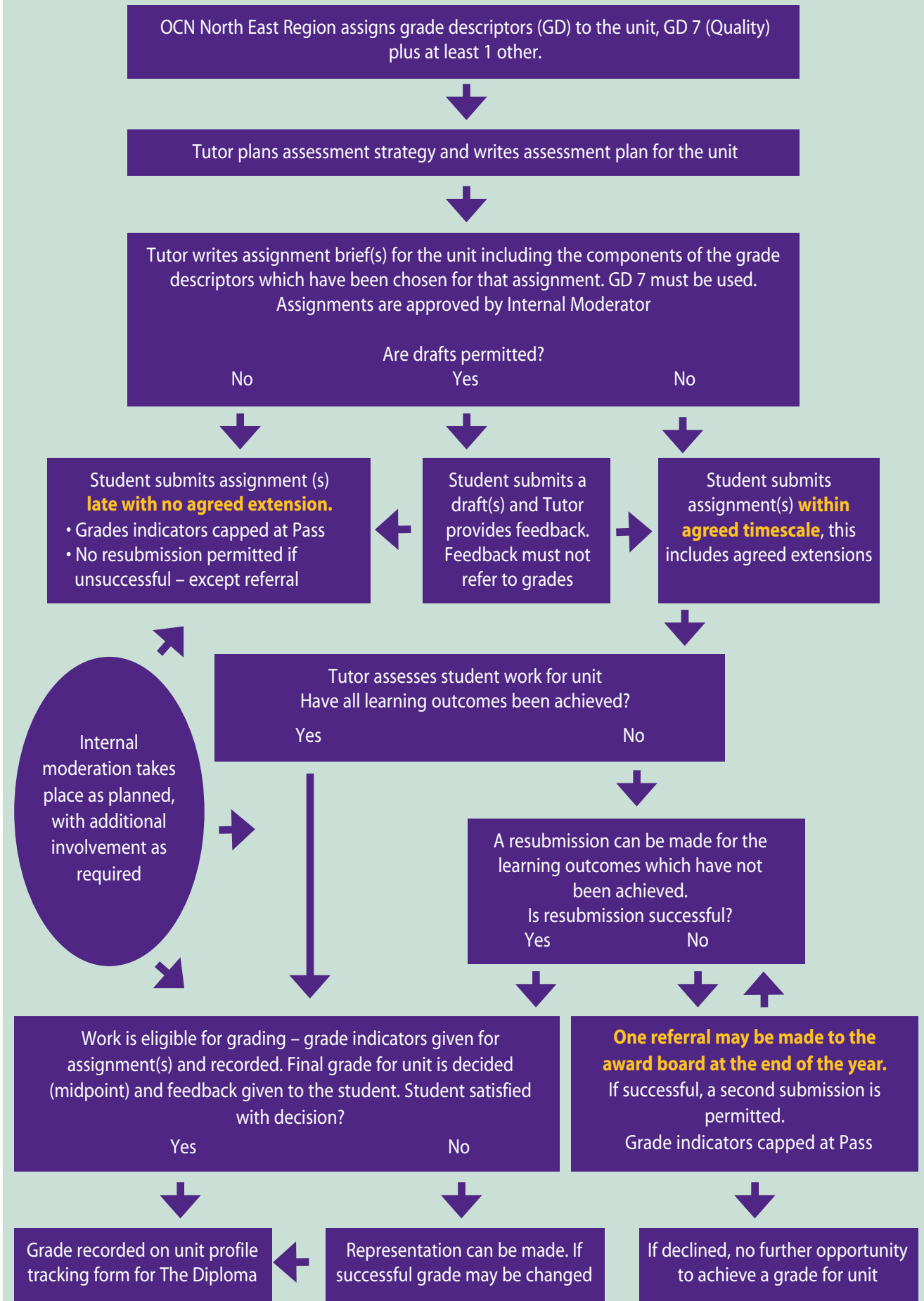
Standardisation

Refer to Part K in the QAA Grading Implementation Handbook.

All tutors should take part in the internal **standardisation of assessment judgements** to ensure that the assessment process is fair and consistent.



Flowchart for the grading process for a unit of the Access to HE Diploma



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