

Part J: Award and certification of the graded Access to HE Diploma

1 Authority for the award of Access to HE Diplomas

Formal authority for the award of the Access to HE Diploma is located with an appropriate body within an Access Validating Agency's (AVA's) governance structure. For operational purposes, this authority is delegated to an awards board (or awards boards, where this function is undertaken at provider or centre level). The lead moderator, or other person appointed by the AVA, acts as the AVA's representative at the awards board.

2 From assessment to awards: process outline

- a Tutors assess student work in accordance with guidelines provided by the AVA.
- b Providers apply their internal moderation procedures (as approved by the AVA) to tutors' assessment judgements.
- c Assessment of resubmissions and consideration of any representations (see Part I), is completed.
- d Samples of assessed units are externally moderated, following the AVA's moderation requirements.
- e The course team records its recommendations for awards to be made to each student, in respect of the award of credits and grades (for each unit) and the award of Access to HE Diplomas. (This normally involves the completion of standard AVA documentation.)
- f The awards board is convened, constituted to meet the AVA's specification, which will include the requirements given below (section 3: Membership of the awards board).
- g The awards board deliberates on the recommendations made, and approves the award of credits, grades and Access to HE Diplomas to students who have met the relevant requirements.
- h The awards board also makes decisions about referrals; cases of academic misconduct; extenuating circumstances; and other special cases, as detailed below (section 4: The awards board's business).
- i The awards board's decisions are formally recorded in the manner required by the AVA. Where any alterations or additions to the recommendations are agreed by the awards board, these are normally recorded as amendments on the AVA's documentation.
- j The lead moderator signs the AVA's documentation to confirm the awards board's approval of all awards and any other decisions made by the awards board.
- k The signed documentation is returned to the AVA, by the specified deadline and in accordance with any other AVA reporting requirements.
- l The AVA checks the documentation received from the awards board and issues Access to HE Diplomas and transcripts of achievement to students.

3 Membership of the awards board

- a The constitution of awards boards is specified by the AVA. The specification will allow a student's achievement and performance on all parts of the course which lead to the award of an Access to HE Diploma to be reviewed by the awards board.
- b The AVA's specification may allow awards boards to differ in size and composition to reflect the size, range and organisation of the course(s) being considered. As a minimum, membership will include the lead moderator (or equivalent), one other representative from the AVA (which could be an AVA officer or another external moderator), as well as at least one provider representative.
- c If more than one course is to be considered at the same meeting, moderators and providers who can represent each course will be present.
- d The lead moderator is responsible for confirming assessment judgements. The Chair of the awards board is responsible for ensuring that due process is followed.

4 The awards board's business

The awards board is conducted according to a standard agenda provided by the AVA and is minuted. The main business is the approval of the award of credits, grades and Access to HE Diplomas. The awards board will confirm that, for each student for whom the award of the Access to HE Diploma is approved, the rules of combination for the named Access to HE Diploma have been met and the credit and grade profiles are accurate and complete.

The awards board receives **no information about offers for progression** to higher education which may have been made to any student, and such information will play no part in its considerations. (The meeting of the awards board will be formally closed before any such information is shared.)

The awards board also makes decisions about referrals; special cases, including extenuating circumstances; aegrotat and posthumous awards; and cases of academic misconduct, as detailed below.

4.1 Referrals

Referral to the awards board can be made in cases where, following unsuccessful resubmission, a student has not achieved sufficient credits to qualify for the award of the Access to HE Diploma. The awards board is able to consider a referral only where the resubmission process has been completed (see Part I). The purpose of referral is to allow the awards board to consider whether a further opportunity for resubmission should be allowed and, if so, what the particular requirements of submission should be.

Referrals are made to the awards board by the course team, following consultation with the external moderator and others involved in assessing or moderating the student's work. Before considering referrals, the awards board will need to be assured that appropriate discussion has taken place between tutors at the providing institution and the student involved as to the best way for the student to progress. In discussing the possibility of referral with a student, course tutors should ensure that the student understands that referral does not automatically result in approval for further submission. It should be made clear to the student that the decision to allow a further opportunity to submit one or more assignments is made by the awards board, on the basis of evidence put before it.

Evidence about referrals will make reference to:

- a any special circumstances affecting the individual case
- b the particular assignments and number of units in which the student has been referred: referrals will not normally be considered where the total credit value of the units in which learning outcomes have not been successfully achieved is greater than 15
- c details of the achievement in the original submissions and resubmissions for the unit(s) in question (including assignments contributing to the unit which may have been successfully achieved)
- d the student's total achievement profile on the Access to HE course.

Decisions about referrals made by the awards board will include:

- a whether a further resubmission opportunity should be offered
- b the nature and extent of the requirements for resubmission. (The smallest element of assessment for resubmission is the assignment: learning outcomes cannot be assessed individually in these circumstances but must be assessed within the context of the assignment through which they were originally assessed on the course, or through a similar assignment which assesses the same learning outcomes and makes equivalent demands)
- c the deadline for further resubmission. The deadline will take into account:
 - the need to inform the student of the awards board's decisions, which should be at the earliest opportunity following the awards board meeting
 - the need to allow a limited but reasonable time for the student to complete the resubmission
 - the need to assess the resubmitted assignment(s)
 - the preferred position that, wherever possible, reassessment will take place and achievement confirmed within a timescale that will allow the student's results to be certificated by the AVA at the same time - or as soon as possible thereafter - as other students' results are certificated
- d where responsibility will lie for confirming the result of resubmission, and the process for confirmation. Normally, responsibility for assessment of the resubmission will lie with the original tutor, and responsibility for confirming achievement will lie with the lead moderator, acting on behalf of the awards board. The lead moderator may consult another external moderator with relevant subject expertise, if he/she considers it necessary to do so. The awards board may propose alternative arrangements, if necessary to avoid unreasonable delay. Decisions will be notified to the AVA.

Referral outcomes will be made known to the student as soon as possible after they have been confirmed.

- a If a resubmission that follows a referral is successful (that is, the achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated in the resubmitted work), approval can be given for the award of credits. Approval will normally be given by the lead moderator, acting on behalf of the awards board, although, if there are a large number of referrals, a further meeting of the awards board may need to be convened. **Grade indicators for the referred resubmission are capped at pass**; these pass grade indicators are added to the unit grade profile; and the unit grade is calculated. Where the resubmitted assignment represents the totality of evidence of achievement for the unit, the unit grade will therefore be pass. Where the assignment represents part of the evidence for achievement on the unit, the unit grade will depend on other grade indicators within the unit grade profile.
- b If a referred resubmission does not demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved, no credits or grades for the unit can be awarded. (A partially completed unit grade profile has no formal status.)

- c students whose achievements do not meet the rules of combination for the course on which they are registered or to which they have transferred (including those whose resubmission after referral is unsuccessful and those who have achieved too few credits to be eligible for referral) cannot be awarded the Access to HE Diploma. Such students will be awarded credits for achievement in successfully completed units.

4.2 Extenuating circumstances

The AVA licensing criteria require AVAs to ensure that providers have appropriate procedures for dealing with cases of extenuating circumstances. Providers' procedures will include a) a clear definition of extenuating circumstances, and b) procedures for the notification of extenuating circumstances by students. Providers will also have procedures relating to special needs and processes for reasonable adjustments.

- a In most cases, extenuating circumstances which affect achievement on individual units (for example, in relation to requests for extended deadlines) are handled at course level, and appropriate action and decisions are taken according to the provider's approved procedures. Course teams should ensure that cases of extenuating circumstances and action taken are documented. This will not only provide auditable evidence of decisions taken, but will help providers to develop 'case law' over time about appropriate actions in particular situations, thereby supporting consistency of practice in providers' handling of cases of extenuating circumstances. The external moderator will confirm that providers have appropriate procedures in place and that these are operated equitably.
- b The awards board will consider cases where extenuating circumstances have affected performance in more than one area or any other way that falls outside the provider's normal processes and is not dealt with elsewhere in this documentation.
- c Where no prior action has been taken, cases of extenuating circumstances that are brought to the awards board will have been considered by the course team and moderator prior to the meeting. Cases will be fully documented, and will include evidence which is presented in a standardised manner and a recommendation to the awards board on whether each individual claim for extenuating circumstances should be supported and to what degree.

The purpose of consideration by the awards board is to bring consistency to the consideration of extenuating circumstances and the consequent recommendations to the awards board meeting.

4.3 Aegrotat and posthumous awards

- a Aegrotat awards may be approved by the awards board, where a) there are **exceptional extenuating certified medical circumstances** which have resulted in the student being unable to complete the course requirements and b) the student has achieved **at least 30 of the credits** required for the Access to HE Diploma. In such cases, the Access to HE Diploma is awarded without full credits and the unit and grade profile will be incomplete. The Diploma awarded will state that it is an aegrotat award.
- b Posthumous awards may be made at the discretion of the awards board.

4.4 Academic misconduct

Each provider will operate its own procedures for dealing with academic misconduct, endorsed by the AVA where these relate to achievement on the Access to HE Diploma. Such procedures will have a variety of penalties to be applied where a student is found to be guilty of academic misconduct, depending on the nature, extent and seriousness of the offence. Penalties may include disqualification for all or part of the award, or requirements for resubmission: they may not include alteration to grades. Serious and/or repeated offences may result in the suspension or exclusion of the learner. In these circumstances, the learner will be considered at the awards board in respect of the award of credit only for those units not affected by the misconduct.

The penalty for lesser offences, affecting one or more assignments, may be a recommendation for those assignments affected to be regarded in the same way as assignments which were unsuccessful after resubmission. The awards board would normally treat such cases in the same way as others where a student has not reached the threshold for credit to be awarded and follow the procedure for referral (see section 4.1). In cases of academic misconduct which have affected the individual's achievement, the report on the provider's investigation of the case, and the provider's judgement, will be considered as evidence.

4.5 Appeals

AVAs and providers will have their own appeals procedures. The grounds for appeal about the award of credits or grades on the Access to HE Diploma programmes are restricted to:

- evidence of administrative error in the assessment process
- extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the awards board.

Any concerns about achievement of credits or grading decisions must be addressed through a representation being made when assessed work is first returned to the student (see Part I for details). The awards board cannot receive new appeals about academic judgements, although it will receive reports on any circumstances where changes were made to grades following representation. Appeals may be received after the results of this process have been published. As appeals are only permitted against aspects of the process and not against academic judgement, they can be referred back to the awards board, if appropriate, via the provider's appeal procedure. The appeal can be dealt with under Chair's action but the result must be endorsed, through counter-signature, by the lead moderator, on behalf of the AVA.

5 AVA certification

AVAs check that providers have completed the awards documentation in full and as required, including confirmation that the lead moderator's signature is present and that the rules of combination for the named Access to HE Diploma have been met by each student to whom the award of a Diploma has been approved.

AVAs issue individually numbered Access to HE Diplomas, with a transcript of achievement for each Diploma. The transcript indicates the credits and grades awarded for each unit achieved at level 3, and credits for each unit achieved at level 2, of the units specified in the rules of combination of the named Access to HE Diploma. Where a student achieves less than is required for the Access to HE Diploma, the AVA issues a transcript only, which records the credits and grades achieved.

Where the achievement of the Access to HE Diploma includes **credits transferred** from another Access to HE course, the transcript issued by the awarding AVA indicates the credits and grades achieved on the course most recently completed. The student will already hold a transcript(s) for credits and grades previously awarded.

Where **accreditation of prior learning** has led to credit being remitted for any level 3 units, the number of credits to be achieved on the Access to HE course will have been reduced proportionately; fewer units will have been completed; and grades are awarded only for the units completed on the Access to HE course. The transcript issued by the awarding AVA indicates the credits and grades achieved on the Access to HE course and, separately, the prior learning that has been accredited by the AVA. The standard of the student's performance in areas for which credit has been remitted is indicated by the assessment outcomes of the original award/qualification. No attempt is made to provide an 'Access to HE grade' for material which has not been completed on the Access to HE course itself.

Any achievement beyond the 60 credits required for the named Access to HE Diploma (as specified in its rules of combination) does not form part of the Diploma and is separately certificated. Grades are not awarded for such achievement.

Certification will be complete, and results made available to students, by the AVA's published certification date for all provision where the provider has met the AVA's deadline for receipt of awards documentation. The main publication of the AVA's results is not delayed because of provider delays or exceptional individual cases.



The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education,
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB.
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786