

## Part H: Grading and moderation

### 1 Introduction

This part of the implementation handbook outlines points to be considered by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) as they review their moderation procedures to ensure that they are fit for the purpose of securing and maintaining standards of graded awards.

### 2 Moderation in the context of a graded award

The guidance given here operates within the broader context of the AVA licensing criteria, which provide the overarching principles and specific requirements for the moderation of Access to HE awards. The licensing criteria continue to provide the main reference point with regard to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) expectations about AVAs' procedures for moderation, and this guidance is intended to supplement, rather than replace, any or all of the existing licensing criteria.

The relevant criteria are those listed under Principle 4 (Academic standards). This principle states that moderation should ensure that 'consistency and sufficiency of standards of student achievement are assured'. As the introduction of grading has led to a change in the way in which student achievement is described on Access to HE courses, there will be implications for the guidance and training which AVAs provide for moderators, and for the moderation process. It will therefore be necessary for AVAs to review their moderation procedures and guidance for moderators, and make any revisions that are necessary to meet the expectations detailed below.

#### a The recruitment, selection and appointment of external moderators will ensure that:

- those acting as moderators at subject level have expert subject knowledge and experience of assessment at level 3 or above. This expertise and experience must be sufficient to enable them to differentiate standards of student performance within level 3 in the subject areas for which they are appointed to act as moderators.

#### b The induction and training of external moderators will ensure that:

- moderators are made aware that they have a role as guardians of standards for Access to HE, and the implications of this role in relation to the award of grades are made clear before they embark on any moderation activity
- moderators are fully informed about how the Access to HE Diploma is assessed; how the award of grades relates to the award of credits and the qualification as a whole; the centrality of the common grade descriptors and how these are assigned to units; the specific requirements relating to how grade descriptors are applied to student work; and the process for determining unit grades
- moderators have access to written information which details all aspects of the assessment model for the Access to HE Diploma, including information about the grade descriptors and grading process
- moderators have the opportunity to discuss and clarify with the AVA features of the assessment model about which they may be unclear.

- c The oversight of internal moderation by external moderators will ensure that:**
- internal moderation has been conducted in accordance with the AVA's published requirements, which will include regular consideration of the operation of the grading process and of the appropriateness of grades proposed. (In most cases, the moderation process operates at two levels: internal moderation/verification and external moderation. The AVA will publish its requirements in relation to internal moderation, which will pay regard to centres' own quality systems, and will monitor and confirm the operation of internal moderation through the external moderation process. There may be some cases where it is not possible to provide for robust internal moderation. The AVA is responsible for making alternative arrangements to achieve the same ends in such circumstances.)
- d The process of external moderation will ensure that:**
- assessment plans and assignment briefs allow differentiated judgements to be made; that unit assessment plans allow grade descriptors to be used to assess student performance reliably and effectively within units; and that helpful feedback is provided to students in relation to grades given
  - assessment practices are consistent with the requirements of the Access to HE Diploma and credit specifications, and QAA's grading guidance, and in particular:
    - judgements about grades are made with reference to the chosen grade descriptors for the unit
    - student performance is described in accordance with the published requirements, using only Pass, Merit and Distinction grades, and no other form of grading is used
    - unit grades are determined according to the approved procedure
    - the process of grading in assessment has been conducted fairly and consistently
  - where grades of Merit and Distinction are recommended for individual student achievement, the relevant grade statements for the chosen grade descriptors describe the standard of performance of the assessed work
  - grades are used consistently at subject level: where there is a comparable standard of performance on comparable types of assessed work by different students, the same grade is recommended
  - records relating to grades are properly maintained
  - lead moderators (or equivalent) are present at, and are full members of, final assessment boards (see Part I), and are involved in standardisation (see Part J).
- e The sampling of students' work will ensure that:**
- the number of samples of assessed work is consistent with the AVA's guidance about minimum sample size and how this should be calculated. AVA guidance may also allow the moderator to make particular requirements to respond to subject norms and to take account of exceptionally small or large cohorts
  - the range of samples of assessed work is consistent with the AVA's guidance about range. This will specify that the sample should include a range of different students' evidence of achievement for the same complete units, with records of the related unit grade profiles and proposed unit grades.
- f The requirements of moderator reporting will ensure that:**
- the AVA receives regular reports on standards of student achievement and performance on each Access to HE course, including information about grades awarded at subject and course level
  - the AVA receives regular reports on the process of assessment on each course, including the use of grade descriptors and the operation of grading practices.



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