

Members' Report

QAA Members – Improving Social Mobility through Access to HE

Brandon Layton, Access to HE graduate and International Relations student at Durham University:
“One of the biggest positives of the Access to HE Diploma is that what it teaches has meaning and is transferable to university. It’s such an underused course for what it gives – it’s amazing”

An alternative route into HE for students without the necessary prior attainment is provided by Access to HE Diplomas. They are...predominantly undertaken by mature learners, and are widely accepted as an entry qualification to HE. Those universities that do not already offer them may wish to develop their own Access Diplomas or collaborate with FECs in their creation. Given the substantially lower fee levels for this type of provision, this will represent better value for money for students and taxpayers. – P103 Post-18 review of education and funding: independent panel report (The ‘Augar Review’)

The Access to HE Diploma, developed and regulated by QAA, is part funded through QAA’s voluntary membership services. The Diploma is delivered in Colleges, many of whom are QAA members. Each year, around 20,000 Access to HE students apply for a degree course at a UK university. The Diploma helps higher education institutions meet their strategic objectives around widening participation, and provides a pool of high achieving students typically graduating in subjects critical to national skills agendas.

How are QAA Members involved in Access to HE?

We know that our members across the UK highly value the Access to HE Diploma, and appreciate the key strategic role they play in quality assuring Access to HE Diplomas. Members are active participants in QAA’s Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC) and its development groups, which are responsible for the operation and development of the Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education.

QAA Members are involved in the following:

- participating in moderation processes
- providing oversight on outcomes through their service on AVA committees
- assisting in the development of Access to HE courses
- advising on content
- taking part in validation processes
- recruitment
- partaking in widening participation for Access to HE students.

Sixty-nine members are approved to deliver QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas as part of their further education provision. We value the continued support of members and their sustained commitment to enhancing student success.

Why do so many students choose it?



Flexible

The Access to HE Diploma is structured to cater to the requirements of an ambitious cohort of students that traditional post-16 qualifications may not capture.



Responsive

Access to HE is designed to react to skills shortages in the labour market and to respond quickly and effectively to changes in circumstances. This was exemplified by its effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Widens participation

The diploma creates life changing career opportunities, and is a cost-effective way for students to enter higher education.

What is the role of QAA?

Development of the Diploma

QAA conducts development work to make sure Access to HE Diplomas provide comprehensive preparation for higher education for adult students. An example of this was our recent work in developing a subject descriptor in Medicine which is being piloted by five providers this academic year and is likely to be rolled-out nationally in September 2021.

Promotion

QAA promotes the Diploma on behalf of our members, and encourages higher education providers to accept Access to HE students.

Regulation and quality assurance

QAA draws on its extensive experience of quality assurance within higher education to ensure robust quality assurance mechanisms are in place and standards are maintained. QAA works with designated Access Validating Agencies to maintain standards and assure quality, inspiring confidence within the higher education sector about the value of the award.

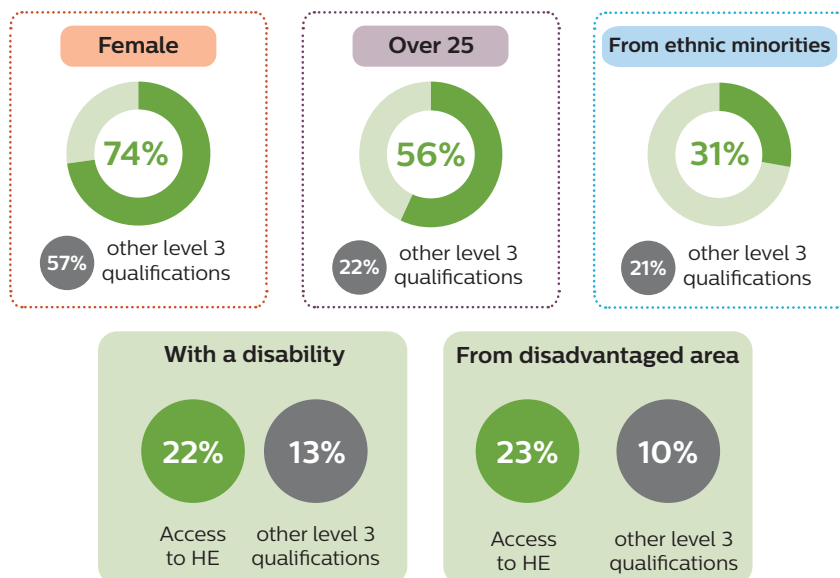
QAA's stewardship and development of the qualification since 1997 has seen a locally recognised qualification achieve national status. The development of a credit-based Diploma with a common grading scheme, size and structure resulted in the qualification being accepted into the UCAS tariff from September 2017.

Benefits to students

The Access to HE Diploma is particularly popular among students in underrepresented groups who are more likely to miss out on traditional A-level qualifications.

This includes:

- mature students
- students from ethnic minority groups
- disabled students
- students from disadvantaged backgrounds

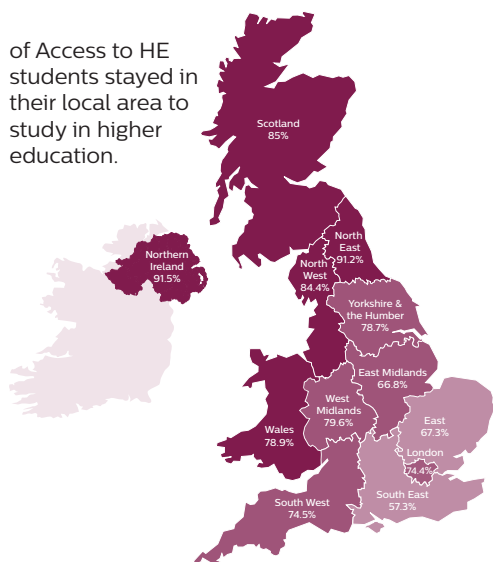


Benefits to society

Going to university



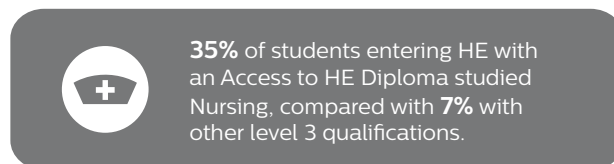
of Access to HE students stayed in their local area to study in higher education.



What do they study?



Top 5 HE subjects studied by students with an Access to HE Diploma



- Access to HE contributes to regional economic development with a majority of Access students opting to study in their local regions
- At a national level, Access to HE students are more likely to choose key occupational courses such as health courses, plugging shortages in the labour market. Access students tend to be more focused on graduate careers and improving their employment opportunities than other students, fortifying the link between the Diploma and strengthening the labour market
- There is evidence to suggest that Access to HE positively impacts entire families, with children following the footsteps of their student parents, and vice versa.

Benefits to higher education providers

There are clear benefits of accepting Access to HE students for higher education providers. Engagement with Access to HE ensures that talent is not lost and creates a constructively diverse student body that helps all students learn in a rich environment. In addition to demonstrating support for widening participation and inclusivity in student recruitment, Access to HE students account for substantial revenue from tuition fees, amounting to millions of pounds. The figures provided by HESA indicate that around 20,000 students with Access to HE Diplomas are accepted each year onto degree courses, and that Access to HE students are more likely to complete courses than students of other qualifications (just 12% of Access to HE students did not complete their higher education courses, compared with 17% of students of other level 3 qualifications).

The table below shows the entrant numbers for providers who admit the most AHE students.

Number of AHE students entering higher education in 2018-19	Higher education institution
845	Birmingham City University
773	Teesside University
629	The University of Wolverhampton
582	University of Plymouth
554	Sheffield Hallam University
511	University of Northumbria at Newcastle
503	London South Bank University
479	Anglia Ruskin University
455	The University of Salford
444	The University of Sunderland
436	University of the West of England, Bristol
427	The Manchester Metropolitan University
422	University of Derby
409	Coventry University
400	The University of Greenwich
392	The University of East London
372	Liverpool John Moores University
359	The University of Central Lancashire
327	The University of Bradford
325	University of Worcester
316	The University of Huddersfield

Pandemic response

The responsive and flexible nature of the Diploma enabled QAA to quickly implement an Extraordinary Regulatory Framework for the Access to HE qualification to ensure that students receive accurate, fair and robust qualifications during the pandemic.

- Assessments were based on calculated grades only, avoiding the system of statistical grade adjustment that caused controversy for other qualifications over the summer.
- Overall national distribution of Pass (17.4%), Merit (35.1%) and Distinction (47.5%) grades awarded as a proportion of graded credit did not deviate significantly from the distribution of grades in previous years, indicating consistency and accuracy of the grading system in times of crisis.
- This was reflected in the overwhelmingly positive student feedback that the Diploma received.
- A new Extraordinary Regulatory Framework will be implemented for the academic year 2020–21.
- Students will be awarded grades for all graded units they complete.
- No estimated assessment grades will be received.

Over 22,000

Access to HE Diplomas awarded to students over the summer



Pass



Merit

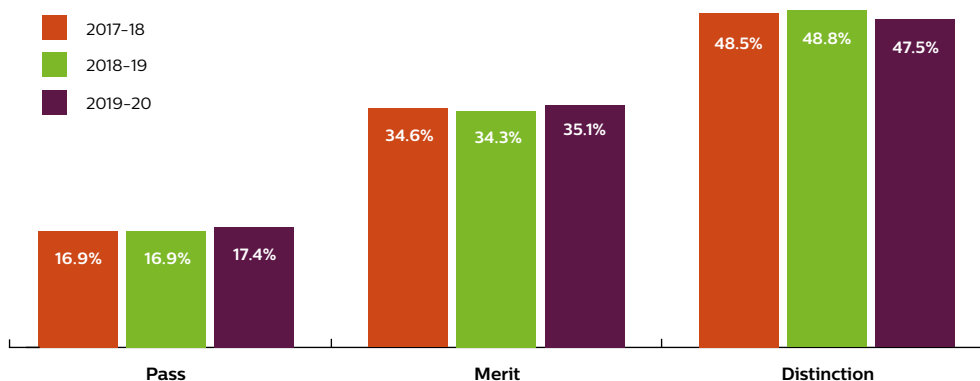


Distinction



Positive student feedback

National distribution of Pass, Merit and Distinction grades as a proportion of graded credit awarded



This report is published on the [QAA Membership Resources site](#), which gives our members exclusive access to a wide range of resources. It is funded by membership fees.