

The Access to HE Grading Scheme

Section E: Addendum

Information for Access Validating Agencies and Providers

August 2023

**Applicable to new students registering
from 1 August 2024**

1 Introduction

1 This document is an addendum to [Section E of the Grading Scheme Handbook](#). It has been developed for Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) and providers/centres to:

- provide information on an arrangement for dealing with those exceptional circumstances whereby a student has been unable to submit all the evidence required for the award of unit(s) that make up the Diploma
- support the application of the Award of the Diploma through extenuation.

2 The arrangements outlined in this document are effective from **1 August 2024**.

3 AVAs and providers/centres will apply the [QAA Grading Scheme](#) for the award of the Access to HE Diploma. The various sections of the Access to HE Grading Scheme jointly detail the common requirements, reference points and regulations that define how grading judgements are made and the process for the award of grades.

2 Awarding the Access to HE Diploma

4 Access to HE students often balance significant additional responsibilities alongside their studies. Support arrangements will be available to students from their course provider/centre if they are finding it difficult to learn or be assessed during their course of study. The arrangements for the award of the Diploma may include:

- award through extenuation
- partial achievement
- an aegrotat award
- extension to the course of study.

5 These arrangements will provide flexibility so that providers/centres can work with their AVA to ensure a suitable awarding arrangement is put in place to fit local needs and meet the individual needs of students.

6 It is expected that AVAs and providers/centres will use all available evidence to decide on which awarding arrangement should be applied. This should be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

Award through extenuation

KEY FACT: Award



If students can be assessed, they should be assessed and awarded, based on planned assessments. In those exceptional cases where they cannot be assessed, a student may still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, via the award through extenuation.

7 In some **exceptional** circumstances, **not all assessments can take place** and in such circumstances the **award through extenuation** is an arrangement that can support the award of unit(s) that make up the Diploma.

8 There will be a range of triggers that impact a student's ability to complete their studies, through no fault of their own, that can be assessed through the award through extenuation arrangements. Potential triggers may include student or provider/centre challenges. **In these exceptional circumstances, the student will be required to present sufficient evidence to be awarded through extenuation.**

9 AVAs will review the processes and procedures developed to support the application of the award through extenuation to ensure they continue to be:

- fit-for-purpose
- meet the requirements of the information in this document
- minimise additional impact or costs to AVAs and providers/centres.

10 Information for providers/centres on the processes and procedures developed to support the application of the award through extenuation will be available from the AVA.

11 The following information on award through extenuation is produced in the form of questions for AVAs and providers/centres to consider.

What happens if a student cannot submit all of the evidence for assessment required for the award of unit(s) that make up the Diploma?

12 Where a student **cannot** be assessed, the student **may** still be awarded unit(s) that make up the Diploma, through the award through extenuation. Other awarding arrangements may also include:

- partial achievement
- an aegrotat award
- extension to the course of study.

How is a unit awarded through extenuation?

13 The award through extenuation will be managed and processed through the **Awards Board**. The award through extenuation will be **evidence-based**.

14 To determine whether the unit can be awarded through extenuation, the tutor/provider will draw upon either:

- established sources of evidence, or
- alternative lines of evidence.

15 Sufficient evidence will need to be available for tutors/providers/centres to make a judgement on the award of a unit through extenuation. This means that tutors/providers/centres may need to ensure established sources of evidence (that is, additional student assessment), or alternative lines of evidence (existing evidence that reflects a learner's performance) are available.

For the **award of credit**, the available evidence must relate to the **learning outcomes** of each unit to be awarded.

How is a graded unit awarded through extenuation?

16 The arrangements for the award of a unit through extenuation as outlined above will be

applied to the grading of units. It is expected that the tutor/provider/centre will draw upon either established sources of evidence or alternative lines of evidence, that are sufficient to satisfy **grading decisions**.

For **graded units**, the available evidence must relate to the **learning outcomes** of each unit to be awarded and the **components and sub-components of the grading standards** assigned to the unit.

What do the arrangements look like for units where a cohort cannot submit all of the evidence required for the award of units?

17 It is important to differentiate individual claims for extenuation and cohort-level 'group claims' for extenuation as a result of organisational challenges at a provider/centre.

18 Providers/Centres should notify their AVAs about any cohort-level challenges as soon as possible.

19 If a provider/centre submits an application with associated evidence for approval, the AVA will follow their processes aligned to the Awards Board. **The AVA will assess each claim on a case-by-case basis to ensure an appropriate action is applied.** This may require the AVA to scale up the processes aligned to the Awards Board. It may also be necessary to undertake an investigation of the provider/centre.

What sources of evidence can be used?

20 To ensure that the award of a unit (including the grading of units) is sufficiently valid and reliable, a tutor/provider/centre will draw on a range of suitable evidence upon which to base their judgements. This could include a range of available assessment (and other) evidence that represents the breadth of underpinning knowledge, understanding and skills aligned to the learning outcomes of the unit and assigned components and sub-components of the grading standards, where applicable, so students can progress with confidence.

21 This section of the document offers some examples of sources of evidence which may be used by tutors/providers/centres when making judgements about the award of unit(s) and grading decisions.

22 Tutors/Providers/Centres will carefully consider and make use of the evidence which is most appropriate for the award of a unit and associated grades, if applicable. In considering the evidence to be used, care must be taken to avoid affording undue advantage or disadvantage to an individual or groups of students. The process must ensure fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgements by the tutor/provider/centre.

23 There are no limitations to the number of pieces of evidence, or number of different types of evidence that may be submitted. The evidence submitted must be sufficient for the unit(s) and grade(s) to be awarded, where applicable. Certain types of evidence may not be used in isolation, for example:

- tracker of achievement and attainment over the course
- witness testimonies and teacher observation.

24 There are two types of evidence to support the award through extenuation:

Established sources of evidence

Student assessment **generated specifically** to support the award of unit(s) and grade(s).

Alternative evidence

Existing evidence that reflects a learner's performance which can be used to inform the award of unit(s) and grades.

25 Below is a list of example evidence that can be used when awarding units and grades through extenuation. This list is not exhaustive, nor does it infer that all or any of the evidence would be appropriate for use.

- summative assessments, including partially completed summative assessments (assessment **of** learning)
- formative assessments (assessments **for** learning)
- notes from class-based activities (student and/or tutor)
- records of professional/academic discussions (Viva)
- research notes
- reflective practice journal/learning log
- blogs, wikis, chat groups between learners for taught sessions; if evidence of this nature is used, data protection legislation should be adhered to
- evidence from work experience (where relevant)
- tracker of achievement and attainment over the course when used in conjunction with other forms of assessment evidence
- witness testimonies and teacher observation when used in conjunction with other forms of assessment evidence.

What does sufficient evidence look like?

26 Sufficient evidence should:

- reflect the evidence that is available
- demonstrate learning outcomes have been met
- support grading decisions
- be clear for a student to understand why the evidence has been selected and how it has been used to arrive at the decision to award a unit/grade (if applicable), should they seek to appeal their unit grade
- not result in a different distribution of results at a cohort level to previous years unless there is an explanation to support this.

What if it is not possible to generate sufficient evidence for the award of a unit?

27 If it is not possible to generate sufficient evidence to meet the learning outcomes of a unit, that unit **cannot be awarded** through extenuation. As part of extenuation, a range of other awarding measures may be applied. This may include:

- partial achievement
- an aegrotat award
- extension to the course of study.

What if it is not possible to generate sufficient evidence to grade a unit?

28 If there is not sufficient evidence to grade a unit but there is sufficient evidence to meet the learning outcomes of that unit, the student will be awarded a Pass.

What is the process for the award through extenuation?

Awards Board

- The award through extenuation will be managed and processed through the Awards Board.
- Section E of the Grading Scheme Handbook summarises the actions that AVAs must take to ensure that student awards and results are properly managed and processed.
- AVAs will review their usual processes for the award of the Diploma and identify what they may need to consider in order to provide effective arrangements for the award of the Diploma through extenuation.

The Awards Board will:

- consider whether the application and associated evidence provided suggest, on balance of probability, that the student's achievement has been compromised by circumstances beyond their control
- review available evidence (established/alternate) to ascertain whether it provides sufficient evidence for the award of the unit(s) (that is, achievement of associated learning outcomes)
- review available evidence (established/alternate) to ascertain whether it provides sufficient evidence for the grading of the unit (graded units only).

Moderation and standardisation

- Section D of the Grading Scheme Handbook summarises the ways in which a common overall approach to grading and consistent standards are secured in the award of grades on the Access to HE Diploma, through the processes of standardisation and moderation.
- As awarding bodies for the Access to HE Diploma, AVAs are responsible for the standards of the awards that they make. Each AVA is required to maintain a system of moderation through which it assures the consistency and sufficiency of standards of student achievement.
- The shift to 'extenuated' models of assessment should be treated as any other assessment model.
- Evidence submitted for the award of the Diploma through extenuation should be quality assured in line with the regulations set out under the Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education.

Results

29 AVAs will manage the process of award through extenuation to ensure results are made available to students and that they are not advantaged or disadvantaged in terms of progression.

Appeals

30 The procedure for student appeals is detailed in Grading Scheme Handbook - Section C. The grounds for appeal on the Access to HE Diploma are restricted to:

- evidence of administrative error (for example, incorrect recording of grades submitted to the AVA by tutor, not all available evidence used to make judgement, unit midpoint grade not calculated correctly), or
- evidence of procedural error (that is, the correct application of the Award through Extenuation protocols).

31 The AVA will not accept appeals against:

- professional judgements of course tutors
- the efficacy of the evidence presented to support such professional judgements.

32 Provider/Centre representatives may appeal on behalf of students or in their own right. The grounds for appeals from Access to HE Providers/Centres are restricted to:

- evidence of administrative error by AVA (for example, AVA did not review all available evidence used to support the award of units through extenuation)
- evidence of procedural error by AVA (for example, incorrect processing of grades, adjustment of grades)
- sanctions applied as a result of maladministration or malpractice allegations.

33 If the appellant believes the appeals process has not been followed by the AVA, they should make a written complaint to QAA within 15 working days of receipt of the outcome of their appeal from the AVA.

Is there a threshold for the number of units that can be awarded through extenuation?

34 There is no threshold. The Awards Board will consider the claim and any associated evidence presented by the student when determining what measures should be applied. The possible awarding measures to be applied will include:

- award through extenuation
- partial achievement
- an aegrotat award
- extension to the course of study.

This addendum replaces the equivalent addendum to *The Access to Higher Education Diploma Grading Scheme, October 2022*. It applies to all new students registering on Diplomas from 1 August 2024. The Access to HE Diploma Specification has also been updated to apply to all new students registering on Diplomas from 1 August 2024.

For students registered before 1 August 2024, please visit www.qaa.ac.uk/access-to-he for details of *The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification, January 2020* and *The Grading Scheme, September 2020*.

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