

Part K: Standardisation

This document 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. In this context, standardisation refers both to:

- 1 **Process**, in terms of the consistent use of standard reference points and common procedures by tutors, moderators and Access Validating Agencies (AVAs)
- 2 **Judgement**, in terms of the validity and reliability of grading decisions and the way in which these are confirmed to ensure that common student outcomes are rewarded by common grades.

1 Process

The Access to HE grading framework specifies a number of common processes and other features (detailed in other parts of this handbook, as indicated below) designed to ensure consistency in the overall approach to grading. The common application of these particular features provides the essential foundations for consistency of outcomes:

- seven common grade descriptors, which define the areas of performance that are assessed by grading on Access to HE Diploma courses (see Part C)
- a set of Merit and Distinction statements for each of the grade descriptors (see Part C), which provide standard reference points for all grading decisions
- detailed components for each Merit and Distinction statement, which allow the descriptors to be modified within specified limits, so that they remain equally appropriate for different subjects and different assessment tasks (see Part C)
- guidance about the wording of the descriptors and components to support common understanding and interpretation of the descriptors (see Part E)
- a standard approach to identifying which grade descriptors are to be used for each unit (see Part D)
- a standard procedure for approving the grade descriptors for each unit (see Part D)
- guidance on how to use a unit's approved grade descriptors when the unit is assessed by more than one assignment (see Part E)
- detailed instructions on the process to be followed to arrive at a final grade for each unit (see Part F)
- requirements relating to moderation, which define the means by which moderators confirm that grading processes are operated as intended and grade descriptors are used consistently in making grading judgements (see Part H)
- regulations about the number and types of reassessment opportunities that are permitted (see Part I)
- standard procedures which relate to the confirmation and award of grades by providers and Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) (see Part J).

2 Judgement

The standard reference points and procedures, taken together, provide a common framework, which is fundamental in assuring consistency. However, following common procedures does not, of itself, ensure common outcomes, as outcomes also depend on the individual decisions that are made. Similarly, external confirmation that certain procedures have been followed, while essential in providing a common basis for awards, is not sufficient to ensure that consistent judgements have been made and that outcomes for students are fair. While it is not possible to separate entirely assessment decisions from the assessment process, as decision-making is a part of that process, it is nonetheless important to give special attention not only to **how** judgements are made but to **what** judgements are made.

As awarding bodies for the Access to HE Diploma, AVAs are responsible for the standards of their own awards. An AVA is required, by the terms of its AVA licence, to have a system of moderation through which the 'consistency and sufficiency of standards of student achievement' are assured, and the role of moderation plays a key role in assuring consistency in the standards of awards. (The moderator's role in relation to standardisation is described in Part H.) Moderation is principally concerned with ensuring that results which have been given by tutors are reliable and valid, as part of the process of confirmation of awards, before results are formalised. Standardisation, on the other hand, is principally concerned with building effective practice for the future.

Each AVA is responsible for the design and operation of its own mechanisms for standardisation, and the AVA will specify the format and focus of its standardisation events. Nonetheless, all AVAs should take account of the need for:

- standardisation within centres
- standardisation between centres
- moderator standardisation.

The particular standardisation mechanisms used will depend on an AVA's size; the geographical distribution of its providers; the organisation of provision (for example, the extent of the use of common units by different providers) and the nature of assessment (for example, the extent to which students are assessed through common assignments). In all cases, however, an AVA's standardisation mechanisms should be designed to secure assessment (including grading) judgements that are:

- a) **valid** - standards of awards are consistent with the external reference points for the Access to HE Diploma (that is, grades given to assessed work reflect the standard of achievement defined by the unit's learning outcomes and the grade statements for the specified grade descriptors)
- b) **reliable** - consistent standards are operated in the award of grades by individual tutors, within course teams and between providers across the AVA as a whole (that is, the same grade(s) is/are given where comparable standards of performance have been demonstrated).

While some AVAs already operate standardisation procedures which are appropriate in their general approach, the introduction of grading means that **standardisation needs to give particular attention to the differentiated judgements** that are indicated by the award of different grades. Although there are no single final grades awarded (so it would be inappropriate, for example, to seek to define a 'merit portfolio'), an AVA's standardisation mechanisms should nonetheless provide a focus on judgements made about the use of grade indicators of pass, merit and distinction, as they are applied for each of the grade descriptors, in different subject areas.



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