

OCN

London



Access to HE Diploma Guide

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OCN LONDON

WHO WE ARE

OCN London is a national not-for-profit organisation that creates and awards qualifications. We are one of the UK's leading Access Validating Agencies. This means we are licensed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to develop and award Access to HE Diplomas.

We work in partnership with universities, colleges, training providers, charities, employers and many other organisations to help transform people's lives through learning. Our focus is on providing opportunities for people – many of them 'second chance' learners who have missed out on traditional education – to progress and achieve their potential. This is at the heart of our mission.

WHAT WE DO

We offer **national awards** specialising in qualifications for learners aged 14 upwards. We are a market leader in the recognition of achievement through credit-based units. This approach offers maximum flexibility for learners and the opportunity to create learning programmes that reflect people's interests and ambitions.

We develop **bespoke programmes** that enable organisations to deliver accredited courses that meet their exact needs.

We run **training courses** for teachers and tutors, assessors, moderators and administrators.

We also offer a **quality mark** to organisations that want recognition for the quality of their work.

With a team dedicated to offering exceptional support and expertise, we have achieved a reputation for enhancing quality and providing a **personal and responsive service** to our centres.

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This qualification guide contains details of everything you need to know about the OCN London Level 3 Access to HE Diploma. It makes reference to the curriculum areas covered, identifies the learners for whom the qualification has been developed and specifies the Rules of Combination for achievement of the qualification.

The guide also covers any important aspects of assessment and moderation that are particular to this qualification.

The guide should be used by all of those involved in the delivery and assessment of these qualifications and can be adapted for learners to help them understand the structure of their Diploma.

This guide is intended as an overview. The [OCN London website](#) contains a wide range of resources and guidance on specific topics to help OCN London centres deliver the Access to HE Diploma.

QUALIFICATION OVERVIEW

The Level 3 Access to HE Diploma is a nationally recognised qualification which is designed to provide a preparation for study in higher education (HE) for adults returning to education.

Individual Diplomas are validated and awarded by Access Validating Agencies (AVAs), according to [regulations and specifications](#) set by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

There are over 1,000 different courses leading to the Access to HE Diploma and courses are available in most further education colleges in England and Wales.

Access to HE Diplomas are available for a range of different progression routes, such as Access to HE Diploma (Nursing), Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design), Access to HE Diploma (Business Studies) – OCN London offers around 50 such titles.

QUALIFICATION LEVEL

The Access to HE Diploma is a Level 3 qualification, although some units within it may be set at Level 2.

It has a qualification credit value of 60 credits:

- 45 credits graded at Level 3 in academic subject specific units and
- 15 credits ungraded at Level 2 or Level 3 (mainly in study skills units)

A credit is equivalent to a 'notional' 10 hours of learning, which includes time spent in class and private study.

ASSESSMENT MECHANISM

The Access to HE Diploma assessment mechanism incorporates:

- assessment tasks which are designed and set by the Centre
- internal assessment of learner work
- internal and external moderation of assessment.

WHO THE QUALIFICATION IS FOR

The Access to HE Diploma is a qualification which prepares learners for study at university. It is designed for adults who would like to study in UK Higher Education but who do not have the necessary entry qualifications, such as A Levels.

It offers a general introduction to study skills and key areas of knowledge within the subject(s) taken, helping adults to become independent, self-directed learners and prepare them for the demands of undergraduate studies. It offers a positive and supportive learning experience where adults can build their skills and confidence.

The qualification is well established, widely accepted by universities and included in the UCAS tariff system. A large majority of those who enrol on Access to HE Diplomas with OCN London make successful applications to university degree courses. Learners who study the Access to HE Diploma find they are well prepared for study at university.

ENTRY GUIDANCE

There are no centrally specified formal requirements for qualifications on entry; however there is usually the expectation that the learner will have literacy, communication skills and numeracy at Level 2 or above.

In some Diplomas – particularly Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Teacher Training – it is likely that learners will need to hold GCSEs at grade A*-C in English and Maths, as these qualifications usually form part of the entry requirements for the degree courses that learners progress to.

QUALIFICATION STRUCTURE

UNITS AND RULES OF COMBINATION

In order to gain the Award, the learner must achieve a total of 60 credits. Of these 60 credits, 45 credits must be achieved at Level 3 from graded units which are concerned with academic subject content. Graded units can be awarded at Pass, Merit or Distinction. The remaining 15 credits must be achieved at Level 2 or Level 3 from units which are ungraded. Some Diplomas do not have any level 2 units available.

Units described as having academic subject content will contain learning outcomes which draw from the knowledge and skills of subjects directly related to the subject of the named Diploma. For example, academic subject units in the Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) will contain knowledge and skills which directly relate to Nursing (e.g. Biology).

The Rules of Combination are set at the time of validation. A set of units will be validated for each Diploma and only units which form part of the Rules of Combination document may be selected and delivered by an approved centre as part of their Access to HE Diploma course.

The Diploma is awarded upon successful completion of the specific units which meet the Rules of Combination and the required 60 credits.

The set of units and Rules of Combination approved for any named Diploma are designed in such a way as to constitute the foundation for a clearly structured and coherent programme of study for learners, with a range and balance of content that ensures learners are prepared for successful study in Higher Education.

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Within each unit there are learning outcomes which are statements of what a learner may reasonably be expected to know, understand or do. The Learning Outcomes will be appropriate to assessment at either Level 2 or Level 3.

Each learning outcome has a set of assessment criteria which describe the requirements a learner is expected to meet in order to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved. All the assessment criteria must be met for a learner to achieve a unit.

GRADES, GRADE DESCRIPTORS AND GRADE DESCRIPTOR COMPONENTS

The graded units in an Access to HE Diploma are graded using a scheme which has been designed to accommodate the flexibility of the qualification (it can be applied to all Access to HE Diploma graded units, whatever their subject or structure). Grade descriptors are assigned to each Level 3 graded unit at the point of approval and each Centre will choose the grade descriptor components that best suit the tasks that have been set to enable a grade to be determined by the tutor.

The wording set by QAA for the grade descriptor components can be found in the [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section B](#).

A grade of Pass, Merit or Distinction is awarded for every graded Level 3 unit that a learner completes successfully as part of an Access to HE Diploma.

The grade descriptors make use of a number of general terms such as 'very good' and 'excellent' which are commonly used in assessment situations as a shorthand to summarise a standard of performance. The precise meaning of these terms varies slightly between different subject areas and assignments, but some general principles should be observed.

- All of the Merit descriptors relate to performance that is 'significantly better than pass (learning outcomes have been achieved), but not as good as Distinction'.
- The word 'generally' often features in the components for Merit, and the word 'consistently' for Distinction. Tutors using the descriptors containing this language should take 'generally' to mean 'in most cases / instances' and 'consistently' to mean 'all the time / in almost every case / reliably'.
- The word 'excellent' is used a number of times within the descriptors to denote 'Distinction'. This should not be interpreted to suggest that absolute perfection is required in a learner's work before a Distinction grade can be awarded. It would be more appropriate to look for work that is outstanding, even though it contains some small mistakes, omissions or imperfections.

It is not expected that learners will understand the language used in the grade descriptors and grade descriptor components as these are written to assist the tutor when they are looking at the assessment strategy, designing an assessment task, assessing the learner's work and deciding on a grade. It is therefore important that tutors write a relevant explanation, which helps the learner to understand what they are expected to do in order to achieve the higher grades. This guidance should be linked to the tasks set, and the grade guidance and should not be a repetition of the grade components and should form part of the assignment brief.

There is [tutor guidance](#) on how to write effective assignment briefs and examples of grade guidance in the [OCN London devised assignment briefs](#). (These resources are available to approved centres through the centre log-in).

A grade indicator (P, M or D) is given for each grade descriptor used to assess that assignment. No intermediate or modified grade indicators can be given (e.g. P/M). The grade indicators together provide the grade profile for a unit for each learner (e.g. PMM) and the grade for the unit is calculated from this grade profile (e.g. M).

Grades are applied to learner work when it is assessed; once applied they cannot be changed unless it is through the internal or external moderation process.

At the end of the year a learner will have a number of assignments that are graded at Pass; others may be at Merit or Distinction. Each of these will be identified on the final transcript.

Grades can only be awarded for graded units which are part of the Diploma (and conform to the Rules of Combination). There is no overall grade for the Diploma..

REGISTERING LEARNERS

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Learners on a one year course (or the first year of a two year course) starting in September must be registered on the course with OCN London within 6 weeks of the course start date using the [QuartzWeb system](#).

Within 12 weeks of the course start date, or before learners submit their UCAS application, learners on a one year course must be registered against units amounting to 60 credits within the Diploma's specified Rules of Combination and the centre's course unit list.

Once registered on a set of units, changes cannot be made unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Requests made to OCN London on the required documentation will be considered on a case by case basis. A learner's non-achievement of a unit that they are registered on will not be considered as an exceptional circumstance. Any such requests cannot be made for more than a total of 9 credits and cannot be considered after more than 26 weeks from the start date of the course.

Learners on a two year course can be registered for 30 credits in their first year and for the remaining 30 credits at the start of the second year of their course. In this case, credits registered in the first year cannot be changed unless evidence for exceptional circumstances is provided and accepted by OCN London. Alternatively, learners may be registered for all 60 credits at the start of the first year.

ASSESSMENT AND MODERATION

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Learners are assessed through activities that are internally set by teaching staff and which enable the assessment criteria for a unit to be met. Tutors mark the work to check it is:

- authentic – the result of the learner’s own performance or activity;
- sufficient – enabling assessors to make a consistent and reliable judgement;
- adequate – appropriate to the level.

Achievement is not confirmed until the work has been through the internal moderation and external moderation processes and the recommended result has been confirmed by the OCN London Awards Board.

The Awards Board deliberates on the recommendations made and approves the award of credits, grades and Access to HE Diplomas to learners who have met the relevant requirements.

The Awards Board also makes decisions about referrals and special cases. OCN London issues Access to HE Diplomas and transcripts of achievement to the Centre for distribution to learners following confirmation at the Awards Board.

THE ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Assessment strategy for Access to HE Diplomas will differ from centre to centre according to local traditions and strengths and the precise subject specific content of their courses. However, it is recommended that the certain principles should underpin the design of a written assessment strategy which should be constructed by the team responsible for delivering the course. This should be regarded as a key teaching, learning and assessment planning document which is regularly consulted and adjusted in response to the experience of delivering the programme. It should be reviewed as part of quality assurance processes.

Diagnostic testing and individual learning goals:

Once an individual learner has been diagnosed as possessing the skills required to succeed on a full Level 3 Access to HE Diploma, precise individual learning goals should be adopted to form the basis of regular review in academic tutorials. These goals should refer to an individual’s specific academic skills and development needs related to the requirements of the learning outcomes in the Diploma units.

Study skills:

Teaching, learning and assessment activities in study skills should be explicitly linked to the subject specific content of the Diploma. Subject specific assignment briefs should, in part, explore subject content through study skills activities such as note taking, summary writing, reading and comprehension exercises, referencing, citation etc.

Problem-solving:

All assignment briefs should challenge learners with problem-solving tasks, and not simply require learners to recycle source materials.

Processing sources:

There should be a strong focus on teaching and learning activities that help learners develop the ability to think critically, to investigate, interrogate, question, compare and contrast source materials.

Academic writing:

Assignment briefs across the course should be constructed in a sequence of incremental difficulty, especially in the first term. In particular, academic writing skills should be developed through using a range of tasks designed to prepare learners gradually to manage more substantial pieces of writing in the second and third terms. This should include academic conventions of citation, referencing and bibliography.

Formative and summative assessment:

The assessment strategy should include formative assessment activities, not all of which necessarily contribute towards the evidence submitted for final graded units. There should be an explicit link between formative assessment activities and summative assessment so that they are related.

Coherent sequencing:

There should be coherent sequencing of formative assessment within units and across units so that tasks and assignments show an explicit developmental curve in academic skills required and depth of subject knowledge expected.

In-class and out-of-class:

Formative activities should be devised that require work from learners outside of class time, but which are explicitly linked to in-class activity. Investigatory tasks, including reading challenges, should be set for learners to tackle outside of class time, but which are carefully guided by tutors, the outcomes of which are monitored by tutors and which form part of assessments both formative and summative.

Grade descriptors:

Close attention should be paid to the use of the grade descriptors in the design of assignment briefs. Tasks should be set that enable learners to show:

- GD1 understanding of subject through problem-solving activities
- GD2 application of knowledge in subject specific contexts
- GD3 application of subject specific skills in context
- GD4 use of information to solve subject specific problems and not just recycling of blocks of information
- GD5 command of communication and presentation skills consistent with subject specific conventions

In addition, expectations of learner autonomy, GD6, should increase in level of challenge during the programme. This should include tutors supporting learners in portfolio building in order to help learners to take increasing responsibility for the management of their own learning.

The final descriptor, GD7, is about quality and must be used with all units. It is of a different nature and character to the other descriptors and allows for professional judgement about quality across the whole of a learner's work.

Tutorial reviews:

There should be regular tutorial reviews of learner progress against the 60 credit target and individual goals determined in the initial ILP discussions.

The use of VLE and blended learning approaches to assessment should be included where possible and where it is applicable.

ASSESSMENTS AND ASSIGNMENT BRIEFS

Tutors develop unit assessment tasks that indicate how assessment criteria will be covered for both graded and ungraded Level 3 units and Level 2 units. For graded Level 3 units, grade descriptors will be applied across the assessment of the unit. There should be clear links between the assessment criteria, the tasks set and the grade components selected for the grade descriptors.

The assignment brief is made up of these assessment tasks and it should be internally moderated by the Centre before being set by tutors.

All assignments must have a specific deadline date which learners are notified of in advance (for example on the assignment brief, or in a formal assessment plan provided to learners). Learners must submit by the deadline specified.

For further information, see the [OCN London Tutor Guidance on Designing Effective Assignment Briefs](#) (centre log-in required).

SUBMITTING ASSESSMENTS

In order to ensure all learners have the same opportunity to achieve, the regulations for submitting assessments, as specified below, must be followed by all centres. Further guidance can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance on Submission Processes](#) (centre log-in required).

Draft submissions

Opportunities to submit assignments (or parts of assignments) in draft for comment and feedback by tutors before the formal submission date are permitted only for the particular assignments where the tutor has decided that this is appropriate and has specified this in advance. It may be appropriate in the first term or the first time an assessment method with specific requirements, such as an essay or a report, are used. Such opportunities will not be the norm.

Where the opportunity for the submission of drafts exists, this is specified to all learners in writing before they begin work on the assignment. It should be clear to learners what they can submit as a draft and how feedback will be provided. A deadline should be set and there is space on the OCN London assignment brief template to do this.

Teaching staff may provide written or verbal feedback on drafts and engage in dialogue of a general kind which allows learners to see how they might develop their response to the assignment brief. In responding to draft submissions, tutors are not permitted to:

- make detailed corrections to a draft submission;
- provide information about predicted grade indicators, or other detailed information about possible grading judgements.

Once a formal submission has been made, neither the learner nor the tutor may later declare it to be a draft.

Late submissions and agreed extensions

If work is submitted after the formal deadline has passed, and no extension has been granted (and there are no exceptional extenuating circumstances which explain the failure to request an extension), all grade indicators (see below) relating to that assignment must be capped at Pass. There is no opportunity for resubmission except via the referrals process (see [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section E](#)).

Providers must state their formal procedures for application for an extension to a deadline, and grounds for approval of an extension, in the standard course documentation. The implications for grading if an assignment is submitted late without an extension being granted must also be stated in the standard course documentation (for example, in a course handbook).

The provider's standard written procedures for approval of extensions must be applied on all occasions when a learner requests an extension to the deadline given on the assignment brief sheet.

Successful and unsuccessful submissions

If a submission is not successful at the first attempt (that is, one or more of the assessment criteria for the assignment has not been achieved), the assignment is regarded as an unsuccessful submission.

When a submission is unsuccessful, no credit can be awarded, it is not eligible for grading and (in the case of graded units) the grading process should not be applied. In these circumstances, the learner should be offered the possibility of resubmission.

Resubmissions

Resubmissions must be managed in accordance with the detailed QAA regulations for resubmissions (see [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section C](#)). In particular:

- the original submission must be returned to the learner, with written feedback which explains which learning outcome(s) has / have not been achieved;
- no feedback about the standard of the work in relation to grades may be given at this stage;
- the specific requirements of a resubmission opportunity must be made clear to the learner;
- resubmission must be consistent with the way in which the learning outcomes(s) were originally assessed (for example, an assessment conducted under exam conditions must be reassessed under the same conditions; the exception to this would be if it is not possible or practical for resubmission requirements to replicate the original assignment or assessment task, such as with group work, in which case the learning outcome(s) should be reassessed through an assignment which makes comparable demands to those of the original assignment);
- only one resubmission opportunity may be provided for any individual assignment (unless mitigating circumstances have been accepted).

Resubmission requirements must be proportionate to the degree of non-achievement. Normally this will mean that a new task has to be set that covers the assessment criterion that has not been met:

- a particular skill has not been fully demonstrated so a single assessment criterion has not been achieved; the resubmission requirements may address that one criterion and assess it in isolation;
- a number of assessment criteria have not been achieved or the non-achievement is deemed substantial in some other way; resubmission requirements are likely to involve a full reconsideration and reworking of the assignment as a whole.

Clear deadlines should be given for resubmission and these must be met by the learner.

Resubmissions should be subject to moderation. The learner's portfolio should include the original submission and the resubmitted work.

Learners cannot resubmit work to achieve a higher grade for a graded unit. The purpose of a resubmission is to give learners an additional opportunity to meet all the assessment criteria for a unit if they failed to do so in their original submission.

Referrals

If the resubmission is unsuccessful (that is, the resubmitted work still does not meet the learning outcome(s) in full), the only means by which a further opportunity for resubmission can be provided within the same registration period is through a referral. If considering a referral, teaching staff must ensure that key steps are taken and items of evidence provided, and in particular that the learner's situation and the best way for the learner to progress have been fully discussed with the learner.

When a learner has not achieved one or more of the assessment criteria of an assessment on first resubmission, or when work has been submitted late without an agreed extension, the learner may be referred for permission to make a second resubmission. When this occurs within the duration of the course, process A described below must be used. Where this occurs at the end of the course (for example, in final assessments), use process B.

A: Referrals during the course

Before referral, the tutor raises the possibility of a referral with the internal moderator. The internal moderator ensures that the following requirements are complied with:

- the learner completed the resubmission process and failed to achieve all the assessment criteria for the work being referred;
- tutors have discussed with the learner the best way for them to progress;
- the learner has been informed that referral does not automatically result in approval for a second resubmission;
- the learner has been informed that the decision to allow a further opportunity to submit one or more assignments at this stage of the course is made by the external Centre Moderator on the basis of evidence presented.

Evidence to support the case for referrals must make reference to:

- any special circumstances affecting the individual learner;
- the particular assignment in which it is recommended to the Centre Moderator that a learner is referred;
- details of the achievement in the original submissions and resubmissions for the unit(s) in question (including any other assignments that contribute to the assessment of the unit which have been achieved);
- the learner's total achievement profile up to the point on the Access to HE course that the referral is requested (including the title of units, credit value and indicative grades, and whether or not they were achieved on the basis of a second resubmission of work as a consequence of referral).

Requests for referrals will not normally be considered where the total credit value of the units which have already been achieved through referral, or might be achieved as an outcome of a further referral, is more than 15.

The records of this process and the request for a referral are forwarded to the Centre Moderator using the required form for a decision:

- LRef1 – Request for learner referral during the academic year
- LRef2 – form that accompanies successfully referred work that has been assessed and moderated.

These forms can be downloaded from the [OCN London website](#) or requested from the Centre Moderator.

Decisions about referrals made by the Centre Moderator must include:

- whether a second resubmission opportunity should be offered.
- the nature and extent of the requirements for resubmission, which must comply with the relevant requirements for first resubmissions.
- the deadline for the second resubmission; for referrals during the year, the deadline will take into account:
 - the need to inform the learner of the decision(s), which should be at the earliest opportunity following the request for referral being sent to the Centre Moderator;
 - the need to allow a limited but reasonable time for the learner to complete the resubmission;
 - the need to assess the resubmitted assignment(s).

B: Referrals at the end of the course

Referrals that are required at the end of the course need to be requested through the Centre Moderator at final moderation. All evidence must be presented and the referral form must be completed and given to the Centre Moderator.

The Centre Moderator will make a decision as to whether to present the request to the Awards Board. The decision on allowing a referral at this stage is made by the AVA Awards Board.

ACHIEVING CREDITS AND GRADES

MARKING LEARNER EVIDENCE

In all units learners must demonstrate the achievement of the required standard identified in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria in all formal assessment activities set by the tutor. The usual quality assurance requirements also apply (including internal and external moderation).

- In ungraded Level 3 units and Level 2 units, the unit will be 'achieved' or 'not achieved'. All assessment criteria must be met in order for the unit to be achieved.
- For graded Level 3 units, the unit will be recorded as Pass, Merit or Distinction when all assessment criteria have been met.
- The tutors use their professional judgement to make decisions about grade indicators, assessing the extent to which either the Merit or Distinction components used for each grade descriptor best describe the standard of work

presented by the learner. The decisions are based only the evidence provided by the learner, and must not be influenced by any other aspect of the work.

- A Pass grade indicator is used where it is judged that the learning outcomes for the assignment have been met, but the work does not achieve the standard required for Merit.
- The grading decisions for each grade descriptor are recorded as grade indicators, which together will create a profile of grades for a complete unit. The overall grade for the unit is based on this profile.
- Grade indicators are recorded only as Pass, Merit or Distinction (they are never combined or intermediate grades, such as Pass / Merit or Merit+)
- Numerical marks are only used in the very specific circumstances detailed in the QAA guidance document ([QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, Annex C1](#)). Numerical marks are not recorded as part of a unit grade profile. Numerical marking is being removed from the Access to HE Diploma and will not be permitted from September 2020.

Further guidance can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance](#).

FEEDBACK

Feedback on work which has not met the requirements of one or more assessment criterion, and therefore has not achieved the standard for graded achievement, must confirm only which aspect of an assessment criterion has not been achieved. It must not provide information on grading.

In Level 3 graded units, feedback must be relevant to and consistent with the requirements of the assessment criteria, grade descriptors and components used for the assignment.

Teaching staff should use the language of the grade descriptors with comments relevant to the work submitted to indicate how the grade standard has been achieved. Additional comments must be consistent with the standard identified in the chosen grade descriptors, and relevant to the assessment criteria covered by the assignment.

Feedback in the context of large, developmental units needs special consideration. Some large credit units focus on development of skills and critical abilities which may be completed over a term or more and may involve significant amounts of discussion between tutors and learners as part of the teaching and learning process. (Such units are often found in art and design or creative arts programmes, or to support extended projects). This may or may not result in a record of the outcomes of the discussions and the subsequent changes a learner makes to their work. Whatever the subject or method of assessment, tutors must not provide feedback during the development of learner work which is so detailed that it becomes, in effect, coaching.

It is necessary to differentiate between supportive guidance and tutor intervention during the progress of work that leads learners to match specific learning outcomes and grade descriptors. This kind of intervention is not permitted.

Tutors must provide individual, developmental feedback about graded and ungraded performance.

Further guidance can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance](#).

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

A reasonable adjustment is any action that helps to reduce the effect of a disability or difficulty that places the learner at a substantial disadvantage in the assessment situation.

It is expected that the reasonable adjustments will be made in line with the centre's own relevant policies and procedures (e.g. fair assessment policy, equality and diversity policy, disability statement). The centre should keep a record of the process followed in order to decide to make a reasonable adjustment.

Reasonable adjustments are approved or set in place before the assessment activity takes place; they constitute an arrangement to give the learner access to the units and qualification. The work produced by the learner will be marked in the same way as the work of other assessed learners.

Awarding organisations and centres are only required by law to do what is 'reasonable' in terms of giving access. What is reasonable will depend on the individual circumstances, the impact of the disability on the individual, cost implications and the practicality and effectiveness of the adjustment. Other factors, such as the need to maintain competence should be taken into consideration.

On the Access to HE Diploma, it is expected that the centre will have asked the learner to identify any access needs when they are inducted onto the course and, in line with the centre's policy on supporting learners, the reasonable adjustments that the learner is eligible for should be agreed. Tutors on the course should be made aware where a reasonable adjustment may impact on how they intend to assess a learner.

Learners should also be aware (e.g. the procedure provided in their course handbook) how to apply for reasonable adjustments during the academic year. This will include the process for applying for an extension due to mitigating circumstances, as an extension is a type of reasonable adjustment.

In some cases, it may be necessary to devise a different task for the learner to ensure the validity of assessment (for example, if a learner is permitted to sit a test on a different day, the validity of the assessment may be reduced if other learners have already sat the test). The task must be internally moderated before it is set.

Permission does not need to be sought from OCN London for in-year reasonable adjustments to assessment methods on the Access to HE Diploma but a record of the process taken to agree the reasonable adjustment must be kept and available for consultation, upon request, by the Centre Moderator if there are concerns about the validity of assessment. It should be clear from the assignment brief, learner work or feedback when a reasonable adjustment has been applied.

The [OCN London Access to Fair Assessment Policy and Procedure](#) goes into further detail about reasonable adjustments. (NB: Sections 11-17 provide useful information but the process for applying to OCN London for a reasonable adjustment does not apply to the Access to HE Diploma unless the adjustment means that the learner will not complete their Diploma by final moderation).

[Disability Rights UK](#) provides examples of the types of adjustments that can be made for learners with specific impairments.

INTERNAL MODERATION

All work submitted by learners and marked by tutors is subject to internal moderation. It is recommended that an internal moderation schedule is constructed at the beginning of the academic year to ensure that internal moderation takes place in a timely fashion. Internal moderation takes two main forms:

INTERNAL MODERATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT BRIEF

Internal moderation of the assignment briefs is the process through which all assignments must pass before they are set for learners. Each assignment should be checked for its appropriateness and relevance to the unit assessment criteria, the selected grade descriptors, the selected grade descriptor components and its general fitness for learners moving from Level 2 towards Level 3 achievement.

These checks cannot be made by the author of the assignment, but are best conducted by subject specialists, quality assurance officers and often benefit from consultation with OCN London. All assignment briefs should be reviewed annually to ensure that they are up to date. This process should be part of the centre's quality assurance annual cycle.

An effective assignment brief will:

- enable the learner to meet all the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for the units;
- enable the learner to demonstrate the abilities identified in the selected grade descriptor components (for Level 3 graded units);
- not simply repeat the assessment criteria, but set a task or tasks to enable the learner to explore the assessment criteria;
- be innovative and stimulating and enable the learner to demonstrate their own subject specific skills and knowledge;
- draw on current materials in the subject area and not simply repeat exercises from dated text books;
- not roll up all the assessment criteria into one task when a multi-task assignment would be a more appropriate way for learners to demonstrate their learning.

Tasks should include a rich range of assessment challenges – oral, practical, investigatory, problem-solving and written. They should include essay writing and examinations, but these modes should not be used to the exclusion of all others.

The form of response required from learners should be precise. If the task requires an essay, that should be stated explicitly. Essay tasks should be supported with guidance that an essay is an elaboration of an argument, not just work that is written. If the task requires a report, the type of report needs to be specified – for example business, journalistic, court, health and safety. Briefs should avoid vague tasks such as 'write an assignment' or 'write an analysis' without specifying the precise format required.

Word limits appropriate to a Level 3 course should be specified. It would not normally be appropriate for any single task on an Access to HE course to require more than 1,500 words.

Tasks should be designed to challenge learners to interrogate sources, not simply recycle them as 'correct' answers. In Science tasks, for example, recycling correct factual information in copied form does not support achievement at Level 3. In these cases it is best to provide learners with the factual data and then set a task for them to use that data in some way to test their understanding.

There should be very careful use of the word 'research'. This should not be used as short hand for collating data, or as a euphemism for submitting downloaded text and images. Research tasks must have explicit goals that test learners' ability to process what they find, not simply locate relevant material.

Tasks should not be lifted from other qualifications such as A Levels or BTEC without careful modification to make them suitable for an Access to HE course. This is especially important in the marking and grading system. Numerical systems imported from other qualifications will not be consistent with the assessment criteria and grade descriptor system of the Access to HE Diploma.

Further information can be found in the [OCN London Tutor Guidance on Internal Moderation of Assignment Briefs and Designing Effective Assignment Briefs](#).

INTERNAL MODERATION OF ASSESSED WORK

Internal moderation of assessed work is the process through which the fairness, accuracy and consistency of achievement is checked within a Centre. This should be an ongoing process during the course of an academic year. It is a process in which all tutors involved in assessment should take part.

The process should check the fairness, accuracy and consistency of the assessment:

- of each tutor teaching on any of the courses within a centre
- of each unit within each course
- between units and courses.

In order to do this effectively a sample of assessment from each tutor and each unit from across all courses needs to be identified to be moderated. This kind of moderation can be conducted in moderation meetings in which tutors from across units and across Diplomas moderate fairness, accuracy and consistency. However, in all cases someone must have overall responsibility for moderation decisions.

By the end of a year, each tutor should have had some of their grading internally moderated and each unit should have been subjected to some internal moderation. Each centre is obliged to maintain up to date tracking sheets that record all grades given by tutors. Regularly reading these tracking sheets enables centres to identify unusual patterns that might suggest inconsistency in grading and therefore what might need some moderation attention.

INTERNAL MODERATION RECORDS

Records of internal moderation should be recorded on the OCN London templates – Internal Moderation of Assignment Briefs form and Internal Moderation of Assessed Work form – and kept in the internal moderation file for each course. The forms can be downloaded from the [OCN London website](#).

All used on the course must be approved by an internal moderator before it is set for learners. Where an [OCN London devised assignment brief](#) is used (with the tasks and grade guidance written by OCN London rather than the tutor) then this should be internally moderated using the Internal Moderation of OCN London Devised Brief form.

Good practice on these forms includes supportive developmental remarks, such as suggestions for improvement and refinement, not simply praise for peers' work. A sign of healthy internal moderation is the confidence to make constructive criticism and to action any issues which have been identified.

STANDARDISATION

Standardisation is a key exercise to ensure that all tutors are working to common standard. Internal standardisation must take place at the centre to ensure consistency in the application of level and credit within and across Diploma course teams. It is expected that this will be organised by the Access Coordinator, quality assurance staff or by course leaders. Forms for standardisation can be found on the [OCN London website](#) and materials to use for standardisation can be requested from OCN London if they are not available locally. It is expected that centres will keep a record of standardisation activities and any actions resulting from standardisation, and these will be available to view at external moderation visits.

OCN London will also run standardisation events in which centres are expected to participate when Diplomas that they offer are included. These events will focus on different Diplomas in different years.

Centres are required to report on the standardisation activity that has taken place at the centre in the Centre Self-Evaluation Report (which reflects on the previous year) and a mid-year Standardisation Report (completed before mid-year moderation).

TRACKING LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Learner achievement should be recorded for each learner and must be available at mid-year and final external moderation. This is an important process for monitoring learners' progress and enabling effective and robust internal moderation to take place. A tracking sheet template is available on the [OCN London website](#).

EXTERNAL MODERATION

CENTRE MODERATOR

Each centre is allocated an external Centre Moderator by OCN London. The Centre Moderator will coordinate external moderation activity for the centre throughout the year and lead the moderation team at mid-year and final moderation.

Centre Moderators will normally be a subject specialist in at least one of the Diplomas delivered at the centre, so will moderate this Diploma at mid-year or final moderation. If the centre is delivering multiple Diplomas or Diplomas outside of the Centre Moderator's subject specialism, then subject specialist moderators will be appointed by OCN London to review specific Diplomas at mid-year and final moderation.

All centres are given a day (about 7 hours) of support from the Centre Moderator as part of the membership fee. This can take the form of:

- Training (e.g. for new tutors, on assignment brief design, on internal moderation, general question and answer session).
- Facilitating a standardisation event.
- Reviewing assignment briefs.
- Drop-in session for tutors with queries.

If the centre requires training or support in addition to the day, then this can be requested from OCN London for an additional fee.

The centre will be provided with the Centre Moderator's OCN London email address. However, any emails to the Centre Moderator should copy in the Access to HE Standards

Officer (s.francis@ocnlondon.org.uk) – this is a full time staff member who may be able to respond to queries more promptly.

ANNUAL REVIEW

The Annual Review meeting takes place at the beginning of the autumn term between the Centre Moderator, Access Coordinator, Quality Manager and, if applicable, heads of department and other OCN London staff. Before the meeting, the Access Coordinator will complete the Centre Self-Evaluation Report and produce a Quality Improvement Plan, identifying how areas identified in the previous year's moderation reports will be addressed.

The Annual Review meeting provides an opportunity to reflect on the previous year and discuss the Centre Self-Evaluation Report and Quality Improvement Plan. The centre's plans for the forthcoming academic year will also be discussed, including the delivery and assessment plan and the dates for the mid-year and final moderation visits will be set.

It is recommended that some of the Centre Moderator support day (e.g. training for new tutors) is used on the same day as the Annual Review meeting.

MID-YEAR MODERATION

Around the mid-point of the course (usually in February), the Centre Moderator will make a visit to the centre to undertake Mid-Year Moderation. Tracking sheets for all courses should be sent to the Centre Moderator prior to Mid-Year Moderation.

The Centre Moderator identifies samples of work from the tracking sheets for scrutiny. In all cases, the sample is selected by the Centre Moderator not the centre. Subject Specialist Moderators (SSM) may be involved in Mid-Year Moderation. The SSM's role is to focus exclusively on the learners' work. Primarily, their function is to check that the tasks set are fit for purpose and that the credits and grades indicated by the tutors are supported by the evidence in the learners' work. They may visit the Centre to carry out this moderation, or may receive assessed work remotely.

The SSMs will feed back to the Centre Moderator on their findings, which will form part of the Mid-Year Moderation report. They will identify good practice such as innovative assignment briefs and developmental feedback, but they are also authorised to state where evidence is lacking to support the grades indicated and what additional evidence will need to be provided before final moderation.

In some cases, a request for evidence to be internally moderated by the centre may be made if it is considered necessary for the Centre to confirm grades awarded.

At the moderation visit, the Centre Moderator will also meet with learners and tutors from across the Diplomas at the centre.

A checklist to prepare for Mid-Year Moderation is available on the [OCN London website](#).

FOLLOW UP TO MID-YEAR MODERATION

Centres will be asked to produce a quality improvement plan for each course for any actions identified in the mid-year external moderation reports. The plan should identify in particular how issues identified as for required action before final external moderation are being addressed.

In March, April and May, OCN London staff members may visit Centres to follow up actions identified by the moderators in order to help Centres to prepare for a smooth final moderation.

FINAL MODERATION

At the end of the course (usually in June or July), the claim for the award of credit and grades for the units completed by the learners is made on the [pre-RAC system](#).

The moderation team makes a final moderation visit to check that all credits and grades recommended by tutors are fully supported by appropriate evidence. The portfolios of all learners are presented where claims are being made. Moderators will not approve credits and grades for learners whose portfolios are not available at final moderation.

The moderators usually spend all day in the centre looking at work. The moderators will either confirm grades or recommend the action that needs to take place before the grades can be agreed (for example, re-grading). No downgrading takes place without consultation between the representatives of the centre, the subject specialist moderator, the Centre Moderator and OCN London officers. However, it is crucial that all learners, tutors and curriculum managers understand that all grades are provisional and are subject to change until the Awards Board (see below) has confirmed final grade decisions.

Any requests for Extenuating Circumstances, Referral or Appeal to be considered by the Awards Board must be presented to the Centre Moderator at final moderation. The Centre Moderator will decide whether there is sufficient basis to and evidence for such requests for them to be put to the Awards Board.

Moderators will also provide supportive feedback on areas of good practice that they have seen and areas that could be improved or adjusted in the following academic year.

A checklist to prepare for Final Moderation and Tutor Guidance on External Moderation is available on the [OCN London website](#).

AWARDS BOARDS

Credits and grades awarded to any learner will not be confirmed until the AVA Awards Board has met. The Awards Board usually occurs around one week after the final moderation.

The Board does the following:

- confirms the award (or not) of all credits and grades for all learners on all courses within a Centre;
- receives and considers requests for Extenuating Circumstances, Referral and Appeal (more information can be found in the [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook Section E: Student results and awards boards](#) and on the [OCN London website](#)).

Once the Awards Board has confirmed final grades, OCN London generates the Access to HE Diploma certificate for each learner in early August. Certificates are sent to the centre, usually to the exams department. Learner results are also sent to UCAS at the beginning of August so that they can be made available to universities so that they can confirm if learners have met their offer conditions.

FURTHER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

OCN LONDON ACCESS TO HE TEAM

Marisa Castellini – Head of Access to HE – m.castellini@ocnlondon.org.uk (Mon–Thurs)

Sarah Francis – Access to HE Standards Officer – s.francis@ocnlondon.org.uk

Michelle Wood – Access to HE Development Officer – m.wood@ocnlondon.org.uk (Mon, Thurs, Fri)

Your centre will also have an allocated Centre Support Officer to help you with registration and certification (020 7278 5511).

OCN LONDON WEBSITE

Centre Area – Access to HE Diploma Guide, QAA documentation, forms and templates, funding information, awards board documentation

Learner Area – information for learners on studying Access to HE Diploma, including the Guide for Learners (downloadable resource) and guidance written by Linking London about applying the HE as an adult

Access to HE Diploma titles – rules of combination and approved unit lists.

For Approved OCN London Centres, using the centre log-in:

Units and indicative content (accessed via the rules of combination)

Resources and Guidance – checklists, marketing materials, forms and templates for specific assessment methods, tutor guidance documents covering:

- Designing Effective Assignment Briefs
- Internal Moderation of the Assignment Brief
- Submission Process
- Assessment, Grading and Giving Feedback
- Internal Moderation of Assessed Work
- External Moderation
- Standardisation
- Ten step guides to delivering Access to HE

OCN London devised assignment briefs – briefs, assessment materials and tutor guidance for study skills and a range of subject-specific units. Can be used as written or as an example of how to write effective briefs.

APPENDIX 1: USEFUL DEFINITIONS

QAA – The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, which develops the specification for the Access to HE Diploma – a nationally recognised qualification which is designed to provide a preparation for study in higher education for adults returning to education – and the regulations under which it is operated.

AVA – Access Validation Agencies, which are licensed by QAA to validate individual Access to HE Diplomas and to quality assure their provision through approved Centres.

OCN London – the AVA that learners are registered with and which will issue learner certificates after the Awards Board at the end of the course.

Level – the level of difficulty of a Unit. Most Access to HE Diploma units are at Level 3, but some are at Level 2 (see below).

Level 2 – broadly the same as GCSE grade A to C work. Learners can only ‘achieve’ Level 2 units.

Level 3 – broadly equivalent to studying at A level standard. Level 3 qualifications provide the knowledge and skills that learners need to progress to a degree or diploma course in higher education and roughly cover the same amount of information as a learner studying for three A levels. Pass, Merit or Distinction is awarded for Level 3 graded units. Level 3 ungraded units are listed as ‘achieved’. Generic descriptions of what learners are expected to be able to do at Level 2 and Level 3 can be found on page 17 of the [Access to HE Diploma Specification](#).

Units – each unit has assessment criteria, a credit value and a Level. The programme of study will include mandatory units that learners must complete, and subject units relevant to the pathway the learner is taking. The credit value of the unit indicates how much learning is involved. One credit is equivalent to a ‘notional’ ten hours of learning – which includes time spent in class and private study. Most units carry three credits (thirty notional hours of learning), but some are larger.

Assignment brief – outlines what learners need to do to achieve the assessment criteria for a unit. For Level 3 graded units, the grade descriptors and their components will also be listed. In addition, guidance regarding how to achieve the higher grades (Merit and Distinction) is also included. A specific submission deadline is shown on the assignment brief which learners must meet.

Learner declaration – this statement must be signed when learners are handing in their work. It is a confirmation that the work that the learner has handed in has been produced by them alone. False declaration of authenticity (for example, by claiming that something that the learner has downloaded was written by them) is academic malpractice.

Assessment criteria – each unit has a set of assessment criteria (AC); these describe what learners must demonstrate to show they have achieved the learning outcome. For Level 2 written assignments learners will produce work which is descriptive. For Level 3 written assignments learners will produce work which is broadly analytical. Not all assessment criteria will be covered by written work – learners may be expected to deliver a presentation or conduct an experiment to meet them. Assessment criteria are listed on the assignment brief so that learners can see how the tasks relate to the AC.

Grade descriptors – for each Level 3 graded unit there are grade descriptors attached which indicate how learners can demonstrate that their work has exceeded that required to gain a Pass. The learner may be awarded a grade at either Merit or Distinction. Grade descriptors vary across the different graded Level 3 units and link to the subject being assessed.

Grade descriptor component – each grade descriptor is made up of grade descriptor components which identify what needs to be achieved in order to be awarded the higher grades. From the assigned grade descriptor components tutors will choose the most appropriate combinations when they are writing the assignment briefs for the graded Level 3 units, and these will link to the tasks set.

Grade guidance – the grade descriptor components are a guide for the tutor and should not be repeated in the grade guidance to the learner. Grade guidance links the grade descriptor components to the tasks set in the assignment brief and helps learners to understand how to achieve the higher grades.

Credit – the credit value of a unit indicates how much learning is involved. A credit is equivalent to a ‘notional’ 10 hours of learning, which includes time spent in class and private study. Most units will give learners three credits at either Level 2 or Level 3, but some may give them more.

Numerical marking – this is only permitted if a Level 3 graded unit is assigned GD1 and / or GD3. However, there must be a clear link between the tasks set, the numerical system used and the grade components in order for the final grade to have been clearly indicated, particularly with reference to GD7 (Quality). Percentage boundaries are not permitted to differentiate between Pass, Merit and Distinction (e.g. 70% = Merit is not a measure of quality of learner evidence and is not allowed). ***Numerical marking will not be permitted on the Access to HE Diploma from September 2020.***

APPENDIX 2: SUBMISSION PROCESS FLOWCHART

