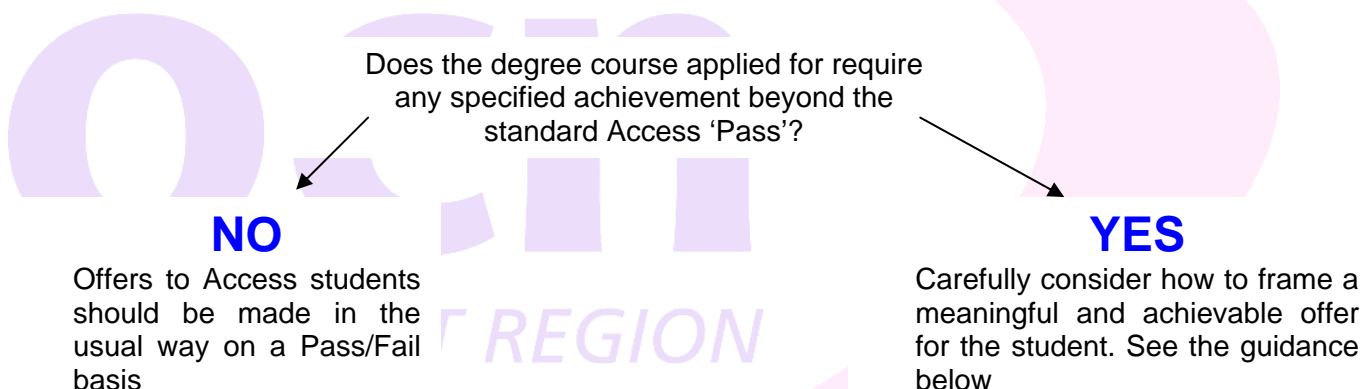


# Guidance for HE Admissions: Making offers to Access students using the QAA grading scheme<sup>1</sup>.

This guidance is issued by OCNSER in its role as a QAA approved Access Validating Agency for the south east of England. It is provided as an addition to the QAA guidance referred to in footnote 1 below.

## 1. Does a graded offer really need to be made?

HE admissions departments are invited to consider carefully if a graded offer needs to be made. If an Access Pass has been required for entry to specific degree courses in the past, is there a need to introduce a higher level of offer. Graded offers can be used for entry to degree courses which require more selection as a result of much higher levels of competition.



## 2. Offers falling outside the QAA Access Diploma Specifications

The following offers are not achievable by Access students as they fall outside the design specifications for Access to HE Diplomas.

### 2.1 Offers requiring more than 60 credits.

These fall outside the QAA Access Diploma specifications and are incompatible with the scheme.

### 2.2 Offers specifying more than 45 credits at Level 3.

The QAA Access Diploma specifications require 'at least' 45 credits at Level 3. The rules of combination for individual Access Diplomas should not require more than 45 Level 3 credits for successful achievement, even though individual students may be able to achieve anywhere between 45 and 60 credits at Level 3. Many Access Diplomas only have 45 Level 3 credits available within them.

<sup>1</sup> QAA Guidance can be downloaded from [www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/information-for-heis](http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/information-for-heis). This guidance is supplementary to the QAA document and is issued by OCNSER in its AVA role.

**2.3 Offers requesting an overall grade (including a grade average or profile) or other pass mark (such as a %).**

There is no overall grade or other mark for an Access Diploma and the QAA grading system cannot support such a final grade. Such offers fall outside the QAA Access Diploma specifications and are incompatible with the scheme.

### 3 Guidance for making offers

**3.1 Standard Pass/Fail offer:** *the standard offer for Access students.*

**3.2 Specific named L3 unit(s) to be achieved at Pass, Merit or Distinction within the Diploma:** useful where limited additional selection criteria are required, for example where graded achievement in a specialist subject area demonstrates a student's particular preparedness for a course.

For example:

Unit Title	Level	Credits	Code	Grade
Social Psychology	Three	3	SER123	Merit
Psychology Research Project	Three	6	SER124	Merit

Such an offer requires the HEI to have details of the units available within a student's Access to HE course. These should be listed in the UCAS application but confirmation of the unit list may be required from the provider college or OCNSER.

**3.3 Overall volume of credits within a specific subject area/module on an Access Diploma:** useful where achievement in one or more specific subject specialism is required but where the achievement of specific units is not necessary. OCNSER advises that the number of graded credits required should be less than the total number of credits available within a subject/module. This acknowledges that Access students may not be able to achieve higher grades at an early stage in the course.

For example:

Subject/Module Title	Number of Credits	Grade
Teaching Studies (9 credits available)	6	Distinction
Social Science (6 credits available)	3	Merit or above

As with 3.2 above, such an offer requires the HEI to have details of the units available within a student's Access to HE course.

**3.4 Offers based on a proportion of overall Level 3 credits achieved at specific grades<sup>2</sup>:** useful where no specific subject achievements are required but where a generally differentiated offer would enable an Access student to apply for a competitive entry degree course. This model enables a specific number of credits (expressed as a %, of the required 45 Level 3 credits) to be achieved at one or more grades<sup>3</sup>. There is no need for the person making the offer to know the potential volume of credits that might be achieved by a student in particular subjects or units on the Diploma.

**3.4.1 Offers with requirements for merits and distinctions**

<b>Example Offer 1: for a highly selective entry course</b>		
<b>Minimum Credit Targets for offer</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>%</b>
Distinction	21	47%
Merit or above	18	40%
Pass	6	13%

<b>Example Offer 2: for a course requiring further selection criteria</b>		
<b>Minimum Credit Targets for offer</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>%</b>
Distinction	3	7%
Merit or above	24	53%
Pass	18	40%

<b>Example Offer 3: for a course requiring some additional selection criteria</b>		
<b>Minimum Credit Targets for offer</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>%</b>
Distinction	0	0%
Merit or above	9	20%
Pass	36	80%

<b>Ready reckoner for proportion of L3 grades</b>	
<b>Number of Credits<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>% of Level 3 Credit</b>
3	7%
6	13%
9	20%
12	27%
15	33%
18	40%
21	47%
24	53%
27	60%
30	67%
33	73%
36	80%
39	87%
42	93%
45	100%

<b>Example Offer 4: for a course requiring a standard Access 'Pass'</b>		
<b>Minimum Credit Targets for offer</b>	<b>Credits</b>	<b>%</b>
Distinction	0	0%
Merit	0	0%
Pass	45	100%

<sup>2</sup> The proportion is expressed as a % of the 45 Level 3 credits required in an Access Diploma. This % does NOT represent in itself any mark or grade.

<sup>3</sup> Since only 45 credits at Level 3 are required by the QAA specifications for the achievement of an Access Diploma, the absolute numbers of credits used for the calculations on this page refer to proportions of 45 credits.

<sup>4</sup> Most units in Access Diplomas have credit values as multiples of 3 but note some units in Access courses may have values of 1 or 2 which could affect the number of credits required in offers.

### 3.4.2 Offers based on grades at merit or above

Where there is no requirement for distinctions, an offer could be framed using the table below.

Credits	Proportion of credit graded at merit or above	Category of offer	Comment
42	93%	Highly selective	For degree courses with <u>highly</u> selective entry requirements
39	87%		
36	80%		
33	73%		
30	67%	Additionally selective	For degree courses with selective entry requirements
27	60%		
24	53%		
21	47%		
18	40%	Selective	For degree courses requiring <u>some</u> additional selection criteria
15	33%		
12	27%		
9	20%		
6	13%		
3	7%		

All of the examples above are intended to be illustrative and not prescriptive. As the system of grading becomes better established and it is likely that the proportion of graded credit required in offers will change over time. The AVA will monitor these changes and will update the examples in this guidance accordingly.

## 4. Second references and requests for further information

### 4.1 Second references

It has been common practice for HE admissions departments to make requests for further information about the progress of individual Access students beyond the first reference supplied with the UCAS application.

OCNSER fully supports the requests for second references in the spring term, which can provide a much better overview of individual potential as by that point in the course, tutors will have had an opportunity to have marked enough student work. Sometimes examples of student work have been requested by HEIs and/or students attending interview have been requested to take examples of marked work with them.

### 4.2 Predicted grades

Predicted grades are not normally supplied by centres, in line with the QAA guidance<sup>5</sup> however in second references tutors should be able to give an indication of the types of provisional grades achieved by students to date.

<sup>5</sup> 'Guidelines for higher education admissions staff' QAA Sep 2009 p4 (see note 1 above for web link) [www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/information-for-heis](http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/information-for-heis) **OCNSER 'Passionate about Access'**<sup>4</sup>

## 5. Access Diploma: a summary of the qualification specifications<sup>6</sup>

- There is no overall grade for an Access Diploma nor is there a meaningful ‘average’ grade profile<sup>7</sup>.
- 60 credits overall need to be achieved
- 45 credits must be achieved at Level 3 with the remaining 15 credits at Levels 2 or 3
- All Level 3 units within the Diploma will be graded at pass, merit or distinction.
- Any additional achievement beyond the 60 credits will be separately certificated, and does not form part of the Access Diploma qualification.
- Any additional Level 3 units achieved will be ungraded (i.e. Pass only)
- Level 2 units are not graded

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<sup>6</sup> Full specifications can be downloaded from:

[www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/creditspecificationsdraft06/creditspecificationdraft06.pdf](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/creditspecificationsdraft06/creditspecificationdraft06.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The credit value of units that are graded within an Access Diplomas can vary considerably. For example two Diploma titles might both allow for the achievement of 48 credits at level 3. One might have 8 final grades (e.g. 8 Level 3 graded units, each worth 6 credits, totalling 48 graded credits) whereas another could have 16 final grades (e.g. 16 Level 3 graded units, each worth 3 credits, totalling 48 graded credits).