



STUDENT HANDBOOK



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All about Access to Higher Education

An Access to Higher Education (HE) Diploma is a nationally recognised Level 3 qualification designed to **help adults progress to university**. It's a popular route for people who didn't take A-levels, want a fresh start, or are returning to education after a break.

Access to HE courses are built to do two things at once: **teach subject knowledge so you're ready for your chosen degree** and **develop academic skills so you can cope with university-style study, assignments, and expectations**.

Why people choose Access to HE

There isn't a single "type" of Access student. People choose Access to HE for lots of reasons, including:

- Changing career direction (for example, moving into healthcare, teaching, business or psychology)
- Meeting entry requirements for university
- Building confidence after time away from education
- Proving they can study at a higher level
- Working towards a long-term goal, such as professional registration

Many learners also value the supportive structure of Access courses: you'll usually have clear teaching, regular check-ins, and guidance on how to improve.





Access to HE Diploma Structures

Access to HE Diplomas are made up of **units**, and each unit carries a number of **credits**. Think of units as the building blocks of your qualification. Each one focuses on a particular topic or skill area and has clear outcomes and assessment criteria.

How the Access Diploma is built

A full Access to HE Diploma is 60 credits in total. In most cases:

- **45 credits** are **graded Level 3 units** (your subject units)
- **15 credits** are **ungraded units** (study skills and personal development)

Your course will have a set structure called “rules of combination” - this simply means your units must follow a required pattern so that the overall Diploma is valid and recognised.

What you'll study

Exact unit titles vary by course, but most pathways include:

- Core subject knowledge (the main themes you'll need at university)
- Applied learning (using theory in realistic scenarios)
- Academic skills (writing, referencing, research)
- A project

This structure helps you build confidence gradually, then apply your skills to more advanced work as the course progresses.

Understanding levels and expectations

Access Diplomas usually include a blend of Level 2 and Level 3 work:

- Level 2 work (ungraded) supports your development and prepares you for Level 3 expectations.
- Level 3 work (graded) is where your university-style learning really happens.

Access to HE Diploma Assessments

When working through an Access to Higher Education Diploma, you will encounter different tasks which test your abilities. These can take many forms including written assignments, practical skills, research and projects.

With us, we only offer our Diplomas through online study which allows you to **enrol at any time in the year and work at your own pace**. Gone are the days of traditional college enrolments and waiting until September to get started. You can now enrol and work towards your Access Diploma when it suits you by **enrolling any time**.

Once on your course, you have **2 years to submit your work** and there are no specific deadlines in this time - you set the agenda and can start your assignments when it suits you. The perfect way to prepare for University in a flexible way that fits in around your life.



Online task deadlines

Each of our Diplomas has a range of tasks for you to complete to earn credits. As a key part of preparing for Higher Education is the management of deadlines, each assignment has to have a strict deadline in place.

With us, however, these are dictated by you and a timer is set when you begin each section which sets a 30-day deadline for your assignment to be handed in. This means you can work faster through your course or take time out if you need without setting a deadline for a unit.

Simply access the assignment, agree to the 30-day deadline when you are ready and submit your work in this timeframe.

UCAS

University Access

One of the biggest advantages of an Access to Higher Education (A2HE) Diploma is how widely it's recognised. Over 140 universities across the UK accept Access to HE students onto undergraduate programmes, including a wide mix of local universities, specialist providers and many well-known institutions.

Each year, around 24,000 Access to HE students progress to university, which shows just how established this route is. Universities across the UK recognise the Access to HE Diploma as a valid pathway into higher education.

What you can move on to at university

Access to HE can open up a wide range of progression options. Depending on your subject pathway and the university's entry requirements, students commonly move on to:

- Health and healthcare subjects (for example nursing and related health degrees)
- Psychology, counselling and mental health-related subjects
- Social work and community-focused degrees
- Education and teaching-related courses
- Business, management, marketing and accounting
- Law, criminology and social sciences
- Computing, IT and data-related degrees
- Science pathways (depending on your Access Diploma content)

Checking entry requirements

Access to HE creates real opportunities - but the best outcomes come from planning ahead. If you already have a university course in mind, check:

- The entry requirements on the university's website
- Whether they specify a particular Access subject
- Whether they require GCSE English/maths (or accepted equivalents)
- Whether interviews, admissions tests or experience are expected.

Many top universities accept Access to Higher Education Diplomas for undergraduate studies. If you have a specific university in mind you wish to apply for, always check their entry requirements directly with them.



UCAS

Progression Routes

Completing an Access to HE Diploma can open a range of routes - and not all of them are the same. Your next step depends on your goals, the subject you've studied, and what you want your future to look like.

Most common progression routes

Many learners progress to:

- Undergraduate degrees (BA/BSc)
- Foundation years leading into a degree (useful if you need extra preparation)
- Higher technical qualifications (such as HNC/HND, depending on the subject)
- Degree apprenticeships (earning while studying, where available)

Some students also use Access to progress into professional training routes or employment that requires Level 3 entry.

Planning a progression route that fits you

A good progression plan looks at:

- What you want to do long term (career or subject)
- What entry requirements you'll need (Access grade profile, GCSEs, experience)
- Whether you need a foundation year or direct entry
- Practical factors: finances, location, travel, childcare, work commitments

Progression isn't just about "getting in" - it's about choosing a route that you can sustain and succeed in.





Assessments

Access to HE Grading

Access to HE grading is designed to show how well you meet the learning outcomes at Level 3. Your grade profile is often an important part of your university offer, so it's worth understanding how it works and how you can improve.

The grading scale

Level 3 units are graded as:

- Pass
- Merit
- Distinction

Universities typically make offers based on the graded credits - for example, asking for a certain number of Distinctions and Merits.

How grades are decided

Grades are based on set assessment criteria and grade descriptors. In practice, higher grades often show:

- Stronger subject understanding
- Clearer structure and academic tone
- Better use of evidence and sources
- More analysis (explaining why something matters, not just describing it)
- Accurate referencing and good presentation

How to move from Pass → Merit → Distinction

If you're aiming to improve your outcomes, focus on:

- Planning (a clear structure improves everything)
- Evidence (use sources to support points)
- Analysis (explain impact, significance, cause and effect)
- Precision (define key terms; avoid vague statements)
- Editing (proofreading and improving clarity)

Often, the difference between Merit and Distinction is not “knowing more facts”, but showing deeper thinking and stronger academic writing.

Access to HE Enrolments

You can **enrol at any time**, so you don't need to wait for set start dates. That's a big difference from many traditional colleges, where enrolment often happens at specific points in the year (for example September or January intakes). With online study, you can begin when it suits you and fit learning around your existing commitments.

You'll have **up to two years to complete and pass your Diploma**, giving you the flexibility to manage study alongside work, family life, or anything else you have going on. You can also work at your own pace - some students prefer to move quickly, while others take a steadier approach.

Online doesn't mean you're on your own. You'll receive full, unlimited tutor support, including:

- Help understanding course content and assignment briefs
- Guidance on academic writing, research and referencing
- Feedback to help you improve and progress with confidence.

Overall, the key benefit is flexibility: **no fixed classroom timetable, no waiting for enrolment windows, and support whenever you need it.**

Study at your own pace

Online study allows you to move through the course in a way that works for you. Some students prefer to move quickly and keep strong momentum, while others choose a steadier pace to fit around other commitments.

The key benefit is choice: you can adjust your study pattern as your circumstances change, without losing your place or having to wait for a new intake.

Course advice

If you're ready to get started, simply head to our site to choose your Diploma, enrol and start today. If you have some questions, **get in touch with our friendly course advisors** to learn more about what Access Diplomas include and if they're the right path for you.



Access to HE

Start your journey

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