

Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design) Diploma Specification

Valid from: August 2026
Learning Aim Code: 40012931

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The Access to HE Diploma Background and Aims

The Access to Higher Education Diploma is a full Level 3 UK qualification. It is regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) which licenses Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) to accredit and award the Access to Higher Education Diploma in the UK.

Access to Higher Education Diplomas enable students to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to progress to higher education. They are key to widening participation from groups traditionally underrepresented at higher education institutions and are therefore aimed particularly, though not exclusively, at adults without traditional qualifications.

The aims of the Access to HE Diploma are to:

- prepare students who are returning to education for progression to Higher Education, further training in a related vocational or occupational area
- help students develop the skills and knowledge they need to achieve on their chosen HE course or career pathway
- familiarise students with the teaching and learning methodologies and assessment strategies found in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- help students to gain confidence in their abilities, to review and monitor their own progress and to become independent students
- develop students' research, planning, analytical and evaluation skills
- enable students to make informed choices about future progression routes.

Diploma Development

Skills and Education Group Access has worked with curriculum specialists and higher education colleagues to develop the Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design). Every Diploma is validated by the AVA through a robust and rigorous peer panel process which then recommends approval to the AVA's Access to HE Committee. By taking into consideration the views of Further and Higher Education practitioners, the AVA ensures that the Diploma meets all QAA requirements and that it enables students to complete a planned, balanced and coherent programme of study, through which they have been able to acquire subject knowledge and develop academic skills which are relevant to the intended progression route(s).

C1 (34.1): The QAA recognised Access to HE Diploma is validated for delivery within the UK by a provider with a main base in the UK (including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) only.

C1 (34.2): Only students with a UK address (including BFPO) can be registered for an Access to HE Diploma.

Diploma Specification

The QAA Diploma Specification states that the Access to HE Diploma is a:

- unitised qualification, based on units of assessment which are structured in accordance with the Access to HE unit specification
- credit-based qualification, operated in accordance with the terms of the Access to HE credit specification
- graded qualification, as determined by the Access to HE Grading Scheme.

This Diploma Specification should be read in conjunction with the QAA Access to HE Diploma Specification, the QAA Access to HE Grading Scheme and associated AVA policies and procedures.

About this qualification

AVA Diploma Title	Main Classification (Sector Subject Area)	Sub- Classification
Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design)	9.0 - Arts, Media and Publishing	9.2 - Craft, creative arts and design

This Diploma specification is valid from: 01/08/2026

Diploma revalidation date: 31/07/2031

Purpose of the Diploma:

The Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design) aims to equip students with a comprehensive foundation in artistic principles and practices, preparing them for higher education and professional careers in the creative industries. This diploma fosters creativity, critical thinking, and practical skills, allowing students to explore various art and design disciplines. By engaging in diverse projects and workshops, students develop a robust portfolio and seek opportunities for live exhibition and presenting work, essential for advancing to higher education within a creative field. Ultimately, the Diploma aims to widen HE participation for non-traditional entrants, mature students and those with diverse prior learning.

The AVA encourages providers to develop students' decolonisation and cultural awareness and include it in their teaching, learning and assessment.

The following key elements are acquired by students depending upon the choice of units:

A. Key Knowledge and Understanding:

1. Artistic Techniques and Media:

- Proficiency in drawing, painting, printmaking, and digital photography.

- Expertise in using various media and materials, including mixed media and textiles.
- Skills in creating 3D realisations and working with moving images.

2. Concept Development:

- Ability to develop and realise ideas for briefs and personal projects.
- Skills in research and evaluation of media and materials.
- Understanding of colour theory and its psychological and historical associations.

3. Critical and Reflective Thinking:

- Knowledge of contextual and historical studies in art and design.
- Engagement in reflective practice and research skills.

B. Subject-Specific Skills:

1. Professional Practice:

- Experience in exhibiting practice and preparing for self-directed work.
- Development of professional practice in art and design.

2. Technical and Digital Skills:

- Competence in digital and/or analogue approaches.
- Skills in creating short videos and using digital media tools.
- Experience in workshops for media and materials development.
- Experience of knowing when and how to use AI appropriately and ethically to support creative endeavour and to ensure transparency of use.

C. Transferable Skills:

1. Communication Skills:

- Enhanced communication abilities, crucial for presenting and explaining artistic concepts.

2. Collaboration:

- Experience working with peers, tutors, and external partners to develop ideas, share feedback, and complete creative tasks collectively.
- Improved interpersonal skills, including negotiation, adaptability, and contributing effectively to group projects.

3. Portfolio Building:

- Skills in creating and curating a professional portfolio for higher education or career opportunities.

4. Preparation for Higher Education:

- Preparation for application and interview processes at the higher education level.

5. Research and Academic Writing:

- Advanced research skills and academic writing capabilities.

6. Reflective Practice:

- Development of reflective practice to assess and improve one's own work.
- Problem solving through creative development

By completing this diploma, students will develop a well-rounded skill set, ready to pursue further study in the diverse field of art and design.

Intended Progression Routes

D2.1 (52.2): Access to HE Diplomas are intended to provide a preparation for study in UK higher education, but the award of a Diploma does not provide guaranteed entry to UK higher education programmes.

The following progression routes were agreed at the point of validation as being appropriate choices for students who achieve the Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design), subject to the course entry requirements and application process:

- BA (Hons) Fine Art
- BA (Hons) Graphic Design
- BA (Hons) Illustration, Graphics
- BA (Hons) Media Studies
- BA (Hons) Fashion
- BA (Hons) Textiles
- BA (Hons) Photography
- BA (Hons) Advertising

It is essential that providers delivering this Diploma consult receiving HEIs themselves to ensure that suitable and relevant progression opportunities are sound. Evidence of HEI consultation and progression possibilities will be identified in the provider's Programme Submission Document.

Accuracy of Information and Diploma Titles

Providers are responsible for ensuring that students receive accurate, clear and timely information relating to the Diploma structure, assessment, grading and progression opportunities. Students must be made aware of the exact validated Diploma title against which they are registered and providers must ensure that published or promotional information does not misrepresent the approved qualification.

Providers must ensure that all information provided to prospective and current students is accurate, clear and not misleading, including information relating to programme content, assessment, grading, progression opportunities and any additional costs associated with study.

Access to HE Diploma provider assessment strategy advice

QAA states that the Access to HE Diploma provides '*HE progression opportunities for adults who, because of social, educational or individual circumstances may have achieved few, if any, prior qualifications*'. They also state that, '*Students who are awarded the Diploma will have completed a planned, balanced and coherent programme of study, through which they have been able to acquire subject knowledge and develop academic skills which are relevant to the intended progression route(s)*'. Therefore all approved providers need to develop Diploma assessment strategies which outline what assessment activities the students will undertake, how they will be used and why they have been chosen in order to achieve the learning aims:

1. **What** is the aim of the diploma assessment strategy?
2. **How** will it be achieved?
3. **Why** has this approach been chosen?

Assessment design:

Access to HE Diplomas should be assessed using innovative and contemporary methods, tailored to prepare students studying at Level 3 for study at Higher Education. Assessment design should be holistic, ensuring students can demonstrate acquired knowledge, understanding and skills in and across units and assessments should reflect those likely to be encountered on Higher Education courses in the same field of study. Specific assessment guidance should be provided for each unit to ensure consistency and fairness across assessment practice. Providers are responsible for ensuring that assessment strategies remain planned, balanced and coherent across the Diploma and that assessment demand remains proportionate and manageable for students. Effective assessment design begins at the planning stage and should be informed by the Provider Handbook, the QAA Access to HE Grading Scheme and associated AVA guidance.

In addition, providers must ensure that assessment methods are chosen which afford students opportunities to demonstrate the requirements of the three Grading Standards; Knowledge and Understanding, Subject Specific Skills and Transferable Skills. Providers should ensure that students are given opportunities to demonstrate the selected Grading Standards and their components through assessment activities and that grading decisions are appropriately contextualised to the assessment tasks, evidence produced and unit content being assessed. Further, assessment methods should reflect, where appropriate, the forms of assessment commonly encountered within Higher Education and should support the development of independent study, research, analytical and reflective skills.

Assessment design should comply with the requirements of the most current QAA Grading Scheme and also be aligned to the principles of assessment:

Validity, Authenticity, Reliability, Currency and Sufficiency (VARCS). Providers are encouraged to consider integrated assessment approaches where appropriate. Integrated assessment should be planned and documented through the Diploma Assessment Planner (AP1), Unit Planner (AP2) and Assessment Brief (AP3) and must ensure that Learning Outcomes, Assessment Criteria and Grading Standards remain clearly mapped and assessable. Integrated assessment should reduce unnecessary duplication whilst maintaining the validity, reliability and transparency of assessment decisions.

Within the delivery of the Diploma, tutors and assessors should ensure that students' work remains current, relevant and authentic including where generative artificial intelligence tools are used. Students should be supported to acknowledge and reference the use of such tools appropriately to ensure transparency.

Providers must ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the authentication of student work and for the management of academic misconduct, maladministration and inappropriate use of artificial intelligence in accordance with AVA policies and procedures.

Providers may recognise valid evidence generated through other assessment activities where that evidence demonstrably meets the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria of a unit. Such decisions must be supported by explicit mapping, appropriate records and adherence to the principles of assessment (VARCS).

Assessment guidance specific to this diploma:

The use of the grading standards and model enables a number of units to be assessed under one overarching integrated assessment and tutors should give some consideration as to whether this approach would be useful for student assessment. Again, the AVA encourages providers to develop student awareness of decolonisation and culture and include it in their assessment strategies.

Tutor/Assessor qualifications and experience specifically required for delivery and assessment of this diploma:

Generally, and as a minimum, it is expected that provider staff teaching on the Diploma have the required professional competence and skills necessary for the mode(s) of delivery to be used, and the level of subject expertise necessary to teach and assess the units available on the Diploma.

Providers must also ensure that appropriate learning resources, student support and delivery infrastructure are available to support the effective delivery and assessment of the Diploma.

Rules of Combination

Where options are available within a single set of rules of combination, which allow alternative requirements for the achievement of a named Diploma, the alternatives permitted by the options are consistent, in terms of academic challenge and demand, and will require equivalent standards for achievement, whenever and wherever it is delivered.

Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design)	
Credit Value of the Diploma:	60
Students must achieve 60 credits in total in accordance with the rules of combination for the Diploma.	
All Diplomas are 60 credits, irrespective of the place, subject or mode of study. Of the 60 credits 45 must be from graded units concerned with academic subject content, with the remaining 15 credits to be achieved from ungraded units. In addition, all students must study a minimum of ten 3 credit units and at least one 9 or 6 credit unit up to a maximum of 30 credits, which may or may not be graded.	
Students can achieve up to a maximum of 30 credits at Level 3 through credit transfer and the award of credit through the recognition of prior learning.	
Students undertaking any Access to HE Diploma, whatever their mode of study, must be: a) registered and certificated for units to a maximum value of 60 credits b) registered for units to the value of 60 credits no later than 84 days from the start date of their Access to HE course, or before the student makes a formal application to a higher education course through UCAS or any other application process, whichever date occurs first.	

Appendix 1 - Units of Assessment – Access to HE Diploma (Art and Design)

For every unit included in the table, further information is included in the Unit Specification, including learning outcomes and assessment criteria. All units must be set out using the AVA standard format.

Grading Standards (Applied to all graded units)

1	Knowledge and Understanding
2	Subject Specific Skills
3	Transferable Skills

There are no mandatory units in this Diploma.

Optional Graded Units (Please select 45 credits from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Professional Practice in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/03G	Three	3
Preparation for Self-Directed Practice	JA2/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Art and Design Project Development and Delivery	JA2/3/AA/08G	Three	3
Evaluating Media and Materials	JA2/3/AA/12G	Three	3
Research Skills for Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/14G	Three	3
Final Major Project: Presentation and Exhibition	JA2/3/AA/27G	Three	3
Portfolio Building in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/30G	Three	3
Visual Language in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/17G	Three	3
Investigating Media and Materials	JA2/3/AA/18G	Three	3
Mixed Media in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/29G	Three	3
Historical Context of Art and Design	JA3/3/AA/05G	Three	3
History of Art and Design	JA3/3/AA/02G	Three	3
Colour Theory in Art and Design	JA3/3/AA/03G	Three	3
Psychological and Historical Associations of Colour Theory	JA3/3/AA/04G	Three	3
Fundamentals of Drawing	JB2/3/AA/05G	Three	3
Print Workshop	JB8/3/AA/02G	Three	3
Producing 3D Realisation from a Brief	JC4/3/AA/04G	Three	3
Working with Moving Images	KJ2/3/AA/06G	Three	3
Creating a Short Video	KJ2/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Final Major Project: Practice	JA2/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Media and Materials Research	JA2/3/AA/05G	Three	6

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Realisation of Ideas for a Brief	JA2/3/AA/06G	Three	6
Designing Symbols and Signs	JA2/3/AA/09G	Three	6
Idea Exploration and Development	JA2/3/AA/10G	Three	6
Contextual Studies in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/25G	Three	6
Visual Language and Sketchbook	JA2/3/AA/28G	Three	6
Drawing and Painting - Visual Recording	JB2/3/AA/04G	Three	6
Drawing	JB2/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Advertising	KB2/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Digital Photography	KJ1/3/AA/01G	Three	6
Diagnostic Project	JA2/3/AA/23G	Three	9
Major Project	JA2/3/AA/24G	Three	9
Personal Project in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/26G	Three	9
Exhibiting Practice	JC4/3/AA/01G	Three	9

Optional Ungraded Units (Please select 15 credits from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
The Safe and Ethical Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence	CK5/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Academic Writing Skills	HC7/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Reading and Note Making	HC7/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Researching and Understanding Opportunities in Higher Education	HC7/3/AA/04U	Three	3
Reflective Practice	HC7/3/AA/16U	Three	3
Media and Processes (Textiles)	JA2/3/AA/08U	Three	3
Using a Workshop	JA2/3/AA/09U	Three	3
Portfolio Building in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/10U	Three	3
Colour Theory in Art and Design	JA3/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Perspectives in Art and Design	JB2/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Printmaking Workshop	JB8/3/AA/02U	Three	3
3D Methods and Materials Workshop	JC4/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Digital Media Workshop	JC7/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Analogue Photography	KJ1/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Media and Materials Development	JA2/3/AA/01U	Three	6
Preparing for Application and Interview at HE Level	JA2/3/AA/03U	Three	6
Communication Skills	KA1/3/AA/01U	Three	6

Inclusion and Exclusion Rules of Combination

Barred Unit 1	National Code	CV	Barred Unit 2	National Code	CV
Print Workshop	JB8/3/AA/02G	3	Printmaking Workshop	JB8/3/AA/02U	3
Colour Theory in Art and Design	JA3/3/AA/03G	3	Colour Theory in Art and Design	JA3/3/AA/01U	3
Perspectives in Art and Design	JB2/3/AA/01U	3	Drawing	JB2/3/AA/02G	6
Fundamentals of Drawing	JB2/3/AA/05G	3	Drawing and Painting – Visual Recording	JB2/3/AA/04G	6
Contextual Studies in Art and Design	JA2/3/AA/25G	6	Historical Context of Art and Design	JA3/3/AA/05G	3
Idea Exploration and Development	JA2/3/AA/10G	6	Realisation of Ideas for a Brief	JA2/3/AA/06G	6
Art and Design Project Development and Delivery	JA2/3/AA/08G	3	Diagnostic Project	JA2/3/AA/23G	9