

Access to HE Diploma (Criminology) Diploma Specification

Valid from: August 2026
Learning Aim Code: 40014654

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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 (Criminology). 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): This 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 (Criminology)	15.00 - Business, Administration and Law	15.50 - Law and Legal Services

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

Diploma revalidation date: 31/07/2029

Purpose of the Diploma:

The Access to HE Diploma (Criminology) provides students with a comprehensive understanding of criminology and related fields. This course prepares students for Higher Education and careers in areas such as law enforcement, criminal justice, and social research. Students will acquire essential knowledge, specific skills, and transferable skills necessary for success in these fields.

A. Key Knowledge and Understanding:

1. Criminological Theory and Practice:

- Understanding of theoretical approaches to criminology.
- Insight into current issues in criminology and their societal impacts.
- Knowledge of situational crime factors and the influence of media on perceptions of crime.
- Impact of forensic psychology in criminal investigations.
- Exploration of crime and society dynamics.

2. Psychology and Behaviour:

- Understanding behavioural neuroscience and its implications in criminology.

- Examination of behaviour and the brain, including the effects of drugs on behaviour.
- Perspectives in psychology relevant to criminological studies.

3. Legal and Ethical Dimensions:

- Awareness of human rights principles and their application in criminal justice.
- Development of academic writing skills specific to criminology essays.
- Competency in reading and note-making for effective study and research.

B. Subject-Specific Skills:

1. Research and Analysis:

- Skills in writing and structuring criminology essays.
- Competence in conducting criminological research and applying findings.
- Ability to critically evaluate theories and empirical research in criminology.

2. Psychological Profiling and Investigation:

- Proficiency in psychological profiling techniques.
- Understanding of forensic psychology's role in criminal investigations.

3. Social Interaction and Communication:

- Skills in social interaction relevant to criminological contexts.
- Improved academic writing skills tailored to criminological studies.

C. Transferable Skills:

1. Academic and Professional Skills:

- Enhanced academic writing and presentation skills.
- Proficiency in information literacy and research methodologies.
- Ability to analyse and present complex information related to criminology.

2. Critical Thinking and Ethical Awareness:

- Development of critical thinking skills applied to criminological issues.
- Awareness of ethical considerations in criminological research and practice.

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 (Criminology), subject to the course entry requirements and application process:

- Criminology
- Law
- Legal Studies
- Psychology
- Social Sciences

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:

Further to the guidance above, tutors should consider the following in relation to assessment methods:

- Case Studies
- Debate
- Essays
- Examinations (open or closed book)
- Presentations
- Research Reports
- Roleplays/Simulations
- Viva-style assessments

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 (Criminology)	
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 (Criminology)

For every unit included in the table, further information is included in the Unit Specifications, including learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

Grading Standards (Applied to all graded units)

1	Knowledge and Understanding of the Subject
2	Subject Specific Skills
3	Transferable Skills

All units in this Diploma are mandatory.

Mandatory Graded Units

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Human Rights	EC7/3/AA/02G	Three	3
Aspects of Situational Crime	EE2/3/AA/17G	Three	3
Crime and the Media	EE2/3/AA/18G	Three	3
Biopsychology: Behaviour and the Brain	PK1/3/AA/22G	Three	3
Biopsychology: Behaviour and Drugs	PK1/3/AA/24G	Three	3
Social Interaction	PK1/3/AA/26G	Three	3
Psychological Profiling	PK1/3/AA/30G	Three	3
Current Issues in Criminology	EE2/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Writing a Criminology Essay	EE2/3/AA/19G	Three	6
Theoretical Approaches to Criminology	EE2/3/AA/23G	Three	6
Impact of Forensic Psychology in Criminal Investigations	PK1/3/AA/20G	Three	6

Mandatory Ungraded Units

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Academic Writing Skills	HC7/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Reading and Note Making	HC7/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Perspectives in Psychology	PK1/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Crime and Society	EE2/3/AA/04U	Three	6

There are no barred units in this Diploma.