

Access to HE Diploma (Humanities and Social Sciences) Diploma Specification

Valid from: August 2026
Learning Aim Code: 40012888

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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 (Humanities and Social Sciences). 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 (Humanities and Social Sciences)	11- Social Science	11.2- Sociology and Social Policy

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

Diploma revalidation date: 31/07/2031

Purpose of this Diploma:

The Access to HE Diploma (Humanities and Social Sciences) provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the diverse fields within humanities and social sciences. This course prepares students for Higher Education and careers in areas such as criminology, education, literature, history, psychology, and sociology. Students will acquire essential knowledge, specific skills, and transferable skills necessary for success in these areas.

A. Key Knowledge:

1. Criminology and Law:

- Understanding of current issues in criminology and theoretical approaches to criminology.
- Knowledge of the law of homicide, non-fatal offences, and negligence.
- Understanding of the sources of English law, law and morality, and human rights.

2. Education and Development:

- Exploration of current developments in education, teaching and learning strategies, and equality and achievement in education.
- Understanding of child development, early socialisation, and safeguarding.

3. Literature and Language:

- Analysis of short stories, poetry, prose fiction, Shakespeare, and the nineteenth-century novel.
- Exploration of language change, original writing, and textual analysis.
- Understanding the influence of community, history, and culture on texts.

4. History and Political Science:

- Knowledge of African, American, Black, British, and European history.
- Insights into industrialisation in Britain, the impact of European colonialism, and the transatlantic slave trade.
- Understanding political ideologies, fascism and communism, and social and economic changes in 19th century Britain.

5. Psychology and Sociology:

- Exploration of key aspects of psychology, cognitive psychology, biopsychology, and developmental psychology.
- Understanding of socialisation, social inequality, crime and deviance, and sociological explanations.
- Knowledge of the welfare state, social policy, and the role and responsibilities of social workers.

B. Subject-Specific Skills:

1. Research and Analytical Skills:

- Skills in conducting research projects in criminology, sociology, and psychology.
- Competence in textual analysis, literary criticism, and historical research.
- Proficiency in analysing political theories and social policies.

2. Educational and Developmental Skills:

- Ability to apply teaching and learning strategies in educational scenarios.
- Understanding child development stages and addressing social care needs.
- Development of skills in safeguarding and promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion.

3. Psychological and Sociological Skills:

- Application of psychological theories to understand human behaviour and social interactions.
- Understanding sociological approaches to contemporary issues and social policy analysis.

- Knowledge of the skills required in counselling, helping techniques, and addressing psychological disorders.

C. Transferable Skills:

1. Academic and Research Skills:

- Enhanced academic writing, research skills, and information literacy.
- Development of reading, note-making, and assignment writing abilities.
- Experience in conducting research projects and understanding opportunities in Higher Education.

2. Communication and Organisational Skills:

- Improved communication skills for presenting ideas and findings.
- Skills in using IT for study, including word processing and other software tools.
- Development of numeracy skills and their application in humanities and social sciences contexts.

3. Professional and Ethical Skills:

- Understanding of ethical considerations in research and professional practice.
- Awareness of professional practices and the importance of reflective practice.
- Skills in managing work experience and applying humanities and social sciences principles in real-world scenarios.

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 (Humanities and Social Sciences), subject to the course entry requirements and application process:

Anthropology	Forensics/Criminology	Politics
Architectural History	Forensic Psychology	Psychology
Business	Geography	Social Anthropology
Creative Writing	Health and Social Care	Social Policy

Criminology	History	Social Sciences
Cultural Studies	International Studies	Social Work
Early Childhood Studies	Law	Sociology
Economics	Media and Journalism	Teaching
Education Studies	Peace Studies	Working with Children and Young Families
English	Policing	Youth and Community

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).

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 (Humanities and Social Sciences)	
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 (Humanities and Social Sciences)

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

There are no mandatory units in this Diploma. However, to maintain the balance required for a dual-title award, students must complete:

- 1. At least 15 credits from the Humanities graded unit offer, and**
- 2. At least 15 credits from the Social Sciences graded unit offer.**

This ensures that every combination of units chosen reflects both subject areas of the Diploma as required by QAA. (This is in addition to the QAA Diploma structural requirements detailed in the 'Rules of Combination' section on the previous page).

The remaining 15 credits (after the 15 Humanities and 15 Social Sciences graded unit requirements are met) may be selected from either subject area, allowing providers and students flexibility in shaping a coherent programme of study.

Humanities Graded Units (Please select a minimum of 15 credits from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Black History	DB1/3/AA/03G	Three	3
The Transatlantic Slave Trade	DB1/3/AA/04G	Three	3
African History	DB6/3/AA/05G	Three	3
Industrialisation in Britain	DB7/3/AA/04G	Three	3
Social and Economic Change in 19th Century Britain	DB7/3/AA/05G	Three	3
Political Ideologies	EA2/3/AA/03G	Three	3
Human Rights	EC7/3/AA/02G	Three	3
Location, Population and Employment	EB1/3/AA/03G	Three	3
Literature: Poetry	FC3/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Literature: Prose Fiction	FC3/3/AA/10G	Three	3
Literature: Shakespeare	FC4/3/AA/03G	Three	3

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Film Adaptations	FN1/3/AA/06G	Three	3
Male and Female Speech	FN1/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Language: Change	FN2/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Language: Original Writing	FN2/3/AA/08G	Three	3
Language: Textual Analysis	FN2/3/AA/09G	Three	3
Law and Morality	EC1/3/AA/10G	Three	3
Social Media and the Use and Change in Language	FN2/3/AA/04G	Three	3
Modern Dramatic Text	FN2/3/AA/10G	Three	3
Stereotyping and the Media	KA2/3/AA/05G	Three	3
Sources of English Law	EC1/3/AA/11G	Three	3
British History	DB5/3/AA/02G	Three	6
American History	DB6/3/AA/06G	Three	6
European History	DB6/3/AA/07G	Three	6
The Impact of European Colonialism	DB6/3/AA/08G	Three	6
Victorian Values	DB7/3/AA/06G	Three	6
Politics: Theories and Concepts	EA2/3/AA/04G	Three	6
Analysing Short Stories	FC3/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Literature: Dramatic Text	FC3/3/AA/08G	Three	6
Literature: Poetry Analysis	FC3/3/AA/09G	Three	6
Literature: The Novel	FC3/3/AA/11G	Three	6
Literature: The Nineteenth Century Novel	FC4/3/AA/04G	Three	6
The Law of Negligence	EC1/3/AA/05G	Three	6
The Law of Non-Fatal Offences	EC1/3/AA/09G	Three	6
The Law of Homicide	EC6/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Writing an English Studies Essay	FM3/3/AA/02G	Three	6

Social Sciences Graded Units

(Please select a minimum of 15 credits from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Application of Sociological Approaches to Contemporary Issues	EE2/3/AA/27G	Three	3
Race and Ethnicity in Modern Societies	EE2/3/AA/30G	Three	3
Socialisation	EE2/3/AA/31G	Three	3
Sociological Explanations	EE2/3/AA/32G	Three	3
Theories of Crime and Deviance	EE2/3/AA/33G	Three	3
Youth Subcultures	EE5/3/AA/02G	Three	3
Family	EE9/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Stress and Eating Disorders	PA1/3/AA/06G	Three	3

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Health Psychology Perspectives	PK1/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Psychological Disorders and Therapeutic Strategies	PK1/3/AA/09G	Three	3
Perspectives in Psychology	PK1/3/AA/21G	Three	3
Biopsychology: Behaviour and the Brain	PK1/3/AA/22G	Three	3
Aggression	PK1/3/AA/23G	Three	3
Biopsychology: Behaviour and Drugs	PK1/3/AA/24G	Three	3
Social Interaction	PK1/3/AA/26G	Three	3
Personality Theories	PK1/3/AA/29G	Three	3
Psychological Profiling	PK1/3/AA/30G	Three	3
Child Development	PK3/3/AA/06G	Three	3
Child Development Early Socialisation	PK3/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Cognitive Psychology	PK8/3/AA/02G	Three	3
Safeguarding	PR2/3/AA/07G	Three	3
The Welfare State	PR2/3/AA/10G	Three	3
Social Inequality	PR2/3/AA/11G	Three	3
Statistics for Psychology	RB7/3/AA/10G	Three	3
Current Issues in Criminology	EE2/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Crime and Society	EE2/3/AA/09G	Three	6
Sociology: Ideas that Shaped the World	EE2/3/AA/28G	Three	6
Globalisation and Development	EE2/3/AA/29G	Three	6
Theoretical Approaches to Criminology	EE2/3/AA/23G	Three	6
Crime and Deviance	EE2/3/AA/24G	Three	6
Sociology: Concepts and Perspectives	EE2/3/AA/26G	Three	6
Current Developments in Education	GA1/3/AA/01G	Three	6
Equality and Achievement in Education Theory and Practice	GA3/3/AA/01G	Three	6
Teaching and Learning	GB1/3/AA/03G	Three	6
Health and Illness	PA1/3/AA/05G	Three	6
Key Aspects of Psychology	PK1/3/AA/04G	Three	6
Research Skills: Project	PK1/3/AA/33G	Three	6
Social Psychology	PK1/3/AA/32G	Three	6
Developmental Psychology	PK3/3/AA/02G	Three	6
The Role and Responsibilities of a Social Worker	PR1/3/AA/06G	Three	6
Social Policy and the British Welfare State	PR2/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Poverty in Contemporary Britain	PR2/3/AA/08G	Three	6
Values, Diversity and Rights	PR2/3/AA/09G	Three	6
Practical Counselling and Helping Skills	PS1/3/AA/03G	Three	6
Research Project: Criminology	EE2/3/AA/22G	Three	9
Research Project	EE2/3/AA/25G	Three	9

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

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Number and Graphical Representation	RB1/2/AA/01U	Two	3
The Safe and Ethical Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence	CK5/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Use of Information and Communication Technology	CN1/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Fascism and Communism	DB2/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Industrialisation in Britain	DB7/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Elements of a Crime	EC1/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Crime and Deviance	EE2/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Sociological Explanations	EE2/3/AA/05U	Three	3
Family	EE9/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Texts and Genres	FC4/3/AA/02U	Three	3
The Influence of Community, History and Culture on Text	FN2/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Principles of Reflection	HB1/3/AA/03U	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
Information Literacy Skills	HC7/3/AA/06U	Three	3
Organisation and Evaluation of Study	HC7/3/AA/07U	Three	3
Research Skills	HC7/3/AA/17U	Three	3
Presentation Skills	HC7/3/AA/18U	Three	3
Numeracy	HD4/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Perspectives in Psychology	PK1/3/AA/02U	Three	3
Crime and Society	EE2/3/AA/04U	Three	6
Higher Education Toolkit	HC7/3/AA/19U	Three	6
Academic English	HC7/3/AA/21U	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
Language: Textual Analysis	FN2/3/AA/09G	3	Texts and Genres	FC4/3/AA/02U	3
Literature: Poetry	FC3/3/AA/07G	3	Literature: Poetry Analysis	FC3/3/AA/09G	6

Barred Unit 1	National Code	CV	Barred Unit 2	National Code	CV
Industrialisation in Britain	DB7/3/AA/04G	3	Industrialisation in Britain	DB7/3/AA/02U	3
Political Ideologies	EA2/3/AA/03G	3	Politics: Theories and Concepts	EA2/3/AA/04G	6
Developmental Psychology	PK3/3/AA/02G	6	Child Development	PK3/3/AA/06G	3
Key Aspects of Psychology	PK1/3/AA/04G	6	Perspectives in Psychology	PK1/3/AA/02U	3
Crime and Society	EE2/3/AA/04U	6	Crime and Society	EE2/3/AA/09G	6
Higher Education Toolkit	HC7/3/AA/19U	6	Presentation Skills	HC7/3/AA/18U	3
Academic Writing Skills	HC7/3/AA/01U	3	Academic English	HC7/3/AA/21U	6
Family	EE9/3/AA/01U	3	Family	EE9/3/AA/01G	3
Sociological Explanations	EE2/3/AA/05U	3	Sociological Explanations	EE2/3/AA/32G	3
Research Project: Criminology	EE2/3/AA/22G	9	Research Skills	HC7/3/AA/17U	3
Research Skills: Project	PK1/3/AA/33G	6	Research Project: Criminology	EE2/3/AA/22G	9
Research Skills: Project	PK1/3/AA/33G	6	Research Skills	HC7/3/AA/17U	3
Research Project: Criminology	EE2/3/AA/22G	9	Research Project	EE2/3/AA/25G	9
Research Project	EE2/3/AA/25G	9	Research Skills: Project	PK1/3/AA/33G	6
Research Project	EE2/3/AA/25G	9	Research Skills	HC7/3/AA/17U	3