

Access to HE Diploma (Social Work) Diploma Specification

Valid from: August 2026
Learning Aim Code: 40011963

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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 (Social Work). 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 (Social Work)	11.0 - Social Sciences	11.2 - Sociology and Social Policy

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

Diploma revalidation date: 31/07/2030

Purpose of this Diploma:

The Access to HE Diploma (Social Work) provides students with a comprehensive understanding of social work and its various components. This course is designed to prepare students for higher education and careers in social work and related fields. Students will acquire key knowledge, subject-specific skills, and transferable skills essential for success in these areas.

A. Key Knowledge:

1. Social Services and Social Work:

- Understanding the role and function of the social services and the responsibilities of a social worker.
- Knowledge of family law, welfare state, and welfare legislation.
- Insight into safeguarding and the social care provisions available.

2. Psychology and Sociology:

- Understanding child development, developmental psychology, and cognitive psychology.
- Knowledge of abnormality, psychological disorders, and key aspects of psychology.

- Insight into social inequality, responding to prejudice and discrimination, and poverty in contemporary Britain.

3. Social Issues and Welfare:

- Understanding the concepts and perspectives on family and society.
- Knowledge of crime and society, and the application of sociological approaches to contemporary issues.
- Insight into values, diversity, and rights in the context of social work.

B. Subject-Specific Skills:

1. Social Work Practices:

- Understand the skills required in practical counselling and helping, understanding the responsibilities of a social worker.
- Ability to apply welfare legislation and social care provisions to scenarios.
- Ability to analyse and respond to social inequality and prejudice.

2. Psychological and Sociological Application:

- Understanding cognitive psychology, behaviour and the brain, and behaviour and drugs.
- Skills in identifying and addressing psychological disorders and developmental issues.
- Competence in using sociological approaches to address contemporary social issues.

3. Professional and Ethical Understanding:

- Knowledge of the safe and ethical use of generative artificial intelligence in social work.
- Understanding the importance of values, diversity, and rights in social work.
- Know the skills required in maintaining professionalism and ethical standards in practice.

C. Transferable Skills:

1. Research and Academic Skills:

- Development of strong research skills and the ability to organise and evaluate studies.
- Proficiency in academic writing, reading, and note-making.
- Understanding of opportunities and tools for success in higher education, including the higher education toolkit.

2. Communication and Professional Skills:

- Improved presentation skills, information literacy skills, and interview skills.

- Development of reflective practice to continuously improve personal and professional development.
- Develop skills required to work collaboratively in diverse and inclusive environments.

3. Critical Thinking and Technological Proficiency:

- Enhanced ability to critically analyse social issues and develop reasoned arguments.
- Skills in the use of information and communication technology for research and practice.
- Understanding of numeracy and its application in social work contexts.

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 (Social Work), subject to the course entry requirements and application process.

- BA (Hons) Social Work
- BA (Hons) Youth Work
- BA (Hons) Social Policy

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).

Suggestions for possible assessment methods include, but not limited to, the following:

- Podcasts/audio recordings – along with a script and a round table discussion to ensure understanding. Students have engaged with this more than a group presentation.
- Integrated assignments where possible to reduce the number of assessments for students.
- Workbooks
- Case studies – students engage well when using case studies.
- Consider the teaching schedule of units, can they be grouped together to allow for integrated assessment.

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 (Social Work)	
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 (Social Work)

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

Mandatory Unit (Please select one of the following units)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
The Role and Responsibilities of a Social Worker	PR1/3/AA/06G	Three	6
The Role and Function of the Social Services	PR1/3/AA/07G	Three	6

Optional Graded Units (Please select **39 credits** from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Family Law	EC7/3/AA/06G	Three	3
Application of Sociological Approaches to Contemporary Issues	EE2/3/AA/27G	Three	3
Responding to Prejudice and Discrimination	EE2/3/AA/20G	Three	3
Family	EE9/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Biopsychology: Behaviour and the Brain	PK1/3/AA/22G	Three	3
Biopsychology: Behaviour and Drugs	PK1/3/AA/24G	Three	3
Child Development	PK3/3/AA/06G	Three	3
Cognitive Psychology	PK8/3/AA/02G	Three	3
Social Care Provisions	PR1/3/AA/04G	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
Welfare Legislation	EC7/3/AA/07G	Three	6
Sociology: Concepts and Perspectives	EE2/3/AA/26G	Three	6
Key Aspects of Psychology	PK1/3/AA/04G	Three	6
Defining Abnormality and Understanding Psychological Disorders	PK1/3/AA/27G	Three	6
Developmental Psychology	PK3/3/AA/02G	Three	6
The Role and Function of the Social Services	PR1/3/AA/07G	Three	6

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Understanding the Welfare State	PR2/3/AA/03G	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

Ungraded Optional 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
Use of Information and Communication Technology	CN1/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Interview Skills and Group Presentations	HB1/3/AA/02U	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
Reflective Practice	HC7/3/AA/16U	Three	3
Research Skills	HC7/3/AA/17U	Three	3
Presentation Skills	HC7/3/AA/18U	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

Inclusion and Exclusion rules of combination

Barred Unit 1	National Code	CV	Barred Unit 2	National Code	CV
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
The Welfare State	PR2/3/AA/10G	3	Understanding the Welfare State	PR2/3/AA/03G	6
Higher Education Toolkit	HC7/3/AA/19U	6	Interview Skills and Group Presentations	HB1/3/AA/02U	3
Higher Education Toolkit	HC7/3/AA/19U	6	Presentation Skills	HC7/3/AA/18U	3