

Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) Diploma Specification

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Learning Aim Code: 40014198

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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 (Nursing). 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 (Nursing)	1- Health Public Services and Care	1.2- Nursing and subjects and vocations allied to medicine

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

Diploma revalidation date: 31/07/2029

Purpose of this Diploma:

The Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) provides students with an understanding of the essential elements required by the nursing profession. This course is designed to prepare students for Higher Education looking for careers in nursing and healthcare. Students will acquire key knowledge, subject-specific skills, and transferable skills essential for success in these fields.

A. Key Knowledge:

1. Human Biology and Health:

- Understanding the structure and function of the human body, including systems such as endocrine, musculoskeletal, nervous, and cardiovascular.
- Knowledge of human growth and development, sex and reproduction, and nutrition and digestion.
- Understanding of the causes and control of diseases, infection and immunity, and specific health conditions such as dementia, respiratory care, and paediatric illnesses.

2. Healthcare and Nursing:

- Understanding mental health, including disorders in childhood and adolescence, and strategies for coping.
- Knowledge of healthcare communication, health promotion, and principles of safeguarding.
- An understanding of the importance of equality, diversity, and inclusion in healthcare settings.

3. Psychology and Sociology:

- Understanding perspectives in psychology, biopsychology, and psychological disorders.
- Knowledge of early attachment and development, and the impact of poverty in contemporary Britain.
- Insight into the role of professionalism and multidisciplinary teams in healthcare.

B. Subject-Specific Skills:

1. Clinical and Nursing Skills:

- Skills in assessing and managing cardiovascular and respiratory care.
- Know how to address mental health and dementia issues.
- Ability to apply knowledge of human biology and health to practice scenarios.

2. Healthcare Practices:

- Understanding the structure and function of cells and how they relate to health and disease.
- Skills in promoting health and preventing illness through education and intervention.
- Know how to safeguard patients and ensure ethical practice in healthcare.

3. Professional and Ethical Understanding:

- Knowledge of professional behaviours and ethics in nursing and health professions.
- Understanding the safe and ethical use of generative artificial intelligence in healthcare.
- Understanding of the skills needed when working within multidisciplinary teams and upholding professional standards.

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.

2. Communication and Professional Skills:

- Improved healthcare communication skills and ability to convey complex information clearly.
- Development of presentation skills and information literacy.
- Understanding what it means to work collaboratively in diverse and inclusive environments.

3. Critical Thinking and Reflective Practice:

- Enhanced ability to analyse health and social issues and develop reasoned arguments.
- Skills in reflective practice to continuously improve personal and professional development.
- Understanding of numeracy in a health context and its application in nursing practice.

D1.1 (45) Subject Descriptor Compliance

The Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) complies with the subject descriptor requirements as mandated by QAA in the **Subject Descriptor for Nursing and Health Professions** document. Please note that the table below shows the minimal credit requirements as set out by QAA, Skills Education Group Access may have increased the minimum credit requirements in Skills Education Group Access in subjects in the Rules of Combination.

Content of the descriptor

Summary of essential requirements for this descriptor

Essential subject content	Minimum credit requirement at Level 3		Minimum credit requirement at Level 2
	Graded	Ungraded	Ungraded
Biology	15		
Numeracy in Health Context			3
Professional Behaviours: Nursing and Health Professions		3	

	Level 3	Level 2 or 3	Total
Total minimum credits for essential subject content	18	3	21
Credits remaining for recommended or other subject content	27	12	39

Essential requirements

Subject: Biology **Level:** 3 **Minimum credit value:** 15

About this subject

A firm grounding in the key principles and processes of biology is essential for pursuing a career in nursing and health professions. While undergraduate courses will also include the study of biology, the inclusion of the minimum content defined here will ensure that Access to HE students are well prepared to gain maximum benefit from their degree studies.

Required content:

- cell structure
- cell function
- transport - for example, osmosis
- homeostasis
- human anatomy and physiology to include a minimum of **THREE** systems from the following: cardiovascular; respiratory; digestion and nutrition; muscular-skeletal; excretion; endocrine; nervous system; genetics.
- additional content may include immunity/defence against disease, reproduction, thermoregulation.

In addition, to the essential biology content, students will also need to cover the essential elements for **numeracy at Level 2** and **Professional Behaviours at Level 3**. Further specific information can be found in the subject descriptor document via the QAA website, which also contains guidance on the use of recommended, not mandatory, subject content which could be used to deliver the Diploma to students.

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

- Any nursing pathway (adult, paediatric, mental health etc)
- Counselling (via mental health nursing)
- Other careers allied to health (e.g. podiatry)
- General health qualifications (e.g. Health and Social Care, Health Science).

Students could also apply to courses such as midwifery, biology or psychology depending upon the chosen pathway and entry requirements of the specific university, however, if this is the student's intention from the outset there are other diplomas which would better suit the student's planned progression.

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 assessment guidance above, tutors should consider the following methods of assessment:

- Videos
- Group activities
- Academic Posters
- Presentations
- Vivas
- Practical 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 (Nursing)	
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 (Nursing)

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

Adult Nursing Pathway

To comply with the QAA Subject Descriptor for Nursing, Health Professionals and related courses the following Rules of Combination must be followed.

Students must take a minimum of **15 credits** from the mandatory biology graded units below.

Mandatory Graded Units (15 credits as a minimum)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Cellular Structure and Activity*	RH3/3/AA/31G	Three	3
The Structure and Function of Cells*	RH3/3/AA/26G	Three	6
Endocrine System	RH4/3/AA/26G	Three	3

(Providers must take the **Endocrine System** unit)

*These may not be taken together, only one OR the other is permitted.

Select the remaining mandatory biology graded unit credits from:

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Human Musculoskeletal System	RH4/3/AA/04G	Three	3
Human Urinary System	RH4/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Nervous System	RH4/3/AA/14G	Three	3
Systems Physiology	RH4/3/AA/18G	Three	6

(Providers must take these two mandatory ungraded units.)

Mandatory Ungraded Units

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Numeracy in a Health Context	HD4/2/AA/01U	Two	3
Professional Behaviours: Nursing and Health Professions	PH1/3/AA/01U	Three	3

Recommended (NOT mandatory) Optional Graded Units (Please select units from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Human Sex and Reproduction	RH4/3/AA/28G	Three	3
Genetics	RH3/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Infection and Immunity	RH4/3/AA/29G	Three	6

Optional Graded Units (Please select the remaining units from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Healthcare Settings	PA1/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Professionalism and Multidisciplinary Teams	PA1/3/AA/16G	Three	3
Dementia	PH1/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Perspectives in Psychology	PK1/3/AA/21G	Three	3
The Cause and Control of Disease	RH4/3/AA/10G	Three	3
Health Promotion	PA9/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Cardiovascular Care	PH1/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Respiratory Care	PH1/3/AA/03G	Three	6
Poverty in Contemporary Britain	PR2/3/AA/08G	Three	6
Mental Health and Coping Strategies	PH4/3/AA/06G	Three	6
Human Growth and Development	RH4/3/AA/31G	Three	6

Optional Ungraded Units (Please select 9 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

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Researching and Understanding Opportunities in Higher Education	HC7/3/AA/04U	Three	3
Reflective Practice	HC7/3/AA/16U	Three	3
Healthcare Communication	PA1/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Principles of Safeguarding	PR2/3/AA/01U	Three	3

Mental Health Nursing Pathway

To comply with the QAA Subject Descriptor for Nursing, Health Professionals and related courses the following Rules of Combination must be followed.

Students must take a minimum of **15 credits** from the mandatory biology graded units below.

Mandatory Graded Units (15 credits as a minimum)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Cellular Structure and Activity*	RH3/3/AA/31G	Three	3
The Structure and Function of Cells*	RH3/3/AA/26G	Three	6
Endocrine System	RH4/3/AA/26G	Three	3

(Providers must take the **Endocrine System** unit)

*These may not be taken together, only one OR the other is permitted.

Select the remaining mandatory biology graded unit credits from:

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Human Musculoskeletal System	RH4/3/AA/04G	Three	3
Human Urinary System	RH4/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Nervous System	RH4/3/AA/14G	Three	3
Systems Physiology	RH4/3/AA/18G	Three	6

(Providers must take these two mandatory ungraded units.)

Mandatory Ungraded Units

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Numeracy in a Health Context	HD4/2/AA/01U	Two	3
Professional Behaviours: Nursing and Health Professions	PH1/3/AA/01U	Three	3

**Recommended (NOT mandatory) Optional Graded Units
(Please select units from this list)**

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Human Sex and Reproduction	RH4/3/AA/28G	Three	3
Genetics	RH3/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Infection and Immunity	RH4/3/AA/29G	Three	6

**Optional Graded Units
(Please select the remaining units from this list)**

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Healthcare Settings	PA1/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Professionalism and Multidisciplinary Teams	PA1/3/AA/16G	Three	3
Health Promotion	PA9/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Dementia	PH1/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Biopsychology: Behaviour and the Brain	PK1/3/AA/22G	Three	3
Mental Health Disorders in Childhood and Adolescence	PH4/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Mental Health and Coping Strategies	PH4/3/AA/06G	Three	6
Introduction to Psychological Disorders	PH4/3/AA/07G	Three	6
Poverty in Contemporary Britain	PR2/3/AA/08G	Three	6
Human Growth and Development	RH4/3/AA/31G	Three	6

**Ungraded Optional Units
(Please select 9 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
Researching and Understanding Opportunities in Higher Education	HC7/3/AA/04U	Three	3
Reflective Practice	HC7/3/AA/16U	Three	3
Healthcare Communication	PA1/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Principles of Safeguarding	PR2/3/AA/01U	Three	3

Paediatric Nursing Pathway

To comply with the QAA Subject Descriptor for Nursing, Health Professionals and related courses the following Rules of Combination must be followed.

Students must take a minimum of **15 credits** from the mandatory biology graded units below.

Mandatory Graded Units (15 credits as a minimum)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Cellular Structure and Activity*	RH3/3/AA/31G	Three	3
The Structure and Function of Cells*	RH3/3/AA/26G	Three	6
Endocrine System	RH4/3/AA/26G	Three	3

(Providers must take the **Endocrine System** unit)

*These may not be taken together, only one OR the other is permitted.

Select the remaining mandatory biology graded unit credits from:

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Human Musculoskeletal System	RH4/3/AA/04G	Three	3
Human Urinary System	RH4/3/AA/07G	Three	3
Nervous System	RH4/3/AA/14G	Three	3
Systems Physiology	RH4/3/AA/18G	Three	6

(Providers must take these two mandatory ungraded units.)

Mandatory Ungraded Units

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Numeracy in a Health Context	HD4/2/AA/01U	Two	3
Professional Behaviours: Nursing and Health Professions	PH1/3/AA/01U	Three	3

Recommended (NOT mandatory) Optional Graded Units (Please select units from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Human Sex and Reproduction	RH4/3/AA/28G	Three	3
Genetics	RH3/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Infection and Immunity	RH4/3/AA/29G	Three	6

Optional Graded Units

(Please select the remaining units from this list)

Unit Title	National Code	Level	CV
Professionalism and Multidisciplinary Teams	PA1/3/AA/16G	Three	3
Perspectives in Psychology	PK1/3/AA/21G	Three	3
Early Attachment and Development	PK3/3/AA/05G	Three	3
Health Promotion	PA9/3/AA/01G	Three	3
Poverty in Contemporary Britain	PR2/3/AA/08G	Three	6
Human Growth and Development	RH4/3/AA/31G	Three	6
Mental Health Disorders in Childhood and Adolescence	PH4/3/AA/02G	Three	6
Paediatric Illnesses	PH5/3/AA/01G	Three	6

Ungraded Units

(Please select 9 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
Researching and Understanding Opportunities in Higher Education	HC7/3/AA/04U	Three	3
Reflective Practice	HC7/3/AA/16U	Three	3
Healthcare Communication	PA1/3/AA/01U	Three	3
Principles of Safeguarding	PR2/3/AA/01U	Three	3

Inclusion and Exclusion Rules of Combination

Barred Unit 1	National Code	CV	Barred Unit 2	National Code	CV
Cellular Structure and Activity	RH3/3/AA/31G	3	The Structure and Functions of Cells	RH3/3/AA/26G	6