

LASER Access to HE Specification & Assessment Framework

Policy Statement

Laser Learning Awards (LASER) is committed to providing a high-quality service and to maintaining the highest standards for its learners, centres, and other stakeholders.

This document contains a summary of the Laser Learning Awards' Access to HE Diploma Specification and Assessment Framework. This sets out the distinctive characteristics of Access Diplomas validated by Laser Learning Awards as an Access Validating Agency (AVA) licensed by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). (58)¹

It is LASER's responsibility to implement the national Access Diploma Specification² on behalf of the QAA and to set its own curriculum and regulations within the QAA national rules and regulations.

Policy Relevance

This policy outlines the key requirements for LASER Access to HE Diploma Specifications along with the Diploma Assessment Framework to ensure consistency and transparency across all LASER Access to HE provision.

Policy Responsibility and Review

This policy is the responsibility of the Head of Access and will be reviewed by January 2029 at the latest.

Introduction

Purpose and aim of the Access to HE Diploma

The Access to HE Diploma is intended to prepare people without traditional entry qualifications for degree level study at university. It may also be used by people wishing to make a career change or who have been out of formal education for a significant time to gain the skills and confidence required for direct progression to employment or further study. The Access to HE Diploma is regulated by QAA and widely recognised as a progression route by universities across the UK.

Target Group

The Access Diploma is open to all learners but is designed to be accessible for individuals who, because of their socio-economic or personal circumstances, may not have been able to consider progression to degree level study. The Access Diploma therefore provides a second chance for individuals who, for whatever reason, were not able to take full advantage of their formal secondary education.

LASER Access to HE Diploma Specification (59a)

All individual LASER Access Diplomas meet the generic requirements of the LASER Access to HE Diploma Specification (see below), which in turn complies with the [QAA Access Diploma Specification \(2023\)](#). (60e/62a)

Underneath the generic specification there is a Diploma Specification Framework for each LASER validated Access to HE Diploma title. This outlines the subject modules available in each title, the unit lists with minimum, and if appropriate maximum, credit choices in each module and the Diploma Assessment Framework for that title. Individual Rules of Combination are then selected based on the framework choices for each diploma offered in a centre.

Specification Rules

All LASER Diplomas are made up of 45 graded credits (sections A, B, C below) and 15 ungraded credits (section D).

- A. At least 30 graded credits are selected from the modules listed in Group A, these units are chosen as specific to the subject of the named Diploma and are all at level 3. There may be minimum/maximum numbers of credits defined in each module depending on the Diploma.

¹ Numbers in brackets throughout this document relate to the relevant QAA Licensing Criteria for AVAs (May 2019)

² See [QAA Access to HE Diploma Specification](#)

- B. Up to 15 graded credits (if IAS is to be offered ungraded, 9 graded if IAS is offered as graded) are selected from either the modules listed in Group A and/or from the additional modules offered in Group B. Group B units are related to the subject of the named Diploma or will complement learning. These units are all at level 3.
- C. 6 credits are required to be selected from the appropriate Independent Academic Study unit (IAS) (or equivalent) for the Diploma title. These units are all at level 3 and can be chosen to be offered as graded or ungraded within the centre’s Rules of Combination.
- D. 15 ungraded credits (9 if IAS is to be offered ungraded) are selected from the modules listed in Group D which include study skills, English Language and Maths and/or ungraded versions of selected units available in Group A or Group B. These units are generally at level 3 but some Study Skills units may be available at level 2.

Units **cannot** be included within a centre’s Rules of Combination as both graded and ungraded, but centres can choose to offer some academic subject units as ungraded versions. These must be identified as part of the course approval and will apply to all cohorts for the said diploma within a centre.

The maximum number of credits that can be achieved from 6 or 9 credit units is 30 credits. These can be made up from graded or ungraded units.

Section	Minimum Credits	Graded/Ungraded	Modules	Notes
A	30	Graded	Title-specific credits	
B	9 or 15	Graded	Title-related and/or title-specific credits	Number of credits dependent on choice of graded or ungraded IAS
C	6	Graded or Ungraded	Independent Academic Study (IAS)	MANDATORY UNIT
D	15	Ungraded	Study Skills units or selected ungraded options from sections A and/or B	Study Skills units can be at level 2 or 3 Number of credits dependent on choice of graded or ungraded IAS

The validated LASER Access Diploma titles are listed in the next section. These are the only titles permitted to be used and each one has a unique Learning Aim code which must be used if claiming public funding for a course. The Rules of Combination for these diploma titles as offered at each centre may vary depending on the choice of units (from the selection available for each Diploma Title Specification) to meet the demands and needs of Access students and progression routes.

LASER Access to HE Diploma Titles (60c)

Each Access to HE Diploma title has an individual Diploma Specification including an assessment framework, potential progression routes and a summary of the Subject Groups and modules (A, B, C & D above) available in that diploma. It lists the units that can be selected in each module and defines the rules to be applied (for example minimum or maximum credits in specific subject areas, barred combinations, etc).

LASER also offers bespoke Access to HE titles that have been developed to meet specific local need or that have defined progression routes. These are not listed below but can be discussed with LASER directly.

Diploma Title	Learning Aim
Access to HE Diploma (Animal Management)	40015609
Access to HE Diploma (Business and Law)	40015634
Access to HE Diploma (Business Information Technology)	40015646
Access to HE Diploma (Business Studies)	40015658
Access to HE Diploma (Computing)	4001566X
Access to HE Diploma (Counselling)	40015671
Access to HE Diploma (Creative Arts)	4001583X
Access to HE Diploma (Creative Computing and Esports)	40015853
Access to HE Diploma (Creative Computing)	40015865
Access to HE Diploma (Criminology)	40015683
Access to HE Diploma (Digital Creative Industries)	40015841
Access to HE Diploma (Engineering)	40015695
Access to HE Diploma (Environmental Science)	40015877
Access to HE Diploma (Healthcare Professions)	40015701
Access to HE Diploma (Humanities and Social Sciences)	40015725
Access to HE Diploma (Humanities)	40015737
Access to HE Diploma (Medicine and Medical Sciences)	40015749
Access to HE Diploma (Medicine) – QAA Subject Descriptor compliant	40015750
Access to HE Diploma (Nursing) – QAA Subject Descriptor compliant	40015713
Access to HE Diploma (Osteopathic Sciences and Healthcare)	40015762
Access to HE Diploma (Psychology)	40015774
Access to HE Diploma (Science and Social Sciences)	40015786
Access to HE Diploma (Science)	40015798
Access to HE Diploma (Social Sciences)	40015804
Access to HE Diploma (Social Work)	40015816
Access to HE Diploma (Teaching and Education)	40015828
Further titles could be developed either as bespoke titles based on local need and/or defined progression routes or they may be suggested to be developed for all and added to the list above.	

Requirements of the LASER Diploma Specification

Independent Academic Study Units (IAS)

This requirement is in recognition of the importance placed by universities on the ability of students to undertake independent academic study in preparation for undergraduate study. The aim of the LASER independent academic study units is to allow students to develop and utilise a range of academic skills to independently engage with a substantial body of academic subject knowledge³.

Independent academic study units are primarily assessed in relation to academic subject knowledge and the acquisition of skills directly related to that subject rather than assessing the generic study skills that need to be used to carry out the piece of independent study.

All IAS units are 6 credits and can be offered graded **or** ungraded depending on local need. There is a complementary Planning and Presentation unit that accompanies the IAS units which can be offered as an ungraded unit to sit alongside the IAS if desired. If a centre chooses to offer their IAS as ungraded, they can select the remaining 6 graded credits from either Group A or Group B.

Independent Academic Study Guidance is available from the online resource bank or the Access office for further support.

³ This requirement is waived in exceptional cases – notably Medicine and Osteopathic Sciences, both of which have specific requirements and established progression routes.

Examination Policy

All LASER validated Access Diploma titles must contain at least **three** opportunities for students to experience appropriate forms of ‘summative’ examination which contribute to the final assessment and grade of the unit. Unless there is a compelling reason, **no diploma should contain more than six examinations**.

The examinations should be ‘summative’ assessments and **must form the only assessed evidence in terms of the allocated Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria they pertain to**. However, they may form part of a **portfolio assessment**, where other Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria for the unit are allocated to different tasks. The examination and the other task (or tasks) will then be graded holistically, such that GS1, GS2 and GS3 are applied once across all tasks for the unit.

Full details of the LASER Access Examination Policy is available here: [Access Policies](#)

Diploma Assessment Framework (62c)

To increase standardisation both in terms of the units offered within (and across) LASER validated Access to HE Diploma titles as well as the models of assessment employed therein, LASER has a series of standardised assessment frameworks for each validated Access to HE Diploma title. These incorporate requirements and recommendations in terms of the models of assessment employed within a given diploma title. These requirements and recommendations are all founded upon likely assessment models in terms of individual progression from each diploma title and aim to increase equity in assessment between common diploma titles delivered by different centres.

The requirements and recommendations within individual Diploma Assessment Framework documents operate alongside, and in conjunction with, the LASER Examination Policy as indicated above. All diploma titles will need to be compliant with the base level requirements of the LASER Examination Policy, however it may be the case that in some Diploma Assessment Frameworks the required frequency of examination may be higher than in others because of their increased use as a method of assessment in their specific progression routes.

All LASER validated Access to HE programmes must include a Diploma Assessment Plan as a part of their validation/revalidation process and the schedules will be required to be updated and available for review as part of the yearly external quality assurance cycle. They will form the key evidence that the diploma is compliant with the requirements of the individual Diploma Assessment Framework.

Required Assessment Models:

All LASER validated Access to HE programmes offered by approved centres must demonstrate the use of the required assessment models noted within individual diploma specifications as part of the Diploma Assessment Plans to be compliant.

There will need to be evidence of graded assessments for units using the assessment models in line with the identified requirements noted within individual diploma specifications (these types of assessment may also be used to evidence ungraded provision).

The requirements include a ‘Suggested Weighted Frequency of Use’ and provision for comments. Requirements are set out in tabular form (see example below).

Assessment Model ⁴	Suggested Weighted Frequency of Use	Comments
<i>See individual Diploma Title Specification for actual assessment requirements</i>	High / Moderate / Low	<i>See below for definition of ‘weighting’ terms</i>

High frequency suggests that the model should be used to assess significant or substantive graded content across the programme. As each centre will develop their own unit assessment plans it is not possible to provide a simple rule in terms of use, but a high frequency of use suggests, for example, that the model is employed in some form to assess 6 credits of a 15-credit subject module (although it may be supplemented by other assessment models in terms of the given individual units). In terms of an overall diploma title, it will likely constitute the predominant (or most frequently used) assessment model for that diploma title (or at least one of the major assessment models). Where more than one model is noted as high frequency, those

⁴ Definitions of the meanings of given **Assessment Models** are contained within Annex One, at the end of this document.

models are expected to be substantively used across the scope of the Access Diploma title. However, the actual appropriateness of their use will be determined by contextual considerations at centre level.

Moderate Frequency suggests that the assessment model will be used often but not predominantly across a given diploma title. For example, it could be that each 15-credit module (where this applies) might use the model once (or perhaps twice) as a means of assessment in relation to their units. It will be expected that it will appear frequently but will not constitute a core or predominant assessment methodology. At diploma level there will be multiple occurrences of this model, but they will not be as frequent as those noted as high frequency. The actual number of times that they are employed will ultimately be determined by individual/contextual circumstances at centre level.

Low Frequency use suggests that although they are infrequently required to be used, they must be employed at some point within the Diploma Assessment Plan as a means of assessing graded credit. They must be used at least once in terms of assessments for the diploma. Once again in determining the reasonable use of low frequency assessment models, judgments will rely upon individual contextual factors at centre/diploma level.

As there are no individual rules or quotas set, External Quality Assurers (EQAs) will be asked to exercise their judgment in deciding whether diploma titles conform to the requirements of the Diploma Assessment Framework. The required assessment models were developed via consultation with HE and Subject Specialists and reflect the predominant ‘norms of assessment’ within the given diploma area. Therefore, EQAs should reflect upon whether assessments across a given diploma (as evidenced within the Diploma Assessment Plan) reflect the spirit of the requirements. As such these requirements set a framework for what would be considered good practice in preparing students for progression.

Recommended Assessments:

The Diploma Assessment Framework also includes recommended models of assessment. These are models of assessment which are recommended for inclusion within the overall assessment models for the diploma. There is no requirement that they represent the model of assessment for a given unit and they can be applied to both graded and ungraded units. Their inclusion does not debar the use of alternative models of assessment where it is reasonable to justify their inclusion based on individual content or progression. There is no limit to the number of times any model may be employed although a possible weighting in terms of use is included. These recommendations are presented in tabular form (see example below).

Recommended Assessment Model	Possible Weighting	Comments
<i>See Diploma Title for recommended assessments</i>	Strongly Recommended / Recommended / Suggested	

Recommended models of assessment, as their title implies, are recommended and therefore where there is reasonable argument for not including a given model this will **NOT** render a programme non-compliant. However, these models form a guide for EQAs in evaluating the Diploma Assessment Plan for a given centre.

Consequences for External Quality Assurance:

All diploma titles will be expected as part of validation/revalidation to supply and keep updated (year-on-year) a Diploma Assessment Plan which must be available for inspection as an aspect of the external scrutiny undertaken by EQAs. The Diploma Assessment Plan should clearly evidence the required assessment models. The document should also evidence (as far as is practicable) the recommended assessment models. EQAs will need to consider Diploma Assessment Plans and apply local level considerations in terms of judging their fitness for purpose. Increased content of law for example in Humanities diplomas may likely increase the expected frequency of Case Studies, whereas the absence of Law may justify a lack of use.

The required assessments must be used broadly used in line with the suggested weightings identified. However, the appropriate frequency of actual use will be determined by the EQA applying a ‘reasonableness test’ at centre/diploma level. If a required assessment model were to be completely omitted this would certainly constitute non-compliance and there would be a need for a condition to be set to remedy this oversight. Moreover, an unjustified lack of use (or over-use) may also result in recommendations or conditions being set by an EQA to address concerns and promote a more equitable overall assessment plan in line with the Diploma Assessment Framework.

In terms of recommended assessments these are not absolute requirements and constitute a series of suggested or possible assessment models allied to a suggestion as to their likely suitable frequency of use. A diploma is not required to evidence these models, but it is suggested that they may be useful based on intelligence from HE. Once again EQAs will need to employ a 'reasonableness test' to frame a judgment as to whether the assessment models employed by the centre are appropriate for progression considering local centre/diploma level needs.

It should be noted that where centres/assessors deem it appropriate any assessment model may be employed so long as it forms a 'reasonable method of assessment' for a given unit. The above framework identifies the required and suggested methodologies of assessment for a given diploma title, which now form a part of the regulatory provision within the overall Diploma Specification. The requirements and recommendations identified have been arrived upon through consultation with HE and Subject Specialists and should be seen as an expression of good practice in terms of ensuring assessment remains relevant to progression. The use of other models is entirely appropriate to address local student needs. In the final analysis any assessment model must be judged to be a reasonable means of assessing the identified Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria and if this is the case it is appropriate. The LASER Diploma Assessment Framework simply identifies the frequency and likely use of different models of assessment within the scope of the identified diploma title to reinforce a more standardised assessment experience for Access students and to ensure their readiness for progression to HE (whilst retaining centre/assessor flexibility as far as is possible). In identifying assessment models, practitioners should also give due consideration to the requirements of the LASER [Guidance on the Use of AI](#) to ensure the veracity of assessments as measures of student achievement.

Annex One: Glossary of terms for assessment methods

Assessment method	Operational definition	Notes
1. Case study	An in-depth and detailed examination of a person, group, or situation.	Popular method of assessment (and research) in healthcare e.g. study of a patient presenting with different health problems, and in Law which allows students to apply law to a given situation/scenario.
2. Essay	A short, written piece on a particular subject or theme which responds to set question requiring the synthesis of discussion or argument.	Addresses a question or given subject/theme; normally in continuous prose with an introduction, main body, and conclusion; normal word ranges: 1000 – 2500 words.
3. Extended essay	A longer written piece on a particular subject or theme.	Addresses a question or given subject(s)/theme(s); has an introduction, main body which is likely to have sub-headings, and a conclusion; word allowances >3000 words related to unit credit value.
4. Examination	A question or set of questions to test a candidate’s knowledge, skills or attitudes taken under controlled conditions.	Includes seen and unseen examinations with pre-specified rules e.g. whether candidate can use notes, calculators or not. It may also include ‘take away’ exams where students are set written tasks to independently complete within a short timeframe.
5. Experiment	A procedure undertaken in a controlled environment to demonstrate known facts or theories, test a hypothesis, or make a discovery.	Would normally require a written ‘write up’ of the purpose, method, and findings. Experiments are typically used within Science based areas but are also employed in Social Sciences.
6. Laboratory / Practical Class (Observation)	A teaching session which is usually included in curricula in the experimental sciences, biomedical sciences, and engineering disciplines. It provides an opportunity to apply and investigate conceptual knowledge, and to develop a wide range of skills, including data collection, analysis and presentation, and problem solving and team working.	Would normally require a ‘witness statement’ in terms of the practical work assessed and maybe used in association with a ‘written report’ of some kind to extrapolate upon the issues raised. There is some similarity here to the ‘experiment’ listed above (at 5) although the key difference is that the ‘observation’ established the student has a competence in terms of a particular skill/task rather than the ability to discuss, analyse or evaluate said task.
7. Portfolio of evidence	A collection of evidence to demonstrate competence and/or knowledge which may comprise of a series of ‘shorter tasks’ which are assessed against a single assessment/assignment brief.	Can be paper-based or electronic; can include 2D and 3D formats; popular in art & design but may be used elsewhere to group a series of Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria which may not be easily incorporated into a single task within a single assessment/assignment brief.
8. Presentation	A demonstration of knowledge, skills or attitudes to an audience using either audio and/or visual aids.	May be an individual or group presentation. When using group presentations assessors need to ensure that the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria which are being assessed as evidenced individually by all participants. Normally assessment will involve the submission of some form of written evidence to support the award of credit.
9. Project	An individual or collaborative endeavour to address a subject of interest to the student(s)	Covered currently under IAS although this form of assessment may be used elsewhere for units which require empirical or qualitative research to be undertaken. When projects are undertaken in groups, once again, care must be taken to ensure that all participants individually evidence the assessed Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria.

Assessment method	Operational definition	Notes
10. Reflective log	An ongoing personal record of the student’s learning experiences which includes analysis, evaluation, and reflection in and on practice.	Popular in healthcare and other professional areas; may be electronic. This may also be relevant in creative areas such as Art & Design, Creative Writing and Music and may also form a part of the general assessment of the IAS in terms of the evaluation of planning and review.
11. Report	A written account for a given audience on a specific subject which has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a clear purpose • specific evidence which has been analysed and applied to a particular problem or issue • recommendations. 	Popular in business
12. Workbook	An assessment which is structured and contains a series of tasks which are mapped to relevant Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria which the student undertakes independently.	This assessment model may be used in virtually any area although it is commonly used in the Sciences. It is useful where a unit is assessed via a ‘single student submission’ although the actual Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria may not easily be evidenced by a single piece of work (e.g. an essay). The benefit of this model is it allows for separate sub tasks to evidence the individual Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria whilst retaining the ability to capture the grading of the assessment against a single assessment/assignment.
13. Literature Review	A written response to a particular text.	Primarily used within the study of English Literature/Media. It will require the student to formulate a written critique of the given text which may or may not draw on alternative academic sources depending on the nature of the task. The model may be broadened within Media to include ‘Textual Analysis’ of film or other media. The model may also be employed in Social Sciences in a more restricted sense to critique a given text.
14. Poster	A form of assessment which requires the student to evidence Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria via the Presentation of a poster which communicates relevant information.	This model may be employed where the student is required to be discerning in terms of presenting key information in relation to a particular assessment. This model of assessment is often used to assess part of a unit as it would be difficult to capture all the information for a whole unit within a single poster in the required depth for Level 3. It has been popularly used within Science and Social Science and has been employed within the overall assessment of IAS units by some centres (where the student summarises the broader content of their research project within a more synthesised poster to capture the headline information). It provides an effective means of assessment in relation to not only capturing understanding and knowledge but also the ability to communicate knowledge effectively to a particular target audience.

Assessment method	Operational definition	Notes
15. Information Leaflet	A model of assessment which requires the student to develop an information leaflet which evidences relevant Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria.	Commonly (although not exclusively) used within Health Studies and Science. The model allows for the student to provide a more in depth and detailed response to set criteria than a poster but requires the student to focus on clarity of communication of understanding and knowledge to an identified target audience. This model may be used for example in terms of a ‘health promotion leaflet’ on a given issue or disease.
16. Developing a Webpage	The student is required to design and develop a ‘webpage’.	An assessment model used in Information Technology/Computing and potentially Business which assesses both technical design skills and communication skills in the sense that the webpage should communicate effectively with its target audience.
17. Production of an artefact	The student is required to make or assemble something to a pre-agreed specification and assessed on completion against the pre-agreed marking scheme allowing credit also for reflection by the student.	Commonly used in Engineering but also may be relevant to Art & Design.
18. Production of a Design Specification	The student is not actually required to make anything but is required to produce a detailed specification which would enable production.	Commonly used in Engineering. Examples of evidence could include CAD drawing, materials list, and production schedule against a pre-agreed specification.
19. Data Analysis	The assessment model requires the student to undertake analysis of a data set which may or not be obtained by the student’s own research. The analysis will apply academic skills to identify relevant information and trends within the data set.	This model of assessment may be appropriate to several disciplines. It requires the student to apply a given set of analytical tools in relation to the area to data and to present their findings in terms of said analysis.

Policy Approval

Approved internally by CEO, 11 March 2024

Approved externally by AQDC, 11 March 2024

Latest review date: January 2029 for approval at AQDC in March 2029

Please note:

This policy is specifically relating to delivery of Access to HE qualifications, for policies relevant for all other LASER and Trident Awards (security industry qualifications) please click here: <https://laser-awards.org.uk/about/policies-and-procedures/>