

AIM Qualifications Access to HE Diploma (Counselling) Level 3 Specification

400/1515/4

V3 July 2026



Document version history

Version number	Date	Description
1	August 2024	▪ Document created
2	January 2026	▪ Section 3 updated to include all possible outcomes for a Referral following the new grading scheme.
3	July 2026	▪ Update to Diploma Details - geographical coverage ▪ Update to Section 3 – Grading – grading unit in one assessment – assessor to record grade indicators ▪ Update to Section 3 – Resubmissions – grading permitted where submitted to deadline

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About us

AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group is an Access Validating Agency (AVA) licensed by QAA to award Access to HE Diplomas to successful students. AIM is one of the largest AVAs In England and Wales and offers the widest selection of Access to HE Diplomas.

AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group is a leading Awarding Organisation providing training providers/centres/colleges with high-quality, regulated, vocational and technical [qualifications](#) from entry level to level 6. AIM's qualifications are suitable for delivery in a variety of settings and are available in a wide range of subject areas. All our UK Level 3 qualifications carry UCAS tariff points which can count towards university entry requirements. We also offer non-regulated accreditation and the AIM Quality Mark.

AIM is an independent [end-point assessment organisation](#) (EPAO) specialising in assessments for apprenticeships for the creative, cultural, and professional services industries.

About this Access to HE Diploma specification

Welcome to the AIM Qualifications Access to HE Diploma (Counselling) qualification specification. This document contains everything you need to know about the Diploma and is intended for tutors, assessors, internal quality assurers, centre managers and other staff within AIM recognised centres and/or prospective centres. It provides information about the structure and delivery of the qualification. This specification should be read in conjunction with the Access to HE Provider Handbook, AIM Centre Handbook and other policy documents available on the website and in the AIM portal.

This is a live document and as such will be updated when required. Recognised centres will be informed via email if changes are made and it is your responsibility to ensure the most up to date version of the Diploma specification is used.

Find out more

Current AIM centres

One of our Quality Leads will be happy to discuss the details of this qualification with you by emailing quality@aimgroup.org.uk or calling 0333 034 8833.

New centres

In order to offer this Diploma, you must be an AIM recognised centre and be approved to deliver this qualification. If your centre is not yet recognised, please contact our business development team to discuss becoming an AIM recognised centre. They can advise you on the best Diplomas for your organisation. Email businessdevelopment@aimgroup.org.uk or call [0333 034 8833](tel:03330348833).

More information can be found on: www.aim-group.org.uk/newcentre

Section 1 – Qualification overview

About the Access to HE Diploma

This level 3 Access to HE Diploma is regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and is designed to prepare learners without traditional qualifications for entry into Higher Education (HE). The Diploma provides an opportunity for learners to acquire and develop knowledge and skills needed to progress to higher education study and enables learners to develop social and emotional skills such as communication and confidence.

Progression opportunities

Learners who complete and achieve the Access to HE Diploma could progress onto Higher Education courses including bachelor's Degrees, Foundation Degrees, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/HND) and Higher Degree Apprenticeships. The Access to HE Diploma could also support entry into employment areas where evidence of study and achievement at level 3 is required.

The aim of this qualification is to prepare students for progression into higher education subjects including, but not limited to:

- Counselling
- Psychology
- Other social science related degrees

Please note students are strongly advised to contact universities prior to commencing this Access to HE Diploma to check the university's specific entry criteria. The award of a Diploma does not provide guaranteed entry to UK higher education programmes.

Diploma details

AIM Qualifications Level 3 Access to HE Diploma (Counselling)		
Assessment	Various – See ‘how the qualification is assessed’ section	
Grading	Graded/Ungraded	
Geographical coverage	United Kingdom	
Operational start date	01/08/2024	
Review date	31/07/2029	
Learning Aim Reference	40015154	
Credit Value	60 credits	
Notional Learning Hours (NLH)	600 hours	
Rules of combination	In order to achieve the Access to HE Diploma, learners must achieve:	
	45	Credits which must be graded, academic subject content at Level 3 only
	15	Credits which must be either at Level 2 or Level 3 ungraded
	60	Credits in total

Qualification size

All Access to HE Diplomas require the achievement of 60 credits maximum of which:

- 45 of the 60 credits must be graded at Level 3: pass, merit, or distinction. Such credits will arise from Academic Subject Content Modules.
- The remaining 15 credits are ungraded and can be achieved at either Level 2 or Level 3.
- Students may only be registered against units with a maximum combined, total credit value of 60.
- Students must study at least one 6 or 9 credit as part of their programme. This may be ungraded or graded.
- No more than 30 credits can be achieved through 6 and or 9 credits, graded or ungraded.

Under QAA regulations, credit may be accumulated towards the Access to HE Diploma over five years. Each student will follow a learning programme in accordance with the requirements of their named Diploma.

Notional Learning Hours (NLH)

Notional learning hours are the length of time required for a learner to complete their Diploma. This includes all learning that may be relevant to the achievement of the learning outcomes including directed and private study, practical and project work, assignments, and assessment time. For all Access to HE Diplomas the notional learning hours are 600.

Entry requirements

There are no formal entry requirements for students applying for the AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group Access to HE Diplomas. Centres adopting the Diploma are, nevertheless, required to ensure that learners admitted onto the Diploma possess the necessary skills and personal qualities to cope with the demands of the course. The AVA expects centres to establish that candidates normally operate to at least Level Two in English and Level Two in Mathematics before being accepted onto a course leading to the Diploma. In addition, centres would be expected to provide advice and guidance about the demands of the course and to establish that applicants show appropriate levels of commitment and motivation.

Further information can be accessed via QAA's [Principles for Admission to Access to HE Diplomas](#)

Section 2 – Qualification structure

Rules of Combination

For the achievement of the Access to HE Diploma (Counselling) students must achieve 60 credits in total, where:

45 Graded Credits	
30 credits must be achieved from the following subject group:	Counselling
15 credits must be achieved from any combination of the following subject groups:	Counselling Psychology Related Studies Work placement
15 ungraded credits	
15 credits must be achieved from any combination of the following subject groups	Study Skills Introductory academic <i>*Academic Study Techniques is mandatory</i>

Barred units

This Access to HE Diploma contains barred units; barred units cannot be used together in the achievement of the qualification. These are detailed in the next section under each individual subject group.

Units

For this Access to HE Diploma, providers may select from the approved units identified below (following the rules of combination). Select the unit titles to view the unit details and grading criteria (if applicable)

Counselling subject group

Subject group	Unit code	Unit title	Level	Credit value	Graded/ungraded
Counselling	WNI046	Cognitive-Behavioural Counselling	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI048	Counselling for Substance Misuse	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI049	Counselling Supervision	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI050	Counselling Theory	Three	6	Graded
Counselling	WNI051	Differences and Diversity in Practice	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI052	Fundamental Skills of Counselling	Three	6	Graded
Counselling	WNI053	Humanistic Counselling	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI055	Loss and Bereavement Counselling	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI056	Main Approaches to Counselling	Three	6	Graded
Counselling	WNI057	Personal Development in Counselling	Three	6	Graded
Counselling	WNI058	Professional Practice	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI059	Professional Skills for Counselling	Three	6	Graded
Counselling	WNI060	Psychodynamic Counselling	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI061	The Therapeutic Relationship	Three	3	Graded
Counselling	WNI062	Trauma Counselling	Three	3	Graded

Psychology subject group

Subject group	Unit code	Unit title	Level	Credit value	Graded/ungraded
Psychology	WNI121	Early Social Development	Three	3	Graded
Psychology	WNI126	Mental Health and Illness**	Three	3	Graded
Psychology	WNI130	Prejudice and Discrimination	Three	3	Graded
Psychology	WNI131	Pro-Social and Anti-Social Behaviour	Three	3	Graded
Psychology	WNI136	Psychopathology **	Three	3	Graded
Psychology	WNI139	Social Perception	Three	3	Graded
Psychology	WNI134	The Psychology of Mental Health and Illness**	Three	6	Graded
Psychology	WNI145	Treatment and Therapies **	Three	3	Graded
Psychology	WNI146	Understanding Stress	Three	6	Graded

**Barred units

1. The Psychology of Mental Health and Illness is barred against Mental Health and Illness

2. Treatment and Therapies and Psychopathology are barred against The Psychology of Mental Health and Illness
3. Treatment and Therapies and Psychopathology are barred against Mental Health and Illness

Related Studies subject group

Subject group	Unit code	Unit title	Level	Credit value	Graded/ungraded
Related Studies	WNI870	<u>Extended Essay</u> **	Three	6	Graded
Related Studies	WNI871	<u>Research Topic</u> **	Three	6	Graded

**Barred units

1. Extended Essay is barred against Research Topic

Work Placement subject group

Subject group	Unit code	Unit title	Level	Credit value	Graded/ungraded
Work placement	WNI872	<u>Work Based Personal Development</u>	Three	3	Graded
Work placement	WNI873	<u>Workplace Organisation</u>	Three	3	Graded

Study skills subject group

Subject group	Unit code	Unit title	Level	Credit value	Graded/ungraded
Study skills	WNI853	<u>Academic Study Techniques</u> *this unit is mandatory	Three	6	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI855	<u>Developing Critical Thinking</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI856	<u>Digital Portfolio</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI857	<u>Email</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI858	<u>English Language Skills</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI887	<u>Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in an Academic Context</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI479	<u>Mathematics – Data Handling and Statistics</u>	Two	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI481	<u>Mathematics – Number</u>	Two	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI859	<u>Mental Health and Wellbeing</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI860	<u>Independent Research</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI861	<u>Preparing for a Controlled Assessment</u>	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI862	<u>Preparing for a Higher Education Admission Interview</u>	Three	3	Ungraded

Study skills	WNI863	Presentation Graphics	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI864	Presentation Skills	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI865	Producing a Written Assignment	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI866	Progressing to Higher Education	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI867	Seminar	Three	3	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI868	Using Spreadsheets - Presentation and Publishing Information	Three	6	Ungraded
Study skills	WNI535	Word Processing	Three	3	Ungraded

Introductory academic subject group

Subject group	Unit code	Unit title	Level	Credit value	Graded/ungraded
Introductory academic	WNI047	Communication Skills	Three	3	Ungraded
Introductory academic	WNI054	Introduction to Counselling Theory	Three	3	Ungraded
Introductory academic	WNI129	Perspectives in Psychology	Three	3	Ungraded
Introductory academic	WNI135	Psychology	Three	3	Ungraded
Introductory academic	WNI160	Social Divisions	Three	3	Ungraded

Section 3 – Assessment

How the qualification is assessed

The assessment strategy for this Diploma will be designed by the provider to ensure that a student's confidence and skills are sufficiently developed in order that they are prepared for the rigorous assessment regimes that they will encounter when they progress onto programmes of study in higher education. The provider must ensure that appropriate quality assurance mechanisms are in place, for example internal moderation, team meetings, standardisation and student representation.

Centres are encouraged to consider using a variety of assessment methods to prepare the learner for study at a higher level in their relevant subject area. These include:

- essay writing
- reports
- presentations
- practical
- academic displays
- discussions
- reflection
- role play
- research projects
- field work
- time constrained assessment

The assessment method for the qualification is by internally set assessments. Centres are free to devise their own assessments for each unit delivered.

Evidence

Assessments will enable students to generate sufficient evidence to cover all assessment criteria for the unit and to demonstrate differentiated achievement. Students will be provided with unit details at the onset of each unit, including details of the assessment and grading requirements for each unit. Where integrated assessments are used, these will clearly signpost the specific unit learning outcomes and grade descriptors/components that are being assessed via the specified task(s).

The AVA would expect all elements of assessment practice, whether activities and their timing, evidence or feedback; to meet the following key principles of assessment as outlined below:

- Authenticity
- Fitness for purpose
- Inclusivity
- Sufficiency, reliability, and consistency
- Validity

The AVA expects centres to keep all elements of their assessment practice under constant review to ensure that the key principles are met. Centres are required to produce their assessment plan prior to the commencement of the course. This will be viewed by the AVA and shared with each relevant Diploma Moderators. In developing a unit assessment plan, tutors should plan an assessment programme that meets the development needs of students and the demands of the unit in as few assignments as possible. Guidance on our expectations is available in the [AIM Qualifications: Access to HE Provider Handbook](#).

Assessment Planning - When planning assessment for a unit, centres need to be aware of the:

- level and credit value of the unit
- status of the unit – graded or ungraded
- Learning Outcomes (LO) and Assessment criteria (AC)
- Grading Standards and Components

If just one assignment is used to assess the unit, it must enable all:

- learning outcomes to be assessed
- grade standards to be applied

All assessments should be designed in such a way as to minimise the requirement for reasonable adjustments to be made.

Assessments must not require learners to produce evidence above and beyond that stipulated in the assessment criteria.

Centres must ensure that assessments briefs are internally moderated before they are issued to learners and must be available to the Diploma Moderators during their first moderation activity.

Further guidance on assessment can be found in the **Access to HE Provider Handbook** and the QAA **Assessment and Grading Handbook** [Sections B](#) and [Section C](#).

Grading standards

A new grade scheme with three new grading standards has been introduced from August 2024 replacing the seven grade descriptors. These standards will be used as the basis for all grading judgements on all courses. The three grading standards relate to different aspects of performance which are relevant to the assessment of a student's readiness for higher study. These are:

1. Knowledge and Understanding
2. Subject Specific Skills
3. Transferable Skills

Grading

- All units are subject to assessment via the assessment criteria.
- All level 3 units within the graded element of the Diploma (i.e. 45 credits with academic content) are graded: Pass, Merit or Distinction
- "Pass" is the achievement of all the assessment criteria in a unit.
- Further grading may be considered only when all the assessment criteria are met: the three grading standards are assigned to each graded unit.
- There are sub-components for merit and distinction for each grading standard.
- Tutors, in assignment design, must identify and apply the appropriate sub- components.
- Where a graded unit is assessed by one assignment tutors must record the grade indicators for each grading standard for each assignment.
- The grading standards indicators (provisional grades) of all assignments for a unit make up the unit grade profile.
- There is NO overall assignment grade. The final grade for a unit is based on the grade indicators in the unit profile as a whole.
- All grade standards are of equal value.
- The final grade is determined by the median of the grade standards' grades.

For full details of grading regulations providers should consult the [QAA Grade Scheme Handbooks](#).

Deadlines

Providers must set deadlines for all work to be submitted for summative assessment. A schedule of assignment deadlines should be produced and shared with students. Students will be advised that the ability to submit work to deadlines is an essential requirement to progress onto higher-level programmes.

Feedback

Students must be provided with clear and constructive feedback which identifies areas of achievement and those where further work is required. Feedback to students should be recorded.

Extensions

Providers must have and clearly state a procedure for students to request an extension to a deadline, and the grounds for approval of an extension.

Late Submissions

If an assignment is submitted after the deadline without an extension having been granted and the work does not meet the learning outcomes, there is no opportunity for resubmission except via the referrals process.

Resubmissions

A first submission that fails to meet the assessment criteria is returned to the student (with feedback) for resubmission. Feedback must relate to the assessment criteria but may not make reference to the grade standards and components. Resubmission should be within a few days (no longer than a week) and be proportionate to the degree of non-achievement. A resubmission permitted for assessment criteria not achieved in the first submission can be considered for grading if submitted on or prior to the resubmission deadline.

Referrals

Requests for referrals will not normally be considered where the total credit value of the units which have already been achieved through referral or might be achieved as an outcome of a further referral, is more than 15.

A student whose resubmission fails to meet all the assessment criteria may request a referral ie the opportunity to make a second resubmission. The request is made to the assessor and Internal Moderator who will collate the evidence and subsequently convey the request to the AVA. The AVA informs the Centre of the decision. Referrals undergo assessment, internal verification and external moderation.

If the referred resubmission is successful and has been allowed as a third attempt (with no previous late submission) the assignment can be used in the grading of the unit (that is, the unit grade is not capped and

should be graded accordingly). If the referred resubmission is successful and has been allowed as a result of a late first submission (that is, without an agreed extension or extenuating circumstances) followed by an unsuccessful resubmission the unit grade will be capped at pass (consistent with the penalty applied for a late submission).

A complete record of all requests for referrals and their outcomes must be provided for the awards board

Reasonable Adjustment and Exceptional Circumstances

Reasonable adjustments and special considerations are available for all assessments, irrespective of whether they are internally or externally set. Where a learner or group of learners may not be able to access the assessment without reasonable adjustments, centres should ensure that they apply in good time for relevant reasonable adjustments to be made, using the [AIM Qualifications Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy](#) which gives clear guidance on the reasonable adjustments and arrangements that can be made to take account of disability or learning difficulty without compromising the achievement of the assessment criteria.

Extenuating Circumstances

Providers must have and clearly state an appropriate procedure for dealing with cases of extenuating circumstances, including:

- a clear definition of extenuating circumstances
- procedures that must be followed by students to notify providers of extenuating circumstances that affect the completion or submission of work for assessment
- procedures followed by providers when they have been notified of extenuating circumstances

In most cases notifications of extenuating circumstances may be handled at course level and appropriate action and decisions are taken according to the provider's procedures. Teams must document cases of extenuating circumstances and the action taken

Recognition of Prior Learning/Credit Transfer

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) and transfer of credit exist to enable students to avoid duplication of learning and assessment. A student may claim RPL or transfer of credit against a whole unit or several units. The potential for a student to undertake RPL or credit transfer relies on the PM carrying out effective interview and initial assessment of students to establish their previous qualifications and/or experience. Claims are made and considered on an individual basis and may be permitted where the units studied/credit previously achieved are within the rules of combination of this Diploma. The total proportion of credits awarded or exempted through RPL or credit transfer must not exceed 30 credits,

that is 50 percent of the credits required for the achievement of the Diploma. Claims must be submitted to the AVA prior to registration of student,

Eligibility will be checked by the PM. RPL/credit transfer is likely to be permitted if the qualification/ credit achievement or experience has been gained within three years of starting the Access programme.

Appeals

Providers must have and clearly state an appeals procedure that students must follow if they wish to question an assessment decision upon receiving it. If a satisfactory conclusion cannot be reached, then the Access Coordinator/Manager or student may escalate this to the AVA.

Academic Misconduct

The importance of demonstrating the authenticity of their work and understanding the issue of plagiarism will be explained to students during the induction process. Should accepted practice be breached, providers should follow their institution's malpractice procedure.

Final Awards Board (FAB)

Following assessment of all students work, the provider must organise an awards board: a formal meeting held shortly after final moderation. The main responsibility of the awards board is the approval of the award of credits, grades and Access to HE Diplomas.

Please see the 'Access to HE: Final Awards Board Policy on the AIM website for further information.

Section 4 – Operational guidance

Offering this Diploma

Centres wishing to offer this Diploma must be an AIM recognised centre. New centres can apply to become a centre using the centre recognition application process on our website: www.aimgroup.org.uk.

We can advise centres of the best and most efficient methods for offering this qualification. All procedures for the use of this qualification, including approval, registration of learners, verification and certification will be completed through the AIM portal and all centres will have an allocated customer experience advisor to support them.

Fees and charges

Details of all our fees and charges can be found on our website, www.aimgroup.org.uk.

Requirements to deliver this Diploma

To offer this Diploma, centres must ensure that tutors:

- Hold a qualification in the subject area and at the level above they are delivering.
- Hold a relevant teaching qualification. The AVA recommends PGCE, Level 5 Diploma in Teaching and Learning or DTLS.

Centres must also ensure that they have in place an Internal Quality Assurance person who:

- Ideally holds or is working towards a Level 4 Award in Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Processes and Practices or its equivalent
- has substantial experience of working in or assessing Access to HE Diploma qualifications
- is familiar with the assessment requirements of the Access to HE Diploma

Approval to offer this Access to HE Diploma

Centres wishing to offer this Diploma must complete and submit a qualification approval request. [This can be found on the AIM website when choosing a qualification.](#) Some qualifications require centres to have specific resources in place and/or their assessors/internal verifiers should hold certain

qualifications. Where this is the case, centres must provide evidence of resources/staff qualifications when completing the qualification approval request.

Resource requirements

There are no specialist resources required to deliver this diploma, however centres should ensure that students have access to

- learning environments that are maintained and kept up to date,
- additional support and other pastoral care
- library/resource centres
- hardware, software and on-line services.

Where centres choose to deliver the placement unit, it is the centre's responsibility to ensure the safeguarding of their learners and to ensure that learners are fully informed regarding any potential costs relating to the placement, for example DBS checks.

Centre responsibilities

Each centre must identify a centre contact who will be responsible for:

- ensuring that the centre meets all the AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group requirements for centre recognition and adheres to all [policies and procedures](#)
- Access to HE provision within the centre
- ensuring all procedures relating to the delivery of the Access to HE Diploma operate effectively in the centre
- ensuring all relevant AIM Qualifications documentation is distributed as required within the centre and that the security requirements for external assessment are adhered to, where applicable.

Registration and certification

Once your centre has approval to offer a qualification, you will be able to register learners using the AIM portal. Learners must be registered onto the correct qualification via the portal. Centres then select their chosen components.

For all registration and certification processes, please refer to the portal guidance document which can be downloaded from our website's [centre handbooks and forms page](#). Details of assessment, internal

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www.aimgroup.org.uk
0333 034 8833

verification and external verification can be found in the [AIM Qualifications: Access to HE Centre Handbook](#).

Learners achieving a qualification will be issued with a qualification certificate detailing the achieved qualification and components. Learners who have not achieved a qualification will, on request, be issued with a component certificate detailing the components achieved.

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