

GUIDANCE

# Level 3 Alternative Academic Qualifications and Technical Occupation Qualifications Qualification Level Guidance

January 2023

**ofqual**

# Contents

<b>Guidance on Specified levels of attainment.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Requirements in the General Conditions of Recognition .....	3
Overall approach.....	3
Principles.....	4
Considerations.....	4
<b>Guidance on standard setting for Alternative Academic Qualifications.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Evidence to be taken into account when setting specified levels of attainment.....	6

# Guidance on Specified levels of attainment

Condition ATQ5.1 allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to the specified levels of attainment that must be used for Alternative Academic Qualifications and Technical Occupation Qualifications.

We set out below our guidance for Alternative Academic Qualifications for the purposes of this Condition.

## Requirements in the General Conditions of Recognition

An awarding organisation is required under Condition E3.2(j) to ensure that the specification for a qualification sets out any specified levels of attainment.

Condition E4.2(f) requires that an awarding organisation must ensure the design of an assessment allows each specified level of attainment detailed in the specification to be reached by a Learner who has attained the required level of knowledge, skills and understanding. Condition G9.2(d) imposes the same requirement in relation to delivery of an assessment and Condition G9.2(e) requires that, on delivery, all assessments must enable the awarding organisation to differentiate effectively between Learners – as explained in the guidance to Condition G9, that is, on the basis of the knowledge, skills and understanding being assessed.

Condition H6.1(c) requires that an awarding organisation issues results which are clear and readily capable of being understood by Users of qualifications.

Condition D3.1 requires an awarding organisation to keep under review, and enhance where necessary, its approach to the design, development, delivery and award of qualifications to ensure that it remains, at all times, appropriate. This includes, under D3.2(a), having due regard to information from Users of its qualifications.

For the purposes of this guidance, we refer to overall schemes for specified levels of attainment as grading scales and to individual specified levels of attainment within these as grades.

## Overall approach

In designing its approach to grading scales, an awarding organisation should consider how its approach will enable it to meet the requirements of the General Conditions. In doing so, it should consider, overall:

- what the grades are intended to indicate in terms of Learners' attainment, and
- on that basis, how many grades to use and what those grades will be named.

## Principles

In determining its approach, an awarding organisation should have regard to the following principles. An awarding organisation should secure that the grading scale for each qualification complies with all of the principles to the greatest extent possible. The grading scale should be:

- appropriate for the information about a Learner's attainment in the qualification that the grade is intended to convey
- appropriate for the knowledge, skills and understanding being assessed and how these are assessed
- capable of being clearly understood by Users of the qualification
- appropriate for the design, structure and size of the qualification
- subject to the above, consistent, where appropriate, with those used in similar qualifications made available by the awarding organisation or by other awarding organisations and, in particular, other Alternative Academic Qualifications.

## Considerations

In designing its approach to the grading scale used – that is, the number of grades and what those grades are named – we will expect an awarding organisation to consider the following, as well as any other relevant factors:

- **The purposes of the qualification** – for example, if a qualification is primarily intended to differentiate between Learners of different abilities rather than signal a level of competence, the grading scale should reflect this.
- **Whether any particular grade is intended to indicate that a Learner has attained specific outcomes in relation to the content in scope, or to indicate relative attainment across a range of knowledge, skills and understanding** – this may be considered in terms of the potential that grading scales can be more 'discrete' (i.e. where the individual points are named outcomes) or more 'continuous' (i.e. where the points on the scale tend to be meaningful primarily in relation to each other).
- **How many grades are needed to differentiate meaningfully between the different levels of performance Learners can achieve and which Users need to differentiate effectively** – a qualification that has many qualitatively

different levels of performance into which it is meaningful to classify Learners is likely to need a greater number of grades than one in which differences between Learners' performances can be more coarsely separated. A large qualification with multiple assessments may suggest a finer differentiation (and therefore more grades) is appropriate compared to a small qualification with a single assessment.

- **The degree to which the approach to describing grades, and to the number of grades, can be understood by Users** – for example, if using a numbered scale, and it is generally understood that in similar qualifications the highest number represents the highest grade, using the same approach in other qualifications will help Users understand the grades.
- **Approaches used in similar qualifications made available, whether by the awarding organisation or by other awarding organisations, and the benefits of taking consistent approaches to grading scales** – for example, if the awarding organisation has a suite of qualifications, a common approach across its suite may help Users understand those grades. Similarly, if different awarding organisations offer qualifications that are considered to be alternatives to one another, the use of similar grading scales may help Users understand the grades. The greater the degree to which grades from different qualifications are intended to indicate equivalent meaning, the stronger the likelihood of it being appropriate to use similar grading scales, and vice versa.

An awarding organisation should explain its approach to grading scales, including the number of grades, names of grades and rationale for its approach, as part of its assessment strategy.

Where a grading scale is being used in an existing qualification, or proposed for a new qualification, which might not meet the principles set out in this guidance, and in particular that differs from those used in other similar qualifications, there should be a clear rationale explaining why the awarding organisation considers this to be appropriate.

An awarding organisation should, in line with Condition D3 (Reviewing approach), gather evidence from Users of its qualification in relation to its grading scale – that is, the number of grades and what those grades are called – so that its approach takes into account the needs of Users. Where this evidence suggests the approach to a grading scale is not sufficiently taking into account the needs of Users, the awarding organisation should consider whether a change to its approach is required.

# Guidance on standard setting for Alternative Academic Qualifications

Condition ATQ9.1(b) allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to the setting of specified levels of attainment for Alternative Academic Qualifications.

We set out below the guidance for the purpose of Condition ATQ9.1(b).

## Evidence to be taken into account when setting specified levels of attainment

Condition ATQ9.2 states that in setting the specified levels of attainment for an Alternative Academic Qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must have regard to an appropriate range of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Condition ATQ9.3 states that such evidence will only be appropriate if it includes evidence of –

- a) the Level of Demand of the assessments for that qualification,
- b) the level of attainment demonstrated in those assessments by an appropriately representative sample of Learners taking that qualification,
- c) where available, the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners taking that qualification in a –
  - (i) prior assessment (which was not for that qualification), whether or not that assessment was for a regulated qualification, or
  - (ii) prior qualification, whether or not that qualification was a regulated qualification, and
- d) the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners who have previously been awarded the qualification.

Without prejudice to any requirements that Ofqual may set in relation to the weight to be given to evidence, examples of the evidence that may be used by an awarding organisation in setting the specified levels of attainment for an Alternative Academic Qualification which it makes available may include –

- question papers or tasks and final mark schemes,

- senior Assessor input into decisions, for example comments on how the assessments have worked or are likely to work, and recommendations for the setting of specified levels of attainment,
- technical information about how the assessments, and/or any similar assessments previously and concurrently available, have functioned, for example mark distributions, mean marks, standard deviations, item-level statistics,
- samples of current Learners' work selected from a range of Centres and assessed or Moderated by Assessors or moderators whose work is known to be reliable,
- details of changes in entry patterns and choices of options,
- archive Learners' work exemplifying specified levels of attainment in previous assessments for the qualification, together with the relevant question papers or tasks and mark schemes,
- inter-awarding organisation evidence for Alternative Academic Qualifications,
- pertinent material deemed to be of equivalent standard from similar qualifications or other relevant qualifications,
- information on Learners' performance in previous assessments for the qualification, and
- marking guides for assessments where the evidence is of an ephemeral nature.

In determining whether it has sufficient evidence of the level of attainment demonstrated in the assessments for an Alternative Academic Qualification by an appropriate percentage of the Learners taking that qualification, an awarding organisation should consider whether the marks (or equivalent information about Learner attainment for Components that are not mark-based) on its system reflect –

- all possible routes through the qualification and/or Component, and
- a representative proportion of Learners' marks (or equivalent information about Learner attainment for Components that are not mark-based) for, or likely to be achieved in, the qualification and/or Component.



© Crown Copyright 2023

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

[View the Open Government Licence at The National Archives website](#) or write to:  
Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU

Published by:

**ofqual**

Earlsdon Park  
53-55 Butts Road  
Coventry  
CV1 3BH

0300 303 3344

[public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/ofqual](http://www.gov.uk/ofqual)