ACCESS TO HE DIPLOMA

THE STORY

Access to Higher Education

ACCESS TO HE DIPLOMA: **THE STORY**

Every year, thousands of adults make the decision to change their future. Some are returning to education after years away from learning, whilst others are seeking a new profession, a fresh start, or the opportunity to achieve ambitions that were previously out of reach. The Access to Higher Education Diploma exists to make those aspirations possible, with around 40,000 people a year enrolling across a multitude of subjects.

More than a qualification, the Diploma equips learners with the **knowledge, skills and confidence** needed to succeed in higher education. Through focused study and academic preparation, learners develop critical thinking, research, analysis, independent learning and communication skills that prepare them not only for higher education, but for lifelong learning and career success. The Diploma also provides an opportunity to gain sector specific skills and knowledge that give them an advantage when moving into Higher Education.

The Access to HE Diploma has been transforming lives by opening doors to higher education and professional careers. Learners use the qualification to progress onto a wide range of degree programmes, including nursing, midwifery, teaching, social work, psychology, business, engineering, computing and many other disciplines that contribute to society and the economy.

Undertaking an Access to Higher Education Diploma can have a significant positive impact on learners' mental health and wellbeing by providing opportunities to build supportive peer networks and develop a sense of belonging. Many students find reassurance in studying alongside others with similar experiences and aspirations. The collaborative nature of the programme encourages **mutual support, confidence-building and the development of meaningful friendships**, helping to reduce feelings of isolation. As learners gain new skills, achieve academic milestones and progress towards higher education, they often experience increased self-esteem, resilience and overall wellbeing, contributing to improved life chances and personal fulfilment.



Agored Cymru · AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group · Ascentis Awarding Organisation · CAVA Cambridge Access Validating Agency · gateway qualifications · Laser Learning Awards · OCN London · open awards Changing lives through learning · Skills & Education Group Access

ACCESS TO HE DIPLOMA: **THE STORY**

Importantly, the Access to HE Diploma is one of the UK's most effective **widening participation** qualifications. It creates opportunities for people who have traditionally been underrepresented within higher education and helps ensure that talent, potential and ambition are not limited by previous educational experiences.

Its impact can be seen in the diversity of the learners it serves. Many Access to HE learners are mature students aged over 25. Around **24% come from disadvantaged communities, 28% report a disability,** and **39% are from ethnic minority backgrounds** (QAA, 2023) (Access to HE, 2023), demonstrating the diploma's significant contribution to improving access and equality within higher education. These learners also bring valuable life experience, determination and resilience to higher education, enriching university communities and the professions they later enter.

The impact of Access to HE extends far beyond individual achievement. The flexibility of the qualification also enables colleges and providers to respond to local and national skills priorities, supporting progression into sectors that are vital to public services and economic growth.

Many learners choose careers in healthcare, education, social care and other professions where skilled practitioners are in high demand. **Around 77% of Access to HE learners** (QAA, 2023) (Access to HE, 2023) also continue their studies within their local area, helping to strengthen communities, address regional skills shortages and develop local talent pipelines.

The story of Access to HE is ultimately a story of opportunity. It is about unlocking potential, removing barriers and creating routes to success for people from all backgrounds. For many learners, the Access to Higher Education Diploma is more than a qualification. It is a bridge between aspiration and achievement, opening doors to university, professional careers and life-changing opportunities.

Access to HE (2023) Key Statistics 2022-23. Available at: https://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/docs/access/regulating-access-documents/access-to-he-key-statistics-2022-34.pdf?sfvrsn=3bb8b881_3 (Accessed: 01 September 2026).

QAA (2023) Key statistics demonstrating success of the Access to HE Diploma. Available at: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/qaa-publishes-key-statistics-demonstrating-success-of-the-access-to-he-diploma (Accessed: 01 September 2026).

Agored Cymru · AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group · Ascentis Awarding Organisation · CAVA Cambridge Access Validating Agency · gateway qualifications · Laser Learning Awards · OCN London · open awards Changing lives through learning · Skills & Education Group Access