

NextGen: HN grading pack

HNC Esports

Qualification code: GHHQ 47

Valid from: August 2026

This grading pack provides information about the process of grading the Higher National Certificate (HNC). It is for lecturers and assessors, and contains all the mandatory information you need to grade the HNC.

You must read it alongside the Educator Guide.

Contents

Approach to grading	1
Whole-qualification grade outcomes	1
Whole-qualification grade descriptors	1
What the whole-qualification grade descriptors do and how they are used	2
Using the grading matrix	4
Meta-skills	5
Learning for Sustainability	5
Grading matrix.....	6
Additional grading guidance	21
Grading model.....	21
Worked examples of grading model.....	23
Administrative information	27
History of changes.....	27

Approach to grading

Grading in NextGen: HN Qualifications produces a valid and reliable record of a learner's level of achievement across the breadth of the qualification content.

As well as grading the whole qualification, you assess individual units on a pass or fail basis. Each unit has evidence requirements that learners must achieve before you can consider them for whole-qualification grading.

Whole-qualification grade outcomes

Learners who pass NextGen: HN Qualifications receive one of the following grade outcomes for the qualification as a whole:

- Achieved with Distinction
- Achieved with Merit
- Achieved

To determine a learner's whole-qualification grade, you use the grading matrix to assess and judge their performance across the key aspects of the HNC. You must align your judgements with the following whole-qualification grade descriptors.

Whole-qualification grade descriptors

Achieved with Distinction

The learner has achieved an excellent standard across the course content, going significantly beyond meeting the qualification requirements. They showed a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of course concepts and principles, and consistently used them to apply skills to complete high-quality work. They engaged significantly with the process of developing their meta-skills in the context of their HN Qualification.

Achieved with Merit

The learner has achieved a very good standard across the course content, going beyond meeting the qualification requirements. They showed a very good knowledge and understanding of course concepts and principles, and consistently used them to apply skills to complete work of a standard above that expected for an Achieved grade. They actively engaged with the process of developing their meta-skills in the context of their HN Qualification.

Achieved

The learner has achieved a good standard across the course content, credibly meeting the qualification requirements. They showed a good knowledge and understanding of course concepts and principles, and used them to apply skills to complete work of the required standard. They engaged with the process of developing their meta-skills in the context of their HN Qualification.

What the whole-qualification grade descriptors do and how they are used

The whole-qualification grade descriptors outline the skills, knowledge and understanding a learner needs to show across the whole qualification to achieve that specific grade. They align with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level descriptors.

NextGen: HNC qualifications are at SCQF level 7. Learners who complete a NextGen: HNC can:

- convey knowledge of the subject's main theories, concepts and principles
- apply skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject in relevant practical and professional contexts
- use a broad range of approaches to address problems and issues in the context of the subject area
- exercise initiative and independence in carrying out activities, and have started to develop their professional practice and behaviours relevant to the context of the qualification
- differentiate between and appropriately apply the knowledge gained through practice, research and other sources

Please use this information, as well as the whole-qualification grade descriptors, to help you understand the standard at which learners should be assessed and graded.

Higher education institutes (HEIs) can use the grade descriptors to set admissions requirements, and employers can use them to help make decisions during a recruitment process.

Qualifications Scotland's quality assurance teams use the grade descriptors and the grading matrix to ensure that grades awarded in a particular NextGen: HN Qualification are at a consistent national standard, regardless of the setting in which they are achieved.

Successful learners receive their grade, along with the grade descriptor, on their certificate.

Using the grading matrix

You must use the grading matrix to judge the learner's whole-qualification grade. You can use the grading matrix at any time, but you only make a whole-qualification grading judgement when you are confident the learner has met all the evidence requirements of all the required units.

The criteria in the grading matrix reflect the knowledge, skills and qualities HEIs and employers can expect of a learner who has completed the qualification. These criteria align with the overall purpose of the qualification, and remain the same for its duration.

Each criterion has sector-specific descriptors of a typical learner's performance standard, aligned to the whole-qualification grade outcomes of Achieved, Achieved with Merit and Achieved with Distinction. These descriptors describe the standard a learner of that whole-qualification grade is expected to show.

The guidance accompanying each criterion can include, but is not limited to, information on:

- relevant types of assessment that may produce useful or meaningful evidence for judging that criterion
- mapping to content that is particularly relevant to that criterion
- mapping to meta-skills

This guidance may be updated over time.

When you make your final grading judgement, you must use a 'best fit' approach based on the learner's achievement across the grading matrix. This may be straightforward — for example, if the learner's evidence shows a consistent standard across the grading matrix criteria. If it is not straightforward, you must make a 'best fit' judgement — for example, if a learner shows a mix of standards across the grading matrix criteria, with no clear pattern. The criteria may not always have equal value. You can decide some are more important to the final grade than others.

Meta-skills

Meta-skills are a key part of NextGen: HN Qualifications and learners can develop them throughout the qualification. A learner's engagement with developing their own meta-skills contributes to their qualification grade. You do not assess or grade competence or progress in individual meta-skills — for example, by judging the quality of a learner's feeling or creativity. Instead, you look at the process of development learners go through. This means learners need to provide evidence of planning, developing and reflecting on their meta-skills.

If qualification content also contributes to meta-skills development, it contributes to a learner's whole-qualification grading through the grading matrix approach.

Learning for Sustainability

Learning for Sustainability does not contribute to a learner's qualification grade.

The exception is where Learning for Sustainability content is part of the qualification content. In this case, the Learning for Sustainability content contributes to a learner's whole-qualification grade, through the grading matrix.

Grading matrix

Criterion 1 descriptors

Criterion 1	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Demonstrate technical proficiency	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">effectively uses digital tools and platforms relevant to esportsoperates gaming hardware and software safely and securely	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">effectively manages content and communication across multiple digital platformstroubleshoots common technical issues and configures systems safely and securely	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">demonstrates advanced media literacy and creates professional-grade contentdemonstrates expert-level proficiency in technical setup and optimisation, including safety and security

Criterion 1 guidance

This competence relates to learners' technical skills. Most of the component units could provide evidence for this competence, particularly:

- Esports: Foundations — requires learners to demonstrate digital and communication skills by using digital tools to create and manage esports content and optimise gaming hardware and software.

- Esports: Game Performance — involves learners having technical proficiency with gaming hardware and software and effectively using game-specific tools and resources.
- Esports: Content Creation — requires learners to generate digital media and manage content.
- Digital Skills — if delivered in the context of gaming, can provide evidence for this competence.
- Emerging Technologies and Experiences — focuses on exploring new digital technologies like machine learning and virtual reality, allowing learners to evaluate these technologies' potential applications in various contexts while developing critical thinking and research skills.
- Network Infrastructure — learners gain technical proficiency by designing, implementing, securing, and maintaining network infrastructures, which involves practical skills in IP addressing, hardware configuration, and network security measures.

Criterion 2 descriptors

Criterion 2	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the esports ecosystem	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrates basic awareness of the esports ecosystem and its components 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> explains key elements of the esports ecosystem with some detail 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides comprehensive insight into the esports industry, including trends and stakeholder roles

Criterion 2 guidance

This competence relates to learners' knowledge of the esports environment. Several of the component units could provide evidence for this competence, particularly:

- Esports: Foundations — covers the structure of, and key stakeholders in, the esports industry. The unit includes roles, responsibilities, and careers in esports, and the economic impact of the industry, and its revenue streams.
- Esports: Marketing and Sponsorship — explores the structure and culture of the esports environment, including its key stakeholders, career opportunities, and ethical practices. It emphasises creating safe, fair, and professional competitive spaces that support player welfare and positive online behaviour.
- Esports: Broadcasting and Streaming — highlights the production standards, roles, and technologies that shape the esports broadcasting ecosystem, preparing learners to contribute effectively to live events, commentary, and digital media in the competitive gaming industry.

- Esports Business Management — requires learners to know the esports ecosystem and stakeholder relationships, and the global and cultural aspects of the subject.

Criterion 3 descriptors

Criterion 3	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<p>Participate in competitive games</p>	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understands basic rules, scoring systems and strategies of specific esports genres and titles • demonstrates basic understanding of game objectives and follows team strategy with guidance • performs core game mechanics with moderate accuracy and consistency 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applies tactical knowledge to in-game scenarios • makes effective in-game decisions, adapts to changing scenarios, and contributes to team tactics • executes advanced mechanics with precision and maintains strong situational awareness 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyses and adapts advanced strategies based on evolving game meta • anticipates opponent strategies, leads tactical plays, and consistently makes high-impact decisions under pressure • demonstrates exceptional mechanical control, reacts instinctively to dynamic situations, and maintains peak performance throughout gameplay

Criterion 3 guidance

This competence relates to game-playing. Evidence for this competence is found in the following units:

- Esports: Game Performance — provides the main source of evidence. This unit focuses on developing learners' practical game-playing skills and performance in competitive esports. It covers game mechanics, strategy, teamwork, and psychological factors, to enhance both individual and team gameplay in professional gaming environments.
- Esports: Foundations — provides evidence to a lesser extent. This unit develops learners' practical gaming skills through hands-on experience in competitive play, focusing on game mechanics, teamwork, and strategic decision-making.
- Esports: Coaching — provides opportunities, as learners focus on improving game performance through effective coaching in competitive esports. Learners develop skills in analysing gameplay, creating training programmes, and applying strategies that enhance individual and team performance in dynamic gaming environments.

Criterion 4 descriptors

Criterion 4	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Analysis and improve performance	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifies basic performance metrics and areas for improvement reviews gameplay to identify basic strengths and weaknesses, with support 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses tools and data to evaluate performance and identify improvements independently analyses performance using tools and data to implement targeted improvements 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implements performance strategies based on in-depth analysis and feedback conducts in-depth performance reviews, integrates feedback from multiple sources, and refines strategies to achieve measurable progress

Criterion 4 guidance

This competence relates to the analysis of gameplay. Evidence for this competence is found in the following units:

- Esports: Game Performance — provides the main source of evidence. Learners analyse individual and team gameplay by identifying strengths and areas for improvement and subsequently developing tactical strategies to enhance performance. Through reflective practice, performance analysis, and strategic planning, learners engage in continuous self-assessment and feedback incorporation to optimise competitive gaming outcomes.

- Professional Practice in Esports — requires learners to evaluate individual and team performance, when a data-driven analysis is expected.
- Esports: Coaching — requires the use of data-driven methods to evaluate individual and team gameplay and could be a contributory unit.
- Esports: Foundations — provides an opportunity to evaluate gameplay, although it doesn't require detailed analysis.
- Data Skills — a context-free unit but, if delivered in the context of esports, could contribute to the evidence base.

Criterion 5 descriptors

Criterion 5	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Communicate and collaborate in a team	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates clearly, using basic tools and terminology, and responds to team instructions participates in team activities and completes assigned tasks with guidance 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicates proactively, provides relevant feedback, and supports team co-ordination contributes ideas, supports team goals, and adapts to group dynamics 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> leads communication efforts, ensures clarity across the team, and resolves misunderstandings constructively takes initiative in team roles, fosters a positive team culture, and enhances group performance through leadership and support

Criterion 5 guidance

This competence relates to team working. Evidence for this competence could be found in many units, depending on how they are delivered (individual or team work), particularly:

- Professional Practice in Esports — provides the main source of evidence. It emphasises the development of communication and collaboration skills in a team setting, as learners engage in planning and executing an esports tournament. This involves

articulating project progress, demonstrating empathy in team dynamics, and effectively contributing to team-based activities to achieve common goals.

- Esports: Game Performance- — requires learners to compete in teams and is a contributory unit.
- Esports: Foundations — involves competitive gameplay where some of the criteria is evidenced.
- Esports: Coaching — involves teamwork.

Criterion 6 descriptors

Criterion 6	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Exhibit personal attributes associated with esports	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes an effective contribution to the organisation of activities • responds to challenges with basic coping strategies • understands the importance of physical and mental health in esports • takes responsibility for assigned tasks in a team • exhibits basic financial awareness 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organises and manages activities with attention to logistics and promotion • adapts to changing circumstances and maintains performance • implements routines to support personal wellbeing • initiates actions and motivates peers in collaborative settings • applies financial knowledge to make informed decisions 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leads complex activities with innovative solutions and contingency planning • thrives under pressure and leads others through change • advocates for and supports holistic health practices in esports teams • demonstrates leadership and drives team success • demonstrates entrepreneurial initiative through financial planning and innovation

Criterion 6 guidance

This competence is evidenced across the qualification. Every unit could contribute to the evidence base. However, the following units are particularly relevant:

- Professional Practice in Esports — a project-based unit that addresses all the grading criteria. It underscores the importance of exhibiting personal attributes such as professionalism, integrity, and adaptability, which are crucial in the esports industry. Learners demonstrate ethical decision-making, self-management, and the ability to adjust to challenges, reflecting the standards expected of a practitioner in esports.
- Esports: Game Performance —a project-based unit that addresses all the grading criteria. This unit develops key personal attributes such as focus, resilience, communication, teamwork, and strategic thinking. Learners build confidence, discipline, and self-awareness by analysing performance and applying improvement strategies in competitive gaming environments.
- Esports: Tournament Organisation — provides evidence for the criteria relating to the organisation of activities and leadership.
- Esports: Foundations — provides evidence for the criteria relating to the organisation of activities and leadership.
- Esports: Coaching — involves leadership and team cohesion.
- Esports: Marketing and Sponsorship — focuses on learners developing personal attributes such as teamwork, communication, professionalism, and strategic thinking. They learn about responsibility, ethical behaviour, and self-management in the esports environment.
- Esports: Business Management — develops personal attributes essential for success in the esports industry, such as leadership, innovation, strategic thinking, and ethical awareness. Learners build confidence, adaptability, and an entrepreneurial mindset while applying business and management principles to real-world esports contexts.

Criterion 7 descriptors

Criterion 7	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Demonstrate professionalism in esports	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • displays respectful behaviour and follows basic ethical guidelines • recognises the value of diversity in esports 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consistently demonstrates professionalism in various esports contexts • supports inclusive practices and respectful communication 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotes ethical standards and acts as a role model in the learner community • champions diversity and fosters an inclusive esports environment

Criterion 7 guidance

This competence relates to professionalism in esports and is evidenced across the qualification. Many units could contribute to the evidence base. However, the following units are particularly relevant:

- Professional Practice in Esports — focuses on professionalism in esports and provides evidence for all the criteria; this is the only unit that explicitly relates to diversity in the field, although this topic will naturally arise in other units.
- Esports: Foundations — learners demonstrate professional and ethical behaviours.
- Esports: Broadcasting and Streaming — involves professional presentations and professional practices such as etiquette, content moderation and legal considerations.

Criterion 8 descriptors

Criterion 8	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<p>Develops meta-skills</p>	<p>The learner adequately engages with the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying out self-assessment of meta-skills, giving reasons for ratings or judgements made • setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories • using reflective practice strategies to track progress and analyse the links between course activities, experiences and meta-skills development 	<p>The learner demonstrates a clear commitment to the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying out self-assessment of meta-skills, giving some insightful reasons for ratings or judgements made • setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories • using reflective practice strategies to track progress, analyse and demonstrate some insight into the impact of their course activities and experiences on their meta-skills development 	<p>The learner demonstrates strong commitment to the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carrying out self-assessment of meta-skills, giving some insightful reasons for ratings or judgements made • setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories, and updating these as required • using reflective practice strategies very effectively to track progress, analyse and demonstrate insight into the impact of their course activities and experiences on their meta-skills development

Criterion 8 guidance

Maps to all units.

You must refer to the meta-skills assessment guidance when grading meta-skills. You can find meta-skills teaching, learning and assessment resources on [our meta-skills web page](#).

Competence in individual meta-skills is not being judged here, for example the quality of a learner's feeling or creativity. Rather, it is the process of development the learner goes through — planning, developing, and reflecting — that should be evidenced and assessed.

Although a meta-skills outcome is located in one unit, evidence of meta-skills development can be gathered from any activity at any time during the course. For meaningful reflection to take place, the process of meta-skills development should happen continually throughout the course. The range of contexts in which this can happen is very wide, and dependent on the sector, as well as individual preferences. Each unit signposts opportunities for meta-skills development.

Additional grading guidance

Grading model

The grading model consists of a grading matrix, divided into several broad areas of competence; each competence has grading criteria for Achieved, Merit and Distinction. The grading model for HNC Esports comprises eight broad areas, each with criteria for grading.

- Criterion 1** Demonstrate technical proficiency.
- Criterion 2** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the esports ecosystem.
- Criterion 3** Participate in competitive games.
- Criterion 4** Analysis and improve performance.
- Criterion 5** Communicate and collaborate in a team.
- Criterion 6** Exhibit personal attributes associated with esports.
- Criterion 7** Demonstrate professionalism in esports.
- Criterion 8** Develops meta-skills.

Using this model, you must determine a specific grade for each area of competence. Collectively, the distribution of grades for each of the eight areas is the **grading profile**. Use the grading profile to decide an overall grade for each learner. You must decide a grade for each of the eight areas of competence before awarding an overall grade (no omissions).

The following is additional guidance for the first area of competence in the grading criteria.

Criterion 1	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Demonstrate technical proficiency	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively uses digital tools and platforms relevant to esports • operates gaming hardware and software safely and securely 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectively manages content and communication across multiple digital platforms • troubleshoots common technical issues and configures systems safely and securely 	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates advanced media literacy and creates professional-grade content • demonstrates expert-level proficiency in technical setup and optimisation, including safety and security

We have emphasised words to show discriminators for grading.

The relative weighting of each criterion is for you to decide. However, we developed the model in such a way that each criterion has an approximately equal value. You must record weightings, and apply them consistently.

In most cases, the learner's grading profile is uniform or mostly uniform. For example, a learner mostly satisfies the criteria for Achieved. In this circumstance, the overall grade is clear. Determining an overall grade when the grading profile is less uniform is more complex. For example, a learner's grades can be distributed across Achieved, Merit and Distinction. In this case, you must use your professional judgement to decide an overall grade.

The following worked examples explain what to do in various scenarios.

Worked examples of grading model

Example 1: Uniform grading profile

Criterion	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
1	X		
2	X		
3		X	
4	X		
5	X		
6	X		
7	X		
8	X		

This illustrates a mostly uniform grading profile. This learner was considered competent in all areas apart from game-playing, where they were highly skilled. The learner's overall grade is **Achieved**.

Example 2: Mixed grading profile (over two grades)

Criterion	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
1		X	
2			X
3		X	
4		X	
5		X	
6		X	
7		X	
8			X

This learner’s grading profile spans Merit and Distinction. The majority are Merit. They demonstrated outstanding knowledge of esports and exceptional meta-skill development, but otherwise was graded at Merit. This learner’s overall grade is **Merit**.

Example 3: Mixed grading profile (over three grades)

Criterion	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
1	X		
2		X	
3			X
4			X
5			X
6			X
7		X	
8		X	

This learner's grading profile spans Achieved, Merit and Distinction. The profile implies an overall grade of Merit or Distinction. They were outstanding in four areas, three related to gameplay and one related to professionalism. In one area (technical proficiency) they were considered no more than competent. This learner sits at the Merit and Distinction threshold. You invited a second assessor to review their evidence. The following table is the second assessor's revised profile.

Criterion	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
1		X	
2		X	
3			X
4			X
5			X
6			X
7		X	
8			X

This learner's overall grade is **Distinction**.

Administrative information

Published: April 2026 (version 1.0)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Please check [our website](#) to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this guide.

If a unit is revised:

- no new centres can be approved to offer the previous version of the unit
- centres should only enter learners for the previous version of the unit if they can complete it before its finish date

For more information on NextGen: HN Qualifications please visit the [NextGen: HN web page](#).

The information in this grading pack may be reproduced in support of Qualifications Scotland qualifications only on a non-commercial basis. If it is reproduced, Qualifications Scotland must be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be reproduced for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from permissions@qualifications.gov.scot.