

# **Next Generation Higher National Unit Grading Pack**

## **Higher National Certificate Physical Activity and Health**

**Qualification code:** GT6A 47

**This qualification is available in a restricted  
delivery model for academic session 2025**

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.

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# **Approach to grading**

Grading in Next Generation: Higher National (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.

SQA'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
<b>Underpinning knowledge and understanding of key concepts and/or skills.</b>	The learner has <b>demonstrated basic knowledge and understanding</b> of the key concepts and/or skills that underpin the role of an exercise practitioner.	The learner has <b>more often than not demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding</b> of the key concepts and/or skills that underpin the role of an exercise practitioner <b>that has exceeded minimum requirements.</b>	The learner has <b>consistently demonstrated high levels of knowledge and understanding</b> of the key concepts and/or skills that underpin the role of an exercise practitioner.

### Criterion 1 guidance

Learner evidence to support grading decisions may include e-assessments, gym induction plans, individual training interventions, group-based training interventions, closed-book assessments, reports and worksheets.



## Criterion 2 descriptors

Criterion 2	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<b>Application of skills as an exercise practitioner (versatile and/or adaptable).</b>	The learner has <b>demonstrated a basic application</b> of the skills required to carry out the role of an exercise practitioner.	The learner has <b>more often than not demonstrated sound application</b> of the skills required to carry out the role of an exercise practitioner <b>that has exceeded minimum requirements</b> .	The learner has <b>consistently demonstrated a high level in their application</b> of the skills required to carry out the role of an exercise practitioner.

## Criterion 2 guidance

Learner evidence to support grading decisions may include individual and group gym inductions, formative observations, summative observations, self-reflective evaluations, work placement supervisor or mentor reports, work placement logbook and work placement self-reflective evaluations.

### Criterion 3 descriptors

Criterion 3	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<b>Thinking and working independently within a physical activity and health sector or environment (self-reflective practice).</b>	The learner has <b>demonstrated the basic skills to work independently and applied a good level of thinking</b> to their role as an exercise practitioner within the physical activity and health sector.	The learner has <b>more often than not demonstrated a sound level of skills to work independently and applied a coherent level of thinking</b> to their role as an exercise practitioner within the physical activity and health sector <b>that has exceeded minimum requirements</b> .	The learner has <b>consistently demonstrated a high level of skill to work independently and applied an outstanding level of thinking</b> to their role as an exercise practitioner within the physical activity and health sector.

### Criterion 3 guidance

Learner evidence to support grading decisions may include work placement supervisor or mentor reports, work placement logbook, work placement self-reflective evaluations, delivery of individual training interventions, delivery of group-based training interventions, self-reflective evaluations for inductions, and self-reflective evaluations from delivery of individual and group training interventions.

## Criterion 4 descriptors

Criterion 4	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<b>Application of judgement and analysis to support and work with a client or clients.</b>	The learner has <b>applied basic judgement and analysis</b> to support and work with a client or clients.	The learner has <b>more often than not applied a sound level of judgement and analysis</b> to support and work with a client or clients that has exceeded minimum requirements.	The learner has <b>applied a high level of judgement and analysis</b> to support and work with a client or clients.

## Criterion 4 guidance

Learner evidence to support grading decisions may include individual and group induction plans, individual training interventions, group-based training interventions and work placement logbook.

## Criterion 5 descriptors

Criterion 5	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<b>Effectively plan and manage time to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work with clients</li> <li>• meet agreed submission deadlines</li> <li>• maintain effective attendance and timekeeping</li> <li>• produce quality work</li> <li>• engage with peers and colleagues</li> <li>• communicate effectively (personal issues and medical issues)</li> </ul>	<p>The learner has demonstrated the <b>ability to meet agreed key deadlines</b> but <b>has submitted work late</b> on more than one occasion.</p> <p>The learner <b>has not communicated effectively in a consistent manner</b> in relation to their attendance or timekeeping on the course.</p>	<p>The learner has <b>more often than not demonstrated a sound</b> ability to manage workload to agreed key deadlines, that has exceeded minimum requirements, but <b>may have submitted work late</b> on one occasion.</p> <p>The learner <b>has communicated effectively in a consistent manner</b> in relation to their attendance or timekeeping on the course.</p>	<p>The learner has demonstrated the ability to <b>confidently manage</b> workload and <b>consistently met</b> key deadlines and <b>has not submitted work late</b>.</p> <p>The learner <b>has communicated effectively in a consistent manner</b> in relation to their attendance or timekeeping on the course.</p>

## Criterion 5 guidance

Evidence to support grading decisions may include first and second attempt submission deadlines being met, effective time management throughout the academic session, records of attendance and timekeeping, and the ability to work as part of a team or group.

## Criterion 6 descriptors

Criterion 6	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<b>Confidently apply a range of professional behaviours to achieve agreed aims when working with:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>clients or participants</b></li><li>• <b>colleagues</b></li><li>• <b>peers</b></li></ul>	The learner has <b>applied a basic range of professional behaviours</b> and <b>has worked well</b> with clients, colleagues, and peers to achieve an agreed aim.	The learner has <b>more often than not confidently applied a broad range of professional behaviours</b> and <b>has worked effectively</b> with clients, colleagues and peers to achieve an agreed aim.	The learner has <b>confidently applied an extensive range of professional behaviours</b> and <b>has worked very effectively</b> with clients, colleagues, and peers to achieve an agreed aim.

## Criterion 6 guidance

Evidence to support grading decisions may include the ability to work as part of a team or group, work placement logbook, work placement supervisor or mentor report, and meta-skills self-evaluation.

## Criterion 7 descriptors

Criterion 7	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
<b>Develops meta-skills</b>	<p>The learner adequately engages with the process of meta-skills development in the context of the HNC by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• carrying out self-assessment of meta-skills, giving reasons for ratings or judgements made</li> <li>• setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies, to develop meta-skills in all three categories</li> <li>• using reflective practice strategies to track progress and analyse the links between course activities, experiences, and meta-skills development</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• carrying out self-assessment of meta-skills, giving some insightful reasons for ratings or judgements made</li> <li>• setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories</li> <li>• using reflective practice strategies to track progress and demonstrate some insight into the impact of their course activities and experiences on their meta-skills development</li> </ul>	<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"> <li>• carrying out self-assessment of meta-skills, giving some insightful reasons for ratings or judgements made</li> <li>• setting clear and measurable goals plus action strategies to develop meta-skills in all three categories, and updating these as required</li> <li>• using reflective practice strategies very effectively to track progress and demonstrate insight into the impact of their course activities and experiences on their meta-skills development</li> </ul>

## **Criterion 7 guidance**

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

This guidance gives, in detail, the expectations of learners' engagement with meta-skills, in the context of their qualification.

You may wish to develop a mapping document to evidence where learners generate evidence for meta-skills and Learning for Sustainability within the qualification to help with grading decisions.

# **Additional grading guidance**

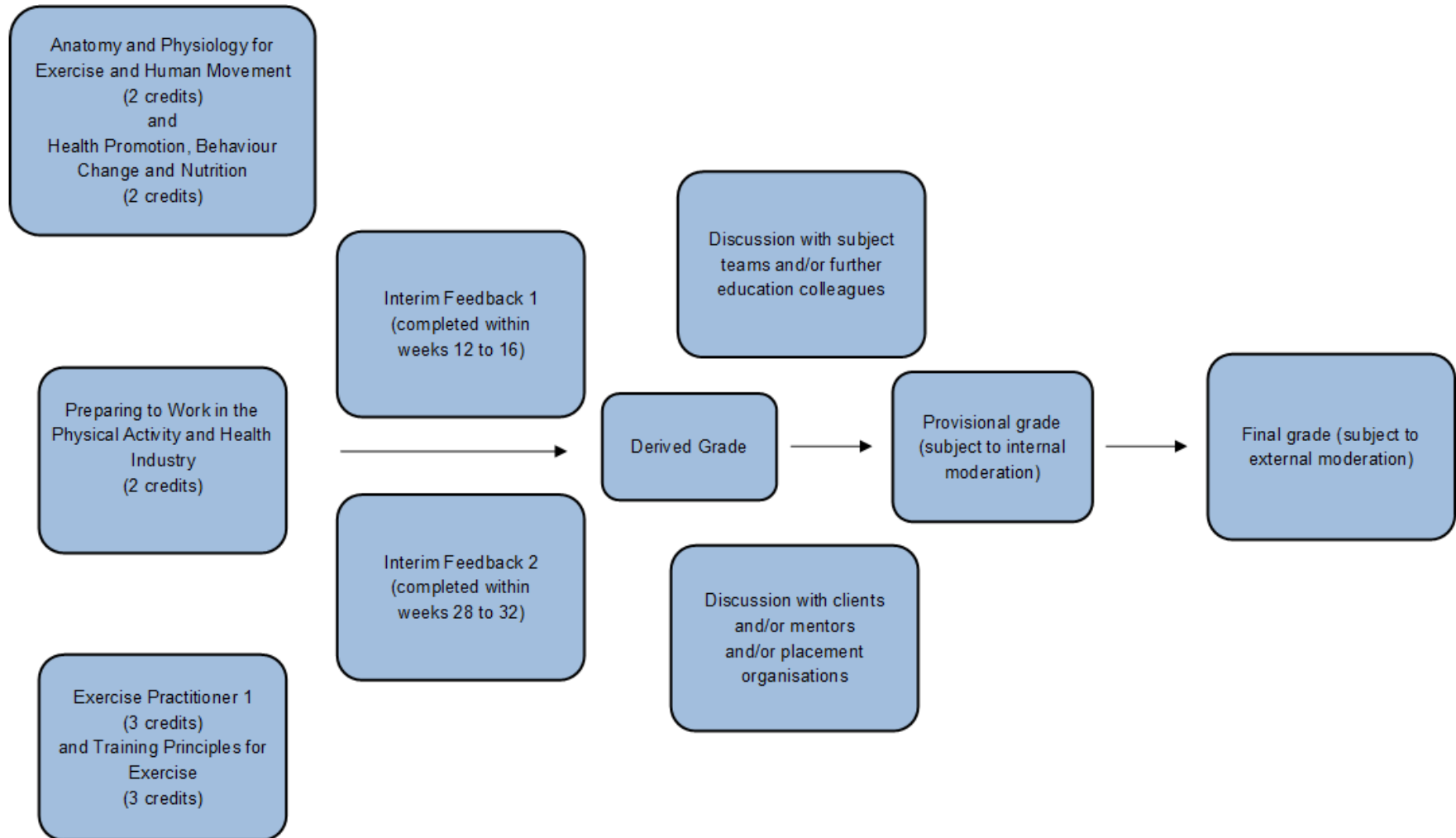
## **Grading model**

Grading for the HNC Physical Activity and Health is based on learners successfully completing the full 15 credits. However, grades are based on the performance of learners across the following 12 mandatory credits:

- Anatomy and Physiology for Exercise and Human Movement (2 credits)
- Training Principles for Exercise (3 credits)
- Exercise Practitioner 1 (3 credits)
- Health Promotion, Behaviour Change and Nutrition (2 credits)
- Preparing to Work in the Physical Activity and Health Industry (2 credits)



## Grading model diagram



## **Worked example of grading model**

The HNC Physical Activity and Health contains several of the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) professional standards, and all skills in each of the units must demonstrate minimum competence in line with the professional standard. The following worked examples are graded using the grading matrix.

### **Learner A — Achieved**

The learner has demonstrated a thorough understanding of the key concepts that underpin the knowledge and understanding of the outcomes contained in the mandatory units. The learner has met the minimum evidence requirements of practical skills to satisfy the skills sections within each of the outcomes across the mandatory units. The client portfolio is of a minimum standard, and the learner has not included any additional detail to support a higher grade.

### **Learner B — Achieved with Merit**

The learner has demonstrated an excellent level of understanding of the key concepts that underpin the knowledge and understanding of the outcomes contained in the mandatory units. The learner has consistently demonstrated an excellent level of practical skills to satisfy the skills sections in each of the outcomes across the mandatory units. The client portfolio has a good level of additional detail to support a higher grade.

### **Learner C — Achieved with Distinction**

The learner has demonstrated an outstanding level of understanding of the key concepts that underpin the knowledge and understanding of the outcomes contained in the mandatory units. The learner has consistently demonstrated an outstanding level of

practical skills to satisfy the skills sections in each of the outcomes across the mandatory units. The client portfolio has an excellent level of additional detail to support a higher grade.

# Administrative information

**Published:** August 2025 (version 1.0)

## History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Please check SQA's 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](#).

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