

NextGen: HN grading pack

HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care

Qualification code: GHQ6 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.

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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: HNC 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
Safe practice and risk management	The learner: • shows basic safe care skills • identifies risks • follows instructions	The learner: • understands safety procedures • sees different risks and makes good decisions, with minimal support • knows when to ask for help	The learner: • demonstrates thorough knowledge of safe procedures in care delivery • proactively identifies and addresses potential risks • takes initiative to ensure safety in all settings

Criterion 1 guidance

Evidence for this criterion should apply to how well learners have achieved the knowledge and skills section of each relevant unit. Learners should understand the process of safe practice in care that encompasses:

- infection control precautions
- the risk assessment process
- acknowledging limitations of knowledge and skills

- asking for support, if necessary

Your grading decision should be based on learners' demonstrated understanding of how this knowledge applies to clinical practice and any documented reflective practice.

Evidence should come from assessor feedback and assessment tasks from across the relevant units:

- Practical Placement Proficiencies (outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)
- Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression (outcomes 1 and 2)

Criterion 2 descriptors

Criterion 2	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Person-centred care and empowerment	The learner: understands basic principles of person-centred care and empowerment, applying them in straightforward cases, with guidance	The learner: has a good grasp of person-centred care and empowerment, effectively applying principles and advocating for individuals, families and carers	The learner: has an excellent understanding of, and actively promotes, person-centred care and empowerment, adapting approaches and ensuring individuals, families and carers are at the heart of all decision making
Assessment, individualised care, and family and carer involvement	The learner: - participates in assessments and care planning, with guidance - recognises the role of family and carers and involves them, as directed	The learner: - independently gathers information - assesses needs - contributes to personalised care plans - actively involves family and carers, respecting their input	The learner: - facilitates holistic assessments - implements plans - skilfully integrates the views of family and carers into care, to ensure comprehensive support

Criterion 2 guidance

This criterion relates to learners' understanding and application of person-centred care and how well they understand and participate in the care planning process. Learners recognise the importance of involving the family, carers and significant others in this process.

You can assess this criterion across a number of units:

- Practical Placement Proficiencies (outcomes 1, 2 and 3)
- Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings (outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)
- The Human Body in Health and Illness (outcome 4)
- Mental Health: A Comprehensive Overview (outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Criterion 3 descriptors

Criterion 3	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Digital skills and communication	The learner: uses basic technology to support communication and care delivery, with support	The learner: proficiently uses appropriate digital tools to enhance communication and data management in care	The learner: - demonstrates skills in using appropriate technology for communication, collaboration, and data management - communicates with clarity, empathy and confidence
Digital skills and academic development	The learner: uses basic technology to support academic work and submissions, and to work in groups	The learner: effectively uses suitable digital technologies to enhance their academic abilities and facilitate communication, both individually and in group settings	The learner: demonstrates proficiency in using suitable digital technologies to strengthen their academic abilities and to communicate and work collaboratively with others in group settings

Criterion 3 guidance

Digital skills and digital communication are an increasing part of healthcare delivery, alongside academic work and assessment. You should consider learners' proficient use of digital skills, both in and out of the clinical area, when grading this criterion. You should assess this criterion across all units in the qualification.

Criterion 4 descriptors

Criterion 4	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Clinical competence and accountability	The learner: • performs standard care tasks under supervision • is aware of evidence-based practice, but requires support • takes responsibility for actions • adheres to professional standards, with guidance	The learner: • performs care tasks with minimal supervision • works independently and accurately, with proficient skills • applies evidence-based practice to care practice • takes responsibility for their actions • accepts feedback • adheres to professional standards	The learner: • demonstrates effective independent clinical competence, while supporting individuals in receipt of care • integrates evidence-based practice into all aspects of care delivery • accepts accountability and meets professional expectations in the clinical setting • learns from experience and critical appraisal • adheres to professional standards of clinical practice

Criterion 4 guidance

Clinical competence requires learners to understand evidence-based practice and demonstrate the ability to work independently in the identified competencies.

You should base your grading decision on the placement assessment document, assessor feedback and the learner's own reflections, alongside achievement of the following unit outcomes:

- Understanding Personal and Professional Development (outcome 2)
- Practical Placement Proficiencies (outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)
- Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings (outcomes 1 and 2)
- Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression (outcomes 1 and 2)

Criterion 5 descriptors

Criterion 5	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Professionalism, ethics, and boundaries	The learner: • demonstrates an elementary grasp of professionalism and boundaries • shows basic professional behaviour • maintains confidentiality • follows professional boundaries, when prompted	The learner: • demonstrates a sound understanding of professionalism, ethics and boundaries • consistently acts professionally • keeps information confidential • makes ethical choices • maintains appropriate boundaries in relationships	The learner: • demonstrates an excellent understanding of professionalism, ethics and boundaries • displays excellent ethical practice and professionalism • maintains clear boundaries and confidentiality, in accordance with professional standards
Relationship building and cultural awareness	The learner: • begins and maintains relationships through basic interactions • acknowledges cultural differences, when prompted	The learner: • engages individuals regularly and meaningfully • respects and adapts to diversity	The learner: • builds strong, adaptable relationships, even through adversity • shows effective cultural awareness and respect in all interactions

Criterion 5 guidance

Learners must exhibit professional attitudes and behaviours, on placement and in the learning environment. You should grade this criterion on learners' demonstrated understanding of professionalism, ethical practice and cultural awareness.

Evidence for this outcome can be generated across several units and integrated assessments, including:

- Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings (outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)
- Practical Placement Proficiencies (outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4)
- Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression (outcomes 1 and 2)

Criterion 6 descriptors

Criterion 6	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Therapeutic relationships	The learner: • demonstrates an understanding of therapeutic relationships • builds trust • communicates, with support • shows basic empathy • recognises non-verbal cues, with direction • adapts communication for cultural differences, when prompted	The learner: • demonstrates an understanding of therapeutic relationships • establishes trust • adapts communication to individual needs • shows understanding of concerns • uses non-verbal cues effectively • handles emotions in communication with professionalism • respects diversity	The learner: • demonstrates a convincing understanding of therapeutic relationships • establishes trust, even in challenging situations • communicates sensitively and clearly • demonstrates excellent listening skills and empathy • aligns verbal and non-verbal communication with ease • demonstrates high emotional intelligence • ensures communication is culturally sensitive and inclusive

Criterion 6 guidance

Learners must demonstrate an understanding of how the therapeutic relationship underpins person-centred care, for example in trust, empathy, communication and an inclusive approach to care practice.

Evidence for this can be found across a number of units and assessments:

- Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings (outcomes 1, 2 and 3)
- Practical Placement Proficiencies (outcomes 1, 2 and 3)
- Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression (outcomes 1 and 2)

Criterion 7 descriptors

Criterion 7	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Reflective practice	The learner: • understands basic reflection and its role in growth • reflects, with support, to identify improvement areas • applies principles, with guidance	The learner: • uses reflection to evaluate and improve care • identifies development needs • applies principles independently, to assess and improve	The learner: • critically analyses experiences for ongoing development • challenges assumptions for personal and professional growth • critically analyses complex situations using principles of reflective practice

Criterion 7 guidance

Reflective practice is fundamental to improving care delivery. Learners must evidence effective reflective practice, not only in terms of clinical practice, but also in terms of academic performance and engagement with learning. Learners can reflect on all aspects of the qualification, and it is the depth of self-awareness and reflection that you should consider when grading the criterion.

Evidence can be generated from:

- Understanding Personal and Professional Development (outcomes 1, 2 and 3)
- Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression (outcomes 2 and 3)

Criterion 8 descriptors

Criterion 8	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Teamwork and collaboration	The learner: • carries out delegated tasks • appropriately shares essential information with the team, following instructions as needed	The learner: • consistently helps the team deliver care • shares information effectively • fulfils the delegated role in the team	The learner: • successfully fulfils the delegated role in the team to deliver inclusive care • participates in effective information sharing • helps to resolve any challenges

Criterion 8 guidance

This criterion reflects the importance of teamwork and collaboration in healthcare and education settings. Learners must work with others and collaborate on delivery of shared academic tasks in the learning environment. This should be evidenced not only through the Practical Placement Proficiencies unit, but also through any units where group work or collaborative activities have been employed.

Criterion 9 descriptors

Criterion 9	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Academic competency	The learner: - demonstrates an understanding of basic academic standards - communicates clearly, with some guidance - manages time and learning tasks, with support	The learner: - applies academic standards, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI) - uses appropriate sources and structures - works logically, with effective referencing - independently balances academic and learning tasks - identifies gaps in knowledge and works to address them	The learner: - critically applies academic standards - produces rigorous, original, logically structured work, that is appropriately referenced - excels at managing responsibilities and independent academic tasks
Achievement of unit assessment	The learner: - demonstrates an understanding of assessment tasks - applies their learning to assessment responses	The learner: - demonstrates a good understanding of assessment tasks - effectively applies their learning to assessment responses	The learner: - demonstrates an excellent understanding of assessment tasks - applies their learning extensively in their assessment responses

Criterion 9 guidance

This criterion relates to learners' ability to produce original academic work that is structured, written and referenced appropriately. When determining grades, you should consider the level of independent learning that learners have achieved, and if they have required remediation for any aspect of the criterion. You should assess this criterion across all units and outcomes.

Criterion 10 descriptors

Criterion 10	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Personal and professional values	The learner: • is aware of personal and professional values • respects diversity • recognises the importance of values in practice, with some support	The learner: • understands how values influence behaviour and decision making • supports integrity • promotes inclusion, in line with professional values and standards	The learner: • demonstrates an excellent understanding of how personal and professional values shape behaviour and decision-making • consistently upholds integrity • embraces diversity • promotes inclusion, in line with professional values and standards

Criterion 10 guidance

Assessment for this criterion should emphasise the extent to which learners recognise and articulate their own personal values and principles, and how these are reflected in their conduct in a healthcare setting. Learners must demonstrate an awareness of the distinction between personal and professional values and principles, and illustrate a clear understanding of how professional standards are applied in practice. Those attaining the highest level provide detailed, concrete examples of how they embed both personal and professional values into their professional practice.

This criterion can be evidenced in:

- Practical Placement Proficiencies (outcomes 1, 2 and 3)
- Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings (outcomes 1, 2 and 3)
- Healthcare Careers: Preparation and Progression (outcomes 1 and 2)

Criterion 11 descriptors

Criterion 11	Achieved	Merit	Distinction
Develops meta-skills	The learner adequately engages with the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by: • 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	The learner demonstrates a clear commitment to the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by: • 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	The learner demonstrates strong commitment to the process of meta-skills development in the context of the qualification by: • 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 11 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 [Qualifications Scotland's meta-skills web page](#). This guidance details the expectations of learners' engagement with meta-skills, and how they must do this in the context of HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care. You are not judging competence in individual meta-skills, such as creativity or emotional insight. Focus instead on the learner's evidence of their process in developing meta-skills such as how they plan, develop and reflect.

Although there is a meta-skills outcome in one unit, evidence of meta-skills development can be gathered from any activity at any time during the qualification. For meaningful reflection to take place, the process of meta-skills development should happen continually throughout the qualification. 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 enables a holistic assessment of each learner across HNC Healthcare Practice: nursing care, resulting in a final overall grade. You should make grading decisions with reference to the grading matrix, which evaluates specific areas of knowledge, practical skills, and professional behaviours. This approach ensures that the assessment of each learner's performance is comprehensive, drawing on evidence from all Higher National Units in the qualification.

HNC Healthcare Practice nursing care comprises 120 SCQF credit points (equivalent to 15 Qualifications Scotland credits) and consists of 6 mandatory units. Learners must successfully complete all units and demonstrate satisfactory performance during their placement before you can award a grade. Each unit includes specific evidence requirements that are assessed through various methods and learners must pass each unit to achieve the qualification. Units are graded on a pass or fail basis. Throughout the qualification, you should encourage learners to review their grading profiles, to identify both strengths and areas requiring improvement.

A key factor in achieving a successful outcome is the learner's ability to work collaboratively with colleagues, service users, and their families. To earn a Merit or Distinction, learners must show they can apply theoretical knowledge to practice, particularly through evidence-based practice approaches. All clinical practice is assessed by a placement assessor or supervisor, or an academic assessor.

Learners must complete a placement assessment document. This must include:

- a record of placement hours
- a demonstration of competencies
- feedback from assessors or supervisors

Other assessments throughout the qualification may include:

- reflective accounts
- project work
- essays
- closed-book assessments
- presentations
- professional discussions

You can assess meta-skills development through reflective practice in the Understanding Personal and Professional Development unit, although the meta-skills outcome itself is found in the Professional Practice in Healthcare Settings unit. In the Understanding Personal and Professional Development unit, learners maintain a portfolio or e-portfolio, which should contain evidence of meta-skills progression, including a personal plan, a record of progress, and self-reflection. The teaching team reviews if learners require any additional remediation or support, and award the final grade when learners have successfully completed all units. Grading is based on comprehensive feedback from the entire teaching team and their reviews of the learner's achievements and engagement with course outcomes. Subject teams should meet at regular intervals to offer interim feedback. They must convene at the end of the qualification to collectively agree on each learner's final grade. In making these judgements, the team considers the scope and difficulty of different assessments and acknowledges that learners may improve as the qualification progresses. Interim grading feedback can highlight both progress and setbacks, though not all criteria is covered during early feedback stages due to assessment and placement schedules.

The grading model aims to:

- provide a holistic evaluation of learner performance across the whole qualification, not just individual units
- identify and highlight strengths in values, knowledge, and skills relevant to healthcare practice
- encourage and motivate learners throughout the academic year
- distinguish levels of achievement for employers and higher education admissions

- ensure consistent grading standards across different centres

You determine final grades by aggregating the results for each criterion. You should note that:

- to achieve the qualification, learners must pass all criteria listed in the grading matrix
- for a Merit, learners must achieve Merit or above in at least 8 out of the 12 assessment criteria, with the remainder at Achieved level or higher
- for a Distinction, learners must attain Distinction in at least 8 criteria, plus Achieved or Merit in 3 additional criteria

You should use the grading model to assess learners holistically across the HNC Healthcare Practice qualification, based on their submitted assessment evidence. Grade each question as Achieved, Achieved with Merit, or Achieved with Distinction, accompanied by an example or explanation. Keep learners informed of their expected grades throughout the qualification.

The grading model should look like this:

Criterion	Interim feedback 1	Interim feedback 2	Final grade
Safe practice and risk management	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Person-centred care and care planning	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Digital skills and communication	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Clinical skills and accountability	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Professionalism, ethics and boundaries	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Therapeutic relationships	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Reflective practice	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Teamwork and collaboration	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback

Criterion	Interim feedback 1	Interim feedback 2	Final grade
Academic competence	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Personal and professional values	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Meta-skills	Insert feedback	Insert feedback	Insert feedback
Overall grade			

Worked example of grading model

Criterion	Interim feedback 1	Interim feedback 2	Final grade
Safe practice and risk management	Throughout all the relevant assessments, JL has worked hard to demonstrate safe practice.	Not yet assessed.	
Person-centred care and care planning	JL has evidenced understanding of person-centred care and has started to participate in care planning activities.	JL has an excellent grasp of person-centred care and empowerment of individuals. They are actively participating in care planning and advocating for the individual	Achieved with Merit Throughout the assessment evidence, JL has demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of person-centred care and its application to care practice. Furthermore, they have fully participated in care planning activities.
Digital skills and communication			
Clinical skills and accountability			

Criterion	Interim feedback 1	Interim feedback 2	Final grade
Professionalism, ethics and boundaries			
Therapeutic relationships			
Reflective practice			
Teamwork and collaboration			
Academic competence			
Personal and Professional Values			
Meta-skills			
Overall grade			

Administrative information

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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](#).

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