



N grade Key facts

Background

In March 2018 Ofqual announced the removal of the must-pass hurdle for external assessments, as part of Level 3 Applied General and Technical Level qualifications. Awarding Organisations were asked to consider changes to affected Level 3 qualifications to provide a safety net for any students who may have narrowly missed a pass grade on one or more external assessments.

Following extensive research and stakeholder engagement, we have now decided to introduce an N (near pass) grade to the Short Answer Examination for the below qualifications:

- NCFE CACHE Technical Level 3 Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care (601/8435/8)
- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care (Adults) (Northern Ireland) (603/5355/7)

What is the N grade and how is it calculated?

The N grade acts as a safety net for learners who have achieved in all other areas of the qualification, and narrowly missed a pass mark in the Short Answer Examination (HSCNISAE), which assesses 'Anatomy and physiology in health and social care' (F/617/6754).

The N grade is calculated for each assessment version; therefore, it will be different in each assessment window.

The N grade is the higher of:

- the same number of marks below D that D is from C
- halfway between the D boundary and 0.

When will it be implemented?

The N grade will be implemented from 1 August 2020, therefore all learners sitting Short Answer Examinations from **January 2021** on the above qualifications can achieve an N grade.

NCFE's core purpose is to promote and advance learning, with a particular emphasis on supporting social mobility and prosperity, and we firmly believe that this is a fair way of improving outcomes for our learners without compromising the integrity of our qualifications and assessments.

The decision to introduce an N grade allows NCFE to maintain comparability with other Awarding Organisations and meet customer needs. We are confident that this change does not impact on our ability to meet the DfE's Appropriate Assessment Requirement and that our assessments remain rigorous and appropriate.

N grade Frequently asked questions

Is an N grade a pass?

An N grade is not a pass, it is a near pass. A learner achieving an N grade will have scored slightly below the pass mark boundary in that particular assessment window. Please note that an N grade is not awarded against the qualification, but against a single component within the qualification (the Anatomy and physiology exam in this case) – so while it is not a pass overall, it does allow a learner to achieve a near pass on one of the exams and still pass the qualification overall, so long as they have passed all other components.

Can someone with an N grade be employed in the same role as someone with a higher pass?

The N grade is not awarded against the qualification. Learners can achieve A*, A, B, C or D overall. The N grade is only awarded against a single component within the qualification (the Anatomy and physiology exam in this case). Marks and grades for individual components within a qualification (such as units or exams) do not appear on NCFE certificates. Therefore, an employer would not be aware that a learner had achieved an N grade, as it does not appear on their certificate.

If a learner has achieved an N grade, can they later resit to improve their grade?

Yes, so long as they have not already been certificated, and they have at least one remaining opportunity to resit. Please see the qualification specification and associated Covid 19 adaptation documentation for information on resits.

Will universities accept an N grade?

The N grade is not awarded against a qualification. Learners can achieve A*, A, B, C or D overall. The N grade is only awarded against a single component within the qualification (the Anatomy and physiology exam in this case). Marks and grades for individual components within a qualification (such as units or exams) do not appear on NCFE certificates. Therefore, a university would not be aware that a learner had achieved an N grade, as it does not appear on their certificate.

What will the certificate look like – will it show the N grade?

No. The certificate will show the overall grade for the qualification, which will be A*, A, B, C or D. The transcript (which comes with the certificate on a separate sheet of paper) shows the breakdown of the qualification components and this will show how a learner has achieved against each part of their qualification. The grade they have achieved for the HSCNISAE (the Anatomy and physiology exam) will appear on the transcript.