

This bulletin is our principal means of updating Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) about current developments. Please contact us directly (access@qaa.ac.uk) for more information about any of the items mentioned here, or if you have any questions.

New Chief Executive is old hand at Access to HE

Anthony McClaran took up post as Chief Executive at QAA on 1 October, after 14 years at UCAS - the last six as its Chief Executive. Anthony's connections with Access to HE go back to the early years of the Access Recognition Scheme when, as Senior Assistant Registrar at the University of Warwick in the late 1980s, he was involved in establishing the local AVA. More recently, he was a member of QAA's advisory committee for Access to HE and acted as a reviewer for AVA reviews.

In discussing his previous involvement, Anthony said, 'I've had an interest in Access to HE in the past because I think that Access courses contribute something different - something important - within the spectrum of HE entry routes. This has been an obviously successful scheme over many years, and the students we met on reviews were always positive and enthusiastic about their experience while on the Access course'. Speaking of the future, Anthony remarked, 'The work that's been done over the last few years to bring more consistency to the Access to HE Diploma has been very important for enhancing the reputation of the qualification in HE. Our recent review [see QAA Board review elsewhere in this bulletin] of our Access to HE work has confirmed that our stakeholders see value in that work, and in QAA's role in managing the Access Recognition Scheme more generally. The QAA Board has noted the substantial success of the Scheme, and the changes in the context in which Access to HE now operates and, as we develop QAA's new strategic plan, we shall be considering how we can build on the successes of the last twenty years'.

You can hear Anthony talking about his thoughts on his move to QAA and his priorities for QAA's future on the podcast at <http://qaa.mypodcast.com>.

QAA Board review

At its meeting on 25 November, the QAA Board received a report about QAA's Access to HE responsibilities, following the project which Dr Anne Thompson and Professor Gareth Parry undertook, involving a literature review and interviews with key stakeholders (www.accesstohe.ac.uk/aboutUs/project09.asp).

The Board noted the range of recent achievements and developments and the way in which QAA's activities and responsibilities had grown in recent years; the quality of the service that the Access Recognition Scheme provided to adult learners and to the HE sector, and expressed its support for the success of the Scheme. Further discussions will now take place both internally and between QAA and external partners, as QAA's position is developed over the coming weeks and months.

Access headlines...Access headlines..

UCAS APPLY - tutor references

The UCAS APPLY system includes a 'predicted grades' field for tutors, providing references for students offering the 'Access to HE Diploma (2009 onwards)', in the same way as it does for other qualifications. It invites referees to 'select/enter a grade for qualifications pending' and provides a single five character space for this. As the Diploma does not lead to a single grade, it would not be meaningful, and could be very misleading, to provide such a grade to a receiving HE institution. It will also make it more likely that students would be made an offer based on the achievement of such a single grade for the qualification as a whole, which they would then be unable to meet. This space should be left blank: general comments about the student's standard of performance to date, and any indicative projections which the tutor feels able to make about likely achievement in different areas should be provided within the text of the reference. Non-completion of this field will have no effect on a referee's ability to complete the reference as a whole or for the application to be processed.

Admissions staff have already been informed by QAA that they should not expect to see predicted grades for the Access to HE Diploma.

Access to HE conference - 2010

A date for your diary: the annual Access to HE conference will be held in London on **17 June 2010**. The conference will celebrate 20 years of national recognition of Access to HE through the Access Recognition Scheme. More information and invitations to register will follow in due course.

Marketing Access to HE - what can national data tell us?

(A contribution from Mike Farmer, Chair of the Access Data Development Group, and member of the Access Recognition and Licensing Committee.)

Finding good market information about potential student demand can be challenging. Analyses of searches on the online Access courses database, and of downloads from the Access to HE website, provide useful marketing data.

From September 2008 to August 2009 over 200,000 course searches were made, the peak months being March to May. People can search using keywords, drop-down menus, or a combination. Some improvements to the keyword search facility are planned, which should enable more detailed analyses in future.

Subject

The most popular search is by subject. The drop-down menu provides 28 standard subject options, of which by far the most popular group was the subject group Health, Public Services and Care (28 per cent), comprised of Nursing (16 per cent), Medicine and Dentistry (6 per cent) and Other (6 per cent). Also popular were Science and Mathematics (9 per cent), Education and Training (Teaching & Lecturing) (7 per cent), and Business, Administration and Law (Business Management) (5 per cent). Searches using keywords provided similar, although not identical priorities: Science (6 per cent), Nursing (5 per cent), Law (4 per cent), Midwifery (4 per cent) and Psychology (3 per cent). It is interesting to compare these percentages with the proportions actually taking the various subjects reported in *Key statistics 2009*.

Location

The second most popular search is by location, often in combination with subject. Unfortunately, it is not possible to report where enquirers are located. The most popular study locations using keyword search were large conurbations, with London (18 per cent) by far the most frequent. The drop-down menu provides study location by region. London (26 per cent) and South East (18 per cent) were the most popular - more, even, than would be expected given their percentage of the adult population. Consequently, some (but not all) other regions receive proportionately fewer 'hits' relative to their population size.

Student profiles

Also of interest from a marketing perspective is that by far the most popular download from the Access to HE website is *A student guide to the Access to Higher Education Diploma* publication (featuring student case studies) (33,000 - representing 35 per cent of all downloads).

Further information

These are the headlines from two reports considered in October 2009 by the Access Data Development Group (ADDG), which I chair. Comments and requests for more information should be sent to the Access to HE team at QAA.

2009-10 recruitment to Access to HE courses

Recently received annual reports from AVAs include a special appendix on retention. Although these have not yet been analysed, there is a clear indication that the national data will show strong demand for Access to HE in 2009-10.

Grading implementation handbook revisions

As recently notified to AVAs by letter, the section on representations and administrative errors (Part I, section 3.5) has been revised and is available on the website (www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications). The main changes are the removal of the requirement for external moderators to be involved in representations, and a clarification of the difference in procedure for representations and for administrative errors.

Annual data submission: update on Data Service pilot

As noted in the August 2009 bulletin, QAA is working with the Data Service to look at whether AVAs in England could receive providers' annual Access to HE learner statistics data from the Data Service, rather than, as currently, requiring providers to submit this data to both the LSC and to AVAs.

Several AVAs agreed to participate in the pilot and the Data Service has provided those AVAs with data for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years. In parallel with the usual data submission exercise, the pilot AVAs are using the Data Service data to complete a second copy of the 2007-08 and 2008-09 data submissions, so that the data from providers and from the Data Service can be compared and the extent of any discrepancies identified. QAA will be evaluating the outcomes from the pilot in the New Year to assess the next steps for the project.

Website improvements

You may have noticed that the Access to HE website homepage has been refreshed. The homepage now has an improved visual layout and incorporates our 20 year logo. We've made it easier to find the course search and FAQs, and we've clarified, for enquirers, the three sources of information about Access to HE; that is the course provider, the awarding bodies (AVAs), or the regulator (QAA).

Published since the last bulletin

The following documents are now available on the Access to HE website:

- *Guidelines for higher education admissions staff* - September 2009 (PDF available at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/AdmissionsGuidanceHEStaff/AccessAdmissionsGuide.pdf)
- *Tutors' quick guide to grading* - August 2009 (PDF available at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/grading/QuickGuideGrading.pdf)
- Open College Network South East Region licence confirmation report (PDF available from: www.qaa.ac.uk/access/reports)
- Open College Network Yorkshire and Humber Region licence confirmation report (PDF available from: www.qaa.ac.uk/access/reports).

Season's greetings

It's been a busy term, with the challenges of introducing grading for the Access to HE Diploma, and handling a continued increase in enquiries from potential students, at the same time as maintaining a focus on providing an ever-improving service for the benefit of students. The Access to HE team at QAA wishes you all a restful time this Christmas.

