

This bulletin is our principal means of updating Access validating agencies (AVAs) about current developments. Please contact us directly (email access@qaa.ac.uk) for more detail about any of the items mentioned here.

Guidance for the admission of students to QAA-recognised Access to HE programmes

The revised Access to Higher Education (HE) admissions guidance (amended to take account of age discrimination legislation), was published on the Access to HE website at the end of 2007 (www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/recognition/recog_intro.asp). This guidance forms a part of the Recognition Scheme and AVAs should ensure that providers are informed about changes.

GCSE equivalence guidance

From 2008-09, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will no longer fund stand-alone GCSE equivalent qualifications which sit outside the requirements for an Access to HE Diploma. This will apply to all Diplomas, including those leading to initial teacher training. In response, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has revised the GCSE equivalence guidance, and this is now available on the Access to HE website (www.accesstohe.ac.uk). Please read this carefully and advise providers, to ensure that colleges and students do not suffer unanticipated funding difficulties next year. Currently, this revised guidance applies only to Access to HE provision in England: a statement on the position in Wales is anticipated soon.

Access to HE courses database

The new Access to HE courses database is currently being built at QAA to replace the UCAS database. We will shortly be involving AVA officers in testing the database, and provide guidance when it is operational. The database will archive data from the old database, and allow AVAs to submit their Access to HE Diploma course information directly. AVAs will be notified when they can begin to input their course listings into the new database and will have several weeks to complete data entry. The database will be launched on the Access to HE website in August 2008. Once it is fully operational, AVAs will need to update and verify the accuracy and completeness of their course listings to QAA twice a year.

The new database has been designed to be the first port of call for those seeking information about QAA-recognised Access to HE Diplomas. A variety of users - such as potential students, advisers and HE admissions officers - will be able to access it. It will not provide details of course content or unit level information. Instead, public users will be able to click on an 'About this course' link from each course which will take them directly to a page on AVAs' own websites.

Access headlines...Access headlines..

For AVA action

AVAs need to consider a number of items in this bulletin:

- Guidance on admissions - have providers been informed?
- GCSE equivalence guidance - have you checked it? Have providers been informed?
- Access to HE courses database - which part of your own website will the database link to?
- Date for the 2008 conference: 18 June - have you made a note of the date?
- Student success stories - have you prompted providers with the home page address?

More success stories?

Our case studies of former Access to HE students and their career achievements have received a lot of interest. We would like help to publish more success stories on our website. Please send the web address (www.accesstohe.ac.uk) to former Access to HE students or providers who may maintain contacts with former students and ask them to share their stories.

New ARLC members

Two new members of the Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC) have been appointed by the QAA Board of Directors:

- Dr Freda Bridge, Principal and Chief Executive, Leeds Trinity and All Saints College
- Peter Davies CBE, Principal and Chief Executive, City Literary Institute.

Full details of the ARLC's current membership are at: www.accesstohe.ac.uk/aboutus/arlc/default.asp

How will AVA websites be linked to the database? This will depend on the structure of AVAs' own websites. In the future, AVAs may wish to provide links directly to their unit databanks but, in the first instance, the minimum requirement is a web page with contact details for an AVA officer who can provide course-specific information. AVAs will be asked to input the web page URL for their courses into the database, as part of the data entry exercise. AVAs are advised to review the content of their Access to HE web pages now to consider the best way of achieving this.

The launch of the new database is a chance to improve the accuracy, quality and quantity of information about Access to HE courses, as well as providing a smoother transfer of information to the LSC for regular updates to the Learning Aims Database. We encourage all AVAs to make the most of this opportunity.

Qualification development progress

The Access Qualification Development Group continues to oversee development and has set up various working groups to advise on different areas.

Grading

The grading trials are underway, involving seven AVAs, 11 Access to HE providers and 48 programmes in 20 different subject areas. The first phase, including the development of draft grading descriptors, is almost complete, and the draft descriptors have been discussed with the AVA reference group and will shortly be discussed with a group of HE admissions staff. During phase 2, the draft descriptors will be used to grade complete units and other aspects of the grading model will also be tested. Guidance will be developed during 2008-09 for implementation of grading from 2009-10.

Common assessment regulations

AVAs' current assessment regulations have provided a useful basis for the common assessment work. Common regulations are under development and will address critical issues for consistency of grades, such as the submission of drafts prior to formal submission; the reassessment of coursework elements and/or exam retakes; and the AVA role in final assessment meetings. The time schedule for this work involves final approval of the regulations early in 2008-09.

Moderation

Moderation will be key in ensuring consistency of grades awarded on the Access to HE Diploma and we are grateful to AVAs that have submitted details of their current moderation models. We are reviewing the documentation as the starting point for the development of guidelines for moderation of the graded Diploma. We will continue to consult AVAs on this.

Access to HE conference 2008

The annual Access to HE event will be held on Wednesday 18 June 2008 at Lakeside Conference Centre, Aston Business School, Birmingham. The conference will provide an opportunity for us to update you and seek advice on developments. We are planning a participative, practice-based event which will focus on moderation. Booking details will be available shortly.

Data requirements - changes to be made

With the introduction of the Access to HE Diploma, we are taking the opportunity to revise some of the data definitions that we use, which will change the way in which AVAs report on provision in the 2008 data submissions in two significant respects:

- subjects will be classified not by Joint Academic Coding System codes but by Sector Subject Areas
- there will be a revised definition of Access to HE 'courses', for the purposes of both the database and statistics collection. This will emphasise the particular programme of study for separate Diploma courses, as identified by their individual sets of rules of combination.

Further information on both these matters will follow shortly.