

This new electronic bulletin will provide regular updates about Access to Higher Education (HE), with particular focus on the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) development and regulatory work in this area. It will replace the occasional updates previously provided by letter to access validating agencies (AVAs) and will normally be produced four times a year.

The bulletin is intended primarily for AVAs and the current issue covers a number of matters of regulatory significance. However, it also contains items which may be of more general interest. Please forward it to others if you think it might be useful to them.

Access to HE website (www.accesstohe.ac.uk)

The Access to HE website was launched at this year's conference in June. All QAA information about Access to HE is now held on the Access to HE website, with the exception of AVA review reports, which will remain on the main QAA website (www.qaa.ac.uk).

There is information for students, providers, HE institutions and others, along with all key policy documents and a section specifically for AVAs. We welcome suggestions about possible additions or other feedback about the website: please email your comments to webmaster@qaa.ac.uk

Grading consultation outcomes

The consultation on grading produced a very clear steer from all constituencies that unit grading should be taken forward for further development as the preferred model. A brief report on outcomes is available from www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/grading/consultation/outcomesaug07.asp A programme of tests will take place throughout the coming year, involving a range of AVAs and providers who have volunteered to take part. The outcomes of the tests will inform the development of detailed guidance.

Access to HE publications

In June 2007, we published *A student guide to the Access to Higher Education Diploma* alongside this year's *Key statistics*. Both publications are available to download on the website and printed copies can be ordered from QAA. Further education colleges, AVAs and HE institutions may order up to 50 copies free of charge, with a charge of £1 per copy being made for additional copies. Please email qaa@linneydirect.com to place your order.

Access headlines...Access headlines..

For AVA action

AVAs are required to respond to a number of items in this bulletin. AVAs should therefore take particular note of the following items.

'Authorised' to 'Access'

The name 'authorised validating agency' has now been changed to 'access validating agency' to clarify the role and purpose of AVAs. AVAs should ensure that changes are made to electronic documents as soon as possible and references in other documents are updated when they are next revised. AVAs should also ensure that their members are made aware of this change.

Grading and assessment regulations

In 2008, the main priority will be the testing and development of grading, which will include work to establish common assessment regulations. In developing standard guidelines in this area and building on current good practice, we are asking all AVAs that have their own standard assessment guidelines (covering, for example, rules around re-submitted work, exam regulations and mitigating circumstances) to submit a copy of their regulations to us by 21 September 2007.

Working groups

Working groups will be established to work with us on developments relating to benchmarks and moderation (see over for details). Please get in touch (access@qaa.ac.uk) if you would like to be involved or would like to nominate someone from the AVA's members who has particular expertise to offer.

Annual report guidance

AVAs' annual reports to QAA are due to be submitted by **Monday 3 December 2007**. Any reports received after this date will be marked 'late' and this will be taken into account in the evaluation of the report. The guidelines have been amended only very slightly this year - primarily to clarify the expectations about financial reporting and to detail the requirements for the 2007 special appendix. The guidelines can be downloaded at www.accesstohe.ac.uk/avas/statisticssubmission/default.asp

Data requirements - changes to be made

Data requirements for 2007 reports have changed very little. However, with the introduction of the Access to HE Diploma, we are taking the opportunity to revise the data definitions for 2008, which will change the way in which AVAs report on their data in two significant respects:

- the definition of 'programme' is to be changed so that, in future, programmes will be defined in relation to individual Diploma titles (as identified by their separate rules of combination)
- subjects will be classified not by JACS codes but by Sector Subject Areas.

Further information on this will follow shortly.

Forthcoming developments (2007-08)

We will continue to move forward with the implementation of recommendations from the Access Development Project, including further work on the Access to HE Diploma.

Benchmarks: In addition, we will be starting to develop a framework for subject descriptors (or 'benchmarks') for Access to HE, as indicated in the 2004 Development Project Report.

Moderation: Later in the year, we will also be undertaking a comparative survey of AVAs' current moderation models to inform the development of guidelines for moderating the grading model.

Access to HE courses database

There is much work being undertaken at QAA to prepare for the transfer of the database from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) to QAA in summer 2008, so this summer's submission is the last that will be made to UCAS. We are working to streamline the submission process and to enrich the information that will be available to users. AVAs will be able to submit their programme information to QAA in the same way as they currently make their annual data submission.

Age discrimination legislation: new admissions guidance

The guidance on Access to HE admissions has been revised to take account of recent age discrimination legislation and will be available on the Access to HE website shortly. An email alert will be sent to AVAs to let them know when it is available.

New members of the Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC)

Two new members have recently been appointed to the ARLC by the QAA Board of Directors:

- Alastair McFadyen, Head of Admissions, University of Hertfordshire
- Phil Bentley, Head of Quality and Curriculum, Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology.

Normal business now restored...

We apologise to anyone who received a delayed response from QAA, following the enforced closure of Southgate House that resulted from the floods in Gloucester, and subsequent postal strikes. Please let us know if you suspect anything of having been lost in the post (or flood).