



# **AVA annual self-evaluation report**

## **Guidance to AVAs (2010-11)**

**(report due at QAA by 1 December 2011)**

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# **Part 1: Annual self-evaluation report - guidance to AVAs (2010-11)**

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose**

The consideration of AVA annual self-evaluation reports plays a key role in the monitoring of AVAs by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Together with the system of AVA relicensing, AVAs' self-evaluation reports enable QAA to satisfy itself and assure others that an AVA is continuing to meet the terms of its licence. The requirement for a self-evaluation report echoes the expectation of the AVA licensing criteria that there should be a 'culture of self-assessment' in AVAs.

Annual self-evaluation reports make a key contribution to the relicensing process, providing the primary documentary evidence for reviews. Review teams may also be asked to follow up queries arising from the scrutiny of self-evaluation reports, and AVAs are asked to respond to recommended actions from relicensing review in their subsequent self-evaluation reports.

### **AVA self-evaluation**

In preparing their self-evaluation reports, AVAs are required to assess the effectiveness of their performance against QAA's published AVA licensing criteria, which are grouped in four main areas: governance; management; quality assurance enhancement and development; and academic standards. An AVA is required to report on its evaluation of its own performance and on its evaluation of the provision for which it acts as the awarding body.

QAA makes no specific requirements about the means by which an AVA undertakes its self-evaluation, but the report should provide the outcomes of routine and explicit self-evaluation procedures, undertaken with reference to the particular requirements of the AVA licensing criteria. The resulting written report which is shared with QAA provides the AVA with a formal record of the outcomes of its self-evaluation and a tool which allows the AVA to monitor its own progress and continuing quality improvement.

Self-evaluation reports should be evidence-based documents, with the standard appendices including copies of formal AVA documents to support the judgements in the main text of the AVA's report.

### **Scrutiny and outcomes**

Self-evaluation reports are submitted to QAA's Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC) which is charged with considering whether QAA can, on the basis of the report provided, be confident that each AVA is fulfilling the terms of its AVA licence.

Following the ARLC's process for the scrutiny of self-evaluation reports, AVAs receive individual feedback on their self-evaluation reports and are notified of whether their reports have been:

- a approved
- b accepted (with a request for further clarification or information)
- c not approved (in which case further action is taken).

If the ARLC's scrutiny of the self-evaluation report and any follow-up enquiries suggests that there is some doubt about whether the AVA is meeting the terms of its licence, there may be a request for further information, or a special meeting or review may be arranged. If initial concerns are confirmed by this further investigation, the ARLC may specify particular actions which the AVA is required to take as a condition of continuation of the licence. If a special review is instigated, the possible outcomes will be the same as for a relicensing review.

## **Preparation and presentation**

### **Approach**

AVAs should:

- 1 present an objective evaluation of the AVA's progress and developments in the previous year, based on the outcomes of the AVA's own processes for evaluation and self-evaluation, rather than a merely descriptive or celebratory account of activities
- 2 reflect on the AVA's performance and Access to HE-related activities during the year which is the subject of the self-evaluation, from the perspective of its position at the start of the following year. (This does not mean that the report should be backward-looking. The emphasis should be on what lessons have been learned from the self-evaluation, and how these are being taken forward in future actions and planned developments. It is also important that the report should not specifically exclude reference to major decisions taken by the AVA or developments that may have taken place since the end of the report year.)
- 3 highlight any problems or difficulties affecting the AVA's work during the report year, and how the AVA has responded to these and its plans for further action, as well as noting successes and positive outcomes of its work
- 4 include evidence that the AVA has monitored its position against the AVA licensing criteria, and identified areas in which work may be needed for the AVA to continue to meet the licensing criteria in full
- 5 indicate specific actions or concrete plans made to address issues and weaknesses identified through the self-evaluation.

### **Preparation**

AVAs should:

- 6 take full account of feedback provided by QAA to the AVA in previous years
- 7 organise material according to the sections given in this guidance (see Sections for inclusion in AVA annual self-evaluation reports, page 7 onwards), with the headings listed here used as section headings for the main text of the self-evaluation report
- 8 use a tone and style which is appropriate to the report's formal status throughout the report
- 9 explain acronyms, local terminology and references to local circumstances, to allow readers unfamiliar with the AVA or its regional context to understand its work
- 10 use sub-headings, lists, tables, charts and process diagrams, if they help to provide information more succinctly and directly
- 11 avoid lengthy, detailed narrative.

## **In relation to the report's appendices**

AVAs should:

- 12 include only one copy of any individual document in the appendices
- 13 use appendices to support and verify statements in the main text, and not include material in appendices without reference to its significance in the main text of the report
- 14 provide clear and accurate cross-referencing between appendices and the main text of the report
- 15 present appendices together at the end of, and separated from, the self-evaluation report
- 16 group, number and title individual appendices, as indicated in this guidance
- 17 where appendices are grouped (for example committee minutes, provided in Appendix 7), identify these separately by use of sub-classifications (for example 7a, 7b, 7c and so on)
- 18 clearly number appendices to allow them to be clearly identified and use some kind of divider to separate main groups of appendices
- 19 wherever possible, use double-sided copying for hard copies of the report to reduce the overall bulk of self-evaluation reports.

## **Before submitting the self-evaluation report**

AVAs should check each copy and ensure that:

- 20 the report has been proofread and any corrections have been made to each copy
- 21 all specified material has been included, including the required appendices (see the Annual self-evaluation report checklist, page 6)
- 22 pages have been numbered in sequence throughout and numbers are consistent with those given in the contents page
- 23 pages have been properly collated
- 24 reports are securely bound, and each copy is presented as a single document under one set of durable covers which will withstand several readings and journeys.

## **Report length**

### **Main text**

The main text of the self-evaluation report (excluding appendices) should be 5,000-7,000 words.<sup>1</sup> Any self-evaluation report that exceeds this guidance by more than 10 per cent (that is, where the main text is more than 7,700 words) will be returned to the AVA for editing. An AVA will be expected to edit a report that is returned to it within five working days, so that the report can be considered at the ARLC's report scrutiny meeting at the beginning of January.

### **Appendices**

There are 16 standard appendices (or groups of appendices) required for self-evaluation reports. Most of the required appendices (see Annual self-evaluation report checklist, page 6) will be documents which the AVA has produced prior to the preparation of the self-evaluation report for its internal purposes.

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<sup>1</sup> The word count excludes all appendices.

If additional information is needed in order to provide evidence of the AVA's self-evaluation outcomes, the AVA should include this, wherever possible, as a clearly labelled sub-section within the standard appendices. Any further appendices are included at the end of the run of standard appendices and numbered in sequence. The total number of appendices (or groups of appendices) must not exceed 21.

## **Submission**

AVAs should submit one electronic copy and five hard copies of the annual self-evaluation report, to arrive at QAA's offices no later than **Thursday 1 December 2011**.

**Electronic copies** of self-evaluation reports should be sent by email attachment to a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk. If any appendix is not available in electronic format, the contents page should state that the appendix is available in hard copy only.

**Note:** the submission should include a contents list of appendices which indicates the subject of each appendix and its number; electronic copies of the appendices should be given the number name only, prefixed by app, for example app2 (this is sufficient to describe the list of an AVA's stakeholders), or app6a, app6b/app6.1, app6.2 (to describe board minutes).

AVAs should also send a separate email to the same address, stating that the self-evaluation report has been sent. This will alert QAA to any difficulties that might arise with the electronic delivery of the self-evaluation report.

**Printed copies** of self-evaluation reports should be sent to:

Ann-Marie Karadia  
Project Officer (Access to HE)  
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education  
Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

## Annual self-evaluation report checklist

(full details provided on pages 7-11)

Main text	Appendices
<b>Executive summary</b>	
<b>Contents page</b> (including sections of main text and appendices)	
<b>Statement of formal approval</b> (signed & dated)	1 annual self-evaluation report preparation (including the process of formal approval). This should include details of when different stages are undertaken, and by whom, and may be shown in a diagram
<b>Section 1 Governance</b>	2 list of AVA stakeholders (marked to show higher education institutions and Access to HE providers), with additions and deletions since the previous year 3 diagram of the AVA's committee structure, with reporting lines 4 list of the AVA committees (include membership/representation and names/affiliation of members, new members and those who retired during the report year) 5 dates of committee meetings during the report year (any cancelled/dates changed?) 6 minutes of AVA board/governing body 7 minutes of committees (including finance committee)
<b>Section 2 Management</b>	8 strategic plan and targets for report year 9 strategic plan and targets for the coming year 10 staff structure (for example, organisational diagram) and list of current staffing (including job titles, fractional and temporary posts, and dates of new appointments) 11 Access to HE financial information 12 externally verified accounts
<b>Section 3 Quality assurance, enhancement and development</b>	13 a summary and evaluation of providers' programme reports 14 list of the AVA's development events and target audiences (detailed evaluations are not required)
<b>Section 4 Academic standards</b>	15 a summary and evaluation of moderators' reports 16 moderators' names, affiliation and length of service
<b>Section 5 Special appendix</b>	
<b>Response to AVA review recommendations</b> (required where an AVA review has taken place since the last annual self-evaluation report was prepared)	

## Sections for inclusion in AVA annual self-evaluation reports

### Evidence of approval

The final version of the report must be formally approved by the AVA's governing body. The approval of the report will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which this occurred. Approval should be evidenced through a formal statement, provided on a separate sheet at the front of the report, which a) specifies the date of the meeting at which the report was approved, and b) is signed by the chair of the governing body.

- **App 1:** an outline of the process for the preparation and approval of the annual self-evaluation report (including the process of formal approval). This should include details of when different stages are undertaken, and by whom, and may be shown in a diagram.

### Contents page

Section headings with associated page numbers should be given. Appendices should also be clearly numbered (including any sub-divisions) and listed on the contents page.

### Executive summary

A summary of the main outcomes of the AVA's self-evaluation which is reported in detail within the main text of the report itself should be provided. Also include:

- a brief contextual overview, providing a basic introduction for readers new to the AVA (for example the organisation's size and structure, geographical reach and scale of its activities)
- the AVA's position at the beginning of the year and its priorities for Access to HE
- opportunities and major challenges in the external environment for the AVA's work
- internal factors influencing the organisation's progress in relation to Access to HE during the report year
- how the events of the year have affected the organisation as a whole, its position at the end of the year, and key priorities for the coming year.

## 1 Governance

This section should evaluate the effectiveness of the AVA's governance structures, with particular reference to any significant changes in legal or constitutional status.

Consider, in particular:

- legal, constitutional or governance changes that have been made and reasons for them
- changes to the involvement of stakeholders (including receiving HEIs and Access to HE providers), including any known reasons for changes
- committees' activity (in terms of the range of business undertaken, frequency of meetings and patterns of attendance)
- policy decisions or measures taken or planned by the AVA in relation to developing the scope and range of its activity
- other key decisions taken affecting the AVA's work and how they arose.

The text of section 1 should be cross-referenced to relevant appendices:

- **App 2:** a list of stakeholders, marked to show HEIs and Access to HE providers, and indicating any additions and deletions since the previous year
- **App 3:** a diagram of the AVA's committee structure, showing reporting lines
- **App 4:** a list of the AVA's committees and indication of their composition in terms of representation and/or named individuals, their institutional/organisational affiliation, and details of those who joined or retired during the report year
- **App 5:** a list of dates of committee meetings which took place during the report year, including any cancelled meetings or changes to dates
- **App 6:** minutes of the AVA's governing body
- **App 7:** minutes of all meetings of key AVA committees, and the committee that has responsibility for finance, and for quality assurance of AVA business. If, for reasons of confidentiality, it is necessary to submit edited minutes, the points at which any material has been omitted, and the subject of omissions (for example 'staff disciplinary hearing') must be made clear.

## 2 Management

This section evaluates the success of the AVA's strategic plans in developing Access to HE. It also reports on the AVA's assessment of organisational risk and its management and operational functions.

Consider, in particular:

- **strategic planning process** - evaluation of the AVA's strategic planning process, including the process for the development, approval and monitoring of the strategic plan
- **response to the report year's targets** - evaluation of the AVA's progress in meeting its targets. Minor detail in this area will be included in the tabulated plan included in Appendix 8, but evaluation of the AVA's progress with major targets should feature in the main text, with reference to difficulties experienced or circumstances which led to any targets being unmet
- **targets for the coming year** - reasons for the inclusion of new targets in the plan for the coming year should be identified: targets for Access to HE should be related to the AVA's broader strategic aims, and to areas identified by the AVA as requiring action
- **resources** - evaluation of the organisation's financial position and financial management; contribution and costs of AVA work to the organisation's finances; accommodation and staffing and their adequacy for the AVA's functions
- **communications** - overview and developments; evaluation of success of communications and promotional work with Access to HE providers and others
- **self-assessment and risk-assessment** - summary of the AVA's internal processes for organisational self-assessment and risk-assessment processes undertaken during the year.

The text of section 2 should be cross-referenced to relevant appendices:

- **App 8:** strategic plan and targets for the report year. The format of strategic plans varies, but all AVAs' plans should include (or make reference to a more detailed document which includes) formally approved targets for the AVA and its Access to HE work. If there is more than one plan, their status and relationship to each other, and the period to which they relate, should be clear. The appendix should show whether and how each target was achieved; how the AVA intends to pursue, or revise, any unmet targets; and whether such unmet targets have been revised, transferred to the coming year's plan, or are now redundant
- **App 9:** strategic plan and targets for the coming year. Tabulated plans relate strategic objectives to specific targets which are measurable and time-limited and which indicate designated individuals/groups with responsibility for meeting the targets
- **App 10:** staffing structure and staff list, with job titles, and indicating fractional/temporary posts and dates of new appointments.
- **App 11:** Access to HE financial information to show how much of the AVA's income and expenditure in 2010-11 (in absolute and proportionate terms) was derived from its Access to HE activity; the different sources of income (for example membership charges, validation/revalidation fees, certification fees, consultancy) and allocation of expenditure (for example staffing, administration, training, moderation, staff development, special projects); and whether there was anything exceptional about income or expenditure in 2010-11
- **App 12:** full audited accounts<sup>2</sup> for the most recent complete financial year. Accounts should be signed and dated.

### 3 Quality assurance, enhancement and development

This section evaluates the AVA's quality assurance processes for Access to HE course recognition, noting developments and the reason for their introduction; improvements they are intended to bring about in the quality of Access to HE programmes or the AVA's assurance of their quality; and an evaluation of their effectiveness since being introduced, where possible. The text should describe any new processes or significant revisions to mechanisms used by the AVA for quality assurance of Access to HE provision.

The section also evaluates the AVA's success in establishing its position as a focus of development, through enhancing current Access to HE provision, initiating new developments, and engaging with developments initiated by others.

Consider, in particular:

- changes to the AVA's quality assurance processes for course development; validation; revalidation; and course monitoring, with explanation for, and evaluation of, any changes
- conclusions drawn about the quality of Access to HE provision from its processes for course monitoring, including the outcome of its evaluation of programme

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<sup>2</sup> The following common circumstances should be dealt with as indicated:

**If the AVA's financial year is not the same as the reporting year:**

- submit the audited accounts for the most recent financial year (indicating the period that it covers), and management accounts for the period of the reporting year that is not covered by the audited accounts.

**If the AVA is an unincorporated association and its accounts are not audited:**

- submit detailed accounts which have been externally verified by some other means, and explain how they have been verified.

**If AVA's accounts are audited through a 'host institution':**

- submit accounts that relate to the AVA, extracted from the 'host institution' accounts, if separately identifiable, and the management accounts presented to the AVA's governing body. If the AVA's accounts are not separately identifiable within the host institution's accounts, explain in the main text how the AVA's accounts are verified, and submit the management accounts presented to the AVA's governing body.

- (or centre) reports, highlighting positive developments; general trends and patterns; particular areas of difficulty; and areas for further development
- summary and evaluation of development and enhancement events organised during the year, noting any particular outcomes
- evaluation of the AVA's involvement in regional or national projects, as well as smaller-scale local initiatives, designed to improve or develop Access to HE; evidence of productive cooperation outside the AVA with other organisations involved in widening participation in higher education and assessment of progress made in these areas.

The commentary on available course data will be based on the AVA's own records. It will include consideration of:

- changes to the AVA's provision, and whether this has changed the overall profile of Access to HE provision
- areas of expansion and contraction
- changes in providers
- progress with validations/revalidations and types of course recognised
- courses withdrawn
- gaps in provision.

General information about recruitment to different types of course (whether described by mode, location, explicit targeting or defined intended progression route) is also useful.

The text of section 3 should be cross-referenced to relevant appendices:

- **App 13:** summary evaluations of programme (or centre) reports, including key findings
- **App 14:** a list of development or enhancement events organised by the AVA (with dates).

#### **4 Academic standards**

This section summarises outcomes of the AVA's monitoring of academic standards on Access to HE courses, and of its procedures for monitoring standards, including assessment, standardisation, moderation, and the award and issue of Access to HE Diplomas.

Consider, in particular:

- assessment of moderation process, particularly in relation to the impact of any recently introduced refinements or changes to the AVA's procedures
- outcomes of measures undertaken to monitor moderators' performance
- analytical response to outcomes of moderation activity through the AVA's evaluation of moderators'/examiners' reports. As well as recording successes and notable achievements, the response will note any apparent weaknesses or areas of concern, and the AVA's intended actions in relation to these. AVAs are not expected to make judgements about named programmes' performance, but the self-evaluation report will mention how the AVA has addressed unsatisfactory quality or standards it has identified
- trends relating to the quality and standards of Access to HE provision and student achievement, as noted by moderators in their reports
- any contextual information that may be needed in relation to different categories of moderation or moderators which are not self-explanatory.

The section on registration and award numbers provides comment on the data that is available at the AVA from its own records. It provides a limited commentary on increases

and decreases in numbers of learners and the number of Access to HE Diplomas awarded, providing detail on the areas in which the AVA observes changes or trends, and any explanation for these that it is able to offer.

The text of section 4 should be cross-referenced to relevant appendices:

- **App 15:** summary evaluations of moderators'/examiners' reports, including key findings
- **App 16:** moderators' names, affiliation and length of service.

## Response to recommendations set at AVA review

Only AVAs which have recently been reviewed complete this section. The AVA provides information about how it has responded to each recommendation. If the AVA has decided not to take action in response to any particular recommendation, the reason for this decision is clearly stated. If the AVA's response to recommendations has been included in the AVA's strategic (or other) plans, reference to each particular recommendation is explicit and easily identifiable.

## Special appendix

In 2011, AVAs are required to submit action plans which set out their plans to achieve compliance with the new AVA licensing criteria by 31 March 2012. (AVAs will have already undertaken a self-assessment against the new criteria, identifying any areas in which the AVA may not be compliant with the new criteria, and will have notified to QAA, during September, any areas in which they envisage impediments to implementation by the compliance date.)

The AVA's action plan will specify:

- 1 each licensing criterion for which the AVA has identified the need for action
- 2 the particular action(s) the AVA plans to take for each listed criterion
- 3 deadlines for completion of each action (including milestones if the action required involves a number of constituent parts)
- 4 who is responsible for taking the individual actions
- 5 progress to date.

In addition, the AVA should provide:

- implications for providers of any AVA actions (with timelines for any required provider action)
- details of how, and by whom, the action plan will be monitored
- the date of the approval of the action plan, and the body responsible for this approval.

The action plan may be presented in any appropriate tabulated format.



**QAA**

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