

Consultation

**Recognising achievement on
Access to Higher Education Programmes**

Proposals for a common credit framework
May 2005



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Recognising achievement on Access to Higher Education programmes: proposals for a common credit framework

Introduction

Background and context

The report on the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) DfES-commissioned Access to Higher Education Development Project¹ (the *Development Project Report*) made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the consistency of both academic standards on Access to Higher Education (Access to HE) programmes and the description of learner achievement. Recommendation 5 of the *Development Project Report* focused on academic standards and proposed that these should be clear, common and consistently applied, capable of accommodating a diversity of programmes and recognising student achievement within a national framework. Recommendation 6 stated that the method of description of achievement on Access to HE programmes should be standardised so that equivalence would be demonstrable and transparent, and that there should be common criteria and mechanisms to allow partial achievement to be acknowledged and transferred. In its response to the *Development Project Report*, the DfES welcomed both of these recommendations and asked QAA to take forward work in these areas.

As a consequence, QAA established several specialist groups to develop more detailed proposals. The Access Qualification Development Group, a group of practitioners from HE and FE with particular experience of Access to HE, has been responsible for producing the proposals set out in this paper.

These proposals are intended to respond to a number of matters identified by learners, practitioners and HE admissions staff, as described in the research for the *Development Project Report*, and to enhance learner progression to a broader range of HE opportunities. Adopting unit-based structures and common standards for Access to HE within a credit framework will also enable Access to HE qualification developments to take account of current qualifications reform in the learning and skills sector more broadly.

In line with the commitment to both consistency and flexibility reflected in the response from the DfES to the *Development Project Report*, there is a renewed interest in developing credit across the post-14 and HE sectors, as demonstrated in the UUK/SCOP *Burgess Report*² and subsequent creation of a follow-up committee; the Secretary of State's request to HEFCE to consider the development of a credit framework within HE; and, in particular, the current development of the Framework for Achievement (FfA)³ by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Learning and Skills Council and the Skills for Business Network, as referenced in the recent Skills White Paper⁴.

¹ *Access to Higher Education Development Project* (QAA, 2004) available at www.qaa.ac.uk/access/developmentproject

² *Measuring and recording student achievement* available at bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/measuringachievement.pdf

³ *A framework for achievement: recognising qualifications and skills in the 21st century* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004), available at www.qca.org.uk/10710.html

⁴ *Skills: Getting on in business, getting on at work* (HMSO, 2005), available at www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/

A credit framework for Access to HE and its relationship to the FfA

The FfA is planned to be a unit-based national system of credit and qualifications designed to describe and encompass a wide range of learner achievement in a single coherent framework. It was therefore agreed that it would be appropriate to explore the ways in which aspects of the architecture, key design features, and operational processes of the FfA could usefully be considered as the basis for developing a credit framework for Access to HE programmes.

The proposals for the Access to HE credit framework set out in this document are consistent with the principles for credit used in the FfA proposals, with many of the proposed individual features of the operation of the FfA, thereby allowing for the possible inclusion of Access to HE within the FfA if this should become appropriate.

The main areas of commonality are:

- the definitions of credit, unit, assessment criteria and learning outcomes, and their proposed application
- the concept of notional learning hours, and its use in ascribing credit values to units
- the specification of a range of standard credit values for units
- the principles of credit accumulation and transfer
- the principle that 'rules of combination' should govern the accumulation of credit towards a named qualification
- the description and operation of credit levels
- the development and use of a credit transcript for all learners
- the development of authorised validating agencies' (AVA's)⁵ management information systems, to ensure that they are capable of entering, retrieving, and tracking accurate and reliable data.

In further considering the relationship between the FfA and a credit framework for Access to HE, it was agreed that the priority for Access to HE was to respond to the recommendations of the *Development Project Report* and the steer from the DfES in relation to consistency and the principles of flexibility and local responsiveness of the Access to HE qualification. Consequently, it was decided to develop proposals which would be fit for these purposes and which would provide a more transparent and consistent way of recognising achievement on Access to HE programmes.

It should be noted that the proposals for a common credit framework contained in this consultation paper are in addition to, and are not intended to replace, those aspects of the QAA *Recognition Scheme for Access to HE*⁶ which relate to programme validation. Moreover, while the adoption of unit-based structures provides opportunities for new approaches to curriculum development, these proposals are not intended to address questions of programme content, or other matters related to the Access to HE curriculum. Nonetheless, respondents to the consultation are invited to consider the broad implications of these proposals in terms of their fitness for purpose for Access to HE and for the continuing development of provision and of the Access to HE qualification.

⁵ AVAs are regionally based consortia of FE and HE institutions. For further details see www.qaa.ac.uk/access

⁶ *The QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to HE in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, available at www.qaa.ac.uk/access

Responding to the consultation

QAA now wishes to consult on its proposals for a credit framework for Access to HE programmes in the following areas:

- **purpose and scope of a credit framework for Access to HE programmes**
(Section 1, paragraphs 1-2)
- **specifications for a credit framework for Access to HE programmes**
(Section 2, paragraphs 3-17)
- **operating the Access to HE credit system**
(Section 3, paragraphs 18-31)
- **consistency of academic standards and the Access to HE qualification**
(Section 4, paragraphs 32-42)
- **regulatory and management responsibilities**
(Section 5, paragraphs 43-45).

Respondents are invited to comment on any or all of the proposals and to indicate the areas in which they wish to see further clarification or development of the proposals. A response form is provided at Appendix D for respondents' convenience. The full proposals and response form are available electronically at www.qaa.ac.uk/access/credit/

Responses, to arrive no later than **15 July 2005**, should be sent to:

Access to HE consultation
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Electronic responses should be sent to access@qaa.ac.uk

The proposals

Section 1

Purpose and scope of a credit framework for Access to HE programmes

- 1 The purposes of a common credit framework and a consistently applied national credit system for Access to HE programmes will be:
 - to ensure greater consistency and transparency in both the description of learner achievement on Access to HE programmes and in the requirements for the award of the Access to HE qualification
 - to promote greater flexibility and diversity.
- 2 The credit framework will apply to all Access to HE programmes covered by the QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and will be operated by the AVAs which are licensed by QAA to act as the awarding bodies within the Recognition Scheme.

Section 2

Specifications for a credit framework for Access to HE programmes

Units

- 3 Units will form the building blocks of the Access to HE qualification, on the basis of agreed rules of combination (see paragraphs 27-31).
- 4 There will be a standard unit specification which applies to all units within the Access to HE credit framework. It is proposed that the unit specification described below be adopted for the Access to HE credit framework:
 - title
 - learning outcomes
 - assessment criteria
 - level
 - credit value
 - unit code (this will relate to the AVA's unit databank – see paragraph 6).
- 5 A common format and standard template for the specification of units will be adopted. The format for this Unit Specification Template can be found in Appendix A. This template relates only to the specification of the unit and is not intended to replace the more extensive kinds of information about curriculum content and assessment methods which will continue to be presented for the purposes of validation of the Access to HE programme. All units to be used within the Access to HE qualification will be described in this format.
- 6 Each AVA will develop, manage and regulate its own local databank of units. Specific responsibilities of the AVA in relation to the AVA's unit databank will include resourcing and developing the requisite data management infrastructure to ensure its effective operation; and having agreed and effective procedures for establishing, maintaining and quality assurance of the unit databank. AVAs will be required to establish standard procedures for:
 - submitting and approving units for inclusion in the AVA's unit databank
 - assessing the continuing currency of units
 - withdrawing units from the AVA's unit databank.
- 7 The establishment of an AVA unit databank will also allow the development of mutual recognition of units by providers within the AVA and, potentially, between

AVAs. Mutual recognition between AVAs would require additional procedures to describe the ways in which units from other AVAs' databanks may contribute towards the AVA's own Access to HE awards.

8 Within the unit specification, learning outcomes are defined as statements of what a learner may reasonably be expected to know, understand or do as the result of undertaking a process of learning and will be expressed in a standard linguistic format (see Appendix A).

9 Assessment criteria are defined as descriptions of the requirements a learner is expected to meet in order to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved. Assessment criteria do not in themselves include sufficient information to conduct a valid and reliable assessment of learner achievement in relation to a qualification. Methods of assessment and their relationship to the achievement of the Access to HE qualification are a function of the validation process for individual programmes.

10 Separate assessment and certification through the award of credit must be available for each unit. This is a matter with significant implications for curriculum design for providers and for the operation of AVAs. AVAs will need to ensure that they have in place appropriate data management and support systems which are capable of holding the necessary information to enable the AVA to:

- award credit for individual units, as necessary
- award credit for whole qualifications
- hold, retrieve and track learner achievement so that learners are able to accumulate and transfer credit towards the Access to HE qualification within the relevant rules of combination (see paragraphs 27-31)
- comply with relevant data and legislative requirements
(See also paragraphs 38-40 in relation to the credit transcript).

AVAs will also need to conform to the principles and processes on the basis of which credit is awarded (see paragraphs 11-15).

Credits and credit value

11 The proposed basis for the award of credit is a significant feature of the proposals for the Access to HE credit framework. It builds on existing experience within credit systems, including current practice in some Access to HE programmes. It is also one of the key features which will enable alignment and articulation with other frameworks and systems, including those operating across HE in England, the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

12 Credit is an award made to a learner in recognition of the quality assured achievement of designated learning outcomes at a specified level. Credits are only awarded for the achievement of all the learning outcomes of a unit. Learners cannot be awarded a proportion of the credits specified for the successful achievement of a unit for partial achievement of a unit's learning outcomes, nor can half credits be awarded. It is not possible to award more credits than are specified for the successful completion of a unit to indicate the quality of individual performance. Credits cannot be graded.

13 One credit is awarded to a learner for the achievement of those learning outcomes within a unit that a learner can be expected to achieve in 10 notional learning hours. Notional learning hours should not be confused with aggregated learning time or guided learning hours, and are not determined through a

mathematical formula or through adding up actual hours. The concept of 'notional learning hours' provides a common measure which allows credit value to be ascribed to individual units.

14 The credit value of a unit is defined as the number of credits that may be awarded to a learner for the successful achievement of all the learning outcomes of that unit. The determination of the credit value of particular units will be a matter of professional judgement for AVAs within their validation and operational processes, determined through the QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to HE.

15 In order to facilitate effective credit accumulation and transfer, there must be standard credit values for units. The standard credit values for units at all levels on Access to HE programmes will be 1, 2, 3, 6, 9 and 12.

Level and volume

16 Level is an integral feature of all units, since the level of the unit determines the level at which credit may be awarded. All Access to HE units will therefore be located at a specific level, using the **levels and level descriptors** developed through the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (NICATS). The NICATS level descriptors are attached at Appendix B.

17 The relationship between the level of units and the level of the qualification is determined through the rules of combination for the qualification. The Access to HE qualification may therefore be made up of units at different levels (see paragraph 33) but overall the Access to HE qualification will be located at Level 3 of the NICATS framework. The particular balance of unit levels required for the award of the Access to HE qualification in relation to a particular Access to HE programme will be subject to approval through the rules of combination (see paragraphs 27-31).

Section 3

Operating the Access to HE credit system

18 This section includes proposals regarding the operation of a credit system for Access to HE, including credit accumulation and transfer, rules of combination, and the development and use of credit transcripts.

Credit accumulation and transfer

19 In order to enhance flexibility and improve learner achievement and progression opportunities, the Access to HE credit framework will allow learners to accumulate credits towards the Access to HE qualification, and to provide the possibility of credit transfer between Access to HE programmes within defined parameters.

Credit accumulation

20 The relationship of credits to the Access to HE qualification will be set out in the rules of combination for individual Access to HE awards, which will constitute structured pathways for credit accumulation towards the Access to HE qualification. The Access to HE qualification can only be achieved by fulfilling the specific rules of combination governing the individual Access to HE award; it cannot be achieved by the random accumulation of credits (See further details in paragraphs 27-31, Rules of combination; and Appendix C, Notes for Guidance).

21 All credits that are accumulated to the award of the Access to HE qualification will be achieved within the five years prior to its award. However, more detailed requirements about the period over which credit can be accumulated which may apply to particular awards (for example, to ensure currency in certain subject areas or for entry to particular programmes of professional training) are a matter for

individual AVAs to decide within their regulatory processes. (See Appendix C, Notes for Guidance.)

Credit transfer

22 AVAs should develop protocols for the transfer of credit into the Access to HE qualification to allow Access to HE learners to transfer credits into Access to HE programmes and between AVAs. (See Appendix C, Notes for Guidance.)

Mutual recognition

23 AVAs will recognise credits awarded by other AVAs where these meet the requirements set out in the rules of combination for their Access to HE awards (See Appendix C). AVAs will also recognise units approved by other AVAs where these meet the rules of combination for their Access to HE awards and the requirements of the standard specification for units (see paragraph 4 and Appendix A).

Accreditation of Prior Learning

24 It is proposed that within the Access to HE credit framework the concepts of, and processes of operation for, the accreditation of prior learning, including the accreditation of prior certificated learning and the accreditation of prior experiential learning, are clearly defined and consistently used within the rules of combination for the Access to HE qualification. The definitions proposed below have been derived from QAA's *Guidelines on the Accreditation of Prior Learning* (September 2004)⁷, and further advice on the application of a range of principles in relation to this practice can be found in the publication. It should be noted that the processes and definitions described below relate to accrediting learning equivalence in order to enable learners to demonstrate that they have already achieved some of the requirements of the rules of combination for the qualification, and therefore they are not required to undertake those units for which equivalent achievement has already been demonstrated. These processes are therefore not a mechanism simply to determine whether students can commence the Access to HE programme but provide a means by which there can be greater flexibility in the manner in which individual learners can achieve the Access to HE qualification.

25 *Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL)* is the generic term to describe processes used to recognise learning achievement outside the rules of combination for the Access to HE qualification for the purposes of demonstrating learning equivalence which meets those requirements.

Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL) is the process through which previously assessed and certificated learning is recognised as equivalent in relation to meeting the requirements for the achievement of the Access to HE qualification. Where previous learning has already been certificated, no credit is awarded, but learners are exempted from relevant credit requirements in relation to the Access to HE qualification.

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is the process by which non-certificated learning achieved in a range of learning contexts is recognised in relation to meeting the credit requirements of the rules of combination for the Access to HE qualification. In this process, credit is awarded by the AVA in recognition of learning achievement and the learner is exempted from achieving the units for which equivalent achievement has already been demonstrated.

26 It is proposed that no more than 50 per cent of the credits required for the Access to HE qualification should be awarded through APL.

⁷ Available at www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/apl/

Rules of combination

27 Within the Access to HE credit framework, learner achievement will be recognised both through the award of credit and the award of the Access to HE qualification. Two related sets of information therefore need to be provided to learners: the number of credits at particular levels they will need to achieve in order to gain the qualification, and the number and titles of units which they must complete and which will be on offer to them by providers. The Access to HE qualification can only be achieved through the accumulation of credits achieved on approved units, through defined rules of combination. The rules of combination will include approved named units and, if appropriate, open units (see paragraph 29).

28 AVAs will be responsible for approving the rules of combination for the Access to HE awards made by them. The two separate processes of (a) programme validation and (b) approval of the rules of combination leading to the achievement of the Access to HE qualification should be clearly distinguished within the AVA's regulatory processes. Rules of combination will need to be approved for each award title (see paragraph 36), even where these exist within a single programme. There might also be occasions when new rules of combination may be approved without a full programme validation. As an example, if a set of additional units have been developed and approved in order to provide a new award title on an existing programme, this would require approval of new rules of combination, although a full programme validation would not necessarily be required.

29 The Access to HE qualifications will comprise units designated as Mandatory, Optional and Open.

- Mandatory units are those which must be achieved in relation to the award of the qualification.
- Optional units offer an element of choice for learners, and the rules of combination will need to state from the offer available to learners which optional units may be accumulated towards the qualification, how many, and at what level(s) learners will need to achieve in order to meet the requirements for the qualification.
- Open units will be those selected by learners themselves and will not be prescribed within the rules of combination. Open units will not necessarily be included in all programmes.

30 AVAs will establish a standard format for setting out rules of combination. The information to be presented for approval by the AVA will include, as a minimum:

- qualification title (see paragraph 36)
- qualification level (see paragraph 17)
- total credit value (see paragraph 33)
- numbers of credits at specific levels which build towards the total credit value
- credit value and level for mandatory, optional and open units
- titles of mandatory and optional units
- numbers and levels of credits permitted for the purposes of credit transfer or APL
- any other requirements in respect of credit accumulation, such as time limits.

(An example of a standard format with guidance notes can be found at Appendix C.)

31 Any other requisite criteria for the achievement of the qualification should be stated separately from the rules of combination. These might include specific requirements in relation to assessment methods, criteria for differentiating individual learner achievement (see paragraphs 41-42), or professional body or other requirements.

Section 4

Consistency of academic standards and the Access to HE qualification

32 The need to establish consistency in the credit value for the Access to HE qualification, in order to assure its credibility and provide transparency and confidence in the qualification and the academic standards which its award signifies, was a key outcome of the *Development Project Report* and of the DfES response to the report. This section includes proposals to provide that consistency.

Credit value for the Access to HE qualification

33 There will be a single total credit value for the Access to HE qualification. On the basis of research carried out to survey the range of, and rationales for, current practice on Access to HE programmes, it is proposed that the credit achievement requirement for the award of the Access to HE qualification for all QAA-recognised Access to HE programmes should be a total of 60 credits (as defined within this document), with a minimum of 45 of these to be achieved at Level 3.

34 This requirement applies to the Access to HE qualification only: it is not a requirement about the Access to HE programme offer. Some programmes may be able to offer additional units, allowing some learners to accumulate more credits than are required for the award of the Access to HE qualification. However, many programmes and providers will not be in a position to do so. It should be noted, therefore, that the award of the Access to HE qualification will, in all instances, indicate that the learner has satisfactorily met the requirements for achievement of the award through successful completion of the relevant rules of combination for the Access to HE qualification. Any further information about the quality of individual learner performance in relation to the qualification will be provided through different means (see paragraphs 41-42).

Qualification titles

35 It is proposed that the nomenclature Diploma (rather than the current Certificate) be adopted for the Access to HE qualification.

36 It is further proposed that the following common format for the title of the Access to HE qualification be adopted:

- *Access to Higher Education Diploma (Subject/area of study)*. Titles of individual Access to HE awards might include, for example, Access to Higher Education Diploma (Business Studies); Access to Higher Education Diploma (Health and Social Care); Access to Higher Education Diploma (Humanities); Access to Higher Education Diploma (Social Sciences).

37 AVAs will approve the specific award title as part of the rules of combination for that award (see paragraphs 27-31 and Appendix C, Notes for Guidance). It should be noted that the requirements described in paragraph 36 refer to the Access to HE qualification title and do not necessarily relate to names and titles used for marketing purposes for Access to HE programmes.

The credit transcript

38 A record of credit achievement will be established and maintained for every individual learner. The credit transcript will hold a record of all credits and the Access to HE qualification achieved by a learner, and will be issued to the learner.

39 Each AVA should develop a system for holding, retrieving, and tracking learner data for the purposes of recording achievement in respect of units and credits. AVAs will develop a data management infrastructure capable of issuing to learners a credit

transcript which records their achievements in a transparent format easily comprehensible to learners, HE admissions staff, employers and others. The exact format of the Access to HE credit transcript will be determined by the AVA.

40 The minimum requirements for the Access to HE credit transcript will be:

- the learner's full name, as registered with the AVA
- learner number identifier
- titles and levels of units completed
- date of completion of units
- number and level of credits achieved
- date of achievement of credits
- achievement of the Access to HE qualification (where appropriate)
- date of achievement of the Access to HE qualification
- required details of differentiated achievement, in relation to the Access to HE qualification (see paragraphs 41-42).

Assessment and recording differentiated individual achievement

41 Further work on assessment and recording differentiated individual learner achievement is being carried out, in line with the request from the DfES that QAA take forward Recommendation 6 of the *Development Project Report*. This work will consider a wide range of matters associated with good practice in assessment and is currently exploring relevant policy and practice and considering research evidence in this area.

42 Further consultation will take place, both as part of the process of the development of proposals and, in due course, once specific proposals on recording differentiated individual achievement have been developed.

Section 5

Regulatory and management responsibilities

43 The respective roles and responsibilities of QAA and AVAs with regard to the development and regulation of the unit-based Access to HE qualification within a credit framework and credit accumulation and transfer system are summarised below. It should be noted that the responsibilities described are in addition to the other duties set out in the Principles and Criteria for the Licensing of AVAs.

Responsibilities of QAA

- Set, approve and monitor the technical specifications and overall design features of the Access to HE credit framework.
- License AVAs to award credit, approve the level and credit value of units, approve rules of combination, and award the Access to HE qualification.
- Oversee quality assurance in relation to the operation of the credit system across all AVAs in the recognition scheme.
- Approve the design specifications for the rules of combination of the Access to HE qualification.
- Approve and monitor the operation of any additional criteria in respect of individual learner achievement for the Access to HE qualification.
- Ensure that details of all regulatory matters relating to credit are included in the relevant documentation for AVAs.

Responsibilities of AVAs

- Support providers in the design and development of units within the approved format.
- Approve the credit value and level of units.
- Support providers in presenting for approval rules of combination for the Access to HE qualification.
- Approve rules of combination for individual Access to HE awards within the parameters for the Access to HE qualification set out by QAA.
- Award credit for the successful achievement of individual units on completion of these units.
- Award credit for the successful achievement of the rules of combination for a qualification.
- Record learner credit achievement in an approved format.
- Develop, maintain and update the AVA unit databank.
- Develop, maintain and update a data management infrastructure capable of supporting the unit databank as well as holding, retrieving and tracking learner achievement, including the potential to securely transfer and exchange data with other AVAs in due course.
- Monitor the consistency of the application of all aspects of the Access to HE credit framework, including the award of credit and any requirements relating to assessment criteria or the recording of differentiation of individual learner achievement for the Access to HE qualification, across all AVA member organisations.

Outline timetable for the introduction of a common credit framework for Access to HE programmes

2005

May-June Consultation on credit framework for Access to HE programmes and requirements for the award of the Access to HE qualification.

July Outcomes of consultation reviewed by Access Qualification Development Group; advice to Access Recognition and Licensing Committee for approval of final proposals.

Sept Full details of common credit framework and specification for the Access to HE award circulated to AVAs.

2005-06

Development (1) year.

- Support and advice sessions for AVAs offered and provided, as needed.
- Re-validation of Access programmes to meet revised requirements (phase 1).

(Development work relating to the Access to HE qualification, including work on recording individual levels of achievement.)

2006-07

Development (2) and transitional year

Re-validation of Access programmes to meet revised requirements (phase 2) and implementation where possible.

2007-08

Full implementation.

Appendix A

Unit template

Unit title	
Level.....	
Credit value	
Unit code	
Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
The learner should be able to:	The learner can:
1	1.1 1.2 1.3 1.4
2	2.1 2.2 2.3 2.4
3	3.1 3.2 3.3 3.4 3.5
4	4.1 4.2 4.3
5	5.1 5.2

Appendix B

NICATS level descriptors

ENTRY LEVEL - employ recall and demonstrate elementary comprehension in a narrow range of areas, exercise basic skills within highly structured contexts, and carry out directed activity under close supervision.

LEVEL ONE - employ a narrow range of applied knowledge, skills and basic comprehension within a limited range of predictable and structured contexts, including working with others under direct supervision, but with a very limited degree of discretion and judgement about possible action.

LEVEL TWO - apply knowledge with underpinning comprehension in a number of areas and employ a range of skills within a number of contexts, some of which may be non-routine; and undertake directed activities, with a degree of autonomy, within time constraints.

LEVEL THREE - apply knowledge and skills in a range of complex activities demonstrating comprehension of relevant theories; access and analyse information independently and make reasoned judgements, selecting from a considerable choice of procedures, in familiar and unfamiliar contexts; and direct own activities, with some responsibility for the output of others.

LEVEL FOUR - develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base; employ a range of specialised skills; evaluate information using it to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems; and operate in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.

LEVEL FIVE - generate ideas through the analysis of concepts at an abstract level, with a command of specialised skills and the formulation of responses to well defined and abstract problems; analyse and evaluate information; exercise significant judgement across a broad range of functions; and accept responsibility for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.

LEVEL SIX - critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge, utilising specialised skills across an area of study; critically evaluate new concepts and evidence from a range of sources; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills and exercise significant judgement in a range of situations; and accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.

LEVEL SEVEN - display mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge and skills, employing advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical or professional activity, accepting accountability for related decision-making including use of supervision.

LEVEL EIGHT - Make a significant and original contribution to a specialised field of inquiry demonstrating a command of methodological issues and engaging in critical dialogue with peers; accepting full accountability for outcomes.

Appendix C

Rules of combination: notes for guidance

Information required	Comments
Qualification title	The format for the title of the Access qualification should be Access to Higher Education Diploma (subject/area of study) eg Access to Higher Education Diploma (Health and Social Care); Access to Higher Education Diploma (Business Studies), Access to Higher Education Diploma (Humanities), Access to Higher Education Diploma (Biology).
Qualification level	The Access Diploma will be at Level 3 within the NICATS framework of levels.
Total credit value	The Access Diploma will have a total credit value of 60 credits .
Numbers of credits at specific levels which comprise the Access qualification	Of the 60 credits, a minimum of 45 must be at Level 3 .
Credit value and level of mandatory units	This section should set out the credit value and level of mandatory units in relation to the 60 credits required for the achievement of the qualification. (eg X credits at Level 3 and Y credits at Level 2 to be achieved through specified named mandatory units – see below).
Credit value and level of optional units	This section should set out the credit value and level of optional units in relation to the 60 credits required for the achievement of the qualification and may be expressed as a maximum or minimum. (eg X credits of which a minimum of Y must be at Level 3 to be achieved through a choice of named optional approved units – see below).
Credit value and level of open units	This section will state if there is any flexibility within the programme for achievement on other units to contribute to the qualification. Since there will be no requirement for these to be validated units within the Access programme, they will not be named or specified except for the credit value and level.

Titles of mandatory units	A list of the mandatory units required for the achievement of the qualification together with their credit value and level should be included or appended.
Titles of optional units	A list of the optional units available to learners in relation to the achievement of the qualification, together with their credit value and level should be included or appended.
Credit value and level of credits permitted through credit transfer and the award of credit through APL	<p>This section should state the requirements in relation to credit transfer and other arrangements through which learners may demonstrate prior learning achievement, eg a maximum of X credits at Level 2 may be transferred from an appropriate qualification or other learning achievement; a maximum of Y credits at Level 3 may be exempted from the optional units on the basis of relevant prior certificated achievement; a maximum of X credits at Y level may be awarded for APL.</p> <p>Overall, the total proportion of credits awarded on this basis should not exceed 50 per cent of the credits required for the achievement of the qualification.</p>
Credit accumulation	Other regulatory matters which might be included here might relate to certain kinds of time restrictions, eg at least X credits at Level 3 in Y subject must have been achieved within 3 years of the award of the Access to HE Diploma; overall, all credits must have been achieved within 5 years of the award of the Access to HE Diploma.

Appendix D

Consultation response form

Respondents are invited to comment on any aspect of the proposals made within the consultation document (*Recognising achievement on Access to Higher Education programmes: proposals for a credit framework*).

All responses should be submitted to QAA by **15 July 2005**.

<p>Section 1 Purpose and scope of a credit framework for Access to HE programmes (paragraphs 1-2)</p>
<p>a Do you broadly support the proposals in this section?</p>
<p>b Do you have any reservations about the proposals in this section?</p>
<p>c Do any of the proposals need clarification or explanation?</p>
<p>d Would you like to see further proposals in this area?</p>
<p>Section 2 Specifications for a credit framework for Access to HE programmes (paragraphs 3-17)</p>
<p>a Do you broadly support the proposals in this section?</p>
<p>b Do you have any reservations about the proposals in this section?</p>
<p>c Do any of the proposals need clarification or explanation?</p>
<p>d Would you like to see further proposals in this area?</p>

Section 3
Operating the Access credit system
(paragraphs 18-31)

a Do you broadly support the proposals in this section?

b Do you have any reservations about the proposals in this section?

c Do any of the proposals need clarification or explanation?

d Would you like to see further proposals in this area?

Section 4
Consistency of academic standards and the Access to HE qualification
(paragraphs 32-42)

a Do you broadly support the proposals in this section?

b Do you have any reservations about the proposals in this section?

c Do any of the proposals need clarification or explanation?

d Would you like to see further proposals in this area?

**Section 5
Regulatory and management responsibilities**

a Do you broadly support the proposals in this section?

b Do you have any reservations about the proposals in this section?

c Do any of the proposals need clarification or explanation?

d Would you like to see further proposals in this area?

Any further comments

This response is submitted on behalf of (name of institution or individual)

	please tick	role (please specify if not responding on behalf of the whole organisation)
AVA		
FE college		
HE institution		
Individual		
Other (please specify)		