



Access to Higher Education

Research project for QAA

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Access to Higher Education development project

Part 2: research reports

Section B – research undertaken by the Learning and Skills Development Agency

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Issues for the development of Access (LSDA 1)

Method

- 1 This focus group research took place on 11 April 2003. The members of the group were selected because of their wide experience of, and expert knowledge about, Access to HE programmes. They were also selected to represent a range of views and perspectives and included representatives from higher and further education, from the authorised validating agencies which recognise Access programmes and award Access certificates and from national organisations which have a 'stakeholder' interest in the development of Access to HE. (Notes for the focus group researchers are in Appendix 1)
- 2 There were four conveners and discussion was encouraged by asking participants to fill in post-it notes and use flip-charts. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared that grouped series of possible questions under five main headings:
 - experience of Access
 - changing landscape of HE
 - progression inhibitors
 - the nature of the qualification
 - consistency versus diversity
- 3 The session was audio recorded and then transcribed. The transcript was examined by a single researcher and analysed by identifying emergent themes. The results were then arranged thematically.

Findings

Change

- 4 The discussions were dominated by the theme of change. For the student, both studying on an Access programme and also in HE is life changing and they sometimes need help in managing this change.
- 5 This is a time of change for both Access programmes and Higher Education. In particular, the proposal to increase the proportion of 18 – 30 year olds who participate in HE and the gradual move towards a transferable credit system have important ramifications. Under these circumstances, Access programmes have lost sight of their mission and face an identity crisis. A minority view was expressed that HE is changing more quickly than Access programmes and a conclusion drawn that Access programmes need to become more innovative. On the other hand, there was a view that HE remains wedded to the idea of three year, full-time honours degrees, which are rarely ideal for the needs of Access students. Indeed, perhaps it is wrong to consider HE as a single sector, because it has splintered into sub-sectors, only some of which welcome Access students.

Profile

- 6 The profile of the Access qualification needs to be raised. Therefore, effective communication has to be established both to prospective students and to HE institutions. Better links need to be formed between Access and HE admissions tutors.

Obstacles

- 7 There are various obstacles to participation on Access programmes that need to be tackled. Many students experience difficulties funding themselves and waste considerable time and energy trying to find the money. The prospect of higher fees in HE will also be a deterrent, engendering 'debt fright'. The mode of delivery tends to be during daytime and this does not meet the needs of a large number of prospective students. This needs to be accompanied by similar changes in HE, so that students can 'earn and learn'. There are social groups where hostility to formal education is common and for these groups a successful learning culture has to be implanted in the neighbourhood. There are also family responsibilities that get in the way. As well as children, many are carers of other relatives.

Location

- 8 Access courses need to be local in outlook and location and address local needs. Many students find it difficult, or impossible to travel far and poor or non-existent public transport will deter many.

Flexibility versus standardisation

- 9 There are good arguments for raising the profile of the qualification through standardising the threshold for awarding the certificate. This would also clarify to HE institutions and admissions tutors what the certificate means. On the other hand, a strength of the qualification is its ability to meet local needs, which would be jeopardised by a 'one size fits all' approach.

Innovations within Access: the extent and nature of existing 'innovative' provision (LSDA 2)

Method

- 1 A survey of innovations within Access provision was carried out in 2002. Open College Networks (OCNs) were asked about the following:
 - programmes currently running in their region which were designed primarily to provide a preparation to higher education but which were not QAA-recognised Access programmes
 - aspects of the Recognition Scheme which restrict developments which they or their providers were seeking to make;
 - possible amendments to the Recognition Scheme which, were they to be added, could more actively promote worthwhile developments.
- 2 There were eight responses (30 per cent). These were from Central England (OCNCE), the South West (OCNSW), the West Region (WROCN), Oxfordshire (OxOCN), West North Yorkshire (WNYOCN), Cambridge (CAVA), the South Yorkshire and Humber Region (SYHOCN) and Hampshire (HAVA). Responses were analysed using SPSS and Excel software. The questionnaire is in Appendix 2.

Findings

Non-Access programmes

- 3 There were comprehensive details provided on non-Access programmes being offered by the OCNs. The table below outlines the numbers of non-Access programmes offered by the eight centres which responded to this question.

CENTRE	NO. OF PROGRAMMES
Central England	6
South West	5
West Region	4
Oxfordshire	3
West North Yorkshire	2
Cambridgeshire	1
South Yorkshire and Humber Region	1
Hampshire	0
Total	22

Table 1. Number of Non-Access programmes offered by the UK OCNs (from the survey, 2002)

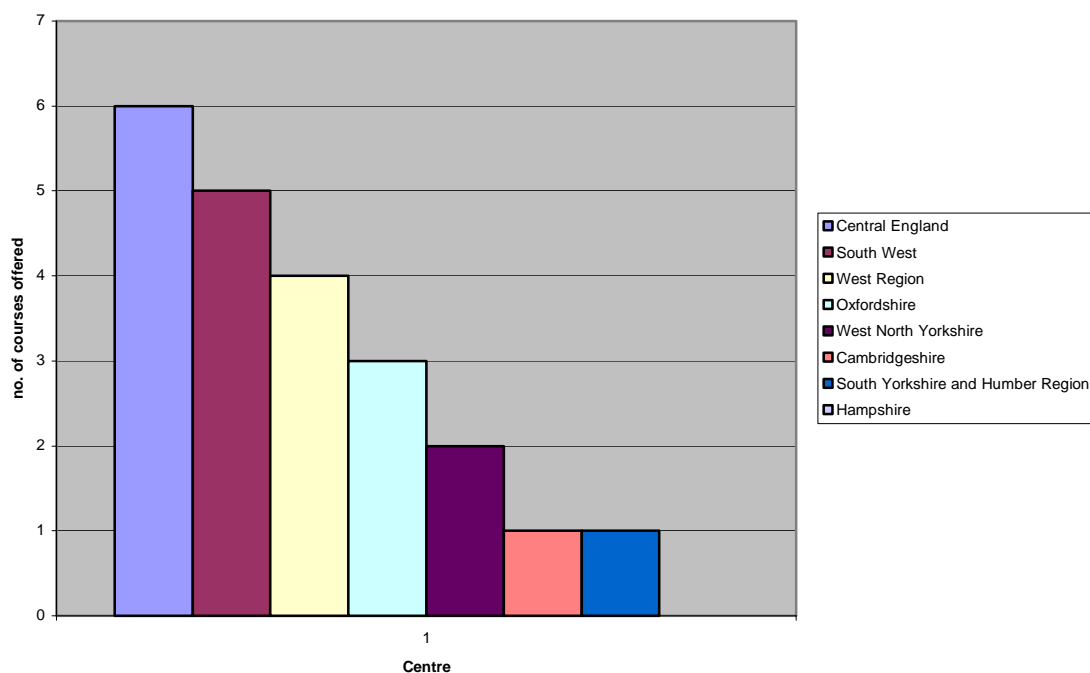


Chart 1. Number of Non-ACCESS programmes offered by the UK OCNs (from the survey, 2002)

Details of the programmes offered at these centres are shown in the table below:

Centre	Non-ACCESS programmes offered at these centres
CAVA	1 programme: Access to Art
HAVA	no non-ACCESS programmes being offered at this centre.
OCNCE	6 programmes: International foundation diploma for HE (Solihull College); International foundation programme (Warwickshire College); Educational Studies and Professional Development (Solihull); Pre-teaching Studies (Solihull); Pathways in Creative Studies (Hereward College); Pre-university Programme in Engineering Principles (Worcester College).
OCNSW	5 programmes: Advanced Diploma in Nursing; Advanced Diploma in Drama; Certificate in Welfare Studies; Certificate in Marketing; Vocational programmes (not specified) offered through ILEX.
OCNSYHR	1 programme listed: This OCN is in the process of developing bridging programmes for university Access (in the Sheffield Universities); only '... Access routes for classroom assistants...' are itemised in their response.
OxOCN	3 programmes: International Studies Programme; Diploma in Healthcare; Study Skills for HE.

WNYOCN	2 programmes Progression module; Working in Communities.
WROCN	Details from ALF leaflet: Non-ACCESS programmes offered at WROCN (West Region Open College Network) were shown in a leaflet entitled ALF (Adult Learners' Framework). The leaflet outlined accredited learning that can be obtained through short programmes offered at the West Region colleges in Bristol and South Gloucestershire. Future plans are to expand provision of programmes to Bath and N.E. Somerset. The leaflet listed centres which are partners in ALF, along with programmes such as Personal Development, Community Learning, Vocational and Professional Development, Preparation for Learning and Community Action programmes, all of which are outside the usual Access programmes.

Table 2. Types and titles of programmes offered by UK OCNs (from the survey, 2002)

- 4 Three of the OCNs in this survey stated that they taught a significant number of international students and that the programmes they provided were not generally in preparation for Higher Education Access but had a much narrower focus (OCNSW, OCNCE and SYHR). Two other OCNs stated that summer schools were being offered (WNY and SYHR).

Restrictions to development

- 5 There were six responses to the question about restrictions to development. Two providers reported no problems, while one out of the six considered '... necessary contact hours for funding...' as 'restrictive', but this was not a concern raised by any of the other five OCNs. However, one other complained that the '... long run-in time for the addition of new programmes or pathways' placed restrictions on the development of new programmes or pathways although this statement was qualified by admitting that the time taken for these developments assures quality programmes (OCNSW). This opinion was obliquely supported by two other responses (OxOCN and WNYOCN) that mentioned the difficulty in '... matching HE styles of assessment to OCN terminology, credit size, levels...' and the academic nature of higher education. Similarly, age limit (under 19 years) was cited as a restriction; for example, in the West North Yorkshire OCN, Access students cannot be certificated to go through to the Northern School of Contemporary Dance despite their qualifying levels (WNYOCN).

Amendments to current Recognition Scheme

- 6 Five OCNs outlined their views about possible amendments to the Recognition Scheme. Cambridge OCN would be interested in '...partaking in any pilot scheme on curriculum development and flexibility...' Central England stated that a review of specifications was needed, to create more flexibility. The provider added that there needs to be a debate about '... fast track...' and '...smaller chunks...' of teaching/learning'. These views were shared by three other providers: South West Region, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire, which added that it was starting developments in 'fast track, 'top-up' and 'brush -up' initiatives. Oxfordshire and WNY were also in agreement that acceptance of present unacknowledged experience of skills could be accepted into the current Recognition Scheme for vocational programmes. Oxfordshire mentioned Equine Studies, and Pilates programmes.

- 7 West North Yorkshire OCN included in this debate the acceptance of Study Skills, Research or IT units into the Recognitions Scheme, as an attraction for a younger clientele, for example, 17 to 18 year olds, who would like to enter HE vocational education but who have neither the understanding of the route nor the qualifications to this area. This was also the view of South West Region and South Yorkshire and Humber OCNs. South West Region suggested that the differences between 'Access for HE' and 'Access for a full-time degree' are properly defined so that students have a clearer idea of their future paths. The comments from South Yorkshire and Humber region OCN (taken from the non-recognised Access programmes section of the questionnaire replies) listed a number of options for young people that this OCN is developing; these include bridging programmes for NVQ and GNVQ students and Youth Access programmes.

Comparison of LSC's Learning Aims database (LAD) with UCAS' QAA Access programme database (LSDA 3)

- 1 UCAS and LSC are currently mapping the LAD and UCAS' QAA Access Programmes Database with a qualification code. However, at present their codes are not compatible and therefore they are not comparable.

LAD

- 2 QAA recognised Access to higher education programmes studied at LSC funded institutions can be identified on the LSC's learning aims database (LAD) as they are given a '4' in the LSC funding status field. The LAD also contains details of Access programmes not recognised by QAA. However, when attempting to determine the total number of enrolments in the learning and skills sector on these QAA recognised programmes, we encountered a few problems. During this project, it was found that some colleges appeared not to have any enrolments on these programmes in the individualised student record (ISR). For this research all these colleges were contacted by telephone or by email (62 in total, please see Appendix 3) and they replied that they did have learners studying QAA recognised Access programmes.
- 3 It is proposed that there are a number of reasons that could explain the above:
 - some confusion at institution level as to which Access programmes are recognised by QAA
 - potential errors in coding on the LAD
 - old codes being used at provider level which could reflect a different Access programme not recognised by QAA; this is often a problem as old qualifications are not taken off the LAD and therefore there are many Access programmes on the database
- 4 The use of old qualification codes could also potentially lead to incorrect awarding body information.
- 5 LSC has stated that it is aware of the problems associated with the LAD. It hopes to overcome some of them by marking the up-to-date qualification codes as preferred for 2003/04 to try to encourage providers to use the new learning aims.
- 6 Web link to LSC's LAD is as follows: <http://providers.lsc.gov.uk/>

The UCAS QAA Access programme database

- 7 The UCAS database only contains QAA recognised Access programmes and does not provide qualification codes that can be matched with the LAD. If a student enquires about an Access programme, which has not been validated by the QAA, UCAS advise them to contact the QAA. Access programmes, which are not QAA recognised, are not on UCAS' Access programme database.

- 8 Web link to UCAS' Access programme database is as follows:
http://search1.ucas.co.uk/Access_cs/index10.html

Use of Access brand

- 9 In carrying out this research, it was found that the term 'Access' is being used by a number of private institutions, for various kinds of programme. Some of these, such as those in using Microsoft applications, have little to do with entry to HE. However, there are others that specify that they are intended for those wishing to study in HE. An example is an 'Art and Design Access Course' offered by Bell International. Publicity for this programme states that it combines art and design and English language study and is intended for those wishing to enter a British university. It also names a 'partner university': Surrey Institute of Art and Design. This programme is not validated by the QAA.

Common characteristics of QAA-recognised provision (LSDA 4)

Part 1. Survey of extent and range of Access provision 2002-2003

Method

- 1 A survey of Access provision was carried out in 2003. AVAs were asked about the following:
 - which providers offer Access programmes
 - kinds of awards available (by designated progression route)
 - types of programme and modes of delivery
- 2 Twenty-three out of 26 AVAs returned completed questionnaires, making a response rate of 88.4 per cent. The completed questionnaires were analysed using SPSS and Excel software. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4.

Findings

Providers

- 3 Further Education Colleges were the biggest providers of Access programmes (76 per cent) of the 392 that were available (see Table 3). These colleges were running 844 programmes (81 per cent) delivered from 1,043 locations. Higher Education institutions were the next biggest providers, providing 8.7 per cent of the total Access programmes at 84 locations. They were running 78 (7.5 per cent) programmes. Third were the adult/community education centres, which were providing 5.3 per cent of the national Access programmes at 38 locations.
- 4 Sixth form colleges offered only 3.3 per cent of the programmes, with Voluntary organisations 2.3 per cent, other organisations 1.8 per cent, private training organisations 1 per cent and schools and employers 0.8 per cent each, respectively. In total programmes were available in 1,220 locations. Of the programmes offered, 1,041 were current, 85 per cent of possible availability. This shows a shortfall from full admissions of only 15 per cent. These figures are listed in Table 3.

	Providers	Places of delivery	Programmes running
FE	298 (76 per cent)	1043 (85.5 per cent)	844 (81 per cent)
HE	34 (8.7 per cent)	84 (6.8 per cent)	78 (7.5 per cent)
adult/community education	21 (5.3 per cent)	38 (3.2 per cent)	38 (3.6 per cent)
6th form colleges	13 (3.3 per cent)	20 (1.7 per cent)	20 (2 per cent)
voluntary orgs	9 (2.3 per cent)	8 (0.6 per cent)	7 (0.7 per cent)
other	7 (1.8 per cent)	8 (0.7 per cent)	35 (3.4 per cent)

private training organisations	4 (1 per cent)	3 (0.2 per cent)	1 (0.09 per cent)
schools	3 (0.8 per cent)	14 (1.1 per cent)	14 (1.3 per cent)
employers	3 (0.8 per cent)	2 (0.2 per cent)	4 (0.4 per cent)
TOTAL	392 (100 per cent)	1220 (100 per cent)	1041 (100 per cent)

Table 3. Providers of Access programmes

- 5 Extra information about Access provision was sought in an addendum to Section A of the questionnaire. Table 4 (see Appendix 5) provides verbatim details of responses. Respondents to this question provided details of 'other' providers of Access programmes. These centres included a prison, an adult education service, a residential college, a primary health care trust and an education service linked to a trade union.

Awards available

- 6 Respondents were asked to provide details of the awards available from their centres. There are 25 categories, some listed as specific subjects and others as general subject areas. Chart 2 shows six levels of programme awards, where Access programmes are available.

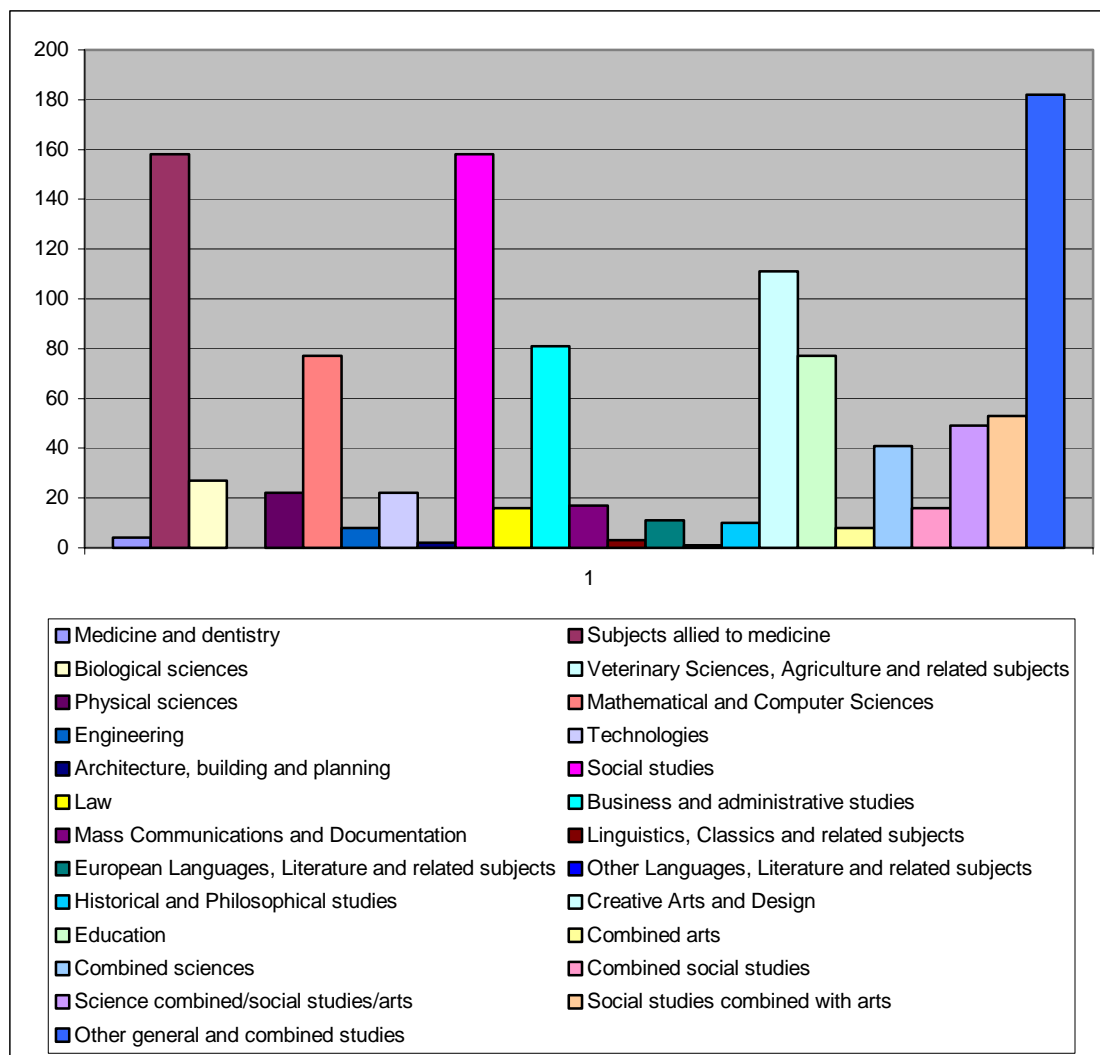


Chart 2. Programmes provided 2002-2003

The highest is over 100 programmes offered at Access centres. These are Other General and Combined Studies (198), Subjects allied to Medicine (164), Social Studies (159) and Creative Arts and Design (111). The second highest category is between 81 and 100; the programme in this band is Business and Administrative Studies (82). Between 41 and 80, there are five Access programmes: these are Mathematics and Computer Studies (80), Education (77), Social Studies combined with Arts (53), Science combined/Social Studies/Arts (49) and Combined Science (41). Between 21 and 40 are: Biological Sciences (27), Physical Sciences (22) and Technologies (22). Programmes offered less frequently include Mass Communications and Documentation (18), Law (16), European Languages, Literature and Related Studies (11), Combined Social Studies (10) and Historical and Philosophical Studies (14). The programmes offered least, with counts under 10 are Combined Arts (8), Engineering (8), Medicine and Dentistry (4), Linguistics, Classics and related subjects (3), Architecture, Building and Planning (1) and Other languages, and Literature and related subjects (1). Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related subjects were not offered anywhere. (See also Table 1 Appendix 6)

Programme type and delivery

Registered programmes

Section C asked respondents to give details about the numbers of programmes they have registered, in categories A – E, or as 'other' programmes.

These programmes are defined below:

Definitions of programme types A – E

Access programmes have been categorised according to different ways in which they have been organised, managed and delivered as follows:

- A) *a programme of study in which all elements are common to all learners;*
- B) *a programme of study in which some elements are common to all learners, but some specific options (defined at the point of recognition) are available;*
- C) *a pathway within a larger framework of Access to HE provision, the elements and options of which are defined at the point of recognition as providing a designated route to the award of the Access to HE certificate. Some elements of the pathway may be common with other pathways leading to the award of the Access to HE certificate within the same framework;*
- D) *a pathway within a larger framework of provision which includes Access to HE, and also includes other named exit routes, in which the elements and options of Access pathways are defined at the point of recognition as providing a designated route to the award of the Access to HE certificate. Some elements of the pathway may be common with elements of other pathways in the same framework which have a different learning aim;*
- E) *a framework of provision (which may be exclusively intended for Access for HE, or which may also include other named exit routes), in which each learner's programme of study is agreed between the learner and the provider on an individual basis. In this model, although separate pathways are not pre-determined, the individual units of study available; the rules of combination; and the successful completion requirements for the award of the Access to HE certificate are approved at the point of recognition.*

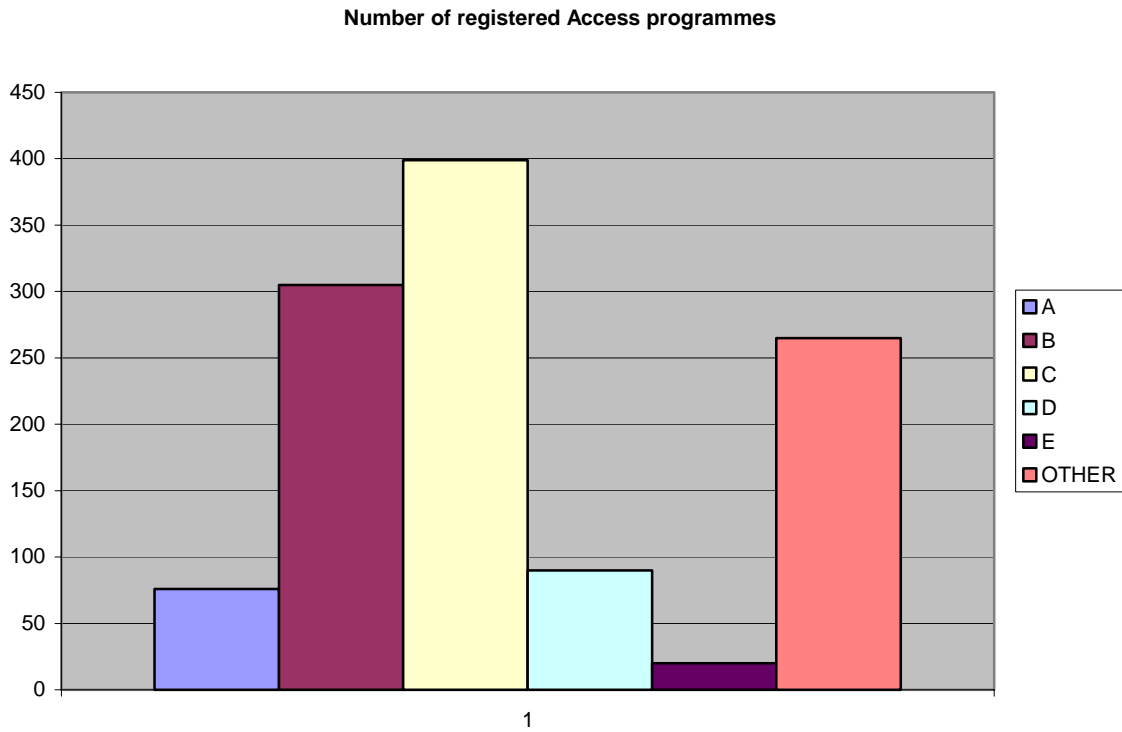


Chart 3 Number of registered Access programmes

Category C has the greatest number of registered programmes. This forms 34.5 per cent of the total number of Access programmes available. The two next highest categories are B and 'Other', which form 26.4 per cent and 23 per cent of the total, respectively. Category D and A have much lower numbers with only 8 per cent and 6.5 per cent respectively. The lowest number was in Category E, with only 2 per cent of the total. The exact totals are listed in Table 5 (See Table 2 Appendix 6).

Programme length

The questionnaire requested details of the length of time for which programmes were run. Response categories are 'less than 6 months', 'more than 6 months but less than a year', '1 year and no more', 'at least 1 but not more than 2 years', 'at least 1 but not more than 3 years', 'at least 1 year - no stated maximum', 'no stated expectation in relation to length of period of study' and 'other')

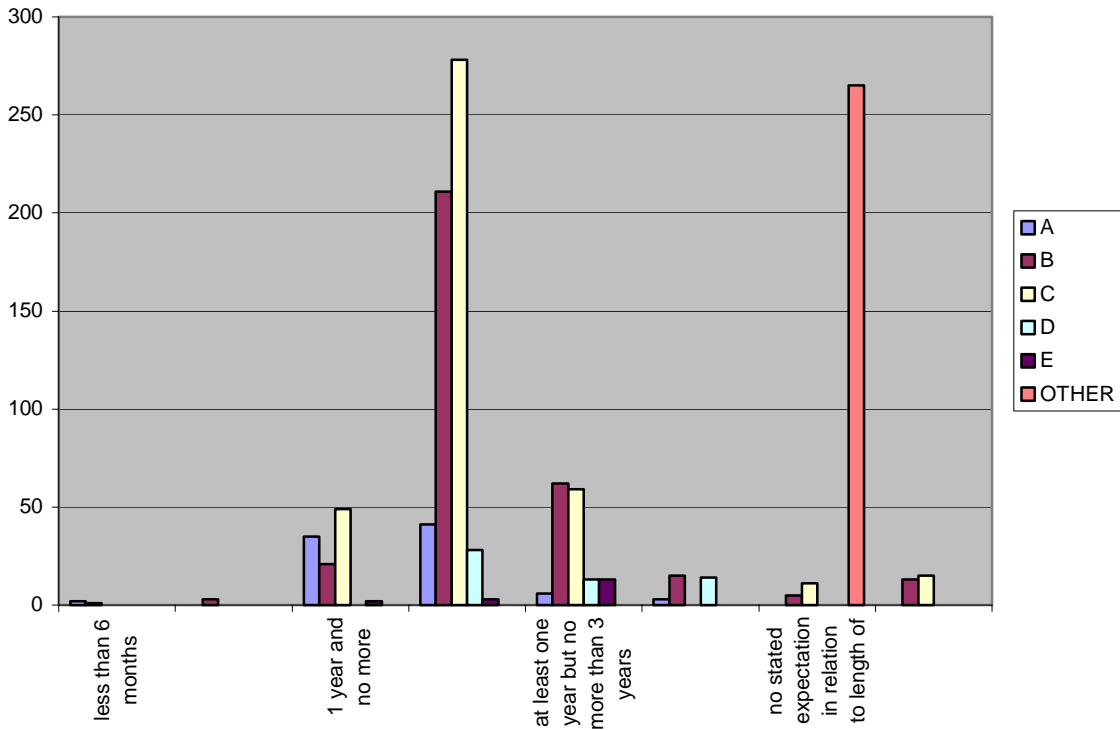


Chart 4: Programme length

Category A has the highest count (2) for the 'less than 6 months programmes'. Category B has the highest (3) for more than 6 months but less than a year'. Five out of six of the categories offered programmes of 'at least 1 but not more than 2 years'. Category C had the highest count (278) for this group as well as for 'at least one year but no more than 2 years' and 'other' (15). This category also showed the highest count (49) for '1 year and no more'.

Category B showed the highest (62) for 'at least one year but no more than 3 years' and also for 'at least 1 year-no stated maximum' (15). The category 'other' offered only programmes of 'no stated expectation in relation to length of period of study ', a total of 265. (For details see Table 3, Appendix 6)

Programme availability

The questionnaire asked about when the programmes were available. For all categories, A - E and other, 95 per cent of Access centres chose to start their programmes in September. Only 14 per cent chose to offer two entry points for the programmes, while only 4 per cent offered roll-on/roll-off programmes. Groups offering 'once a year-other start', 'twice a year' or 'more than twice a year-roll-on/roll-off' programmes amounted to counts of 1.3 per cent, 9.4 per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively. There were no responses to the 'other' category (for more details see table 4, Appendix 6).

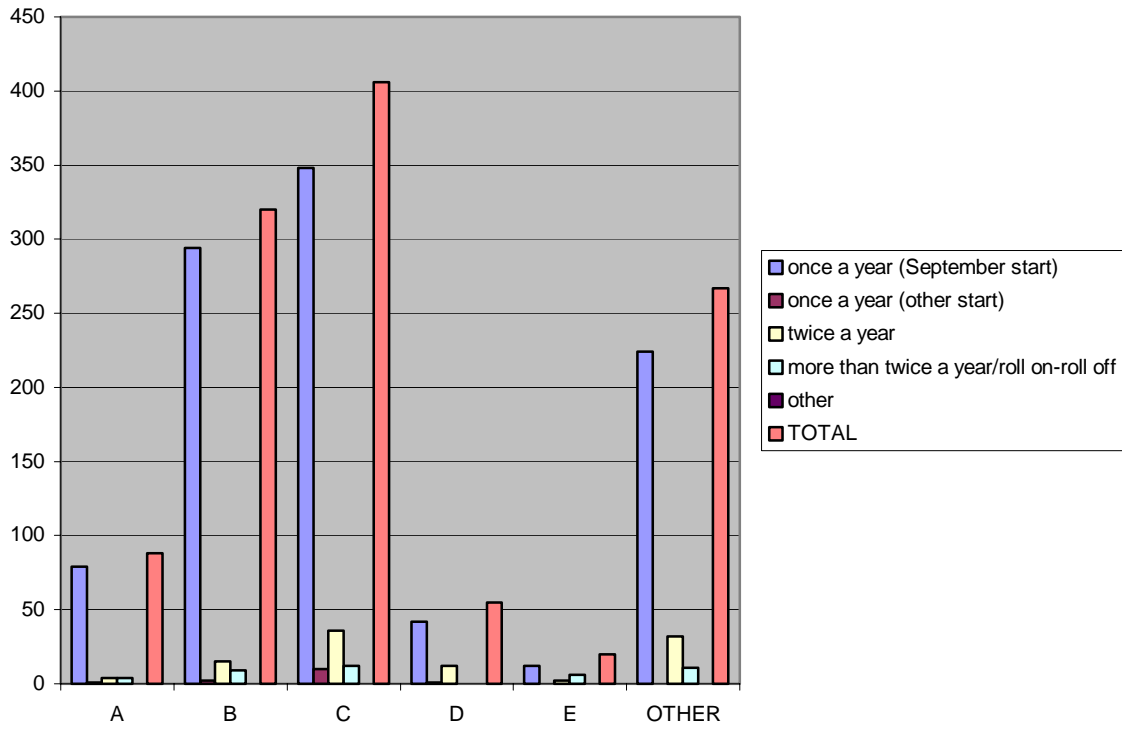


Chart 5: Programme availability (programmes made available by provider)

Times of delivery

The questionnaire asked about times when programmes were delivered.

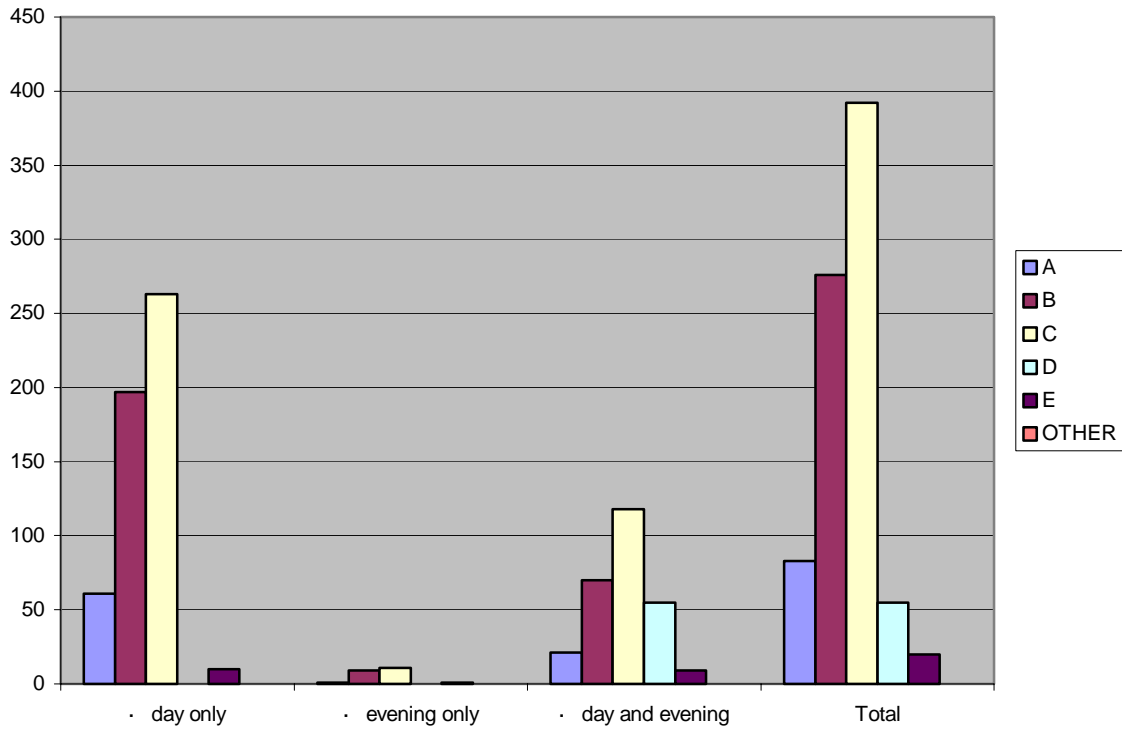


Chart 6: Times of delivery (programmes delivered by provider)

Of all the centres (517) in category A, 64 per cent of the total delivered programmes during the day only, 2.4 per cent delivered them in the evening and 33 per cent offered programmes during both the daytime and the evening.

In category A, 72 per cent delivered programmes during the day, 1.3 per cent during the evenings and 25 per cent in both daytime and evenings.

In category B, 73 per cent of the total delivered programmes during the day only, 2.7 per cent delivered them in the evening and 25 per cent offered programmes during both the daytime and the evening.

In category C, 67 per cent of the total delivered programmes during the day only, 3 per cent delivered them in the evening and 30 per cent offered programmes during both the daytime and the evening.

In category D, 100 per cent of their programmes were offered in evenings.

In category E, 47 per cent of the total delivered programmes during the day only, 2.4 per cent delivered them in the evening and 33 per cent offered programmes during both the daytime and the evening (see table 5, Appendix 6)

Modes of delivery

The questionnaire asked about modes of delivery. The response categories are classroom-based, distance learning (wholly e-learning), distance learning (partial e-learning with e-learning support), and distance learning (without e-learning).

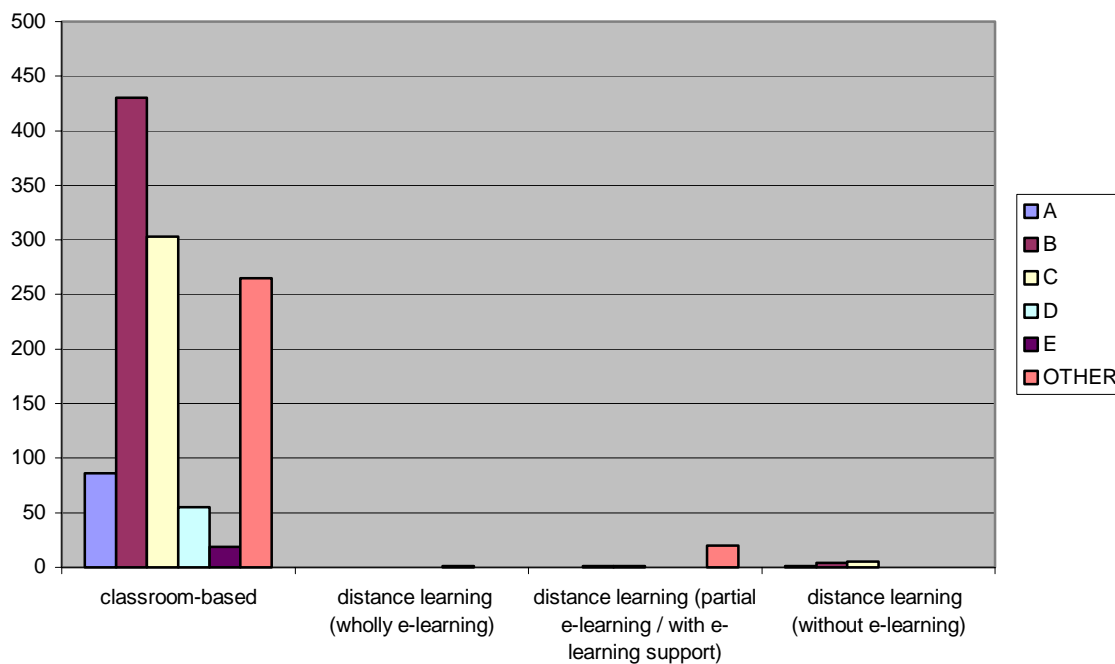


Chart 7: Mode of delivery

Of all Access provision, 97 per cent was classroom-based learning for all categories A - E and 'other'. Distance learning (with partial/e-learning support) comprised 1.8 per cent of delivery modes for all categories and all other returns are insignificant. However, through all categories, distance learning and distance learning without e-learning was not available (see Table 6, Appendix 6).

Addenda to Section C

The penultimate question asked respondents to provide details of the 'other' provision. Only four replied. One said that it was the same as category D, except that 'pathways' are defined at point of entry. Of the other responses, one was contradictory, one stated that all of its programmes have a limit of five years, after which work cannot be submitted and one stated that programmes sometimes use a mix of taught sessions and e-learning (see table 7, Appendix 6).

The last question asked whether the AVA had noticed any significant movement between these categories in the last three years. Thirteen responded, as follows:

- there is a strong trend towards more flexible delivery and more than one entry date (5 out of 13)
- there had been discussion about running part-time programmes (3 out of 13)
- there had been discussion about running modular programmes (2 out of 13)

- an interest in distance learning and partial distance learning for the future had been shown (2 out of 13)
- a broader selection of vocational pathways had been discussed;
- there has been discussion about 2 year programme
- there has been discussion about a move to partial distance learning programmes
- discussion has included the concept of new provision now in Category C (older provision still in Category B)

Views of AVAs (LSDA 5)

Method

- 1 Telephone interviews were conducted with officers of five of the AVAs who completed the questionnaire for the 2002 survey of innovations within Access provision. These AVAs were selected because they had indicated on questionnaire returns examples of innovative developments in their areas. They are OCNW, SEOCN, AQA, OCN South Yorkshire and Humber, OCN WR. A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 7) was used which asked about:
 - innovation
 - programmes for 19-21 year olds
 - progression
 - collaboration and curriculum development

Findings

Innovation

- 2 AVA directors gave examples of various innovative models of delivery, for example a part-time, flexible delivery model where students are able to take up to five years to complete the full certificate (OCNW). The development of smaller Access awards variously described as short/fast forward/ top-up awards aimed at people in work lasting one term, some units delivered in the evenings and/or at weekends, a 4-6 credit award designed to go alongside other qualifications have been developed in South Yorkshire and Humber. AQA is accrediting a short programme of three units for partial certification for a college in the London area.
- 3 There is an awareness of the value of developing programmes close to the community in off-site, work-based or multi site arrangements. The Community Involvement in Rural Areas Access to HE programme, submitted by Derbyshire County Council to the South Yorkshire and Humber AVA evolved out of an existing accredited programme which was due for re-approval.
- 4 The Adult Learners Framework in Bristol and South Gloucestershire has been developed by the community education service (with two FECs and a private training provider) and has LSC funding to develop on-line units whereby students will be able to gain accreditation for small 'chunks' of learning. This is an example of close collaboration between the AVA and a group of other agencies. In the long term it is envisaged that coherent pathways could be developed leading to Access to HE programmes.
- 5 The Kent Modular Access Programme is aimed at lower paid workers and people in Adult Education, particularly students going into vocational areas of HE, e.g. foundation degrees.
- 6 Several directors said that current funding rules could prove a barrier to innovation; they claimed that the LSCs are inflexible and this made things difficult for managers.

'Funding is often a block to developing new approaches'. However in some cases FECs had proved resistant to suggestions for change, with managers and teaching staff on Access programmes being 'conservative and complacent'.

19-21s

- 7 Where younger students have been recruited they are being integrated into mainstream Access programmes. In Yorkshire and North Nottinghamshire a pilot scheme is being developed by the youth service and colleges, aimed at providing a different style of delivery within the traditional Access ethos.

Progression

- 8 Opinions vary on the issue of grading. The official line adhered to by all AVAs is that Access programmes are not graded. Good relations with HEIs mean that 'grading is not an issue'. However the AVA which made this comment gave an example of the local university deciding without consultation to raise its entry requirement for nursing to more units than are covered on the feeder Access programme. Some AVA directors expressed opinions about the importance of having national benchmarks for academic standards for Access, which they claim are long overdue. According to this view, a lack of such benchmarks leaves students short-changed, particularly those students who are competing with A level students for HE places in law, medicine, physiotherapy etc.

Collaboration and curriculum development

- 9 AVAs gave examples of conferences on curriculum development and meetings to share successful practice. Some AVAs have produced a database of approved units available for new tutors. A group of AVAs: CAVA, OCNW, Hampshire OCN Yorkshire and Humber have begun to pool resources.
- 10 Some commented that within colleges there was sometimes poor communication between Access tutors and others, that Access teachers could be rather isolated in a 'separate box' and did not work with staff on other programmes e.g. on curriculum development or teaching methods.

National standardisation versus local flexibility

- 11 Different views were expressed about the desirability of any move towards national standardisation. Some urged caution:

Access does need a higher profile but not a heavy-handed approach.

We not want a move towards GCSE or A level syllabuses; the tradition is that Access responds to local needs.

- 12 Some expressed strong opinions about the need to standardise levels of achievement on a national basis and that the QAA should take a lead on this. It was suggested that QAA should promote the development of standardised units, as a first step.

- 13 However, there was a view that there is a need for templates and criteria for different sized Access awards. One group of AVAs has met recently to discuss whether they were making similar demands about credits needed for the full award.
- 14 Several AVAs made the point that they work over wide areas of the country but that the QAA still thinks of them as regional bodies.

Views of Access tutors (LSDA 6)

Method

- 1 For this research, Access tutors or coordinators in five Further Education colleges were interviewed. The colleges were chosen because they had been identified by the researcher as likely to be data-rich cases. Whilst this research produces illuminating findings, it is important to note that they are not generalisable. Rather than setting the agenda herself, the researcher elected to adopt a grounded theory method. Therefore, the interviews were unstructured, allowing respondents to describe what their concerns were and the kinds of issues they wanted to raise. Grounded theory also guided analysis of the data, which were scrutinised for themes.

Findings

Need for a national strategy

- 2 Tutors reported that, in their opinion, Access urgently needs to raise its profile through a national campaign; it needs a national 'push'. They consider the lack of a national promotion or national recruitment strategy to be a cause of frustration to them. This corroborates findings of previous research carried out by the same researcher (Bromley, 2002)

Financing Access and financial support for Access students

- 3 The issue of finance for Access programmes and financial support for students on Access programmes was a cause of concern to tutors. Although the LSC emphasises its commitment to Access to Higher Education programmes as approved and accredited provision carrying equal value to programmes within the national qualifications framework (NQF), providers claim they do not have sufficient funds to provide the number of contact hours per week, either as part of the core, or in the form of support workshops and enrichment similar to what students on AS/AVCE programmes receive.
- 4 The research carried out by LSDA in 2002 found that the vast majority of Access students were also in paid employment, for example one Yorkshire college reported that 341 out of 352 Access students were working. This finding was confirmed by this research, which found that a large number of Access students on programmes in colleges visited for this research were working part-time and having to juggle work and family commitments with their studies.
- 5 College tutors interviewed for this research claimed that financial concerns are a major reason for students failing to complete their Access programmes. Respondents also repeatedly made this point in the 2002 LSDA research. It is pertinent that one third of all Access enrolments come those living in deprived wards, as identified by postcodes. This is a growing trend and between 1997 and 2001 Access students were over three and a half times more likely to be on benefits than enrolments on traditional pathways (Learning and Skills Council, 2002, p.24).

- 6 Under the present arrangements students on low incomes can continue to receive benefits while they are studying on an Access programme (up to 16 hours a week). However the rules as applied by the Department of Work and Pensions mean that students can be faced with losing benefit unless they accept the offer of a full-time job. If this happened, they would have to give up the programme. The LSDA 2002 research found that financial concerns were a reason why an increasing number of students who completed Access programmes were not progressing to HE.
- 7 In preparing students for HE Access tutors take them through the DfES booklet called 'Financial Support for Higher Education Students', and explain the availability of bursaries, scholarships, Access and hardship funds. However, there remains anxiety and confusion. The prospect of financing themselves through university on loans is daunting for many mature students, especially those with family responsibilities.
- 8 A recent survey of 2,000 sixth formers and FE students concluded that the costs of HE and financial concerns were a barrier to HE entry. 'Debt aversion deterred entry into HE, especially for the very groups the government wants most to attract...the complexity of student funding arrangements was an impediment to entry and made the interpretation of information supplied difficult, especially for older low-income prospective students with children' (Callender 2003, p. 13). Access tutors and coordinators reported that they think more could be done at a national level to counter the deterrent effect of publicity about student debt, for example by making it clear that students on low incomes will not pay fees under any new arrangements.
- 9 The advantages and disadvantages of a more standardised approach to Access Tutors reported that the benefits of the present system for students are local flexibility and responsiveness, and for tutors the opportunity to design their own programmes. However major problems continue to arise with admissions tutors at progression stage in some universities or departments due to the different credit systems in use and the lack of standardisation. This point was highlighted by Carey (2002, p.228): 'Access credits (at level 3) are now regarded as having equal value to AS/A level and AVCE qualifications although higher education admissions staff still have difficulty with the ungraded nature of Access provision'.
- 10 In the opinion of tutors, the difficulties arise when Access students are in competition with A level students for places on oversubscribed or 'elite' programmes such as physiotherapy or medicine. Even where there are longstanding progression agreements with local HEIs the entry requirements can change. Programme tutors gave examples of admissions tutors suddenly and without consultation asking for more credits than the Access programme offered.
- 11 Opinion is divided over whether there should be a move to a national credit scheme. One college manager felt that this should happen but 'not through the OCN network which is far too bureaucratic'. One college suggested as a first step introducing a set of nationally agreed compulsory core units, for example in communications and study skills.

19-21s

- 12 Some colleges were accepting under 21s onto Access programmes before the 2002 change in the rules, that allows those aged 19 and 20 to also be accepted (so long as their OCN gave approval). However most returns to the 2002 survey stated that applicants were told to wait until they were 21. There was considerable interest in developing discrete programmes for the younger students in the future and seven colleges tutors stated that either they had programmes 'under development' or that they would like to develop them for this group believing that there is 'a definite need'.
- 13 Some colleges were already piloting new 'Access type' programmes for students between 18 and 21. These were based on the Access model with a strong emphasis on induction (in one case with a residential), tutoring, study skills, an increased number of level 2 units and new compact arrangements with local HEIs.
- 14 An example is the two-year 'youth entry to Higher Education in humanities and social science' at Lewisham College, which is similar to some adult Access programmes. It was started for 16-19 year olds for whom traditional A levels were not considered appropriate. It has a radical approach (hands-on and based on reality and students' interests) to dealing with its traditional academic disciplines: economics, law, sociology, psychology, history and politics. The students have three hours of group tutorial a week and one-to-one tutorials three times a term. They work towards level key skills in communications, numeracy and statistics and IT. By June 2003, 21 students had completed the programme, progressing to local and other HEIs. The programme is accredited by LOCN.
- 15 Another example is the one-year Unilinks programmes (economics and humanities) at City and Islington College. These were designed to prepare students in the age range 18 to 20 for entry to a Higher Education programme by providing a different set of skills and assessment from the A level route. Most of the first cohort had failed or dropped out of GNVQ programmes. Retention, achievement and progression in the first year were considered good and numbers more or less doubled the following year. These OCN accredited programmes were designed with particular progression routes in mind. The tutors of the Unilinks programmes believed that the younger students benefited from being together rather than mixed with older students.
- 16 The experience of running these discrete programmes for young people, who have in many cases recently failed on other programmes, has been mixed. There have been successes as outlined above but also problems with students dropping out. Tutors in City and Islington decided to close one of the Unilinks programmes and mix younger students with the older age group on mainstream Access programmes so long as they have had a definite break between school and college.
- 17 In the colleges visited for this research, there has been no significant development of separate Access or Access type programmes for younger students but some growth in numbers of 19-21s on adult Access programmes in the academic year 2003-4. Sheffield College makes its approach clear in this marketing leaflet:
'These programmes are aimed at mature students, traditionally, over 21's. However we can accept students who are aged 19 (or above) on the start date of their programme. It is our responsibility to ensure that the programme is appropriate to your needs and is a programme from which you will benefit.'

Part-time Access

- 18 Access tutors reported that there is a definite trend towards part-time enrolment (day and evening) with students completing the programme over two years and going on to part-time degree programmes. Many colleges have responded to students' need to combine paid work and study by increasing their part-time offer. Several tutors commented that better publicity and UCAS recognition needs to be given to part-time degrees. The trend towards part-time Access was noted in the 2002 report, although colleges recorded their reservations about how it could benefit students academically.
- 19 Many students intend to finish their programme in one year but do not complete enough level 3 units and re enrol for a second year joining the next year's intake. Some colleges want to be able to offer students the option to complete the full Access certificate over a longer period; one college noted that students 'can take up to five years to complete the full certificate'. However curriculum managers complain that current LSC funding arrangements are not flexible enough to support part time programmes, or students who complete their programme over several years. One tutor commented that 'Progression to university with partial completion does not register as a success for the college'.

Developments in curriculum organisation: unitisation, modularisation and flexible delivery

- 20 Some colleges with an Access provision have transformed their programme organisation and delivery in the last few years by developing modular frameworks and a unitised curriculum and some have experimented with different session times to meet student demand. In the opinion of tutors, these developments have been successful in retaining students and improving both full and partial achievement rates.
- 21 The 2002 LSDA research found that colleges which had unitised their programmes reported a higher rate of both full and partial achievement (Bromley, 2002). It also found that many colleges with a substantial Access were offering pre-Access programmes combining study skills and subject specific work. Some were general: 10 sessions of OCN units focusing on writing skills, personal assessment and study skills; others were specific, for example Pre-Access to nursing included professional studies, science, literacy, maths, IT and research skills. In the larger colleges these were part of a range of level 1 and 2 provision. The programmes were organised in a variety of ways, full- and part-time, some in an intensive way, some over a number of weeks, some with several entry and exit points during the year. Most of the programmes were run as units accredited by the local OCN and most were taken with a view to progression to a level 3 Access programme.
- 22 For this research, several tutors criticised their OCN/AVA for 'becoming both more prescriptive and more unpredictable in outlining the criteria for unit writing; the criteria keep changing'. Practitioners were expected to be 'very pernickety about learning outcomes'. 'We end up writing units with too many learning outcomes that we can't really keep to in practice'. They claimed the OCN/AVA 'swings between generic and specific criteria' for assessment and gives contradictory advice; sometimes it wants all the criteria assessed in each module, sometimes one piece of work for each of the criteria, which they found time consuming and frustrating.

- 23 Access coordinators and tutors reported they were working in isolation, sometimes at the level of a single programme. They said would welcome more regional conferences, for example on the issue of separate provision for the 19-21 age group or to promote curriculum planning and development. They reported they would like to be able to share units and successful practice.
- 24 The main criticism levelled at one AVA is that it does not monitor properly for quality of delivery or progression. Its focus is entirely on organisational issues. One tutor commented: 'The AVA checks our form filling and unit writing but is not interested in whether we are preparing students well for university'.

Views of access students (LSDA 7)

Method

- 1 Student views were collected through two focus group sessions, one at Sheffield College and one at City and Islington College (London). (See Appendix 8 for programme details). The focus group at Sheffield College took place on 14 October 2003. There were 15 students in the group, all of whom were enrolled on the science Access to HE programme. Three were males and 11 females. The majority were aged between thirty and forty-five with four under twenty-five. The second focus group at City and Islington College took place on 11 November 2003. There were eight students in the group, all of whom were enrolled on the business Access to HE programme). Three were male and five female.
- 2 For both sessions there was one convener, who took notes. A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 9) was used which asked questions about:
 - Reasons for enrolling on the programme
 - How they found out about the programme
 - Progression plans
 - Factors that contribute to, or hinder, student success

Findings

First session at Sheffield College

Reasons for enrolling on the science Access programme

- 3 Students had found out about the programme from a variety of sources including Connexions, the college's own publicity and word of mouth. Five of the women had started the programme at this time because their children had started school and they felt freer to make plans for their own education and careers. One student had taken a child care course two years before, worked as a playgroup supervisor and then decided that she wanted to go further:

The time was right for a change, time to develop me.

- 4 One of the men had been an engineer for 14 years, but following an accident at work had been moved into clerical work. When the company cut back staff he decided to change direction, study for a degree and become a teacher. Two women who knew each other through their children's school encouraged each other to apply and travelled by car together from Bakewell in Derbyshire; another came from Huddersfield. One student had moved back to Sheffield from Surrey because she believed the programme would enable her to progress to a physiotherapy programme at Sheffield Hallam University.

Progression plans

- 5 Most students in the group were working on their applications to HE and knew exactly what career they wanted to move into. Several planned to move into teaching, both

primary and secondary, others into occupational therapy, forensic science, diagnostic radiotherapy, physiotherapy, psychology or medicine.

Student motivation

- 6 There was general agreement among the group that they would be moving on to HE having 'built up our confidence on the Access programme'. Preparing UCAS applications was seen as a positive motivating factor.

Student support

- 7 Several students commented that they found the programme work very difficult at first (especially maths for some and chemistry for others), reviving bad memories of school. It was clear that strong studying partnerships had developed and informal mentoring or revision was organised by those who performed well in a particular subject.
- 8 The students wanted their tutors to be 'tough' and firm about deadlines; they saw this as a necessary and important preparation for life in HE. It was also apparent that they also appreciated their tutors' supportive and flexible attitude to individual needs and difficulties and their help in accessing financial support.

Balancing home with study and work

- 9 The difficulties of balancing home responsibilities with study and work were often mentioned in the discussion. This was made more problematic when children were at primary school some distance from college, or where a partner was unsupportive or an employer uncooperative and inflexible about hours. Several of the students went on to work in shops after their day at college.

Financial issues

- 10 Some students had constant worries about money. The student who had worked as an engineer for fourteen years and was hoping to train as a physics teacher had part time care of his children and depended on benefits. He claimed that he was 'constantly being harassed' by the Department for Work and Pensions over his entitlement to jobseeker's allowance. Three students said they had first started the programme last year but had encountered financial difficulties and dropped out, returning to complete this year. One of these was a young student hoping to go to medical school.

Second session at City and Islington College

Progression plans

- 11 All the students interviewed intended to apply to university to study business at HND or degree level and were just beginning to write personal statements and visit university open days.

Student motivation

- 12 Several students travelled across London to the college having chosen it over other, nearer ones where the same programme was offered. This sense of having chosen the programme for its reputation, its close partnership with the business studies department of London Metropolitan University and a favourable impression formed at interview, contributed to the students' sense of satisfaction and motivation. There was

general agreement in the group that the Access structure and emphasis on study skills and personal development suited them well. One girl said she had thought about coming on an Access programme for a year before applying. One young man who had dropped out of an evening A level programme at another college (he said he was working as a waiter in the day time and other evenings) was glad to have found a programme which suited him so much better and which also provided 'a quick route to university'.

Student support

- 13 The students all appreciated their tutor's support. They considered that they were working hard with lots of deadlines to meet. Finance was particularly difficult for most of them, but they believed they had made considerable progress since starting the programme less than two months ago. The programme is run over three days, leaving time for part-time employment. The programme hours were cut a few years ago to 12.5 a week and two units were removed. At the time of the research, the programme was taught for 14 hours over three days. Students also had access to workshops and additional learning support. They stressed the importance of continuity and regular teaching (One of the teaching team has recently left the college and has not yet been replaced)

Balancing home, work and study

- 14 Although they said they had 'too much work' and 'too many deadlines' and 'no time for a social life' the students said they were coping with the demands of the programme.

Financial issues

- 15 Several students received financial support from the learners' support fund, particularly for travel expenses. One student was working 20 hours a week in a restaurant and another was doing 16 hours at weekends as a sales assistant. However, none of the females present were working.

Survey of QAA-recognised provision (LSDA 8)

Method

- 1 A questionnaire (see Appendix 10) was sent to 26 AVAs by email in July 2003. Eight responded within six weeks, however following further requests by email and telephone, this increased to 13, making a response rate of 50 per cent. The questionnaire collected quantitative and qualitative data about:
 - completion criteria
 - accreditation methods
 - grading
 - requirements for programme content
 - consistency
- 2 Quantitative data were analysed using Excel software, while qualitative data were analysed by identifying themes that emerged from responses and grouping them accordingly.

Findings

- 3 The number of QAA Access programmes validated by an AVA varies from three to 216. The latter is much higher than any of the others (the next highest being 97). The average is 50. Without including the 216, the average is 30.
- 4 Only two AVAs reported running Access Programmes not validated by QAA. However, one of these will be replacing these with QAA validated programmes for the forthcoming academic year. The other runs six Youth Access programmes.
- 5 AVAs reported that the number of credits required varies from programme to programme, for example more are required for medicine and fewer for foundation degrees. Between AVAs the minimum varies from 16, 12 of which must be at level 3, to 22, with 16 at level 3. Although Access programmes are not required to be graded, one AVA stated that it has a requirement that students should achieve an overall average score of 60 per cent.
- 6 Respondents were divided about what ought to be the requirement for an Access qualification. Some stated that more credits should be required, with 18 at level 3 being the minimum, while others considered that for some programmes, even 16 credits, of which 12 are at level 3 is too high. One respondent proposed awarding a 'diploma' and a 'certificate' and other awards for different levels of partial achievement, which 'need not necessarily be an entitlement to matriculate to HE'. Another respondent considered that 'the current system works well'.
- 7 There was also disagreement about whether all Access programmes should have the same number of credits and it is clear from the responses that strong opinions are held about this is a topic. Those in favour of standardisation propose the importance of letting HE providers and their admissions staff have a clearer understanding of what

this qualification is and also raise the status of the qualification. However, others claimed that HE requirements vary, as do requirements for subjects and that Access courses need to have the flexibility to meet these various needs. One added that it should not be a qualification with 'artificial credit barriers'.

- 8 AVAs were asked the percentage of students who successfully completed their Access Programmes in 2001/02 and the number who progressed to Higher Education. Respondents pointed out that the figures they provided do not reveal the whole picture, because a large number of students would be studying for the qualification over more than one year. For example, for one AVA 59 per cent completed that year, however it was estimated that almost half of the remaining 41 per cent would complete in the following year. Another pointed out that those who did not complete the diploma nevertheless had partial completion. Yet another claimed that the returns are poor and the numbers unreliable. Hence the overall average of 33 per cent is probably not a reliable figure, especially as it includes 15 per cent from one AVA that operates a large number of part-time programmes, lasting up to five years.
- 9 Respondents reported that there are no other common, standard requirements and that this varies, depending on the programme. Some, such as medicine or teaching, specify certain requirements, e.g. for the latter GCSE or equivalent in science, maths and English language. One stated that defining an equivalency is a problem, whereas another claimed to have resolved this through its rules of combination which 'ensure that each student is enrolled on a coherent Access pathway'.
- 10 Respondents were asked about measures they take to ensure consistency. One admitted 'this is a weak area in both this AVA and the scheme' and most other respondents fell short of giving specific details of steps they take. It seems that they rely on internal and external moderation and moderator's training or 'various standardisation projects'. One stated that it is developing common, approved units across programmes and another that units approved for one centre could then be used by all other centres. One mentioned that standardisation meetings are held for IT, Maths, Communication and Art & Design.
- 11 In response to a question about steps they take to determine the need for a particular Access programme, some report being much more stringent than others. Whereas one relies on need being identified by tutors or co-ordinators at a centre, another prefers to have need determined by progression opportunities. Another attempts to combine these by 'supply chain management...evaluating demand with HEIs and the LSC and brokering a supply side solution'. Two report demanding concrete evidence of need for a programme, such as market research and identifying shortage of graduates in a specific subject or skill area. On the other hand, others seem content to only rely on 'discussions' with tutors in centres to identify need.
- 12 The main way AVAs report ensuring programmes are relevant is through annual reviews and moderation. However, one reports using peer group (re) validation, with a range of stakeholders represented. Another looks at student feedback provided by programme teams and also uses data from an annual survey of past students.

- 13 In response to a question asking how they work with providers to ensure programmes meet local needs, AVAs tended to respond that they leave this to the provider, in some cases liaising with their own development officers. Some mentioned that this was partly done by moderators and, strangely, by examiners. One claimed that it will take the initiative itself, should the need be identified through another source, such as a community group.
- 14 AVAs were asked how they work with HE providers, to ensure that Access programmes are appropriate for them. In reply, they reported having representatives from HE on various boards, committees, panels and forums. One stated how HE representatives chair all approval panels and many mentioned using HE tutors as moderators.
- 15 There was general agreement that there are both strengths and weaknesses in the QAA validation criteria for the development of innovative programmes, although one respondent only reported perceived strengths and another only perceived weaknesses. They were praised for giving Access programmes rigour and credibility and being designed to encourage innovation and allow flexibility. However, one cautions that there is a risk of loss of credibility if rigour is sacrificed for further flexibility. Two mentioned that a weakness is that the criteria seem to be written mostly for a three term, one-year mode of delivery. One claimed that the weaknesses are that Access is outside the UCAS points system, HEI admissions staff are ignorant about Access and that they are inadequate for those who want to use an Access course to 'brush-up' skills and knowledge they learned in the past. One expressed the view that there is no point in innovating when HEIs do not, because this does not provide a satisfactory preparation to HE study and students 'need the study skills, basic skills and subject knowledge to succeed'.
- 16 Some used this question about strengths and weaknesses to raise strong concerns about funding innovative programmes. As one put it:

Uncertainties of funding are of critical importance. As Access to HE is considered to be "other provision" by the Learning and Skills Council colleges are under pressure to drop such provision and replace it with qualifications approved on Section 96/97 for which the funding is secure. The problem is particularly acute for colleges that offer significant part-time Access where students are unable to firmly commit to progression to HE at the initial point of enrolment. ...Colleges are unable to enrol such students on the Access Pathway funding codes and this will prevent large numbers of students from being able to participate in such structured learning.

- 17 The issue of funding was again taken up when AVAs were asked for three proposals to modernise Access programmes, in order to make the greatest impact on flexibility and meet the needs of today's adults. Another theme that emerged was that there should be different levels of Access programme and the certificate differentiated in some way, or broken up more, so that it could be achieved in stages. A feeling was expressed that the present definition of Access is too restrictive. One considered present standards too restrictive and claimed that many students find the first year of university less demanding than their Access programme. An alternative view was

expressed that standards need to be enhanced by introducing a common core into all Access programmes. Respondents also mentioned the importance of fully embracing accreditation of prior education and learning and not setting any limits on the number of credits that could be awarded in this way. There was also a view that HEIs and admissions staff need to undertake training in Access programmes.

- 18 The final question invited additional comments. Although this did not elicit anything new, it did reinforce other themes. For example, some of those who had not mentioned concerns about funding expressed them here. Another theme that was reiterated was the importance of HEIs being better informed about Access programmes. On this topic, one respondent wrote about

Inflexibility often stifles growth in this area and prevents many suitable learners gaining the recognition that they deserve e.g.

- Admissions tutors being pedantic about requirements for number and communication skills (almost demanding a GCSE in Maths and English when our equivalent provision is probably a higher standard than the acceptable grade C).
- Admissions tutors requiring grades, or more credits than the required Access programme, for those courses with a high demand e.g. Law. Limited opportunities to raise awareness among Admissions Tutors exactly what Access to HE provision offers.

Review of literature about adult participation in formal education (LSDA 9)

Method

- 1 This is a narrative literature review. To find relevant literature, electronic databases were searched and, in addition, a hand search was undertaken of journals judged to be potential sources. All literature was analysed and those studies considered relevant were subjected to a content analysis. From these, themes were identified. Initially, only literature specifically about participation on Access programmes was sought. When this produced very little, the search was extended to include literature about participation by adults in formal education.
- 2 Although the aim was to look for robust evidence, this was not found. According to Oakley (2003, p.6) '...identifying reliable primary research in education is akin to searching for needles in haystacks'. In its absence, this review reports studies which are informed more by opinion than empirical evidence.

Findings

- 3 Cultural, social and economic factors influence participation in education by adults. Understanding these factors helps to understand the characteristics of those who are more or less likely to participate, although this does not necessarily explain why they do, or do not, choose to. Attitudes towards education are influenced by family, friends, school experience, as well as by intrinsic qualities such as self-concept and intelligence quota (IQ) (Gull, 2000). However, there is wide agreement in the literature that social class is the most significant factor (Tonks, 1999; McGivney, 2001; Burk, 2002; Hayton and Paczuska, 2002; Archer, 2003; Gilchrist et al., 2003).
- 4 Although social class is a difficult term to describe and operationalise, research in the UK has consistently found it a key determinant of educational achievement and life chances. According to Chazan (1992, p.172) '...social class is a highly ambiguous concept, but the links between social class and educational achievement and life chances have been demonstrated by researchers no matter which definition of social class is used'. Those from privileged backgrounds are very likely to have been to an HE institution within two years of leaving school and the more disadvantaged the background, the less likely someone is to have participated in formal, post-compulsory education (Gilchrist et al., 2003). Forsyth and Furlong (2003) point out social disadvantage determines educational achievement regardless of innate academic ability.
- 5 The view of many authors is that formal education is set up by an elite in such a way that it favours this elite, which is then best able to exploit these opportunities and hence maintain control of society. According to this view, those from disadvantaged backgrounds will lack the 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1990) to gain from education and the social status quo is maintained (Burke, 2002). These authors fail to explain why some from disadvantaged backgrounds do participate, perhaps because their view seems to be that education institutions need to change, rather than expecting potential students to make the adjustment (Hayton and Paczuska, 2002; Warmington, 2002). Although nearly all these authors are working in HE, few of them are able to specify in

what ways the institutions ought to change. Moreover, they seem to assume that everyone would be motivated to learn, if social barriers were removed, a view disputed by Hillage and Aston (2001).

- 6 Tied up with the issue of social class is family background. Parental influence is strong, including parents' attitudes to education and their own levels of achievement (Davies et al., 2002; Gilchrist et al., 2003). If a family is ignorant about the benefits of education, having a friend, or acquaintance who participates can be crucial (Hutchings, 2003). Family circumstances can have a powerful influence on participation, however it is important to note that these can change. A new partner or having children can prompt someone to return to education. Reay et al. (2002) state that this is particularly so for women and Access programmes.
- 7 Some authors stress that returning to education is a life changing experience for many and perceived as such, in that it introduces a new and different culture (Reay et al., 2000; Marks et al., 2003). This can seem as threatening as it can be enticing and there is often a separate transformative event that can act as a spur, such as redundancy, divorce, children leaving home (Dawson and Boulton, 2000). As explained above, there is a common view that it is the institutions that should be making cultural changes, not potential students.
- 8 If social class and family background influence adult participation in education, so does one's previous school experience and achievement (McGivney, 2001). The greater the achievement at school, the greater the probability people will participate in education as adults and vice versa (Taylor and Cameron, 2002; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Marks et al., 2003). Gilchrist et al. (2003) report that nine out of 10 who have no formal qualifications say they would definitely not enter formal education. Moreover, when students without a history of success enter education, they are likely to lack the necessary study skills (Gibson and Waters, 2001).
- 9 Hutchings (2003) claims that schools have low expectations of those from less privileged backgrounds and that this influences their self-confidence. The importance of having belief in one's ability is another theme that comes up often in the literature about adult participation (Clayton and McGill, 2000; Reay et al., 2002; Gilchrist et al., 2003). According to this view, education is for others, those from other backgrounds, those who are perceived as being intelligent (McGivney, 2001; Marks et al., 2003).
- 10 It is clear, therefore, that educational institutions will have their work cut out if they are to attract such students. Even those who toy with the idea of studying, might lack the confidence to enquire, let alone apply. It is asserted that many potential adult students find institutions to be intimidating and alienating and that particular effort needs to be made prior to entry to help them overcome these feelings (George and Gillon, 2001; McGivney, 2001). However, it is claimed that advice and guidance is usually fragmented and not aimed at those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hayton and Paczuska, 2002; Gilchrist et al., 2003). Clayton and McGill (2000) also call for support structures for potential students to be improved.
- 11 Sharma and Selay (2000) consider that institutions need to change what they deliver and how and where they deliver it, while George and Gillon (2001) claim they need to

work on the curriculum, institutional development and staff development. A study by Greenwood et al. (2000) is less vague and proposes that a programme aimed at widening participation should have the following characteristics: be local and easy to get to; free; be taught at convenient times that fit in with other responsibilities such as childcare; be in a small centre, because this is less intimidating; be delivered to a small group; have a short duration (be 'bite-size') and build on a student's interests, skills and prior knowledge. Alheit and Dausien (2002) produce evidence that for Access students, standardisation of the curriculum works against the success of marginalised groups. However, since this is based on a non-representative sample of only 23 students, this finding can only be considered provisional. Edwards (2001) specifies that more Access programmes should be available part-time and through distance learning.

- 12 For several authors, to attract more learners, institutions need to be local and community-based (Clayton and McGill, 2000; Taylor and Cameron, 2002; Taylor and Knight, 2002; Reay et al., 2002;). Merton and Greenwood (2001) add that in addition, an institution needs to be safe and welcoming.
- 13 There is a view that not enough is being done by institutions to attract male learners. Access programmes in particular are said to be too geared up to the needs of women and there is a lower level of mature males taking up education (McGivney, 2001). Women tend to study on Access programmes for personal developmental reasons and men for instrumental reasons (Pilkington and Stuart, 2001; Marks et al., 2003).
- 14 Although policies and initiatives by institutions might make a difference to participation, it is often human contact that is the decisive factor. Keynes and Syriad (2000) and Merton and Greenwood (2001) stress the difference supportive tutors can make, if they are good humoured, approachable and willing to take account of individual needs.
- 15 Finally, costs of education are a significant theme. This can be a barrier to participation, especially for low income, prospective students (Clayton and McGill, 2000; Knowles, 2000; Callender, 2003; Hatt, et al., 2003; Hutchings, 2003), while financial aid increases participation (McGivney, 2001).

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APPENDIX 1

Notes for coordinators of focus group research

Access Focus Group

Access Recognition Advisory Committee (11/4/03)

Brief

Time available: 1 hr 30mins (11.30 am – 1.00 pm)

Research aim: to consider how Access to HE programmes could be more effective in enabling a larger number of adults to be prepared for and progress to higher education.

Focus group objective: to generate and explore ideas which will be further explored in follow-up research. (Other issues which are germane to the research aim are to be explored through other means and in other fora.)

Group profile

Nearly all members of the group will have considerable experience of and knowledge about Access to HE programmes and/or working with Access students. They are experts in this field. However, they are otherwise a very mixed group, including representatives from higher and further education, from the authorised validating agencies which recognise Access programmes and award Access certificates and from national organisations which have a 'stakeholder' interest in the development of Access to HE. Because many of them are closely involved with Access, they are likely to have well-developed, and perhaps entrenched, views on the subject. Some will also think that they already know what others think and, while confrontational behaviour is very unlikely, participants will probably expect to disagree with each other. Those from national bodies (e.g. the DfES, the LSC, UCAS) may need to be circumspect in what they say on certain topics in this forum.

Potential difficulties with this group could therefore be:

- a reluctance to disclose;
- imbalance in contributions;
- lack of reflection (statements of well-rehearsed views);
- polarisation of views.

APPENDIX 2

Questionnaire for Innovations Survey

We would find it most helpful if, on the basis of your local knowledge, you were able to provide any information about the following:

1. **Courses currently running in your region which are designed primarily to provide a preparation to higher education but which are not QAA-recognised Access courses** (apart from those which have hitherto been excluded because of age): please describe their main features, and explain why, to your knowledge, they are not able, or choose not to be, included as QAA-recognised Access courses;
2. **Aspects of the Recognition Scheme which restrict developments** which you or providers are seeking to make;
3. **Possible amendments to the Recognition Scheme** which, were they to be added, could more actively promote worthwhile developments.

APPENDIX 3**Providers contacted to find out if their Access programmes are validated by QAA**

AQA	South Tyneside College
ASOCN	Havering College of Further and Higher Education
ASOCN	South East Essex College of Arts and Technology
ASOCN	Suffolk College
BAF	Barnet College
BAF	Northbrook College, Sussex
BCAF	Blackburn College
BCAF	City College, Coventry
BCAF	Cornwall College
BCAF	Halesowen College
BCAF	Walsall College of Arts and Technology
CAVA	Cambridge Regional College
CAVA	College of West Anglia
CAVA	Great Yarmouth College of Further Education
CAVA	Peterborough Regional College
CAVA	Lowestoft College
CDWOCN	Gateshead College
CROCNAC	Barnfield College
CROCNAC	Bedford College
CROCNAC	Broxtowe College, Nottingham
CROCNAC	Dunstable College
CROCNAC	Aquinas College
CROCNAC	Milton Keynes College
CROCNAC	Northampton College
EAC	Braintree College
GMOCN	Bolton Community College
GMOCN	Bury College
GMOCN	City College, Manchester
GMOCN	Manchester College of Arts and Technology
HAVA	Brockenhurst College
HAVA	Eastleigh College
HAVA	Highbury College, Portsmouth
HAVA	Stanmore College
HWCAA	North East Worcestershire College
LOCN	Bracknell and Wokingham College
LOCN	City of Westminster College
LOCN	Croydon College
NCFE	Thomas Danby College
NEA	Accrington and Rossendale College
NEA	Alton College
NEA	Filton College
NEA	Park Lane College
NEA	Somerset College of Arts and Technology
NEA	Sutton Coldfield College

NWACC	City of Bath College
SEWAC	City College, Birmingham
SEWAC	Plymouth College of Further Education
SEWAC	Thanet College
SSWLAA	Guildford College of Further and Higher Education
SSWLAA	Merton College
SSWLAA	Strode's College
SWWOCN	Barnet College
SWWOCN	City and Islington College
SWWOCN	Leicester Adult Education College
SWWOCN	Plymouth College of Further Education
SWWOCN	Preston College
SWWOCN	Welland Park Community College
TWAF	New College, Durham
TWAF	Redcar and Cleveland College
UNORTH	Derwentside College
UNORTH	Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College
WMAF	Stourbridge College

APPENDIX 4

Questionnaire for survey of extent and range of Access provision 2002-2003

A researcher may wish to discuss the AVA's recognised provision.
 Please tick if you are willing to take part in such discussions.

Please enter your AVA names:

Please enter a contact name:

Return completed form to QAA by 31 March 2003

PLEASE READ THE GUIDANCE NOTES CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THIS PRO FORMA

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ALTER THE LAYOUT OF THIS FORM

SECTION A: PROVIDERS

Providers offering Access to HE programmes

HE institutions			
FE institutions			
Sixth form colleges			
Adult/community education centres			
Schools			
Voluntary organisations			
Employers and employer organisations			
Private training providers			
Total providers/programmes			

Please give details of other providers:

SECTION B: AWARDS AVAILABLE

	Designated progressions route	2002-03
		Programmes running
A	Medicine and Dentistry	
B	Subjects Allied to Medicine (e.g. <i>Access to Nursing and Access to Health Studies</i>)	
C	Biological Sciences	
D	Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related subjects	
F	Physical Sciences	
G	Mathematical and Computer Sciences	
H	Engineering	
J	Technologies	
K	Architecture, Building and Planning	
L	Social studies (e.g. <i>Access to Social Work</i>)	
M	Law	
N	Business and Administrative Studies	
P	Mass Communications and Documentation	
Q	Linguistics, Classics and related subjects	
R	European Languages, Literature and related subjects	
T	Other Languages, Literature and related subjects	
V	Historical and Philosophical Studies	
W	Creative Arts and Design	
X	Education (e.g. <i>Access to Training</i>)	
Z1	Combined Arts	
Z2	Combined Sciences	
Z3	Combined Social Studies	
Z4	Science Combined/Social Studies/Art	
Z5	Social Sciences Combines with Arts	
Z6	Other General and Combined Studies	
	Total awards available	

SECTION C**Programme and type of delivery**

	A	B	C	D	E	Other
Total number of registered programmes in this category (see guidance notes for definitions of categories A-E)						
Programme length (programmes may be completed in):						
• less than 6 months						
• more than 6 months but less than a year						
• 1 year* and no more						
• at least 1 but not more than 2 years						
• at least 1 but not more than 3 years						
• at least 1 year* - no stated maximum						
• no stated expectation in relation to a length of period of study						
• Other						
Programme availability (programmes made available by the provider)						
• once a year (September start)						
• once a year (other start)						
• twice a year						
• more than once a twice a year/roll on-roll off						
• other						
Time of delivery (programmes delivered by provider)						
• day only						
• evening only						
• day and evening						
Mode of delivery (programmes where the mode of delivery is)						
• classroom based						
• distance learning (wholly e-learning)						
• distance learning (partial e-learning with e-learning support)						
• distance learning (without e-learning)						

*year = 'academic year'

Please give details of 'other' provision
Has the AVA noticed any significant movement between these categories in the last 3 years? If so, please describe the nature of the changes

APPENDIX 5**Other Providers**

Centre	Other Providers (quotes from q'res)
WNYOCN	'prison provider'
ASOCN	'Norfolk Adult education service'
OCNWM	'Adult residential college'
TROCN	'The provider under other is Trade Union Education Services. This is the name of the national organisation that had the programme approved. However, the programme will not be delivered by this provider but will be re-approved locally for each TU approved provider wishing to deliver the programme.'
LOCN	'This shows a much larger number of programmes than on the returns for 2001-2, as the latter did not count designated pathways as separate programmes, which is the case with this dataset.'

Table 4. 'Other' Providers

APPENDIX 6

Tables for Common characteristics of QAA-recognised provision

Table 1: Programmes provided 2002/2003

TOTALS	Designated progression route	TOTALS
FOR		
EACH	Medicine and dentistry	4
PROGRAMME	Subjects allied to medicine	164
	Biological sciences	27
	Veterinary Sciences, Agriculture and related subjects	0
	Physical sciences	22
	Mathematical and Computer Sciences	80
	Engineering	8
	Technologies	22
	Architecture, building and planning	1
	Social studies	159
	Law	16
	Business and administrative studies	82
	Mass Communications and Documentation	18
	Linguistics, Classics and related subjects	3
	European Languages, Literature and related subjects	11
	Other Languages, Literature and related subjects	1
	Historical and Philosophical studies	14
	Creative Arts and Design	111
	Education	77
	Combined arts	8
	Combined sciences	41
	Combined social studies	10
	Science combined/social studies/arts	49
	Social studies combined with arts	53
	Other general and combined studies	198
	TOTAL	1179

Table 2. Total number of registered programmes in this category

Registered Programmes	
A	74
B	275
C	399
D	90
E	19
OTHER	265
TOTAL	2244

Table 3. Programme length

Programme Category	less than 6 months	more than 6 months but less than 1 year	1 year and no more	at least one year but no more than 2 years	at least one year but no more than 3 years	at least one year - no stated maximum	no stated expectation in relation to length of period of study	other	Total
A	2	0	35	41	4	3	0	0	85
B	1	3	17	204	59	10	5	12	311
C	0	0	49	278	59	0	11	15	412
D	0	0	0	28	13	14	0	0	55
E	0	0	2	2	13	0	0	0	17
OTHER	0	0	0	0	0	0	265	0	265
TOTAL	3	3	103	553	148	27	281	27	2245

Table 4. Programme availability (programmes made available by provider)

	once a year (September start)	once a year (other start)	twice a year	more than twice a year/roll on-roll off	other	TOTAL
A	77 (7.8%)	1	4	4	0	86
B	279 (28%)	2	11	8	0	300
C	348 (35.%)	10	36	12	0	406
D	42 (4.2%)	1	12	0	0	55
E	11 (1.1)	0	2	6	0	19
OTHER	224 (22%)	0	32	10	0	266
TOTAL	981(95%)	14(1.3%)	97(9.4)	40(3.8)	0	1132

Table 5. Time of delivery (programmes delivered by provider)

	day only	evening only	day and evening	Total
A	59	1	21	81
B	186	7	63	256
C	263	11	118	392
D	0	0	55	55
E	9	1	9	19
OTHER	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	517(64%)	20(2.4%)	266(33%)	803

Table 6. Mode of delivery (programmes where the mode of delivery is)

	classroom-based	distance learning (wholly e-learning)	distance learning (partial e-learning / with e-learning support)	distance learning (without e-learning)	Total
A	84	0	0	1	85
B	412	0	1	4	417
C	303	0	1	5	309
D	55	0	0	0	55
E	18	1	0	0	19
OTHER	265	0	20	0	285
TOTAL	1137	1	22	10	1170

Table 7. Results of Questionnaire to find out AVA 'other provision' and movement between categories'.

Initials	centre name	other provision	movement between categories?
AQA	Assessment and Qualification Alliance	no response	no response
TRACOCN	Thames Region Accrediting Consortium	N/a	No
NWMOCN	N.W.Midlands	no response	Strong trend towards flexible delivery - day plus evening: part-time plus full-time. One provider shows strong recruitment in January intake as well as September. Others have tried it but failed to recruit mid year in large enough numbers. One issue is the lack of flexibility in most HE progression routes.
MOCN	Merseyside	N/A	More vocational pathways have been added, although this is not necessarily reflected in Section B, Awards Available
TROCN		no response	The categories listed above have been fairly stable at this OCN over the past 3 years. We have had a degree of interest in distance learning but none of our providers have yet implemented this mode of delivery.
OCNCE	North central England	no response	no response
NEMOCN	N.E.Midlands	no response	Providers continue to strive to offer flexible modes of delivery to address increasing demands from learners for flexible provision.
LOCN	London	no response	no response
HAVA	Hampshire	N/A	Movement from 1 year to 2 year Programme in the last three years.
SEWOCN	SOUTH EAST	This is the first statistical collection SEWOCN has completed since assuming responsibility for Access provision in West Wales. This has drawn attention to the different approaches to the development of Access provision between AVA's. Access provision in South East Wales takes the format of an Access framework with various pathways available in it (Section D) on comparison provision in West Wales have separate programmes of study with specific options and common elements (Section C). Another observation to be made which has not become explicit from this statistical data is that distance learning is an option for elements of study within some Access provision and Providers are using e-learning as a tool for distance learning and learning support even though programmes wholly delivered by distance learning have not been created.	<p>Within provision for subjects allied to medicine some Providers have moved towards two intakes a year in line with the University of Wales College of Medicine application process.</p> <p>A key change noted in QAA Reports over the past three years is a significant movement towards part time provision. Over this time Providers have responded to learners need to undertake part time study due to financial and personal needs. This has resulted in the shift to flexible Access to HE programmes which in turn has impacted upon retention rates.</p>
KMOCN	KENT & MEDWAY	no response	No major changes with the exception of the addition of a partially distance learning programme which although

Part 2: research reports (LSDA)

			it does not have actual e-learning (i.e. online assessment) it does have web and email support.
NELHOCN	N.E. London and Hertfordshire	no response	Some movement towards modular provision rather than discrete Programmes
ASOCN	Anglia South	no response	no response
WNYOCN		no response	Slight shift towards more part-time provision
GMOCN	Greater Manchester	no response	no response
CAVA	Cambridge	no response	No Significant changes
NWOCN	N. Wales	no response	
		no response	Yes. We are a new AVA and have embarked on a programme to unitise all Access provision. Newly unitised provision now falls into category C (Pathways and Common Core); Older provision remains in Category B. All provision will have moved to category C b
CROCNAC	Chiltern region		
		Under length of programme all OxOCN programmes have a five year limit, after which work cannot be submitted for an award	Movement to more part time provision by learners
OxOCN	Oxfordshire		
OCNW	WEST	Definition as 'D' except pathways defined at point of entry	No
		4 x at least 2 yrs, no more than 5 years 9 x at least 1 yr, no more than 5	Move from general modular programmes to modular programmes with named pathways.
OCNWM	West Midlands		
OCNSW		no response	The trend towards multi-exit, multi--subject programmes continued, albeit at a slower rate

APPENDIX 7

Interview schedule used for views of five AVAs

Innovation

Please describe any examples of new, innovative programmes that have developed in the last two years in response to changes in demand.

19-21s

Do you propose developing Access programmes for 19-21 year olds? If so how might they differ in specification from the current Access provision you validate?

Progression

What advice do you give to providers on 'grading' for HE?

Collaboration and curriculum development

What opportunities are there in your area/scheme for collaborative curriculum development and tutor INSET?

National standardisation v local flexibility

What are your views on this issue? What would be gained/lost by the development of a system of national standardisation for Access?

APPENDIX 8

Details of Access programmes at Sheffield College and City and Islington College used for student views focus group research

Sheffield College provides a wide range of Access to HE programmes (over 600 enrolments in 2001-2). The science Access programme enrolls between forty and fifty each year and has an excellent reputation and record of student progression to HE.

There are strong links with local universities, particularly Sheffield Hallam.

In 2002, 14 students went on to SHU and two to Sheffield University. Students also gained places at UEA, Manchester, East London, Liverpool JM, Portsmouth, Plymouth and Strathclyde. The programmes students applied to included Biochemistry, Physiotherapy, Forensic and Analytical Science, Social Policy and Sociology, Diagnostic Radiography, Occupational Therapy, Radiotherapy and Oncology, Psychology, Environmental Science, Marine Biology, Primary Education with QTS and Secondary Education with QTS. Offers ranged from 12 credits at level 3 to 24 credits (for physiotherapy)

Despite the close and good relations with HE the local HEI admissions tutor for nursing had just raised the number of credits required for progression beyond the number that the programme could provide (without consultation)

City and Islington College provides a wide range of Access to HE programmes (over 300 enrolments 2001-2) The Business Access programme enrolls up to 40 students each year and has always worked very closely with London Metropolitan University on both general programme design and progression issues but also on the specific details of programme content. London Metropolitan requires students to have 16 credits at level 3 for entry onto a business HE programme. Last year 25 Access students successfully moved on to HE, the majority to London Met, with others going to City or Westminster Universities both of which require 20 credits. Students in this year's group are also considering Middlesex, Brunel and Hertfordshire. It is rare for students from this programme to move outside London for HE.

This is an established 'traditional' Access programme working closely with local universities. This year for the first time there are a number of young people on the programme i.e. under 21. Most of them are single, without childcare responsibilities and living at home. In line with general guidance about taking younger students onto mainstream Access programmes the programme tutor had looked carefully at both their previous education and employment history check to check that there was a definite break between school/college and this application. Students' previous employment included sales, catering (restaurant and bar work) and jobs in the music industry.

APPENDIX 9

Interview Schedule used for focus group research at Sheffield College and City and Islington College

1. What were your reasons for enrolling on the programme?
2. How have you found out about the programme?
3. What were your progression plans?

What do you feel are the factors that are going to support you in achieving success and were there any barriers and if so what were they? [Prompt: Were there any financial issues?]



APPENDIX 10

Interview schedule for survey of QAA-recognised provision

QAA Access Development Project

The Learning and Skills Development Agency has been commissioned by the QAA to carry out a piece of research to provide information on Access programmes. The research will inform QAA’s response to the request from the DfES in the recent White Paper “The Future of Higher Education” that it should

‘Come forward with proposals to modernise the criteria for Access programmes so that they are sufficiently flexible and attractive to meet the needs of today’s adults’.

As part of the research we are asking AVAs to provide us with some detailed data and some suggestions as to how they might like to see the criteria modernised.

Please would you complete the survey and return electronically to Nicholas Houghton – email: nhoughton@lsda.org.uk by Friday 25th July 2003

Name of AVA	
Name of respondent Position	
Address	

Section A: Data

1a) How many Access programmes do you currently run that are validated by QAA? b) How many Access programmes do you run that are not validated by QAA?	
---	--

3a) QAA policy states that there are broad minimum requirements for successful completion of an Access programme. How many credits do you require learners to achieve for
Full completion..... number of credits at level 2
Full completion..... number of credits at level 3
Full completion..... number of credits at level 4

Partial completionnumber of credits at level 2

Partial completion..... number of credits at level 3

Partial completion..... number of credits at level 4

b) Would you like to see any variation in this?

Please tick box

Yes No

If yes please say why and give specific number s of credits that should apply.

c) Do you think all Access programmes should have the same minimum numbers of credits?

Please tick box

Yes No

If yes please say why and give specific numbers of credits that should apply if different from your answer to b) above.

4) What percentage of those learners who were registered with the AVA successfully completed their Access programme during year 2001/02

%

5) What percentage registered learners from 2001/02 successfully progressed into HE in 2002/03?

%

Section B: Programmes

6) Apart from the number of credits awarded for successful completion of an Access programme do you have other standard requirements for programme content for your Access programmes? E.g. credits in Mathematics, Communications, and IT etc.

Please describe these below and include any specialist combinations (e.g. Maths level 2 for a teaching Access programme)

7) In addition to external moderation, please outline any measures you take to ensure consistency across the Access programmes you validate?

8) What steps do you take to determine the need for a particular programme of study?
Please give an example

9) How do you ensure that the programmes you validate are relevant to learners?

10) How do you work with providers to ensure Access programmes are developed in line with local needs?

11) How do you work with HE providers to ensure that Access programmes are appropriate to the needs of the institution?

Section C: Future developments

QAA has a specific remit from the DfES for the recognition of Access to HE courses and has established a scheme for the management of the responsibilities associated with this remit. The aim of the current project is to provide information to inform QAA's response to the request from the DfES that the Agency should '*come forward with proposals to modernise the criteria for Access programmes*'.

In this section we are asking for your opinion, as an AVA Officer, on the current QAA Recognition Scheme and how the scheme could be modernised. Your individual answers will be treated in confidence. The final report will have aggregated responses to these questions.

13) What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses in the QAA validation criteria for the development of innovative programmes?

14) Please can you suggest three proposals to modernise the criteria for Access programmes that would make the greatest impact on flexibility and meeting the needs of today's adults.

1)

2)

3)

14) Please can you suggest three proposals to modernise the criteria for Access programmes that would make the greatest impact on flexibility and meeting the needs of today's adults.

1)

2)

3)

15) If you have any additional comments you would like to make on modernising the criteria for Access programmes – please identify below:

Thank you very much for taking time to complete this survey

Please email the completed survey to: nhoughton@lsda.org.uk