

## Access to Higher Education Diploma: grading consultation outcomes

### Background

A consultation on potential models for introducing grading to the Access to Higher Education (HE) Diploma was undertaken between April and July 2007. Responses were invited from all UK higher education institutions (HEIs), further education colleges (FECs), access validating agencies (AVAs) and a range of organisations with an interest in Access to HE and/or widening participation.

Two separate models (unit grading and portfolio grading) were described and comments were requested in relation to a number of features of each, as well as features that would be common to both. Respondents were invited to indicate for each feature described whether they:

- a agreed with the proposal
- b agreed with some reservations
- c agreed with substantial reservations
- d disagreed with the proposal.

Where this report indicates that respondents gave an 'agree' response to a proposal, this relates to those who selected 'a', ie those who agreed with the proposal with no reservations.

### Outcomes

A total of 126 completed response forms and two letters were received. All 128 responses were analysed by QAA's Information Unit. The key outcomes are recorded below.

#### Total responses

category	No of institutional responses	% of responses of total responses	No of individual responses
FE college	46	37%	16
HE institution	37	29%	5
AVA	16	13%	3
Other	24*	19%	3
Unknown	3	2%	

\* An aggregated response from one AVA accounted for 15 responses in the 'other' category

### Support for a common grading system

Over 98 per cent of all respondents agreed with the proposal that a common grading system should be used on all Access to HE Diplomas, and that details of the scheme should be published by QAA, as part of the Recognition Scheme.

## **Unit grading or portfolio grading?**

- 98 respondents (80%) stated an overall preference for **unit grading**.
- 23 respondents (19%) stated an overall preference for **portfolio grading**.

All of the different groups of respondents stated the same overall preference by a clear majority.

Respondents were encouraged to review and comment on each model separately, irrespective of the model which they preferred.

- Proposals in the section relating to both models had an overall 'approve' rating of 89 per cent.
- Proposals in the section relating to unit grading had an overall 'approve' rating of 78 per cent.
- Proposals in the section relating to portfolio grading had an overall 'approve' rating of 45 per cent.

All of the detailed proposals within the section relating to both models and in the section relating to unit grading were given an 'agree' response by a clear majority of respondents.

## **Proposed actions**

In view of the clear support for unit grading indicated by the response to the consultation, it has been agreed that QAA should move forward with tests of this model, as planned.

However, in spite of the satisfaction recorded by a majority of respondents in relation to all of the proposals common to both models and the proposals for unit grading, a number of queries, uncertainties and concerns were expressed about points of detail.

The primary areas in which comments were recorded were:

- no numerical equivalents available for grades
- no overall grade available
- the award of grades for units with a number of pieces of assessed evidence
- clarification on the relationship between unit size and grade
- clarification regarding common assessment regulations
- procedures for moderation and standardisation
- status of Level 2 achievement.

All of the concerns recorded were made by a minority of respondents. Nonetheless, proposals in these areas have been re-examined and each will be clarified, modified, subject to testing and/or reviewed once implemented, as appropriate.

A more detailed report and response to the grading consultation will follow in due course.