



# **The Access to Higher Education Conditions**

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# The Access to Higher Education Conditions

## Introduction

1 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is responsible for regulating the Access to Higher Education (HE) Diploma. The QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to HE ('the Recognition Scheme') provides the regulatory framework through which QAA exercises this responsibility. Within this framework, QAA licenses organisations to develop, validate, approve and award Access to HE Diplomas. An organisation that has been licensed by QAA for these purposes is known as an Access Validating Agency (AVA).

2 The Recognition Scheme can be split down into the following five areas:

- 2.1 **The Licence arrangements:** These are the arrangements QAA has in place to manage the licensing process for AVAs. They set out the requirements for becoming an AVA ('the Licensing Agreement') and maintaining an AVA licence.
- 2.2 **The Access to HE Conditions:** These are the conditions an AVA must continue to meet once it has been successfully awarded an AVA licence. An organisation that wishes to become an AVA must demonstrate how it meets, or may meet, some of these conditions.
- 2.3 **The Monitoring arrangements:** These are the monitoring arrangements QAA operates to make judgements about whether an AVA is meeting the requirements of the Recognition Scheme. This also includes information on the approaches QAA may take where it has concerns about an AVA's compliance with the requirements of the Recognition Scheme.
- 2.4 **The Qualification requirements:** These requirements are set out in the Diploma Specification, Grading Scheme and Subject Descriptors. The Diploma Specification and Grading Scheme set out QAA requirements for the design, delivery, assessment and award of the Diploma. The Subject Descriptors set out requirements for the content of particular subject areas. Together, these qualification requirements ensure consistency across the qualification, and across AVAs.
- 2.5 **Guidance documents:** QAA will, from time to time, produce guidance documents that provide further explanation and detail as to how specific elements of the Recognition Scheme will operate or be implemented by QAA.

3 This document sets out the Access to HE Conditions ('the Conditions') - the regulatory conditions that an AVA must continue to meet once it has successfully been awarded an AVA licence. These conditions are designed to be predominantly principles and outcomes-based. In practice, this means that while there are some conditions which set out rules that must be met, others set out broader standards by which an AVA must operate. QAA's assessment of an AVA's compliance with these principles and conditions will focus on the outcomes an AVA achieves in relation to each condition.

4 This regulatory approach looks to ensure effective regulation of the Access to HE Diploma while recognising the differing organisational structures and forms of each AVA, and the circumstances of varied providers that may wish to deliver the Diploma to students. This allows AVAs to meet the requirements of the conditions in diverse and innovative ways that best suit their organisation and circumstances.

5 The regulatory framework that underpins the Conditions is governed by the principles of our regulation. These principles are as follows:

### **To maintain the integrity of the Access Diploma**

5.1 We regulate in the interests of the learners undertaking the qualification to ensure that each instance of delivery of an Access qualification maintains the general standards we specify, that quality is ensured and assured, and that the content and delivery of the qualification is fit-for-purpose.

### **To support students to progress to and succeed in higher education**

5.2 Our regulation aims to ensure that learners who complete the qualification have the opportunity to both secure a place on a higher education course and succeed in their undertaking of the course.

### **To ensure the relevance of the qualification and support its growth**

5.3 This principle aligns with QAA's wider strategy - specifically, our focus area regarding securing academic standards and the value of qualifications.

## **Key terms**

### **Access to HE Diploma**

An Access to HE Diploma is a full Level 3 qualification, designed to provide preparation for study in higher education. Individual Diplomas are separately defined: they are titled according to their subject focus, and the required learning for each Diploma is indicated through the units of assessment specified in its rules of combination. The term is used both to refer to the qualification itself and to the learning requirements that lead to its award. (Further details are provided in '*The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification*'.) A Diploma may be delivered by one, or more than one, provider.

### **Access to HE course**

An Access to HE course is a named Access to HE Diploma that has been approved for delivery by a particular provider and is listed on QAA's Access Course Database. A course is therefore unique to a particular provider, even where the Diploma requirements are the same as those on one or more other courses.

# Part 1: The AVA

## Section A: Management, governance and strategy

### Condition A1: Governance arrangements

6 An AVA must have in place and maintain governance structures that are responsible for ensuring the effective discharge of its responsibilities in respect of:

- 6.1 the AVA Licensing Agreement
- 6.2 the Access to Higher Education Conditions
- 6.3 the Diploma Specification
- 6.4 the Grading Scheme
- 6.5 the Subject Descriptors (where relevant), and
- 6.6 any other requirements that may be placed on the AVA from time to time by QAA in accordance with the Recognition Scheme.

### Condition A2: Accountability

7 The AVA's most senior body within its governance structure has overall responsibility for adherence with all requirements of the Recognition Scheme and ensuring that the organisation meets its responsibilities as an AVA. This body has direct responsibility, which **may not** be delegated, for the formal approval of:

- 7.1 the annual AVA statement of compliance to QAA.

The following responsibilities for formal approval also sit with the AVA's most senior body, but **may** be delegated to another body or person:

- 7.2 the formal approval of any written submission required by QAA for the process of AVA monitoring
- 7.3 the formal approval of formal statements to QAA about how the AVA has addressed requirements for the renewal of the AVA licence, or any other queries formally raised by QAA about the AVA's compliance with the Access to Higher Education Conditions, and
- 7.4 the formal approval of the AVA's Strategic Statement for Access to HE.

8 The senior body must also ensure the following responsibilities are undertaken within the AVA:

- 8.1 the granting or withdrawal of approval of Access to HE providers, Access to HE Diplomas and courses
- 8.2 the assurance of quality and standards on Access to HE Diplomas
- 8.3 investigation of Access to HE providers where there are matters of potential or actual non-compliance with the requirements of the Recognition Scheme (including when directed to do so by QAA)

- 8.4 the operation of a complaints and appeals scheme to address both student and provider complaints
- 8.5 procedures for the award and certification of Access to HE Diplomas, and
- 8.6 dissemination of the outcomes of both QAA and AVA-led monitoring processes, and their use to enhance the AVA's Access to HE provision.

## **A2.1 - Responsible Officer**

### *Appointing a Responsible Officer*

9 An AVA's most senior body within its governance structure must nominate to QAA a senior officer to act as its Responsible Officer.

**Responsible Officer** means a senior officer at the AVA, who should normally be the chief executive or equivalent. A responsible officer who is not the most senior officer of the AVA would only be accepted by QAA where there is sufficient reason for this - for example, if the AVA has a number of activities not all of which are related to Access to HE, and there is a senior officer who is not the chief executive but is responsible for Access to HE activities.

10 An AVA must notify QAA within two working days when it nominates a new responsible officer.

### *The role of the Responsible Officer*

11 The Responsible Officer will act as the primary regulatory contact between the AVA and QAA in relation to all activities undertaken by the AVA in accordance with the Recognition Scheme.

12 In particular, the Responsible Officer shall be responsible for:

- 12.1 making statements to QAA (other than any which is required by QAA to be made by the AVA's most senior body) that QAA will be entitled to rely on as being accurate and made on behalf of the AVA
- 12.2 ensuring that where QAA issues the Responsible Officer a statement, request or notice addressed to the AVA, QAA will be entitled to treat that statement, request or notice, as having been given to the AVA.

## **A2.2 - Strategic Statement**

13 The AVA must have a Strategic Statement approved by QAA regarding its role as an AVA. In preparing its Strategic Statement, the AVA must secure, and through the content of its Statement demonstrate, the input of:

- 13.1 providers of the Access to HE Diploma, and
- 13.2 higher education providers in the UK.

14 The Strategic Statement must be prepared in a format and following any guidance specified by QAA (which may be updated from time to time) and must be submitted for approval by QAA:

- 14.1 whenever the AVA applies or is required to apply for a renewal of its AVA licence
- 14.2 at any other time where the AVA makes a decision that would affect the contents or accuracy of an existing approved Strategic Statement, or
- 14.3 at any point as determined and requested by QAA and communicated to the AVA as a written request.

### **A2.3 - Annual Statement of Compliance**

15 An AVA must make an Annual Statement of Compliance to QAA. The Annual Statement of Compliance must be:

- 15.1 made in the format specified and on any date, as may be notified to the AVA by QAA
- 15.2 accurate and contain all relevant information as requested by QAA
- 15.3 considered and approved by the AVA's most senior body within its governance structure
- 15.4 signed by the Chair of the AVA's most senior body within its governance structure and the Responsible Officer.

## **Condition A3: Finance and resources**

### **A3.1 - Ensuring the ability to develop and award qualifications**

16 An AVA must ensure that it has, in QAA's reasonable opinion, sufficient resources in place to develop, validate, approve and award Access to HE Diplomas.

### **A3.2 - Ensuring financial viability**

17 An AVA must ensure that it has, in QAA's reasonable opinion, sufficient financial resources and facilities to develop and award Access to HE Diplomas, and undertake all other relevant and associated activities, until at least the time at which every learner enrolled with any provider on an Access to HE Diploma validated by the AVA has had an opportunity to complete their course in accordance with the normal practice of the AVA (which shall include any resubmission or referral opportunities, as set out in '*The Access to HE Grading Scheme*').

18 The AVA's financial statements are externally scrutinised through a full annual audit by an auditor who is listed on the Register of Statutory Auditors and who is independent of the preparation of the AVA's accounts and financial statements.

19 Audited financial statements for each year must be prepared on the basis of the Financial Reporting Standards 102 (FRS 102), or the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), if applicable.

## **Condition A4: Identification and management of risk**

20 An AVA is required to have in place, risk management tools and processes that facilitate risk assessment activities and the development and, where necessary, implementation of contingency plans that, in QAA's reasonable opinion, protect the interests

of students in the context of business failure of the AVA, business failure of an approved provider, and the withdrawal of provider or course approval.

21 An AVA must provide within five working days such information about its risk assessment activities as QAA may request.

### **Condition A5: Complaints and appeals**

22 An AVA is responsible for ensuring that its complaints and appeals scheme is followed in practice. The process for dealing with complaints and appeals should be set out in documentation that is published and made available to both students and providers. These documents should ensure that:

- 22.1 the information provided to complainants or appellants clearly sets out the process that the AVA will follow when dealing with a complaint or appeal, including expected timeframes for consideration and resolution
- 22.2 the individuals charged with deciding the outcome of the appeal or complaint have appropriate authority, were not involved in the incident that is the subject of the complaint or appeal, were not involved in deciding the outcome of the complaint where an appeal has subsequently been made and have no vested interest in the outcome
- 22.3 the process(es) that an AVA will follow when dealing with a complaint or appeal are compliant with the requirements of all relevant organisations and legislative provisions should they apply.

### **Condition A6: Compliance with regulatory requirements**

#### **Condition A6.1 - The Regulatory Documents**

23 Where a Regulatory Document requires an AVA to take, or avoid taking, any action, the AVA must comply with that requirement. Where a Regulatory Document sets out guidance or principles of good practice, an AVA must have regard to the guidance or principles in undertaking its responsibilities as an AVA.

24 **Regulatory Document** means any one of the following documents that form part of the Recognition Scheme:

- 24.1 the AVA Licensing Agreement
- 24.2 the Access to HE Conditions
- 24.3 the Access to HE Grading Scheme
- 24.4 the Access to HE Diploma Specification
- 24.5 the Access to HE Subject Descriptors
- 24.6 any guidance document relating to the Recognition Scheme as produced and issued by QAA and indicated as being a Regulatory Document.

25 From time to time, QAA may issue a document to an individual AVA as a form of notice, requiring compliance with any or all of the requirements of the Recognition Scheme, a specific condition, and/or a suspension or restriction of an AVA's licence (or any element of a licence). Any such document is to be treated as a Regulatory Document that must be complied with.



### **Condition A6.2 - Access to HE trademarks**

26 An AVA must ensure that it uses the Access to HE trademarks (Access to HE logo, recognition mark and wordmarks) in line with the requirements specified in Conditions for the use of the Access to HE trademarks.

### **Condition A7: Student registration**

27 An AVA is responsible for ensuring that students undertaking any Access to HE Diploma, whatever their mode of study, are:

- 27.1 registered with an AVA to a QAA-recognised Access to HE Diploma no later than six weeks (42 days) from the student start date on the course
- 27.2 registered for units to the value of 60 credits no later than 12 weeks (84 days) from the start date of the Access to HE course, or before the student makes a formal application to a higher education course - whichever date occurs first
- 27.3 registered and certificated for units to a maximum value of 60 credits
- 27.4 registered for at least one 6 or one 9-credit unit as part of their Diploma; this may be a graded or ungraded unit
- 27.5 registered for no more than the maximum of 30 credits that can be made up of 6 or 9-credit units; graded and ungraded 6 and 9-credit units count towards the maximum.

## **Section B: Monitoring and information provision**

### **Condition B1: Notification to QAA of certain events**

28 An AVA must notify QAA when it has reason to believe that any notifiable event has occurred or is likely to occur. A notifiable event is any actual or potential incident that, in the reasonable judgement of QAA, negatively affects or could negatively affect:

- 28.1 an AVA's ability to meet the terms of its Licensing Agreement
- 28.2 an AVA's ability to comply with the Access to HE Conditions, or
- 28.3 an AVA's ability to comply with any or all of the requirements set out in the Regulatory Documents as defined in Condition A6.

29 QAA will set out in separate guidance from time to time, further information about the types of incidents that could be a notifiable event, the types of incidents that will always be a notifiable event and requirements for the timing of reporting and the information to be provided by an AVA.

### **Condition B2: Notice to provide information to QAA**

30 Where QAA issues a written notice to an AVA requiring the AVA to provide QAA with any information that it seeks for the purpose of performing any function in relation to the operation of the Recognition Scheme, the AVA must:

- 30.1 comply with the terms of the notice, and
- 30.2 ensure that all information provided to QAA in response to the notice is accurate and complete.

- 31 Any such notice may include terms which:
- 31.1 specify the time within which the information is to be provided
  - 31.2 specify a form in which the information is to be provided
  - 31.3 specify the manner in which the information is to be provided
  - 31.4 require that the information required is accompanied by supporting documents or data as may be described, and
  - 31.5 require an AVA to provide information which is already in its possession, or which has to be created or obtained by it for the purposes of compliance with the notice.

### **Condition B3: QAA monitoring of AVAs**

32 An AVA will be subject to and expected to comply with the requirements of monitoring activities as directed by QAA. In reviewing information submitted by an AVA as part of any such monitoring activities, QAA will form a judgement on whether the AVA is meeting the requirements of the Recognition Scheme.

- 33 In undertaking any such monitoring activities an AVA must:
- 33.1 provide QAA with such information as QAA specifies at the time and in the manner and form specified
  - 33.2 comply with reasonable requests made by QAA to cooperate with any monitoring activity, in particular, but not limited to, providing explanations or making documents available to QAA or making members of staff available to meet with QAA.

34 QAA will set out in separate guidance from time to time, further information about the reporting points and requirements of all QAA monitoring activity.

### **Condition B4: Information and data submission requirements**

35 An AVA must provide QAA, when requested, with individual student data and course data for the purpose of assisting QAA in performing any function in relation to the operation of the Recognition Scheme which shall include, but are not limited to:

- 35.1 assessing the performance of AVAs in approving and validating Access to HE Diplomas
- 35.2 ensuring provision that is, in QAA's reasonable opinion (and as may be specified from time to time in guidance), of high-quality for all Access to HE students and that supports them to access higher education
- 35.3 understanding patterns of student enrolment, achievement and progression.

36 Where an AVA is required to submit any information or data to QAA, it is responsible for ensuring that the information or data supplied is:

- 36.1 accurate and complete
- 36.2 provided by the time specified
- 36.3 provided in the manner specified, and

36.4 provided in the form specified.

**Condition B5: AVA monitoring of records**

37 An AVA is responsible for:

37.1 maintaining a complete and up-to-date record of Access to HE Diplomas offered by its providers

37.2 ensuring that QAA's Access to HE course database is kept up-to-date in line with QAA's requirements, with any necessary amendments made within five working days of the change taking place or immediately if the change relates to the withdrawal of provider approval

37.3 recording and retaining accurate records of its award of grades, credits and Diplomas.

38 An AVA will be expected to make its records available for inspection by QAA on request.

## Part 2: Providers approved to deliver the Diploma

### Section C: Provider and course recognition

#### Condition C1: Provider approval

##### C1.1 - Process for approval

39 An AVA must have in place and implement a documented procedure for the approval of providers to deliver Access to HE Diplomas. This procedure must include a requirement for a provider approved to deliver Access to HE Diplomas to have:

- 39.1 a main base, which is in the UK, Channel Islands or Isle of Man
- 39.2 systems to ensure that only students with a UK (including British Forces Post Office), Channel Islands or Isle of Man address are registered for an Access to HE Diploma
- 39.3 governance structures that are responsible for ensuring the effective discharge of its responsibilities as an approved provider and in line with the requirements of the Recognition Scheme, and
- 39.4 arrangements for internal moderation, standardisation, monitoring and quality assurance procedures for the delivery of provision.

##### C1.2 - Requirement for an agreement between the AVA and provider

40 An AVA should ensure that the arrangements between it and the provider include a written enforceable agreement. The agreement should include provisions which:

- 40.1 require the provider to deliver recognised Access to HE Diplomas and courses in accordance with the Recognition Scheme and the AVA's moderation, standardisation, monitoring and quality assurance procedures
- 40.2 require the provider to market recognised Access to HE Diplomas and courses in a clear and transparent way - including, but not limited to, providing information on entry requirements and funding status
- 40.3 set out the requirements with which the provider must comply in order to continue to deliver Access to HE provision
- 40.4 establish a sanctions policy to be applied in the event that the provider fails to comply with these requirements
- 40.5 require the provider to operate an appeals and complaints handling procedure for the benefit of learners
- 40.6 set out any arrangements in relation to scrutiny of provider assessment standards that the AVA will undertake or that will be undertaken on its behalf, and require the provider to retain any data that the AVA considers necessary to allow it to undertake that scrutiny effectively
- 40.7 specify a process to be followed in any withdrawal of the provider (whether voluntary or not) from its role in the delivery of Access to HE Diplomas
- 40.8 require the provider to take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of learners in the case of such a withdrawal

40.9 set out that a condition of provider approval is that the provider acknowledges and agrees that any Access to HE Diploma or course that it develops cannot be transferred from one AVA to another (see Condition C6).

### **C1.3 - Confirmation of provider approval**

41 Before a provider is permitted to deliver all or any part of any Access to HE Diploma for which it is approved, the AVA must ensure that the course(s) are listed on the QAA's Access Course Database.

42 QAA will treat any such update to QAA's Access Course Database as a notification that the AVA has confirmed provider approval for the delivery of named Access to HE Diplomas (or Access to HE provision).

### **Condition C2: Ongoing monitoring of providers**

43 An AVA is responsible for having in place and implementing documented procedures for monitoring both provider performance and its compliance with QAA's requirements in relation to:

43.1 the Diploma specification

43.2 the Grading Scheme

43.3 the use of the Access to HE trademarks as set out in 'Conditions for the use of Access to HE trademarks', and

43.4 any Subject Descriptor that may apply.

44 Through these provider monitoring procedures, an AVA must be able to effectively demonstrate to QAA how the AVA is ensuring it complies with the Access to Higher Education conditions through its operation and implementation of a provider approval process.

45 The provider monitoring procedures should include details of:

45.1 how an AVA will risk assess each provider

45.2 the actions an AVA will take to remedy any incidence of non-compliance with the requirements it places on a provider, and

45.3 the student protection measures an AVA will implement to ensure students' continuation of study in the event of provider failure, withdrawal of provider approval, and withdrawal of course approval.

46 An AVA should also set out the sanctions it may impose to mitigate potential risk to students in cases of non-compliance by a provider. These sanctions will include amending, suspending or withdrawing approval from a provider, or for a specific Access to HE Diploma. Sanctions may also include enhancements or additions to the terms of provider approval.

## Part 3: Validation, approval, delivery and awarding of the Access to HE Diploma

### Section D: Development of Access to HE Diplomas

#### Condition D1: Content and structure of Access to HE Diplomas

##### D1.1 - Compliance with the Recognition Scheme

###### ***The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification***

47 An AVA must ensure that the content and structure of Access to HE Diplomas meet the requirements as set out in each section of *The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification*:

- 47.1 the qualification characteristics
- 47.2 the specification for the achievement of the Access to HE Diploma
- 47.3 the additional requirements for the achievement of a named Access to HE Diploma
- 47.4 diplomas and units
- 47.5 rules of combination
- 47.6 other successful completion criteria
- 47.7 credit accumulation
- 47.8 recognition of student achievement, and
- 47.9 development of Access to HE Diplomas.

###### ***The Access to Higher Education Grading Scheme***

48 An AVA must ensure that the content, structure and delivery of Access to HE Diplomas meet the requirements as set out in each section of *The Access to Higher Education Grading Scheme*:

- 48.1 core principles
- 48.2 the grades
- 48.3 the grading standards
- 48.4 using the grading standards in assessment
- 48.5 moderation and standardisation, and
- 48.6 awarding the Access to HE Diploma.

###### ***Access to Higher Education Subject Descriptors***

49 Where applicable, an AVA must ensure that the content and structure of Access to HE Diplomas meet the requirements as set out in the relevant *Access to Higher Education Diploma Subject Descriptor*.

## D1.2 - Accessibility of Access to HE Diplomas

50 As an awarding body, an AVA must ensure that the content, structure and delivery of an Access to HE Diploma complies with relevant provisions of the *Equality Act 2010*.<sup>1</sup>

51 An AVA must monitor the Access to HE Diplomas it makes available for any feature which could disadvantage students with one or more protected characteristic.

52 Where an AVA identifies such a feature it must consider its duty under the *Equality Act 2010* to make reasonable adjustments.

## D1.3 - Modifications to units and Diplomas

53 An AVA should have a documented procedure in place for managing modifications to units and Diplomas. The procedure must:

53.1 comply with the relevant provisions of the *Consumer Rights Act 2015*<sup>2</sup> where changes will affect students currently studying on a Diploma

53.2 include communication with students, where changes will affect students currently studying on a Diploma

53.3 include a mechanism for relevant parties (such as providers and moderators) to suggest modifications

53.4 differentiate between major and minor modifications

53.5 include consultation with relevant parties (such as providers, moderators and receiving higher education institutions).

54 Once modifications are approved, the AVA should ensure that all providers delivering the relevant Diploma(s) are notified of the amendments immediately.

## Condition D2: Approval and ongoing validation of Access to HE Diplomas and courses

### D2.1 - Initial approval and validation of Access to HE Diplomas and courses

#### **Definitions**

When an Access to HE Diploma or Access to HE course is **approved**, this means that following a rigorous validation review process, it has been approved for delivery by provider(s).

When an Access to HE Diploma or Access to HE course is **validated**, this means that it has been subject to a rigorous review process by the AVA to ensure that the content, structure and planned delivery meet the regulatory requirements of the Recognition Scheme.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents)

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/15/contents)

A **validation panel** means a panel of members who jointly provide current, relevant experience and expertise in:

- the delivery and assessment of Access to HE Diplomas
- curriculum knowledge relevant to the Diploma(s) and all the units being considered
- the delivery of higher education programmes in subject areas indicated as intended progression routes for the Diploma(s) being considered, and
- the admissions requirements for the intended higher education progression routes.

### ***Access to HE Diploma***

55 An AVA must have in place and implement a clearly documented procedure for the validation of an Access to HE Diploma. The procedure should include:

55.1 specifications for the form and content of documentation to be submitted for Diploma validation

55.2 details on the processes and requirements for each stage of the validation process leading to Diploma recognition.

56 The AVA should have validation criteria which ensure, for a Diploma to be validated:

56.1 it complies with the requirements set out in The Access to Higher Education Conditions, The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification and The Access to Higher Education Grading Scheme and, where relevant, Access to Higher Education Subject Descriptors

56.2 its intended potential progression route(s) in higher education are clearly stated, and the subject coverage, level and structure of the content, and choice of options where they are available, are appropriate as a preparation for that/those route(s).

57 The validation process should include the use of a validation panel to scrutinise the proposals and should be applied to:

57.1 Diplomas developed by an AVA for subsequent delivery by approved providers, and

57.2 Diplomas developed by approved providers.

### ***Access to HE course***

58 Where an approved provider is seeking approval to run Access to HE courses based on an AVA-developed Diploma, the validation procedures and criteria that apply to Diploma approval are applied to course approval.

### ***Granting approval***

59 Where an AVA grants approval of a Diploma with conditions, the AVA should confirm:

59.1 that the conditions ensure that the Diploma meets the AVA's validation criteria in full

59.2 the date by which any conditions must be met (which will be before the start date for the first planned delivery of the Diploma by any provider) and the process for confirming that they have been met.



### **Validation period**

60 The validation period should be for a period of no more than five years from the date of initial approval, and the initial approval should include a forward schedule of revalidation for Diplomas. Where exceptional circumstances require an extension to the standard period, the validation period should be considered by the AVA and will not normally be extended by more than one year.

61 Once approval has been granted and formally recorded, an AVA should:

61.1 inform providers that a new Diploma is available (for Diplomas developed by an AVA)

61.2 update the QAA Access Course Database.

### **D2.2 - Revalidation of an Access to HE Diploma**

62 An AVA should have a revalidation process and criteria which are in line with the requirements for initial Diploma validation.

63 The revalidation process should include the use of a validation panel to scrutinise the Diploma against a set of standard criteria and should be applied to:

63.1 Diplomas developed by an AVA for subsequent delivery by approved providers, and

63.2 Diplomas developed by approved providers.

### **D2.3 - Quality assurance**

64 An AVA should have in place a clearly documented quality assurance arrangement that allows it to approve and monitor the delivery and quality of Access to HE Diplomas offered by both:

64.1 providers who are subject to external inspection, and

64.2 providers who are not subject to external inspection.

65 These arrangements should allow an AVA to ensure that the experience of students registered on Access to HE Diploma courses at providers not subject to external inspection is:

- **equitable** - at least of an equivalent quality to the experiences of students studying at organisations subject to external inspections by other bodies
- **consistent** - delivery of the programme of study is provided by qualified teachers and is at least comparable to that at other organisations delivering the AVA's Diplomas
- **robust** - the educational experience is at least as secure as for those students studying at traditionally funded organisations.

## **Condition D3: Provider and Diploma withdrawal**

### **D3.1 - Withdrawal of an Access to HE Diploma**

66 If a Diploma is to be withdrawn at or before the end of its validation period, an AVA must inform providers of the final date on which new starters may be enrolled, allowing reasonable time for registered students to complete the course or transfer to another appropriate course. If appropriate, arrangements should be made for transfer of credit.

### **D3.2 - Provider withdrawal**

67 In the event that the provider withdraws from its role in delivering the Access to HE Diploma(s), the AVA must take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of learners.

### **Condition D4: Diploma and course transfers**

#### **Provider-developed Access to HE Diplomas and courses**

68 It is a condition of provider approval for a provider to acknowledge and agree that any Access to HE Diploma or course it develops cannot be transferred from one AVA to another (see Condition C1.2).

69 Where a provider wishes to move its Access to HE provision from one AVA to another, it will need to make arrangements to withdraw its provision from the current AVA and undertake a provider approval and validation process with the new AVA.

#### **AVA-developed Access to HE Diplomas and courses**

70 An AVA can transfer a Diploma it has developed to another AVA. In undertaking the process of a transfer, both AVAs are responsible for ensuring that:

- 70.1 the receiving AVA is able to provide adequate and appropriate quality assurance arrangements, staff development and support for Diploma(s) and/or course(s) to be transferred
- 70.2 the receiving AVA has the resources to undertake the revalidation of the Diploma(s)/course(s) through its usual validation procedures before the transferred Diploma(s)/course(s) reach the end of the current period of validation
- 70.3 the receiving AVA is able to support the continuing study and achievement of students part way through a course and arrangements for continuation that meets the needs of students is confirmed for those students part way through a course; consent to a change of contract has been obtained in line with the relevant provisions of the *Consumer Rights Act 2015*<sup>3</sup>
- 70.4 appropriate arrangements have been made for the transfer of any records of assessment and achievement for students registered on a course at point of transfer, and
- 70.5 sufficient regard to Intellectual Property law and any Intellectual Property rights assigned to the Diploma(s) and/or course(s) being transferred has been given by both the transferring and receiving AVA.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/15/contents)

## Section E: Setting, delivering and moderating assessments

### Condition E1: Operationalising standardisation and moderation

#### **Definitions**

**Valid** means standards of awards are consistent with the external reference points for the Access to HE Diploma (that is, grades given to assessed work reflect the standard of achievement defined by the unit's learning outcomes and the grade components and sub-components that are applied from the grading standards).

**Reliable** means consistent standards are operated in the award of grades by individual tutors, within course teams and between providers across the AVA as a whole, and over time (that is, the same grade(s) is/are given where comparable standards of performance have been demonstrated).

71 An AVA must have in place and implement clearly documented standardisation and moderation procedures that ensure a common overall approach to assessment and grading and consistent standards in the awarding of grades on the Access to HE Diploma.

72 These procedures should ensure that the AVA is operating in line with the requirements of the *Access to HE Grading Scheme*, and cover all aspects of assessment design and practice, including:

72.1 unit design

72.2 assessment strategy at course level

72.3 assessment design at unit level

72.4 assessment decisions

72.5 moderator decisions

72.6 resubmissions and referrals.

73 In designing and operating its own mechanisms for moderation and standardisation an AVA should ensure that it takes account of the need for:

73.1 standardisation within providers

73.2 standardisation between providers

73.3 moderation standardisation.

74 An AVA's standardisation mechanisms should be designed to secure assessments (including grading) judgements that are **valid** and **reliable** and allow for:

74.1 moderators' engagement with assessment and grading decisions before a student has completed 30 credits of study

74.2 moderators to advise on and challenge provisional grades, where required.

75 Tutors and internal and external moderators should also have the opportunity to discuss and calibrate their expectations relating to the standards of work expected by:

75.1 the requirements of any work at Level 2 or Level 3

75.2 the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the specific units with which they work

75.3 the grade descriptors.

### **Condition E2: Assessment design**

76 An AVA should ensure that in setting an assessment, the content of the assessment:

76.1 is appropriate for the method and medium of delivery

76.2 provides an appropriate level of academic demand

76.3 provides opportunities, appropriate to the mode of study, for students to achieve the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit

76.4 provides opportunities for differentiation of performance consistent with the requirements of the grade descriptors

76.5 requires the demonstration of academic skills

76.6 facilitates valid and reliable assessment of student achievement.

### **Accessibility of assessments**

77 An AVA must ensure that in planning and setting assessments it complies with relevant provisions of the *Equality Act 2010*<sup>4</sup>, including its duty to make reasonable adjustments.

### **Condition E3: Academic misconduct (including generative artificial intelligence)**

78 An AVA must have in place and implement a policy on academic misconduct (to include as a minimum: plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating and acceptable use of generative artificial intelligence) to ensure that quality and standards and academic integrity are maintained in the design and implementation of assessments.

79 The policy should identify what the AVA considers to be acceptable use of generative artificial intelligence, and what is unacceptable and how this may be treated as academic malpractice.

80 In developing and maintaining its policy position on the use of generative artificial intelligence in assessments, an AVA should have regard to relevant guidance that QAA may issue from time to time, as well as any relevant legislation, and may have regard to common and general approaches being undertaken within further education in the UK.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents)

## **Condition E4: Moderation**

### **E4.1 - Internal moderation**

81 An AVA must have requirements in place to ensure that its providers operate rigorous internal moderation procedures which facilitate:

- 81.1 the application of consistent standards of demand in assessment
- 81.2 assessment design that maximises reliability and validity in assessment outcomes
- 81.3 the consistent and accurate application of the requirements of The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification and The Access to Higher Education Grading Scheme as appropriate.

### **E4.2 - External moderation**

82 An AVA must arrange appropriate oversight of internal moderation by external moderators to ensure that internal moderation has been conducted in accordance with the AVA's published requirements.

### **E4.3 - Recruitment, selection and appointment of external moderators**

83 The AVA should operate standard procedures for the selection and appointment of external moderators, which ensure that moderators:

- 83.1 have relevant teaching and assessment experience in adult, further or higher education
- 83.2 have relevant and current subject knowledge for their area(s) of moderating responsibility at a level at or higher than the level they are moderating
- 83.3 are external to the provider(s) they are required to moderate
- 83.4 have declared known and perceived conflicts of interest that are recorded by the AVA.

### **E4.4 - Induction and training of external moderators**

84 An AVA is responsible for inducting and training external moderators to ensure they are sufficiently qualified to:

- 84.1 make judgements about the standards of performance that demonstrate achievement in accordance with the Ofqual Level 3 descriptor in England, or Level 3 of the *Credit and Qualifications Framework in Wales* (CQFW).
- 84.2 judge the comparability of input and outcome standards across the provision that they moderate.

85 An AVA should make available to moderators and providers, written guidance which details all aspects of the assessment model for the Access to HE Diploma, including information about grading standards and processes.

#### **E4.5 - Moderator reports**

- 86 An AVA should ensure its moderator reports contain information regarding:
- 86.1 standards of student achievement and performance on each Access to HE course, including information about grades awarded
  - 86.2 the process of assessment on each course, including the use of grading standards and the operation of grading practices.
- 87 An AVA should ensure that, upon receipt of a moderator report, it:
- 87.1 responds promptly to individual moderator reports
  - 87.2 provides copies of moderator reports to appropriate provider staff
  - 87.3 ensures that matters raised in reports that require specific action by providers are brought to providers' attention as soon as reasonably possible, alongside a clear timescale for action.

### **Section F: Awarding the qualification**

#### **Condition F1: Qualification recognition**

##### **F1.1 - Procedures for the award of Access to HE Diplomas**

- 88 An AVA's procedures for the award of Access to HE Diplomas should ensure:
- 88.1 a final moderation process takes place before the Final Awards Board and before recommendations for the award of credits, grades or Diplomas are made to the AVA
  - 88.2 students on Access to HE courses are awarded credit and, where appropriate, grades for all units achieved and an Access to HE Diploma if the specified units have been achieved
  - 88.3 the function, processes and membership of the Final Awards Board are clearly defined
  - 88.4 all requirements as set out in the Recognition Scheme are met.

##### **F1.2 - Certification**

- 89 An AVA should ensure that it issues an Access to HE Diploma certificate to all students who have been awarded the Access to HE Diploma.
- 90 An Access to HE Diploma certificate should follow the format set out in Annex 3 of *Conditions for the use of Access to HE trademarks*, with the title of the Diploma set out as stipulated in Annex A of *The Access to Higher Education Diploma Specification*.
- 91 Any errors relating to the award or certification of the Access to HE Diploma should be rectified immediately by the AVA as soon as it becomes aware of such errors.

##### **F1.3 - Transcript of achievement**

- 92 An AVA should issue each student who has been awarded the Access to HE Diploma with a transcript of unit achievement. The transcript should include the grade awarded for each unit and how many credits were awarded for each successfully completed graded or ungraded unit.

93 Where a student achieves less than the 60 credits required for the Access to HE Diploma, an AVA should issue a transcript only. The transcript should include the units, credits and, where appropriate, grades achieved.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
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+44 (0)1452 557 000

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