Access to Higher Education

Open College Network London Region

Contents

Foreword

1   The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is responsible to the Department for Education and Skills for the recognition of Access to Higher Education (HE) courses. QAA exercises this responsibility through a national network of authorised validating agencies (AVAs), which are licensed by QAA to recognise individual Access to HE courses, and to award Access to HE qualifications to students. The AVAs are responsible for implementing quality assurance arrangements in relation to the quality of Access to HE provision and the standards of student achievement. QAA has developed a scheme for the licensing and review of AVAs, the principles and processes of which are described in the *QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The Recognition Scheme is regulated and administered by the Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC), a committee of the QAA Board of Directors.

2   The ARLC is responsible for overseeing the processes of AVA licensing and periodic review and relicensing. The criteria applied by the ARLC and by review teams operating on the Committee's behalf, in reaching judgements about whether and under what terms an AVA licence should be confirmed or renewed, are provided within the Recognition Scheme documentation. These criteria are grouped under the four principles that provide the main section headings of this report.

3   Following an AVA review, a member of the team presents the team's report to the ARLC. The Committee then makes one of four decisions:

i   **unconditional confirmation** of renewal of licence for a specified period

ii   **conditional confirmation** of licence with conditions to be met by a specified date

iii   **provisional confirmation** of licence with conditions to be met and a further review visit by a specified date

iv   **withdrawal** of licence for operation as an AVA.

4   This is a report on the review for the Open College Network London Region (OCNLR). QAA is grateful to OCNLR and to those who participated in the review for the willing cooperation provided to the review team.

The review process

5   The review was conducted in accordance with the process detailed in the *QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The preparation for the event included an initial meeting between OCNLR representatives and QAA's Assistant Director to discuss the requirements for the Overview Document (the Overview) and the process of the event; the preparation and submission by OCNLR of its Overview, together with a selection of supporting documentation; a meeting of the review team to discuss the Overview and supporting documentation and to establish the main themes and confirm the programme for the review; and negotiations between QAA and OCNLR to finalise other arrangements for the review.

6   The review visit took place from 26 to 28 September 2006. The visit to OCNLR consisted principally of meetings with representatives of OCNLR, including AVA officers; members of the Board, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and Access Validation Committee (AVC); moderators for Access to HE programmes; and Access to HE providers and receivers.

7   The review team consisted of Dr Mark Atlay, Head of Teaching Quality Enhancement, University of Bedfordshire; Penny Blackie, Regional Director, Foundation Degree Forward; and Keith Fletcher, Assistant Director, Open College Network South West Region. The review was coordinated for QAA by Matthew Cott, Assistant Director.

The AVA context

Background and major developments since the last AVA review

8   The London Open College Federation (LOCF) was founded in 1989 to accredit learning programmes in the London area. In the same year, four AVAs were licensed in London

by the former Access Courses Recognition Group (ACRG). In 1991, ACRG agreed to transfer these licences to LOCF which became a single AVA. In 1994, LOCF was established as a company and in 1998 it was renamed the London Open College Network (LOCN). With the national network of OCNs moving towards a regional structure, LOCN was awarded the London regional licence and changed its name to the Open College Network London Region (OCNLR) in June 2005.

9   The previous review of the AVA, conducted by QAA in June 2000, resulted in a conditional renewal of the AVA's licence with three conditions which were met and the licence confirmed in May 2001.

Major developments since the previous review

10   Since the previous review there have been changes to the operation of the OCN and of AVA provision within it. These changes include the merger of the two previous regional committees with responsibility for Access to HE; an increase in modular provision; improved systems and processes for data management using OPUS; changes to moderation procedures; an increased use of generic units; the standardisation of credit requirements; and the expansion and reconfiguration of OCNLR staff and changes to the operation of curriculum officers.

Members and provision

11   The regional compass of OCNLR has expanded slightly with the recent rationalisation of OCNs nationally and there have been some changes to membership. Membership includes a range of community organisations, adult education providers, further education colleges (FECs) and higher education institutions (HEIs) within boundaries which map that of the London Regional Development Agency and are broadly defined by the M25 motorway.

12   Since the previous review, learner numbers have fluctuated but have increased overall. Learners come from diverse backgrounds and the number of learners in the younger age range has shown the largest increase. Approximately 13 per cent of OCNLR's learners are registered on Access to HE programmes. The success rate on Access to HE programmes is 62 per cent and the data from 2004-05 indicated that 75 per cent of those who successfully complete their programmes progressed into HE. Provisional data for 2005-06 made available to the review team indicated that the success rate has remained constant but the numbers of successful learners progressing into HE has increased to 82 per cent.

AVA statistics 2004-05

13   The AVA reported the following statistics in its annual AVA report for 2004-05:

Providers offering Access to HE programmes	31
Access to HE programmes available	112
Access to HE programmes running	102
Access to HE learner registrations	4,792
Access to HE certificates awarded	2,981

Principle 1

The organisation has governance structures which enable it to meet its legal and public obligations, to render it appropriately accountable, and to allow it to discharge its AVA responsibilities securely

Governance

14   The Board of Trustees is the locus of authority for the AVA and all other committees report to it directly or via its sub-committees. Trustees are elected by the Annual General Meeting for a three-year term, but may be re-elected without limit. While it recognised that there may be benefits in retaining trustees over a longer period, the review team recommends that the AVA, in considering the principles of effective governance, imposes a limit to the number of terms of office that a trustee may serve. The trustees understand the values of OCNLR, support its mission, reflect the interests of a range of provider organisations, and represent a wide spectrum of educational and community values relevant to the mission and

purposes of the AVA. Trustees see themselves as ambassadors for the OCN. The review team acknowledges the significant contribution that trustees make to the AVA.

15 Trustees accept ultimate responsibility for the strategic direction and policies of OCNLR, as distinct from day-to-day operational decisions. Their overall experience gives them the necessary context and strategic planning skills. There were four vacancies on the Board at the time of the review and a Search Committee was being established. The 12 existing members have a clear and proactive involvement, both as members of the Board and as chairs and members of sub-committees. All key sub-committees are chaired by trustees. This ensures a level of knowledge, understanding and continuity that enables the Board to be fully accountable for the strategic direction of the AVA. The Board formally signs off the annual AVA report to QAA in a timely fashion. The Board operates under the best practice principles of Nolan and the review team noted the seriousness and commitment with which they carry out their demanding duties.

The committee structure

16 The Board of Trustees has three sub-committees: the Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC), the Remuneration Committee and the QAC. QAC has two sub-committees: the Membership Committee and the AVC.

17 The QAC is chaired by a member of the Board and includes six other Board members. Its members represent a range of FECs, voluntary and community organisations. Although the QAC makes decisions about quality assurance matters across all OCNLR's provision, its role in Access to HE provision is less prominent. The QAC takes its role seriously as the custodian of the OCN's reputation. The OCN's committee, which focuses entirely on Access to HE, is the AVC; the QAC endorses its decisions and reports them formally to the Board.

18 Each provider of Access to HE programmes or receivers of students from them is entitled to nominate a member to the AVC. Members and

officers told the review team that involvement in committee business and attendance at meetings has improved considerably since the merger of the two previous Access to HE committees (see above paragraph 10). AVC members are offered training in validation and quality management, including assessment procedures and internal moderation.

19 All members of the AVC receive the committee papers so they can be kept informed and this democratic membership is valued. There are standing agenda items for each meeting: programme approval, which can involve checking conditions from panel meetings; signing off approvals and sampling amendments. The Committee receives the course document and the panel report to inform its decisions. A key role of the AVC is to recommend approval or withdrawal of approval of Access to HE programmes. Its members sit on validation panels in their capacity as either a subject expert or by virtue of their Access to HE background, and as stated in the terms of reference for the AVC, 'ensure that effective systems and guidance are in place for the achievement of the QAA-recognised Access certificate'. Members of the AVC who met with the review team appreciate the opportunity for debate and discussion on a variety of topics, such as the development of the Access to HE Diploma, the reduction of the enrolment age of Access to HE students from 21 to 19, as well as the peer review opportunities afforded by membership of the AVC.

20 The terms of reference also point to the AVC's responsibility to 'ensure that effective systems and guidance are in place for validation, moderation and the award of credit for Access programmes'. The AVC advises QAC on matters concerning quality assurance and scrutinises the annual AVA report before it goes to the Board. It was not entirely clear to the review team where the final responsibility lies for the approval of validation reports overview of moderators' reports, and enhancement of Access to HE provision. While the operation of these processes generally works effectively in practice, the wording of the committees' terms of

reference lacks precision. For both the QAC and the AVC, terms such as 'advise', 'recognise', 'report on', 'ensure' and 'confirm' do not sufficiently clarify the extent of each committee's respective responsibilities. The review team therefore recommends that the AVA refines and clarifies the terms of reference of its committees in light of the licensing criteria.

21   The AVA has experienced some difficulty obtaining active support from all of its HEI members in spite of the important contribution they can provide as the receivers of students from Access to HE programmes. A few HEI members play an active and valuable role in the AVA's committee structure, as well as in advising on curriculum development and quality assurance matters, and also as validation panel members. However, this level of involvement is not the norm. AVA officers have been imaginative and flexible in order to ensure some involvement and plan to approach staff in HEIs who have a remit for widening participation in the hope that they may act as a conduit to other HE staff. The AVA also plans to suggest joint research projects to increase involvement from HE.

22   The AVA's committee structure is clearly defined; in most cases reporting lines are clearly delineated and the committees work effectively within the current terms of reference. The overlap of membership from one committee to the next allows for effective continuity. The review team considers that the AVA would benefit from refining and clarifying the governance structures, to fully meet the requirements of the AVA licensing criteria where these are not covered by the current terms of reference, for example, the addition of a responsibility for the enhancement of Access to HE. Furthermore, in order to ensure the best possible governance of the AVA, the team recommends that it would be helpful to review membership categories to ensure appropriate stakeholder representation, as well as maximum terms of office.

Constitution and legal identity

23   OCNLR is a fully independent, legally constituted company, responsible and

accountable to its members. The Memorandum and Articles of Association serve as the formal constitution of the AVA, containing details of its legal identity, function, aims and structures. The structure of the AVA is based on a Members Council, to which each providing and associate member of the AVA is entitled to send a representative. The Members Council elects the Board of Trustees at the Annual General Meeting.

24   The governance structure ensures an appropriate level of formal accountability. The National Open College Network (NOCN) and QAA licences set the framework in which the AVA operates. Apart from these, there is no restriction on the independent decision-making or operation of the AVA.

25   The Memorandum and Articles of Association and status as a limited company limit the legal liability of the AVA's members and their representatives. As a company limited by guarantee, the AVA operates in accordance with the regulations of the *Companies Act*. A fully audited set of accounts is prepared each year and submitted to Companies House.

Membership

26   The AVA is a membership organisation with charitable status. At the time of the review, 35 of its members were offering Access to HE programmes. Members range from HEIs and large FECs to small community or voluntary organisations. The review team met representatives from this range of stakeholders and considered that there is consistency of approach and operation. Organisations wishing to join the AVA complete a rigorous application which is scrutinised by AVA officers and then discussed by the Membership Committee, which consists of at least two members of the Board of Trustees. The outcomes from that committee are reported to the QAC which approves membership. Since the redrawing of OCN regional boundaries, new members have joined from another neighbouring OCN. It is possible for the Board to withdraw membership from organisations which do not fulfil the AVA's requirements but this is a rare occurrence.

27 NOCN has introduced a Centre Approval system for all OCNs. OCNLR is introducing this system alongside its existing membership approval system which it considers to be robust. In the audit trails (see below paragraph 92), the review team was not always able to see how the two approval processes (centre and membership) worked in tandem.

Principle 2

The organisation is able to manage its AVA responsibilities effectively, and to maintain an appropriate structure to support them

Aims and targets in relation to the AVA and Access to HE provision

28 The general educational aims of the AVA focus on 'the advancement of the public' by promoting and increasing participation in education and training, particularly by those adults who have benefited least from existing provision. Other 'objects' as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association cover the improvement of the quality and flexibility of education provision, facilitating progression for learners by enabling them to achieve OCN credits and, where appropriate, to transfer these towards a qualification. The AVA works with the NOCN accreditation system in London and as an AVA under licence from QAA. All of these aims are applied to Access to HE provision.

Strategic planning

29 OCNLR operates a regular strategic planning process over a three-year cycle using NOCN's standard pro forma. The previous AVA review in 2000 recommended that the AVA develop the process of strategic and policy planning and monitoring; the AVA has made considerable progress in this area. The three-year plan is developed by the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Senior Management Team and Trustees, and is approved by the Board of Trustees. Strategic goals, operational targets and objectives are set annually for OCNLR as a whole, not specifically for Access to HE provision. Action is monitored by the Board, using a traffic light colour-coding system of urgency to

delineate progress. The members who met the review team however agreed that there was no planned interim review of the strategy. Given that a revised strategic plan will have to be available for 2007, the team was surprised that formal discussions did not appear to have started on this. However, stakeholders who met the team were aware of the plan and felt they had the opportunity to contribute to it. The recent development of a regional Access to HE strategy reflects the broader remit for the AVA since the restructuring of the NOCN in July 2005 and explores the growing relationship with other stakeholders in the region. The team considers that if the Access to HE strategy has a closer relationship to the OCN's strategic plan in its next iteration, it will inform its objectives usefully.

30 The previous AVA review in 2000 recommended the development of a procedure for the systematic monitoring of the achievement of Access to HE aims and objectives. An activity cycle for governance is now in place which includes monitoring, evaluating and reporting on achievement of strategic objectives and targets. The Action Plan for 2005-06 set operational targets for the year which have been monitored by the Chief Executive and lead Access Curriculum Officer throughout the year, and were evaluated and reported to the July 2006 meeting of the Board of Trustees. The new Regional Access Strategy is to be included in this activity cycle.

Resources and financial management

31 OCNLR's income has remained relatively stable over the years and in September 2005 its audited income was £1,075,294; staffing accounts for 64 per cent of the costs. Although financial matters for the OCN are treated as a whole, the review team was informed by senior officers that income received from Access to HE provision in 2005-06 is projected at 34 per cent of the total income for the year, and payments to Access to HE external moderators amounted to 32 per cent of the total committed to external moderation. OCNLR has appropriate financial regulations in place.

32 As part of the governance activity cycle, the FGPC considers a preliminary budget for the

next financial year prior to discussion at the July Board meeting. The Board of Trustees agrees and monitors the budget and its allocation of resources. When the review team queried the deficit budget for the previous year, the Chair of the Board stated that the Board would prefer to balance the budget but will tolerate a deficit for one year as long as the budget balances over a three-year period. This is largely to maintain staffing stability and significant cash reserves support this policy. The question of fees is sensitive for certain providers; FECs are currently in a difficult position and voluntary organisations need to raise funds for fees. One Board member characterised the situation as a balancing act in which cost-effective provision needs to support providers and sustain a high quality student experience.

33   The AVA operates efficiently and effectively both in its internal mechanisms and in its dealings with its members and other external agencies. The review team met members of all the major committees and a small group of stakeholders and there was widespread praise for, and appreciation of, the AVA's efficiency, attention to detail and the quality of support the staff offers its members. A thorough risk management analysis was undertaken following the self-assessment exercise in April 2006 and many actions have been implemented, including the appointment of new staff and the successful nomination of a Board member to the NOCN Board.

Transparency of procedures

34   The AVA has developed procedures and policies that are clear and comprehensive. These include an equal opportunities policy which informs recruitment and appeals and complaints procedures. The equal opportunities policy is highlighted in moderator training. The review team noted that there were very few appeals or complaints because any areas of dissatisfaction were dealt with at an early stage by the officers who link with providers. These and a range of other procedures are collected in an excellent handbook which is easy to use, appropriately detailed, clearly written and available to all staff. The revised London Access

Handbook, available to all members, includes moderation procedures and is a valuable and lucid contribution to the operation and understanding of the AVA.

35   Although minutes are kept for all committees, the level of detail contained within them is not always sufficient given the role of the QAC and AVC. On the basis of its scrutiny of a sample of the AVA's minutes, the review team formed the view that members absent from committee meetings would not always gain necessary information from the minutes alone to explain the debate and decisions. The team therefore recommends that the AVA adopts a more comprehensive form for its minutes to fully inform other committees and stakeholders of the nature of discussions and outcomes.

36   The licensing criteria requires the AVA to monitor a number of aspects of the promotion of Access to HE provision, including publicity material and the proper use of the authorised QAA logo on providers' promotional literature. The review team did not receive evidence that this criterion is systematically implemented and the AVA is therefore required, as a condition of licence, to introduce a process whereby it can verify the accuracy of providers' promotional information related to approved Access to HE provision and the proper use of the authorised QAA logo.

Facilities and staffing

37   The OCNLR office is situated in dedicated, secure premises at 15 Angel Gate in central London. The location of staff in an open plan area contributes to effective teamworking, and all staff are equipped with a telephone and computer. A meeting room is also available.

38   OCNLR has 24 members of staff. They operate within a clear structure with defined areas of responsibility and lines of accountability. Staff are aware of their roles and are managed supportively. The review team noted that several members of staff, including the Chief Executive, her deputy and the Director of Curriculum and Development have been employed by the AVA for a considerable number of years. This is a significant strength

for the organisation, reflecting a level of commitment and teamworking that have enabled the AVA to operate successfully and consistently. An additional post has been created, the Director of Quality, to take account of the changes in requirements and licensing criteria.

39 Five curriculum officers report to the Director of Curriculum and Development and all are assigned a caseload of Access to HE providers. One curriculum officer has a lead responsibility for Access to HE provision and oversees the links with providers. Regular team meetings are held and there are also frequent informal discussions, helping to increase the sense of ownership for all staff. There are carefully planned staff development opportunities for staff which enable them to keep up to date and which assists their professional development.

40 OCNLR regained the Investors in People Standard in March 2006 having originally achieved the award in 2002. Providers and other stakeholders who met the review team value their dealings with staff at all levels of the AVA. They appreciate the advice, help, responsiveness and efficiency as the staff guide them in all processes from programme development and approval to registration and certification. The team commends the management, responsiveness and team working of the AVA's central office staff.

Data collection and management, including annual reports to QAA

41 All aspects of the AVA's operation are reviewed with the use of management reports from the OPUS database. The staff use the compilation of the annual AVA report to provide a mechanism for development and review, and use that opportunity to interrogate their data. Service standards are set and met and data and statistics are provided annually and on time to QAA. The review team considers that the data for Access to HE provision could be analysed in more detail to provide evaluative information about trends. There was little evidence that the data are used to inform analysis of performance, attainment and retention in relation to ethnicity, gender or programmes which would inform planning. Commentary on the data are the Annual AVA Report tended to concentrate on success. Providers praised the efficiency of the administration officers who deal with data collection.

42 Officers have been trying for some years to encourage providers to register their students via the OCN's electronic registration system, but so far the uptake has been disappointing. Apart from making data inputting easier for the AVA staff, officers believe that providers would save the time and effort they currently spend on checking achievement in paper-based systems. The review team encourages the AVA to persevere with efforts to persuade and support providers to make use of electronic registration.

Support for members and communication with providers

43 The AVA provides a range of effective support for its members and communications are regular, supportive and appreciated. All members receive the AVC committee papers, so even if distances and other pressures make it impossible to attend all meetings, members are kept informed. An effective publication, the Access Directory, lists members and provision across the AVA. At programme level, the AVA curriculum officer offers support spanning development, change and validation.

44 The AVA publishes Access bulletins and newsletters which contain a useful range of information covering major changes to ways of operating, good practice case-studies and general advice. A number of Access forums are held each year. Some are mandatory for providers because they cover key aspects such as the credit framework and internal moderation; others are optional, but offer providers a chance to network and share good practice identified by moderators.

45 The range of people who met the review team included programme leaders, programme managers, senior staff in institutions, committee members and moderators, and all considered that the support and communications they receive from the AVA are of a very high standard.

Principle 3

The organisation is able to assure the quality and fitness for purpose of Access to HE programmes at the point at which they are granted formal approval, and to have effective means to develop, evaluate and review the Access to HE provision for which it has responsibility

Programme development

46 The AVA's team of curriculum officers supports the development of programmes for submission for validation. The review team heard from tutors and other stakeholders that the support for programme development was excellent, involving detailed advice on curriculum, course design and assessment, with examples of good practice. The officer builds a close, supportive relationship with the centre and communication is good. The team commends the AVA for the support it provides to centres and which contributes to the overall high regard in which stakeholders and members of the Access to HE community hold the AVA.

47 The procedure for programme development and validation, together with the programme information that the AVA requires for submission to a validation panel is set out in the AVA's submission document that is accompanied by comprehensive submission guidelines. Discussions with Access to HE coordinators, members of the AVC and the QAC confirmed that, in both the development and the validation process, they work well in practice. However, they do not include a requirement for the provision of specific information on the mechanisms for targeting and recruiting individuals to an Access to HE course. The review team recommends that the AVA should include this requirement within its submission guidelines.

48 The submission guidelines provide 'guidance' on HE involvement in the programme development process, and curriculum officers support the forging of links to appropriate HE staff for advice on curriculum content and progression. However, HE involvement is not currently an AVA requirement. The review team formed the view that HE involvement in the development process can be critical in ensuring that Access to HE prepares students for progression to HE. The AVA is therefore required, as a condition of licence, to make it a requirement that the Access to HE programme development process involves consultation with representatives from HE with relevant experience.

49 The AVA currently operates a minimum credit specification for the award of the Access to HE qualification of 48 credits, with a minimum of 36 credits at level 3 and the remainder at level 2. This must be clearly stated in the programme submission and is scrutinised and agreed by the validation panel. The AVA's Credit Framework Implementation Plan (updated in June 2006), approved by QAA, sets out the significant stages that the AVA has to complete in order to introduce the framework and the new credit target by 2008-09. From discussions with Access to HE coordinators, members of the AVC and QAC, and officers, and through the audit trails, the review team concluded that the AVA is prepared for this change, which represents a substantial workload, and is meeting the deadlines within its plan. The AVA is also aware of the complexities connected with the inclusion of GCSE equivalences within the overall framework, and have taken the first steps to accommodate these by revising existing units to reflect the new credit requirements.

Programme validation

50 The curriculum officer who has supported the programme development decides when a programme is ready to be submitted to the validation panel, although the date is agreed in advance.

51 The AVA requires that 'an Access Validation Panel will have representatives from further, adult and higher education from relevant curriculum areas and with expertise to ensure informed peer group appraisal'. Members of

the AVC and QAC often act as panel members. The panel's function is to 'consider the programme and recommend recognition as appropriate'.

52 Evidence presented to the review team indicated that the inclusion of representation from higher education on Access to HE recognition panels was standard practice. However, the Overview noted that the AVA has had increasing difficulty in obtaining such representation. In such cases the AVA uses a reader from HE whose comments and suggestions are fed into the panel by the Chair. From discussions with members of the Board, staff and committee members, it was evident that this difficulty is part of a wider inability or reluctance by staff from HEIs to get involved with the operation and governance of the AVA (see above paragraph 21).

53 In addition, the review team heard from curriculum officers, Access to HE tutors and representatives from HE that the AVA's validation panels are rigorous in their experience, extending to a detailed examination of the proposed curriculum and the programme's fitness for purpose. On the basis of their examination of validation panel reports and discussions with tutors, AVA staff and committee members, the team concluded that validation panels are comprehensive and thorough in their examination of the programme submissions and rigorous in their methods and operation.

54 After the validation panel, the AVA formally notifies the submitting organisation of the panel outcome by letter, confirming that the validation of the programme depends on the receipt of the revised programme submission document. The letter states that validation runs from the date of the panel (and not from the date of final approval by the AVA). On return of the amended programme document, the curriculum officer checks that it reflects the decisions of the validation panel, that any conditions have been met and that the necessary amendments have been made. The programme is then referred to the AVC for consideration, supported by the amended

programme document and the panel report. It is the remit of AVC to check that panel membership was adequate and appropriate, and that the proper panel process was followed. The committee also checks for confirmation by the curriculum officer that any conditions set by the recognition panel have been met. The AVC then recommends approval to the QAC.

55 The QAC's remit is to 'endorse the recommendations of the AVC in respect of validated Access programmes and the award of QAA recognition'. It is the QAC which makes the final decision on programme validation. To arrive at a validation decision, in practice, the committee relies on, or samples, several sources of information: the minutes of the AVC; the programme document and panel report; input from members of the committee who are also members of the AVC; and input from any member of the committee who sat on the panel. It was clear to the review team from examination of the evidence, including the audit trails (see below paragraph 96), that there can be a significant period of time between the panel date and the final validation decision by the QAC. This has resulted in programmes commencing before the AVA has granted final approval. Although the AVA recognises the dangers inherent in this situation and senior officers informed the team that they have 'tightened up' their processes, it is the team's view that, should the current validation process continue to operate, there is a real danger that retrospective validation could recur in the future. While the team concluded that the validation process is essentially sound, the AVA is required, as a condition of licence, to review and revise its procedures for granting final programme approval to ensure that this is achieved prior to the commencement of the programme.

56 The AVA has in place a sound mechanism for regulating modifications to validated programmes. Its documentation requires full details of all proposed changes and confirms that, in the case of proposed programme changes that significantly alter the original programme by, for example, 50 per cent or

more, providers may be required to resubmit the programme for revalidation.

57 The process for quinquennial review and revalidation is the same as that for initial programme validation. Although the submitting tutor at a validation panel is always asked to give a brief introduction to the submission, the AVA has introduced an additional requirement for a fuller critical review from providers for revalidation from 2006-07 onwards. The review team agreed that this is likely to be a valuable addition to current processes and requirements, particularly in the context of the wide-ranging review and revalidation of all OCNLR validated programmes necessary to meet the requirements of the new Access to Higher Education Diploma and credit specifications.

Programme review and the development of Access to HE provision

58 External moderators are required to collect course and learner information from centres at the final moderation event and to record this on the External Moderation Report Cover Sheet. However, this information is confined to statistical data. The review team formed the view, based on discussions with staff, members of the AVC and QAC, and minutes and papers from these committees, that the AVA operates mechanisms for review of provision using, for example, the information provided by moderators in their reports. However, to date, the AVA has not required providers to submit any form of regular self-assessment, such as an annual programme review. Senior staff confirmed that they were aware that this was an issue that needed to be addressed and the AVA aims to revise the current system for introduction in 2007-08. There are plans to extend the AVA's quality focus to embrace a whole centre approach which will draw upon the centre's own self-assessment report and include the centre's plans for any future course developments. The team concurred that the requirement for self-assessment by centres was crucial for the review and development of the AVA's provision, in particular to the quality and comparability of programmes, and the

consistency of student outcomes. The AVA is therefore required, as a condition of licence, to ensure that it gathers all of the necessary data and information required for the regular review and development of its Access to HE provision including regular self-assessment reports of Access to HE programmes from providers.

59 For 2006-07 moderators are required by the AVA to include examples of good practice in their final moderation report. While this has not previously been an AVA requirement, many moderators routinely included such information in their reports (see below paragraph 99). The Overview reported that the AVA has used these examples of good practice in training events, forums, panels or as advice to tutors at the programme development stage. Discussions with staff and committee members confirmed this and such activities are seen as a valuable tool for quality improvement, especially in relation to course design and delivery. Although there was sound evidence that the AVA uses and disseminates examples of good practice, the review team could find little evidence that there was a systematic approach to this process (see below paragraph 81). The team therefore recommends that the AVA should develop a more systematic approach to the dissemination of examples of good practice identified in moderators' reports especially in relation to course delivery.

60 The way in which the AVA approves, monitors and moderates Access to HE provision is encapsulated in the London Access Handbook, which provides a common reference point for the AVA's policies. To help ensure consistency, the AVA utilises the OCN level descriptors and applies a standard approach to systems and procedures. The AVA has also recently started work on strengthening the process of standardisation to ensure uniformity of standards across its validated provision (see below paragraph 75).

61 The AVA made a recent decision to allow the development of new units only where there is no appropriate approved unit freely available to tutors from its unit database. The review team supports the AVA's view that this is a way

to achieve more consistency in the standard of Access to HE provision and a way of improving the quality of provision across the region. The team heard from one coordinator that this would be restrictive, but from discussions with other coordinators the decision has been generally well received as a useful tool for curriculum planning.

Promotion of Access to HE within the London Region

62 The AVA has a long history of involvement in promoting Access to HE at all levels. The AVA holds forums, an annual Access to HE conference, is involved with or maintains close links with key agencies and stakeholders across the region such as the LSC, London Regional Development Agency, and lifelong learning networks. The AVA plans to build on and extend these relationships. AVA staff contribute to conferences and are involved in regional projects.

63 OCNLR is a member of the NOCN Access Group and members of staff regularly attend national conferences and events.

64 The review team was convinced by the evidence presented that the AVA provides clear direction on Access to HE in the region and acts as a focus and a link for the Access to HE community. The team commends the AVA for its strong commitment to widening participation and Access to HE as evidenced by its work across a range of centres, and for the strong leadership it provides on Access to HE regionally.

Principle 4

The organisation is able to secure the standards of achievement of students awarded the Access to HE qualification

The moderation process

65 OCNLR discharges its responsibility for external programme monitoring and assessment ('moderation') primarily through the use of external moderators. In its London Access Handbook it states that 'rigorous external moderation is vital to its quality assurance strategy'. At the time of the review, changes to the moderation process, notably in the roles of external moderators, were being implemented as the result of a review of the moderation structure undertaken during 2006. The stated outcomes of this review had been to increase the effectiveness of the process, extend standardisation across centres and establish a stronger link at centre rather than programme level.

66 In the period immediately prior to the review, the moderation process involved a range of moderators depending on the complexity and nature of the provision. 'Programme' external moderators were appointed to discrete programmes; 'curriculum' external moderators were responsible for particular curriculum areas; 'pathway' external moderators were responsible for discrete combinations of credits within a Modular Access Programme (MAP); and 'lead' moderators for the coordination of a team of external moderators and in monitoring the arrangements for internal moderation for a MAP. Under the new provisions, the process for Access to HE moderation has been separated from that for wider OCNLR credits and the roles simplified. Small centres offering only Access to HE programmes now have a single centre moderator, while larger centres and those running MAPs have a lead Access to HE moderator who is expected to take direct responsibility for programmes within their own area of competence, supported by one or more subject specialist moderators. Subject specialist moderators are typically involved in moderating at a number of centres with a view to helping to establish consistency.

67 Guidance on the role of moderators is clearly provided in the London Access Handbook which is revised annually and distributed to all moderators. The role of the moderator is to ensure that the programme operates according to the submission document agreed by the approval process; that all processes leading to the award of credit pay due regard to fairness and equity; that the evidence of achievement is appropriate and sufficient; and that the assessment judgements are valid and consistent. Moderators provide for overall consistency in the award of credit to learners across the OCN, encourage organisations to develop the quality of their programme within a culture of continuous improvement and advise them, where appropriate, to contact AVA curriculum officers for specific advice and support.

68 Under the arrangements for Access to HE provision prior to 2006-07, curriculum moderators visited centres annually while other moderators visited three times each year. Under the new arrangements centre moderators visit twice a year, lead moderators three times a year and subject specialist moderators visit each centre once a year. Moderators are provided with a detailed checklist of the areas to be covered in visits. The main purpose of visits during the course of the year is to review work and discuss the learning experience with students and tutors, while at the end of the year visits are concerned with the verification of academic standards, credits and certificates.

69 In order to become an OCNLR member, prospective centres are required to demonstrate an effective internal moderation system, the operation of which is confirmed by moderators in their annual report. Moderators typically attend an internal moderation meeting, receive minutes and reports of meetings, and externally moderate a sample of internally moderated work.

70 While the review team was unable to scrutinise the new moderation process in operation, from its review of the documentation and its discussions with officers, coordinators and moderators, it was able to confirm that the process was currently operating as specified by the AVA. The team formed the view that there was a clearly specified definition of the function of moderation which included the maintenance and enhancement of the quality and fitness for purpose of Access to HE programmes; the student experience; the verification of standards of student achievements leading to the granting of the Access to HE award; and an overview of the conduct of assessment, which ensures that approved programmes are being delivered and that students are receiving fair and equitable treatment.

Moderator appointment and support

71 Individuals interested in becoming moderators are provided with information about the criteria for selection and complete an application form. AVA officers scrutinise the applications against the criteria and take up two references. Potential moderators are required to attend workshops before their appointment is confirmed. Not all new moderators are appointed to centres immediately and they are provided with the opportunity to attend a moderation visit with an experienced moderator.

72 Moderators are independent of centres and contracts are between the moderator and OCNLR, and are re-issued on an annual basis. Contracts are issued by the AVA Moderation Officer and state that moderators must inform OCNLR of any circumstances which could lead to a conflict of interest or affect the externality of appointment. OCNLR may terminate a moderator's appointment at any time if the individual does not fulfil the terms of the contract. The time limitation exercised by the AVA in relation to the appointment of moderators to programmes has been five years but the review team heard that this has been reduced to four years for the round of new moderator appointments in order to meet the requirements of the new licensing criteria. On completion of their maximum period of work with a particular centre, moderators may be appointed to another centre so that their experience can be further utilised.

73 Once appointed, the moderator contacts the centre to make the necessary arrangements for the year. The London Access Handbook provides detailed information on their role, guidance on its implementation, checklists and associated pro formas. This information is also available on the OCNLR website. In addition, a Moderator Bulletin is distributed to inform moderators of any changes during the year.

74 Although in its Overview the AVA stated that the QAC approves the appointment of all OCNLR moderators, the review team was unable to identify a clear reference to this in the Committee's terms of reference. Committee papers provided evidence that QAC had received a paper detailing moderator appointments at the start of 2005-06, but the team could find no mention in the minutes of this process. The team formed the view that, given the central role played by moderators in rigorous external moderation, the terms of reference for QAC or AVC should be revised to clearly locate responsibility for monitoring the appointment of moderators and that the recording of such activity within committee minutes should be enhanced.

75 In its Overview, the AVA acknowledged that the comparison of academic standards and judgements across its Access to HE provision is an area in need of improvement. Previously, the use of curriculum external moderators and other moderators across programmes, together with standardisation exercises at forums had enabled moderators to make comparisons. At the time of the review visit, revised mechanisms were being piloted. The pilot process involved sampling similar units offered at a number of centres with moderators selecting sample scripts from at least three learners covering a range of achievement. The review team heard that two of these scripts should have been internally moderated and the sample should cover work assessed by different tutors. The outcomes of the initial standardisation event (in September 2006) had focused on essay writing and identified areas for development which would be addressed during the coming year. The team was informed that this process had

proved to be beneficial and that more rigorous systems for standardisation would be developed for consideration by AVC. While the team was unable to scrutinise the outcomes of these recent developments, and considered the AVA had been somewhat slow in developing its procedures to ensure standardisation across centres, it was satisfied that the processes now under development would address this issue.

76 Through its review of documentation and discussions with moderators and AVA staff, the review team concluded that the AVA has procedures that ensure that moderators acting on the AVA's behalf to monitor the quality of Access to HE programmes and the standards of student achievement are competent to do so. Moderators spoke very positively about the support they received through the London Access Handbook, training and mentoring arrangements, and the team commends the AVA for its work to induct, support and develop its moderators.

Moderator reports

77 Moderators submit an annual report using a standard template. Lead moderators moderate their own programmes and receive reports from the subject specialists so that they can write a full report on the range of Access to HE provision.

78 Moderator reports are read by the AVA's officers before dispatch to the centre. Any concerns or issues are identified using a standard pro forma which is completed for all reports. This form highlights the need for immediate action, where necessary, and any other issues such as the training of the moderator. Unless a major issue is highlighted, centres are not required to respond to reports. The moderator's report form has recently been revised so that issues raised in the previous year's report would be explicitly commented on the following year. In extreme circumstances, should a provider fail to meet the AVA's standards, then the AVC may recommend to QAC the withdrawal of approval. Centres are asked annually to evaluate the moderation process and the outcomes are used by the AVA to develop and refine its moderation practices.

79 Guidance in the London Access Handbook reminds moderators that they should not report or make their report available to anyone outside OCNLR or the centre. The review team noted that this wording raised some ambiguity about whether moderators should send reports directly to the centre, as well as the AVA, as a matter of routine and heard of variable practices in this regard among the moderators with whom it met. While sending copies directly to centres might assist with the speed of communication, it could also lead to a situation where the centre was aware of negative comments in a moderator's report before the AVA. The AVA may wish to review the clarity of its guidance in this area.

80 AVA officers write a brief summary report for the AVC and QAC, and moderators' reports together with the officer's evaluation are sampled by the AVC to ensure consistency and to identify any further matters for consideration.

81 Through the audit trails, the review team was able to review the feedback provided by moderators. The generally thorough nature of these reports highlighted both areas of concern and of good practice which might be more widely disseminated (see above paragraph 59). The team considered that the summary report provided by officers, while identifying courses where quality and academic standards were perceived to be directly at risk, did not adequately reflect the rich information on the quality of provision within the AVA which could be used to inform future development work or the enhancement of practice.

82 The review team noted that the summary paper by officers together with the minutes are the main means by which QAC undertakes its responsibility to ensure the satisfactory operation of the AVC in respect of the quality and academic standards of Access to HE provision. The team considered that the two-page summary paper provided limited information. The AVC, in its consideration of moderators' reports in 2005, had identified some concerns including that 'one report was too short to substantiate findings that all was well'

and another was 'too general to be of use'. However, no actions to address these weaknesses were identifiable in the minutes or in subsequent minutes. While the team heard of the serious way in which issues were highlighted and addressed, it could find no indication from the recorded minutes or paperwork that reports are acted on within an agreed timescale, and thus that committees are discharging their responsibilities and the overall outcomes of the moderation process are analysed fully and reviewed on a periodic basis. The AVA is therefore required, as a condition of licence, to strengthen the current reporting arrangements between AVC and QAC on the overall outcomes of the moderation process to ensure that they are sufficiently thorough and robust.

Access to HE certificates and the Access to HE Diploma

83 OCNLR holds the licence to award the Access to HE certificate and the authority to award these certificates is devolved from the Board, as locus of authority for the AVA licence, to the Chief Executive. The AVA has been working with its centres to develop plans to restructure Access to HE provision to meet the requirements of the new Access to HE Diploma, and envisages all Access to HE provision being revalidated within the new structures by August 2008.

84 Under current arrangements for the Access to HE certificate, tutors are required to indicate the achievement of the Access to HE certificate when the learner has achieved the necessary number of credits. The final external moderation meeting confirms the award of Access to HE certificates or credit and must be attended by the lead moderator, college tutors and pathway or curriculum moderators. Within the new moderation arrangements, the lead moderator is responsible for arranging and convening the final moderation meeting. At this meeting, moderators sample students' work, scrutinise tutor recommendations and sign Recommendations for Award of Credit (RAC) forms for individual students, agreeing that learners have achieved all the learning outcomes of the credits being claimed as specified in the programme document. The review team was

able to confirm that the AVA has in place specified procedures and clear criteria for the award of Access to HE certificates.

The issuing of certificates, diplomas and credit transcripts

85 OCNLR's Access to HE certificates and credit transcripts have a standard format which meets licensing expectations. The review team discussed the process for the issuing of certificates, including replacements, with programme leaders, moderators and AVA staff, and was able to review completed RACs through the audit trails. The team noted instances where the thorough final checking of RACs against programme requirements by officers raised queries that required a response by the moderator or centre. Programme leaders talked positively about the effectiveness and timeliness of the process for the issuing of certificates. From its review of the evidence, the team considered that the AVA has in place a regulated process for the issue of Access to HE certificates and credit transcripts to students.

Audit trails

86 The review team conducted 10 audit trails of the AVA's provider members. The purpose of these trails was to enable the team to consider the consistency and effectiveness of the AVA's processes at centre level and to identify issues and points that needed further investigation through the extended review process. The team considered an appropriate sample of Access to HE programmes including a range of FECs of varying sizes, two HE providers and a community education provider. The programmes represented a wide curriculum spread, included vocational programmes and were of varying sizes (from six to over 200 learners).

87 The review team was presented with a consistent set of evidence which included, where available: moderation, monitoring and evaluation documentation for the years of the life of the programme. This included the validation panel report; final programme document; letter confirming validation; AVC confirmation form; moderators' reports; learner and certification records; records of programme

changes; and documentary evidence tracking the various stages of the administration and support processes.

88 The review team also referred to other relevant documents to support the audit trails, including: provider publicity documentation; student handbooks; tracking sheets for recording action on programme changes; the London Access Handbook for Centres and Moderators; the OCNLR Procedures Manual; membership application forms and criteria for membership; completed and processed centre approval documentation with details of stages of approval; and validation panel leaflets and guidelines.

89 The audit trails included two examples of documentation which tracked the stages of the centre approval application. The centre approval process is a relatively new introduction and, as yet, not all AVA member organisations have been through the process. The AVA continues however to operate its long-standing membership process alongside the centre approval process.

90 Centre approval documentation is that used by OCNs nationally as part of NOCN and incorporates OCNLR's requirements for constitutional compliance. These include assurances on the provision of an adequate standard of teaching and access to learning facilities, the adequacy of support systems, the appointment of an OCNLR coordinator with specified roles, support for moderation and assessment, and confirmation of adherence to the AVA's published requirements for quality assurance. In the examples of the approval process reviewed, the review team formed the view that the procedure was thorough and effective, and left the applicants in no doubt of the requirements and responsibilities of full OCNLR approval as a centre, which the team considered to be appropriately rigorous.

91 The review team considered the relevant documentation: AVC, QAC and Membership Sub-Committee and Board minutes, the procedures manual and membership application forms for this process, but not the actual membership applications.

92 The review team noted the challenge of introducing the new centre approval process alongside its established membership approval process but concluded that it was not entirely clear how the two approval processes supported, complemented or overlapped with each other.

93 From the detailed evidence within the programme files, it was apparent that the AVA collects and stores an adequate level of programme and learner information and data. This information was thorough, accurate and consistent across the files considered by the review team.

94 The review team could find no direct evidence within the programme files for the stages and details of the programme development process for each programme, nor of regular HE consultation. However, the validation panel reports for all programmes showed that panels considered every section of the programme submission document, although no specific details were given of their deliberations, and that panel composition was adequate and appropriate and included an HE representative. From the evidence examined, the team considered that the development process was comprehensive and allowed validation panels to consider all aspects of the programme thoroughly and to come to a reasoned and informed validation decision.

95 Subsequent to the validation panel, the AVA informs the submitting organisation formally by letter of the panel outcome; these letters were present in the programme files. The letters confirm that the validation of the programme depends on the receipt of the revised programme submission document and evidence that any conditions have been met, and runs from the date of the panel.

96 When the amended programme document is received by the AVA it is checked by the curriculum officer who supports the centre and a note is made on the panel report that 'signs off' the document as being the final version. There was evidence of this process in the programme files trailed. The files contained evidence to show that the AVA checks whether conditions have been met, although it was unclear how this was reported to or processed by committee. The programme document, together with the panel report, is submitted to the next meeting of the AVC which considers and recommends approval to the QAC. There was evidence in the files of AVC consideration of the validation, although no date was recorded for this stage of the validation. The QAC, in turn, considers and endorses the recommendation of the AVC and thus grants final approval. It was evident from the documentation and records that the programme validation process sometimes took a significant period of time, and that on at least two occasions, programmes had commenced prior to final approval being granted.

97 There was evidence to show that revalidation processes mirror those for full validation. However, the AVA's policy and process on establishing whether a proposed change counts as minor or major, and therefore requires a validation panel, was unclear from these examples.

98 There was no evidence in the files that the AVA requires annual programme reviews, or other means of self-assessment, from providers, although some information is collected directly from providers by external moderators and included on the front cover sheet of the moderation report. The AVA collects annual statistics to support its annual AVA report to QAA.

99 Reports from external moderators included evidence of student support and feedback, programme delivery and assessment, award of certificates and credits (also included on RAC form in files), internal moderation, response to previous moderation reports, resources, issues and recommendations. Moderators also sometimes included details of any good practice that they had identified, although this was not explicitly requested by the AVA, and it was unclear from the files how this was subsequently used by the AVA and disseminated. It was also not clear from the files what subsequent action the AVA had taken on the reports once they had been received and

processed apart from a very brief factual overview report to the AVC.

100   There is no requirement for moderators to check on publicity materials and their reports did not normally include this. Audit trails revealed that both the use of publicity materials to promote the AVA's Access to HE courses and the amount of prior and induction guidance given to Access to HE learners varied considerably across providers.

101   The files did not include evidence of a centre's response to moderation, nor whether this was an AVA requirement.

102   Evidence in the files of the certification process showed this to be secure, consistent and in line with QAA requirements.

Conclusions

103   OCNLR is a well-established AVA operating within boundaries broadly set by the M25 motorway. It is involved with a wide range of Access to HE providers, largely in community and college settings, and has developed mature systems for the validation, monitoring and support of Access to HE provision. As an OCN it has been largely unaffected by recent national restructuring and has been able to concentrate on the development and enhancement of provision within its area.

104   Since the previous QAA review in 2000, OCNLR has reviewed and revised its committee structure and their associated terms of reference. Whereas previously it had operated with two AVCs covering provision north and south of the Thames, responsibility for all aspects of Access to HE provision now resides with a single AVC. The location of responsibility for Access to HE within one committee combined with an evolutionary approach to the development of policies and procedures has ensured greater consistency and provided continuity and clarity to Access to HE providers.

105   The development of new provision is supported by OCNLR's curriculum officers and increasingly draws on standard units where possible. Panel composition, reports of validation events, responses to conditions and

programme documentation are sampled by the AVC and programmes are only approved once the minutes of the AVC are seen by the QAC which has responsibility for final approval of new provision within the overarching OCNLR structure. This is a lengthy process and, dependent on the timing of committee meetings, can result in a large time delay between panels and final approval. This can mean that, in rare instances, programmes are effectively running after conditions have been met, but before final approval has been confirmed by QAC. As a mature AVA, there is scope to review the effectiveness of this process to ensure that, while maintaining the integrity and robustness of the approval system, the development of Access to HE provision remains responsive to the developing and changing needs of learners and providers.

106   Within OCNLR structures the AVC reports on Access to HE provision to the QAC. Cross-membership and reporting through minutes help QAC and hence the Board ensure that the quality and standards of Access to HE provision are secure. Current committee minutes are not detailed and attendance at committee meetings can be affected by a range of factors. More detailed reporting to QAC on key aspects of quality and academic standards such as the outcomes of the AVC's scrutiny of moderators' reports would help further secure the integrity of the quality monitoring arrangements and the functioning of key committees.

107   Moderators are the key element in the AVA's procedures for assuring the monitoring of the quality and standards of Access to HE provision. The processes for the selection, training and support of moderators are robust, full and clearly documented and moderators are consulted about changes to practices within the AVA which impact on their roles. However, the AVA does not currently include self-assessment reports from providers in its annual monitoring arrangements in line with the requirements of the licensing criteria.

108   Continuity of key staff augmented by recent additions to new posts has enabled the AVA to develop strong links with Access to HE providers and its moderators. However,

ensuring the active involvement of HEIs in its operation, particularly in relation to the development and approval of new provision, has been a continuing challenge. The AVA has plans to address this issue through a variety of means including developing research links and a more targeted approach focused on admissions tutors and those within HEIs with responsibility for widening participation. The longer term enhancement of its Access to HE provision will be dependent on further strengthening its links with HEIs.

109   Following the introduction of revised QAA principles and criteria for the licensing of AVAs in October 2005, OCNLR reviewed its practices and identified some minor changes to its operation and procedures. However, these have not yet been embedded fully in practices to ensure that the AVA meets the new requirements in full. Work with providers on revising programme structures to reflect the requirements for the new Access to HE Diploma is well underway.

110   The AVA produces accurate, clearly written and helpful documentation for its key stakeholders and has clearly documented procedures and processes for its main administrative tasks which allow it to check and monitor the progress of key documentation through its systems.

Commendations

111   The AVA is commended for:

- the quality, usefulness and accessibility of its handbooks, procedure manuals and other documentation, forms and processes (paragraphs 34, 76)

- the management, responsiveness and team working of the AVA's central office staff (paragraph 40)

- the close relationships it has with key stakeholders and the service it provides in response to providers' needs (paragraphs 46, 64)

- its strong commitment to widening participation and Access to HE as evidenced

by its work across a range of centres and for the strong leadership it provides on Access to HE regionally (paragraph 64)

- the guidance, training, support and mentoring given to moderators and the use made of moderators in developing the moderation process (paragraph 76).

The AVA licence

Review outcome

112   The Open College Network London Region is awarded a conditional renewal of its AVA licence, with conditions to be met by the date specified below.

Conditions

113   The licence is renewed on condition that the AVA:

i   introduces a process whereby it can verify the accuracy of providers' promotional information related to approved Access to HE provision and the proper use of the authorised QAA logo (paragraph 36)

ii   makes it a requirement that the Access to HE programme development process involves consultation with representatives from HE with relevant experience (paragraph 48)

iii   reviews and revises its procedures for granting final programme approval to ensure that this is achieved prior to the commencement of the programme (paragraph 55)

iv   ensures that it gathers all of the necessary data and information required for the regular review and development of its Access to HE provision including regular self-assessment reports of Access to HE programmes from providers (paragraph 58)

v   makes use of the outcomes of the moderation process to improve and enhance approved Access to HE programmes, including that there is an involvement of key

AVA committees in the response to moderators' reports, that reports are acted on within an agreed timescale, and that the overall outcomes of the moderation process are analysed and reviewed on a periodic basis (paragraph 82).

Conditions to be met by **30 June 2007**

Recommendations to the AVA

114 The review team recommends that the AVA:

i   refines and clarifies its governance structures to meet the requirements of the new licensing criteria and to more clearly emphasise enhancement and locate key responsibilities. In particular:

- terms of office (paragraphs 14, 22)

- terms of reference for committees including AVC and QAC (paragraphs 20, 74)

- categories of membership and stakeholder representation (paragraph 22)

- responsibility for validation reports, overview of moderators' reports and enhancement of Access to HE provision (paragraph 22)

ii   adopts a more comprehensive form for its minutes to inform fully other committees and stakeholders of the nature of discussions and outcomes (paragraphs 35, 74)

iii includes, in the programme documentation submitted for validation, a requirement for specific information on the mechanisms for targeting and recruiting individuals to an Access to HE course (paragraph 47)

iv   develops a more systematic approach to the dissemination of examples of good practice identified in moderators' reports especially in relation to course delivery (paragraphs 59, 81).

Appendix

Aims and objectives of AVA review

The aims of the system of AVA review are:

i   to provide the basis for an informed judgement by the ARLC about the fitness of the AVA to continue as a licensed agency

ii   to promote public confidence in Access to HE as a properly regulated and respected route into higher education by assuring:

   ● the quality and adequacy of AVAs' systems and procedures

   ● the quality, comparability and range of AVAs' operations

   ● the adequacy and comparability of AVAs' standards for approval, moderation and monitoring of programmes

   ● consistency across AVAs in the operation of criteria for the granting of the Access to HE award

iii to stimulate reflective and self-critical perspectives within AVAs, as an instrument to promote quality enhancement

iv   to provide an opportunity to identify and disseminate good practice of AVA operations

v   to provide a mechanism for ensuring necessary, and encouraging desirable, improvements and developments in AVAs.

The objectives of each AVA review are:

i   to examine, assess and report on:

   ● the development of, and changes in, the AVA since its last review or initial licence, and its plans and targets for the future

   ● the organisation's continuing viability and robustness and the ways in which the AVA demonstrates sound governance

   ● the efficiency and effectiveness of the AVA's operational and quality assurance systems

   ● the range and scope of the AVA's activities, and the appropriateness and value of these activities

   ● the ways in which the AVA approves and monitors programmes and the ways in which these processes take account of the need for consistency and comparability

   ● the ways in which the AVA satisfies itself of the adequacy and comparability of standards achieved by students gaining the Access to HE certificate

   ● the evidence available to indicate the AVA's success in achieving its aims and targets

ii   to identify and report on:

   ● strengths and good practice in procedures and operations

   ● areas which would benefit from further development

   ● areas requiring attention.