



Promoting higher quality

**The Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education**



Cambridge Access
Validating Agency

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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 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 certificates to students. The AVAs are responsible for assuring the quality of the individual Access to HE courses which they recognise and the standards of student achievement on those courses.

2 QAA has developed a scheme for the licensing and review of the 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 *QAA Recognition Scheme*). The Recognition Scheme is regulated and administered by the Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC), a committee of the QAA Board of Directors. The ARLC appoints review teams with appropriate experience of Access to HE provision, who undertake reviews of AVAs and report to the ARLC on their findings. The *QAA Recognition Scheme* includes the detailed 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 awarded and renewed. These criteria are grouped under the seven principles that provide the main section headings of this report.

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

- i **unconditional renewal** of licence for a specified period;
- ii **conditional renewal** of licence with conditions to be met by specified date(s);
- iii **provisional renewal** of licence with conditions to be met and further review visit by specified date(s);
- iv **suspension** of licence until specified conditions are met;
- v **withdrawal** of licence for operation as an AVA;
- vi **temporary renewal** of licence with request for further information by specified date (decision suspended).

4 This is a report of a review of the AVA function of the Cambridge Access Validating Agency (CAVA) undertaken by QAA. The Agency is grateful to CAVA 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*. The preparation for the review included an initial meeting between CAVA representatives and the QAA Assistant Director (Access) to discuss the requirements for the *Analytical Account* (the *Account*) and the process of the review; the preparation and submission by CAVA of its *Account*, together with a selection of supporting documentation; a meeting of the review team to discuss the *Account* and supporting documentation and to establish a draft programme for the review visit; and negotiations between QAA and CAVA to finalise the programme and other arrangements for the review visit.

6 The review visit took place on 28 and 29 May 2002. The visit to CAVA consisted principally of meetings with representatives of CAVA, including the CAVA Quality Assurance and Executive Officer; members of the CAVA Council and Quality Assurance Committee; moderators for Access to HE programmes; Access to HE course leaders from providing institutions; representatives from higher education institutions; and former Access students now studying in higher education.

7 The review team consisted of Dr Peter Easy, Vice-Principal, University of Gloucestershire, and Dr Robert Allen, Director of Learning and Quality, University of Greenwich. The review was coordinated for QAA by Ms Kath Dentith, Assistant Director (Access).

The AVA context

8 CAVA is based in Cambridge and draws its members from a broad geographical region which includes Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, the Peterborough unitary authority, and parts of Suffolk. Its sole function is as an Authorised Validating Agency for Access programmes, other than the approval of a generic pre-Access course which was validated in 2000 and offered in two centres in both 2000-01 and 2001-02.

Major developments since the previous review

9 CAVA was first licensed as an AVA in 1991. Its last major review was conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) in 1995 and resulted in a renewal of the licence. The major issues raised by that review included CAVA's links with other agencies and institutions, aspects of the systems and arrangements for moderation (with a particular focus on the selection criteria for moderators, action in relation to the matters raised in moderators' reports, and staff development activities); and a number of operational issues including the monitoring of the sufficiency of administrative support in order to ensure that some functions, such as

the creation of 'mechanisms for the analysis of data on students' progression' might be enhanced.

10 The *Account* prepared by CAVA for this review did not address these issues specifically, although some discussion of all of them was included at various points in the body of the text. The review team noted that some of the matters raised in 1995 had still to be fully resolved and these are discussed later in this report.

11 In the period since the HEQC review, major developments have included the growth in the size of CAVA as an AVA with a particular expansion in 1999, chiefly due to the acquisition of additional members following the demise of the East Anglian Access Consortium. The AVA also successfully secured limited company status in 2001.

AVA statistics

12 The AVA reported the following statistics to QAA in its annual report for 2000-01:

Providers offering Access to HE programmes	10
Access programmes available	30
Access programmes running	23
Access learner registrations	1011
Access to HE certificates awarded	487

13 In 1995, CAVA had 11 members, of which seven were institutions providing 15 discrete Access programmes. At that time, enrolments stood at about 450 with 61 per cent of students achieving an award. The 23 discretely titled programmes offered by the AVA's current providers include several combined or modular programmes offering different pathways. The trends demonstrated by the AVA's data indicate, in general, a steady growth in the number of registrations to the 2001-02 figure of around 950, of whom about 50 per cent achieve certification. There have, however, been some fluctuations since the late 1990s, and the current figure represents a small decrease in the number of registrations recorded for 2000-01. The *Account* did not contain precise data on the numbers of learners recruited from ethnic minority groups, although a figure of 6 per cent was quoted for the year 2000-01 against a regional (eastern England) population of 3 per cent. The *Account* did provide progression data for each year since 1996-97, which showed that learners achieving progression to higher education has remained relatively steady at about 40 per cent.

Principle 1

The organisation has a structure which is based on a partnership of members, including institutions which provide Access to HE programmes and institutions of higher education.

14 CAVA's *Handbook* describes the organisation as 'an equal partnership of...members'. The current membership includes nine institutions providing Access programmes, all of which are further education colleges, and four higher education institutions (the University of Cambridge, Anglia Polytechnic University, the University of East Anglia, and the Health Studies School of Homerton College). There are no members from the voluntary, community or private sectors. Noting the recommendation of the 1995 review in respect of CAVA's links with other bodies - and taking into account its developing relationships with the North Anglia Open College Network and other adjacent OCN/AVAs - CAVA may wish to consider whether its service to, and support of, Access provision in the region might benefit from the expansion of its membership to include a broader range of organisations.

15 CAVA does not issue separate statements on the conditions for membership, the process for applying for membership, or the rights and responsibilities of its members. The review team heard that, in general, prospective members were expected to demonstrate their agreement with the aims and constitution of the AVA. CAVA's *Handbook* states that applications from prospective members will be considered by its Council although no *pro forma* or other written application appears to be used for this purpose. Otherwise, membership issues appear only to be covered in broad terms by the *Memorandum and Articles of Association* required by its status as a company limited by guarantee. These cover the legal liability of members, the expulsion or suspension of a member, and the notice period required for termination of membership.

16 The review team was able to scrutinise the admission of a new member, a major further education college, which had taken place in 2000-01. The minutes of the CAVA Council in November 2000 noted that the College had 'verbally applied for membership'. According to the *Account*, it was then admitted to membership in December 2000, prior to the Council's next opportunity to ratify such a decision formally at its subsequent meeting of February 2001. On the evidence of the minutes of those meetings, no detailed information on the new member or its provision appears to have been seen by the Council and no related discussion appears to have taken place, prior to its admission to membership. Given that the provision was validated at the time by a neighbouring AVA, the team was surprised that CAVA had made no contact with that organisation. Having assumed responsibility

for the oversight of the quality assurance of this provision, CAVA appropriately appointed new external moderators and implemented its own course reporting requirements, thereby providing an interim safeguard with respect to standards. No arrangements were made through which the AVA could formally verify the quality or standards of the new member's Access provision, however, until the full revalidation of the provision in summer 2002.

17 In the review team's judgement, CAVA does not currently meet all of the licensing criteria, expressed under Principle 1, which requires a clear and transparent process for admitting organisations into membership of the AVA. It is therefore a condition of the renewal of its licence that the AVA produces a consolidated statement which describes the process for admitting organisations into membership, and includes the criteria and conditions of membership, and the rights and responsibilities of members.

18 The review team would also wish to remind the AVA that the membership of one school or department of a higher education institution would not be considered equivalent to the membership of the institution itself. Such a member could therefore not be considered as one of the two higher education members of an AVA required under the AVA licensing criteria.

Principle 2

The organisation has governance structures which allow it to discharge its AVA responsibilities securely

19 The formal constitution of CAVA is set out in its *Memorandum and Articles of Association*. Each member institution nominates one person to become a Director of the limited company and these Directors form the Council which is CAVA's governing body. The Council elects a Chair and a Vice-Chair from amongst its members on an annual basis, although, by established practice, only the Vice-Chair is elected since, at the end of each year, the existing Vice-Chair automatically assumes the Chair's position for the following year. Despite the relatively short period of office that this system implies, this form of 'succession planning' has served CAVA well in past years, ensuring that the workload is spread amongst its Directors and that the incoming Chair has a measure of experience in the business of the organisation.

20 Until recently, and as a reflection of the relatively small size of the organisation, the Council was the only formally constituted body in the governance structure of CAVA. However, in June 2001, and in recognition of the growing amount of business which it had to undertake, the Council considered and approved a document,

The Future Structure of CAVA, which introduced amendments to the governance structure, including the establishment of three sub-committees: the Quality Assurance Committee, the Finance, Resources and Personnel Committee, and the Staff Development Committee, all of which report to the Council.

21 In the revised governance arrangements, the Council continues to hold responsibility for determining the overall strategy of CAVA and is the locus of authority for the AVA licence. It retains, however, some specific responsibilities for quality assurance including the arrangements for the approval of new programmes. The remit of the Quality Assurance Committee is limited to the consideration of annual reviews from providers and external moderators' reports, and to the appointment of moderators. According to *The Future Structure of CAVA*, the responsibility of the Finance, Resources and Personnel Committee is 'to plan and monitor the CAVA financial situation' as well as advising Council on matters related to fees, and to the services provided by CAVA's host, Anglia Polytechnic University. The Staff Development Committee's remit is focused on the organisation of the staff development events which form part of CAVA's annual calendar.

22 At the time of the review, these new governance arrangements had been in place for less than a year. The review team was thus not in a position to judge their complete effectiveness. However, the team noted that *The Future Structure of CAVA* (later designated *The New Structure of CAVA*) appeared to be the only written statement of the new arrangements. The paper describes the broad purpose of each sub-committee and offers an outline of its membership. However, in the view of the team, these did not constitute formal statements of remit, membership, quoracy, and frequency of meetings.

23 The review team also noted that the membership of each sub-committee followed a standard pattern by including the Chair of Council (who also takes the chair of the sub-committee), the Vice-Chair of Council, the CAVA Quality Assurance and Executive Officer, and a varying number of other Council members. In this sense, the sub-committees could perhaps be interpreted as 'sub-groups' of Council, since no other person from within the CAVA member organisations could qualify as a committee representative. In the long term, a major reason for establishing the sub-committees - to relieve the Council of some of its weight of business - may be self-defeating since its overall effect is to have the same members meeting more briefly, but more frequently.

24 The constitution of the sub-committees also raises issues of governance for consideration by CAVA. In effect, the current structure leads to the Council reporting to itself on all matters. Whilst it is not unusual for the Chair of a governing body to assume leadership of any sub-committee dealing with financial and operational matters, a clearer separation of duties in relation to quality assurance would usually be considered desirable. The role of the Quality Assurance and Executive Officer also requires some clarification: it is not clear from papers or minutes whether the post-holder is a member of the sub-committees or, more properly, their officer. CAVA will wish to give attention to both of these issues to avoid any possible conflicts of interest.

25 In the judgement of the review team, the new governance structure represents a step forward for CAVA in the management and organisation of its business. However, in order to meet the licensing criteria in full, the AVA should review its constitutional arrangements and governance structures to ensure that sub-committees of Council have formal remits; that details of membership, quoracy, reporting lines and frequency of meetings are specified; and that the role of staff of the AVA at meetings is clarified.

Principle 3

The organisation is aware of, and in a position to meet, its legal and public obligations

26 As noted above, the legal identity of CAVA has been secured by its decision to become a company limited by guarantee. This also gives it a basis for entering legal agreements and for ensuring the proper conduct of its financial affairs.

27 CAVA's relationship to its host organisation, Anglia Polytechnic University, is less clear. On the assumption of company status, the AVA took control of its own financial affairs and became the employer of its own staff. However, the University continues to provide, at no charge, significant services to the AVA. These include office accommodation and the major office expenses. The provision of these services is not guaranteed by a memorandum of co-operation or any other written undertaking. This is a matter of some importance for an AVA whose financial capacity would be seriously challenged were there a need to purchase such services.

28 It was clear to the review team that the University was supportive of CAVA which, in turn, greatly appreciated the benefits of the partnership. The team was also told that a written agreement with the University was nearing completion. However, it is a condition of the renewal of the licence that CAVA

establishes a formal agreement with Anglia Polytechnic University in respect of the provision of services.

Principle 4

The organisation is able to manage effectively its AVA responsibilities and the structure which supports them

Aims

29 The aims of CAVA are set out in its Memorandum of Association and repeated in its *Handbook*. They include the facilitation of progression to higher education, the provision of opportunities for under-represented groups, the quality assurance of the programmes which it validates, and the promotion and dissemination of good practice in Access provision. In the view of the team, these aims are congruent with those of the *QAA Recognition Scheme*.

Strategic planning

30 The *Account* offered no details of how CAVA undertakes its strategic planning. A short Operating Statement is included in the *CAVA Handbook*. However, this is a general articulation of aims and operational procedures rather than representing the outcomes of any specific strategic planning cycle. The existence of an Action Plan in each of CAVA's annual reports to QAA might suggest the existence of some purposeful planning activity but, again, the review team was told that these plans were not the outcomes of any deliberate considerations by the Council but were a synopsis or record of the major issues discussed by the Council in the year in question.

31 In effect, CAVA does not produce a formal written strategic plan against which it monitors its performance and measures its progress against set targets. The review team was told that, since Access provision and its promotion was CAVA's sole business, a formal strategic plan had not been thought necessary. The common view presented to the team was that providers had responsibility for the establishment of their individual strategies and that CAVA's role was that of a facilitator to help ensure the fulfilment of those plans. A similar position is taken in respect of development, with the *Account* stating that 'CAVA does not have [a] prescriptive development policy. Individual member institutions develop courses as and when they perceive a need and [CAVA] supports these initiatives by course validation'.

32 The position adopted by the AVA is, by its own admission, reactive rather than proactive. In addition to imposing a limit on the control which CAVA can exercise over its future direction and developments, it

also restricts the services which it offers to its members. As an example, in discussing the collection of data, the *Account* suggests that CAVA might be more active in analysing trends in areas such as Access recruitment and retention in order to supply information to its providers and to 'inform the strategic direction of the Agency'. With the lack of a strategic planning framework, the review team found it difficult to conceive how either ambition might be achieved.

33 The criteria for licensing and re-licensing require an AVA to have systematic and effective mechanisms which enable it to pursue its aims, and to have established procedures to review performance in relation to those aims. Currently, the lack of a proactive strategic planning function indicates that CAVA does not meet these criteria. Therefore, it is a condition of the renewal of the licence that CAVA establishes clear and systematic processes for strategic planning which include the development of an annual action plan, approved by Council, which is regularly monitored and reviewed, and which helps the AVA to ensure that it is achieving its aims.

Financial management

34 In many senses, CAVA's approach to the management of its finances mirrors that of its general position on strategic planning. The *Account* offered only rudimentary information on finances and little or no accompanying analysis. In discussion with Council members, the review team heard that financial planning was conducted on a year-by-year basis with some interim reporting. While there is no question about the probity or practical management of finances, there was little evidence of any longer term or more forward financial planning other than the aim to achieve, as a contingency, reserves of around a third of annual turnover.

35 CAVA operates with a relatively limited budget and, in the past five years, has either achieved small surpluses (although on one occasion this was due to an unanticipated 'windfall' sum) or has used its reserves to cover an annual loss. Its greatest cost is its staffing and the level of professional support which the AVA is able to secure (see paragraph 37-38, below) has undoubtedly been affected by its limited finances. The appointment of additional administrative support in 2001 has led to a current budget deficit which is initially to be covered from its reserves. The narrow margins within which CAVA operates are demonstrated by its decision to move back into surplus in 2002-03 by a small increase in its membership subscriptions and a doubling of the fees charged for registration and certification. Even such a notable increase in income is forecast to produce only a small surplus, which might well be subject to simple erosion

by inflation in the following year and would not allow the AVA to rebuild its reserves.

36 This short-term approach to financial planning was a matter of some concern to the review team and it is a condition of the renewal of the licence that CAVA introduces more systematic financial planning to ensure the longer-term security and viability of the organisation.

Staffing

37 CAVA has one permanent member of staff with the title of Quality Assurance and Executive Officer, who is currently full-time in the post. The same person is also the Company Secretary. A part-time (12 hours per week) administrative assistant was employed at the time of the review to assist in the operations of the AVA and to provide some measure of cover for the full-time Officer. While this more recent appointment is a clear improvement on the previous position when casual part-time staff were appointed at times of particular pressure, there are, clearly, limitations to the kinds of activity that the administrative assistant would be able to cover for the Officer. Although the *Account* did not provide any commentary on the sufficiency of the AVA's staffing base, it was clear in discussion with CAVA staff and Council members that more generous staffing levels would be necessary in order to enhance the services which the AVA is able to offer its members.

38 In this context, the review team noted that the sole permanent member of staff had not always been employed on a full-time basis and was told that the extent of the contract was dependent, year-on-year, on the income secured by learner registration fees. The team did not consider there to be a causal relationship between learner registrations and the duties of the Officer, many of which are not related to the volume of students on programmes validated by the AVA. With these issues in mind, CAVA should review the current and medium-term requirements for professional and administrative staff in order to establish the baseline needs of the organisation and thus ensure that it can meet its obligations as a licensed AVA.

Operational procedures, documentation and data systems

39 For the most part, CAVA has well-documented procedures for its major operational functions including the registration of learners, the validation and recognition of programmes, the revalidation of programmes and interim modifications to them, and the receipt and consideration of moderators' reports. Overview statements in the *CAVA Handbook* are generally supported by clear and detailed guidance for those involved in implementing procedures.

40 The AVA collects data from its providers chiefly through the means of the annual report submitted at the end of the academic year and a supplementary report on progression received in October. The annual report form is designed to be compatible with the data collection method employed by the QAA to ensure that information is readily transferable. The *Account* provided some commentary and analysis of data trends, and the view expressed in the *Account* that the AVA's data collection function was operating efficiently was shared by the review team.

Communications

41 CAVA communicates with its providers through a *Bulletin* which is produced three or four times each year. It was clear to the review team, and supported by those Access practitioners whom the team met, that good informal communications existed between the AVA and its providing members. The annual staff development events are also valued by members as an opportunity for networking, especially given the broad geographical region covered by CAVA. However, admissions tutors from receiving higher education institutions appeared to be less well informed of both general developments in Access provision and of the specific developments occurring within CAVA itself. The AVA may wish to consider ways in which it could enhance its communications with such tutors.

42 The review team also scrutinised the promotional literature produced by providing colleges for their CAVA-validated Access provision. It noted that, in several cases, CAVA was not mentioned as the validating body for the current Access provision. In some cases, such literature still carried references to the Higher Educational Quality Council, which ceased to operate in 1998; continued to use the phrase 'kite-marked', which has now been superseded; or claimed validation by the East Anglian Access Consortium, whose licence was ceded in 1999. The team considered that CAVA's role as a licensed AVA within the national Access recognition framework could be misunderstood by such references. CAVA is therefore required, as a condition of licence, to ensure that closer guidance is given on the ways in which Access provision is described in promotional literature, and to establish a mechanism to monitor this.

Equal opportunities

43 As an organisation, CAVA does not have a formal policy on equal opportunities. Since this is a requirement of the licensing criteria, the AVA is expected to establish and implement an approved equal opportunities policy in relation to its own activities.

Grievances and appeals

44 As a requirement at validation, CAVA expects all providers to have a procedure in place to cover academic appeals by students. However, the review team noted that there was no statement of CAVA's involvement in such appeals in its position as the ultimate awarding body. The *CAVA Handbook* describes the process by which providers may appeal to CAVA against decisions made by the Council on the recommendation of validation panels although, other than the existence of an Appeals Board, no full details of this process are set out. There did not appear to be any other documented processes by which grievances or appeals against or within CAVA itself could be lodged.

45 CAVA is therefore asked to put into place procedures to cover its role as an awarding body in respect of academic and academic-related appeals lodged by students registered for programmes validated by the AVA; grievances and complaints lodged by members in respect of the AVA's decisions in areas other than the validation of programmes; and complaints and grievances lodged by its staff.

Self-assessment and risk assessment

46 The review team was told that the AVA's chief mechanism for judging its effectiveness was based on the satisfaction expressed by its members through normal meetings of the Council and its sub-committees. In this sense, CAVA's approach to 'self-assessment' is dependent on one relatively informal source of external information, and there is no regular mechanism by which it is able to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of its operation as an AVA. In addition, there did not appear to the team to be any developed method by which the AVA could assess the risks to its operation and prepare appropriate contingency plans, the absence of which might be hazardous given the limited financial capacity of the organisation.

47 It is therefore a condition of the renewal of the licence that CAVA implements a procedure for monitoring and assessing the continuing quality and effectiveness of its management and operation, including consideration of potential risks, and mechanisms to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Annual reporting to QAA

48 CAVA has satisfactorily met its annual reporting commitments to the QAA, although the review team noted that, unlike previous years, the Council had not formally approved the report that was submitted in 2001. The team was also disappointed that, in 2001, CAVA had formally declared that it complied in full with the revised Principles and Criteria for the Licensing

of Authorised Validating Agencies when - on the evidence of this review - there exist areas where compliance has not yet been achieved.

49 It is within the licensing criteria under Principle 4, in particular, that the review team considers that there are most causes for concern. In addition to a number of what might be termed 'technical' matters to be rectified, the AVA will need to address some fundamental limitations identified in planning and in the consideration of resourcing issues if it is to meet the licensing criteria and ensure that it is able to manage its AVA responsibilities effectively.

Principle 5

The organisation is able to assure the quality and fitness for purpose of Access to HE programmes to which it grants formal recognition.

Programme development

50 In both the *Account* and the *CAVA Handbook* reference is made to validation being a 'co-operative and positive process to enable the course team to produce a high quality learning experience for learners', and the *Account* also records CAVA's view that it has 'robust systems' for validation and revalidation. The *CAVA Handbook* provides detailed information on the nature and timing of the validation process, and a similarly comprehensive outline of what should be included in the Course Document that is required as part of the process. Course teams bringing forward proposals either for validation or revalidation are therefore provided with strong guidelines on requirements in relation to the analysis of needs, course structures, subjects and syllabuses, assessment and certification statements, student selection and support, staffing, and administration and monitoring. CAVA's requirements in relation to the inclusion in all programmes of 'CAVA Learning Skills', and the application of the AVA's credit framework are also clearly outlined in the *CAVA Handbook*. As such, the formal technical requirements of the process of validation (and revalidation) are clearly set out.

51 No explicit reference is made in the documentation provided for the review to opportunities for proposing course teams to gain advice from existing practitioners or CAVA itself as part of the developmental process. The review team heard, however, that, informally, such opportunities are available and that course teams regularly approach colleagues in other member institutions for advice and support. CAVA is always willing, the team was informed, to facilitate such informal interactions. Staff development events are also perceived as a means by which the validation process is supported. However, in

the light of its expanding membership and in further pursuit of its view that the validation process should be 'cooperative and positive', the team considered that CAVA should introduce a formal system that provides appropriate support for the development of new programmes, including both further and higher education members.

Programme validation

52 The *Account* identified how, when institutions seek to develop a new programme, 'the CAVA Council is informed, a chair for the validation is appointed from Council members who have previously observed an experienced chair, and the validation is processed'. The *Account* also states that CAVA takes a 'great deal of care' in ensuring that the panel established for a validation event is 'well-balanced' to allow the assessment of the course to be 'fair'. Panels are required to have members with expertise in the provision of both higher and further education, as well as experience of Access learners; subject specialists; a 'cross-bencher' from the providing institution; and, if relevant, professional representation. The 'cross-bencher' is an individual not involved in the preparation of the Course Document, who is there to ensure 'fair-play' and, when needed, answer panel queries about the providing College. While it was evident that CAVA ensures that such expertise is available within all validation panels, the principle that 'frequently one person can cover more than one requirement' means that panels are of variable size. The team was assured that the principle was used to make panel size appropriate to the scale and scope of the programme under consideration. However, this is not monitored, and CAVA may wish periodically to audit the membership of panels to ensure that the criteria identified are being fully met.

53 The *CAVA Handbook* provides very specific timelines by which the process of validation is managed, and the *Guidelines for Validation Events* provides clear and detailed information about validation for the institution hosting the event, the chair of the panel and panel members. The *Guidelines* includes information about the programme for the event, advance documentation, the roles of the different participants, the criteria for validation, and possible outcomes. Similarly clear were the processes for reporting, responding to conditions identified in reports (including time scales), and formal ratification by the CAVA Council.

54 Panel members are asked to complete a short evaluation of the validation process, subsequently summarised by the CAVA Quality Assurance and Executive Officer, and reported to the Council. The process is administered through the CAVA office with

the CAVA Quality Assurance and Executive Officer attending, and reporting on, events. The *Account* noted that if it appeared that procedures were not working satisfactorily, the Council would approve any necessary amendments to the validation process. Evidence seen by the review team suggested that, in general, the process of validation was administered efficiently and effectively, with strong central requirements generally well managed by the CAVA office.

55 While not necessarily undermining CAVA's view that it has a 'methodical' approach to [re]validation which is both 'cooperative and positive', the Council may need to strengthen the means by which panels, necessarily expressing different perspectives, can be managed in such a way as to ensure a consistent and rigorous consideration of programmes, by identifying some of the AVA's expectations more explicitly. The review team noted, for example, that on one occasion Council had been informed that the 'event had been hindered by the HE representative's unrealistic expectations'. The team also heard a view expressed that the recently introduced credit framework enabled course teams to consider the value of the component parts of courses and that this had been helpful in the validation process. The AVA may wish to explore how the credit framework might be utilised more fully within its formal processes and requirements for validation, as part of a move to ensuring consistency of panel judgements. The team would also recommend that the AVA expand the description of its credit framework so as to demonstrate its use of nationally recognised principles of credit development and award and the compatibility that it offers with credit awarded elsewhere.

The locus of authority for the recognition of Access programmes

56 Although the CAVA Council has delegated some of its quality assurance functions, particularly in relation to monitoring and moderating, to the Quality Assurance Committee, it has retained direct oversight of validation and revalidation. The chair of a validation panel approves the panel's report which is then circulated to the CAVA Council. Once the conditions outlined in the report have been met, Council is asked by the chair of the panel to ratify the course formally. The panel chair attends the Council meeting to give an oral presentation of the course and to answer any questions about either the event or the course from Council members. If satisfied that all CAVA procedures have been carried out, the course is formally ratified by the Council. The team saw evidence that the Council undertook this role, ensuring that all conditions were met before ratification and admission of students to the newly validated programmes.

57 The review team concluded that, once a programme was presented for validation, the AVA had thorough and well-documented procedures in place through which it was able to assure the programme's quality and fitness for purpose. However, as a condition of licence, the AVA should introduce a formal process for programme development (see paragraph 51, above). The team would also recommend that the AVA develop the description of its credit framework and consider the means through which it can be used more fully within its validation procedures to contribute to the consistency of validation outcomes (see paragraph 55, above).

Principle 6

The organisation is able to safeguard the continuing quality of Access to HE programmes, and to secure the standards of achievement of students awarded the Access to HE certificate

Moderation processes

58 The *Account* asserted that CAVA had 'rigorous and effective external moderation procedures and quality assurance mechanisms'. Although there is no singular statement on the nature, scope and scale of the moderation process, there is significant and detailed documentation on the various elements that make up that process, notably in the *Guidelines for External Moderators* and the *CAVA Handbook* from which they are drawn.

59 External moderators are described in the *CAVA Handbook* as having the dual role of 'both external examiner and critical friend'. Their duties and responsibilities in relation to standards, quality and awards are extensively detailed. Aside from core duties relating to visits (twice a year) for meetings with students and staff, the monitoring of assessment material, attendance at examiners' meetings, and the countersigning of certificates, moderators are also asked to be involved in on-going course development and review, to monitor recommendations made during (re)validation and annual monitoring, to arbitrate in relation to appeals, and to identify for college managers appropriate concerns. There is a clear specification of what is required in terms of particular activities, sampling criteria, and the monitoring of what CAVA now describes as 'internal moderation'. The AVA stated plainly in a number of documents that, in order to 'ensure the fairness, standard and currency of awards, CAVA requires at least one External Moderator for each Access course', and, acknowledging that the duties and responsibilities are extensive, was clear that the 'size and subject range of any course for which a sole moderator has responsibility should be limited to

ensure that their task in overseeing quality assurance procedures is realistic'. It was not difficult, therefore, to concur with CAVA's view that the appointment of external moderators is a 'crucial part of the QA process of the agency.' The team saw evidence that moderators generally discharged their responsibilities enthusiastically and effectively, both as external examiner and critical friend.

60 More recently, CAVA has sought to emphasise the importance of the internal quality assurance procedures of providing institutions in reinforcing and complementing its own systems. In late 2001, as a consequence of the annual reporting exercise, the newly established Quality Assurance Committee considered that it was apparent from external moderators' reports that procedures in different institutions for internal standards moderation were often 'unclear'. Investigation of the reports themselves by the review team showed that in some cases, no such internal moderation mechanisms were evident to the external moderators. As a consequence, the Committee considered the issue and produced a formal statement requiring that all providing member institutions have their own internal moderation procedures, accepted at validation, and monitored by the external moderators. The *Account* concluded that the 'Council wishes to pursue this subject and the Quality Assurance Committee will have further discussions...' In its meetings with Access practitioners, the review team was able to conclude that the principle of the required monitoring of internal moderation procedures had been widely disseminated and appeared to have been accepted. In the team's view, this constituted a significant further mechanism to support the moderation procedure and should be carefully monitored to ensure effective compliance.

Moderator selection, appointment and induction/training

61 External moderators must be 'committed to the philosophy of Access' and have appropriate subject expertise, as well as, where possible, current or recent experience of Access practice/progression. They are recruited from an institution that is unrelated to the providing institution and which is not a main receiver of learners from the moderated course. The *Account* explained that moderators are appointed to courses at the beginning of the academic session, following approval by the Quality Assurance Committee (which requires the CVs of all external moderators) and the provider institution. Although they are appointed initially for one year, they can be reappointed up to a maximum period of three years for any one course, though they may subsequently move on to become a moderator for another CAVA course. All have a

contract with CAVA. The *Account* showed that, in total, there were 13 moderators appointed: seven from CAVA's providing member institutions (mostly the founding institutions); and three from two of the higher education institutions within CAVA. The review team noted that, of the 13 moderators, three currently serve on CAVA's Council, two of whom are also members of the Quality Assurance Committee.

62 The review team sought to determine whether this pattern of moderator appointment constituted a sufficiently external framework and how, given the apparent limitations in terms of externality, as well as the dual role of external moderators as examiners and critical friends, CAVA had introduced appropriate devices that would guarantee independence, rigour and consistency for the moderation process. CAVA members acknowledged that there were limitations to the level of externality they could deliver in practice, though considered that the expertise and knowledge of those appointed, as well as the process by which they were appointed, meant that there was a rigorous system in place. Indeed, it was claimed that attempts to broaden the base of moderation to include individuals outside the AVA had had mixed results. Additionally, it was felt by CAVA members that the 'controlled length of service and movement across the region of moderators assists in ensuring equality of standards throughout the CAVA providers'. CAVA also considered that the fact that five staff from its members had undertaken moderation duties outside the region and four non-CAVA staff had moderated within the AVA further strengthened the argument that externality was sufficient and appropriate. The team recognised the AVA's attempts to involve individuals from outside the AVA's members and the difficulties it had experienced in this. The team took the view, however, that the AVA could extend the range of experience within its moderator cohort by seeking the involvement of those not otherwise involved in the AVA's processes, and the team would recommend that the AVA explore ways in which it this might be achieved. By so doing, the AVA would extend awareness of its activities more widely, as well as securing a more appropriate distance between the process of moderation and its monitoring by the AVA.

63 The review team heard that there had been discussion within CAVA of the way in which the introduction of lead moderators might also be used to improve the effectiveness of the present system. After further investigation by the Council, it had been decided that this would be inappropriate, but an alternative mechanism had been piloted to determine whether the mentoring of new moderators would be valuable. This would enhance the current document-driven method of inducting new moderators by

providing an experienced moderator from the same (or nearby) institution, or the CAVA Quality Assurance and Executive Officer. It would involve the mentor explaining the CAVA reporting requirements, together with an institutional visit in which the new appointee would act as an observer to the activities of an experienced moderator. Though the pilot, involving one new moderator, was still underway, the team heard that it was likely that the process would be introduced generally in September 2002. The team considered that this process was likely to provide a valuable addition to the induction of new moderators.

64 Further training and support for moderators was currently provided through the expectation, though not a requirement, that they would take part in CAVA staff development events. External moderators themselves pointed out to the review team that their experience and expertise as providers or recipients of Access ensured that they had relevant and up-to-date knowledge on the issues, both national and local, affecting their role as moderators. The team welcomed these limited initiatives but considered that CAVA needed quickly to build further on them and review the process by which moderators are recruited, inducted and trained, with a view to enhancing its effectiveness.

65 The review team was also able to see evidence that, where the external moderator did not meet the requirements of their contract, the AVA was able to act in both the short and long term to provide replacements and to ensure that the moderating function was effectively discharged.

Monitoring and responding to moderation output

66 External moderators visit normally at the middle and end points of the academic session, being required to provide reports on each visit. CAVA has introduced a standard reporting template which includes sections on meetings and arrangements, assessment and curriculum, structure and content, general observations, and issues which need addressing. While there are inevitable differences in the individual reporting styles of moderators, it was evident that this standardisation provided an increased opportunity for CAVA to monitor the courses and their standards in a consistent and comparable manner.

67 In addition, CAVA requires an annual report from all courses, which enables course teams to monitor the continued effectiveness of provision. These reports also provide the vehicle by which CAVA can evaluate and report upon its courses to the QAA. The annual course report is made up of two forms, principally statistical in content, which provide information on both the course and progression from it. Although opportunities are provided within the course report format for

narrative and commentary, course leaders are not required to complete these sections, and they are infrequently used. The emphasis on analysis and action in the annual process of course monitoring usually falls to the external moderators' reports. CAVA considered that this concentration on moderators' reports was appropriate, in that it was moderators who were required to follow up action and in that sense they are perceived as the 'first line'. Equally, the AVA is aware of the heavy demands already put on Access course leaders, who normally have to report into their own institutions annually, and who might find further reporting requirements imposed on them by CAVA burdensome. In its further development of procedures to monitor the Access provision for which it has quality assurance responsibilities, the AVA may wish to consider how it might be able to make use of reports produced by course leaders to satisfy internal quality assurance procedures in its own processes of course monitoring.

68 The Quality Assurance Committee meets in the autumn to read and comment on moderators' reports and their associated annual course reports. All reports are read by at least two committee members, reported on orally, and recorded on a reader's cover sheet. The CAVA *Handbook* notes that 'issues of concern are raised with the providing institutions and are brought to the attention of the Council through a synoptic report'. More specifically, the CAVA Quality Assurance and Executive Officer writes to the course leader and/or external moderator, or if necessary institutional managers, about any concerns or examples of excellence which have been identified at the meeting. Both the letters and the responses are studied by the Quality Assurance Committee to ensure that any stated actions are being pursued and are 'adequate, sufficient and timely' in rectifying any problem areas.

69 As noted above (see paragraph 20), the Quality Assurance Committee was established in 2001 because of a concern that the volume of business needing to be considered by Council had, with expansion, become too great. A particular concern was that there was an emerging danger of simply 'rubber-stamping' reports, and the establishment of the Quality Assurance Committee had been perceived as a vehicle for more effectively managing, and reflecting on, the reports, and for identifying cross-course issues.

70 There was evidence that those aims had been partially achieved. Notably, the Committee was able to draw out two major issues, those of internal verification and external moderating, where the reports produced evidence of the need for further general action across the AVA. Though it was unclear whether these were new issues, or simply that it had become easier to identify them, the review team considered that there had been an

improvement in the ability of CAVA to maintain an oversight of its activities and to act accordingly. Minutes of the Committee's meeting in November 2001 showed that individual courses were treated in some detail, actions in some cases identified and then followed up at the next meeting of the Committee in March 2002. The team was able to concur with the CAVA's view that these changes to procedures had strengthened the capacity of the AVA to monitor its activities across the range of members, as well as discharge its responsibilities in relation to individual courses.

71 It was evident, however, that further development of the system is required. In its consideration of moderator and annual course reports, specific actions were sometimes identified by the Quality Assurance Committee. However, in looking at the original source documentation and, in particular, the moderators' reports, it was not clear to the review team on what basis, and how systematically, concerns were identified and action required. Some issues raised by moderators in their reports were not specifically identified as requiring action by the Committee and there was little consistency in the relationship of the issues raised by moderators to actions required by the Committee.

72 While there was some evidence that moderators checked during return visits on actions taken by providers in response to previous reports, and these would include actions not specifically identified by the Quality Assurance Committee, there was a lack of clarity about where responsibility lay for ensuring that action was taken or how the various component parts of the new reporting structure were made coherent, coordinated and easily transparent to CAVA and its Quality Assurance Committee. This reduced, in the review team's view, the effectiveness of the recent structural changes. The AVA should, therefore, as a condition of licence, continue to develop and enhance the framework for moderation such that it is able to identify, act on, and monitor all issues identified by the moderators and thus to ensure consistency of standards and further the enhancement of quality.

The award of the Access to HE certificate

73 The duties of moderators include the review of student performance through sampling according to guidelines issued by CAVA. Moderators must also be present at all meetings of assessment or examining boards where recommendations for awards are considered and made. The award of an Access to HE certificate cannot be made without the countersignature of the moderator. The actual process by which the achievement of learners is checked against the components necessary for an award is the responsibility of the providing institution and does not form part of moderators' formal duties, although they

are required to monitor the internal moderation procedures established by the provider.

The issue of Access to HE certificates

74 CAVA creates a register of all learners from the registration returns made in November of each year. In the following May, providers are asked to inform the AVA which of these learners are not expected to qualify for an Access award. The AVA then prepares certificates for all other students. These certificates, signed by the Quality Assurance and Executive Officer, are sent to the provider for signature by the moderator and the course leader. Certificates for learners who do not eventually qualify for an award are returned to CAVA.

75 The review team was concerned by this process for the issue of certificates, which appeared to work on a 'default' mechanism and involved the dispatch of signed certificates from the awarding body with no confirmation that an award had been recommended for the learners involved. In the view of the team, the risks of such a system were amply demonstrated in 2000 by the award by one provider of two Access to HE certificates to learners who had not followed an approved course and where there had been no external moderator present.

76 CAVA is asked to consider a process in which the final signature and the subsequent issue of the certificate is undertaken by the AVA itself following confirmed recommendations from its moderators resulting from meeting of award or examining boards. It may also wish to reflect on whether the authoritative signature on the certificate should be that of the Chair of the CAVA Council. The AVA is thus required to amend the process for the issue of Access to HE certificates to ensure its absolute security.

77 While the review team found the moderation process itself to be clearly described and essentially sound, it agreed that, in order to meet the licensing criteria under Principle 6 in full, the AVA would need to improve the induction and training of moderators and amend the process for the monitoring of moderation outcomes. In addition, the flaw in the procedure for certification described above should be attended to as a matter of urgency in order to protect the security of the award of Access to HE certificates.

Principle 7

The organisation is underpinned by structures and processes which enable it to review, evaluate and develop the Access to HE provision for which it has responsibility.

Monitoring the quality of Access programmes

78 The emphasis within CAVA's annual reporting exercise is on the statistical information provided by providing institutions and, crucially, the reports of moderators (see paragraphs 66-67, above). The evidence collected by the review team suggests that the AVA has engaged in the review of certain of its activities and is currently reviewing some of its procedures to make them more effective. The establishment of a Quality Assurance Committee has provided an opportunity to strengthen its review procedures. It has also confronted the AVA, traditionally reluctant to over-formalise its procedures and to impose too much standardisation on its members, with the challenge of pro-actively utilising the new structures to make them more effective in ensuring consistency and comparability of standards across members and their courses. In seeking to maximise this effectiveness, there are undoubted potential opportunities to strengthen and broaden the work of the perhaps currently misnamed Quality Assurance Committee in terms of how CAVA discharges its responsibilities for reviewing, evaluating and developing the provision for which it has responsibility.

The revalidation of Access programmes

79 According to the *CAVA Handbook*, revalidation takes place when a course has run through the normal three years of approval granted for a new course. The procedures for revalidation, designed 'to encourage the planned development of Access courses and based on the operation of the course to date', are similar to those for validation with one significant exception. Incorporated into the proposal document must be a 'thorough analytical and evaluative review of the course, assessing the extent to which the aims and objectives of the course have been achieved and detailing all the changes already made or proposed'. If successfully revalidated, a further four years of approval will normally be given to a course. In looking at the evidence, the review team was able to concur with the conclusion reached by CAVA in its account, namely that the AVA 'has developed vigorous and effective procedures for the process of revalidation.'

Conclusions

80 The Cambridge Access Validating Agency (CAVA), while based in Cambridge itself, serves Access to HE providers across a large area of eastern England, including parts of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and

Suffolk, and has higher education members in Cambridge and Norwich. Since 1999, its membership has grown markedly, in part because of the closure of a neighbouring AVA, and, as a result, it has moved from being one of the smallest AVAs, which had concerns about its own viability, to being a medium-sized AVA in terms of both numbers of programmes and students.

81 The AVA has accommodated this growth without radical alteration to its well-established modus operandi, although it has recently revised certain of its structures and procedures. In 2001, it was established as a company limited by guarantee and, in the same year, it developed a new committee structure to lighten the increasing burden on those responsible for the governance of the AVA and the quality assurance of its approved Access programmes. This extended structure appears to have improved the AVA's ability to manage and regulate its activities, but some adjustments to the AVA's sub-committees will be needed to ensure that they can be fully effective. Although the AVA is already committed to reviewing this new structure to guard against creating inefficiencies and unnecessarily adding to the workload of those involved, there are more critical issues, such as clarity of remits and details of membership, which need to be included in a review of these structures in order to secure the sound management and governance of the AVA.

82 CAVA has chosen to operate a deliberately non-bureaucratic regime and is anxious to maintain a 'lightness of touch' in its relationship with providers, which it regards as an essential element of its ethos. While the desire to maintain practices and structures which have worked well in the past is entirely understandable, the AVA will need to give further consideration to the operational requirements of the larger organisation it has become. Any review of the AVA's operation will also need to take account of the more extended and specific responsibilities of a licensed AVA, now defined within the *Principles and Criteria for the Licensing of Authorised Validating Agencies*. The licensing criteria stipulate, for example, that an AVA should plan effectively and strategically in pursuance of its aims. CAVA, perceiving itself as an essentially responsive organisation, has not yet developed clear mechanisms in this regard. While this approach has not necessarily disadvantaged its members, neither has it enabled the AVA to make significant strides towards meeting its aims in relation, for example, to developing and encouraging relationships and arrangements which facilitate progression to higher education.

83 The AVA's constitutional independence is protected by its company status, and a service level agreement (in preparation at the time of the review) with its host institution should provide a greater

measure of security for the AVA and contribute to its capacity to plan effectively. The host institution provides a generous level of support in kind to the AVA, which enables CAVA to maintain an office base from which it can manage its processes for the quality assurance of Access to HE provision. While there is no reason to doubt the host's commitment to the AVA, the low level of the AVA's own financial reserves, and the absence of contingency plans, would place the AVA in a vulnerable position should the host need to bring current arrangements to an end. However, the AVA could also be destabilised by a much less severe change, such as a relatively small drop in Access recruitment or transfer of providers to another AVA. In recent years, the AVA has responded to such fluctuations by adjusting the chief officer's hours each year according to the income generated by the AVA's business. Given the AVA's low staffing base, this practice constitutes a real threat to the continuity and quality of service that the AVA is able to offer. The weakness of the AVA's financial position is exacerbated by what, to date, has been a weakness in financial planning. These limitations contribute to an uncertainty about the security of the AVA's continued effective operation, and place constraints on its ability to engage in meaningful strategic planning and development.

84 CAVA has an appropriate framework for the quality assurance of Access provision which, for the most part, works effectively to validate, monitor and review Access programmes. Over recent years, these procedures have become more formalised and better documented, providing more fully developed and reliable mechanisms for quality assurance. Since the last review, CAVA has attempted to provide greater external involvement in its work. While the AVA has been able to involve some individuals who are external to the AVA in its various processes, the continued smooth running of the AVA's key quality assurance procedures can largely be attributed to the long-term commitment and experience of representatives from its core membership. The readiness of individuals to be involved in the work of the AVA, and their experience and thorough background knowledge, developed over a number of years, provides the AVA with a strength and continuity at its core. However, the weight of responsibility falls on relatively few shoulders and, to avoid becoming a closed circle, and for the sake of the general health of the organisation, the AVA will need to explore ways in which it can encourage the involvement of others, especially those who may have particular expertise to offer. It may be less the involvement of those external to the AVA that is required than the involvement of a wider range of representatives from within the AVA's members, both from higher and further education members.

85 With separate Quality Assurance and Financial

Planning and Development Committees now in place, the AVA will be better able to review and monitor all aspects of its operation. In so doing, it will need to be mindful of its function and formal position as an awarding body, and consider how best to manage the responsibilities that derive from that status within the context of the requirements of the AVA licensing criteria.

The AVA licence

Review outcome

86 The Cambridge Access Validating Agency is awarded a **provisional** renewal of its AVA licence, with conditions stipulated below to be addressed by the dates specified. The AVA will be revisited in **June 2003**.

Conditions

87 The CAVA licence is provisionally renewed on condition that the AVA:

- i produces a consolidated statement which describes the process for admitting organisations into membership, to include the criteria and conditions of membership, and the rights and responsibilities of members (paragraphs 15-16);
- ii reviews its constitutional arrangements and governance structures to ensure that:
 - a) sub-committees of Council have formal remits, and that details of membership, quoracy, reporting lines and frequency of meetings are specified; and that
 - b) the role of staff of the AVA at meetings is clarified (paragraphs 23-25);
- iii establishes a formal agreement with Anglia Polytechnic University in respect of the provision of services (paragraph 28);
- iv establishes clear and systematic processes for strategic planning which take account of data collected by the AVA and which include:
 - a) the development of an annual action plan approved by Council, which is regularly monitored and reviewed, and which helps the AVA to ensure that it is achieving its aims (paragraphs 30-33);
 - b) the introduction of systematic financial planning to ensure the longer term security and viability of the organisation (paragraphs 34-36);
- v reviews the current and medium-term requirements for professional and administrative staff in order to establish the baseline needs of the organisation to ensure that it can meet its obligations as a licensed AVA (paragraphs 37-38);

- vi ensures that closer guidance is given on the ways in which Access provision is described in promotional literature and establishes a mechanism to monitor this (paragraph 42);
- vii establishes and implements an approved equal opportunities policy in relation to its own activities as an organisation (paragraph 43);
- viii puts in place procedures to cover:
 - a) grievances and complaints lodged by its employed staff;
 - b) complaints and appeals lodged by members in respect of the AVA's decisions;
 - c) its role as an awarding body in respect of academic and academic-related appeals lodged by students registered for programmes validated by the AVA (paragraphs 44-45);
- ix implements a procedure for monitoring and assessing the continuing quality and effectiveness of its management and operation, including consideration of potential risks to its operation, and mechanisms to ensure that appropriate action is taken (paragraphs 46-47);
- x introduces a formal system and provides appropriate support for the development of new programmes, including both further and higher education members (paragraph 51);
- xi reviews the process by which moderators are inducted and trained, with a view to ensuring that all moderators are fully prepared to undertake their duties and enhancing the effectiveness of the moderation system (paragraph 64);
- xii continues to develop and enhance the framework for moderation, such that the AVA is able to identify, act on and monitor all issues identified by moderators, and thereby ensure consistency of standards and enable the enhancement of quality to take place (paragraphs 71-72);
- xiii amends the process for the issue of Access to HE certificates to ensure its security (paragraphs 74-76).
- ii consider ways in which it could enhance its communications with admissions tutors from receiving higher education institutions (paragraph 41);
- iii periodically audits the membership of panels to ensure that the criteria identified are being fully met (paragraph 52);
- iv explore ways in which the credit framework might be utilised as part of a move to ensuring consistency of validation panel judgement (paragraph 55);
- v expands its definition of its credit framework to demonstrate its use of nationally-recognised principles of credit development and award, and the compatibility it offers with credit awarded elsewhere (paragraph 55);
- vi carefully monitors internal moderation procedures to support the moderating procedure and ensure effective compliance (paragraph 60);
- vii explores ways in which it might extend the range of its moderator cohort (paragraph 62);
- viii develops its course reporting requirements to make use of reports which are produced by course leaders to satisfy providers' internal quality assurance procedures (paragraph 67).

Conditions to be met by 31 May 2003

Recommendations

- 88 The review team recommends that the AVA:
- i considers whether its service to, and support of, Access provision in the region might benefit from the expansion of its membership to a broader range of organisations from the voluntary, community, and private sectors (paragraph 14);

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.