

Access to Higher Education

Hampshire Authorised
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 (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 (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.

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 Hampshire Authorised Validating Agency (HAVA). QAA is grateful to HAVA and to those who participated in the review for the willing cooperation provided to the team.

The review process

5 The review was conducted in accordance with the process detailed in the *Recognition Scheme*. The preparation for the event included an initial meeting between HAVA 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 HAVA 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 HAVA to finalise other arrangements for the review.

6 The review visit took place from 13 to 15 February 2007. The visit to HAVA consisted principally of meetings with representatives of HAVA, including AVA officers, members of the Management Committee, the Quality Assurance Committee, the Business and Planning Committee, the Development Committee and the Staff Development Committee, moderators, and local and regional stakeholders.

7 The review team comprised Dr Dawn Edwards, Director, Research, Scholarship and Learning (St Mary's University College, Twickenham); Professor Nicholas Goddard, formerly Associate Dean and Head of Social Sciences, (Anglia Ruskin University); Harvey Woolf, formerly Head of Academic Standards (University of Wolverhampton), member of the ARLC and Lead Reviewer. The review was coordinated for QAA by Matthew Cott, Assistant Director.

The AVA context

Background and developments since the previous AVA review

8 HAVA was formed in 1983 by three further education (FE) colleges and the then Portsmouth Polytechnic, now the University of Portsmouth. It was granted Higher Education Quality Council approval in 1993 and subsequently licensed by QAA as an AVA in 1993 to validate Access to HE programmes in Hampshire, West Sussex and Wiltshire. Following rejection by QAA in 2001 of a proposal to merge with the Wessex Access Federation, HAVA decided to remain a separate organisation and to maintain its status as an unincorporated association.

9 The previous review of the AVA, conducted by QAA in September 2002, resulted in a conditional renewal of the AVA's licence with a number of conditions which were met, and the licence was confirmed in July 2003. Although the Overview for the current review did not explicitly record the AVA's response to issues raised in the previous QAA review report, the majority of these have either been addressed or overtaken by subsequent events.

10 The period since the previous review has been one of consolidation for the AVA. Developments have included the appointment of centre moderators to provide a broad external and objective overview of provision at individual centres, the development of the HAVA website and work on the implementation of the new credit structure.

Members and provision

11 Membership of HAVA comprises 13 FE centres delivering Access to HE courses, 10 of which deliver the standard HAVA scheme, and four HE institutions (HEIs) receiving Access to HE learners. In addition to the standard scheme, a bank of 34 subject modules of which learners study a combination of four, HAVA offers stand alone programmes in art and design, and science. These are designed to link learners to specific HE destinations. No new stand alone programmes have been brought forward since the previous review.

AVA statistics 2005-06

Providers offering Access to HE programmes	13
Access to HE programmes available	15
Access to HE programmes running	15
Access to HE learner registrations	741
Access to HE certificates awarded	361

12 Two centres have left the scheme and one new one has joined in recent years. The current 13 providers consist of four sixth form colleges, eight FE colleges and one university. The number of Access to HE programmes running has remained constant for the past three years with the majority being combined/general modular programmes, one physical sciences programme and three creative art and design programmes.

13 There has been a steady increase in registrations over the years reviewed, with 2005-06 registrations being 14 per cent greater than those in 2001-02. The ratio of part to full-time learners has remained constant over the period being in the region of 50 per cent, as has the percentage of females in each cohort, ranging between 74 to 77 per cent. Retention has declined slightly to 70 per cent in 2005-06 with the art and design stand alone courses having the highest retention rates.

14 Of the learners that completed the course, the percentage successfully achieving a Pass has consistently remained between 95 and 97 per cent. Learners have progressed to a wide range of HEIs located across the UK, although at least 60 per cent each year progress to local HEIs.

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

Purposes, legal identity, membership and constitutional arrangements

15 According to its mission statement, 'HAVA is committed to developing, maintaining and expanding learning opportunities and progression to Higher Education for adults especially those belonging to sectors of the community hitherto under-represented in Higher Education'. To realise its mission, HAVA validates only Access to HE courses; it does not concern itself with any other qualifications or awards. All the AVA's structures, activities and resources have been developed and deployed to allow it to achieve the purposes set out in its mission. The review team found abundant evidence of this commitment to Access to HE through its meetings with HAVA members and its reading of the AVA's documentation.

16 The AVA's representatives who met the review team were of the view that the mission statement was in itself a sufficient account of the AVA's purposes and goals and, thus, did not require the articulation of more specific strategic aims and priorities to shape the development of the AVA or to inform its rolling strategic plan (see below paragraphs 30 to 32). For example, there appeared to be no explicit strategic statement of how the AVA intends to satisfy the new licensing criteria relating to the AVA's regional role. The impact of this is considered below in paragraph 34.

17 HAVA is an unincorporated association. Voting membership is open to any institution or organisation that delivers its validated Access to HE programmes and to any regional HEIs that receive its Access to HE learners. Members sign a memorandum of agreement with the AVA specifying their respective obligations to each other. Membership arrangements and all other

formal statements about the AVA's functions and structures are included in the clearly written Constitution, which is widely available to all members in the well-produced paper guides and manuals as well as on the AVA's easily navigable website.

18 The AVA allows for attendance at the Management Committee, the AVA's governing body, representatives from organisations in the region involved with adult learning. This arrangement addressed a recommendation from the previous QAA review. However, these representatives are not permitted voting rights and, apart from a brief period when a local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) representative agreed to participate, the AVA has been unable to obtain representation from such organisations. The present review team formed the view that the non-voting status could be seen to devalue the potential contribution that such representatives could make to the development of HAVA. From its discussions with HAVA representatives the team concluded that the AVA should reconsider the role and status of these other organisations in the work of the AVA and its committees so that it could draw on the widest possible pool of expertise on all Access to HE-related matters (see also paragraphs 27 to 29 below).

19 The Constitution is designed to ensure that no one stakeholder, or minority of stakeholders, can exercise undue influence on the AVA's formal committee structure. At present the University of Portsmouth has three members on the Management Committee, one as a receiving HEI and two as a consequence of the University delivering two Access to HE courses. However, this triple membership does not appear to create any difficulties for the impartial functioning of the AVA. The review team noted that HAVA is widening the base of its moderators and curriculum working party (CWP) chairs (see below paragraph 46) and members to involve more staff from HEIs other than the University of Portsmouth, whose staff play an important role in all aspects of the AVA's work. The team welcomes this development, not least as a means of ensuring

that no stakeholder or group of stakeholders could be in a position to exert undue influence informally on the AVA.

20 The independence of the AVA from the University of Portsmouth, which provides office space and equipment for the Senior Officer in University House free of charge as part of its contribution to widening participation, is underwritten by a carefully worded contract with the University that specifies the AVA's obligations to the University. The AVA makes appropriate use of legal advice, has limited the liability of its members, and has its accounts externally and professionally audited. The Constitution is explicit about the AVA's capacity to hire and dismiss staff; to secure the supply of goods and services; and that it is neither a provider of Access to HE programmes nor a receiver of Access to HE learners.

Governance structures

21 The Constitution states that 'HAVA functions through the work of its Management Committee which has final responsibility for governance and management on behalf of its members' and through the four subcommittees: the Quality Assurance Committee; Business and Planning Committee; Staff Development Committee; and Development Committee. The Management Committee can delegate operational decisions to its subcommittees, which report directly to the Management Committee. However, it is the Management Committee that is responsible for governance and management and for all policy and strategic decisions. It is, therefore, through the Management Committee that the AVA dispenses its responsibility to identify clearly the locus of authority for AVA responsibilities within its governance structures and all the specific requirements that follow from this.

22 As noted above, HAVA draws a distinction between member organisations that are entitled to voting membership of the Management Committee, and non-voting members of the Management Committee who are representatives of other organisations or are individuals who hold particular responsibilities

in HAVA. The latter category includes two senior moderators who also sit on the Examination Board (see below paragraph 78), the Development Consultant, and the Development Officer. In addition, non-voting Access to HE practitioners with specialist knowledge or experience may be co-opted to the Committee from time to time. In its reading of the Management Committee minutes the review team did not identify any co-option of practitioners, and the AVA may wish to consider how this facility might be utilised to a greater extent. The Management Committee has two other voting members: the treasurer, if not already a member, and the external adviser/assessor. The rationale for according voting rights to the external adviser was not clear to the review team. The AVA may wish to review this.

23 Each delivering and receiving member (recently renamed affiliated centres and affiliated HEIs) is entitled to nominate one representative to the Management Committee. Delivering members are represented by a centre's Access to HE programme coordinator. While there is a clear expectation that delivering members will send their programme coordinator to the Management Committee, there is no parallel expectation of the type of HE representative that the AVA would expect on the Management Committee. The current HE representatives are a Head of School who has a particular involvement in widening participation; the Outreach Coordinator based in the University's Quality Assurance Unit; the Head of Widening Participation; and a senior lecturer in a school that offers part-time degrees. One HE representative had been unable to attend any Management Committee meetings for a year and had not been able to find a proxy, as allowed for in the memorandum of agreement. The AVA may wish to publicise its rules relating to non-attendance at committees more widely so that all members are aware of the implications of missing consecutive meetings. The HE representatives who met with the review team underlined their institutions' commitment to the AVA. From the discussions in meetings and

its reading of the documentation, the team concluded that it would help HEIs in making their nominations to the Management Committee if the AVA were to make more explicit the experience, types of skills and expertise that it wishes HE representatives to bring to the Committee.

24 Roles, remits, limits of authority and membership of the four subcommittees are explicitly delineated in the Constitution. With the exception of one member of the Development Committee, all committee members are drawn from the Management Committee, HAVA moderators and the CWPs. The Development Committee membership specification includes a senior manager from FE. Although a nominee had been identified at the time of the review visit, he was yet to be appointed to the Committee.

25 The terms of office of the Chair, Deputy Chair, Treasurer and Chair of the Examination Board are limited by the Constitution. There is no corresponding limitation on the length of time committee members can serve. AVA representatives assured the review team that promotions, changes of role and retirements ensured that there was a regular turnover in the membership of all the committees. The AVA may wish to consider specifying periods of membership for all its committees so that renewal of committee membership is built into its governance structures.

26 The review team was informed that HAVA is committed to its current model of governance because it ensures that the AVA is run and therefore owned by Access to HE practitioners, supported by the expertise of its HE representatives. At each of its meetings the team was presented with direct evidence of the committee members' enthusiasm for and experience of Access to HE. It was very apparent to the team that Management Committee members are extremely supportive of, and firmly committed to, their Management Committee work, as are the members' institutions. Access to HE programme coordinators, for example, are often given a timetable allowance to attend meetings. The

Management Committee provides a valuable forum for the exploration and resolution of current Access to HE issues, such as the implications for programmes of the age discrimination legislation or strategies for improving retention.

27 While recognising the strengths of the Management Committee's approach, it was difficult for the review team to confirm that the Management Committee collectively possessed the range of expertise and skills necessary to accomplish all the tasks entailed in the Management Committee's wide-ranging terms of reference. The team concluded that the present combination of management, operational and strategic requirements included in the remit needed to be reviewed to ensure that HAVA is in a position to meet the local, regional and national challenges of the next five years. For example, the AVA should consider whether to separate the strategic and management functions currently demanded of the Management Committee and allocate each of these sets of activities to a different committee, one of which would be responsible for the strategic direction of the AVA. This reallocation of responsibilities could help to clarify the mix of skills required to undertake the different governance functions in the AVA. Such a review would build on the very valuable work of current and former Management Committee officers and members. A revised governance structure, which included senior and appropriately experienced personnel from a range of existing members and new organisations, would recognise more fully that the AVA is operating in a different context from five years ago and help the AVA to promote Access to HE more widely in the region.

28 It is, therefore, a condition of licence that HAVA reviews the role, remit and membership categories of the AVA's governing body, so that its constitutional structure includes a sufficient and appropriate spread of experience, expertise, seniority and representation from among its voting and non-voting members. In meeting this condition, the AVA should also review the criteria for the election of FE, HE and

other representatives to the AVA's decision-making bodies.

29 It would follow from any revisions to the Management Committee that the roles, remits and membership of the various subcommittees will have to be reviewed to take into account any changes in the Management Committee's terms of references and to allow the AVA to make the most effective use of the talents of its members. It is, thus, also a condition of licence that the AVA reviews the role, remit and membership of its subcommittee structures, paying particular attention to the functions of business planning and development.

Principle 2

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

Strategic planning

30 The Overview stated that it was the responsibility of the Business and Planning Committee to regularly review and update the AVA's strategic plan, considered by both the Development and Quality Assurance Committee, and finally approved by the Management Committee. The rolling strategic plan 2005 to 2008 was included as an appendix to the Overview and consisted of a series of objectives with action points, responsibilities, timescales and monitoring clearly identified.

31 In the course of its discussions with HAVA committee members and other stakeholders, the review team explored the nature of the AVA's strategic planning process at some length. It was told that the original plan came out of the previous QAA review and that the 'rolling' nature of it was essentially a series of actions to be achieved and was not seen in terms of a three-year cycle, but rather a continuous programme to achieve the HAVA remit of good quality Access to HE provision. The team found that the Management Committee, which has ultimate responsibility for strategic planning, does not produce a

report other than that prepared for QAA purposes. The AVA representatives recognised that there was a need for more evaluation of the AVA's strategic direction.

32 In terms of HAVA's regional strategy the review team found that no specific targets were set for the expansion of membership or student numbers. Moderators had been asked to explore opportunities for extending provision at centre level with limited success, but the team learnt that the recently appointed Management Liaison Officer would have as his brief the establishment of regional links with emphasis on South Hampshire. The team was told that HAVA had looked at centres where Access to HE was not currently delivered but had not pursued an aggressive approach to expansion.

33 The review team found that the Management Committee provided the main forum for members' views to be expressed. The team also found that Access to HE programme coordinators were the main means of communication with receivers and this was largely at middle management level.

34 On the basis of its meetings, the review team formed the view that it would be necessary for HAVA to strengthen its strategic planning process to enable it to engage in the regional agenda more prominently, although it also recognised the potential of the new post of Management Liaison Officer to establish proactive liaison with current and future stakeholders at a senior level. The team additionally concluded that a widening of the categories of membership of the AVA's committees, to extend it beyond its current predominately practitioner base, would be desirable in order that the views of receivers of Access to HE students and other stakeholders could inform the strategic planning process more effectively.

Management effectiveness

35 The AVA carried out a review of its organisational structure during the process of self-evaluation leading to the Overview. The review team explored the mechanisms in place

to monitor and assess the continuing quality and effectiveness of its management and operation. The team found that, technically, ultimate responsibility for the AVA's management and operation lay with the Chair of the Management Committee, termed 'the Senior Administration Officer'. In a meeting with the AVA representatives, the team heard that this term was recognised as an anomaly and all such references were to be deleted from its documentation. The Chair is elected by its members, although the view was expressed to the team that HAVA operated through the exercise of collective responsibility by the Management Committee. In practice, the team found that much of the day-to-day business of the AVA was conducted by the Senior Officer, whose role the team considered to be discharged with exemplary efficiency and professionalism, although it was made clear that major decisions would only be taken in consultation with the Management Committee Chair. The team formed the view that this implicitly understood mode of operation should be made more explicit. It is therefore a condition of licence that the AVA, within its constitution, makes a clear statement of where responsibility for the leadership and day-to-day management of the AVA is located. This information should be included within the relevant AVA documentation.

36 HAVA has a small permanent staff base with much responsibility falling on the Senior Officer who is on a fractional appointment. The review team was reassured that the workload associated with this post was adequately monitored via the formal annual appraisal process conducted by the Chair of the Management Committee. The team ascertained that induction arrangements for validation chairs and panel members were essentially informal. The team recommends that the AVA formalises the induction arrangements for validation chairs and panel members and develops its arrangements for identifying and, in the light of this identification, meeting the training and development needs of its officers, including those appointed on an elected basis.

37 The review team found that the AVA makes adequate use of statistical and other data to review its performance and keeps explicit records to monitor the achievement of its objectives as set out in its rolling plan. The team was informed of the progress of the new data management system which had fully met the AVA's expectations.

38 The review team was provided with a clear statement of the membership and terms of reference of the AVA's committees and Examination Board. The team formed the view, however, that there was no formal mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of the committees. The team considered that such a mechanism might have indicated to the AVA the need for a greater breadth of expertise, externality and seniority among committee membership. In reviewing its committee structure, the AVA will wish to give attention to mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of their operation.

39 The review team was satisfied that the AVA met the licensing criteria with regard to its structures for collection, recording and holding of data about Access to HE programmes and students, and the annual report to QAA contains commentary on learner profiles, completion, achievement and destinations.

40 In its reading of the available documentation, the review team confirmed that committee and board minutes are produced to an appropriate, professional standard although, in the case of the Business and Planning Committee, they were found to be extremely brief.

Financial regulation

41 The Business and Planning Committee has important responsibilities in relation to HAVA's financial matters. The review team found that, on the whole, these were dealt with in an appropriate manner and that the externally audited annual accounts met in full the requirements of the annual report to QAA. Through its meetings with AVA representatives and its scrutiny of documentation, the team

found that processes in relation to the forward planning in the AVA's financial management were not entirely clear, neither were the processes for financial decision-making. The team formed the view that the AVA's approach to the management of its financial affairs could be strengthened. The AVA will need to make more explicit in its operational procedures a number of organisational matters in relation to its financial management in order to be able to demonstrate clearly that it continues to meet the licensing criteria which relate to the organisation of the AVA, including the requirement that it has forward planning in its financial management and clear processes and systems through which it controls and monitors financial decision-making.

42 A distinctive feature of HAVA's financial management concerns the role of treasurer who is elected from the Management Committee for a period of three years, but eligible for re-election after the expiry of the term. The terms of reference for this post include management of HAVA's funds, discharge of tasks identified by the Management Committee and Business and Planning Committee, payment of authorised expenditure, and preparation of accounts. The review team explored the commitment involved in the efficient exercise of these important responsibilities and was assured that the workload was less onerous than appeared from the post's remit. The team found that the present financial management approach operated by HAVA is adequate, but had reservations about whether this would be the most efficient way to operate in the future. The team considered that the changing context could bring with it greater complexity and demands on such a role. In considering its financial management arrangements, the team therefore recommends that the AVA reviews the continuing appropriateness of having an elected treasurer rather than a designated administrative officer.

Communication

43 Following the previous QAA review, HAVA established a Coordinator Manual which is now

updated annually and informs providers of all regulatory matters relating to the design, delivery, and management of Access to HE programmes. An informative and helpful website has also been developed which posts a calendar of events as well as information for new tutors and a newsletter. From its discussions with subject and centre moderators, the review team concluded that their communications with the AVA worked well, with the Senior Officer being highly accessible and HAVA offering prompt responses to queries. The team's meeting with members of the CWP's and local and regional stakeholders similarly confirmed that lines of communication were generally good, although mechanisms for feeding views back to HAVA, and into the strategic plan, were perceived by the representatives as being open to improvement.

44 The review team was informed that senior moderators were now given an explicit role in verifying the accuracy of providers' promotional literature and the team confirmed that information and guidance issued to students was effectively monitored.

45 The AVA has an equal opportunities policy that operates effectively. The AVA expects that any learner complaints and appeals are dealt with through centres' own procedures in the first instance; HAVA's procedures are dealt with in its Procedural Guide and were clarified and revised as a result of the self-assessment leading to the Overview.

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

Support for initial and ongoing programme development

46 HAVA provides a high degree of support for initial and ongoing programme

development to centres through the work of the Quality Assurance Committee, CWPs and centre and subject moderators. CWPs are responsible for the design, assessment and quality assurance of subject modules or cognate groups of subjects. They comprise a subject specialist from each centre together with a subject moderator, providing a strong body of expertise and experience about what is required for the successful design and development of modules as well as input from HE. Consultation with HE occurs through subject moderators within CWPs, and CWP chairs, a number of whom are from HEIs.

Validation of centres

47 The processes and criteria for the validation of new centres and the granting of formal approval are explained in the AVA's detailed *Procedural Guide and Validation and Review of Centre Guidelines* which are updated annually and available on HAVA's website. These help to ensure a comparability of student experience across centres, adding a further layer of coherence to the student experience in addition to that provided by the sharing of common subject modules within the HAVA Scheme. This is further strengthened by common requirements in relation to the policies and procedures and structure of each course.

48 The guidelines for both validation and periodic review (see below paragraph 58) are combined and this makes it difficult to ascertain which processes occur in which activity. The AVA recognises this and plans to develop separate guidelines for initial programme approval and revalidation; a development that the review team supports. HAVA also acknowledges that its guidance does not include a statement that QAA recognition may be given only to programmes which are delivered in the UK, as required by the licensing criteria. It is therefore a condition of licence that the AVA updates its validation documentation to include this statement.

49 New centres wishing to develop a programme liaise with a member of HAVA and

are invited to discuss initial proposals with the Management Committee. Should the initial proposal be approved at this stage, the centre proceeds to validation.

50 The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is responsible for appointing the validation panel and its Chair, which should comprise at least four members including a member of QAC, a member from another HAVA provider, an HEI representative, and one member external to HAVA. Panel reports, prepared by the Chair, are submitted to QAC for approval. Reports are then approved and ratified by the Management Committee which makes the final decision regarding formal approval, and outcomes are reported to the head of the institution and Access to HE coordinator. It is the responsibility of QAC to monitor satisfactory outcomes of any conditions, and suspension of HAVA approval may be applied if centres fail to meet those conditions. The Chair of the panel is responsible for confirming to QAC when conditions have been met and evidence has been received that any recommendations have been considered and acted upon by the centre.

51 Since the previous QAA review, only one new centre has been approved in the HAVA scheme. This was undertaken in 2003, and since then procedures for programme validation have been updated. The review team was therefore unable to make an informed judgement on the robustness of the procedures in practice. However, the team considered that the processes, as set out for centre approval, were rigorous and appropriate to ensure the quality of provision. If operated as stated, they will ensure that Access to HE programmes delivered in each centre are considered and approved at an appropriate level within the AVA. The team was assured that the submission guidelines gave providers a level of clarity and support to enable AVA officers to make effective use of their time assisting with the development process, and for validation panels to be clear subsequently in their assessment of the fitness for purpose of the provision.

52 From its scrutiny of guidance documentation and discussions with AVA staff, the review team was assured that the process for granting formal recognition was consistent with the licensing criteria.

New subject module approval

53 For centres wishing to develop new modules, a new module specification is prepared, with the centre's tutor taking advice from an HE subject moderator and the relevant CWP. QAC considers and approves both the initial proposal and the resultant new module specification, which is forwarded to the Management Committee for final approval. For the development of modules in new disciplines, where there is no pre-existing CWP, an HE adviser is appointed by QAC to provide support and advice.

54 Each module has a detailed and comprehensive specification; the template for which is currently being reviewed by HAVA in light of implementation of the new Access to HE Diploma. Modules operate with a consistent structure across all HAVA subjects and are all made up of three units designed to enable students to progress from a formative introduction to the subject to the development of knowledge and skills necessary for preparation for study in HE. Assessment is also designed with a common structure, with consistent weightings given to the three units within each module, and common requirements for the award of the Access to HE certificate. The review team found the role of CWPs and their involvement in programme development to be a notable strength and the AVA is commended for this.

Validation of stand alone programmes

55 Validation procedures for new stand alone programmes have elements in common with those for new centre and new module validation, but also include requirements relating to course content and how the coherence of the learning experience will be achieved. In addition, at least one panel member must have expertise in the relevant

subject area. No new stand alone programmes have been brought forward since the previous QAA review.

Guidelines/policy on assessment

56 The AVA specifies in the criteria for course organisation within the *Procedural Guide and Assessment and Moderation Guidelines* the information it requires providers to give about assessment on proposed Access to HE programmes. This covers the requirements for the award of the Access to HE qualification, weightings of units within a module, assessment modes and procedures for marking and moderation. The criteria also state that explicit assessment criteria and marking guidelines must be included in the learner handbook; this was confirmed by the review team. The AVA has clear guidelines relating to assessment and generic assessment criteria which are provided to students in their handbooks. Through meetings with staff, the team confirmed that staff are fully aware of assessment policies and procedures and that these are applied in a rigorous and robust manner in centres.

57 In addition to the above areas that are stipulated as requirements in the submission process, the AVA provides specific policy guidance documents for the Accreditation of Prior Learning.

Revalidation procedures

58 HAVA operates a policy of quinquennial review of centres which follows the same process as that for validation, with the exception that periodic review also contains an evaluation of the centre's annual reports. The revalidation report is considered and approved by QAC, which is then ratified by the Management Committee. Outcomes are notified to the head of institution and the centre's Access to HE programme coordinator. Conditions set through the review process are monitored by QAC.

59 Guidance for revalidation is contained within the *Procedural Guide and Validation and Review of Centre Guidelines*, supplemented by

details of the criteria against which panel members should make a judgement. As noted previously, the review team formed the view that processes would be clearer if the validation and review guidance were separated and HAVA agreed with this view. HAVA also acknowledged the need for a briefing pack specifically for panel members to include possible outcomes of the revalidation process. The team suggests that HAVA addresses this to ensure both panel members and chairs are made fully aware of their role and responsibility. The team, in its scrutiny of revalidation documentation, also noted that panel membership did not always include a QAC member as stated in the guidelines. However, the team was assured that HAVA would address this in future events.

60 Having scrutinised the panel reports available and spoken with AVA staff, the review team was assured that the AVA's revalidation process and procedures were as robust as those for initial validation, and consistent with the licensing criteria.

Programme monitoring and review

61 The AVA has a comprehensive system of programme monitoring and review that enables it to ensure quality across its centres and parity in the students' learning opportunities. Centre coordinators, CWP chairs and subject, programme and centre moderators each submit an annual report to QAC for scrutiny.

62 The requirements for annual reporting are set out in the relevant manuals and annual calendar of events. Following the previous review, the AVA has revised the format of the annual reports to enhance the quality of its provision and robustness of procedures. QAC scrutinises and actions each report and provides feedback covering any matters of concern and good practice to the institution at senior level. A summary of key issues arising from annual reports is prepared by the Senior Officer for consideration by the Management Committee. Good practice identified in the annual reports is shared between centres through their placement on the HAVA website in a members

only section. The review team noted variations in the level of detail provided in the annual reports and a lack of evaluation of information and data provided. The AVA acknowledged that further work is required to ensure the reports are sufficiently detailed and self-evaluative and is working towards this.

63 In addition to formal annual reporting, a strength of HAVA's system of programme monitoring is that specifications of existing modules are reviewed annually by CWPs. As CWPs include HE subject moderators, the evolution of the modules reflects the changing demands of HE and developments in academic disciplines. The team found CWPs to be particularly effective in the review of provision. Any recommendations for change are subject to agreement between the CWP and the subject moderator, prior to approval by QAC and ratification by the Management Committee.

64 Having scrutinised the reports available and spoken with AVA representatives, the review team was assured that the AVA's review process and procedures are comprehensive and robust, and consistent with the licensing criteria.

Implementation of the Access to HE Diploma and credit specification

65 The AVA has a clear strategy for the implementation of the Access to HE Diploma. The new common credit structure and Access to HE Diploma will be piloted from September 2007 with full implementation in autumn 2008. HAVA intends to offer a range of modules, adopting a four-subject model for the new credit structure with students being required to take 60 credits, 45 of which will be at level 3 in seven specified pathways. Module revisions are being made by the appropriate CWP, with new module specifications being ratified by an Approvals Group appointed by QAC. Centre revalidation will commence in spring 2007 and is intended to be completed by autumn 2007. This will be a paper-based exercise with validation documents being approved by QAC.

66 From its examination of the comprehensive action plan developed by HAVA and discussions with staff, the review team is confident that HAVA will be in a position to implement fully the Access to HE Diploma from September 2008 and that its new management information system is appropriate for the needs of the Diploma.

Programme development and enhancement

67 HAVA states in its mission that it is committed to developing, maintaining and expanding learning opportunities and progression to HE for adults. It is notable, however, that since the previous review, HAVA has not expanded its provision, indeed two centres have left. Senior staff in HAVA recognised that expansion is now a priority and have therefore appointed a Management Liaison Officer to develop links with senior staff in HEIs, AimHigher, LSC and the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN), and to work with target groups including the armed services, merging colleges, and hospitals, with a view to expanding provision in the region. While the review team welcomed this appointment, it would suggest that the AVA needs to be open to other possibilities to meet its aim of maintaining its position within the region and its responsibilities for the development of Access to HE provision.

68 HAVA provides leadership in the promotion of Access to HE at a national level through its membership of the Federation of Authorised Validating Agencies (FAVA), of which HAVA has been the chair. FAVA provides a mutually supportive forum to share best practice and staff development activities and to undertake standardisation and programme development activities. HAVA's leadership at a regional level is less clear; the review team only saw limited evidence of involvement with the LSC and the LLN in the development of Access to HE.

69 Support for staff is provided through the AVA's staff development events which are planned and overseen by the Staff

Development Committee, complemented by specific activities organised by individual centres. HAVA's annual conference provides an opportunity to share good practice and discuss issues pertinent to the AVA and its operation. In its meeting with staff, the review team noted the value of this event in promoting and supporting the work of the AVA.

70 Although there has been a lack of development of HAVA's Access to HE provision in the last five years, the review team was assured that the AVA's approach to programme development and enhancement, and its plans for future expansion were consistent with the requirements of the licensing criteria.

Principle 4

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

External moderation

71 External moderation of programmes is one of the AVA's strengths. HAVA has three different types of moderator: subject, programme and centre. Subject moderators, who are predominantly drawn from HEIs, are members of a discipline-based HAVA scheme CWP and are responsible for setting and confirming standards for the scheme's subjects. The direct involvement of subject moderators with subject practitioners both assures standards and enhances the quality of the provision. Programme moderators perform a similar role to subject moderators for stand alone programmes. Centre moderators are appointed to two or more centres to oversee consistency in the delivery of programmes and of the student experience across centres, and to identify any generic matters that affect the management or operation of programmes. Centre moderators are expected to confirm that providers have taken the actions set out in a centre's annual report. Moderators further contribute to the work of the AVA through the election of two senior moderators from different HE institutions, one representing humanities and the other sciences, to QAC. The

senior moderators also attend the Management Committee as non-voting members 'to advise on matters from a HE perspective' and the Examination Board 'to consider...mitigating circumstances'. The duties of moderators are fully described in the Constitution. The moderation processes and procedures are comprehensively and informatively specified in the Moderator Manual.

72 The AVA has explicit and appropriate criteria for the appointment of subject moderators; by implication these apply to programme and centre appointees. Although some of the moderators the review team met were involved in their institutions' admissions processes in a general way, there was no evidence of any direct involvement of moderators in the recruitment and selection of the HAVA Access to HE students to the universities' courses. HAVA does not have a formal mechanism for the recruitment of moderators, such as advertising on its website for new moderators. However, it does have a variety of effective informal recruitment systems. This has resulted in the AVA having a sufficient and appropriately qualified group of moderators for all its programmes and centres.

73 Moderators are approved by the QAC. All receive a letter of appointment from the AVA and are required to agree to the terms of appointment in writing. While there is no explicit reference to the conditions under which the AVA would terminate the appointment, those conditions could be readily inferred from the wording of the letter. The review team was informed of the termination of the appointment of a moderator who had failed to meet his obligations to the AVA. The AVA recognised that it should consider revising its current appointment letter to include both termination and the prohibition of subcontracting. The AVA also acknowledged that it needs to reword the permitted period of office to meet the licensing criteria that limits tenure to normally no longer than four years.

74 The moderators who met the review team commended the compulsory induction training session which complements the moderators'

pack; the clarity and completeness of the moderation documentation; and the continuing staff development available to them. The group was complimentary about the speed with which the Senior Officer responds to queries, and about the way in which the AVA keeps all moderators informed of changes and developments. For example, the centre moderators had been briefed on the requirement placed on them from September 2006 to check the accuracy of providers' promotional material. The team was impressed by the moderators' enthusiasm and commitment to HAVA and its systems for maintaining what the moderators perceived as high academic standards.

75 CWPs provide an exemplary means of allowing the subject moderator to compare the standards of achievement of students from all the centres taking the subject. The decision to appoint the same moderator to all stand alone programmes in the same discipline safeguards the consistency of standards in these programmes. The AVA's generic and subject marking guidelines offer another mechanism for assuring consistency across providers. The Examination Board has recently started to review the statistical data on student performance prepared by the external adviser and noted that there is little variation in the mean marks achieved in each subject. Moderators are clear about their reporting responsibilities and are aware that the QAC can require, and has required, inadequate reports to be rewritten. The AVA recognises that the reporting template needs to be made more evaluative and is working on a revised version for implementation in summer 2007. Where appropriate, moderators comment on internal verification (IV) systems, but not all centres include Access to HE in their IV processes.

76 QAC members read all the moderation reports using a checklist of matters for consideration and QAC submits a report to the Management Committee, identifying good practice and areas for development, as part of annual subject reporting. Because all centres are represented on the Management

Committee, all programme providers automatically receive copies of the QAC report to disseminate in their own centres. This approach to the analysis of the outcomes of the moderation process provides the AVA at various levels with the assurance that standards are appropriate and are being maintained. It also offers a means of identifying any causes for concern.

77 Centre moderators' reports are sent to the centres concerned; the AVA expects centres to respond to any issues that the centre moderator has identified. The AVA may wish to reflect on whether it should formalise the QAC's role in monitoring moderators' reports, as this is not in the committee's terms of reference, and its arrangements for requiring centres to respond to centre moderators' reports.

The Examination Board and the award and issue of certificates

78 The Examination Board is appointed by the Management Committee. The Board, which meets annually, is chaired by an HEI representative and comprises the external adviser, the two senior moderators and one representative from every Access to HE programme. The Board's terms of reference are 'to determine the performance of all enrolled learners and award certificates on the basis of pass lists agreed with the centres; to consider and make decisions regarding special cases; to consider and make decisions regarding re-sits; and to advise on examination matters raised by HAVA during the year'. The Board's minutes confirm that it carries out these functions.

79 The review team was informed that it is the Examination Board, rather than the Management Committee, that awards the Access to HE certificate and will award the new Diploma. The Management Committee formally ratifies the decisions made by the Board and gives approval to the Senior Officer to issue certificates. The team agreed that this was an appropriate system but was concerned that the evolution of this practice had not been incorporated into the Constitution. It is, therefore, a condition of licence that the AVA

specifies the location within the AVA's structures for the formal authority for the award of the Access to HE Diploma and publishes this in the relevant AVA documentation.

80 The certificates awarded to HAVA's students meet the licensing criteria's required wording and format. There are appropriate systems in place for the issuing and reissuing of certificates and the AVA's management information system will be able to provide credit transcripts as part of HAVA's implementation of the Diploma and credit specifications.

81 Overall, the review team considered that the AVA largely satisfied the licensing criteria underpinning Principle 4 and has adopted a very effective model of subject moderation.

Audit trails

82 In the course of its visit, the review team conducted six audit trails of the AVA's member institutions. The purpose of the trails was to enable the team to form a view as to the effectiveness of the AVA's procedures for quality assurance at the centre level and to establish that the AVA's processes are implemented with the requisite degree of consistency.

83 The providers selected for the trails comprised an appropriate sample of Access to HE programmes validated by HAVA with respect to size, geographical location and socio-economic context. The selection of centres included both those which delivered the HAVA Access to HE standard scheme and stand alone programmes.

84 The review team was provided with audit trail files which comprised three sets of documentation. The first was material relating to periodic review, the second contained annual reports for the years 2003-04 to 2005-06, and the third included a range of course documentation such as course specification, student handbooks, general student information and promotional literature. There was no centre approval documentation available for the period under review.

85 Periodic review of HAVA's centres takes place on a five-year cycle. Dates of the periodic reviews in the audit trail sample ranged from 2002 to 2007. The review panels in all cases comprised four members predominately drawn from HAVA's centres or participating HEIs. There was only a limited amount of externality evident on the panels and the team could identify no members originating from outside the HAVA region.

86 In all cases, the review panels had had meetings with students who were uniformly positive about their experience on a varied range of Access to HE courses. Meetings with staff indicated a high degree of commitment to Access to HE with favourable comment on the CWP system. The events demonstrate an effective forum for dialogue between the AVA and its providers and exchange of views on such key issues as learning support; credit for study skills; student retention and student facilities which go beyond individual centres. In general, responses to HAVA's recommendations were full and timely, both on the part of the centre's senior management and the Access to HE coordinators, and evidence is given of the appropriate resolution of difficulties; in one case, approval was postponed pending a visit and report from the centre moderator.

87 In general, the coordinators' annual reports were largely descriptive and, in discussions with the review team, HAVA recognised the need to develop the template in order to make reports more evaluative. Since the academic year 2004-05, centres have been required to demonstrate a response to previous recommendations, but the current nature of the questions asked tends to lead to a good deal of repetition and bland reporting under the current template. These reservations notwithstanding, it was clear to the team, that within the limitations of the reporting structure, coordinators had completed the reports conscientiously and were engaged with issues of enhancement.

88 Under the HAVA scheme, centre moderators produce both initial and final reports. The initial meeting which takes place

during the late winter/early spring period includes meetings with both staff and students. While the reporting template is again largely descriptive, in their final summary, centre moderators are required to provide a statement about the fitness for purpose of the programme and to indicate any concerns which need to be brought to the attention of QAC. The review team considered this to be a valuable external safeguard to the maintenance of quality in the AVA's programmes. The centre moderator's final moderation report effectively assures that HAVA's procedures are met in full by centres.

89 Additional documentation reviewed as part of the audit trails included a range of course materials and student handbooks, which were found by the team to be strongly supportive of the student learning experience, and centre publicity material which adequately outlined the purpose and opportunities of Access to HE but which was often rather 'lost' in a larger portfolio of courses delivered by large centres.

90 On the basis of the documentation available, the review team had confidence that the HAVA processes and principles operate effectively and that the AVA is able to maintain effective oversight of Access to HE courses delivered by its providers under its authority.

Conclusions

91 HAVA has its roots in a scheme established almost 25 years ago between the University of Portsmouth and a number of local FE colleges. The nature of the AVA's relationship with the University of Portsmouth is, in many ways, a notable strength, although there is a danger of an overreliance on one HEI at the expense of establishing similarly strong relationships with other HEIs in the region. The AVA will wish to give due consideration to this and their links with other bodies and organisations to facilitate not only their expansion, but maintaining their position as a key provider of Access to HE in the region.

92 HAVA's mission since its inception has been to develop, maintain and expand learning

opportunities and progression to HE for adults, with its locus being the delivery of practitioner-led Access to HE programmes. As a result, HAVA has a long-standing and excellent reputation in the provision of Access to HE programmes, producing students who are well equipped to progress to HE. It is notable that student numbers have remained constant in recent years, despite changes to the funding method for Access to HE provision and greater competition.

93 The AVA has a slim administrative structure, focusing on the Senior Officer, with support from the University and through the cooperation of providers. The Senior Officer fulfils a central role in the administration and organisation of HAVA and their knowledge, commitment and professionalism makes a significant contribution to the success of the AVA's operation. At all levels of the AVA's structures, there is substantial involvement by practitioners from both further and higher education institutions, and their high level of commitment has made a substantial contribution to the AVA's continued operation and notable strengths.

94 Since the previous review, HAVA has reviewed many aspects of the AVA's organisation, and produced comprehensive documentation describing its revised structures, policies and procedures. Its revised Constitution, introduced after the previous review, has led to improvements in the AVA's governance and management, and greater clarity and transparency about the AVA's structures, policies and procedures. However, further attention is required to ensure that HAVA can respond in a strategic manner to changes within Access to HE provision in a competitive market. To this end, a review of the roles, remit and membership of HAVA's governing body, to ensure that its constitutional structure includes a sufficient and appropriate spread of experience, expertise, seniority and representation within its voting members, will be required.

95 Currently, voting members of HAVA's governing body, the Management Committee, comprise all centre coordinators, HEI receivers, the Treasurer, one external adviser and the Chair of HAVA, with two senior moderators and the newly appointed Management Liaison Officer sitting on the committee as non-voting members. HAVA should reconsider the rationale for such a structure to ensure an adequate number of senior staff with expertise in strategic planning contribute to decision-making of the governing body to guarantee the continued sustainability of its operation. They will also, as a result, wish to consider the structure and function of the governing body's subcommittees and criteria for appointment to these so they remain fit for purpose. The AVA will need to address a number of constitutional matters in order to be able to continue to meet the licensing criteria which relate to governance structures, including the requirement that the AVA has sufficient and appropriate experience and expertise to ensure sound governance and decision-making.

96 On the whole, the review team found HAVA's financial management arrangements to be appropriate. However, it noted a number of areas that could be clarified and to which the AVA will need to give further consideration, such as its processes for forward planning and financial decision-making. As it moves forward, the AVA will also wish to consider whether it could operate more efficiently through assigning financial responsibilities to a designated administrative officer rather than to an elected treasurer.

97 In contrast to the structural and procedural changes which it has made since the previous review, the AVA has made relatively few recent revisions to the distinctive model through which the HAVA-approved Access to HE provision itself is developed, approved, assessed and monitored. The strength of the HAVA model lies in the central role the CWPs play in the development, assessment and review of modules. This approach makes a strong contribution to the comparability of provision and consistency of

standards at the subject level, while retaining practitioner control over curriculum content and development. Consistency and quality of provision at programme level is now ensured through the appointment of centre moderators ensuring a strong quality assurance framework within and across programmes. The continued quality of programmes is assured through the comprehensive annual reporting process. HAVA has acknowledged the need for a greater degree of evaluation within this process and is considering ways of achieving this. The review team welcomes this and would also advise the AVA to consider how it might draw more directly upon the expertise of colleagues from FE and HE who play a lead role in quality assurance and enhancement.

98 The current HAVA model will be delivered in its present format until September 2008, when the AVA will move to delivering the Access to HE Diploma, using a four-subject model, divided into seven named pathways. The AVA has a clear implementation plan for the Access to HE Diploma, running a pilot year from 2007 and a rigorous framework for the approval of new unit specifications and programmes.

99 In view of the evident strengths of HAVA and their unquestionable commitment to Access to HE provision, it is unfortunate that the AVA is not currently engaged in any significant strategic attempts to extend the reach of its work either within or beyond its traditional FE provider base. To address this, the AVA has recently appointed a Management Liaison Officer at a senior position within the AVA, whose role is to engage and liaise with a range of stakeholder bodies and individuals, including both those who are currently involved with HAVA and its work, with a view to expanding provision. This initiative is welcomed by the review team. It is too early to judge what impact the appointment will have on the AVA's provision. However, the AVA believes it will facilitate its development and expansion.

100 The HAVA Scheme has a number of unique features and a strong reputation for producing students able to cope very successfully with the demands of HE. The

documentation it produces for students, and for delivering and receiving members, is clear and comprehensive as is its website. Its practitioner-led approach ensures the curriculum is current and appropriate and prepares students well for HE, and the clear commitment and enthusiasm of all staff involved in the scheme ensures that HAVA meets its aims. The review team particularly commends the AVA for its capacity to generate, among its members, a strong and enduring sense of ownership and commitment to the mission of HAVA. This is mirrored by the commitment of the practitioners and the support provided to those practitioners from their institutions.

101 Sustaining its future and continuing to be a key provider of Access to HE programmes in a competitive and changing environment are the key challenges facing the AVA over the next five years. A review of its governance model and the way in which key functions such as strategic planning and finance are organised should support the AVA in responding to these challenges.

Commendations

102 The AVA is commended for:

- the commitment, responsiveness and efficiency of the Senior Officer, universally acknowledged by the AVA's members and other stakeholders to the review team, and substantiated by the evidence provided (paragraphs 35, 43)
- its curriculum working parties as an example of best practice of practitioner-led subject development. By bringing together Access to HE practitioners, moderators and HE subject academics, the CWPs provide a very effective mechanism for curriculum development, the setting and confirmation of standards, mutual support among staff, and the sharing of good practice. The range of the CWP members' experience and expertise ensure that the AVA maintains a broad perspective on developments in the HAVA scheme's subject areas, and thus is able to offer

students a current curriculum and Access to HE staff with regular and frequent subject updating. CWP's promote forward planning for, and a structured approach to, the review and revision of the curriculum (paragraphs 54, 63)

- its capacity to generate, among its members, a strong and enduring sense of ownership and commitment to the mission of HAVA. The commitment of the practitioners and the support provided to those practitioners from their institutions (paragraphs 15, 26, 100).

The AVA licence

Review outcome

103 The review team recommends that Hampshire Authorised Validating Agency is awarded a conditional renewal of its AVA licence, with conditions to be met by the dates specified below.

Conditions

104 The licence is renewed on condition that the AVA:

- i reviews the role, remit and membership categories of the AVA's governing body so that its constitutional structure includes a sufficient and appropriate spread of experience, expertise, seniority and representation from among its voting and non-voting members. In meeting this condition, the AVA should also review the criteria for the election of FE, HE and other representatives to the AVA's decision-making bodies (paragraphs 18, 23, 27, 28, 38)
- ii consequent on condition (i), reviews the role, remit and membership of its subcommittee structures, paying particular attention to the functions of business planning and development (paragraph 29)
- iii within its constitution, makes a clear statement of where the responsibility for the leadership and day-to-day management of the AVA is located. This

information should be included within the relevant AVA documentation (paragraph 35)

- iv updates its validation documentation to include a statement that QAA recognition may be given only to programmes which are delivered in the UK (paragraph 48)
- v specifies the location within the AVA's structures for the formal authority for the award of the Access to HE Diploma and publishes this in the relevant AVA documentation (paragraph 79).

An approved implementation plan to meet conditions (i) to (iii) should be submitted to QAA by 29 February 2008, with implementation expected by September 2008. Conditions (iv) to (v) to be met by 22 June 2007.

Recommendations to the AVA

105 The review team recommends that the AVA:

- i ensures that its regular strategic planning process identifies strategic aims and priorities and that its arrangements make effective use of the views of the receivers of Access to HE students (paragraphs 16, 31 to 34)
- ii formalises the current informal induction arrangements for validation chairs and panel members and develops its arrangements for meeting the training and development needs of its officers, including those appointed on an elective basis (paragraph 36)
- iii reviews the continuing appropriateness of having an elected treasurer rather than a designated administrative officer (paragraph 42).

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 previous 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.

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