



Access to Higher Education

Quality & Moderation Handbook

2009/10



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1. Introduction to External Moderation

The purpose of moderation

For the Open College Network South East Region, licensed as an Access Validating Agency (AVA), Access moderation has the following purposes:

- a) to verify, through a process which is external to the providing centre, the standards of achievements of learners leading to the award of credit and to the award of Access to HE Diplomas according to the specifications set out by the QAA;
- b) to ensure consistency in the award of credit to learners and that learners are receiving fair and equitable treatment.
- c) to monitor and report on assessment arrangements of approved programmes;
- d) to be an ongoing and accessible source of critical advice for centres and their staff in order to support the continuous improvement of AVA accredited programmes;
- e) to ensure accredited programmes are delivered in accordance with the specifications agreed at the Validation Panel.
- f) to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of the quality and fitness for purpose of Access to HE programmes

2. Guidelines For Access Moderation

2.1 Information moderators should have, and be aware of, before starting moderation

Moderators should familiarise themselves with the location of relevant AVA information on the OCNSER Access web pages and if there are any queries contact the OCNSER Access Customer Support team by either calling 01227 827249 or 827823 or emailing e.sharp@ocnser.org.uk. The Access Quality & Moderation Officer will be able to deal with most enquiries and will request a response from other AVA staff if necessary

The following documents and information, provided by the AVA, should be reviewed by moderators before contacting a centre.

- copies of the current AVA, Access Moderation & Quality Handbook & Access Centre Handbook and Access Assessment Principles
- The new Grading Handbook which can be found at: <http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/grading>
- validation documentation relating to the Access Course(s) including an Access Diploma Recognition Document and Rules of Combination
- copies of previous external moderator reports

- Access Interim Visit Report and Final Report templates (available from downloads page on the website)

2.2 Overview of moderation visits

The external moderator should contact the Access Co-ordinator at the Access provider centre to arrange visits as soon as they receive confirmation of their contract and the information in 3.1 above.

Moderators can arrange for ongoing contact between themselves and the Access centre via phone, email, video online etc as necessary. If an additional visit is required before the Awards Board (Final Exam/Assessment Board), then a moderator MUST contact the Access Quality and Moderation Officer for approval if additional expenses are to be claimed.

The final visit must include attendance at the Awards Board (Final Exam/Assessment Board) for the Access Diploma titles being moderated. These usually take place towards the end of the course. This is a mandatory role for the moderator and is examined in more detail below.

2.3 The Initial Visit

The first visit should normally take place within the first term of an Access Course, especially if the moderator is new to the programme, or if the Access course has been newly validated to commence from 1st August in that academic year.

The purpose of this visit will normally be to:

- Ensure that problems that may prevent the confirmation of the award of credit/Access to HE Diploma are resolved before the final external moderation/exam board visit.
- Check that recommendations from the previous external moderation report have been addressed.

External moderators are not expected to confirm the award of any credit at this stage or to gather information about learner retention. However, they should bear in mind the Moderation Report Headings and use these as a basis upon which to structure the visit. At the end of the year the External moderator will need to be able to respond to each of the headings and the visits should be seen as a means to gather the evidence required. Initial visits also provide the ideal opportunity to meet with learners to find out if they have any concerns.

An **External moderator Initial Visit Report (AQR1) must be completed after the first/initial visit**. This should be emailed to the Access Quality & Moderation Officer or uploaded to the Access Centre's online Workspace and an alert sent to Emma Sharp. This should be completed within **10 working days** of the visit. The Moderation Initial Visit Report and guidance notes can be found on the OCNSER web site (<https://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-moderation>)

Where issues of concern are identified, which the tutor/provider can rectify before the programme ends without detriment to the learners, the external moderator should agree an action plan for improvement with the programme tutor. A template for an Action Plan is included in the Initial Visit Report and guidance notes. The Action Plan can be handwritten at the time of the visit and left with the tutor to action. At the next visit the external moderator will follow up on any actions identified.

If there are serious problems with a programme then the Initial Visit Report should identify the nature of the problem and be sent to the AVA as soon as possible.

2.4 Ongoing contact with the centre

In support of the moderation process there could be a substantial amount of ongoing contact between the centre and the external moderator. In some cases an external moderator may need to make an additional visit but must contact the Access Quality & Moderation Officer at the AVA before doing so.

An external moderator will usually make other forms of contact with a centre apart from a physical visit. Such contact may take the form of written/electronic requests for specific information, telephone discussions etc. Programme leaders may wish to send samples of learner achievement to an external moderator, or assignment/exam questions etc. to the external moderator for approval. The centre's 'Access Workspace' should be utilised wherever possible to facilitate this communication.

2.5 The Access Awards Board

(formerly known as Examination/Assessment Board)

Each Access centre is required to hold an Awards Board (Examination/Assessment Board). This is the meeting at which the award of the QAA Access to HE Diplomas to learners is confirmed. It is the external moderator who acts on behalf of the AVA to confirm the award of the Access to HE Diploma to students at this meeting.

This must be a formally recorded meeting. OCNSER has agreed a Standard Agenda for Examination Boards and centres are required to use this. Guidance is provided as an appendix to the OCNSER Access Centre Handbook and is available as a download. (<http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-downloads>)

Centres must notify OCNSER of the dates of their Awards Board by the end of March (see relevant OCNSER Circular for precise date each year).

Awards Board Minutes must be sent to the AVA or uploaded to a centre's Access Workspace as soon as possible after the meeting has taken place.

2.6 Conduct during visits

During a visit the external moderator will be meeting with tutors/course teams; and familiarising themselves with the programme; sampling assessed work etc. With the permission of the centre moderators may ask to meet learners. However it is **NOT** part of the external moderator's required duties to observe teaching. An external moderator cannot insist on being present during a teaching session although a tutor may invite them to attend.

An external moderator should try to arrange a visit when it is possible (if the centre has given approval) to talk to the learners as well as the tutor. Where circumstances allow, at least some time should be spent with learners without any tutor present or in immediate earshot.

Moderators are representatives of the AVA and should conduct themselves to the highest standards of behaviour whilst on the premises of OCNSER approved centres.

3. The Sampling of Access Academic Standards

3.1 Context and Overview

The Centre is responsible for ensuring that a programme meets the quality standards and academic standards agreed at the Validation Panel. External moderators need to ascertain how and whether consistent standards are achieved. This is particularly important where there are a number of different tutors involved in delivery.

Centres must have in place an internal moderation (IM) process which will ensure that there is a consistency in the standards of achievement asked of students across the Diploma(s). Moderators should specifically request details of the IM process and look to see that it has been carried out properly and that adequate records have been kept.

3.2 When should sampling of student work take place?

The standard of work produced should usually be sampled in the later stages of the course delivery so that the moderator can be assured that the final award of the Diploma is robust. It is normal practice for samples of student portfolios to be available at, or immediately prior to, the Awards Board. Earlier sampling at the initial visit stage can be used to support the process and centres may find this a useful opportunity to discuss assessment issues with moderators.

Sampling might take place via a 'virtual' environment using the centre's 'Access Workspace', or by posted/emailed copies of student work.

An agreed sample of student work should also be available at the Awards Board.

3.3 How should sampling be conducted?

It is important that before or during the first visit an external moderator agrees with the responsible tutor what information and samples of assessed work will be seen for moderation. If there are a number of different tutors delivering the programme the external moderator may wish to meet the tutors during his/her visits, or see the minutes of their internal team meetings.

The external moderator, NOT the tutor, specifies the student sample of assessed work that is to be seen. It is important that sufficient evidence is sampled for the external moderator to feel confident about the consistent and valid award of credit.

- If more than 50 learners are registered to receive credit for an individual Diploma title then the minimum sample size is 20% (or 10 portfolios).
- For programmes that register fewer than 50 learners it is usually necessary to sample at least 5 portfolios.

A basic formula that many external moderators use for selecting the range of portfolios within a sample is an example of achievement at each level (top, middle, lowest of the range) plus any problems or borderline cases. In order to select a sample it is necessary for the tutor's records of assessment to be available so that moderators are able to see learners' profile of progression.

The sample moderated should:

- include sufficient evidence to ensure that the learning outcomes are demonstrably achieved by learners gaining credit;
- ensure that assessment criteria at different levels are applied appropriately and consistently;
- ensure that different methods of assessment are applied appropriately and consistently;
- ensure that assessment criteria are interpreted consistently in 'borderline' cases;
- ensure different tutors are applying assessment criteria consistently.

The sample of evidence of assessed work will therefore include, as appropriate:

- examples of work assessed by different tutors;
- examples of different methods of assessment;
- examples of all the different levels of achievement;
- a range of learners across ability levels and different grades;
- all 'borderline' cases.

3.4 Grading: The Moderator's role

From September 2009 onwards, Access external moderators will also play a role in assuring the quality and consistency of grading decisions made by tutors in relation to Access student achievement.



In general moderators should look at grade decisions made for Units and assure themselves that a proper grading process was undertaken and that tutors decisions across the Diploma(s) they are moderating, are consistent.

In particular this will mean that moderators should look at:

- Assessment plans for units
- Student assignment briefs prepared by the centre
- Evidence of internal moderation which covers grading decisions
- Samples of marked student work showing the grade indicators awarded by the assessor
- Individual student grade profile and class tracking sheets which show how the unit grades were arrived at
- Agreeing the grades awarded and the credit level achieved at the final Awards Board

Supporting Information on grading

OCNSER has developed a specific Access grading web page at <https://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/grading> You will find the documents listed below on these pages and in addition you can browse a range of example templates for centres to use for assessment plans, assignment briefs etc.

Item	Click for link
OCNSER Guidance on Grading for Access	
Part H of the QAA Grading Handbook: Grading & Moderation	

3.5 What happens if the moderator does not agree with the centre's marking?

If the external moderator does not agree with the recommendations for the award of credit within the sample then a further 10% random sample must be selected (or at least 2 samples of the contested assignment for smaller courses). When a second sample is taken by the external moderator, and whatever the outcome of a second sample, the reason(s) for taking an additional sample and for the decision reached must be recorded and fed into the internal quality process and reported to OCNSER by the external moderator (usually via the final External Moderation Report)

Following the second sample the following action(s) may be appropriate:

- assessed levels/credits/grades are agreed;
- assessed levels/credits/grades are adjusted in line with the specifications of the validated submission document;
- recommendations are made to improve the assessment/internal verification processes;
- Award of credit is not approved by the external moderator and the matter is urgently referred to OCNSER as a 'Moderation Problem'

3.6 Some Important Points to Remember

- All learning outcomes in the unit must be achieved for the credit to be awarded.
- All assessment criteria in the unit must be met for the credit to be awarded.
- Learning outcomes must be achieved to the standard described by the assessment criteria.
- The evidence presented to the external moderator must demonstrate achievement of all learning outcomes in all units for which credit is being claimed.

4. Retention of samples of student achievement by Centres

Centres must retain a representative sample of learner achievement for each run of each Access Qualification Award per year. These samples will be retained for a period of 3 years to enable the monitoring of standards over time, centres and Diploma titles.

Providers must retain one whole student portfolio of assessed evidence per Access Diploma title per year. Where retention of the assessed portfolio is impractical, e.g. for Art and Design courses, suitable photographic or equivalent records should be retained.

The portfolio, either as a photocopy of originals or in electronic format must clearly:

- show marking with the level of achievement clearly indicated. Where the achievement is other than written or paper based evidence (e.g. audio/visual, photographic evidence), there must be a clearly labelled tutor assessment or recording sheet of some kind to indicate the Level and where relevant, grade achieved.
- be representative of the overall type of assessment used on the programme.

- be the final summative evidence and must be clearly mapped to the unit offered within the Access Diploma.
- must be accompanied by evidence of internal moderation relating to the representative portfolios. In most cases this will be an OCNSER Internal Moderation Report or a centre's own paperwork records for internal standardisation which directly relates to the relevant Diploma.

5. The Final Moderation Report (AQR2-3)

The final moderation report must be made on the most recent version of the OCNSER Access to HE Final Moderation Report template AQR2-3 (available from the OCNSER Access downloads web pages). This report template contains guidelines for its completion, and Moderators will be notified, via an email or a Briefing sheet, if a new version is available.

External moderators are advised to familiarise themselves with the QAA Access to HE Diploma and common credit specification to assist them in the compilation of the final report.

The final external moderation report should be submitted to the AVA as an email attachment as soon as is reasonably possible after the Awards Board has been completed. Work on sections of the report could have been started after the initial visit and subsequent contacts. The report should be submitted to the AVA **no later than July 31st**, i.e. the end of the academic year in which the course ran. Where Access courses are run outside the traditional academic year, the report should be submitted to the AVA within 4 weeks of the Exam Board taking place. Send the emails to e.sharp@ocnser.org.uk

The Final Moderation Report (AQR2-3) is available as a template from our web site at: (<https://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-moderation>) in the Access Moderation section.

6. OCNSER's role in assuring the quality of the external moderation process

6.1 Moderation Standardisation

The AVA will convene a number of meetings for moderators at which they will be able to meet with other Access moderators, share and sample examples of good practice in moderation reports. The AVA will also be developing methods for introducing standardisation of learner achievement across the Region during 2009-10 as a part of its wider standardisation agenda.

6.2 Monitoring of Access Moderation Reports and Moderators

The AVA will compile an annual overall Access Moderation report which identifies key issues and actions which will be presented to the Access to HE Quality & Development Committee for approval and subsequent implementation.

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Access Moderation reports will be copied to individual Business Development Managers handling an Access account with centres for follow up re recommendations and conditions identified in the report.

The OCNSER Access Quality & Moderation Officer will keep a tracking system to include; the receipt of moderation reports, providers responses to moderation reports and individual Business Development Manager quality interventions in response to moderation. This will be freely available to the Development Team. Outstanding issues arising from this tracking process will be reported to the Access to HE Quality & Development Committee as necessary.

Where an individual moderator falls short of the required Access moderation standards then the OCNSER Access Quality Manager will prepare a report for the Access to HE Quality & Development Committee with a recommendation to suspend or terminate the contract for that moderator. The potential for the contract to be ended under these conditions is set out within the moderator contract.

6.3 Moderator Clusters

Where a centre has more than one external moderator appointed by the AVA, each moderator will be supplied with the contact details of the other moderators. The centre's online 'Access Workspace' will allow a means for moderators attached to a single centre to share information and communicate.

6.4 Procedures re sanctions and withdrawal of approval from centres

In the event of non compliance by a centre with the external quality assurance procedures of the AVA (including external moderation, centre approval, non-payment of fees or actions which undermine the integrity of the award of Access to HE Diplomas), the Access to HE Quality and Development Committee shall have the right to:

- Notify the centre of the intention to suspend approval unless remedial action is taken
- Temporarily suspend approval until remedial action is taken
- Permanently remove approval

Appendix 1

Access Moderator Annual Checklist

When ¹	What	Key Action/Outcome	Date Achieved
Sept – Dec	Receive contract and schedule information	sign and return copy of contract to AVA	
Sept – Dec	Contact centre(s) and arrange first visit	Arrange initial and subsequent visit dates	
Sept - Feb First Visit	Complete Initial Visit and agree in year action plan/points as required	Send completed Initial Visit Report (AQR1) to Access Quality & Moderation at AVA	
Jan – May	Ongoing contact with centre by email etc as required	Agree Exam Board and second visit date plus your requirements for that day	
June – July	Second visit & Access Awards Board	Attend the Awards Board, sample evidence and sign RACs	
July – August	Write moderation report and submit travel claim/fee invoice	Send to AVA via email	
August	OCN payment for moderation activity	Payment received!	

¹ This checklist assumes September to July start and end dates, for courses with other start dates adjust the timescales accordingly.

Appendix 2
Access Centre Annual Quality & Moderation Checklist

When²	What	Key Action/Outcome	Date Achieved
Sept – Dec	Receive notification of appointed moderators from AVA	Contact moderator to arrange visit if you have not heard from him/her by mid to late November	
Sept – Dec	Liaise with moderator to provide information as required	Identify point of contact for moderator	
Sept - March	Initial Visit takes place	Agree action plan as appropriate with EM and date for Awards Board Notify AVA of Awards Board date	
Jan – May	Ongoing contact with EM by email etc as required	Send any queries to EM as necessary (e.g. special arrangements for individual students etc)	
June – July	Awards Board takes place	Use AVA procedures/agendas etc and submit formal notes of meeting to AVA ASAP Send completed RACs to AVA	
July – August	Receive Diploma certificates from AVA Complete Annual Report for AVA Complete 'Response to Moderation Form AQR6' and action plan as required	Distribute certificates to students and inform HEIs of successful students Submit Annual Report to AVA Submit AQR6 to AVA	

² This checklist assumes September to July start and end dates, for courses with other start dates adjust the timescales accordingly.

Appendix 3

Key Access Quality & Moderation Documents

Title of Document	Description	Comment (click below to follow links)
NOCN Guidance on Internal Moderation	Detailed definitions and guidelines on how to conduct an internal moderation process	Available as a download
Access Initial Moderation Visit Report (AQR1 Access)	Template for recording first visit information	Available as a download
Access Final Moderation Report Template (AQR2/3 Access)	Template only for the final moderation report	Available as a download
Access Moderation Report Guidelines (AQR2/3)	Guidelines & template for the final moderation report	Available as a download
Access Moderation Claim Form (AQR4)	Claim form for sending to AVA to claim travel and expenses	Available as a download
Access Awards Board Guidelines & Agenda (AQR5)	Regulations on how to conduct the exam board	Available as a download
Provider Response to Moderation Form (AQR6 Access)	A form for centres offering Access courses to show how they plan to respond to the moderation report	Available as a download
Access Assessment Principles (AQR9)	A statement of the principles of, and a guide to the best practice in, assessment as recommended by the AVA	Available as a download

Appendix 4 : SUMMARY OF THE EXTERNAL MODERATION PROCESS

