



# Access to Higher Education

## Centre Handbook



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## Section 1. Access to Higher Education & OCNSER

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### 1.1 About Access to HE Programmes

#### 1.1.1 What are Access courses?

Access to higher education Diplomas (Access courses) provide a preparation for higher education (HE) for students who have few, if any, other qualifications. They address the particular needs of adults who may have left school early and been out of education for a number of years<sup>1</sup>. Courses are specifically designed to equip them to succeed in studying at university level. Access courses are targeted, in particular, at groups which are under-represented in HE.

Some Access courses prepare students for particular HE courses, such as Access to Law, Access to Nursing, and some provide a more general preparation for HE. Access courses include a number of academic subjects relevant to the student's intended progression route in HE. They also usually include a compulsory core element, including study skills, which equip students who may have little or no recent experience of studying with the essential skills to do so.

Most courses can be completed in one year, and many are also available on a part-time basis, to allow students to study over two or more years. Assessment is usually by a combination of coursework and examination, and most allow students to accumulate credit towards the Access to HE Diploma as they progress through the course.

The majority of Access courses are offered in further education colleges, but some are provided in adult education centres, community centres, and universities. They are developed and approved on a local basis, by colleges and universities working together, so that they can take into account the needs and circumstances of local groups, as well as the opportunities within particular HE institutions.

#### 1.1.2 The national currency of Access provision

Access courses are recognised by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through their inclusion in a national scheme. A student who successfully completes an Access course is awarded a certificate bearing the QAA Access logo:



Since 2008-09, all Access qualifications have been titled 'Access to Higher Education Diploma (name of subject/area of study)'.

A unique feature of Access courses is that the QAA devolves the operational responsibility for Access courses to a national network of Access Validating Agencies

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<sup>1</sup> Access provision used to be identified as being available only to those aged 19 years and above, however in 2006, in response to age discrimination legislation, the QAA removed reference to the age restrictions. However the funding of students below the age of 19 years on Access provision will be at the discretion of the LSC.

(AVAs<sup>2</sup>), of which OCN South East Region is one. Since most Access courses are designed by individual colleges/centres to meet the needs of their local adult populations, this means that nearly all Access courses are different. The AVA is charged with ensuring that despite these differences, there is a consistency of experience and outcome for learners, which serves the purpose of Access courses, i.e. to support adult learners in gaining entry to higher education.

Access Courses are one of the only National Qualifications which are locally designed and yet enable students to progress to any higher education institution in the country.

## **1.2 OCN South East Region (OCNSER) as an AVA**

As an AVA, OCNSER is responsible for ensuring that Access courses offered within the region undergo a rigorous initial approval process and are then subject to a continuing quality review process thereafter.

OCNSER operates according to a set of criteria laid out by the QAA for AVAs which relate to both the functioning of the AVA and the design and operation of the Access to HE Diploma and credit specifications<sup>3</sup>.

OCNSER was formed out of the merger of two existing AVAs in the South East Region; OCN Hampshire, Isle of Wight & Sussex & OCN Kent & Medway in 2006. OCNSER is now an AVA its own right replacing these two former AVAs.

OCNSER is licensed by the QAA to issue QAA approved Access Diplomas to learners who successfully complete an Access to HE course at a centre approved as a provider of Access courses by OCNSER.

Further details of the QAA's Access to HE Recognition Scheme can be found at: [www.accesstohe.ac.uk](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk)

## **1.3 The range of services offered by OCNSER as an AVA**

The list of services below is indicative of the support that OCNSER provides to Centres approved to offer Access to HE provision. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

### **1.3.1 Support for the validation of new and existing Access to HE Courses**

An OCNSER Development Manager is assigned to each Access Centre and will be able to provide support via one or more on site visits as well as telephone and email support. This support, amongst other things, will include detailed feedback on:

- the Centre Approval application
- the construction of Units of Learning (Units)
- the writing and submission of the Access to HE Programme Recognition Document

<sup>2</sup> AVAs were formerly known as Authorised Validating Agencies but the QAA renamed them as Access Validating Agencies in 2006.

<sup>3</sup> For full details of these specifications see: [www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/default.asp](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/default.asp)

- continuing support for the further development of existing and new Access provision within the Centre.

### **1.3.2 Continuing quality assurance of Access provision within Centres**

This is achieved via:

- the annual external moderation cycle for each Access to HE course
- the annual monitoring of Centre Approval status
- continuing monitoring of quality at a centre via the Centre's Annual Access Report to OCNSER, including detailed statistical information for submission to the QAA

### **1.3.3 OCNSER Access to HE Publications**

These currently include:

- Access to Higher Education Courses Directory
- Applying to Higher Education Information Booklet for Learner
- Advice for HE Admissions Tutors re Access to HE
- Regular Access to HE Briefings for Centres
- Access Handbook and related forms and procedures
- Dedicated web pages for Access to HE

### **1.3.4 Wider support for Access**

OCNSER is actively committed to the promotion and continuing development of Access both within the region and nationally. In pursuit of this aim the AVA supports:

- An annual Regional Access to HE Conference
- Regular local<sup>4</sup> Access Practitioner Forums
- Staff development for Access practitioners by attendance at validation panels, free places on external moderator training, customised training for staff delivered in Centres or at OCN venues.
- OCN officer engagement with key stakeholders to support Access (e.g. Learning & Skills Council, further education colleges, higher education institutions, employers etc.)
- Research into Access related issues

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<sup>4</sup> These are offered on a sub-regional basis dependent on demand.

## Section Two: Specifications for the Access to HE Curriculum

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### 2.1 General Advice

An OCNSER Development Manager will be assigned to support the development of Access provision within centre. The Development Manager will be able to provide Access staff in the centre with examples of other Access to HE programmes and units, contacts in other Access centres, advice regarding the application of QAA guidelines and criteria. S/he will also assist you with the writing of the submission document and will read your drafts and send back amendments and comments

The QAA 'Access to Higher Education Diploma and credit specifications'<sup>5</sup> published in March 2006 form the basis for the construction of Access to HE provision. All centres are strongly advised to consult these specifications when developing new or amending existing Access to HE provision.

### 2.2 QAA Specifications for Access to HE Credit & Qualifications Framework

Centres offering Access to HE provision must ensure that they follow the criteria set out by the QAA. OCNSER as an AVA will approve all courses using the QAA specifications as the benchmark standard.

The following is an extract from the QAA specifications<sup>6</sup>:

#### Qualifications and awards

- a. The Access to HE qualification is known formally and generically as the 'Access to Higher Education Diploma'. As a particular award offered and granted to students, the qualification is referred to by an individual award title which indicates the subject or area of study.
- b. Individual award titles have a common format: Access to Higher Education Diploma (subject/area of study) which reflect the intended progression route(s) of the particular programme of study. Titles of Access to HE awards include, for example, Access to Higher Education Diploma (Business Studies); Access to Higher Education Diploma (Health and Social Care); Access to Higher Education Diploma (Art and Design). Where the award is intended to provide progression to combined or less specific progression routes, the award name will reflect this, for example Access to Higher Education Diploma (Combined Sciences); Access to Higher Education (Social Studies combined with Arts). Award titles are approved through AVAs' validation processes. A single Access to HE programme sometimes provides a number of different routes which lead to several different awards titled in this way, all of which are Access to HE Diplomas.
- c. The common format for the award title is used on the diploma which is issued to students (which also carries the QAA Access to HE logo). This

<sup>5</sup> See [www.qaa.ac.uk/access/creditspecificationsdraft06/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/access/creditspecificationsdraft06/default.asp)

<sup>6</sup> See [www.qaa.ac.uk/access/creditspecificationsdraft06/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/access/creditspecificationsdraft06/default.asp)

format for the title of the award is also used in any information provided to receiving institutions (including in Universities and Colleges Admission Service applications) about students' target achievement on individual programmes.

d. The Access to HE Diploma is a credit-based qualification, made in accordance with the terms of the Access to HE credit specifications, as defined within this document and its appendices. Student achievement is recognised both through the award of credit (as identified on a credit transcript) and the award of the qualification (as identified on a diploma), subsequent to the student having satisfied the rules of combination (see paragraphs 12-16). Any further information about the quality of individual student performance in relation to the qualification is provided through different means.

e. Access to HE qualifications are awarded to students on the basis of the satisfactory completion of generic qualification and particular award requirements. The generic qualification requirements are provided here (see paragraph 6); particular award requirements, made in keeping with these generic requirements, are confirmed through the AVAs' validation processes approved by QAA.

### **Requirements for the award of the Access to HE Diploma**

a. The generic qualification requirements identify the number of credits at particular levels that students need to achieve in order to be awarded the Access to HE Diploma. The credit achievement required for the award of the Access to HE Diploma on all Access to HE programmes is a total of 60 credits. Of these 60 credits, a minimum of 45 credits must be achieved at Level 3 and the remainder must be achieved at Level 2 or above. (Levels are defined at Appendix A.) This requirement is constant for all awards of the Access to HE Diploma made by all AVAs, irrespective of the place, subject or mode of study.

b. The particular award requirements additionally identify the number and titles of the particular units from which the credits must be derived. These requirements are stipulated in the rules of combination for the particular award. The rules of combination thereby ensure the coherence of every programme which leads to the award of the Access to HE Diploma (see paragraphs 12-16).

c. All Access to HE students who satisfactorily complete the particular award requirements of the programme on which they are studying are awarded the Access to HE Diploma. The award of the Access to HE Diploma will, in all instances, therefore, indicate that a student has satisfactorily met the generic requirements for achievement of the Access to HE Diploma, as well as the particular requirements for the named award. In so doing, the student will have satisfactorily completed a coherent programme of study, which indicates their readiness for higher education.

d. Units provide the building blocks of Access to HE programmes. The combination of particular units, with particular credit values, provides structured pathways for a coherent programme of study through which credit is achieved and accumulated towards the Access to HE Diploma.

e. The credit achievement requirement does not necessarily equate to the total number of credits which might be available on a programme. Additional credits might be available as a feature of programme design, where additional units are offered within a programme to increase flexibility and choice. However, providers are not obliged to offer more units on a programme than are required to allow a student to achieve the award, and not all students will be able to take additional units, even where they are included within a programme. Thus, while some students may be able to accumulate credits which are additional, or at a higher level, to those which are required for the award of the Access to HE Diploma, these credits cannot be made part of the generic qualification or individual award requirements. If students achieve credits which are in excess of the required achievement (either in number or level), this is indicated on the credit transcript which is issued to students.

#### Other successful completion criteria

f. There may be other stipulations, in addition to credit regulations, to ensure the fitness for purpose of the programme for the Access to HE award. Any other criteria for the achievement of the qualification are stated separately from the rules of combination, within a statement of successful completion criteria. These might include specific requirements relating to assessment regulations, criteria for differentiating individual student achievement, or professional body or other requirements.

## 2.2 Summary of references for Section 2 designing the Access curriculum

Documents below can be downloaded from <http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-downloads>

Title of Document	Description	Comment
'Designing the Access Curriculum'	Provides wider guidance re the construction of Access provision to support centres	Available as a separate download from <a href="http://www.ocnser.org.uk/document/507">http://www.ocnser.org.uk/document/507</a>
NOCN Assessment Definitions	Guidance from NOCN on constructing a range of assessment activities	Covers from Entry to Level 3. See NOCN Centre Handbook on web site
Unit Writing Guidelines	Detailed guidance on the writing of NOCN units which conforms to the QAA unit specifications for the common credit framework for Access to HE	Available from OCNSER web site
<a href="#">QAA Access to HE Diploma and credit specifications – March 2006</a>	The QAA framework and specifications for the credit system and qualification structure for Access	Click on the hyperlink in the first column to download the document.

## Section 3: Submitting Access Programmes for Validation and Re-validation

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### 3.1 Becoming an approved Centre to offer Access to HE Courses

In order to offer Access to HE courses a Centre must apply for and successfully complete the OCNSER Centre Approval Process<sup>7</sup>. Where a centre intends to only use OCNSER as an AVA, a separate Access Centre approval process exists. Achievement of approved centre status means that the necessary internal quality standards and procedures are in place to ensure that the needs of Access students are the quality of their learning experience are assured. OCNSER will annually monitor the Centre Approval status of each centre.

### 3.2 The Validation Process for Access to HE Courses

This section contains specific guidelines re the processes for centres submitting Access to HE programmes for validation by OCNSER.

Access programmes will either be new programmes seeking validation for the first time or existing programmes seeking re-validation.

The requirements for each are:

#### New programmes

- Appropriate curriculum development including consultation with HEIs and local market analysis to identify demand.
- New Access Course Recognition Document plus relevant appendices to include copies and list of all units
- Support from HEIs for the new provision

#### Revalidation of existing programmes

- Revalidation Report completed by Centre
- Updated Access Course Recognition Document plus relevant appendices to include copies and list of all units
- Endorsement of HEIs for revised provision

A final draft of the Access Course Recognition Document (and Revalidation Report if applicable, will be agreed with between you and your OCNSER Development Manager. These will then be will be scrutinised at a validation panel.

The validation panel may require you to make certain changes to the programme as conditions of validation and may make recommendations which will be monitored during the first external moderation round.

Strong support from relevant HEIs is usually the best way to ensure a smooth panel process for your programme. HE input into the revalidation or new course development process is strongly advised and evidence of HE support for new Access courses is a requirement at validation panels.

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<sup>7</sup> For online details follow the links from the OCNSER web site at [www.ocnser.org.uk](http://www.ocnser.org.uk)

Once the changes have been made and re-submitted to the OCN and the OCNSER Quality & Development Committee has approved the validation, then your Access to HE programme has completed the approvals process. The OCN will update the QAA and relevant agencies that your Access Programme is now an approved Access Qualification.

### 3.3 Re-validation Procedures Access to HE Provision

#### 3.3.1 Validation Period.

Access courses are validated for a period of 5 years. All courses must be re-validated before their expiry date. The commencing validation date shall be the 1<sup>st</sup> August following the date of the validation panel. Hence a course revalidated in September of an academic year will actually have a validation start date of the following August. In this way no Access courses will run out of validation during an academic year.

Centres will be made aware of the need to re-validate courses by the start of the 5<sup>th</sup> year of validation (i.e. during September) so that a revalidation schedule can be arranged in a timely manner.

If, under exceptional circumstances, a course is granted a temporary extension of its validation period by the Access to HE Quality & Development Committee then it must be revalidated during the period of the temporary extension. The validation period under these circumstances will commence from the previous validation expiry date.

#### 3.3.2 Re-validation Panel

The re-validation process will require a new clean and updated version of the **Access to HE Course Recognition Document** and related appendices, incorporating any changes and amendments made over the previous 5 years.

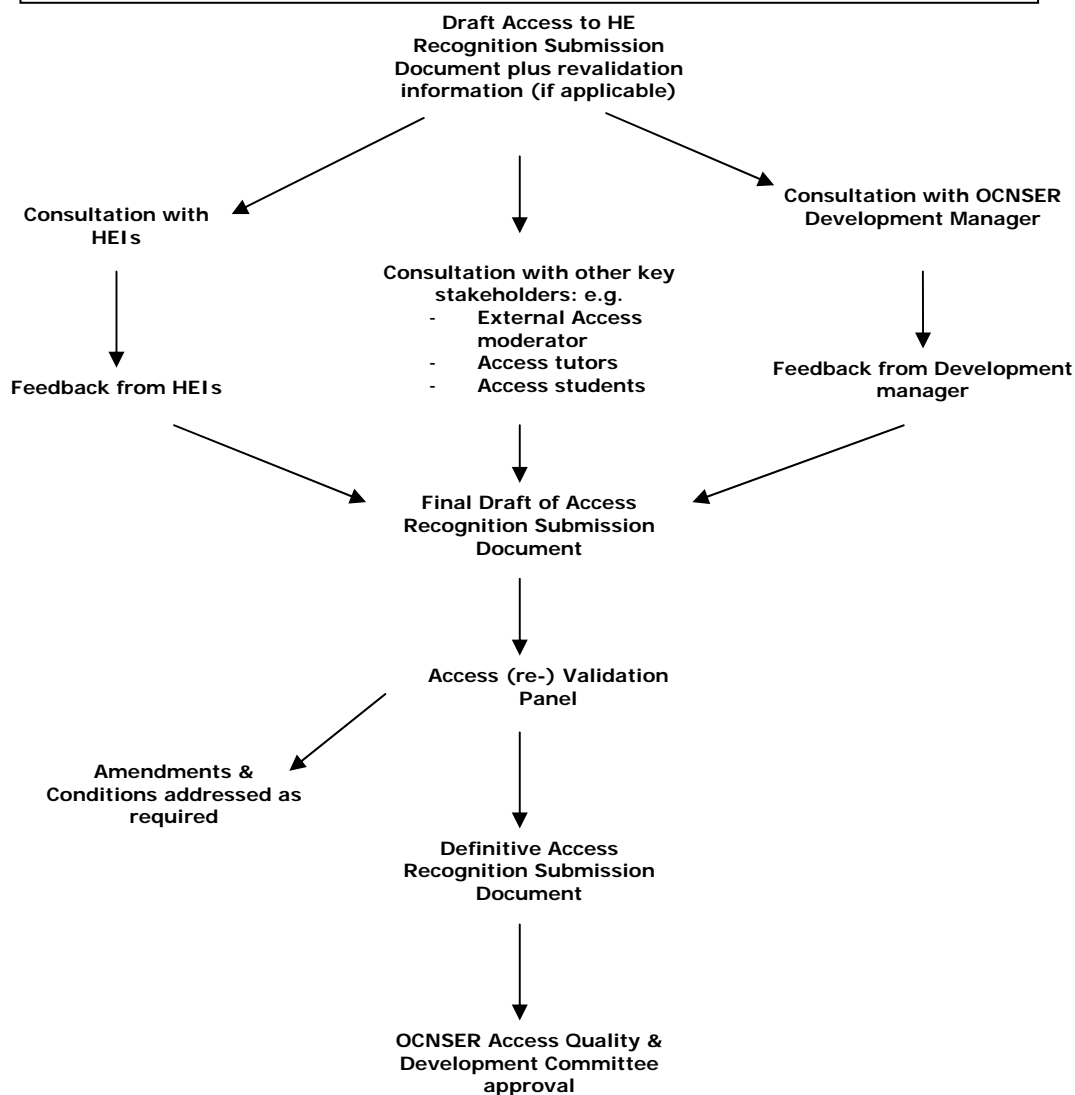
The re-validation panel event will also scrutinise the **Access Re-validation Report** as prepared by the Centre.

### 3.4 Summary of references for Access validation

The documents below are all available to support the development and validation processes for Access to HE provision. They are all available from the OCNSER web site or by contacting OCNSER. See <http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-downloads>

Title of Document	Description	Comment
Access to HE Course Recognition Document	This is the template which <u>must</u> be used to submit an Access Course for validation	Multiple individual award titles can be submitted in a single submission document
Access to HE Course Recognition Document Guidelines	This provides specific guidelines for completing the Access to HE Course Recognition Document	It is important to use this document to ensure that the submission contains the relevant information
Access Unit Template	Unit template specifically for Access to HE units.	Other OCN units may be used in Access courses but must be identified in the Unit list.

**Summary of Access Programme Validation Process**



## Section 4 Quality Assurance

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### 4.1 Introduction

Access to HE programmes within OCNSER are subject to the standard quality assurance procedures operated for all OCNSER programmes. There are some additional requirements for Access programmes over and above the standard OCN criteria. This section provides an overview of the quality assurance processes for Access to HE provision. See [www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-moderation](http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-moderation) for a range of documents and information.

### 4.2 Internal Moderation

#### 4.2.1 General guidance

Access programmes must have an internal moderation system in place. As a minimum this system must ensure that assignments are marked consistently and in keeping with the OCN Level descriptors. Centres should formally record this process and ensure that evidence of it is available to the external moderator.

Centres might adopt one or more of the following:

- Internal standardisation meeting(s) involving all tutors teaching on the programme.
- Regular second/cross marking of samples of student assignments etc.
- Regular team meetings with assessment/standardisation as a standing agenda item.

OCNSER recommends using the OCNSER Access Internal Moderation procedures and documentation to support internal moderation. These can be found at our Access moderation web page; [www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-moderation](http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-moderation)

#### 4.2.2 Using a Centre's own internal moderation procedures

Where a centre wishes to use its own internal moderation procedures these must be cross referenced to the internal moderation criteria below and approved by the external moderator

#### 4.2.3 Internal Moderation Criteria:

- a) Assessment is appropriate, consistent, fair, transparent and does not unintentionally discriminate against candidates with disabilities.
- b) Tutors/assessors receive ongoing advice and support, for example, on designing assessment activities.
- c) Learners are clear about assessment requirements and are given opportunities to achieve against the assessment criteria.
- d) Learners' work is presented in a manner that supports the moderation process.
- e) Evidence of learner achievement is mapped to the assessment criteria.
- f) Award of credit is valid, reliable and consistent.

### Summary of OCNSER Internal Moderation Documents

All documents below are available from <http://www.ocnser.org.uk/access-to-higher-education/access-moderation>

Title of Document	Description	Comment
IMA1 :OCNSER Guidance on Access Internal Moderation	Detailed definitions and guidelines on how to conduct an internal moderation process	Applicable to Access as well as OCN provision
IMA2 :Access Internal Moderation Sample Record	Form for recording sampling of one or more units	Optional form for use by centre
IMA3: Access IM Action Plan template	Form for IM to agree and review an action plan	Optional form for use by centre
IMA4: Assessment Plan template	Form planning and reviewing assessment on an Access Diploma	Optional form for use by centre

### 4.3 External Moderation

See **Access Moderation & Quality Handbook** – available as a separate download from <http://www.ocnser.org.uk/document/3326>

### 4.4 Awards Board

Each Access centre is required to hold a Final Awards Board for each Access Diploma title (see [Access Awards Board Guidelines and Agenda](#)). This is the meeting where the course team, in conjunction with their external moderator, recommend the award of the QAA Access to HE Diploma to learners. This must be a formally recorded meeting.

Centres must notify OCNSER of the dates of their Examination Boards by the end of the Autumn Term (see relevant OCNSER Circular for precise date each year).

Fial Awards Board Minutes must be sent to OCNSER as soon as possible after the meeting has taken place.

## Section 5. Further Information

### 5.1 Table of OCNSER Contacts

Role	Name	Email	Tel
Director of Access	David Gittins	<a href="mailto:d.gittins@ocnser.org.uk">d.gittins@ocnser.org.uk</a>	01227 824018
Access Quality & Moderation Officer	Emma Sharp	<a href="mailto:e.sharp@ocnser.org.uk">e.sharp@ocnser.org.uk</a>	01227 827249
Access Communications and Validations Officer	Sue Martin	<a href="mailto:s.martin@ocnser.org.uk">s.martin@ocnser.org.uk</a>	01227 827823
Access Registration and Certification Officers	Kinsey Sutton & Nicola Chambers	<a href="mailto:Accessadmin@ocnser.org.uk">Accessadmin@ocnser.org.uk</a>	01227 827823

### 5.2 Map of South East Region



### 5.3 National Access related web sites

Site	Address
<b>QAA web pages for Access:</b> probably the best site for Access providers, has definitive guidelines and downloads for AVAs and providers re Access statistics, credit specifications etc.	<a href="http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk">www.accesstohe.ac.uk</a>
<b>Aim Higher</b> starting page for mature students – brief but has links to main Access sites	<a href="http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/courses/getting_back_into_education.cfm">www.aimhigher.ac.uk/courses/getting_back_into_education.cfm</a>