



openawards

Open Awards Standardisation Policy and Procedure

Standardisation Policy and Procedures

Definition

Standardisation

'In the context of assessment, this describes the process through which those involved in assessment develop a shared understanding of the standard of student achievement that will be assessed as meeting the requirements of the assessment outcomes available (In the context of Access to HE, pass, and grades of merit or distinction). Such assessment decisions cannot be made in a way that is reliable and valid unless the underpinning assessment structures (unit design, assessment design and so on) are of the highest quality, so standardisation of these aspects of the assessment infrastructure to ensure their quality is also a key component to be addressed'.

QAA October 2016

Introduction

Open Awards standardisation policy and procedures for Access to HE provision will ensure that assessment is consistent and accurate standards are being applied and maintained across all provision. Open Awards is committed to monitoring unit design, assessment design/practices, and achievement standards of units common across sector and subject areas.

The development of robust standardisation processes for Access to HE Provision, which can be applied both within centres and nationally, will provide the evidence of consistent practice. The processes outlined in this handbook will ensure that standards are comparable across:

- **providers (and satellite sites)**
- **different types of providers (colleges / private providers)**
- **different subject areas**
- **modes of delivery (blended / distance learning)**

.....and over time.

General Scope of Policy

This policy document covers the standardisation of all provision accredited by Open Awards, as an Access Validating Agency, licensed by QAA.

Overall responsibility for this policy and procedure rests with Open Awards acting under delegated responsibility from the Board of Trustees.

Policy

Open Awards will, through its centre recognition process and compliance monitoring of all Providers, ensure that all its units which make up the Access to HE Diplomas are subject to a robust moderation and Provider standardisation. Open Awards will ensure that all recognised providers contribute to regional, national and inter-AVA standardisation of its Access to HE Diplomas.

Information regarding standardisation and moderation is made available to providers via:

- Access to HE Handbook 2016-17
- Provider Standardisation Handbook 2016-17

Open Awards will ensure standards are consistent across all centres by:

- Ensuring that standardisation occurs within centres as part of a rigorous internal quality assurance processes, through the centre recognition process and ongoing compliance monitoring and external moderation activities.

- Ensuring Providers monitor and maintain the quality and integrity of assessment design and practices and decisions within their organisations (including, satellite sites) over time.
- Planning and delivering a comprehensive annual programme of regional standardisation events that enable internal verifiers and external moderators to compare specific standards or required achievement for the award of credits and grades over time.
- Ensuring that the Head of Quality, Access to HE Manager, Lead and Pathway Moderators adopt a consistent approach in quality assuring the delivery of Open Awards Access to HE Diplomas by approved Provider organisations.

The standardisation activities will allow Open Awards to:

- Provide an opportunity to ensure the consistency of the award of credit to learners across different providers/ verifiers / assessors / different types of providing organisations and modes of delivery and agree the standards to be achieved.
- Compare the different assessment strategies used across a unit(s) and to ensure that:
 - the assessment strategy including any benchmarked tasks allow for the generation of evidence to be produced which is:

Sufficient:	There is enough evidence to demonstrate achievement against unit
Appropriate:	For the level and type and complexity of the learning
Authentic:	The evidence is attributable to the learner
Valid:	Standards of awards are consistent with the external reference points for the Access to HE Diploma and grades given to assessed work reflect the standard of achievement defined by the learning outcomes for the unit and the grade components that are applied from the assigned grade descriptors.
Reliable:	Consistent standards are operated in the award of grades by individual tutors, within curriculum teams and between providers, and over time.

- the assessment strategy and the assignment task(s) does not prevent any unintended barriers to achievement for a particular learner and pay due respect to any issues of equality and diversity.
- Ensure that the assessment tasks are written in a language that is appropriate to the level and is free from bias.
- Ensure consistency in the assessment judgements that are being made based on the available evidence.
- Ensure the standard of the feedback provided to learners is detailed, specific, identifies strengths and highlights areas for improvement.
- Ensure the adequacy of the feedback provided to assessors and the robustness of the internal verification of the assessment judgements.
- Review the **appropriateness and currency of the units** and their fitness for purpose in the current context and make any necessary recommendations/reviews.
- Identify and share best practice.

The outcomes of the standardisation process will be used to:

- Improve the assessment practice of tutor assessors within provider organisations and bring about consistency of assessment decisions to safeguard the integrity of the award of credit and Diplomas. Open Awards will publish the outcomes of standardisation activities through reports, exemplars and identification of best practice.
- Improve consistency in the judgements of moderators. Open Awards will publish the outcomes of moderation activities through reports and identification of best practice.
- Monitor and evaluate equality and diversity issues in the design of units, Diplomas, and assessment strategies and use these to inform unit and Diploma review.
- At a Regional and National level, influence and continuously improve unit and Diploma design and any prescribed assessment tasks within the Diplomas.

Provider Responsibilities

Commitment to participate in standardisation activities is a condition of the Centre Agreement. As a minimum requirement the centre must:

- **Plan and undertake standardisation of internally set tasks and the outcomes of internal assessment**
- **Contribute assessed material to Open Awards standardisation activities upon the request of Open Awards staff.**
- **Allow subject specialist staff to participate in and attend standardisation activities organised by Open Awards**

It is mandatory for centres to anonymise all samples ('clean' samples) provided for standardisation purposes.

Outcomes of standardisation events will be circulated and published to all Access Providers and will be used to inform future quality development activity. If significant shortcomings are identified, this will be an area of enquiry for future external moderation and review processes for the relevant Providers/Diplomas.

Any shortcomings identified at Provider level, through standardisation activities will not affect the achievement of learners previously certificated. Open Awards may complete further investigations and put support measures put in place for the Provider(s) involved.

Review arrangements

The Head of Quality and Access to HE Manager will monitor the effectiveness and outcomes of standardisation activities as part of the Open Awards self-review process.

This document will be reviewed, on an annual basis, and at other times where it appears that a review is required following feedback on standardisation activities or in response to QAA.

For 2016-17, the review has presented amendment requirements to the standardisation policy and procedures, namely:

- Creation of a dynamic on-line training area (via Moodle) to ensure all Moderators are up to date and can access relevant training, resources and standardisation activities throughout the year.
- Replace existing Lead moderators with permanent members of the quality team by Sept 2017 in order to ensure consistency in moderator decisions and feedback.
- Increase spot checks carried out through 2016-17 on:
 - Moderator performance during interim and pathway moderation visits
 - Provider standardisation activities

- Incorporate standardisation activities into Access to HE Forums
- Bring forward Annual Compliance Monitoring reviews from November to October and Initial Pathway Moderation visits from March to the end of January. The new timings of such visits are to ensure that action and support measures can be provided earlier enough to ensure impact within year (where applicable).

Regulatory Requirements

The Standardisation Policy and Procedures are designed to fulfil the requirements of QAA Licensing Criteria, specifically:

92 The AVA has a documented strategy for moderation and standardisation that sets out its approach to ensuring the consistency and comparability of the standards of student achievement.

93 It has a systematic and documented procedure for the implementation of its strategy for moderation and standardisation.

94 The strategy covers all aspects of assessment design and practice, including:

a unit design

b assessment strategy at course level

c assessment design at unit level

d assessment decisions

e moderator decisions

f resubmissions and referrals.

95 The AVA ensures that assessment design:

a is appropriate for the method and medium of delivery

b provides an appropriate level of academic demand

c provides opportunities, appropriate to the mode of study, for students to achieve the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit

d provides opportunities for differentiation of performance consistent with the requirements of the grade descriptors

e requires the demonstration of academic skills

f facilitates valid and reliable assessment of student achievement.

96 The AVA ensures that assessment practices on Access to HE courses:

a are consistent with The Access to Higher Education Diploma and Credit Specifications and grading requirements

b maximise the reliability and validity of assessment outcomes.

97 The AVA's operation of moderation ensures that consistent assessment standards are applied in all instances where Access to HE Diplomas or common units are delivered on more than one course or more than one occasion.

98 The standardisation procedure provides opportunities for tutors, internal moderators and external moderators to share, discuss, and where necessary recalibrate their expectations relating to the standards of work expected by:

a the requirements of any work at level 2 or level 3

b the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of the specific units that they work with

c the grade descriptors.

99 The AVA ensures that consistent standards are applied in assessment, so that equivalent student achievement and performance is reflected in consistent recommendations for credits and grades.

100 The AVA ensures that the assessment demand and assessment outcomes of units in cognate subjects within different Diplomas are subject to standardisation to ensure the consistency and reliability of decisions relating to student performance.

101 The procedure ensures that:

a moderators engage with assessment and grading decisions in the early stages of a course, and as early as is practicable

b moderators advise on and if necessary challenge provisional grades assigned to student work.

102 The AVA ensures that its providers operate rigorous internal moderation procedures which meet the AVA's requirements, and which facilitate:

a the application of consistent standards of demand in assessment

b assessment design that maximises reliability and validity in assessment outcomes

c the consistent and accurate application of QAA assessment regulations.

Procedures

Standardisation and Moderation

A. Standardisation through External Moderation

Moderation and standardisation are both concerned with ensuring the consistent application of the process of assessment and grading. The aim of moderation is to verify, through a process (which is external to the Provider organisation), 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 QAA.

External moderation is a central part of Open Awards quality assurance process. Details of procedures and processes for the external moderation of Access to HE Diplomas are set out in Open Awards Moderator External Moderation Guidelines 2016-17.

External moderation at a provider level is led by a Lead Moderator. They have overarching responsibility for quality and manage a team of pathway moderators who undertake the external moderation and verification of all courses within their allocated pathways. They are subject experts in order to ensure grading across different tutors is consistent and is in accordance with the QAA Grading Scheme Handbook. They are able to discuss their judgements with other members of the moderation team or the lead moderator when undertaking their work.

There are three external moderation visits over the course of the year. These are:

- annual compliance which confirms overarching compliance with policies and procedures and confirms the moderation cycle for the rest of the year
- interim pathway moderation which is a first review of learner evidence to ensure that work is meeting the standard and systems are being followed
- final moderation, when a final review of learner work is undertaken to confirm the standard has been met.

Open Awards does not recommend a specific sample size for external verification, as this will vary from course to course. Moderators are requested to take a risk assessment approach to sampling.

Moderators are asked to consider whether there are any factors which may contribute to a higher risk to the security of the award of credit, e.g. new provider, new course, new modes of delivery, new assessors/s, outcomes of previous verification visits, etc. identification of any such factors should be used to determine the focus and size of the sampling process.

Moderators are asked to decide on what is a representative sample for the course which will give them confidence that the award of credit is secure.

A suggested sample size is 10% which should include:

- All units delivered
- All assessors - the assessment decisions of any assessors new to the course should be particularly scrutinised
- All modes of delivery
- Include evidence from all sites where the Diploma is delivered
- Evidence that has been subjected to Internal Verification
- One learners work for the unit which has been graded as an overall Pass
- One learners work for the unit which has been graded as an overall Merit
- One learners work for the unit which has been graded as an overall Distinction
- Units with a grade profile outside of QAA grade tolerance
- Evidence that is considered by the assessors to be borderline for the award of credit.
- Evidence of where a reasonable adjustment has been made to the assessment strategy
- Evidence that has not formed a part of the internal verification sample
- Learner has achieved the Unit by means of the Credit Transfer/Exemption/Equivalence process

- Have a random element to it. (This relates to the verifier choosing the sample, all be it that there may be some dependence **on the assessor to identify some of the above.**)

Within these parameters Moderators are required to choose their sample size as to be manageable but meaningful. Sample size should be proportionate.

All actions from External Moderation reports are presented in Provider Profiles, that are made available to Moderators via the Moodle Site. All actions from all external moderation activities are also consolidated into an overarching action plan and monitored for areas for improvement, training needs and examples of best practice.

B. Standardisation and Internal Moderation

Providers are expected to complete standardisation through internal moderation activities. Providers will record their internal moderation activities via the internal verification form and make these available to moderators during their visits, for review.

The internal moderation process ensures that:

- Assignment briefs are internally verified and approved for use prior to delivery
- Assessment is appropriate, consistent, equitable and transparent
- Tutors receive ongoing advice and support, for example on assessment design, unit design, modes of delivery etc.
- Learners are clear about assessment requirements and are given sufficient opportunity to achieve against the assessment criteria
- There is appropriate use of the grading system
- Learner's work is presented in a manner which supports the moderation process
- Evidence of Learner achievement is mapped to the assessment criteria
- The Award of Credit is valid, reliable and consistent
- Actions for improvement are identified, communicated to the course team and followed up

In addition to internal and external moderation and other quality assurance visits to Providers, assessed work of learners is systematically compared to confirm standards through standardisation within centres and between centres and across time. Please see below a list of standardisation practices:

Standardisation Practices

1. Provider standardisation

In any provider organisation where there is more than one tutor / assessor delivering the same course or similar courses and making assessment decisions and recommendations for the award of credit to learners it is essential that the internal verification process includes an opportunity for the standardisation of their practice. The internal verifier for the course(s) has the responsibility for arranging and facilitating standardisation events. Open Awards will provide guidance and report forms to support planning; implementation and reporting the outcomes of these events (see Provider Standardisation Handbook).

Open Awards will provide any necessary training and the Open Awards Lead and Pathway Moderators will offer support to their Providers if required.

As part of compliance monitoring activities, Open Awards may review Provider standardisation activities via scheduled spot checks.

2. Regional Standardisation

Open Awards will organise regional standardisation events. Standardisation activities are also executed in the Access to HE forums. The schedule for the events is made available to providers via the Provider Standardisation Handbook. These events will be the responsibility of the Head of Quality and Access to HE Manager. Pathway and Lead Moderators with a relevant subject specialism are requested to attend.

All Pathways, modules and units will be subject to standardisation and review on a three year rolling programme. Please refer to the Standardisation/Unit Revision Plan that is available in the Provider Standardisation Handbook.

Providers will be asked to participate in these events in one of two ways:

- to contribute sample materials to the event, and
- to participate in the event by attending and contributing samples.

As stated earlier, it will be the responsibility of an Open Awards Moderator or Access to HE Manager to request and collect samples. This will normally happen during a compliance monitoring and moderation visits but Moderators may request samples by telephone or email.

3. E: Standardisation

Alongside the 'Live' standardisation events, this year Open Awards will be piloting online standardisation activities with the Humanities and Social Science Pathway. Online standardisation activities will take place from January 23rd 2017 to April 28th 2017.

4. National Standardisation / Inter AVA Standardisation

Samples of learners evidence of achievement used for regional standardisation will be made available for national standardisation events as appropriate.

Open Awards supports working with other awarding organisations to raise quality standards and assure that specified levels of attainment for a qualification are consistent and reliable. It is the aim of Open Awards to facilitate inter-AVA standardisation this year (2016-17).

5. Moderator standardisation

External moderators will be required to identify and collect, during the course of moderation, evidence/examples of:

- a) unit assessment plans and assignment briefs
- b) assessed work graded at pass, merit and distinction (to include 'typical' and borderline grades)

Assessment plans and assignment briefs will be used to allow moderators to compare assessment demands across provision. Assessed work will be used in standardisation exercises. Activities include comparison and discussion in subject 'clusters' during moderator training and agreeing excellent practice to disseminate across provision.

Additional methods will include attendance and participation in Open Awards standardisation events. Where consensus is reached, samples will be used to compare across cognate subject areas. Outcomes of standardisation activities to inform development of assessment practice and facilitate collection of a regional bank of 'exemplars'. Moderators will raise any concerns identified at times other than during moderation events directly to Open Awards Head of Quality. Open Awards will respond to concerns raised, which may include the revision of a Provider risk rating and determine any required actions or support measures.

Schedule of Open Awards Standardisation Events and criteria for the selection of units to be standardised

The Standardisation calendar has been produced as part of a three year rolling programme. The three year rolling standardisation/unit review programme was developed to respond to:

- the need to ensure the comparability of standards of common units across a range of Diplomas / Pathways / modes of delivery.
- QAA requirements
- the volume of uptake of particular units/Diplomas
- units where issues have been raised by IVs, External Moderators, Assessors, QAA, including those units where queries have been raised about the unit content
- units offered in different modes of delivery
- units offered with different grading options (graded Vs ungraded units)
- the need to standardise across Providers, regionally/ nationally and between lead and pathway moderators
- the need to ensure standardisation of quality across sectors e.g. FE/ Private Training Providers

The three year programme is presented for approval to the Access to HE Committee each year before being published as an annual calendar in the Open Awards Provider Standardisation Handbook and circulated to centres' Quality Contacts and External Moderators.

Conduct of Standardisation Activities

Open Awards adhere to set practices in managing all standardisation activities which are made available to Providers as best practice for their internal standardisation activities.

Standardisation events will be conducted to a format following a standard agenda. The outcomes of all events will be reported using standard report formats (facilitator reports)

Standardisation activities must identify the responsibilities of the participants and outline expected outcomes.

The activities will allow participants to:

- **consider standards across a range of different types of evidence e.g. e portfolios, essays, short answer questions, tutor observation sheets etc.**
- **confirm the validity of evidence**
- **assure consistent approaches to assessment decisions**
- **consider whether assessment methods are relevant and appropriate and pitched at the right level for the learner**
- **consider how easy portfolios are to navigate to assess the learner evidence against the assessment criteria**
- **review the differentiated judgements that are indicated by the award of different grades**
- **review the standards of assessor feedback**
- **review IM assessment decisions and feedback to assessors**
- **identify and share best practice**
- **confirm standards across time by examining materials and outcomes from previous standardisation events and activities.**

Other documents relevant to the process will include:

- **Open Awards Access to Fair Assessment Policy**
- **Access to HE Unit Guide**
- **Access to HE Grading Scheme Handbook**

Training will be provided in the conduct and reporting of standardisation events for all Facilitators, Lead Moderators, Pathway Moderators or other officers. Training will also be provided for IVs within centres with responsibility for organising internal standardisation events. These will form a part of the Open Awards' CPD offer for its Providers.

Further information on the conduct of Internal standardisation activities can be found in the provider handbook.

Sample Retention and Sampling Strategy

Samples will be taken from current learner evidence, logged and stored at Open Awards electronically. This is to allow Open Awards to build up a sample in order to compare standards over time.

Samples will be retained by Open Awards for the lifetime of the qualification to ensure samples are available to allow a comparison of standards over time.

Providers will be required to retain samples of learners work for a three year period. Providers will also be required to retain the following records for a three year period from the end of the year to which they relate:

- Names of learners, dates of birth and contact address
- Title and accreditation number of each qualification and unit studied
- Name(s) of Assessor(s)
- Assessment records, including assessment decisions and reasons for the decision
- Names of Internal Verifier(s)
- Full records of the internal verification process i.e.:
 - The internal verification plan;
 - Minutes of internal verification meetings;
 - The sample taken by the internal verifier, normally in the form of a spreadsheet/matrix;
 - Any resulting action points and details of how and when these have been or will be addressed.

Providers will be required to release samples of learners work upon the request of Open Awards. In many cases the sample will be acceptable in the form of photocopies of the original or may be in electronic format.

Open Awards will then make electronic copies of the evidence for retention. For effective standardisation events to be conducted it is important that the sample provided should be as complete as possible to ensure that informed judgements can be made about all of the evidence to support the purpose of the standardisation process as specified above. Providers, Lead and Pathway Moderators will be furnished with the following guidance for preparing their samples:

The sample should support the evidence of achievement for a whole unit of assessment and should include:

- A copy of the unit descriptor including unit code.
- Whole assessment strategy for the unit being standardised including tasks/assignment briefs/benchmarks. These should be mapped to the assessment criteria for the unit.
- All of the evidence generated by a learner(s) against all of the assessment criteria for the unit(s).
- Clear record of the assessment decision including feedback to the learner in relation to the achievement / non achievement of the assessment criteria/grading criteria (if applicable).
- Internal verification records including feedback to the Assessor and the Internal Verifier's judgments on the security of the award of credit.
- Evidence where possible of subsequent monitoring of any actions identified by the internal verification process.
- Copy of completed RA1 if a Reasonable Adjustment has been made at the discretion of the centre for any learner.

Dissemination of Outcomes of Standardisation Activities

The standard reports recording the outcomes of the activities will be disseminated to all attendees at the event for confirmation. In addition individual providers will receive feedback on their samples, as to whether or not the identified standards are being met.

Open Awards will then collate all of the outcomes from the meeting. This will include:

- An internal report to inform unit and qualification review
- An external report for all Providers
- Exemplars
- Identification of best practice

The Open Awards Access to HE committee will monitor the effectiveness and outcomes of standardisation activity as part of the self-evaluation process.

The outcomes from standardisation activities are used to improve the assessment practice of assessors within providers and bring about:

- consistency of assessment decisions to safeguard the integrity of the award of credit and grades (independent on whether it is graded or not, or the mode of delivery adopted for that unit)
- ensure that equivalent standards and requirements for achievement apply on different Access to HE courses which lead to Diplomas, within Open Awards and across different student cohorts
- Improve consistency in the judgements of moderators
- Improve the quality of feedback to assessors
- Improve the quality of feedback to learners
- Monitor and evaluate equality and diversity issues in the design of units, Diplomas, and assessment strategies and use these to inform unit and Diploma review

Standardisation of Open Awards staff practices and processes:

As part of the Standardisation processes, Open Awards recognise the need to ensure that staff adopt a consistent approach in quality assuring the delivery of the Access to HE Diploma by approved provider organisations

This is monitored by the Head of Quality and Quality and Compliance Officer, through a variety of methods, including:

- **Adoption of standard forms, processes and procedures**
- **Work shadowing arrangements**
- **Regular staff training**
- **Regular team meetings**
- **Dissemination of information via staff intranet (Fig 1) / Moodle (Fig 2)**

Figure One:

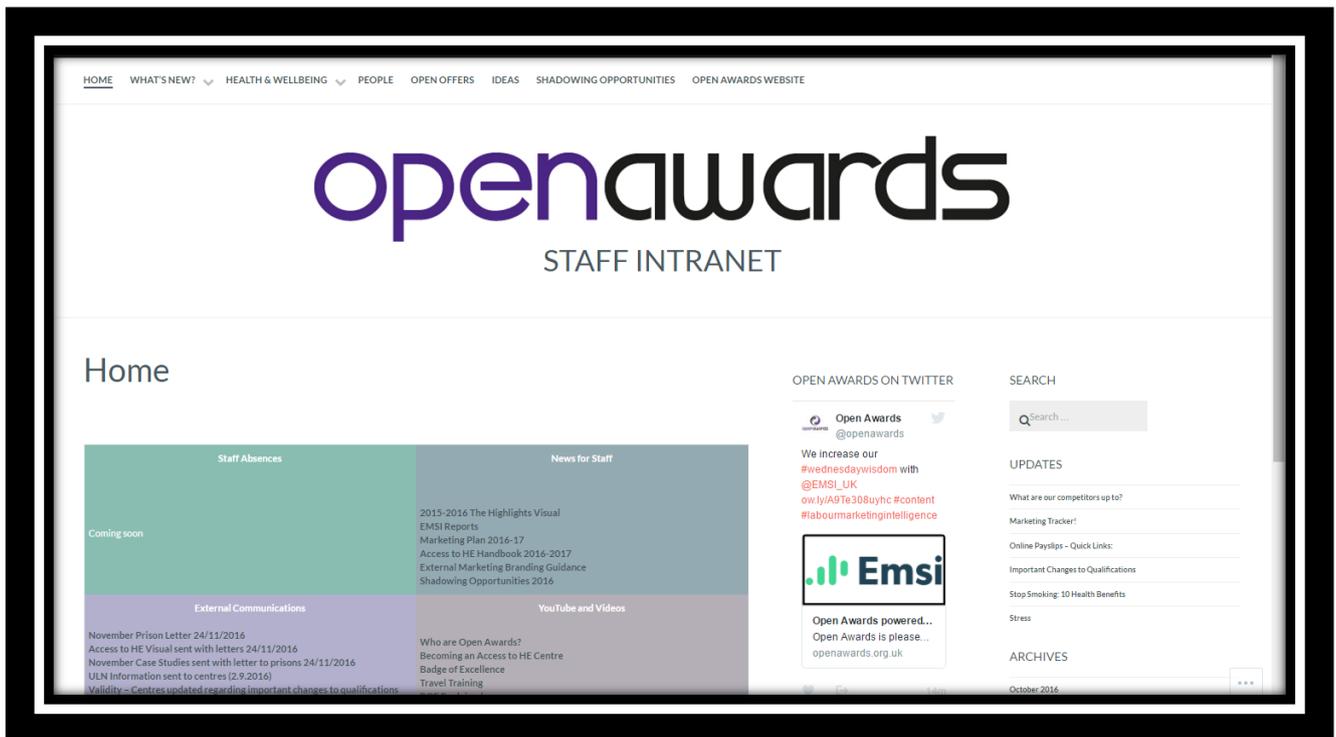


Figure Two:

