

# Access to Higher Education Provider Handbook

2020/2021



HANDBOOK

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## 1. Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to the Open Awards Access to Higher Education Provider Handbook.

The Access to Higher Education (HE) Diploma is a widely recognised qualification that prepares adults for entry to higher education. It is regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to ensure it meets rigorous quality requirements.

This handbook aims to give you a comprehensive overview of the processes required to deliver Open Awards' Access to HE Diplomas and is intended as a primary reference for all those involved in the delivery, assessment and quality assurance of the Access to HE Diplomas, including:

- Administration and Exams Officers
- Co-ordinators
- Managers (including Quality Managers)
- Internal Verifiers
- Tutors / Assessors

This handbook helps ensure that all parties meet the requirements of the QAA Licensing Criteria for Access Validating Agencies. From time to time QAA may amend or add criteria in year, which will result in us needing to amend our processes. On these occasions, we will notify you of the changes as soon as possible and provide support on implementing any changes.

We hope that you find this handbook useful and informative. If you have any questions or queries about any information provided here, please feel free to contact us on 0151 494 2072.

All information we hold about your centre, key contacts, and your learners are held securely on our database and only used for the purposes provided. You will find full details on how we use and protect your information at Open Awards in our [Privacy Notice](#). The Privacy Notice gives you details on:

- Your rights in relation to the information we hold;
- How we keep it secure;
- The type of information we collect and how we use it;
- Who we share information with;
- How long we hold information for.

## The Access to Higher Education Diploma

**24,895**

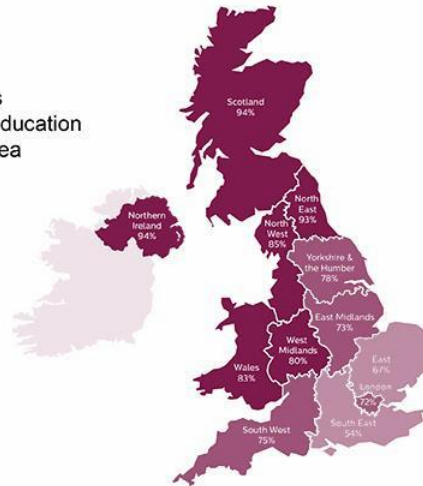
Diploma students entered higher education  
in England and Wales

**94%**

in full-time study

**79%**

of Access to HE students  
are accepted by higher education  
providers in their local area



## Top subjects

studied in higher education  
by students with an  
Access to HE Diploma



**48%**

Subjects allied to medicine  
(including nursing)



**11%**

Social studies  
(including social work)



**9%**

Biological sciences



**9%**

Business, law and  
administrative studies



**5%**

Maths and  
Engineering



**4%**

Education

The Access to HE Diploma contributes to widening  
participation in higher education



over 21 years old



from low  
participation areas



from ethnic minority  
backgrounds



had a disability or  
learning difficulty

**90%**

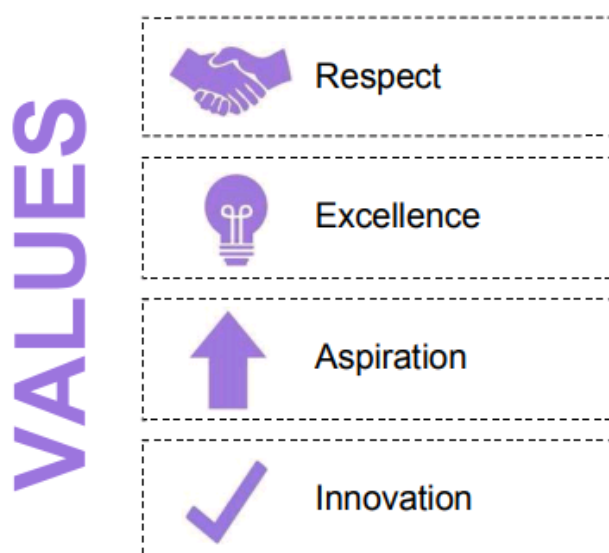
of higher education leavers with an Access to HE  
Diploma were in employment or further study six  
months after they completed the course

## Why Work with Open Awards?

We know that Access to HE Diplomas require commitment and dedication from both staff and learners. We believe that it is our duty to ensure that all Access to HE providers who deliver our Diplomas feel supported and confident to work effectively with their learners.

At Open Awards, we believe in Changing Lives Through Learning and it is no secret that Access to HE Diplomas transform people's lives. It is vital therefore that we work collaboratively with providers to ensure that everything we do is learner-focused and to the highest possible standards so that learners have the best possible chance to progress onto Higher Education.

Ensuring that the Diplomas offered by our providers and the modules and units that we offer remain current and relevant for learner progression into HE courses is a key priority for the Open Awards Access to HE team. We work with providers and other key stakeholders to develop and review our offer and are keen to help providers develop the courses that they need to offer to satisfy local demand.



## 2. The Access to HE Diploma

### Overview

The Access to HE Diploma is regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for HE (QAA). It is a qualification which prepares people that generally do not have traditional qualifications for study at degree level. Most Access to HE courses can be completed in one year. However, you can also study part-time over two or more years, or through distance learning or evening sessions.

The Access to HE Diploma is widely recognised by most UK universities, and many actively encourage applications from Access to HE learners. Each year, around 20,000 Access to HE learners apply for a degree course at a UK university to study in a wide range of subjects. The Access to HE Diploma attracts UCAS Tariff points

Learners are registered for mandatory units to the value of 60 credits at the start of their course. Open Awards Access to HE units are either 3 or 6 credits each. The combination of units in a Diploma is chosen when it is submitted for approval by the provider.

Diploma titles reflect the intended progression route or main area of study, e.g. Access to HE Diploma (Nursing), Access to HE Diploma (Humanities).

### Structure and Grading

Learners must achieve all 60 credits validated within the Diploma in order to attain it.

The Diploma is comprised of 45 credits from level 3 graded academic units and 15 credits from level 2 or 3 ungraded units. Ungraded units may be developmental and/or ungraded versions of academic units. Ungraded and graded versions of the same unit cannot appear in a diploma.

All Access to HE Diplomas follow a standard grading structure. Each graded academic unit (level 3) is awarded as a Pass, Merit or Distinction. **There is no overall, single grade for the Access to HE Diploma.**

Grading decisions are made in accordance with QAA's Grading Scheme (2018). Providers recommend grades for each graded academic unit following assessment and internal verification. These recommendations are subject to Pathway Quality reviews by Open Awards and not final until after the [Final Awards Board \(FAB\)](#).

**Learners should be made aware that any grades recorded by the tutor/assessor are subject to change up until they are awarded by Open Awards at the Final Awards Board.**

Final learner achievement is issued as a Diploma qualification certificate and unit transcript.

For all up-to-date information and guidance regarding grading, please refer to the QAA Access to HE Grading Scheme Handbook which can be found on the [QAA website](#).

The documents that explain the QAA guidelines on grading are:

- Grading Scheme Handbook: Index (September 2013)
- Grading Scheme Handbook Section A: Introduction and Summary (September 2013)
- Grading Scheme Handbook Section B: The Grade Descriptors (September 2013)
- Grading Scheme Handbook Section C: Using Grade Descriptors in Assessment (September 2013)
- Grading Scheme Handbook Section D: Moderation and Standardisation (September 2013)
- Grading Scheme Handbook Section E: Learner Results and Awards Boards (September 2013)
- Tutors' Quick Guide to Grading (September 2013)

## Grade descriptors

There are seven grade descriptors for Access to HE:

1. Understanding of the subject
2. Application of knowledge
3. Application of skills
4. Use of Information
5. Communication and presentation
6. Autonomy and/or Independence
7. Quality

Open Awards has assigned three or more grade descriptors to be used with a particular unit to capture and reward the standard of learner performance that need to be taken into account when grading decisions are made for that unit.

All grade descriptors assigned to a unit must be used in the grading of the unit whenever it is delivered. Descriptors that have not been formally assigned to the unit must not be used.



# Grading Scheme Access to HE Diploma



Any questions, please do not hesitate in contacting us via email:  
a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk j.mizon@qaa.ac.uk

### 3. Provider validation

#### Becoming an Approved Open Awards Access to HE Provider

If you would like to offer an Access to HE Diploma with us, the first thing you need to do is to become an approved Open Awards provider. This involves completing simple Centre Recognition Application forms that ask you to provide us with information on how you plan to develop, deliver and manage your courses.

All information requested is mandatory and required to ensure that we comply with our regulatory obligations with the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for HE).

The process to become an approved provider with Open Awards is outlined below:



Complete the Centre Recognition Form and the Supplementary Access to HE Approval Forms. To request these forms, please email [ahed@openawards.org.uk](mailto:ahed@openawards.org.uk)



One of our team will contact you and discuss your Access to HE plans. We will work together on a plan for maintaining quality and standards.



You will then be able to pay your Centre Recognition and Annual Fee and sign the Open Awards Centre Agreement. Your Centre Approval will be submitted to our Access to HE Committee for their approval.



You will receive continuing support from our dedicated team of experts, which includes training and curriculum development to ensure high-quality processes.

Sometimes we might need to work with you to develop your application before we can give you approval. If this is the case we can offer packages of support to help you meet the required standards. If you are not subject to external inspection from a government agency, for example Ofsted, you will be subject to additional ongoing quality checks.

Your status as an Approved Provider for Access to HE will be reviewed each year through the Quality Review process.

Throughout the centre recognition process we discuss your chosen areas of provision. Once you are approved, we can work with you to finalise Access to HE Diploma(s) for the subject(s) and progression route(s) you are planning. See [How to Build Your Access to HE Diploma Course with Open Awards](#) for more information.

### **Provider staffing and resources**

All Access to HE Providers must comply with our Centre Agreement which includes a commitment to have sufficient financial, administrative and human resources to deliver the Access to HE provision.

Access to HE providers need to nominate appropriate contacts for the following roles so that we can ensure that all information is communicated to the correct person:

#### **Managers**

Providers need to identify a senior manager with overall responsibility for Access to HE provision, including strategic management of Access to HE provision.

#### **Access to HE Coordinator**

The role of the Access to HE Coordinator is key to the development and delivery of Access courses. This is usually a senior manager with responsibility for all Access to HE provision at your centre. Any curriculum or quality assurance based information or queries will be directed towards this person. Some administration queries will also be directed to this person.

The Access to HE Coordinator should be allowed an appropriate amount of time and support to ensure that the following duties relating to the Access to HE Diploma are carried out:

- acting as the main point of contact for Open Awards
- cascading Open Awards guidance to appropriate staff at the provider
- providing information, advice and guidance to current and potential learners
- attending Open Awards training and subject development events
- supplying relevant, timely information to Open Awards
- ensuring that grades are added to the Markbook in a timely manner
- appointing and training tutors and internal verification staff
- ensuring compliance with Open Awards policies and procedures
- overseeing moderation and compliance visits carried out by Open Awards
- ensuring that actions are completed in a timely manner
- publicity and promotion of the Access to HE Diploma
- organising the Final Awards Board.

The Access to HE Coordinator need not personally carry out all of these duties but must take responsibility for ensuring they are undertaken.

## **Tutors**

Teaching staff must have the professional competence and skills to teach and assess the Access to HE programme, particularly in relation to the models of delivery being used. They must also have subject expertise in the subject matter of the Access to HE Diploma being delivered. Teaching staff must also have expertise in providing pre- and post-course guidance, including the criteria and selection process for progression to HE.

## **Access to HE Administrator**

Open Awards will direct all administration and course-related queries and information to this contact.

They will also be included in some of the curriculum correspondence. You may choose to have more than one administrator (usually for additional portal accounts) but you must identify a lead contact. Certificates are always sent to this person and the site where the Access to HE Administrator is based as recorded with Open Awards as the correspondence address. Occasionally, the Access to HE Coordinator and Administrator roles are carried out by the same person.

A portal account is allocated to the Access to HE Administrator at your centre. Additional portal accounts can be provided although care should be taken to ensure that control of learner and course information is monitored centrally. Please note that by logging onto the secure portal, you are accepting the terms and conditions of use. These terms and conditions can be found on the log in screen when you input your credentials.

## **Access to HE Finance Contact**

All invoicing and finance queries will be directed to this person.

Please see our [Privacy Notice](#) for details on how we use, store and protect all personal information collected by Open Awards for our legitimate business interests.

## **Resources**








Open Awards expect that all Access to HE delivery takes place is suitably resourced including well-equipped classroom areas with adequate ICT facilities. Learners who need to complete practical work as part of their Diploma must have access to suitably equipped workshop areas relevant to the pathway. Learners must also have access to high quality learning resources.

The resources available for delivering the Access to HE Diploma will be reviewed through our course recognition and quality review processes.

## 4. Building your Access to HE Diploma Course

### How to Build Your Access to HE Diploma Course with Open Awards

Open Awards offers over 60 Access to HE Diploma titles across 8 subject areas:

 <b>Business and Management</b>	 <b>Computing</b>
 <b>Construction and the Built Environment</b>	 <b>Creative and Performing Arts</b>
 <b>Health</b>	 <b>Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism</b>
 <b>Humanities and Social Sciences</b>	 <b>Science and Engineering</b>

Providers use these approved qualifications to put together their courses. Courses must meet the rules of combination for the Diploma. We provide a Course Creator Tool (also known as 'Merlin') which ensures that you are providing the right information.

Building your Access to HE Diploma is as easy as 1, 2, 3...



**Selecting a Diploma Title:** Firstly, consider what degree course(s) and career pathway(s) you would like to prepare your learners for and select a Diploma title that reflects this.



**Choosing Content to Satisfy Rules of Combination:** Secondly, build your Diploma by choosing modules and units from our bank of units according to the Rules of Combination set out below. When deciding upon the content, consideration should be given to the requirements of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to which your learners are most likely to progress.



**Submitting your Proposal:** Thirdly, submit your proposal to us for review. We will consult with a range of stakeholders, such as HEIs themselves, other providers and moderators who will ensure that the content meets the intended purpose.

Let's look at these stages in a bit more detail:

### **Selecting a Diploma Title**

Open Awards set the titles for Access to HE Diplomas through the development process. Titles of Access to HE Diplomas are important as the title must reflect the intended HE destination for those learners undertaking the Diploma. The titles must conform to a QAA- prescribed format:

Access to HE Diploma (name of subject/area of study/progression route)

Examples:

- Access to HE Diploma (Engineering)
- Access to HE Diploma (Humanities)
- Access to HE Diploma (Health Professions)

If you are unable to find a suitable title from our existing titles, new developments can be considered. Contact the Access to HE team on 0151 494 2072 who will be able to advise on how to do this.

### Rules of Combination

These are the rules which govern the combination of modules and units you are required to use to build your Access to HE Diploma. Specific rules of combination for each Diploma title will be detailed in the relevant Diploma Guide. You can also go to the Open Awards [website](#) and view all of the Access to HE units available using the 'Search Access to HE' tool.

Our Course Creator Tool (Merlin) and supportive Access to HE team will help guide you through the process and make sure you follow the correct Rules of Combination.

The overarching rules are:

- The units in your Diploma must total 60 credits with subject content from one pathway
- 45 of these credits must be from graded Level 3 units that have academic content
- 15 of these credits will be from ungraded units at Level 2 or Level 3. These units may be academic content or developmental.

The three different types of unit mentioned can easily be identified from their unit codes outlined below:

Unit Type	Coding Prefix
Graded Academic	GA
Ungraded Academic	UA
Ungraded Developmental	UD

Diplomas must contain a minimum of 2 and no more than 4 modules from academic subjects to ensure that the content is coherent and relevant to the intended progression routes.



## Additional Diploma Specific Rules of Combination

In addition to the rules of combination listed above, some additional rules apply for specific Diploma titles. These will be outlined in the Diploma Guide e.g.:

- **Health Pathway:** Diplomas **must have at least 15 credits** from the Human Biology module
- **Teaching:** Diplomas **must have 15 credits** from graded academic units in a National Curriculum subject

## Using Alternative Modules

You may include a choice of module combinations in your Diploma where appropriate. For example, for Social Science, you may choose to have both of the following combinations;

- Social Work, Psychology and **Sociology**
- Social Work, Psychology and **Education Studies**

To do this you should submit your Diploma with some interchangeable modules of the same credit value. The Merlin Course Creator Tool will guide you through your selection.

**Please note: If you build your Diploma course in this way, Assessors, Internal Verifiers and anyone involved in the registration of learners must be aware of the alternative combinations of units.**

## Submitting Your Proposal for Review

When you have successfully created your Diploma course you should submit it for approval via the Open Awards secure portal. This will be reviewed by the Open Awards team for approval. All approved courses will be presented to the Access to HE Committee and Board of Trustees for final approval. You will be formally notified of the approval outcome including a date for commencement of delivery. This will be the date you requested on your Merlin.

**Important:** Once a course has been approved any changes to the course will need to be made using the 'Minor change to course form' available on the Open Awards portal. Please refer to '[Making changes to your approved courses](#)' section of this handbook for details.

Requests to add new modules, units or Diploma titles to the Open Awards Diploma framework should be made to the Open Awards Access to HE Manager. Please refer to [Requesting New Modules, Pathways, and Diploma Titles](#) section of this handbook for details.

It is the provider's responsibility to ensure that learners are taught and assessed on the correct units. **If a learner has been taught and assessed for different units to those approved in the course, they may not achieve the Diploma qualification.**



## Course Revalidation

Your course will need to be revalidated at least every five years. Revalidation follows a similar process as initial development and ensures that the content remains relevant and appropriate to the intended progression route.

## Unit Types Explained

### Graded Academic Units (GA)

These units are level 3 subject units which make up the bulk of your Diploma. Each unit is made up of either 3 or 6 credits. They must total 45 credits.

### Ungraded Academic Units (UA)

We have identical ungraded versions of all our graded units.

These can be used to introduce learners to the Diploma subjects and to level 3 study

They can be combined with a selection of ungraded development units (UD) or used on their own to build the required 15 credits of ungraded units.

### Ungraded Development Units (UD)

These units can be level 2 or level 3 and are intended to help learners develop both academic and study skills necessary to meet the demands of achievements at level 3.

They can be combined with a selection of ungraded academic units (UA) or used on their own to build the required 15 credits of ungraded units.

# Access to HE Diploma



The Open Awards Level 3 Access to Higher Education Diploma is life changing qualification specifically designed for adult learners as an alternative route to A-Levels onto university degree courses. Learners are required to achieve 60 credits in total to achieve the Diploma but there are certain Rules of Combination required. Follow the three steps below to build your very own Access to HE Diploma

In order to achieve the full Diploma, learners must gain 45 credits from academic graded units (GA) and 15 credits from ungraded academic units (UA) and /or ungraded development units (UD).

**1.**

**Choose from 8 Pathway Modules**

**Choose a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 modules from that pathway**

**2.**

**Choose Graded Academic Units (GA) amounting to 45 credits from within chosen modules**

**3.**

**Choose a combination of Ungraded Academic (UA) and/or Ungraded Developmental Units (UD) amounting to 15 credits**

New Diplomas to be submitted to Open Awards using the Diploma Creator Tool, Merlin. For a copy of the Merlin form please contact [ahed@openawards.org.uk](mailto:ahed@openawards.org.uk) or call 0151 494 2072

Access to HE Diplomas consist of **Pathways**. Each pathway contains **Modules**. Each module contains **Units**. Each unit contains **3,6 or 9 credits**.


**\*Teaching or ITT Diplomas**  
A minimum of 15 credits from National Curriculum modules.

**\*Health Pathways** must have a minimum of 15 credits from the Human Biology module.

# Subject Pathways & Modules


 Humanities & Social Science
Criminology
Development
Education
English
History
Law
Psychology
Social Work
Sociology
Theology & Religious Studies


 Computing
Computing
Commercial Aspects of Computing
Mathematics for Computing
Development

 Creative & Performing Arts
Art & Design
Business
Development
English
Film, Media & Culture
Media Make-Up
<b>*NEW UNIT*</b> Performing Arts

 Hospitality, Leisure & Tourism
Business
Computing
Development
Hospitality
Management
Sports & Exercise
Travel Tourism

 Health
Development
Human Biology
Health Studies
Microbiology
Psychology
Science for Health
Sports & Exercise
Sociology

 Construction & the Built Environment
Business
Construction
Development
Electrical & Electronic Engineering
Management
Mathematics
Physics

 Science & Engineering
Biology
Chemistry
Development
Education
Electrical & Electronic Engineering
Mathematics
Microbiology
Physics
Psychology

 Business & Management
Business
Development
Law
Management
Sports & Exercise

**\*NEW PATHWAY! \***

## Making Changes to your approved Courses

Once your Access to HE Diploma course has been approved it can only be amended through a formal change process. This section explains how this process works and gives an indication of the timescales involved.

Should you need to make a change to your course please use the 'Minor Change Form' which is available on the Open Awards secure portal.

Any other changes will require a new course submission using the Course Creator Tool (Merlin)

The following table shows how we categorise these changes and the subsequent actions required.

Change Type	Change Description	Action Required
Minor Change	A change of up to 15 credits selected from an existing module within a validated Diploma as long as Open Awards consider that the change will not detract from the coherence of the Diploma, its suitability for the stated progression route, and the rules of combination are still met.	Minor Change Form to be completed and submitted through the Secure Portal.
Minor Change	Addition of an alternative module to an existing validated Diploma, as long as this has the same credit value as the original module, and the alternative module is comparable in demand to its alternative. It must also align to the content and rationale of the Diploma.	
Major Change	Change to Diploma title using an existing Open Awards' QAA approved title that aligns to the content and rationale of the Diploma.	To be classed as a new Diploma course. Course Creator Tool (Merlin) to be completed and submitted through the Secure Portal.
Major Change	A change to an existing approved Diploma course involving 16 credits or	
Major Change	A replacement of one or more modules by another from the same pathway.	

Other requested changes may also be considered and we will use our discretion as to the process to be followed to approve any change.

### **Making Minor Changes**

You should submit minor changes through the Secure Portal using the Minor Change Request Form.

If the change is considered acceptable and the Diploma is still fit for purpose for the intended target group and stated progression route, the change will be approved for all future registrations on the Diploma. Minor changes will be processed within one calendar month of receipt and notification will be emailed to the Access to HE Coordinator who will be asked to check and confirm the changes.

**Changes you wish to be processed for the next academic year must be received by 31<sup>st</sup> of July at the latest.**

### **Making Major Changes**

If you wish to make a major change to your Diploma you will need to request and submit a new Diploma Course on a Merlin form through the Secure Portal. These changes will be processed in the same way as new Diploma courses and must be submitted no later than 31<sup>st</sup> May each year.

## **Requesting changes to Open Awards Access to HE Programme of Pathways, Modules and Units**

Open Awards is keen to ensure that all of its qualifications are valid and fit for purpose. We welcome suggestions from any stakeholders for any proposed changes to the structure and content of Pathways, Modules and Units.

### **Requesting Textual Changes to Units**

You can make suggestions for textual changes to unit content to the Access to HE Manager who will review them with you and then submit them to the Access to HE Committee and Board of Trustees for approval if appropriate.

Each unit has a shelf life of up to five years before a review is scheduled. Depending on the context of the changes proposed, we may take immediate action to amend the unit or wait until the unit review is scheduled.

### **Requesting New Units**

If you cannot find the unit content you are looking for, you may propose the content for a new unit. The unit will be considered by a panel of subject specialists from other Access providers, HEI contacts and quality reviewers before being submitted to the Open Awards Access to HE Committee for approval. Once approved, you will be able to include the unit in your Diploma by requesting the change according to the Diploma Amendment Guidance. Please make sure that the replacement units do not affect the Rules of Combination for the Diploma eg only replace a graded unit with another graded unit, only replace Level 3 unit with another Level 3 unit.

### **Requesting New Modules, Pathways, and Diploma Titles**

We welcome business cases for the proposal of new modules, pathways and titles, which can be submitted to the Access to HE Manager for review by the Open Awards Access to HE Committee and Board of Trustees for approval. As changes to the programme structure may impact on some or all users of the Diploma, we will ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in the consultation process before any change is agreed and implemented. Changes should not be implemented in your diploma course until you have written confirmation that the changes have been approved and you have requested the change to or a new Diploma.

All Open Awards Access to HE units are valid for a maximum period of 5 years following addition to the Open Awards Access to HE Programme. Open Awards conduct reviews of a selection of units across the academic year to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

Providers are invited to comment on the suitability of units as part of the review process before they are taken to panel for renewal.

## Access to HE Course Materials and Sample Assignments

In addition to the submission and review of Pathways, Modules and Units that make up the Open Awards Access to HE Programme, providers are invited to contribute to the provision of sample assignments and course materials.

During academic year 2018/19, Open Awards begun work to create course materials to support blended and online learning. This year, we hope to continue to build on these materials and seek your feedback on them. These materials are subject to scrutiny and quality assurance prior to publishing.

Course materials are freely available for all Open Awards validated providers via a secure online platform. For further information please contact a member of the team on 0151 494 2072.

## 5. Recruiting and registering learners

### Promoting your Access to HE Diploma

We encourage you to actively market your Access to HE Diploma in order to attract the cohort of learners you require. We do ask that you comply with our branding guidelines so that we can ensure a consistent message is being communicated.

The guidance for using the Open Awards logo and the QAA Access to HE logo are available on the Open Awards [website](#).

Where you are actively marketing an Open Awards Access to HE Diploma, we ask that, as a minimum, you include the following information:

- Any entry requirements to the course, where applicable
- Any additional requirements for professional progression (e.g. a minimum grade C in GCSE English, Maths and Science for primary school teaching)
- Details of the cost of the course, including the Open Awards registration fee if this is charged separately
- Please also make it clear that successful completion of an Access to HE Diploma does not guarantee access to Higher Education, but rather allows learners to apply to universities via UCAS.

As best practice you should:

- Indicate possible vocational progression routes
- Include labour market intelligence to demonstrate the need for the qualification
- Explain funding opportunities, such as Advanced Learner Loans
- Provide case studies of previous Access to HE learners
- Highlight alternative methods of delivery used on your course

We will review the way you promote your Access to HE Diploma with you as part of the Annual Compliance Monitoring visit.

If you need any support with marketing your Diploma, contact us and we will be happy to help.

Don't forget, when promoting your courses on social media, you can tag Open Awards via the following channels below....

Twitter - @openawards

Facebook – Open Awards

Instagram - openawards



## Registering Learners

Access to HE learners should be **registered within 6 weeks** of the learner's individual start date via the Open Awards [Secure Portal](#) or before the learners official (usually UCAS) application deadline. Please make sure that learners are registered with the correct details and on the correct Diploma. If learners are registered incorrectly, there will be an administration charge to rectify errors.

Learners can be added onto course runs up until 6 weeks from the start date but are subject to the 6 week registration deadline.

Amendments or late registrations may be requested up to 26 weeks from the learner's start date but are only considered in extenuating circumstances and on an individual basis. These requests may result in further investigations by Open Awards and control measures may be applied. Please see section on Late or Incorrect Course Registrations below.

Learner data can be submitted using the provided Learner Registration Form (Access to HE) template or via a report generated from your own MIS system. The data provided must be in accordance with the **Access to the HE Data Specification** document which is available via the secure portal.

### Fair Processing and Extended Privacy Notices

We have a responsibility under the Data Protection Act to ensure that learners are informed of how their information is processed and shared. Please ensure you make learners aware that their information will be passed to Open Awards for registration purposes. You should also provide a copy of the [Privacy Notice – Learner Information](#) to your learners so that they understand what data we hold about them, why we hold it and how their data is used.

We strongly recommend that you encourage them to visit the Learning Record Service [website](#) to view the Extended Text Privacy Notice which will explain how their data may be shared.

Providers must also make learners aware that upon achievement of qualifications and/or units, Open Awards will pass achievement details to the Learning Records Service for the purpose of updating their Personal Learning Record.

### Checking Learner and Course Registrations

You must ensure that learners are registered with their **correct legal** name on the correct Diploma.

Once you have registered your learners, you can use the 'Course Run Confirmation' report via the [Secure Portal](#) to check that all information is correct.

We recommend that you use this report whilst registering your learners and throughout the 6 week registering period.

## Late or Incorrect Course Registrations

Learners may be registered late or transferred to another unit or course run between 6 and 26 weeks from the start date but only in extenuating circumstances. The following forms are available on the Secure Portal:

- Request for Late Registration Form
- Request for an Amendment to a Learner Registration

Completed request forms must be submitted via the Secure Portal and will be considered on an individual basis. These requests may result in further investigations by Open Awards and control measures may be applied.

The Access to HE Late Registration Fee will be applied for late registrations and the Administration Fee will be applied for transfers. See Open Awards Fees and Charges on our [website](#).

## Learners on Two-Year Courses

These learners should be registered on course runs that span the 2 year period rather than as two separate 1-year course runs.

## Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer

### Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

RPL is the generic term for processes used to recognise learning achieved outside the formal course of learning designed to support student achievement of a named Diploma. It includes recognition of both experiential and certificated learning.

### **Level 2 units**

Access to HE providers are able to request blanket exemptions for Level 2 achievements from GCSE achievements. These exemptions must be requested when the Diploma is initially submitted for approval. Approval for Level 2 exemptions will cover all future learners on this Diploma, although the provider remains responsible for checking and retaining evidence of each learner's achievements where exemptions are claimed.

Exemptions will be allowed for learners who have an appropriate GCSE at grade C or above against level 2 credits in units relating to communication, mathematics and science.

A maximum of 6 credits may be exempted against any single GCSE. A maximum of 9 credits at Level 2 can be claimed through exemptions.

Our Pathway Moderators may request evidence of prior learning (e.g. copies of named learners' GCSE certificates) through their sampling activities.

Please be aware that exemptions are not allowed on certain Diplomas. (Please check the Rules of Combination).

Should a provider wish to claim RPL for a learner that has evidence of prior learning at Level 2 that does not align with the blanket approval outline above, must follow the guidance for Level 3 below.

### ***Level 3 units***

Providers wishing to request Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Level 3 achievements must submit a completed [Recognition of Prior Learning Request \(RPL\) Form](#) for each learner as soon they have started the course but no later than six weeks from their start date. RPL requests should form part of individual learning plans as necessary.

Requests should be submitted via the Open Awards Portal. The Head of Quality and Standards will consider all RPL request forms supported by relevant evidence within 5 working days of receipt.

RPL requests must be supported by evidence against assessment criteria to allow Open Awards to decide whether the evidence is:

- valid
- current
- authentic
- sufficient
- reliable

RPL requests for Access to HE learners cannot be submitted for part units. If a learner cannot evidence prior achievement of all assessment criteria for a unit, we cannot accept RPL requests. No more than 50% of the credits required for an Access to HE Diploma can be awarded through RPL.

Please be aware that any units achieved through RPL do not attract grades (and therefore do not have UCAS Tariff points attached to them).

**Providers must continue to deliver the unit(s) to the learner until they receive formal confirmation that the RPL request has been approved.**

### Credit Transfer

Learners who have achieved Access to HE Diploma credits (either from Open Awards or another AVA) may wish to claim credit towards an Open Awards Diploma.

Credit transfer can only be granted where the content of the unit/s from which those credits matches the content of the unit/s they wish to claim. If a student transfers from one named Diploma to another (either within or between AVAs), credits already achieved may be transferred if:

- The credits are derived from units that are equivalent to an Open Awards unit which is acceptable within the rules of combination for the named Diploma to which the student is transferring.
- There are no more than a maximum of 50% of the units of any Diploma being achieved in this way.
- Equivalent units can only be claimed if achieved within the last 5 years.

### Requesting RPL or Credit Transfer

Formal requests must be submitted via the Open Awards Portal in line with our RPL Policy and Procedure which can be found on the [Open Awards website](#).

The Head of Quality and Standards will consider all RPL request forms supported by relevant evidence within 5 working days of receipt and make recommendations to the Access to HE Committee. The Committee's decision is final and will be shared with the provider within two weeks of the meeting.

**Providers must continue to deliver the unit(s) to the learner until they receive formal confirmation that the RPL request has been approved.**

### Withdrawing Learners

Learners can be withdrawn via the Secure Portal up to 6 weeks from their individual start date.

## 6. Delivery, Assessment and Quality Assurance

### Blended and Distance Learning

We are happy to support you to innovate and use technologies to deliver your Diplomas via methodologies of this type; however, we will require some extra information from you to make sure that your course complies with QAA regulations.

Aspects to consider for Distance Learning are:

- Enrolment
- Admission
- Resources
- Learner support
- Assessment
- Quality Assurance

We classify Diplomas where at least 75% of the learning hours are delivered remotely as distance learning.

Open Awards offer blended learning materials for a range of units. These materials are free to use for Open Awards approved providers and can be accessed by learners via a secure online platform. Learners must be registered for use of this platform and brief training is provided for tutors to support delivery. To get set up, please contact us.

### Unit Assessment Plans

Each Access to HE Diploma must be supported by an assessment plan for each unit that makes sure that learners are able to demonstrate the skills, knowledge and confidence that will prepare them for the rigorous assessment regimes in higher education.

In order to achieve the Diploma, learners must meet all Learning Outcomes and associated Assessment Criteria in all the units specified in the rules of combination for the Diploma.

All grade descriptors assigned to a unit must be used in the grading of the unit whenever it is delivered. Descriptors that have not been formally assigned to the unit must not be used.

Tutors must develop plans which show how they intend to assess the unit, and these plans must be internally moderated. The assessment plan should cover the whole Diploma and include:

- Number of assignments
- Type and range of assessments
- How tasks will allow for differentiation
- An assessment strategy for the whole Diploma

- A schedule of delivery and assessment/ scheme of work
- Consideration as to whether the strategy prepares learners for Higher Education

Where a unit is assessed by more than one assignment, the assessment strategy must clearly state which graded descriptors will be considered for each assignment and how you will apply a single grade for the unit.

Each assessment criterion can only be formally assessed from one assignment but grade descriptors can be used more than once. Grade Descriptor 7 (Quality) must be used for all assignments.

### Preparing Your Assignments

One of the many benefits of an Open Awards Access to HE Diploma is that you design the assignments yourself to suit the context of delivery and to make the most of the variety of assessments methods available to you. Here are a few principles to consider when designing your assignments:

#### 1 Transparency

- The Learning Outcomes and associated Assessment Criteria for a unit should be made available to the learner
- The requirements of the assessment should be expressed clearly in relation to the Assessment Criteria
- The specific grade descriptor components used to grade learners' work must be published together with the assignment brief

#### 2 Fairness

- Assignments must be written in a style and using language that makes them as accessible as possible to all learners
- The skills required to complete an assessment must relate to the subject and topics being assessed

#### 3 Reliability

- An assessment strategy may be considered to be reliable if, when used with different groups of learners, it produces similar outcomes in terms of successful completion as well as in terms of the range of grades achieved

## 4 Validity

- The outcomes of assessment may be considered to be valid if:
  - the evidence of assessment can be attributed to a specific learner
  - the assessor is able to justify achievement and recommended grades against the specific criteria for the unit

## 5 Sufficiency

- The evidence of assessment should be sufficient to allow an assessor to make a judgement that a learner has achieved all the learning outcomes for a unit and
- The evidence of assessment should be sufficient to allow an assessor to justify any recommended grades
- There must be evidence that the learner has fully met all of the assessment criteria and the evidence should be balanced and reflect the demands of the criteria.

## 6 Authenticity

- At least one assessment from each module in a Diploma must be observed.
- Ensure that you collect learner statements and signatures (Assignment Brief)
- Encourage the use of referencing and bibliographies
- Discourage “passive recycling of sources”

## 7 Delivery and Assessment

- Operate a formal approach to the submission of learner work
- Set deadlines must be notified to learners in writing (Assignment Brief)
- **At least one unit for each module should have some element of supervised assessment**
- Work is assessed against the specific assessment criteria for the Unit
- A learner’s submission is successful if they have achieved all the Learning Outcomes attached to an assignment by meeting all the associated assessment criteria
- Each assessment criteria can/should be formally assessed only once
- Grades are assigned by reference to common grade descriptor components
- Only the components published by the QAA may be used
- Draft submissions are allowed, however no indication of grade can be discussed with the learner. You can discuss whether or not assessment criteria has been met



## 8 Identify Areas of Improvement Through Evaluation and

- Assessments and units should be reviewed taking into account achievement data, suitability and learner and tutor feedback.
- Consider Moderator feedback
- Ensure that you have an internal standardisation policy
- Ensure that your internal standardisation schedule is appropriate and aligns with the policy
- Take part in Open Awards subject development groups
- Contribute to Open Awards unit reviews

Open Awards make training on assignment writing available to providers throughout the year. Dates will be provided in the summer term in readiness for the following academic year.

Further information and guidance on unit assessments can be found in the Grading Scheme Handbook on the QAA Access to HE [website](#).

### Drafts, Submissions and Re-submissions

It is a requirement that you publish procedures for the formal submission of work for assessment in your course handbook. These procedures must be the same for all the Access Diplomas that you are approved to deliver.

Your procedures must conform to QAA requirements set out in:

- [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, Section C](#)
- [QAA Grading Scheme Handbook, Section E](#)

### Draft submissions

Opportunities to submit assignments in draft for comment and feedback by tutors before the formal submission date are permitted only when this has been specified in advance by the tutor. Such opportunities should not be the norm.

Tutors can discuss whether or not assessment criteria have been met but cannot give an indication of grade or make detailed corrections to a draft submission.

### Formal submissions

Providers must set deadlines for all work to be submitted for formal assessment, and notify these to learners in writing before the assignment is undertaken. The course handbook should clearly state your expectations of the format in which submissions should be made. Once a formal submission has been made, this cannot later be declared to be a draft.

## Resubmissions

If a learner hands work in on time, but has not demonstrated achievement of all assessment criteria, the provider can set a second deadline to allow the learner to cover the missing criteria only. The first submission should not be graded and no indication of grade must be given, but returned to the learner with guidance as to what needs to be resubmitted.

Resubmissions must:

- be proportionate to the degree of non-achievement
- be consistent with the way the learning outcome(s) were originally assessed
- be subject to a clear deadline
- be applied consistently in equivalent assessment situations, so that all students have equivalent opportunities for resubmission and reassessment
- ensure that the additional or revised work being resubmitted is clearly distinguishable from the work originally submitted
- be subject to moderation

Completed resubmissions can be awarded a grade if handed in by the set resubmission deadline.

A learner with a legitimate extension may also resubmit work, although resubmission dates may need to be extended as a result of the initial authorised late submission.

## Late Submissions

If a learner hands work in late without a good reason, it can be marked against the learning outcomes and assessment criteria but will **be capped at a pass**. Late submissions include:

- Work handed in later than the first submission deadline without an agreed extension
- Work handed in after an agreed extension date
- Work handed in later than a resubmission deadline
- Incomplete work (if you have a clear policy relating to this eventuality)

If a late submission does not meet the learning outcomes there is no opportunity for resubmission except via the [referrals process](#).

## Extensions

Requests for extensions can only be made due to extenuating circumstances and must be made in writing. Providers need to submit these requests to Open Awards ([ahed@openawards.org.uk](mailto:ahed@openawards.org.uk)) for consideration as soon as possible with a deadline of the day before the final pathway moderation. Requests for extensions must be accompanied by supporting evidence. Decisions will be confirmed either in writing or on the date of the Final Awards Board.

Any requests that are not approved by the deadline should be discussed with the Pathway Moderator at the final pathway quality review meeting.

**Please note:** Any units that the learners managed to achieve will be reviewed by the Pathway Moderator as normal. Learners with approved extensions will not have any awards certificated until the provider has submitted the final results.

## Referrals

When a learner has not achieved all the assessment criteria for a unit following either of the scenarios below and due to special circumstances, the provider may wish to request an additional opportunity for a learner to resubmit work order to achieve credit.

- if the first submission was late and failed to address all assessment criteria,
- If resubmitted work failed to address all of the assessment criteria

Learners can be granted up to 15 credits from referred work. A referral is not automatically granted so tutors should not permit further work to be done until the Pathway Moderator has agreed to this. The reviewer's decision is final in referral cases.

Providers must track all resubmission and referrals.

If a referral is agreed and a learner meets all the learning outcomes of an assessment the grade indicators for the referred resubmission are **capped at a Pass**.

If all grade descriptors are covered by the resubmitted work then all grade descriptors are capped at a pass.

If some grade descriptors are not covered in the resubmitted work, they are eligible for grading in the normal way. This is usual in cases where there is more than one assignment and the unaffected assignment contains grade descriptors that are not in the affected assignment.

### Making referrals during the course

A referral may be considered by the curriculum manager if there is sufficient time before the end of the course run.

All requests must be documented using the Learner Referral Request Form available through the Secure Portal. Completed forms and supporting evidence must be made available to Open Awards at the next moderation visit (whether the request was approved or not) and records must be made available at the Final Awards Board.

### Making referrals towards the end of the course

If there is insufficient time before the end of a course run, a referral request may be made to the Final Awards Board using the Referral at FAB form. The FAB will review all evidence presented to decide whether a further opportunity for resubmission should be allowed. Where agreed, the FAB will outline specific requirements of the resubmission.

### Feedback to the Learner

All feedback provided should be sufficient, focused and developmental. It should provide justification for the grades recommended.

There are two sections for feedback.

The type of feedback required depends on whether the unit is graded or ungraded.

	Feedback requirements
Graded units	<p>Feedback against the grade descriptors.</p> <p>Reflect the components selected for each grade descriptor.</p> <p>Feedback against guidance provided on the Assignment Brief and Feedback sheet</p> <p>Include specific examples where the learners work provides evidence for the recommended grade</p> <p>Should be developmental – allowing learners to understand how to achieve a higher grade in subsequent assignments.</p>
Ungraded Units	<p>Feedback against achievement of the assessment criteria should reflect achievement following a first submission.</p>

## Recording Results

Once a learner's assignment(s) for a unit have been assessed and an overall grade given for the unit, the grade should be recorded on the Open Awards Markbook via the Secure Portal

Results must be entered by a single portal account holder. This may be the Access to HE Administrator or by another nominated contact. **Portal accounts must not be shared or logged on multiple times simultaneously as this can lead to duplicated results.**

**Please Note:** Once a portal account holder has begun entering results on a course run, all other portal users are blocked from entering or amending results for that course run.

Results added to the Markbook can be amended for individual learners at any time prior to submission at the end of the year, for example if they have been entered incorrectly. Results will be added to a basket for the course until grades have been entered for all learners and for each unit they have achieved.

At the initial compliance visit Open Awards will obtain a copy of the scheme of work/delivery schedule for each Diploma being delivered. This will help us to know when to expect unit grades to be added to the Markbook for your courses.

**Failure to upload grades to the Markbook in a timely manner will delay the timing of pathway quality review visits, increase your risk rating and may incur additional costs.**

## Amending results on the Markbook

Results on the Markbook should be checked regularly for accuracy and can be corrected at any time throughout the duration of the course before submission. Changes to the award of credit post certification will incur an administration fee.

We recommend that you ask your learners to check their final results before submission using the 'Access to HE Results Confirmation' report available on the Portal. You do not need to send copies of this signed confirmation to us but you should store them for future reference should the learner contest their grades once certificated.

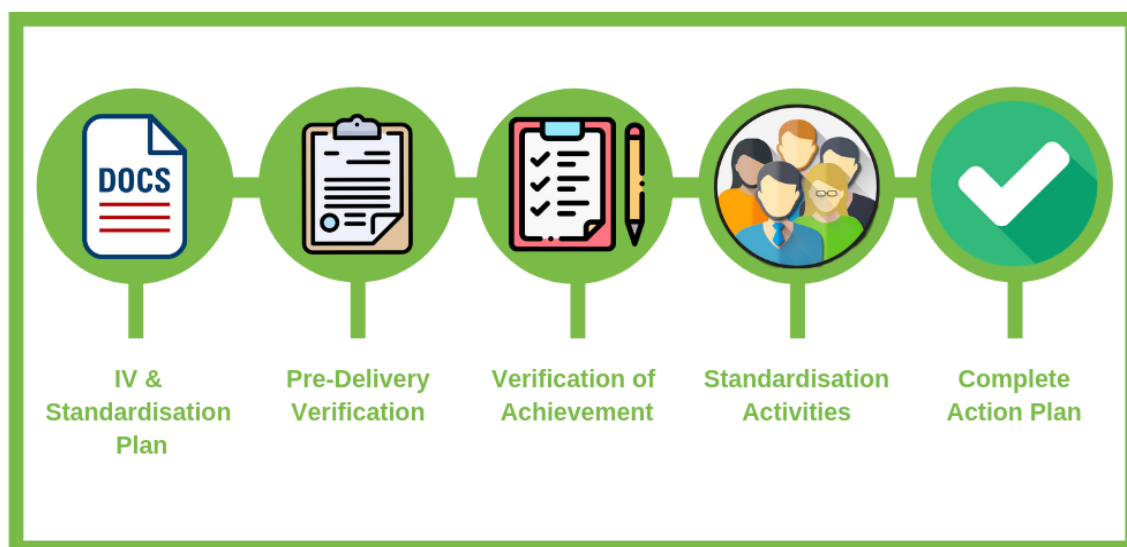
## Submitting Your Results

Once the final pathway moderation meeting has taken place and any required changes to results have been made via the portal, the person who has added results to the basket should immediately submit them in readiness for the Final Awards Board (FAB).

If you discover errors to the submitted results, you should contact the Open Awards Access to HE team immediately. You must also make the Pathway Moderator aware of the error. See the [Secure Portal Guide](#) for information on submitting results.

The submitted Markbook will be approved by the Lead Quality Reviewer at, or immediately, after the Final Awards Board has taken place. Once results have been verified by the Lead Quality Reviewer, Open Awards will process the certificates.

## 7. Internal Verification and Standardisation



Internal verification is a process by which the provider systematically samples and evaluates its assessment practices and decisions, and acts on the findings to ensure consistency and fairness. The main purpose is to improve and standardise practice in the assessment of learners.

The Access to HE Coordinator must take responsibility for internal verification of all Access to HE Diplomas at your organisation and we will expect that you have the appropriate levels of resources to implement these processes.

As well as the relevant knowledge to understand the Access to HE specification, criterion-referenced assessment and the Access grading scheme, the individual(s) responsible for internal verification will also be expected to have relevant subject expertise at an appropriate level.

The internal verifier will recognise and promote best practice and identify where there are concerns that require action.

Internal verification ensures that:

- Assignments are checked and revised if necessary before they are delivered to learners
- All assessments are carried out according to the requirements of the QAA specification and grading scheme and adhere to the principles described in this handbook
- Decisions made about assessments, including indicated grades, are fair and equitable and represent the achievement of the learners

All internal verification activities must be recorded on the Open Awards Internal Verification Record which covers all stages of verification and is available through the Secure Portal and Assignment Briefs.

## Planning Internal Verification and Standardisation Activities

All IV and standardisation activities should be planned and documented. It is important that you schedule all activities in advance so that this becomes an ongoing activity which allows for changes to be made to assessment practices in year if required. The plan should also outline the systems that are in place for to elicit and respond to learner evaluation and feedback on the assessment process. Feedback should be used to bring about continuous improvement.

You should produce a calendar of all internal verification and standardisation activities and make this available to all appropriate staff and your Open Awards Lead Quality Reviewer. It should include all activities you run internally, as well as highlighting the range of external standardisation and training activities available through Open Awards.

Standardisation opportunities should be available for all staff, including:

- Internal Standardisation
  - Formal (eg recorded standardisation meetings)
  - Informal (eg emails, discussion)
- Evidence of grade analysis
- External standardisation (Open Awards events)
  - Provider contributes samples
  - Staff attends events

Your internal verification activities should be planned in line with a robust policy which conforms to Open Awards' published requirements (eg includes all assessors, all sites, effective sampling system, robust, consistent, proportionate and manageable).

All IV activity must be recorded using Open Awards' mandatory documentation. (Internal Verification Form) and the outcomes of IV should be stored securely in an IV file which is made available to the Lead Quality Reviewer.

Outcomes of internal verification should be turned into action plans which are monitored through to completion. An overview of the outcomes, including how actions are being addressed, should be shared at course team meetings.

You are responsible for taking immediate action to address any issue that poses a threat to the quality or academic standards of Open Awards' Access to HE Diplomas.



## Pre-Delivery Verification

Pre-delivery verification of assessment ensures that the strategy you use in order to assess learners' performance is fit for purpose and provides the learners with all the necessary information.

It is vital that this takes place **before** the start of the course **and** when any significant changes are made to the strategy, e.g. when new assignments are written.

The following documentation should be made available to the internal verifier to complete the pre-delivery verification:

- Assessment plan
- Copy of the unit of assessment (downloaded from Open Awards unit bank)
- Completed assignment brief and feedback sheet (including all tasks)

The internal verifier should record their findings on the Internal Verification Record which is available through the Secure Portal. Completed records should be retained and made available for Open Awards moderators to review on request.

## Verification of Achievement

Evidence presented by learners to demonstrate unit achievement must be assessed (and graded where appropriate) in accordance with QAA regulations.

Verification of achievement should be ongoing throughout the year to ensure that the evidence for each unit is verified as soon as is practicable after assessment has taken place. This will ensure that any problems involving the practice of a particular assessor are highlighted as soon as possible in order to give sufficient time to take any remedial action before the assessor formally assesses other subsequent units.

The following document samples must be submitted to the Internal Verifier:

- Evidence assessed by each assessor
- Evidence from every unit, including ungraded and developmental units
- For graded units, evidence representing a range of recommended grades and grade profiles

It is important that the sample is selected by the internal verifier, not the tutor. The sample should be representative not random. Although we do not specify the percentage size of evidence you are to submit to the Internal Verifier for sampling, we do expect that the sample:

- is a fair reflection of the number and size of groups assessed
- is a fair reflection of the range of grades and grade profiles recommended by the assessor

- includes a Pass, Merit and Distinction for each cohort sampled
- includes examples of units where there is no clear mid-point grade
- includes 'borderline cases' where similar profiles result in different aggregated grades, e.g. PPMMM and PPPMM (in this case the indication of a single grade means the difference between a Pass and Merit for the Unit)
- is a fair reflection of the demographic features of learners (e.g. gender, ethnic background, age and disability status)
- includes various modes of delivery, where appropriate (i.e. classroom, blended and distance learning)
- aligns with your Provider's policies relating to quality assurance and Internal Verification
- takes into account the experience of the assessor (i.e. the sample for new assessors must be greater until the Internal Verifier is assured that they are assessing consistently with other assessors involved in the assessment of learners on a Diploma)
- takes into account implementation of new assessment plans or assignments
- allows the IV to review process on actions identified in previous reports

**Please note:** Over the delivery cycle of a Diploma, internal verification samples should include:

- Every unit
- All the assignments or tasks used for the assessment of a unit
- Work from all assessors

### Internal Verification Record

The Internal Verification Record must be used to reflect the Internal Verification activity for each tutor and named units of assessment. It should cover all assignments used to assess a unit and include a record for all learners in the sample:

- The learner's name
- Title of Diploma
- The grade recommended for the learner by the assessor (this is the aggregated grade)
- The application of QAA and Open Awards regulations in the assessment of each learner's work and the recording of achievement
- Action to be taken to improve assessment and record keeping
- Whether there is good practice to share
- Check list for information to include in your Internal Verification Record:
- Assignment Brief Sheet: Have you fully completed the Assignment Brief Sheet and are you happy that all information is accurate?
- Feedback Sheet: Have you fully completed the Feedback Sheet and are you happy that all information is accurate?
- Checking: Are you confident that there is sufficient evidence that the learner has met all the assessment criteria for the unit?

- Grading: Has all assessment criteria been met? Was the work submitted by the agreed deadline? To assess cases where there may be an indication of over grading or under grading, consider the grade profiles for each unit; are the grade profiles consistent for different units and different assessors for the same cohort and stage in the course?
- Agreement: Does the Internal Verifier agree with the assessment decision of the assessor?
- Numerical Marking\* - If this has been used, has this been applied appropriately using the grade boundaries for Merit and Distinction grades published on the Assignment Brief and Feedback sheet and for the appropriate grade descriptors (GD1 and / or GD3)?

\*The consistent awarding of “flat” grade profiles by an assessor (PPP, MMM or DDD) might be an indication that the numerical mark is being used to determine all the grades for the assignment.

For further guidance please see the Annex C1 on page 9 of Section C of the [QAA Grading scheme handbook](#).

### Internal Standardisation

Standardisation is a vital component of any robust quality assurance system and as a condition of provider approval all Open Awards Access to HE providers agree to participate in standardisation activities.

Where more than one tutor / assessor makes assessment decisions and recommendations for the award of credit to learners on the same Diploma or similar courses it is essential that internal verification processes include the standardisation of their practice.

Open Awards expect providers to plan and undertake standardisation of internally set tasks and the outcomes of internal assessment **at least twice a year**. This allows you to:

- ensure the consistency of the award of credit to learners across different assessors/moderators/modes of delivery/provider and to agree the standards to be achieved.
- compare the assessment strategy and planned assessment tasks used across a unit/s to ensure that they:
  - allow for the generation of sufficient/appropriate/authentic evidence to be produced
  - give fair access to assessment
  - prevent any barriers to achievement
  - respect equality and diversity issues
- ensure that the assessment tasks are written in language that is appropriate to the level and are free from bias

- ensure consistency in the assessment judgements made by assessors on the available evidence
- ensure that adequate constructive feedback is given learners
- ensure that adequate constructive feedback is given to assessors which demonstrates the robustness of the internal moderation of the assessment judgements and identify and share best practices.

The internal verifier for the course(s) has the responsibility for arranging and facilitating standardisation events.

**Please note:** As well as running internal standardisation activities, Access to HE providers are expected to:

- Contribute assessed material to Open Awards standardisation activities and events upon request.
- Allow subject specialist staff to participate in standardisation activities organised by Open Awards

Further information about Open Awards national standardisation events can be found in [Open Awards Standardisation](#).

### Action planning

At each step within the cycle of internal verification, feedback to assessors is important to help improve and standardise assessment practices. Action plans can include reference to the sharing of best practice which should be shared through the scheduled meetings of the course team and internal standardisation, or areas for improvement.

### Best Practice

Examples of exceptional practice, which an Internal Verifier could comment on include:

- Detailed, developmental feedback
- Consistent and accurate completion of administrative details Assignment Brief and Feedback sheet
- Maintenance of Electronic Markbook

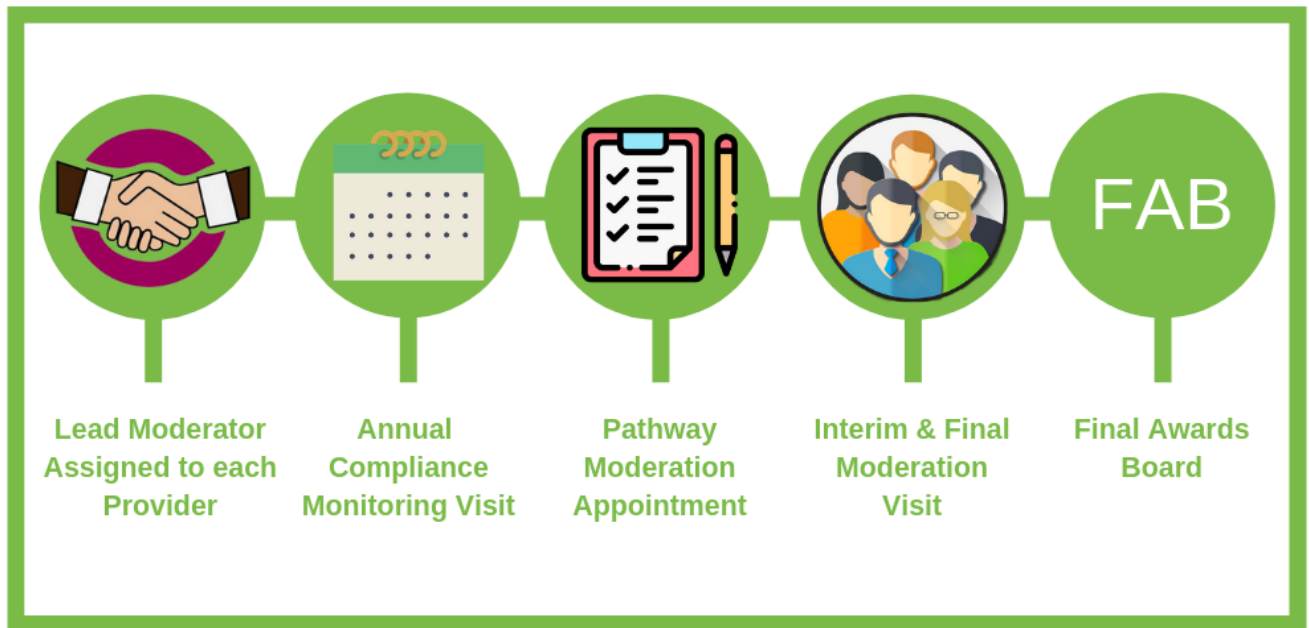
## Areas for Improvement

The internal verifier must provide useful and constructive feedback to both support and encourage improvement. This should take the form of specific actions to correct error and/or deficiencies.

Some examples of such feedback are provided on the following table:

Issue Identified	Possible Action (IV Comments)
Incomplete records - Assignment Brief and Feedback sheet, Electronic Markbook	Highlight any specific problems and provide a timescale for correction of deficiencies.
Inaccuracies in grade aggregation	Highlight errors and arrange for corrections to be made and checked.
Errors in marking, e.g. where inaccuracies in learner work has not been corrected, or where an assessor has made an inaccurate comment	Highlight inaccuracies and arrange for additional marking /commenting of learner work. Recommend attendance at Open Awards training.
Cases where the verifier considers the assessor has been too lenient or too harsh in the grades recommended	Highlight discrepancies, justifying their own decision. Arrange to meet the assessor to discuss and agree standards. Recommend attendance at Open Awards standardisation events.
Poor feedback that lacks a developmental imperative or does not relate to the Grade Descriptors or grade descriptor components	Highlight deficiencies. Arrange a meeting to discuss deficiencies. Share examples of best practice.

## 8. External Moderation



### Your Quality Review Team

Each year, we allocate a Lead Quality Reviewer and a Pathway Moderator for each Access to HE Diploma the provider offers. We match the knowledge, skills and experience of our Pathway Moderators with the content of the Diplomas the provider offers.

#### Lead Quality Reviewer

- Oversees the quality of your Open Awards Access to HE provision
- Monitors compliance against the Open Awards Centre Agreement and regulatory requirements
- Agrees provider moderation dates
- Identifies the need for specialist Pathway Moderators support
- Attends the Final Awards Board meeting
- Takes overall responsibility for the secure award of credit

#### Pathway Moderators

- Undertake the external moderation of all courses within their allocated pathways
- Report to Open Awards via the Lead Quality Reviewer
- Monitor grade decisions made for units to ensure proper grading processes were followed
- Ensure grading across different tutors and modes of delivery is consistent and is in accordance with the QAA Grading Scheme Handbook
- Ensure Award of Credit is accurate

### Allocation of Lead Quality Reviewer

Access to HE Diplomas are usually delivered on an academic timetable (September to July). Open Awards allocates one Lead Quality Reviewer to each provider at the beginning of the academic year. A Lead Quality Reviewer will normally only be allocated to a specific provider for a maximum of four years.

### Arrangements for 'Roll-on-Roll-Off' Provision

Where Diploma delivery does not coincide with the academic year the pattern of moderation visits will need to reflect the timing of individual course runs. This may result in the need for additional moderation visits and more than one Final Awards Board in any calendar year.

These arrangements will be discussed with you by the Lead Quality Reviewer and confirmed at the Annual Compliance Monitoring Visit.

### Annual Compliance Monitoring Visit – Lead Quality Reviewer

The purpose of the visit is to:

- Review the performance of a provider's Access provision in 2017-18
  - Review of data, including achievement rates
  - Review of delivery including good practice, concerns and feedback from learner.
- Review progress against actions previously set
- Monitor compliance against provider validation criteria
- Review delivery plans for 2018-19, including
  - Course titles and contact details
  - Unit codes and rules of combination
  - Requests for RPL or Credit Transfer
  - Plans for assessment, internal verification and standardisation
- Agree the date, time and location of Final Awards Boards
- Set actions for 2018-19
- Identify areas of good practice and key strengths
- Determine the provider's Annual Risk Rating.

Before the visit you will be sent:

- An Annual Compliance Monitoring Report which identifies sections you will need to complete before the visit. This will need to be returned to your Lead Quality Reviewer at least 5 working days before the visit.
- An Access to HE provider data report which identifies Open Awards and ESFA data for 2017-18. You will need to refer to this data in order to answer some of the questions in the monitoring report. The data report does not need to be returned to Open Awards.
- Contacts list. This document includes all the contacts we hold for your Access to HE provision. You will need to review and update this document as necessary and return to your Lead Quality Reviewer at least 5 working days before the visit.
- Guidance for the Access to HE Annual Compliance Visit. This outlines how to complete the report prior to the visit, what to expect during the visit and includes a checklist for you to identify which documents to use as evidence for the compliance visit.

Along with the completed documentation referred to above, you will also need to send schemes of work/delivery plans for each Diploma being delivered and a copy of your internal verification and standardisation plan(s). These documents should be sent to your Lead Quality Reviewer at least 5 working days before the visit.

The agenda for the visit will follow the format of the Annual Compliance Monitoring Report. The Lead Quality Reviewer will have reviewed the responses you made prior to the visit, and all associated paperwork, and will use this detail to inform discussions.

Actions and risk ratings will be discussed at the visit. A final version of the report will be made available via the Open Awards Portal within ten working days of the visit.

### **Learner Registration and Achievement Data Reporting**

ESFA and QAA work with Open Awards and other Access Validating Agencies to review registration and achievement data each year so we are required to undertake extensive data analysis. Whilst this data is normally reviewed through the annual compliance visit, we may contact you from time to time to request information or updates.

Please ensure that learner data is accurate and complete and that we have the correct contact details for the most appropriate person for us to liaise with over data.



## Pathway Moderator Activities

Each Pathway Moderator will normally visit twice during the year, once in the spring (Interim Quality Review Visit) and again in the summer (Final Quality Review Visit), before the Final Awards Board. Should you require more than two moderation visits, we reserve the right to charge for the extra activity.

### Interim pathway visit

The interim visit is normally scheduled to take place in February to make sure that the Pathway Moderator engages with assessment and grading decisions in the early stages of a course, and as early as is practicable. The visit scheduling also takes into account your scheme of work for the relevant Diploma(s). If your delivery plans make it clear that units will not be assessed until later in the delivery cycle, we may schedule the visit later in the year. However, we would still need to review your assessment and IV practices in a timely manner so may ask for samples to be made available for us to review remotely.

The Pathway Moderator will review the population of the Markbook at least five working days before a scheduled visit. By reviewing the scheme of work for the relevant Diploma(s) they will expect grades to have been entered for the units you should have already delivered and assessed.

The Pathway Moderator will identify a representative sample to review and make a request for the sample to be made available either at their visit or electronically in advance of the visit. Samples of marked learner work should show the grade indicators awarded by the assessor and be supported by assignment briefs, evidence of Internal Verification which covers grading decisions and assessment plans for the relevant units.

**If the number of grades added to the Markbook is substantially lower than the amount we expected from your scheme of work, we may need to rearrange the visit at the expense of the provider.**

At the visit, the Pathway Moderator will:

- Review admissions requirements and practices
- Review the appropriateness of tutors, internal verifiers and other staff
- Review unit design, content and delivery
- Review assessment strategy, assignment design and sampling
- Scrutinise the selected samples to assure the grades awarded and the Recommended Award of Credit is sound (additional samples of learners work may be requested at the visit).
- Review arrangements for learner support

- Review internal verification and standardisation practices
- Update the action plan for the pathway
- Make suggestions for improvement
- Identify good practice and key strengths

Actions will be discussed at the visit. A final version of the report will be made available via the Open Awards Portal within ten working days of the visit taking place.

### **Final pathway visit**

The scope of the final pathway Quality Review visit is similar to that of the interim visit, albeit with greater focus on the sampling of learner achievements.

**If the number of grades added to the Markbook is substantially lower than the amount we expected from your scheme of work, we may need to rearrange the visit at the expense of the provider. This will adversely affect your risk rating and may result in the Final Awards Board being rescheduled.**

The final visit allows the Pathway Moderator to confirm the award of credit for learners on the Diploma(s). Actions will be discussed at the visit. A final version of the report will be made available via the Open Awards Portal by no later than 26<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Reports from final pathway visits taken outside of the standard cycle will be made available two weeks after the date of the visit.

### **Additional Monitoring Visits**

If you do not meet the obligations of your Validation as a Provider and/or fail to address areas of concern highlighted by the moderation team within their Action Plans and Reports, we reserve the right to request additional visits to monitor your activities. As part of such monitoring activities your risk rating can be reviewed within year.

Please note: You may be charged for these additional visits. A complete overview of pricings for visits, as well as additional visits, can be found on our [website](#).

## Open Awards Standardisation

In 2019-20, Open Awards standardisation activities will take place as part of subject development groups for each pathway area. These groups will meet annually to:

- review current units and delivery (including standardisation)
- highlight best practice
- discuss new units and Diplomas being developed
- consider longer term development plans for the pathway

Standardisation is a vital component of any robust quality assurance system and as a condition of provider approval all Open Awards Access to HE providers agree to participate in standardisation activities, both internally and externally. As a minimum requirement each provider must:

- Plan and undertake standardisation of internally set tasks and the outcomes of internal assessment (at least twice a year). For guidance on internal standardisation activities, please go to [Internal Standardisation](#).
- Contribute assessed material to Open Awards standardisation activities and events upon request. This should include:
  - copies of assignment briefs
  - samples of completed graded assignments
  - samples of completed ungraded assignments
- Allow subject specialist staff to participate in and attend standardisation activities organised by Open Awards

All assignments used for standardisation will be anonymised. The events are designed to be professional development opportunities and a great opportunity to network with peers.

Open Awards runs a series of standardisation activities that are accessible to all Access to HE providers. The purpose of Open Awards standardisation is to:

- promote and achieve consistency of assessment and moderation practice
- ensure consistency in the application of level and credit across Open Awards Access provision
- ensure that standards are comparable
  - across providers (and satellite sites)
  - across different types of providers (colleges / private providers)
  - across different subject areas
  - across modes of delivery (blended / distance learning)
  - over time.
- identify and develop agreed points of reference by which standards can be referenced and agree processes for them to be applied and reviewed
- ensure that a full range of assessment activities allow for the generation of appropriate assessment evidence
- inform the quality improvement cycle by identifying training and development issues
- share and disseminate best practices.

The development of robust standardisation processes for Access to HE provision, which can be applied both within and between providers, provides the evidence of consistent practice.

Open Awards runs live standardisation events for each pathway to allow practitioners to peer review and learn from each other through networking. We are aware that some staff may wish to participate in standardisation activities but will be unable to attend events at the Open Awards office.

We also offer online standardisation activities. You will be provided with access to an online repository of standardisation activities, training and opportunities to share best practices.

### **Moderator Standardisation**

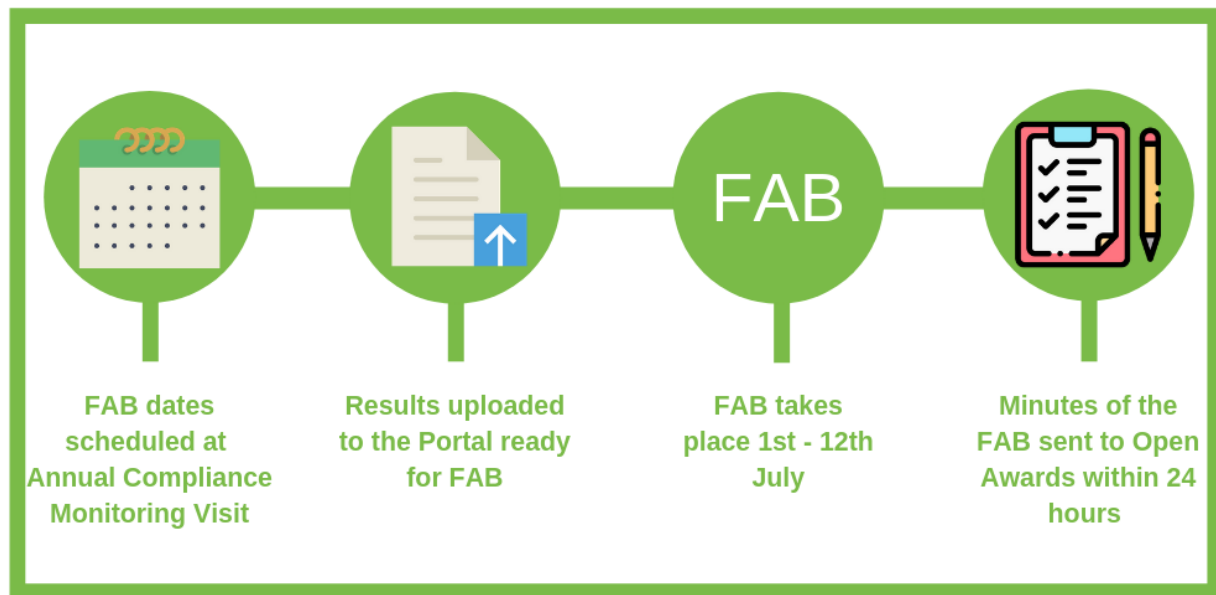
Open Awards Pathway Moderators will identify and collect, during the course of moderation, evidence/examples of:

- unit assessment plans and assignment briefs
- 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 activities (anonymised). Such activities include comparison and discussion in subject 'clusters' during moderator training and agreeing excellent practice to disseminate across provision.

Please note that the standardisation activities for each level are related and will influence, and be influenced, by the outcomes of each other.

## 9. Final Awards Board (FAB)



\* For courses starting in September. Where courses start at other times of the academic year, additional FAB dates will be arranged with the Lead Quality Reviewer.

### What does the Final Awards Board do?

The Final Awards Board (FAB) is a formal meeting which must take place at the end of the Diploma course following all external moderation activity. It follows a set agenda which is designed to:

- Approve the Award of Credit, grades and Access to HE Diplomas, including:
  - Learners achieving the full Diploma
  - Learners achieving through agreed Credit Transfer or RPL
  - Learners for whom partial achievement is being claimed
  - Learners for whom a referral has already been requested within the duration of the course
  - Learners for whom referral is being requested at the FAB
  - Aegrotat awards
  - Posthumous awards
- Consider cases of academic misconduct, extenuating circumstances and appeals.
- Ensure the provider's ongoing adherence to the QAA licensing criteria
- Confirm the provider's approval status with Open Awards for the next academic year

The FAB must be constituted by the following roles:

Member	Role
Chair	<p>To Chair the meeting in accordance with the agenda provided by Open Awards.</p> <p>Must be a manager from the provider with responsibility for Access to Higher Education, e.g. the Access Coordinator, Curriculum Manager or the Quality Manager.</p>
Scribe	<p>To formally minute the meeting using the template provided by Open Awards.</p> <p>The scribe will be supplied by the provider but cannot be the same person as the Chair.</p>
Lead Quality Reviewer	<p>To confirm assessment judgements.</p> <p>To confirm ongoing adherence to the QAA licensing criteria following scrutiny throughout the moderation cycle.</p> <p>To decide whether or not to confirm the provider's status as an Open Awards Access to HE Diploma provider for the next academic year.</p>
AVA Representative	<p>To confirm that due process is followed throughout the meeting.</p> <p>To encourage the provider to nominate learners for the Keith Fletcher Award.</p>
Course Representative	<p>Course tutor(s) with day-to-day responsibility for coordinating the Diploma to address any queries posed regarding specific learners' achievements.</p>

For more detailed information about roles of the FAB attendees, the agenda for the FAB and further supporting information please see the Final Awards Board guidance on the Open Awards [website](#).

Open Awards provide one-to-one support sessions for providers to help you prepare for the FAB if you feel that you need further support. Please contact the Access to HE team at [ahed@openawards.org.uk](mailto:ahed@openawards.org.uk) if you would like to benefit from this service.

At the end of the Final Awards Board, the minutes of the meeting are signed by the Chair, the Scribe and the Lead Quality Reviewer and returned to Open

Awards within 24 hours. Multiple Diploma courses from the same pathway can be included on the same set of minutes. A separate set of minutes must be completed for each pathway. The template for the minutes can be found [here](#)

Certificates cannot be produced until after the signed FAB minutes have been returned to Open Awards.

### Achievement for a named Access to HE Diploma

The Diploma is awarded for all learners who the Final Awards Board considers have fully met the specific Rules of Combination for a named Diploma and those who have not fully met the Rules of Combination but for whom an Aegrotat or Posthumous award is being requested.

### Aegrotat Awards

An Aegrotat award may be requested for learners who, due to extenuating circumstances, have been unable to complete their Access to HE Diploma course and who have achieved at least 30 of the credits required for the Access to HE Diploma. The provider feels that the learner should be awarded the Diploma and will not be disadvantaged by the absence of the full grade profile

Requests are to be made by completion of the 'Request for Aegrotat Award form available on the Secure Portal and returned. Aegrotat requests must be received through the portal along with supporting evidence **before** final pathway moderation.

If the extenuating circumstances occur after this date, the form should be completed and sent to us before the date of the Final Awards Board meeting.

**Please note:** Requests cannot be considered at the Final Awards Board meeting.

For confidentiality purposes the learner should be identified on the request form by their Open Awards Registration Number/ Learner ID, rather than name.

Any affected learner must be informed that, if the Aegrotat is approved that:

- their Diploma certificate will clearly state that it is an Aegrotat award
- their Credit Transcript will list only the units that have been achieved
- the implications that this may have for any current HE offers or subsequent HE application

### Posthumous Award

A posthumous award may be made at the discretion of the Final Awards Board provided that the request is supported by the next of kin of the learner.

Requests should be directed to [ahed@openawards.org.uk](mailto:ahed@openawards.org.uk)

## Referral Requests

It is anticipated that most referral requests will have been considered in advance of the Final Awards Board, within the duration of the course. The Final Awards Board will receive details of such requests and their outcomes.

If the need for a referral request comes to light near to end of the course run, then the request may be made at the final pathway moderation and approved at the Final Awards Board using the Referral at FAB form available through the Secure Portal. Copies of the form(s) are to be forwarded to Open Awards with the minutes of the Final Awards Board meeting.

**Please note:** no certificates will be issued until their final awards have been recommended and verified. You must ensure that you submit the final results for these learners following the deadline confirmed by Open Awards and in readiness for final moderation.

## Partial Achievement

Partial achievement should be claimed for learners who have not fully met the specific Rules of Combination for a named Diploma, where an Aegrotat award or extension request has not been approved and for whom there has been no request for referral to the Final Awards Board. Such learners will receive a Credit Transcript only.

## Other Extenuating Circumstances

The Final Awards Board will consider any cases where extenuating circumstances have affected a learner's performance in more than one area or in a way that falls outside the provider's normal procedures. In such cases the specific circumstances must have been considered by the course team and Lead/Pathway Moderator(s) prior to the Final Awards Board. Cases must be fully documented with a recommendation to the Final Awards Board on whether each individual claim for extenuating circumstances should be supported and to what degree.

## Reporting Academic Misconduct

Cases of academic misconduct must be documented internally, reported to the Lead Quality Reviewer and presented to the Final Awards Board.

The Provider's policies and procedures for dealing with academic misconduct will be reviewed annually as part of the Annual Compliance Monitoring Visit.

Please refer to [QAA Grade scheme handbook, section E \(page 5\)](#), for further details regarding Academic Misconduct.



## 10. Results and Certification

### Processing Results

#### Learner Checking

We recommend that you ask your learners to check their final results before submission using the 'Access to HE Results Confirmation' report found on the portal. You do not need to send copies of this signed confirmation to us but you should store them for future reference should the learner contest their grades once certificated.

#### Submitting Your Results

Once the final pathway moderation meeting has taken place and any required changes have been made, you should immediately submit the results in readiness for the Final Awards Board (FAB).

If you discover errors to the submitted results, you should contact the Open Awards Access to HE team immediately. You must also make the Pathway Moderator aware of the error. See the [Secure Portal Guide](#) for information on submitting results.

The submitted results will be approved by the Lead Quality Reviewer at, or immediately, after the Final Awards Board has taken place.

#### Processing of Results by Open Awards

Your results will be processed and certificates dispatched within 10 working days of the Final Awards Board. To ensure this service standard can be met, results must have been submitted before the Final Awards Board and minutes must be received within 24 hours of the FAB

Please ensure that there is someone available to deal with results queries from us during this time as you may be asked to resubmit results. Please ensure that an approved portal user is also available.

The results processing stage includes the following steps;

1. Submitted results will be verified by the Lead Quality Reviewer
2. Results will be initially assessed. Completed and signed minutes must be received for this stage to begin.
3. Any queries will be raised regarding results with the Access to HE Coordinator, Administrator or nominated contact.
4. Any learners who cannot be processed due to outstanding query will be held back. It is essential that this is avoided and queries are resolved quickly with the provider.
5. Results will be awarded to learners and reports generated.
6. Award reports to be sent to and checked by providers who must confirm that

results are correct. **Please make sure that the contact (named at the FAB) is available to confirm these reports otherwise there may be a delay in your learner receiving their certificates.**

7. Open Awards generate certificates and post to the Access to HE Administrator or nominated contact by recorded delivery.
8. Access to HE Administrator or nominated contact confirms receipt of certificates using guidance provided on letter accompanying certificates.

## Certificating

Learner certificates will only be issued to you once:

- The Markbook has been fully completed, submitted and verified.
- Signed copies of the FAB minutes have been received.
- Award reports have been checked and verified by a named contact.
- Certificates have been checked by Open Awards.

Learners who have achieved the full Diploma will receive a Diploma qualification certificate and the unit transcript which may cover 2 pages. Learners who have not achieved the Diploma but have been awarded units will receive a unit transcript only. All your certificates will be issued to you together, except in cases of learners with outstanding queries ie extensions, referrals etc.

Certificates will be sent by post (Royal Mail Recorded - First Class) for delivery to the Access to HE Administrator unless we have been notified of alternative arrangements. They should be checked immediately and distributed securely to learners as soon as possible to avoid any issues with their university application.

Centres who have requested e-certification will also be able to view and download electronic PDF versions of certificates for distribution to your learners through secure electronic means.

### HEI Certificate Queries

You may be contacted by universities who need copies of learner certificates. They should be given certificates by the learners but you can refer them to the Open Awards Access to HE team or [ahed@openawards.org.uk](mailto:ahed@openawards.org.uk) for direct access to learner results via the secure portal.

### Certificate Reissues

Learners can request a copy of their certificate directly through Open Awards or via their place of study. There is a certificate reissue charge of £25 or they can pay £15 for a statement of results. Universities and overseas validation agencies usually request an original certificate.

## Appeals on Awards

The grounds for appeal about the Award of Credits or grades on the Access to HE Diploma are restricted to cases where:

- there is evidence of administrative or procedural error
- there are extenuating circumstances that, for good reason, could not be notified prior to the Final Awards Board
- Learners are advised to follow the colleges internal appeals procedure to ensure that the provider has had opportunity to investigate the matter internally. Once a formal outcome has been communicated to the learner, and if they wish to continue the appeal, the learner is advised to formally write to Open Awards with their concerns. The matter will then be investigated in line with the Enquiries, Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures.

**Please note:** Suggested learner grades must be subjected to external quality reviews and are therefore not confirmed until Final Awards Board has taken place.

## 11. Access to HE Training

Open Awards provide annual training on Access to HE administration, standardisation, delivery and assessment, assignment writing and quality assurance. Please ensure that the appropriate members of staff at your centre attend these sessions.

We can also provide bespoke training at your centre if required. Please note that this will incur a cost. Information regarding pricing can be found [here](#).

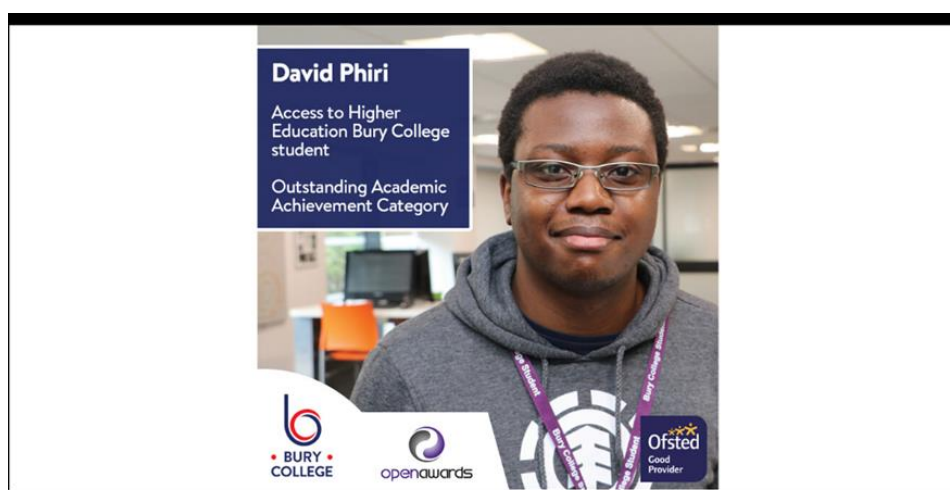
## 12. The Keith Fletcher Memorial Prize

As we have done for many years, this year Open Awards will be supporting the Keith Fletcher Access to HE Memorial Prizes for learners on courses during the last academic year. We were extremely honoured and very proud to have one of our learners from Bury College win the award for achievement last year (19-20) Read all about it [here](#).

Keith Fletcher worked for many years in the South West of England within its successive Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) and was a great supporter of Access to HE. In memory of Keith's commitment to Access, a number of AVAs agreed to award prizes for Access learners drawn from across the regions for 2010-11 and after a successful presentation event in London; it was decided to develop this as an annual presentation. The prize is now supported by all 13 AVAs across England and Wales.

As a participating AVA, Open Awards is invited to nominate one Access learner on Access to HE Diploma courses in during last academic year for each of two prize categories: Outstanding Academic Achievement and Outstanding Commitment to Study.

We encourage nominations for the prize from all our Access to HE providers. This is a great opportunity for you to get the work of your exceptional learners recognised on a national platform. All nominations should be sent to [ahed@openawards.org.uk](mailto:ahed@openawards.org.uk) by late October.



### 13. Feedback to Open Awards

At Open Awards we are committed to providing a service which is prompt, courteous, clear and responsive to customer and learner needs. We are keen to hear any feedback from all of our stakeholders which will help towards the constant review of our services and products.

If you would like to register a compliment, comment or complaint you may do so in accordance with our [Enquiries, Complaints and Appeals policy](#) which is available here.

## 14. Open Awards Policies and Procedures

Open Awards' Access to HE provision is supported by a range of policies and procedures that we expect providers to comply with. We will review your policies and procedures through our moderation activities to ensure that they comply with our requirements and are being followed. Links to our policies and procedures can be found on our website [here](#).

- Conflicts of Interest Policy
- Enquiries, Complaints and Appeals Policy and Procedures
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Guidelines for Use of the Open Awards Logo
- Invoicing Policy
- Malpractice and Maladministration Policy
- Plagiarism Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations Policy
- Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Procedures
- Sanctions Policy
- Standardisation Policy

## Appendix 1: Open Awards 2020-2021 Access to HE Calendar

## Quality assurance and moderation

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