

Guidelines for Internal Verification: Access to HE Diploma Programmes

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Gateway Qualifications Guidelines for Internal Verification for Access to HE Diploma Programmes

This Guidance will assist Access Tutors, Coordinators, Centre and Subject Moderators in establishing or revising, monitoring and evaluating Internal Verification (IV) arrangements for Access to HE Diploma Programmes. It accompanies the Gateway Qualifications Access to HE Submission Guidelines.

Please do not hesitate to contact Gateway Qualifications if you need further assistance.

Gateway Qualifications is licensed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to act as an Access Validating Agency (AVA) for Access to HE Diploma qualifications. The QAA is responsible for ensuring that AVAs operate in accordance with its criteria. Precept 5 of the QAA Access to HE Licensing Criteria relates specifically to the quality assurance and enhancement of Access courses and academic standards. The moderation model operated by Gateway Qualifications is designed to ensure compliance with QAA licensing criteria.

Access to HE team contact details:

If you have any questions about this guidance, or need to seek clarification about any aspects of the Quality arrangements for Access to HE programmes, please email quality@gatewayqualifications.org.uk or call 01206 911 211 ext. 250.

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INTERNAL VERIFICATION GUIDANCE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Context and Purpose of Internal Verification

- 1.1 Internal Verification (incorporating both standardisation and internal moderation) is integral to Gateway Qualifications' commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of Access to HE Diploma Programmes. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) places an emphasis on Access providers being able to demonstrate that adequate Internal Verification arrangements are in place.

One of the ways in which the validation process must ensure that an Access Diploma course is fit for purpose is through the scrutiny of the system of Internal Verification, and the ability of the system to articulate with Gateway Qualifications' External Moderation processes. Internal Verification is therefore an essential part of the process through which an institution is able to demonstrate to Gateway Qualifications that Access to HE Diploma Programmes are operating in accordance with the specifications agreed at the recognition panel.

- 1.2 Internal Verification can be defined in general as,

A process by which the Centre regularly samples and evaluates its assessment practices and decisions and acts on the findings, to ensure consistency and fairness. It involves two key processes – moderation and standardisation – and is carried out by one or more internal verifiers across Access courses or pathways and Access curriculum areas (known as Access to HE Diploma Programmes).

- 1.3 Internal Verification arrangements are a major focus for Gateway Qualifications' Access Centre Moderators and Subject Moderators (External Moderators). Centre Moderators provide scrutiny and act as a critical friend at programme level for a Centre. They report on Centre performance to the Centre and to Gateway Qualifications as the AVA. Subject Moderators provide scrutiny at subject level across a range of Centres and through doing so, report on comparative performance to the Centre, to the Centre Moderator and to Gateway Qualifications as the AVA. Where rigorous and effective Internal Verification procedures are in place and transparent to external scrutiny, the need for AVA intervention is lessened.

- 1.4 Assessment decisions and practices should be consistent with the Principles of Assessment in Gateway Qualifications accreditation. These will be elaborated upon in the Gateway Qualifications' Assessment Guidance but have as their most important features:

- **Validity**

Assessment should measure what it claims to measure and what is important to measure; there must be a close fit between the assessment methods and the learning outcomes.

- **Authenticity**
All assessment practice must have processes in place to ensure that the evidence for assessment is the learner's own work.
- **Reliability and Consistency**
The assessment result should be replicable and consistent either under different circumstances or with a different assessor.
- **Sufficiency**
The assessment should be capable of generating sufficient evidence for the target level.
- **Fitness For Purpose**
Assessment should be appropriate for the form of assessment e.g. an initial assessment should build confidence and not deter a learner from appropriate progression.
- **Inclusiveness**
Gateway Qualifications promotes inclusiveness in learning and equality of opportunity. Assessment should be equitable and should be designed to allow all learners to achieve, regardless of their history or differences.

These Principles should be reflected in the Access Submission Document. Internal Verification arrangements should be able to demonstrate that ongoing assessment decisions and practices operate in accordance with these principles.

1 **MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS**

Internal Verification arrangements must include as a minimum:

- An identified individual responsible for co-ordinating the Internal Verification process providing a single point of contact for Gateway Qualifications.
- A planned structure for Internal Verification that incorporates all of a Centre's Access to HE Diploma's provision.
- An agreed and published annual timetable for Internal Verification, including Internal Verification meetings. This should be available for the Centre Moderator to review.
- Clear and documented roles and responsibilities for all those involved including all tutors and assessors participating in the process.
- Comments fed back to Tutors/Assessors support quality and consistency.
- A forum for discussion of borderline cases and good practice in assessment.
- Sampling of assessment tasks and assessed work with sampling methods specified and the details agreed with Gateway Qualifications, usually within the Access Submission Document.
- Standardisation of assessed work.

- Full and clear records and action plans in respect of all meetings, activities and events – these must be readily available to Gateway Qualifications and External Moderators.
- Clear procedures for the monitoring and reviewing of the Internal Verification process and effective mechanisms for taking action on the outcomes.
- Activities take place that ensure that:
 - ❑ There is reasonable parity and evenness in assessment requirements across all Access provision.
 - ❑ Learning outcomes are being achieved at the standard indicated by the assessment criteria in the relevant units.
 - ❑ Feedback to learners is clear and constructive.
 - ❑ Credits are being awarded consistently and in line with specifications outlined in the Access submission document.
 - ❑ Grades are being awarded accurately and consistently.

3 INTERNAL VERIFICATION MODELS

3.1 Some key points underpin all models:

- All tutors/assessors must be involved.
- All Access to HE Diploma provision must be included.
- Nobody can internally verify work that they have themselves assessed.

3.2 There are a number of possible models for Internal Verification:

Model 1: This is the simplest arrangement, in which there is one Internal Verifier who verifies the work of all of a Centre's Assessors.

This model would be particularly appropriate for a small Centre. The process is supplemented by a standardisation meeting for all Tutors/Assessors to ensure consistency.

Model 2: In this model a number of a Centre's Assessors are identified as Internal Verifiers, and each is responsible for verifying the work of one or more other Assessors.

There must be an identified co-ordinating Internal Verifier, who has overall responsibility for ensuring that the verification process operates effectively. S/he would normally verify assessment carried out by the other Internal Verifiers.

Model 3: All Assessors act as Internal Verifiers and have responsibility for sampling one or more courses / pathways of other Assessors ('round robin'). This is supplemented by regular meetings of all Internal Verifiers where internal consistency is discussed and standardisation can take place. For example, Assessor A verifies for Assessor B, Assessor B for Assessor C and Assessor C for Assessor A. In theory

there is no upper limit to the size of the 'circle', although in practice it must remain manageable. One member of staff must act as co-ordinating Internal Verifier to ensure that the process operates effectively.

This model would be appropriate for a larger Centre, particularly where there is provision across a number of pathways. In this case the co-ordinating Internal Verifier is likely to have significant experience in quality assurance that enables him/her to verify across the range of the Centre's provision.

4 INTERNAL VERIFICATION IN PRACTICE: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN INTERNAL VERIFICATION

4.1 The Tutor/Assessor

The Tutor/Assessor is responsible for:

- Planning managing and carrying out assessment.
- Ensuring that his/her records are accurate and legible.
- Keeping an up-to-date copy of the Access Submission Document and the units.
- Preparing assessments.
- Delivering the Access course / pathway / subject and assessing within the standards and framework agreed with Gateway Qualifications and stated in the submission document.
- Providing assessment samples for Internal Verification and External Moderation as required, including postal samples to be submitted to Gateway Qualifications for Subject Moderation.
- Taking part in Internal Verification meetings and standardisation activities as required.
- Implementing any decisions or recommendations made by the Internal Verifiers or External Moderators.

4.2 The Access Coordinator

The Access Coordinator is responsible for:

- Notifying the Internal Verifier of all programme runs.
- Liaising with the Internal Verifier on arrangements for the Internal Verification of the programme.
- Liaising with the Access Centre Moderator.
- Making adequate arrangements for assessment of learners who need special consideration and exam access arrangements.
- Overseeing the completion of Recommendation for the Award of Credit forms (RACs).

4.3 The Internal Verifier

The role of the Internal Verifier is to ensure that:

- Assessment is appropriate, consistent, fair and transparent and does not unintentionally discriminate against any learner.
- Tutors/Assessors receive ongoing advice and support, for example in designing assessment activities.
- Learners clearly understand assessment requirements and are given opportunities to achieve against the assessment criteria by completing appropriate assessment tasks.
- Learners' work is presented in a manner that enables effective verification to take place.
- Learners' assessed work presented as evidence for the award of credit is authentic.
- Evidence of learner achievement is clearly mapped to the assessment criteria.
- Recommendations for the award of credit are valid, reliable and consistent.
- Relevant and complete records relating to Internal Verification and Assessment are kept.

4.4 Internal Verifier: Tasks

- Establishing a calendar of Internal Verification activities.
- Verifying all assessments before they are launched.
- Reviewing assessments set against the assessment criteria in the submission document to ensure adequate coverage.
- Inducting tutors into the requirements of the programme including an introduction to the Internal Verification Policy.
- Sampling and reviewing assessments completed by learners and assessed by tutors.
- Determining and implementing an effective sampling strategy and sampling plan.
- Ensuring internal standardisation activities take place which inform parity and consistency and quality improvement.
- Keeping accurate and appropriate records of the Internal Verification process.
- Ensuring that Subject Moderation samples are provided in a timely fashion to the AVA as determined by the quality cycle.
- Giving support and advice to tutors to ensure they provide adequate support advice and feedback to learners and understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Ensuring that relevant staff attend Internal Verification meetings; staff development and standardisation meetings.
- Completing report forms and evaluations for internal review and the External Moderator as required.
- Maintaining contact with the External Moderator as necessary and attending meetings where the External Moderator is present.
- Compliance with any decisions or recommendations made by the External Moderators.
- Feeding back information from the External Moderator reports to Tutors/ Assessors.

5 INTERNAL VERIFICATION IN PRACTICE: ACTIVITIES

The following activities must take place during the course of an Internal Verification cycle. The length of this cycle will vary according to a Centre's provision. In many cases this will be based on an academic year, but some will use the calendar year.

5.1 Planning for Internal Verification

A plan of the proposed Internal Verification activity must be developed before the cycle begins. This must indicate what will happen, when it will happen, who is to be involved and how it is to be recorded.

5.2 Induction and Updating for Tutors/Assessors

All new Tutors/Assessors must be introduced to the Centre's Gateway Qualifications Access to H.E processes and practice. It is essential they:

- Have all the relevant units, assessment materials and submission document.
- Clearly understand the assessment requirements and procedures including Grading.
- Have information about, and access to, training opportunities and support materials, both within the Centre and as provided by Gateway Qualifications.
- All Tutors/Assessors must know who is managing the Internal Verification process and who will actually carry out the Internal Verification of the work they will be assessing. They need to know what is in the Verification Plan and about any issues relevant to their work that may have arisen from previous Internal Verification or External Moderation or from evaluation of the Verification process.

5.3 Verification of Assignments/Assessments

- All assessments must be verified before they are released for use by tutors and learners. It is strongly recommended that where practical, assessments are reviewed by a third party who is not a subject specialist, to ensure that the assignment instructions are accessible to all and clearly presented.
- All new assessments and all existing assessments brought forward to a new programme and /or a new year must be verified.

5.3.1 The purpose of verification of assignments/ assessments

- To ensure that assessments allow the learner to provide valid evidence.
- To ensure that assessments allow the learner to provide authentic evidence using a range of assessment methods.
- To ensure that assessments are reliable and consistent.
- To ensure that assessments allow the learner to provide sufficient evidence that learning outcomes and assessment criteria are being achieved.
- To ensure that assessments are fit for purpose and inclusive.
- To ensure that grading has been applied correctly.

5.4 Induction and Involvement of Learners

Learners should be made aware at the beginning of the course what the assessment requirement will be.

The Internal Verifier will also need to meet with learners at some point during their course to ensure that their experience of assessment is positive. In particular it is important they:

- Understand the assessment requirements.
- Are receiving clear and constructive individual feedback on their assessed work.
- Are making progress towards meeting all the required assessment criteria.

The timing of a meeting with learners should be appropriate to the particular course and group. It should be far enough into the course for some meaningful assessment to have taken place, but early enough for any issues to be addressed before the learners' chances of achievement are compromised.

5.5 Sampling Assessment

It is the Internal Verifier's responsibility to monitor the quality of assessment through the sampling of assessment practices and decisions. The Internal Verifier – not the Assessor – should specify the sample of assessed work that s/he wants to see, and it is important that the sample is sufficient for the Internal Verifier to form a view on the consistency and validity of the assessment. The minimum sample size is 10% or five portfolios, whichever is the greater.

In sampling assessed work the Internal Verifier should look for evidence that:

- Assessment tasks are standard and appropriate for the course and the learners.
- Assessment decisions are fair and consistent, both across provision and over time.
- Assessors are providing learners with clear and constructive feedback on their work.
- Clear and accurate assessment records are maintained.

It is not usually possible, or necessary, to verify every aspect of assessment at each Internal Verification exercise or event. A properly selected representative sample should identify any issues with assessment practices and decisions. To ensure that a sample is representative, the Internal Verifier must take into account all variable factors that may impact on the quality of assessment.

These factors, on the basis of which the Verifier defines a sampling strategy, include:

- Delivery sites.
- Tutors/assessors.
- Number of units.
- Unit level and credit value.
- Delivery methods.
- Assessment methods.
- Borderline cases.
- Reasonable adjustments.
- Issues arising from previous verification.

The Internal Verifier should check the selected sample in three ways:

1. All assessment for an individual learner – to ensure assessment is appropriate, consistent and complete.
2. Specific learning outcomes across a number of learners – to ensure that assessment is consistent for all learners.
3. Level, credit value and grade– to establish that standards are maintained across units, assessors and sites, and over time, and continue to reflect the requirements of the assessment criteria.

Over the course of the year the Internal Verifier will need to ensure that assessment is being carried out as planned. This will involve holding regular Internal Verification meetings with Tutors/Assessors. These meetings should be specific to the Internal Verification process to allow it to receive the necessary focus – even if all those involved work closely together and discuss assessment and Verification informally in the course of their work.

5.6 **Standardisation**

Standardisation meetings should involve all Tutors/Assessors with the Internal Verifier.

At standardisation meetings, assessments are scrutinized for consistency and coherence. Agreement should be sought on what is acceptable evidence for a unit of assessment and this should be informed by External Moderator reports where necessary.

The outcomes of standardisation should be recorded in writing and made available to the External Moderators. Access Centre Moderators will request a copy of the Internal Verification Annual Report or equivalent review of the Internal Verification processes.

Samples of work should be kept over a period of time and should be available for standardisation activities. It is important to guard against inflation of standards to ensure that consistency is maintained over time.

6 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR INTERNAL VERIFIERS

All Internal Verifiers must have experience relevant to the area(s) for which they have responsibility. They should also have an understanding of quality assurance and improvement, and the Centre must ensure that they develop their practice in this field. Gateway Qualifications offers introductory and refresher training which covers both the theory and practice of the role in more detail.

Due to the necessity of external scrutiny before the Diploma is awarded to learners, it is not possible for Internal Verifiers working on Access to HE Diploma programmes to use their Approved Internal Verifier Status in this context.

7 INTERNAL VERIFICATION IN THE ACCESS SUBMISSION DOCUMENT

7.1 Access Submissions must describe the institution's or organisation's Internal Verification system. The Submission must demonstrate that the procedures used meet the minimum requirements listed in section 2 above.

7.2 Access Submissions will provide information on the following:

- The relationship between Internal Verification and the 5 Principles of Assessment.
- How roles and responsibilities are fulfilled, including the names of the Internal Verifier/s.
- Internal Verification activities and sampling procedures, including an annual calendar.
- Reporting arrangements, including the provision of reports for the External Moderators and the provision of feedback to Tutors/Assessors.
- Procedures for the evaluation of Internal Verification processes and mechanisms for subsequent action (self-assessment exercise, annual Internal Verification report etc.).

NB *This Guidance has been amended and updated in the light of requirements made in the QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education Grading Scheme Handbook (September 2013), the QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education Access to Higher Education Diploma specification (September 2013) and QAA Criteria for the licensing and relicensing of Access Validating Agencies (July 2014): Precept 5.*