

OCNSER –Regional Access Frameworks

Discussion Paper 1

Outline of 3 OCN AVAs Developments of Regional Access Provision

1. OCN South East Region Context

One of OCNSER's aims in its regional Access strategy is to develop a 'regional Access framework'. This is an assumption implicit within the new QAA licence criteria which expects Access Validating Agencies (AVAs) to become more regional in their operation.

Our collective task, in consultation with our Access centres, is to determine the most appropriate model for developing such a framework in the south east to ensure we have; ownership by Access providers, HEI buy in and an appropriate approval/ validation model. A time scale will also need to be established and responsibilities allocated.

Access Practitioner Group Meetings held in the autumn term of 2007 will discuss this issues and receive this paper.

The summaries below are examples of how other Access Validating Agencies have started to develop and implement regional frameworks.

2. OCN North East Region

2.1 Context

The AVA has a Regional Programme (RP) that has been its central strategic objective for almost 3 years. The RP anticipated the creation of a regional AVA following merger.

Initiated in 2004 the RP has established two regional QAA approved Access programmes – one covering the North East coastal region and the other covering Cumbria.

The RP has been conceptualised as a 'communally shared' framework programme' that has facilitated a 'reach' to the entire NE and Cumbria regions.

2.2 Process

The RP has followed a two stage process.

Announced at the Regional Access Forum in November 04, the period Jan 05 to March 05 was used as a consultation period with providers actively engaged to ensure a real sense of ownership in the outcomes.

The RP was launched in September 05 and by October working groups (WGs) had been established with approximately 50 participants. A steering group/strategic group had been established with the WGs looking at pathways.

All existing programmes and units were included at the start of the 05 – 06 run, during this period the WGs and the Strategic Group worked on rationalising units and pathways.

The RP started with 500 units and 27 Access programmes.

Currently there are 180 units with an expectation for further rationalisation. WGs looked at popular (used) units and also wrote new ones where there was a demand.

The process also factored in the requirements of new Diploma. Providers were willing participants in the whole process – the consultation process was viewed as essential in this – along with the ‘all in’ to start. HE involved in some WGs and University of Teeside in Strategic Group. The AVA also evaluated the process as part of development, which confirmed these observations.

The Strategic Group is intended to be the driver for identifying new developments within the structure and contents of the programme.

3. OCN South West Region – Access Framework

3.1 Approval Process

The ‘Common Access Framework’ (CAF) has its own unique approval method.

Full CAF programme is already approved. New pathways can be developed using the process outlined below (this could be the model for another AVA to develop its common framework)

1. Outline and draft specification approved by the AVA’s HE Access Committee.
2. CAF Development Group (representatives from providers and HE receivers in curriculum area) meet to agree detailed specification, and unit titles etc for pathways and their modules .
 - Details circulated to all providers for feedback and with request to donate existing successful non-CAF units.
 - Lead College given task (and paid) to write units using existing units used by providers outside CAF or writing new ones. Pathways also include existing CAF units (where relevant).

3. Once units are written to satisfaction of AVA, scrutiny groups of FE and HE staff (not the Lead College) meet to act as a 'Panel' to agree units and completion criteria for pathways and modules
4. Reports of all these meetings and units/modules submitted to HEAC for final validation.
5. New pathways distributed to providers and put on to website.

If any provider wants a one-off bit of provision that would not suit inclusion in CAF, AVA would use the traditional Panel method but this will be limited.

4. OCN North West Region

4.1 Context

In this region there were differences in culture and approaches to Access but not of major consequence. What obstacles there were have been overcome and the AVA is now focusing on its Regional Programme (common framework). This has pulled together different approaches – recognising some different priorities in different parts of the region. The RP is seen as a unifying feature – for example providers are working together on this. Providers are in tune with benefits of the RP.

4.2 Development of the Framework

The AVA used subject specific development groups to help develop the framework – the RP's common curriculum came from this.

OCNNWR Access focus is on the vocational agenda (which has influenced the RP). Providers have been very involved and this has included the establishment of a Vocational Access steering group (also a requirement of a local Aimhigher project). (The VA Steering Group preceded the development of the RP and a prototype of this group has been in existence for 4 years – a sub-group of this group is now working on how VA is to converge with the RP).

Vocational pathways have been developed that are linked to sub regional/regional skills priorities. Work has been undertaken evaluating employer demand/need. This has led to the AVA looking at the use of component elements (units) for work based learning. (Rather than focussing on units, the AVA has been considering the type of course structure most suitable for work-based learners – shorter "top-up" provision is a favoured model but the current funding regime does not favour this kind of provision). This has been driven by funding *and* the pattern of student demand for 'work related' outcomes.

The AVA also sees its role as broadening the Access target group and therefore furthering its mission. There is a recognition that there is a major challenge in developing work based Access.