

## Revised Access End of Year Arrangements: 2015-16

### A) Introduction:

This document details the new Access 'end of year' arrangements that have been adopted by Laser Learning Awards (LASER) for the academic year 2015-16 and provides detailed information of the updated procedures as well as giving examples of what these mean in practice. This document supersedes all previous guidance in terms of 'end of year arrangements' related to final moderation and awards boards procedures.

### B) Context:

LASER as a QAA licensed Access Validating Agency (AVA) is required to operate external moderation systems that comply with Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) regulations. In September 2015 the QAA issued new guidance for AVAs that required them to in effect 'de-couple' the Final Moderation Visit (FMV) from the Final Awards Board (FAB). This was based upon a concern to ensure that should an External Moderator discover significant problems at their final sampling visit, then there should be 'sufficient time' for the centre to address these concerns prior to the Final Awards Board, the External Moderator signing off the Recommendation for the Award of Credit (RAC) and the final awarding of the Access Diploma.

### C) End of Year Arrangements:

#### i) Summary of Final Awards Board for 2016

The Final Awards Board process for 2016 will be in 4 parts as set out in the table below.

Parts	Summary
<p><b>A single visit consisting of:</b></p> <p><b>Part One: The Final Moderation Visit (FMV)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>+</b></p> <p><b>Part Two: Preliminary-Awards Board (PAB) Meeting</b></p>	<p><i>A visit by the EM approx. 2 weeks before the Final Awards Board consisting of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EM sampling marked student work and portfolios</li> </ul> <p><i>Followed by</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EM discusses issues arising from moderation, agrees next steps/actions prior to FAB</li> <li>• Draft (or final if ready) RACs approved</li> </ul>
<p><b>Part Three: Virtual Awards Board Phase</b></p>	<p><i>The period after the FMV/PAB and before the FAB</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre implements agreed actions from FMV</li> <li>• Centre uploads RAC to Quartz-Web</li> <li>• EM verifies RAC</li> </ul>
<p><b>A single visit consisting of:</b></p> <p><b>Part Four: Final Awards Board Meeting</b></p>	<p><i>A single visit by a LASER Officer approx. 2 weeks after FMV</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final RACs accepted by FAB</li> <li>• LASER rep discusses issues with centre as part of annual reporting process</li> </ul>

## ii) The Stages

Parts One & Two outlined below would normally be carried out on the same day during a single visit.

### **Part One: The Final Moderation Visit (FMV)**

The first part of the Final Moderation Visit consists of the final moderation of samples of student work. Prior to the Final Moderation Visit the External Moderator will have arranged to sample work from a number of student portfolios. Moreover, all student portfolios should also be available to the External Moderator should s/he wish to sample work from them.

There is **NO** expectation that all portfolios will be complete at this point.

Where a college/Access providing institution offers several Access Diplomas with more than one External Moderator, it is possible that the Final Moderation Visits for individual Diplomas may occur on different days (see Part Two re PAB below).

The majority of folders should be nearly complete by this date with assessed work accumulated over the year, however the last assignments and some exam marking may still be on-going.

#### **Before the Final Moderation Visit the centre will have available:**

- All student portfolios (as complete as they can be by that time)
- Any specific portfolios/pieces of work specified by the External Moderator in advance of the meeting

#### **At the Final Moderation Visit the external moderator:**

- Will sample the work available. This will form the basis of the final External Moderation report alongside the information already available from the initial moderation visit and feedback from the remote sampling undertaken by subject specialists. Where concerns arise the External Moderator may ask to see work from additional portfolios.
- May also set a **condition** or **conditions** that further samples of work be provided remotely after the Final Moderation Visit and prior to approving the RAC (this might be work as yet unavailable as it may still be being marked). The centre **will** be told this clearly and unequivocally at the Preliminary-Awards Board Meeting (see below).

### **Part Two: The Preliminary-Awards Board Meeting (PAB)**

Where a college/Access providing institution offers several Access Diplomas with more than one External Moderator, it is possible that the Preliminary Awards Board for individual Diplomas may occur on different days. Where this is the case separate Preliminary Awards Board minutes must be taken and retained.

This is the first stage of the Final Awards Board process. It should comprise of the External Moderator, the Access Coordinator / Manager, the Internal Moderator and teaching staff

from the programme<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, if judged appropriate, student representatives may be asked to attend in order to provide feedback on the student experience.

***Before the Preliminary Awards Board the centre will have:***

- Have available all student portfolios (as complete as they can be by that time)
- Have available RACs completed for as many learners as possible
- Have identified a member of staff to take the notes.
- Be familiar with the requirements of the LASER Preliminary Awards Board template report
- designated a member of college staff to take the notes using the LASER Preliminary Awards Board template report

***During the Preliminary Awards Board meeting (using the PAB Agenda<sup>2</sup>):***

- **The Centre** will provide the External Moderator with a summary report on the management of relevant diploma titles.
- **The External Moderator** will provide feedback to the centre in relation to the Final Moderation Visit moderation sampling. S/he will also assess/discuss and receive feedback from the centre on any outstanding Recommendations and Conditions as recorded on the initial visit section of the External Moderation Report. The External Moderator will also gather information in terms of the Organisation; Administration and Course Management aspects of the diploma, as well as discussing Assessment Practice and Internal Moderation with centre staff. The External Moderator may also impose Conditions, which must be met prior to the Final Awards Board (as noted above).

*Extensions for the submission of student work*

- The Centre will have the opportunity to put forward any cases where it is felt that extensions beyond the Final Awards Board date (i.e. work that will not be marked in time for inclusion on the RAC) are required or aegrotat awards might be justified. Where possible any student issues such as Student Representations, Referrals, Appeals or incidents of Academic Malpractice may be discussed and either resolved or at least discussed such that arrangements can be made for their ultimate resolution<sup>3</sup>.

**If a centre feels it at all likely that a student will be unable to complete by the Final Awards Board, an extension for that student should be requested at the Preliminary Awards Board.** Where there are appropriate mitigating circumstances the extension can be permitted and the work must be graded. However, where a student has missed deadlines and there is no mitigation an extension may still be agreed beyond the end of the programme but the work will be 'capped to pass'.

An External Moderator should not be asked to: agree extensions, approve representations, referrals, appeals or receive notification of incidents of academic malpractice after the Preliminary Awards Board Meeting (in all but exceptional

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<sup>1</sup> LASER Officers are not required to be in attendance as a LASER representative will attend the Final Awards Board

<sup>2</sup> Available from the Access Downloads page

<sup>3</sup> Please note if student representations, referrals, appeals etc. are received by a centre after the Preliminary Awards Board, these should be raised with the External Moderator in Phase 3, following existing LASER procedures.

circumstances). Where there are such exceptional circumstances External Moderators must be notified as soon as is possible.

In arranging extensions, the centre must bear in mind that time must be allowed for the work to be marked and internally moderated (in line with normal LASER protocols) and the External Moderator will need to assure him/herself that this work has been properly assessed (although this may be undertaken remotely). LASER is required to have processed Access results in time for onward distribution by UCAS by the end of July.

### ***Recommendations for the Award of Credit (RACs)***

**The Preliminary Awards Board meeting will NOT usually conclude in the verification (signing off) of the RAC by the External Moderator.**

It is likely that RACs will be incomplete at this point and therefore the External Moderator will not be in a position to sign/approve the RAC until the centre has signalled their completion.

However if the RAC is complete and the External Moderator is in a position to verify it then s/he may login to Quartz-Web and verify the RAC. This could take place at the Preliminary Awards Board if the External Moderator is given, or has access to the Internet to logon to Quartz-Web. The responsibility for the accurate completion of the RAC remains with the centre.

### ***After the Preliminary Awards Board meeting***

- The centre must produce the written minutes/notes in an electronic format as soon as possible.
- These minutes/notes and related paperwork (e.g. Extension forms, student representations) must be made available and be ready for presentation to the Final Awards Board.

## ***Part Three: The Virtual Awards Board***

During this phase the centre will ensure that any actions/requirements set out by the External Moderator at the Final Moderation Visit/Preliminary Awards Board are implemented/fulfilled.

- RACs must be fully completed and uploaded to Quartz-Web as soon as possible and no later than **two working** days prior to the Final Awards Board date in order to allow the External Moderator to verify the RAC
- If the External Moderator is satisfied that all actions have been met and also that the RACs have been satisfactorily completed then s/he will verify the RACs on Quartz-Web and send a copy of their Final External Moderation Report to LASER before the Final Awards Board.
- Any further documentation relating to Extensions (that would fall beyond the Final Awards Board), Aegrotat Awards, Student Representations, Referrals, Appeals or Academic Malpractice should be prepared for presentation to the Final Awards Board.

## **Part Four: The Final Awards Board Meeting (FAB)**

The meeting will be comprised of:

- the centre's Access Coordinator/Manager,
- a representative of Senior Management
- a LASER Representative (who will also record the outcomes of the meeting).

Additionally any appropriate Access staff might attend as deemed appropriate by the centre. Student Representatives could be invited to attend the start of the meeting to provide feedback on the student experience. However students must not be present for the confirmation of the award of diplomas. The meeting will use the LASER Final Awards Board agenda/report to record proceedings.

**For the Final Awards Board the centre will have:**

- copies of the minutes/notes of each Preliminary Awards Board for scrutiny and approval
- access to student portfolios if requested on the day (in case any issues arise requiring scrutiny of student work – however they do NOT need to be set out in a room for inspection)
- completed recording sheets showing student results and grades awarded
- completed RACs as uploaded to Quartz-Web

This meeting has two parts.

### **Part A: Confirmation of the Award of Access Diplomas**

Part A of the meeting is to confirm the award of credit for units and the award of Access Diplomas as verified by the External Moderator.

The RACs, as uploaded to Quartz-Web and verified by the External Moderator cannot be amended at the Final Awards Board.

Requests for amendments to RACs arising as a result of mistakes, work that was given an extension and has been received and marked after verification of the RAC by the external moderator, or for any other reason must be directed to the LASER Access Office to ensure that the proper procedure is followed. In all these cases this will result in a new RAC being generated just for those students affected by any amendments.

Once the LASER Representative is satisfied that at that point the RAC is an accurate record of student achievement the meeting can fully convene.

Formal final approval will be given for any extensions or aegrotat awards. There will also be scope for the discussion of Student Representations, Referrals, Appeals or incidents of Academic Malpractice, although these will be based firmly on External Moderator recommendations. Any decision in light of new evidence would remain provisional subject to External Moderator confirmation.

The meeting will conclude with the formal confirmation of the award of Diplomas and/or units for each student as stated in the External Moderator verified RAC under the agenda item in the Final Awards Board meeting template.

### ***After the Final Awards Board***

- The centre must send electronic copies of all Preliminary Awards Board notes/minutes to the LASER Access Office at [accessenquiries@laser-awards.org.uk](mailto:accessenquiries@laser-awards.org.uk)
- The LASER representative will pass a copy of the Final Awards Board notes/minutes to the LASER Access Office.

### **Part B: Development Meeting**

Part B of the meeting is focussed on developmental and end of year reporting issues. Please note that this meeting will substantially reduce the annual reporting requirements upon centres.

#### *Developmental*

- Feedback to the centre by the LASER representative based on the draft External Moderator's Final Moderation Report (verbatim where necessary).
- Recommendations and conditions for the coming academic year set by the External Moderator (if applicable)
- Areas of conspicuous 'good practice'
- Areas that may need improvement
- Plans for developing new Access Diploma titles and/or amending existing titles
- Feedback for developing and improving LASER's services

#### *End of year reporting*

The set agenda for the meeting will allow the LASER Representative to gather some of the evidence that had hitherto been included in Centre's Annual Report. This will reduce the workload required by staff within centres. The agenda for this aspect of the meeting (along with all other documentation) will be circulated to centres prior to this meeting to ensure that the relevant data is available.

### **D) Conclusion:**

The new arrangements will create a more robust process for ensuring that Access Diplomas are valid and fit for purpose as defined by the QAA. LASER is conscious of the need to reduce the administrative burden on centres and recognises that the new end of year procedures involve some additional administration however to compensate for this the requirements of the centre annual report for LASER will be reduced.