

Moderation Briefing for Centres: EM Reporting and Final Awards Boards **2015-16**

Context:

As a result of guidance issued by the QAA in September 2015 in relation to the conduct of Moderation within AVAs and in particular Final Awards Boards, LASER proposes to change moderation processes across the scope of the AVA's activities, and, in particular, in relation to Final Awards Board processes.

EM Reporting in 2015-16:

A new development for 2015-16 has been the introduction of new External Moderation Reporting documents. The AVA will now be using **ONE** External Moderation Report pro-forma which incorporates Recommendations and Conditions from the previous year as well as recording in-year progress in terms of the **Initial** and **Final Moderation Visits** (in relevant sections). This document will be provided to centres after the initial visit (partially completed) and in the wake of the Final Moderation Visit in fully completed form. The format of the document has been changed to achieve this as well as to enable a more streamlined and focused reporting structure. EMs will now consider centres in terms of compliance with QAA Precepts in 3 key areas (**Organization, Administration and Course Management; Assessment Practice;** and, **Internal Moderation**) as well as examining progress in an on-going manner in terms of **Recommendations and Conditions** set over the course of the year. EMs will now be asked to report using the exception reporting model utilized by the QAA (which only requires comments where there is identified good practice or non-compliance with QAA precepts... In all other instances compliance is simply confirmed by signalling agreement rather than comment). Copies of the new **EMA 1** form and guidance notes are available from the LASER website. It is hoped that the new model of reporting will provide a more focused and useful document for both centres and the AVA.

Remote Moderation / Standardization (in year sampling):

A further development in response to QAA guidance has been a shift towards increased use of 'in-year' moderation and standardization of work. Emma Milton (the Access Quality and Moderation Officer) will soon be contacting centres to request 'in-year' samples of work in relation to specified subjects. This will involve centres (where possible) providing evidence of work for a given unit at **Pass, Merit** and **Distinction** grade. This process will take place in three phases across the scope of the year. In cases where a centre has an overall ABB+ average in excess of the upper tolerance of the QAA benchmark we will also be asking centres to provide copies of unmarked work which will be blind marked by subject specialists prior to comparison with the centres' grading decisions. This should not be seen as a 'test' but rather a means for the AVA to assure itself (and the QAA) that assessment practice at these centres is appropriate. Centres will be provided with the feedback from all moderation exercises (as well as the feedback being passed to relevant centre level diploma moderators). Where there is evidence of good practice the samples may be used by the AVA as evidence of good practice to underpin standardization sessions and remote training and support. The AVA plans to continue the format adopted last year in running standardization activities in parallel with Spring Access Practitioner Group Meetings. There will also be a focus on supporting centres to improve practice and the resources from these sessions will continue to be available remotely.

Final Awards Boards:

The QAA have asked that all AVA's ensure that there is opportunity for Centres to respond to any concerns raised by External Moderators prior to the conducting of the Final Awards Board. Therefore, it is no longer possible for the Final Moderation Visit and the Final Awards Board to be run on the same day.

New Procedures for Final Awards Boards:

All centres and EM's should now anticipate that the Final Moderation Visit should take place approximately 2 weeks prior to the Final Awards Board.

The EM will visit for the Final Moderation of work and undertake sampling of student portfolios. The EM will complete the EMA 1 Moderation Report for the centre and will also consider / agree any Extenuating Circumstances or Aegrotat Awards proposed by the centre.

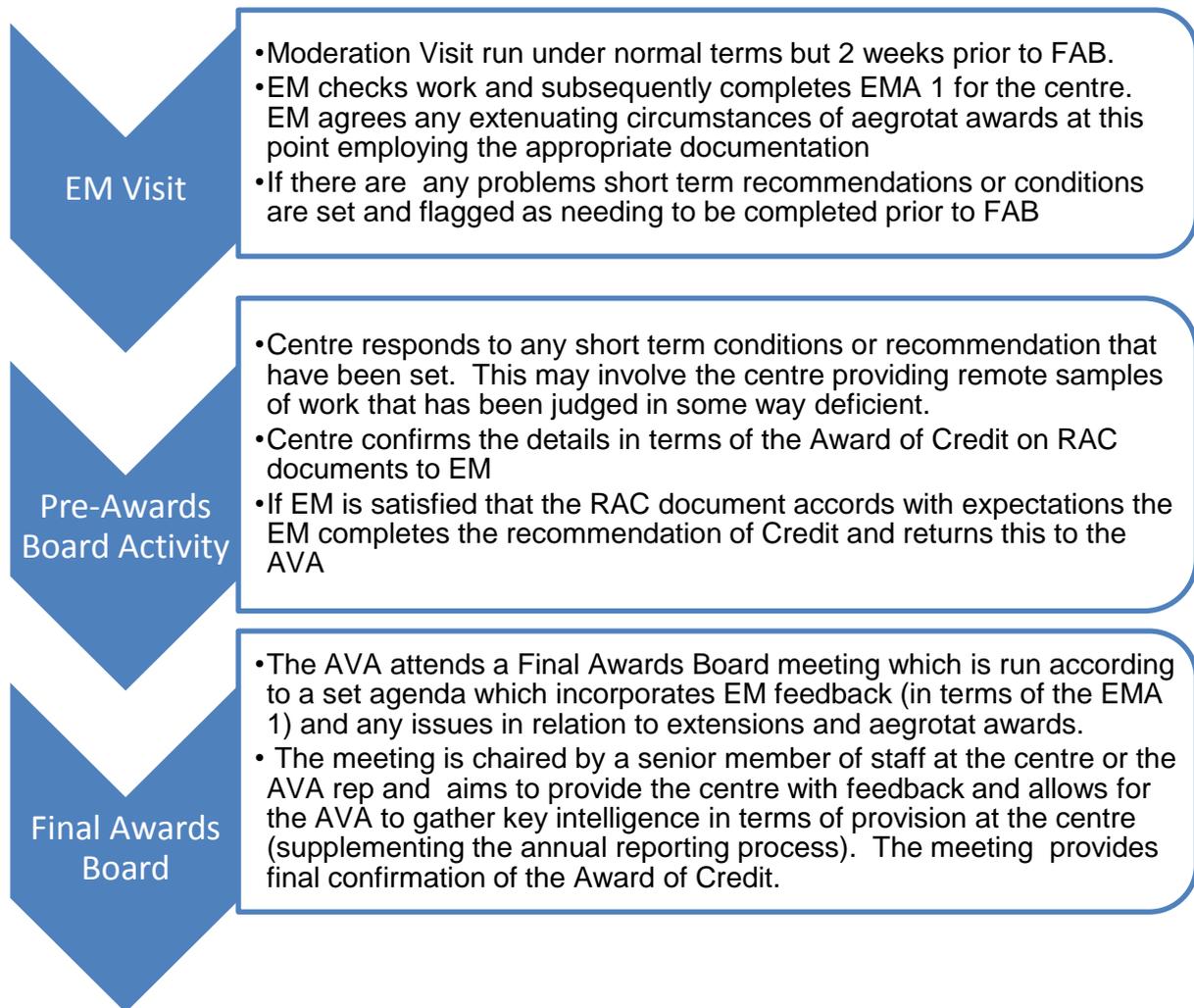
If the EM is happy that all is satisfactory, the centre will then forward the completed RAC's for the EM to agree in the time after the Final Moderation Visit but **PRIOR** to the **Final Awards Board**. The EM will then forward **both** the **EMA 1** and **approved RACs** to LASER who, upon receipt will then go ahead with the Final Awards Board for the Centre / Diploma titles. It is vital that both centres and EMs are aware that if the AVA does not have access to the EMA 1 and the approved RACs it will not be possible to go ahead with the Final Awards Board. These documents taken together constitute the EMs 'remote' participation in the Final Awards Board process and so without them the Final Awards Board will not be able to go ahead.

What happens if there are problems with the EMs' Sampling?

If the EM is NOT satisfied with the sampling undertaken, the EM can then ask either for more or enhanced sampling to be remotely forwarded to him / her or for the centre to undertake remedial actions where, for example, there are grading anomalies highlighted or inappropriate assessment decisions. The EM will highlight the necessary actions as **Conditions** which will need to be met prior the commencement of the Final Awards Board. The AVA will be notified as soon as is practicable in these instances. If necessary the date of the Final Awards Board may need to be adjusted to allow the centre increased time to meet any conditions set (although this would hopefully not be the norm). However, the AVA will not go ahead with any Final Awards Board without the full agreement of the EM. Once the EM is happy they will then submit their EMA 1 (completed) and the agreed RAC documentation for the diploma title.

Once the AVA has received the agreement of the EM (in terms of the above) the Final Awards Board will take place. The EMA 1 document will form the body of the EMs' remote participation in the Board which will then be made up of Centre Staff (as is the norm) and one AVA representative. Credit will be awarded in line with the agreed Recommendations for the Award of Credit document (RAC). At this point the Final Awards Board will also confirm any final decisions in terms of extensions and aegrotat awards (alongside any other matters relating to referrals, plagiarism, appeals etc. (although these should be dealt with on the appropriate AVA documentation available from the AVA website: <http://laser-awards.org.uk/content2.asp?id=434>). It should be noted that although the EM does not attend the Final Awards Board in person as a general rule, this may be sanctioned if there are extreme concerns in relation to quality processes at the centre. Furthermore, as previously stated, no Awards Board decisions will be taken without the formal agreement of the relevant EM (whether remotely or in person).

A summary of the new processes can be found below:



What happens if all the folders are not ready given the date is earlier?

This is a quite reasonable concern for centres. If there is insufficient work available for the EM to sample then the award of credit cannot be confirmed and a further remote sample would be necessary (as stated previously). It is reasonable to expect most work to be completed by the final moderation date (2 weeks prior to the Final Awards Board) and further sampling should not present too great a challenge if it is necessary (as for example an EM asks to see a small sample of an as yet unmarked unit (or units)). However, if there is a significant amount of work missing, then the centre would need to address this as a matter of urgency as a Final Awards Board could (and should) not go ahead until the EM is satisfied such that s/he can sign the Recommendation for the Award of Credit document. This may mean AVA re-arranging the Final Awards Board visit in the most extreme cases. However, it should be remembered by both EMs and centres that the sampling process is precisely that... *i.e.* work is sampled and there is not a requirement for the EM to view every unit from every student, rather to ensure that the EM is satisfied across the scope of assessment (and based upon the samples viewed) that assessment is taking place in line with the QAA

precepts. Where there are concerns we would ask that EMs formally notify the AVA so that we can work with centres to ensure that student's interests are best protected in terms of any delays in the Awards Board process.

Annual Reporting:

A number of centres raised concerns in relation to the demands placed upon them in terms of the completion of the Annual Report template (in the wake of Final Awards Boards). In response to these concerns the AVA representative will use attendance at the Final Awards Board as an opportunity to gather relevant supplementary information from centres (rather than asking centres themselves to provide this through filling out forms in the wake of the board).

Full details will be provided to centres in advance (in the shape of a revised AQ5 Agenda document in respect of Final Awards Boards to ensure that centres are well prepared for the centre reporting aspects of the Final Awards Board process. There will still remain a need for centres to submit an Annual Report however the content of this document will now be significantly reduced. We hope this will enable centres to use their time more effectively as we appreciate there are always significant demands placed on centre staff in terms of the administration and management of courses.

Conclusion:

We hope that this document is useful in summarizing the key changes in terms of moderation and standardization activities across the scope of the academic year. If there are any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact the Access Quality Manager (Ken Duckett) by mobile 07900.265802 or by e-mail at K.Duckett@laser-awards.org.uk .

We hope that you all have an enjoyable Christmas / New Year Break.

The Access Team