

Discussion Document



Access Practitioner Group

Autumn 2016



Ken Duckett / Sue Martin

LASER Access Practitioner Group Meetings

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Introduction:

Firstly welcome!!! A new academic year is with us and it will undoubtedly present us with both challenges and opportunities. We at LASER would like to thank our centres and moderators for their continued support and congratulate them on their success in making Higher Education possible for so many non-traditional entrants. This Access Practitioner Group meeting will deviate a little from the norm in that a significant portion of the meeting will be given over to training and discussion of issues surrounding moderation. We hope that you will find this helpful. The first item on the agenda though remains General Updates.

General updates & Dates to note:

This Autumn the APG sessions were attended by 57% of LASER Centres. This was a pleasing increase (up 8%) on previous years. In general the 'round up' at the beginning of the sessions presented a very erratic picture in terms of the impact of changes in relation to the withdrawal of the NHS Nursing Bursary Scheme. Some centres noted an overall decline in Nursing students whilst others noted no overall decline and a few noted an increase in provision. Generally though there was no clear pattern underpinning this in terms of the location of centre for example so it was both difficult to assess the possible impact of the funding changes or indeed Access recruitment across all pathways (as the picture remained equally erratic). Some centres noted a noticeably younger age of recruits to programmes whilst others noted an increase in the presence of older students. This is important as it would appear that there is no discernable patterns relating to recruitment but some centres are concerned at an apparently inexplicable drop (unless the funding question has impacted on some but not all centres).

The UCAS tariff is now in place for the academic year 2016-17. For more guidance on the implications of this new development please see [Access Bulletin 3](#) available from the LASER [Access Newsletters webpage](#)¹.

The schedule of dates for Final Awards Boards had been circulated to centres and revisions will be made and a new timetable circulated before Christmas.

The LASER Access Conference will take place on Friday the 7th July 2017 in Central London. At the moment there is no clear 'theme' for the event but we will be including an item on Higher and Degree Apprenticeships for Nursing & Healthcare and LASER's role in the Kent National Collaborative Outreach Project for higher education. Any further suggestions please to Sue Martin know (S.Martin@laser-awards.org.uk).

'What Moderators Want'

As part of a more general drive to improve transparency and clarity in relation to moderation processes, LASER has rewritten and relaunched our *Moderation Handbook*. This document provides information for both External Moderators and Centres in relation moderation processes. The new handbook has been restructured to include a more chronologically based discussion of what to expect in terms of moderation activities throughout the year. The focus of the document is now squarely on explaining 'what to expect' and 'when to expect it'. It is hoped that this document will enable centres to be clear on what it is that External Moderators and Subject Specialist Examiners will expect to see in terms of their scrutiny of diploma titles. It also outlines the new role of the Lead Centre Moderator.



¹ Click on link or paste this into your browser, <http://laser-awards.org.uk/content2.asp?id=318>

Introducing the Lead Centre Moderator:

In 2016-17 every centre will be allocated a Lead Centre Moderator. In centres where there are a number of External Moderators looking at different Diploma titles one External Moderator will assume the role of Lead Centre Moderator. In centres where only one External Moderator is responsible for the centre's diploma titles then that External Moderator will also act as Lead Centre Moderator.

The Lead Centre Moderator's role will encompass two basic activities:

- 1) Ensuring Centres are compliant with the requirements of Subject Specialist Examination and feeding back SSE judgments to relevant staff at the centre and the External Moderators
- 2) Producing a summary 'pro-forma' report in relation to all moderation activity at the centre. This report will capture the existent External Moderation processes as well as SSE activities and like the existent External Moderation Report it will evolve over the course of any given academic year.

The new Lead Centre Moderator will play a critical role in ensuring that SSE work is scrutinized and feedback is provided to centres in a timely fashion which enables them to be confident that they are operating in accordance with the QAA regulatory framework.

In order to assist practitioners in planning for moderation LASER has prepared a training presentation in relation to the expectations which you will find in your packs together with the new Moderation handbook. This will provide an opportunity to both clarify and reflect on the key quality assurance processes employed by LASER.

The PowerPoint slides for the above presentation, updated Moderators' Handbook and QAA Grading Handbook Section C are attached with this document.

Distance/Blended Learning Working Group – project launch:

One increasingly common topic in External Moderation reports is the use of alternative models of delivery (perhaps unsurprisingly given the findings of the FELTAG Report). The increased use of new technologies to deliver and assess Access programmes has led LASER to attempt to develop a set of guidelines which will both clarify our expectations in relation to the use of new technologies and to also aid centres and External Moderators in terms of quality assuring assessments utilizing this model of delivery. In the pack you will find LASER's proposals for the setting up of a working group looking into all aspects of digital learning. If you are interested in taking part in this consultation, and have not already signed up to the process do please let us know. We anticipate that there will be one physical meeting in the early stages of the process and then the rest of the consultation will be undertaken 'virtually'. It is anticipated that this process will develop a set of guidelines for assessors and moderators in terms of the quality assurance of all digital models, from blended learning to 'fully remote' distance learning delivery.

Discussion:

This item attracted interest amongst a number of centres and Access Practitioners. The trend towards digital methods of delivery and the impact of what has been termed 'disruptive technologies' on conventional methods of educational delivery sparked some interesting debate.

The questions raised in terms of embracing the potential benefits of e-learning are clear. However, concerns remained for many in terms of the balance between 'distance provision' and the need for some form of contact both tutorially and in terms of assessment. The working group will have an initial face to face meeting at some point in January and will then move to work remotely. It is anticipated that different members of the group will focus on different questions in relation to e-learning and will be able to influence their areas of particular interest.

Breaking News!!!

As part of LASER's on-going commitment to support practitioners in the development of flexible Access provision we are going to work on developing a new suite of resources in association with the new units developed. These will include **e-learning materials for practitioners** to utilize as part of the delivery of 'distance learning' or blended learning programmes and will include **audio-lectures, handouts and formative / summative assessments**. The first products of the e-learning process will be available for the next academic year.

Access Online Forum:

We are setting up an online forum to try and support the further development of a community of Access practitioners across LASER validated centres and other interested parties. In the coming weeks you will receive a briefing on how to join this online community which will provide a secure area for discussion including the sharing of ideas and having a place to ask questions of colleagues in other organisations.

There will initially be areas for Access tutors and Access Managers & Coordinators as well as a specialist area for Access moderators. It is easy to use although you will need to a login and password to ensure that it remains a private and secure area.

Discussion and Update:

We are still considering which platform to use and although we have tested a version on 'ProBoards' we are looking at another product hence the delayed launch. We hope that as many staff as possible within all of our approved Access centres will join in once we go live. In future we will be posting our Access Practitioner discussion documents via the new Access Forum as well as continuing to contact you by email.

This new development is anticipated to 'go live' in the first part of January. The system will only be successful as an on-line forum if practitioners support it. We hope that it will serve as a remote 'extension' to Access Practitioner Group meetings and that it will become a focus for sharing 'good practice' and also as a vehicle for consolidating the LASER Access Community.

Direct Entry of Access Unit Results



As an alternative to completing Recommendations for the Award of Credit (RACs) spreadsheets at the end of the year we are in the final stages of preparing Quartz Web (the admin area for LASER where learner registrations are uploaded) to enable the direct entry of provisional unit results throughout the year.

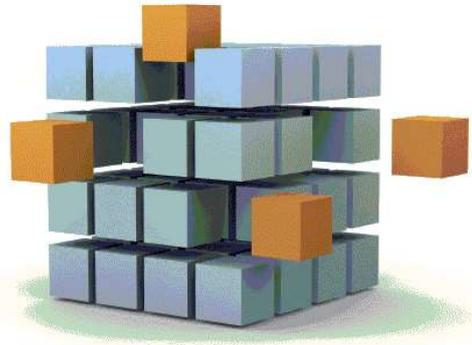
These unit results, ranging from non-achievement through to Distinction, will be provisional and subject to verification by the external moderator

and Final Awards Board. Once they have been verified at the end of the year the results are then uploaded from your Quartz Web Access area into our main system.

This option will be ready in early 2017 once Access student registrations are complete. A full set of guidance is in preparation and you will still be able to opt to use RACs if that suits you better!

Unit Bank Update:

As you will be aware the first units for the new LASER Access Unit Bank in **Health Studies, Biology, Psychology** and **Sociology** are now available from the [Resource Bank area on the LASER website](#) (you will need a login for this – if you don't have one please contact the Access Office on 01227 811827 or email accessenquiries@laser-awards.org.uk) and many practitioners have already begun to use them. The reception for the new units has been extremely good. However, some practitioners have commented that there is a lack of 6 credit units. The decision was taken last year to avoid where possible 6 credit units as it was felt that they often represented an uncomfortable amalgamation of two topics better served as separate units. It was also felt that 6 credit units may have a negative potential impact on grading profiles for students. However, some practitioners have expressed a desire to retain some 6 credit units. Where this is the case LASER is happy for centres to retain their current offering and we will work with these centres to review the units at point of validation to ensure that the units remain as effective and efficient means of assessment.



Discussion:

*With the first stage of unit revision nearly complete LASER will now be looking to key units within Subject Modules across the full range of Access Diploma provision. We will be reviewing **all** remaining multi-provider units in the coming year and will be launching new 'quality marked units' in these areas ready for the coming academic year.*

Biology:

The most controversial area in terms of the publication of the new units has been in the area of Science. The suite of Biology units, unlike the other units in the reform process, were written in such a way as to contain a core syllabus with additional units for those wishing to study Biology in the context of Nursing and Health Studies and a further separate set of units for those wishing to study Biology in terms of Science Diplomas (the content was similar but with a slightly different focus for each group). Therefore, the unit writer envisaged that all students would study the 'Chemistry for Biology' Unit and the 'Biomolecules' Unit. The reason for this was to build a foundation of core learning whilst allowing for knowledge to then be developed in a manner relevant to support progression. The units themselves were reviewed by expert moderators and FE and HE practitioners. This model also received highly favourable feedback from Ofsted at an inspection at the college of the main unit writer.



The units themselves do have some overlap within them as knowledge is developed and to this end some centres have decided to adopt a 'continuous assessment model' where by the assessment of each unit is broken down and 'spread' across the course of the year. Whilst this does not necessarily have to be the case there are some considerable merits to this approach. Whilst the student will not gain a definitive grade for each unit until late in the course, this means that all grade profiles for assessments will reflect developmental learning throughout the course allowing for an early steep learning curve to be

countered by later assessments where students are more confident. Moreover, as each assessment will develop a grade profile but not an actual grade the student will be able to get a sense of how they are doing.

The Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria for these units emphasize the 'overlapping' nature of scientific understanding and may appear dense and somewhat specific in comparison to more

conventional Social Science or Humanities Units. However, every effort was taken to reduce the number of Assessment Criteria within the units to allow for a more manageable assessment process whilst retaining the academic rigour required by Higher Education practitioners.

Reviewing the Units:

We are more than happy to hear practitioners' views throughout the academic year in relation to the new units and will review all new units offered at the end of the year to ensure that they provide an effective method of assessing learning in relation to their individual titles.

Discussion:

The general reception of the new units has been positive, although as noted above there remain some concerns in terms of the Biology units. Some practitioners have noted concerns at the inclusion of 'Chemistry for Biology' as an integral aspect of these units. However, the major concern relates to the actual expectations of the units (i.e. the level the subjects are to be achieved at). For this reason LASER will be looking into the wording of the units to ensure that the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria (and Indicative Content) accurately describe the expected achievement. We are more than happy to hear the views of practitioners as part of this process. We will also be working on the creation of assignments and also learning resources in relation to these units as an aspect of the development of e-learning.

Off the Shelf Unit Assessments / Assignment Briefs:

LASER has asked our unit writers to devise some optional assessments for some of the units within the unit bank. We already have optional Assignment Briefs for all the main IAS and EIAS units and aim to add to these in terms of the new unit stock. Whilst these assessments remain optional and centre can choose whether to adopt them or use their own preferred assignments we believe that they will help to build a clearer set of expectations in terms of the requirements of assessment for the new units.

Discussion:

The introduction of 'off the shelf' assignment briefs was largely welcomed by practitioners at the APG meetings. There were some concerns that this might lead to compulsory assessments in certain areas but once practitioners were reassured that the briefs would be optional there was a warm welcome. It was noted that even where practitioners did not use the actual briefs they still remained a valuable resource in terms of standardizing the expectations of assessments in relation to new units.

Standardization:

A further resource in terms of the above is the new LASER 'EIAS Commentary Document'. This document is to be used in association with three exemplar assignments relating to the Social Science EIAS. The three exemplar assignments represent work at Pass, Merit and Distinction grade. These assignments were part of the 2015-16 Standardization sessions and there was an extremely high level of agreement in terms of the grading (with only one practitioner disagreeing with a grade which they felt should be raised from Merit to Distinction). Therefore, LASER felt the samples along with commentaries and markers comments would present an excellent set of examples which might assist in terms of standardization of expectations across the different grade boundaries.



Discussion:

The Standardization resources were welcomed by Access Practitioners. It was noted that although they related to the Social Science EIAS, the content made them relevant as comparators to Professional Studies EIAS units as well as those relating to Humanities. They are now available via the Resource Centre on the website: <http://laser-awards.org.uk/loginuser.asp>

The Last Word:

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We hope that it will be of interest and will prepare you for the Access Practitioner Group Meetings for this year. Should you have any questions please do let us know. We can be reached via the contact details listed below:

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