



AVA licensing

Operational description

September 2019

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Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is responsible for arrangements for the formal approval and quality assurance of Access to Higher Education (HE) courses. The *QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education (the Recognition Scheme)* provides the framework of structures, mechanisms and regulations through which QAA exercises this responsibility. Within this framework, QAA licenses organisations to approve Access to HE Diplomas, recognise Access to HE courses and award Access to HE Diplomas to students. An organisation which has been licensed by QAA for these purposes is known as an Access Validating Agency (AVA).

This document outlines the AVA licensing process that QAA uses when considering applications for AVA status.

This AVA licensing process is overseen by the Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC) on behalf of QAA's Board of Directors. It provides a common component of guidance for applicant AVAs, the ARLC and licensing teams.

Please refer to the document summary listed in Table 1 if you are currently an AVA and wish to seek information regarding how to:

- surrender the AVA licence
- merge by acquisition with a non-AVA recognised awarding organisation
- merge by acquisition with another AVA.

Table 1: Document summary list

Process	Document description
AVA licensing agreement	Outlines the standard conditions for the licensing of Access Validating Agencies
AVA licensing criteria	Sets out QAA's requirements for the governance and management of AVAs, and the procedures and mechanisms to be operated by AVAs for maintaining the quality of Access to HE courses and the standards achieved by students awarded the Access to HE Diploma.
Procedures for the surrender of an AVA Validating Agency licence	Sets out the procedures that an Access Validating Agency (AVA) should follow, and the actions that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) will take, when an organisation surrenders its AVA licence.
Access Validating Agency (AVA) cessation of trading procedures	Sets out the procedures that QAA will follow when an Access Validating Agency (AVA) ceases trading.
Procedure for AVA merger by acquisition by a non-AVA recognised awarding organisation	Sets out the procedures that an Access Validating Agency (AVA) should follow, and the actions that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) will take when an AVA merges by acquisition by a non-AVA recognised awarding organisation.
Procedure for AVA merger by acquisition of one AVA by another	Sets out the procedures that an Access Validating Agency (AVA) should follow, and the actions that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) will take when an AVA merges by acquisition of one AVA by another.

All documents are available at www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/regulation-and-licensing/avas

AVA licensing: Operational description

Notification to QAA

1 An organisation may contact QAA for informal advice about the responsibilities of AVA status and the process of AVA licensing. Once a formal commitment has been made to apply for an AVA licence, the organisation must notify QAA in writing. The ARLC is informed that the notification has been received. QAA then provides the organisation with full details of the licensing process. This includes:

- explicit instructions for the submission of an outline application, including a date for its submission
- an approximate schedule for the complete licensing process
- fee information for AVA approval process.

Outline application

2 The applying organisation prepares an outline application according to guidelines provided (see [Appendix 1](#)) for consideration and prima facie approval by the ARLC. Applications must satisfy each of the points detailed under paragraph 3 below.

Consideration of the outline application

3 The ARLC considers the outline application with reference to the following points:

- the adequacy and clarity of the information provided (an outline application which does not provide information in all categories cannot be approved to proceed to full application)
- the appropriateness and viability of the applying organisation to carry the responsibilities of a licensed AVA
- the potential ability of the applying organisation to address and meet the licensing criteria
- the readiness of the applicant to proceed to the full licensing process
- the impact of the award of a new AVA licence on existing AVAs and Access to HE provisions.

4 On the basis of its consideration of the outline application in the light of these factors, the ARLC may:

- invite the organisation to proceed to the preparation of a full application
- invite the organisation to resubmit the outline application with specified changes
- reject the application - if the organisation is not invited to proceed with the application, the reasons for the ARLC's decision will be provided.

Licensing team

5 QAA appoints a licensing team of two AVA reviewers and a QAA Officer to manage the process. The licensing team is responsible for overseeing the progress of the licence application and providing advice to the ARLC.

Preparation and submission of full application

6 The AVA prepares its full application in accordance with guidance and to a template provided by QAA, providing evidenced information about how the organisation meets, or intends to meet, the AVA licensing criteria. This is submitted to QAA in the manner and by the deadline specified by QAA.

Scrutiny of the licence application

7 The licensing team scrutinises the licence application, seeking evidence that the applicant meets, or will meet, the AVA licensing criteria. The team may request additional information and/or clarification from the applicant to satisfy itself in this regard. Only one request for additional information can be made. The request for, or receipt of, additional information does not guarantee the success of the application.

8 The licensing team may also recommend an interregnum to the process if, after initial scrutiny, the team considers that substantial development is required; or if, after a request for additional or revised documentation, the application is still considered deficient. The licensing team's advice is reported to the ARLC for approval.

Licensing meeting

9 QAA invites senior representatives of the applying organisation to attend a meeting with the licensing team to discuss aspects of the application. This is usually held at QAA's offices.

Outcomes

10 After the scrutiny of an application and the meeting with representatives of the applying organisation, the QAA Officer presents the licensing team's conclusions to the ARLC and answers any questions the Committee may have. On the basis of this, one of three decisions are made by the ARLC:

- granting of a provisional AVA licence, subject to standard conditions and any specific required actions
- referral, with recommendations about matters to be addressed and an invitation to resubmit
- rejection of the application.

11 The ARLC bases its decision on the licensing team's advice about the organisation's compliance with QAA's requirements for licensing.

Award of the AVA licence

12 The organisation is informed of the ARLC's decision. In addition to the standard conditions of licensing,¹ QAA may attach required actions to be met by specific dates. Where an application is unsuccessful, the applying organisation is given the reasons for the referral or rejection.

¹ See AVA licensing agreement: Standard conditions for the licensing of AVAs. The AVA licensing agreement sets out the continuing obligations of the licence-holder and the benefits of AVA licensing that are provided by QAA: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/regulation-and-licensing/avas

Follow-up

13 From award of a provisional licence the AVA falls into the annual monitoring process and is required to provide submissions as detailed in the AVA monitoring timetable at [Appendix 4](#).

14 Within two years, the AVA is reviewed. The review enables QAA to confirm that the structures and procedures described in the AVA's application have been implemented and are operating satisfactorily. Wherever possible, members of the licensing team are included in the review team.

15 The confirmation of the AVA licence and the nature of any follow-up and monitoring activity by QAA depends on the outcome of the review and level of risk identified. Where a review results in a judgement of low or medium risk, the ARLC makes a recommendation to the QAA Board that the AVA licence can be confirmed. Where a review results in a judgement of high risk,² the ARLC makes a recommendation to the QAA Board about whether the provisional licence should be temporarily extended or withdrawn.

Complaints and appeals

16 Complaints about the conduct of the AVA licensing process are considered by QAA in accordance with the formal procedures on its website (see www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/how-to-make-a-complaint/complaints-about-qaa-and-appeals-against-decisions).

² <https://qaa.moodle.school>

Appendix 1: Outline application template

The outline application may be submitted in any appropriate format but should provide information about each of the following.

Name

- Name of applying organisation
- Name of lead officer for application and contact details
- Name of Chief Executive of applying organisation
- Name of the Chair of the applying organisation's governing body

Legal identity

- Legal identity of applying organisation
- Details of staffing and/or services to be provided by any other body/ies, and the nature of the relationship with the other body/ies

Memoranda of agreement or service level agreements should be appended.

Resources

- Approximate annual income, indicating main sources of income
- Approximate annual outgoings, indicating main areas of responsibility for expenditure
- Responsibility and key mechanisms for financial management of the organisation
- Cost/benefit analysis and risk assessment for responsibilities as AVA licence holder

Accounts for the last financial year and budget for the current year should be appended.

Membership and partners

- Company members (where the organisation is a registered company)
- Other further education members or partners, indicating those who are current providers of recognised Access to HE courses
- Other higher education members or partners, indicating those who are current providers of recognised Access to HE courses
- Other organisations working in partnership with the organisation

Letters of expression of interest, signed by heads of institutions, should be appended for institutions that are not currently members, but have indicated an interest in becoming members should the organisation be successful in its AVA licence application. Current providers of Access to HE courses that have expressed an intention to transfer QAA-recognised Access to HE provisions to the applying organisation should include a statement to this effect in their letters.

Courses

- Providers of Access to HE courses that are currently members of, or working in partnership with, the organisation
- Providers of Access to HE courses that have expressed interest in membership (as identified and evidenced under Membership and partners)
- Access to HE courses currently offered by providers listed under Membership and partners (recognised Access to HE courses and their current AVA should be identified)

- Numbers of learners currently registered on Access to HE courses

Structures

- Diagrammatic outline of governance structures of the applying organisation, with indication of any proposed changes for AVA status
- Proposed locus of authority for AVA licence, for quality assurance of Access to HE, and for the development of Access provision within the organisation's governance structures
- Diagrammatic outline of organisational and staffing structures of the applying organisation
- Proposed staffing levels and responsibilities relating to Access to HE within the organisation

Previous experience

Applying organisation's experience in accreditation of Access to HE or other Level 3 courses, and brief details of how the associated responsibilities are managed within the organisation.

Rationale

- Primary geographical area to be served by Access to HE provisions recognised by the applying organisation.
- Rationale for the organisation's application for AVA licence, including statements on a) value to the organisation and its members and b) anticipated benefits to others.

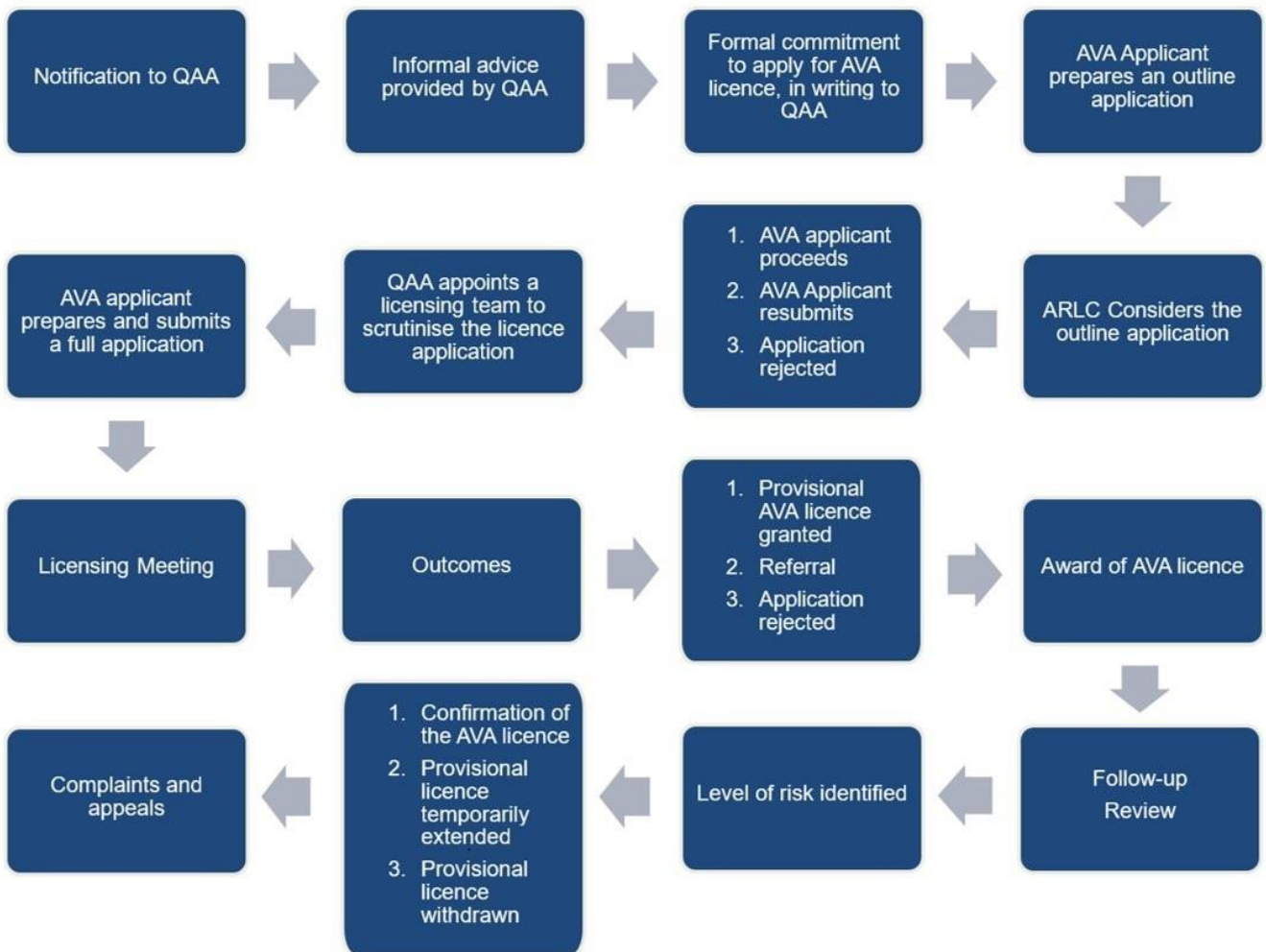
Date

Date of submission of outline application

Statement of commitment

A statement of commitment should be signed by the Chair of the applying organisation's governing body on the organisation's behalf. The statement should indicate when, and by whom, the formal decision to make the application for an AVA licence was taken. It should also confirm that the organisation has considered the AVA licensing criteria and is able to be able to meet the criteria in full.

Appendix 2: AVA licensing procedure



Appendix 3: Fee structure

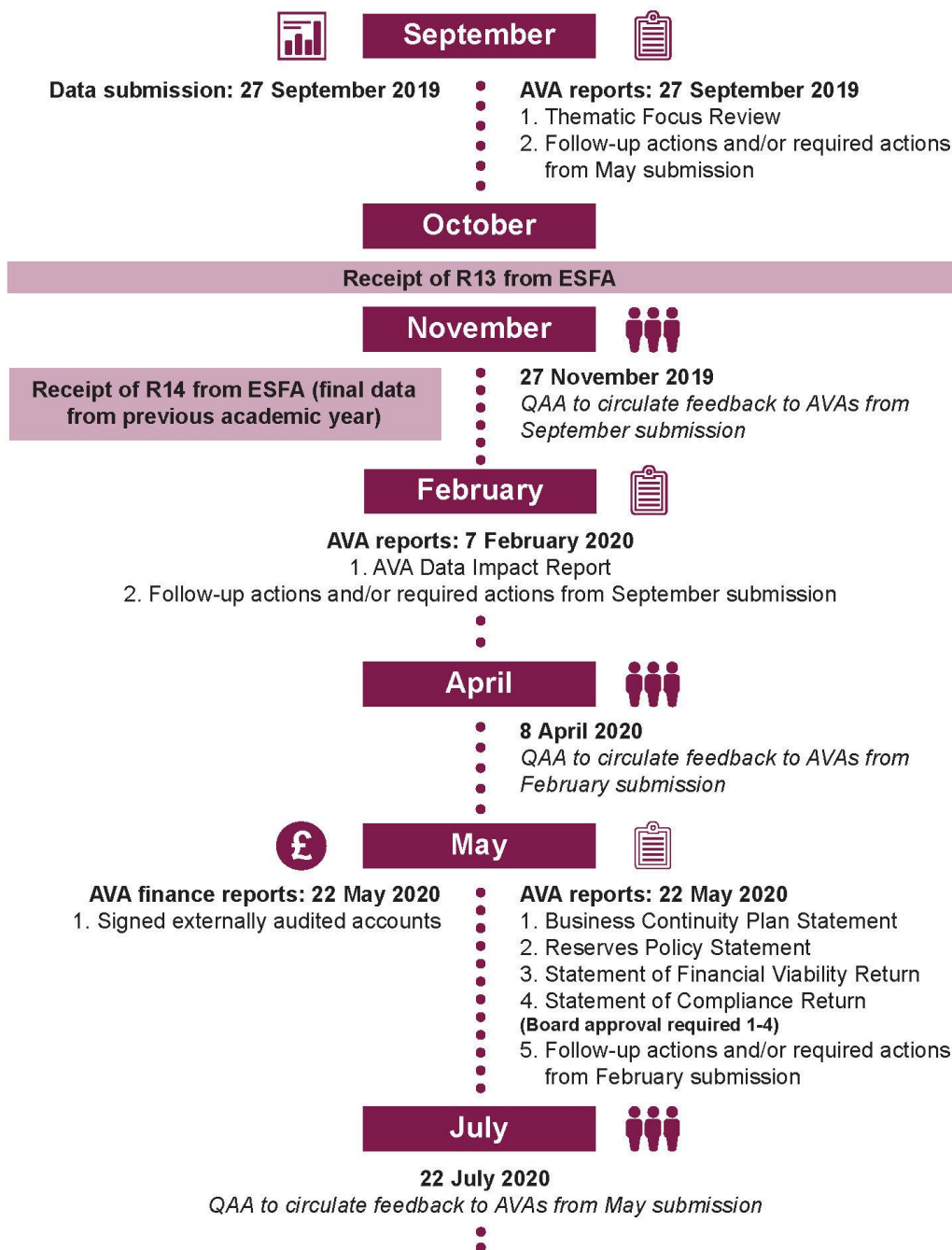
Fees will be charged for AVA licensing applications. The fees are accurate at the time of publication.

Type of monitoring activity	Cost
AVA licensing and approval process	£32,500*
Quality assurance review visit	£4,500

*Please note that further costs may be incurred where additional review visits are mandated.

Appendix 4: AVA monitoring indicative timetable

AVA Monitoring Timetable 19/20



Any Questions?

Please do not hesitate to contact us via Moodle or email:
a.karadia@qaa.ac.uk j.mizon@qaa.ac.uk



Appendix 5: Document information

Document Information	
Document owner	Access Manager
Oversight committee	Access Recognition and Licensing Committee (ARLC)
Published location	www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/regulation-and-licensing/avas
Other documents referenced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AVA licensing agreement • AVA licensing criteria • AVA Monitoring: Operational Descripton • Procedures for the surrender of an Access Validating Agency licence • Access Validating Agency (AVA) cessation of trading procedures • Procedure for AVA merger by acquisition by a non-AVA recognised awarding organisation • Procedure for AVA merger by acquisition of one AVA by another <p>Please refer to: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/access-to-he/regulation-and-licensing/avas</p>
Acknowledgements	Access Officer
Next review	September 2020

Version control			
Version number	Date issued	Author	Update information
V1.0	January 2012	K Denith	First published version
V2.0	March 2018	J Mizon	The policy was updated in March 2018 to reflect changes to the licensing criteria and the AVA monitoring method.
V3.0	July 2018	J Mizon	The policy was updated in July 2018 to incorporate the fee structure for AVA licensing.
V4.0	September 2018	J Mizon	The policy was updated in September 2018 to include a link to the AVA Monitoring: Operational Description and removal of the term 'relicensing' from the document.
V5.0	September 2019	J Mizon	Updates to links within document.

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