



Access to HE

**Provider Handbook
2015 -16**



Introduction

Welcome to the 2015-16 Access to HE Providers' Handbook. This document has been designed to be an easy point of reference for Access to HE AVA queries. The handbook includes an overview of LASER policies and other guidance and where necessary will direct the user to downloadable forms or to the most appropriate Access Team member for further assistance. The handbook is available as an electronic document that provides links to the LASER Access web pages as appropriate.

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The Access Year

The table below references key activities taking place during 2015-16.

References in bold are expanded later in this handbook (on e-version click to go straight to the relevant section)

September	Centres receive student welcome leaflets from AVA - further copies available on request Re-validation timetable published. Co-ordinators are sent Start of Year information
October	Moderator details confirmed with all centres First Access Practitioner Group (APG) meetings held alongside Assessment & Grading refresher workshops
November	Registration of learners (deadline 1 December 2015)
December	Class lists circulated to centres. Centres MUST check that learner information is accurate.
January	Initial Moderation visits should be taking place across centres during this term HE Applications : UCAS deadline 15 January
February	Centres will start to receive copies of the Initial Moderation reports Centres MUST check and confirm the accuracy of 'recommendation for the award of credit' forms (RACs) details
March	Second Access Practitioner Group (APG) meetings held
April	Standardisation events
May	New Validations panels to be completed by early May AVA recommends all centres check AVA policies relating to award achievement; including reasonable adjustments, APL, mitigating circumstances and extensions in preparation for end of year.
June	Recommendation for the Award of Credit (RAC) Forms or Online results to be completed prior to Final Awards Board (Boards to be held in June and July)
July	Processing results – e-results sent to centres by end July Annual LASER Access to HE Conference 10 July London Annual Centre Reports to be completed and returned to the AVA
August	Certification of learners Centres receive certificates for onward distribution to students. Centres receive Moderation Reports (as available).

General Policies and Guidance

LASER produces a number of guidance and policy documents for use by centres, these along with a number of forms required are available from our web pages.

The ['For Access Providers' web page](#) is a good starting place to find information and most of our policy documents and templates can be found on our [Access Downloads in General Guidance](#)

General Guidance & Policies



The role of the Access Coordinator in centres providing Access Diplomas

The LASER Access charging tariff 2014-15

Access Centre Annual Report Template 2014-15 (due for release early 2015)

Start of Year

All centre co-ordinators receive start of year email, which includes a contacts update form, fees tariff, confirmation of courses running, student registration details and a request form for the date of the Final Awards Boards. We ask all centres to complete and return the contacts update form as fully as possible as this enables AVA staff to contact the relevant people with any queries and helps us to keep our database updated. The confirmation of courses running is required to ensure that moderators are allocated where needed and notified in good time if a course is not running.



Final Awards Boards should be agreed at initial visits and notified to Marie Jones, m.jones@laser-awards.org.uk in the LASER Access Office as soon as possible to ensure the AVA is able to attend all Boards. Further information on [Final Awards Boards](#) can be found later in this document.

Access Practitioner Group Meetings

Access Practitioner Group (APG) Meetings provide an opportunity for staff working in colleges as tutors and managers to come together and share views and discuss best practice across the region. Your LASER Access officers are also present to share regional and national news and we try to have a lead theme for each meeting.



We hold APGs once per term (the summer meeting is usually a conference) and we hold each of them at between 3 or 4 separate venues across the region to try and ensure that colleagues are able to attend at least one.

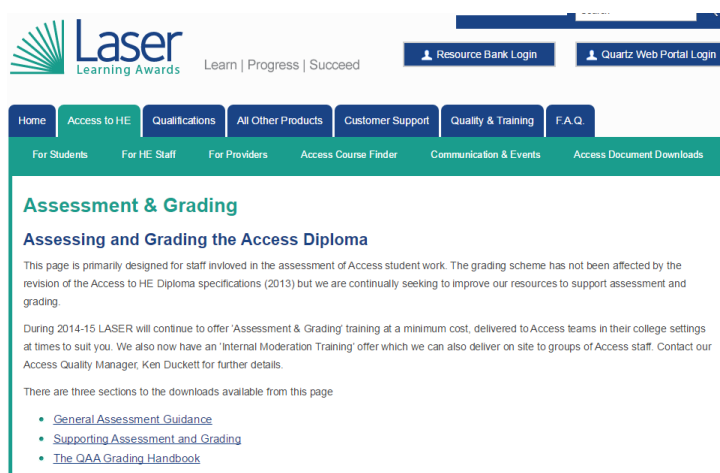
Please encourage several members of your Access team to come to each meeting. They provide a valuable staff development opportunity and there is no fee for attendance.

APG meetings are arranged by Sarah Hatherly, s.hatherly@laser-awards.org.uk so please contact her if you would like further details, dates of the next round of meetings, or can offer a venue for future meetings or visit our Access Meetings and page.

Assessment and Grading

Our Access Assessment & Grading web page has links to a range of guidance and template documents to support the implementation of grading for Access courses. These include:

- LASER Access assessment guidelines
- Templates for recording grade indicators and final unit grades
- Forms for use re student 'representations' (appeals against grading decisions), reasonable adjustments etc.



If you have queries about the allocation of grade descriptors to units please contact us at accessenquiries@laser-awards.org.uk

Student Registrations

Access learners must be registered with LASER on a named Diploma with units to the value of 60 credits by 1 December or within 12 weeks of the start of the course for January starts. Registrations received after this date will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances in line with QAA regulations requiring that all students are registered against units to the value of 60 credits within 12 weeks of the start of a course.

Student Certification
RACs and Certification Overview
Guide to completing the RAC
Request to amend student Access Diploma Certificate
Guide to re-issuing Access Diplomas
Re-issuing Diploma request form
Calendars and Contacts
Calendar of key dates 2014-15
LASER Access Customer Support Team - contact details

Students cannot have their unit registrations amended after this date unless there are exceptional circumstances and this process requires the submission of additional information and review by LASER.

Student registrations are submitted online via LASER Access Quartz Web. The latest

manual for using this facility is available from the [Registrations section of our Downloads page](#).

Further details on registering students can be found on our [Access Registration & Certification webpage](#). If you have specific questions please contact our Access Customer Support Officers for Registrations and Certification, Marie Jones, m.jones@laser-awards.org.uk or Kinsey Sutton, k.sutton@laser-awards.org.uk for assistance.

Following the uploading of student registrations LASER will send Class Lists for centre to check to ensure that names are spelled correctly. Amendments to student registrations at a later date will incur an additional fee.

Validation and Re-validation of Access Diploma Programmes

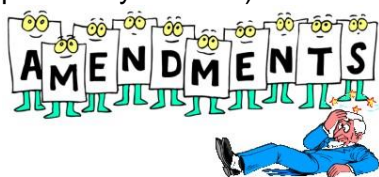
- **Re-validations**

Centres that are due to re-validate their Access Diplomas will be contacted directly by LASER early in the year before their Diploma titles are due for re-validation. Full details of the process are provided along with all dates when paperwork is to be submitted. The LASER Access Team will support this process.

Up-to-date templates will be forwarded directly to centres and are available on the LASER Access web pages or you can contact Nicola Chambers, (Access Customer Officer) n.chambers@laser-awards.org.uk for assistance.

- **Amendments to Current Programmes**

Minor amendments to Access Diploma Qualifications are those that fall within the scope and intention of the Diploma programme (i.e. the suite of Diploma qualifications) that was approved at original validation panel. Guidance regarding the type of amendments that can be made along with the Amendment Form (AV5 – previously A7 form) can be found at the [Access Downloads](#) page.



Charges are made for amendments (see the [LASER Access to HE Tariff](#)) and such amendments should be submitted prior to the start of the academic year in which they are to take effect. Higher charges are incurred for amendments made in-year and in some

cases it may not be permitted to make any such changes that would impact unfairly upon students.

To discuss your requirements and whether an amendment to programme is suitable, please contact Sue Martin (Access Development Manager), s.martin@laser-awards.org.uk

- **Additional Diploma Titles**

The addition of new Diploma titles to a centre's current Access provision may be made using the Additional Access Diploma (AV6) process if the title is a variation on Access Diploma provision already validated by LASER at the centre. Full details of the instances when this would be appropriate can be found in the AV6 Guidance

document which, along with the Recognition Document, is available from the [Validation section of the Access Downloads](#) web page.

Where the additional Diploma title requested is within a sector not currently offered at the centre (for example a centre offering only health related courses wishes to develop a new business programme) the qualification approval will be subject to a full validation panel (see **New Validations** below).

To discuss your requirements and whether an Additional Diploma or full validation is required, please contact Sue, s.martin@laser-awards.org.uk

- **New Validations**

New centres or centres wishing to offer develop programmes beyond the scope of their current offer will be required to complete validation paperwork to be scrutinised by a validation panel.

LASER will work with centres to provide guidance on curriculum development, completion of the Recognition Documents, collation of appendices and engagement with HEIs to support any new provision.

Panels are convened by LASER and comprise FE provider representatives from other LASER centres delivering Access, HEI admissions or subject specialists, moderators and LASER officers. Validation Panel Guidance is available with full details on panel membership and function. There is a fee for setting up validation panels.



Further information on submitting Access Diplomas for Validation can be found on the [Validation section of the Access Downloads](#) page.

To discuss your requirements or for further information about new validations, please contact Sue, s.martin@laser-awards.org.uk

HE Applications

Higher education institutions operate fair admission procedures in accordance with existing codes of practice. LASER has [Referencing Guidelines for Access Students](#) available relating to applications from students pursuing LASER validated Access to HE Diploma Courses as well as offering, [Standard Text for Access UCAS References](#) and a [template for notifying universities of student results](#). All of these documents can be found on the LASER Access web pages.

Results are also transmitted to universities via the UCAS 'Awarding Body Linkage' scheme and for 2015-16 this includes not only pass/fail information but also full grade profile details. LASER also offers a results service direct to subscribing universities in the South East of England whereby admission staff are given limited access to our Quartz database to check student results in late July to early August.



Students should be reminded that it is their personal responsibility to ensure that their Access results are confirmed with a university where they have accepted an offer of a place.

Some universities may ask for predicted student unit grades. There is no QAA or LASER regulation related to such requests but guidance can be found in the [QAA Toolkit for HE Admissions in section 2.7](#). Staff should consider the best interests of the student in responding to such requests.

Requests for second references on individual students after the UCAS application has been submitted are also sometimes received and this can be very helpful in allowing some students to gain places on degree courses. In rare cases examples of marked student assignments may also be requested.

If you have any further queries relating to HE Applications, please contact Sue, s.martin@laser-awards.org.uk

Quality & Moderation

Internal Moderation

Internal moderation can be defined as:

'a process undertaken by a providing organisation in which assessment practices and decisions are regularly sampled and evaluated and findings are acted upon to ensure consistency and fairness'.

. LASER has available a range of resources to support internal moderation:

[IMA1: Internal Moderation Guidelines](#)

[IMA2a: Sampling feedback template for individual assignment](#). (use this form to provide feedback to a tutor/assessor on a sample of work for an individual student)

[IMA2b: Access Student Sampling Record](#) (use this form to record feedback to a tutor/assessor for sampled work for a number of students)

[IMA3: IM Action Plan](#) (use this form as a template for an action plan for feedback to a tutor/assessor)

[IMA4: Diploma Assessment Plan](#) (for planning assessment for an entire Diploma)

[IMA5: Unit Assessment Plan](#) (for planning assessment for a single unit, if using an IMA4 there may well be no need to use an IMA5)

[IMA6: Student Portfolio Sample](#) (use for feedback for sampling an entire student portfolio)

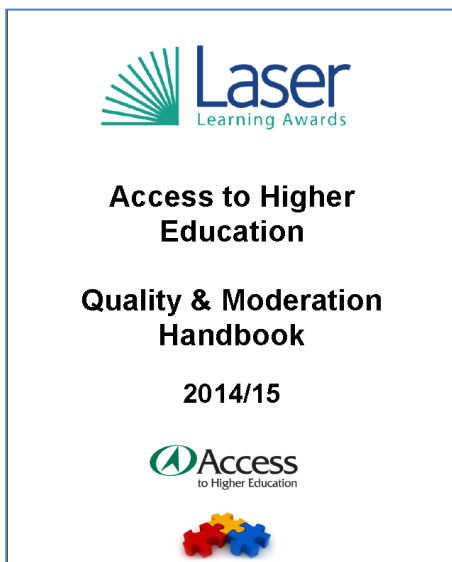
[IMA7: Cover Sheet for Student Portfolio](#) (use one of these at the front of each student portfolio to make IM & EM easier)

[IMA8a: Internal Moderation Sampling using the Chevron method](#) (guidance)

[IMA8b: Internal Moderation Sampling using the Chevron method](#) (template)

All these documents can be downloaded from the [Internal Moderation section of the Access Downloads](#) pages or contact Emma Milton, e.milton@laser-awards.org.uk for assistance.

- **[External Moderation](#)**



Please see the LASER publication 'Access to HE Quality & Moderation Handbook' for a detailed description of the external moderation process. This document is used as a key reference source by LASER's external moderators and is intended to provide an overview and resource for staff in colleges and other centres providing Access to HE Diploma courses.

LASER sends contacts and profile details of moderators to each centre at the beginning of the year and Access co-ordinators and moderators are expected to liaise to confirm dates for initial visits (to take place during January - March) and for final moderation and Final Awards Board.

For any Access practitioners who would like to know more about moderation or who have any specific queries regarding moderation at their centre, or for those who wish to consider becoming a LASER Moderator, there is a range of documents that can be accessed from our [Access Downloads](#) page or contact Emma Milton, (Access Customer Support Officer, Quality & Moderation) e.milton@laser-awards.org.uk for assistance.

- **Standardisation**

We are continually improving and developing our approach to the standardisation of academic achievement on LASER validates Access to HE Diplomas and our Access Quality Manager organises a range of related events and activities for each year.



LASER holds subject standardisation meetings annually.

Purpose: To assure consistency in the standards of student achievement across the range of LASER's Access Diploma subjects.

Benefits to participants: This is an excellent opportunity to ensure that you are assessing and grading work appropriately, to share your good practice in assessment and learn from the assessment practice of others.

Subject moderation meetings provide an opportunity to compare and discuss the application of pass/fail and the award of grade indicators to examples of student work. We try to hold these meetings in a range of accessible venues and we are developing virtual processes to complement these physical meetings and enable greater participation.

We are also appointing new **Subject Specialist Examiners during 2015-16** who will be sampling student work in selected academic subject areas to monitor and maintain standards across the full range of our Access to HE college providers with a view to the development of exemplar work to help teaching staff in framing decisions in terms of the application of Pass, Merit and Distinction Grading Descriptor Components.

Student Achievement and Results

Recommendation for the Award of Credit (RAC) Forms

Providers are notified by the Access Team as soon as the Recommendation for the Award of Credit (RAC) Forms are available to download. In 2015-16 it is possible to use our online Direct Results Entry service so that provisional unit results can be uploaded throughout the year thus avoiding the need to enter all the results into RACs at the end of the year. Separate guidance will be sent out during the autumn term.

“It is imperative that centres confirm the accuracy of RACs when requested in order to ensure that all learner programmes are complying with the Rules of Combination for their Diploma title.”

Accuracy of the RACs is also essential for the smooth-running of the Final Awards Boards. Guidance on how to download and complete will be available on the [Access Registrations & Certificate web page](#) or you can contact Marie Jones, m.jones@laser-awards.org.uk for assistance.



Completing the RAC forms

Detailed guidance will be available from the [Certification section of the Access Downloads page](#).

The RAC forms are to be completed electronically as this will speed up the process once we have received them. Please do not return completed RACs via email but use the upload facility on the website.



RACs must be completed prior to the commencement of the Final Awards Board to enable them to be signed-off by the external moderator. They should be returned

along with minutes of the Final Awards Board and any forms for APL, credit transfers or requests for exemption from units through extenuating circumstances or approved extension forms within 5 working days of the Board.

Awards Boards

QAA is currently reviewing the format and regulations for Awards Boards – watch out for updates from LASER

The Awards Board has delegated responsibility from LASER for the day to day quality and regulatory oversight of an Access to HE Diploma leading to the final award, or not, of the Access Diploma to individual students. See our [Final Awards Board Guidance](#) for further details.

Awards Board – virtual throughout the year

The implementation of the revised QAA Access Diploma Specifications (2013) has meant that a virtual 'Awards Board' comes into existence from the start of the course, for each Access Diploma offered by a centre. Membership consists of the LASER External Moderator, an appropriately senior college manager (e.g. Access Coordinator/Manager, Quality Manager etc.), college Access course leader and as required the LASER Access Quality Manager. The Awards Board will consider a number of issues such as requests for referrals, special extenuating circumstances etc.

Awards Board – end of year

Pre-Awards Board

We strongly recommend that centres hold an Internal Pre-Awards Board as a way of allowing tutors to confirm their students' results with the course leader and internal moderator. This should be held at least a week and preferably two weeks before the Final Awards Board. This enables teams to verify that the results are complete and accurate, and where necessary request further student work before the Awards Board confirms the results. This reduces the volume of work at the end of the year and adds as a further internal check that results presented at the Awards Boards are free from technical error and therefore reduces the risk of appeals from students for post-Awards Boards amendments.



The AVA is not requiring an additional layer of reporting – this is merely a **recommendation**. Centres are free to devise their own methods of ensuring that records presented to the Awards Boards are accurate

Final Awards Boards

Awards Boards are required to be held as specified by the QAA (previously called Exam Boards or Final Assessment Boards). Further information on Final Awards Boards will be included in the LASER End of Year Guidance document, and will include Final Awards Board Guidelines and template agenda for the meeting; this information is will also be available from the [Quality Processes section of the Access Downloads page](#). It is important that Awards Boards are conducted in line with this guidance to ensure the integrity of the award of Access Diplomas. Further clarification can be sought by contacting the Access Team.

The Final Awards Board is the point at which the decision with regard to the award of the Access to HE Diploma for individual students is made. A LASER representative will be present at each Board.

Key evidence/information required at the Final Awards Board:

- Summary tracking/recording information to enable the Board to see that all successful students have met the rules of combination for the specific Diploma title.
- Grading summary profiles for all classes and individual student grade profiles.
- Recommendation for the Award of Credit (RAC) forms for each class group per title with the centre's proposals for the award of credit already completed.
- Copies of all necessary documents relating to requests for referrals, exemptions, extensions and any other final appeals with regard to the award of any units and/or the award of the overall Access Diploma title.

For exemptions though **APL, credit transfer or extenuating circumstances**, please ensure that you have followed the correct procedure and used the appropriate forms for the accreditation of prior learning (APL), credit transfer, exemption through exceptional, certified medical circumstances. There is also a form of seeking extensions for the submission of work beyond the date of Final Awards Board.

A copy of these forms, if used, should be sent to the AVA Access office along with the Final Awards Board minutes (Exam/Final Assessment Board) and RAC Summary sheets, as relevant.

Certification

In order to improve notification of results, offers an interim results notification service. All results are uploaded to LASER Quartzweb when they are received and centres can then download full confirmation of student results that can then be printed and given to students or emailed to HEIs. Any typographical errors (e.g. names spelled incorrectly) should be notified to LASER at this stage so that they can be corrected before Diploma certificates are sent out.



Only once all results have been inputted will certificates be printed for despatch to Access centres who in turn give them to students.

LASER will send certificates out as quickly as possible once all results have been uploaded — this is subject to any queries that arise on individual programme runs. Providers will be notified of any potential delays and information/clarification requested from them as soon as possible after receipt of RACs. All printed

certificates and credit transcripts will be dispatched by the end of August at the latest (subject to receipt of RACs and supporting paperwork from centres).

Certificates are sent to Access Centres by First Class Recorded Delivery to the named Certificate Contact identified on the start of year contact request sheet. LASER does not

send certificates individually to students and we would appreciate any student queries coming via centres.

Amendments to certificates

Certificates should be checked on receipt by providers and any typographical errors reported to the Access Team immediately. These will be rectified as soon as possible, please note if the errors stem from information supplied by providers (i.e. names spelt incorrectly at registration) there may be a charge for re-issue of certificates.

Please note that amendments to grades for any reasons other than technical error will NOT be accepted.

Requests for amendments to grades due to technical error are only permitted if the application is made **within 8 weeks** of receipt by the AVA of the completed RACs.

Grade amendments can only be considered from providers, who make the case for why the change is required in writing to the LASER Access Office and must supply evidence of justification for the amendment. The AVA reserves the right to review that evidence and investigate further as required. Each case will require Senior Manager sign-off within the providing institution as well as documentary evidence where available and LASER External Moderator or Access Quality Manager sign-off.

For further details of procedures visit the [Access Downloads](#) or the [Registration & Certification](#) pages or contact Marie Jones, m.jones@laser-awards.org.uk for assistance.

Notification of results to HEIs

LASER does not notify HEIs of results as we do not hold the details of students' applications.

From the summer of 2015 grading profiles and Diploma achievement data will be transmitted via UCAS to the universities where students have confirmed offers.



LASER will continue to offer a direct results search facility for universities in the region subscribing to this service.

However it is the responsibility of each student to ensure that they provide their achievement information to universities to confirm their places and this is usually by the end of August at the latest.

Colleges providing Access courses should be prepared to confirm results to universities upon request once LASER has released the 'interim results' via Quartz Web.

The LASER Access office will also confirm results for individual students if contacted by a university.

Re-issuing Certificates

All requests for the re-issue of a certificate/s, whether by an individual learner or by the centre offering the programme, should be submitted to LASER in writing. Criteria for Re-issuing Certificates and the Request Form are available to download or contact accessenquiries@laser-awards.org.uk for assistance. A fee applies to this service and proof of identity is required.

Annual LASER Access to HE Conference and Events

LASER holds an annual Access to HE Conference in the summer term with a varied programme depending on the key issues at the time - including a range of speakers (usually featuring QAA input), round-table discussion, workshop and seminar sessions and plenty of opportunity to network with Access colleagues.



LASER also offers other seminars and workshops through the year on a wide range of topics and welcome suggestions for future events. These are promoted directly to our Access contacts, will be posted to our website and featured in our regular Access updates.

To find out more or to sign up to receive updates, contact our communications customer support officer Sarah s.hatherly@laser-awards.org.uk.

Annual Centre Reports

Each centre is required to complete an Annual Centre Report by 31 July. This information forms part of the AVA Annual Self-Assessment Report to the QAA and we also use the reports, along with moderation reports to feedback to centres and to analyse overall trends across the region.



We would really appreciate if you complete your annual report so that it provides an analytical overview of your Centre's Access Diploma offer. We are sent statistical data relating to Access students directly from The Data Service and we may contact centres during the year with questions about the data cuts as received. We will also send data for verification and commentary at the end of the academic year. As part of the feedback to centres we can then illustrate individual centre statistics in

comparison to regional and national data.

Annual Centre Report templates will be sent directly to co-ordinators, and will be available from our website in the Spring term however if you have any queries, please contact Nicola n.chambers@laser-awards.org.uk



Contact Us for Access

David Gittins Chief Executive	d.gittins@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827	Contact David for issues relating to national policy or if you have a query which you think no one else in the team can field! <i>David can be contacted Monday – Friday</i>
Sue Martin Access Development Manager	s.martin@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827 / 07900 265803	Contact Sue for Access development work, validation, revalidation and compliance issues and Access Development & Quality Committee. <i>Sue can be contacted Monday – Friday</i>
Emma Sharp Access & Corporate Services Manager	e.sharp@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827	Emma oversees the running of the Access Office and the quality and moderation, contact her if you are unable to get hold of the Customer Support Officer to help with your query. <i>Emma works Tuesday/ Wednesday</i>
Ken Duckett Access Quality Manager	k.duckett@laser-awards.org.uk 07900 265802	Contact Ken for quality issues including standardisation and moderation. <i>Ken works Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday</i>
Marie Jones Access Customer Support Officer	m.jones@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827	Contact Marie for learner registrations, certificates and general enquiries. <i>Marie can be contacted Monday – Friday</i>
Nicola Chambers Access Customer Support Officer	n.chambers@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827	Contact Nicola for validations and revalidations, QAA and LARA database of courses and Access Practitioner Group (APG) meetings. <i>Nicola works Tuesday/Wednesday</i>
Emma Milton Access Customer Support Officer	e.milton@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827	Contact Emma for all external moderator enquiries and issues relating to quality on Access courses. <i>Emma works Tuesday/ Wednesday/Thursday (term time only)</i>
Kinsey Sutton Access Customer Support Officer	k.sutton@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827	Contact Kinsey for learner registrations, certificates and general enquiries. <i>Kinsey works 9.30 – 1.30pm Monday – Friday</i>
Sarah Hatherly Access Customer Support Officer	s.hatherly@laser-awards.org.uk 01227 811827	Contact Sarah for Access learner prize information, marketing & events, publications and other communications related enquiries. <i>Sarah works Thursday/Friday</i>

Laser Learning Awards (LASER) is an awarding organisation regulated by Ofqual and is an Access Validating Agency licensed by The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).



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 www.facebook.com/LaserAccess
 www.linkedin.com/company/laser-learning-awards

