1. **Format of Qualification**
   1. The AEA Qualification will be conducted strictly in accordance with this Qualification Format and Rules document.
   2. Candidates are deemed to accept the terms of this document as a condition of applying for registration.
   3. It is the responsibility of candidates to ensure they understand and comply with the Qualification Format and Rules and any specific instructions provided in the Candidate’s Handbook. The Association can take no responsibility for any failure to comply.
2. **Qualifications and Examining Boards**
   1. The Qualification will be administered by the Qualifications and Examining Boards in accordance with their terms of reference approved from time to time by the Association.
3. **General requirements**
   1. Candidates must be members of the AEA at the time of registration and remain so at all times throughout the qualification process.
   2. In **England and Wales**, candidates applying to register for the **Certificate** must:

a) be able to demonstrate three year’s relevant experience in both modules of the Certificate; or

b) have completed all modules of the AEA Foundation Course; or

c) have commenced the AEA Foundation Course and are booked to complete all modules within a year of the date of their registration; or

d) have booked on to either a residential or online AEA Foundation Course that will be delivered before 31 December following their registration.

* 1. In **Scotland**, candidates applying to register for the **Certificate** must either:

a) be able to demonstrate three years’ relevant experience in either electoral registration or elections administration; or

b) enclose with their application a letter making a case to be exempted from the above requirement endorsed by their line manager which confirms the details in the letter are true and accurate.

* 1. A candidate may not apply to register for the **Diploma** unless they have previously been awarded the Certificate. There is no time limit between a candidate being awarded the Certificate and registering for the Diploma.

1. **Qualifications programme**
   1. **Certificate** candidates must:
      1. Complete a programme of four work-based assignments on subject matters set by the Examining Board. All four assignments must be passed. The pass mark for each assignment is 45 marks out of a possible 100; and
      2. Achieve pass marks in two written assessments under examination conditions. The pass mark for each examination paper is 45%.
   2. Once the candidate has achieved four passes for assignments and passes for both parts of the written assessment, the Certificate in Electoral Administration will be awarded. Successful candidates will be entitled to use the designatory letters AEA (Cert) or AEA (Cert- Scotland) provided that they remain in membership of the Association.
   3. **Diploma** candidates must:
      1. Complete to the provisional satisfaction of examiners a dissertation on a topic that has been approved by the Examining Board;
      2. Subsequently attend a discussion with examiners on the dissertation to validate the marks given. The pass mark for the dissertation is 45 marks out of a possible 100; and
      3. Following the award of a pass mark for the dissertation, achieve pass marks in two written assessments under examination conditions. The pass mark for each examination paper is 45%.
   4. Once the candidate has reached the required standard for their dissertation and passes for both parts of the written assessment, the Diploma in Electoral Administration will be awarded. Successful candidates will be entitled to use the designatory letters AEA (Dip) provided that they remain in membership of the Association.
2. **Timetable for completion**
   1. A candidate must commence the relevant part of the programme (Certificate or Diploma as appropriate) within five years of the date of their registration.
   2. Each part of the programme (Certificate or Diploma as appropriate) must be completed within two years of the candidate commencing the respective part.
      1. This requirement shall automatically be extended to allow for a re-sit of an examination at the first assessment day following the second anniversary of the commencement date, and, in the event of a second re-sit, at the assessment day that follows.
   3. In exceptional circumstances approved by at least two members of the Qualifications Board, the period for completing the relevant part of the programme may be altered.
3. **Responsibility for preparation**
   1. Candidates are responsible for preparing for the Qualification under their own arrangements and for undertaking all such research and study as is required.
   2. Candidates should ensure that any training courses they attend are suitable for their personal requirements. It should be noted that only those courses directly provided by the Association are accredited.
4. **Relationships and interests**
   1. Any candidate who works or has worked with, or has any personal relationship with, an examiner must declare that fact in writing to the Chair of the Qualifications Board as soon as they become aware of the fact.
   2. The names of the examiners will be listed in the Candidate’s Handbook issued following registration.
   3. No candidate should attempt to use their working or other relationship with an examiner, officer or employee of the Association to advance their prospects in the Qualification or to seek an unfair advantage over other candidates.
5. **Registration**
   1. Applications to register for either part of the Qualification must be made on the correct application form by the appropriate date, which are:

* 1 September for the Certificate; and
* 1 October for the Diploma.
  1. Applications must be accompanied by the prescribed basic fee or a purchase order. Candidates will not be permitted to start their respective programmes without this requirement being met.
  2. In exceptional circumstances, late applications will be considered provided that:

a) written notification outlining the exceptional circumstances is included with the application; and

b) in addition to the basic fee, the prescribed late application fee is enclosed with the application or added to the purchase order.

* 1. As part of their application, Certificate candidates must indicate their choice of date and venue for their assessment.
  2. Diploma candidates will be required to confirm notification of the date of their assessment, which will be in the September following confirmation of them passing their dissertation.

1. **Fees** 
   1. The fees will be set by the Association as part of the annual budgeting process. They will be published on the AEA website and included in the respective information packs.
2. **Certificate assignment requirements**
   1. The four work-based assignments must be submitted in strict numerical order by 31 December, 31 March, 30 June and 30 September following commencement of the programme.
   2. Each assignment must be between 2,000 and 2,500 words, calculated in accordance with the guidance notes for the preparation of assignments provided in the Candidate’s Handbook.
   3. An assignment may be submitted earlier than its prescribed last date but only if any or all previous assignments in the series have been submitted.
3. **Marking procedures for assignments**
   1. Each assignment will be marked independently by two examiners using the marking schemes previously approved by the Examining Board.
      1. If the two marks awarded are within 10 marks of each other, the average of the two marks will be used to determine the overall mark.
      2. If the difference in the two marks is greater than 10, the script will be referred to a third examiner. Once the third mark has been obtained, the average of the closest two marks will be used to determine the overall mark.
   2. To obtain a pass, the overall mark must not be less than 45.
4. **Dissertation requirements**
   1. An outline of the dissertation must be submitted for approval by the Examining Board by the 31 January following the candidate commencing the programme. An outline that does not meet the required standard may be re-submitted once and must be re-submitted within one month of the notification of rejection.
   2. The final dissertation must be submitted by no later than the following 30 September.
   3. The dissertation must be between 7,000 and 10,000 words, calculated in accordance with the guidance notes for the preparation of dissertations provided in the Candidate’s Handbook.
5. **Marking procedures for dissertations**
   1. Each dissertation will be marked independently by two examiners using the dissertation outline previously approved by the Examining Board.
      1. If the two marks awarded are within 10 marks of each other and the average of them results in a mark of 45 or above, a provisional pass will be awarded and the candidate invited to attend an examiner discussion.
      2. If the difference in the two marks is greater than 10, the script will be referred to a third examiner. Once the third mark has been obtained, the average of the closest two marks will be used to determine whether the script is awarded a provisional pass or a fail.
      3. To obtain a provisional pass, the overall mark must not be less than 45.
   2. Following the award of a provisional pass, the candidate must attend a discussion with examiners on the dissertation to validate the marks given.
   3. To obtain a confirmed pass following the discussion, the overall mark must not be less than 45.
6. **Examination procedures**
   1. The assessment days will be administered in accordance with the procedures and regulations set out in the Candidate’s Handbook issued following registration.
   2. For **Certificate** candidates, the assessment day will follow the format shown below:

* 10.30 Written examination paper 1 (2 hours)
* 13.30 Written examination paper 2 (2 hours)

Both papers will consist of five questions from which candidates will be expected to answer three.

In England and Wales, examination paper 1 will cover Module C1 of the syllabus (Electoral Registration) and examination paper 2 Module C2 (Elections Administration).

* 1. In Scotland, examination paper 1 will cover either Module SC1 (Electoral Registration) or Module SC2 (Elections Administration) as appropriate whereas examination paper 2 will cover Module SC3 (Scottish Public and Electoral Administration).
  2. For **Diploma** candidates, the assessment day will follow the format shown below:

• 10.30 Written examination paper 1 (2.5 hours)

• 14.00 Written examination paper 2 (2 hours)

Paper 1 will consist of six questions (three each from modules D1 and D2). Candidates will be expected to answer four (two from each module).

Paper 2 will consist of five questions from module D3 of which candidates will be expected to answer three.

* 1. The examination questions for the certificate assessment days each year will be set in accordance with the syllabus that is in force on 1 September of the previous year.
  2. The examination questions for the diploma assessment day(s) each year will be set in accordance with the syllabus that is in force on 1 October of the previous year.

1. **Marking procedures for examinations**
   1. Each examination script will be marked by one examiner using the marking schemes previously approved by the Examining Board.

(a) Any scripts that fall below 49% of the total marks for the paper will be referred to a second examiner.

(b) Once the second mark has been obtained, the average of the two marks will be used to determine whether the script is awarded a pass or a fail.

* 1. To obtain a pass, the average mark for each script must not be less than 45%.

1. **Notification of results** 
   1. **Certificate** **assignments** – results for assignments will be notified to candidates within two months of the date on which the work was received by the Association.
   2. In cases of marginal fails or fails for assignments, the candidate will be advised of deficiencies, errors or technical faults.
   3. Any assignments which are deemed to be failures may be re-submitted once. Re-submission must be made in accordance with paragraph 17. of this Qualification Format and Rules Document.
   4. **Diploma dissertations** – provisional results for dissertations will be notified to candidates within two months of the date on which the work was received by the Association.
   5. If the work obtains a provisional pass or higher, the candidate will be invited to attend a discussion with the examiners.
      1. Following the discussion, the examiners will decide whether to confirm their provisional pass and, if so, will agree the grade. The grade will be notified to the candidate within 48 hours of the discussion.
      2. If the provisional pass is not confirmed, the outcome will be notified to the candidate within 48 hours of the discussion ending. The dissertation may then be resubmitted once in accordance with paragraph 17. this Qualification Format and Rules Document.
   6. In cases of marginal fails or fails for dissertations, the candidate will be advised of deficiencies, errors or technical faults.
   7. **Examinations** – results of examinations will be notified to candidates within two months of the date of the relevant assessment day. Candidates will be advised whether their work has achieved a pass or a fail by reference to the following grades:

* Distinction – 75% and above
* Credit – 60% to below 75%
* Pass – 45% to below 60%
* Marginal fail – 40% to below 45%
* Fail – below 40%

The actual mark awarded will also be advised.

1. **Re-submission of assignments and dissertations**
   1. If a candidate wishes to re-submit an assignment/their dissertation, they must notify the Chair of the Qualifications Board in writing within 21 calendar days of the date of the written notification of the original failure.
   2. The notification must be accompanied by the appropriate re-submission fee or purchase order number.
   3. Re-submissions must be made within two months of the date of the notification of failure.
   4. In cases of re-submitted assignments or dissertations, the highest grade that will be awarded is that of a pass.
   5. Where a re-submitted assignment or dissertation is marked as a failure, the candidate will be considered to have failed that part of the Qualification and they will be removed from the programme. All fees paid shall be forfeited except that in exceptional circumstances and at the absolute discretion of the Qualifications Board, an appropriate part of the fees may be refunded.
2. **Withdrawal and re-submission of assignments and dissertations**
   1. If a candidate wishes to withdraw a submitted assignment/their dissertation before receiving the mark for the document, the original submission fee will not be reimbursed.
   2. The re-submission must be made by the original deadline for the assignment/dissertation unless an alternative deadline has been agreed.
   3. The mark for any re-submitted assignment or dissertation will not be released until the prescribed submission fee has been received or purchase order number provided.
3. **Re-sitting an assessment**
   1. If a candidate wishes to re-sit any part of the assessment day, they shall notify the Chair of the Qualifications Board in writing within 21 calendar days of the date of the written notification of the original failure. The notification must be accompanied by the appropriate re-sit fee or a purchase order.
   2. Candidates will be required to undertake the re-sit at the next assessment day following written notification of the original failure, except in exceptional circumstances agreed by two members of the Qualifications Board.
   3. Candidates will be able to re-sit any part of the assessment day on a maximum of two occasions, subject to following the procedure set out in paragraph 19.1.
   4. Where a candidate fails to achieve a pass mark for any part of the assessment after sitting the assessment day on the three separate occasions permitted will be considered to have failed that part of the Qualification and they will be removed from the programme. All fees paid shall be forfeited except that in exceptional circumstances and at the absolute discretion of the Qualifications Board, an appropriate part of the fees may be refunded.
4. **Deferrals**
   1. If after commencing the programme (Certificate or Diploma as appropriate) a candidate wishes to defer its completion to a subsequent programme, they shall make a written request to the Chair of the Qualifications Board.
   2. The request shall be considered as soon as practicable by at least two members of the Qualifications Board. In doing so, they shall consider the circumstances of the deferral request, the impact on the timetable for completion set out in paragraph 5. of this Qualification Format and Rules Document, and whether any or all fees shall be forfeited and/or additional fees charged.
5. **Withdrawals**
   1. If a candidate chooses to withdraw from the Qualification, all fees paid shall be forfeited except that in exceptional circumstances and at the absolute discretion of the Qualifications Board, an appropriate part of the fees may be refunded.
   2. Applications to be treated as exceptional circumstances shall be made in writing to the Chair of the Qualifications Board within 21 calendar days of the date of them being notified of the candidate’s withdrawal.
6. **Failure to submit or attend**
   1. Except in exceptional circumstances and at the absolute discretion of the Qualifications Board, if a candidate fails to submit an assignment/their dissertation by the due date or fails to attend an assessment day, or to make application for a re-submission or re-sit in accordance with paragraph 17. or 19. of this Qualification Format and Rules Document, they will be deemed to have failed that part of the Qualification. All fees paid shall be forfeited except that in exceptional circumstances and at the absolute discretion of the Qualifications Board, an appropriate part of the fees may be refunded.
   2. Applications to be treated as exceptional circumstances shall be made in writing to the Chair of the Qualifications Board, together with any supporting documentary evidence, within 21 calendar days of the relevant date.
   3. For this purpose, the relevant date will be deemed to be the date by which the assignment or dissertation should have been submitted, or the date of the assessment day.
7. **Extension of dates for submission of assignments/dissertation** 
   1. Assignments/dissertations not submitted by the due date(s) will be deemed to be failures except that a candidate may apply for an extension of time for submission.
   2. Such an application shall be made in writing and must be received by the Chair of the Qualifications Board by no later than 21 calendar days before the original date for submission of the document. The application must state the full reasons for the request.
   3. The application shall be considered as soon as practicable by at least two members of the Qualifications Board. Any extension granted shall, except in exceptional circumstances agreed by those considering the extension, be for a period not longer than 28 calendar days after the original date for submission of the document.
   4. The Qualifications Board reserves the right to require that the prescribed extension fee be paid before the assignment or dissertation is marked.
8. **Assessment day deferrals**
   1. Subject to compliance with the timetable requirements of paragraph 5. of this Qualification Format and Rules Document, Certificate candidates may defer participation in their scheduled assessment day by giving seven calendar days’ notice in writing to the Chair of the Qualifications Board of their wish to do so.
   2. In exceptional circumstances and at the absolute discretion of the Qualifications Board, later deferrals will be permitted. Requests must be made in writing to the Chair of the Qualifications Board providing the relevant reason(s) and attaching any supporting evidence. Where the deferral request is denied, non-attendance will result in the candidate being deemed to have failed that part of the Qualification and all fees paid shall be forfeited.
   3. Diploma candidates may request deferral of their scheduled assessment day, which may only be granted in exceptional circumstances and at the absolute discretion of the Qualifications Board. Requests must be made in writing to the Chair of the Qualifications Board providing the relevant reason(s) and attaching any supporting evidence. Where the deferral request is denied, non-attendance will result in the candidate being deemed to have failed that part of the Qualification and all fees paid shall be forfeited.
9. **Appeals**
   1. Appeals against fails will only be allowed in extenuating circumstances which meet one of the following criteria:

**In respect of an examination:**

a) the candidate was suffering from a medical condition or personal situation that unduly affected their performance on the day;

b) the candidate was prevented by a medical condition or other emergency or unforeseen situation from attending or completing an assessment day.

**In respect of an assignment or dissertation:**

c) the candidate was unduly affected by some external circumstance during the period available for re-submission.

* 1. Appeals against a fail for an assignment or dissertation will only be considered against a re-submitted document.
  2. Candidates wishing to appeal must do so in writing to the Chair of the Qualifications Board within 21 calendar days of the notification of failure. The application must state the full grounds for the appeal and include any supporting documentary evidence. In the case of an appeal on medical grounds, the documentary evidence must include a written statement from a qualified medical practitioner who has been involved in the treatment of the candidate.
  3. The appeal will be dealt with by the Qualifications Board by way of written representations only, except that the Board at its sole discretion shall have the right to require the appellant to appear in person before the Board.
  4. The application must be accompanied by the appeal fee or purchase order. This fee will be returned if the appeal is upheld.
  5. In cases where the appeal is upheld, the following will apply:

a) for an examination, the candidate will be permitted to re-sit the examination at the next assessment day without payment of the re-sit fee;

b) for an assignment or dissertation, the candidate will be permitted to re-submit the work within two months of the date of the letter notifying the outcome of the appeal without payment of the re-submission fee.

* 1. The decision of the Qualifications Board on all matters relating to appeals is final and will be notified in writing to the appellant. No further correspondence on an appeal will be entered into after written notification has been sent.

1. **Cheating and plagiarism**
   1. Allegations of cheating or plagiarism by a candidate will be dealt with by the Qualifications Board in accordance with procedures approved by the Board.
   2. A candidate found guilty of a charge of cheating or plagiarism may be subject to such penalty as the Board may determine on the evidence, including expulsion from the Qualification with or without a recommendation that the candidate be not permitted to register again for the Qualification within a stated time or sine die.
   3. A candidate expelled from the Qualification shall forfeit all fees paid. In addition, the matter shall be reported to the AEA Board for consideration as to whether the Association's disciplinary procedures shall be invoked.
2. **Failure to comply**
   1. A candidate who fails to comply with this Qualification Format and Rules Document may be charged with misconduct and in such cases shall be dealt with by the Qualifications Board in accordance with procedures approved by the Board.
   2. A candidate found guilty of a charge of misconduct may be subject to such penalty as the Board may determine on the evidence. In the case of expulsion from the Qualification, the same provisions as in paragraph 25. of this Qualification Format and Rules Document shall apply.
3. **Alterations to the Qualification Format and Rules Document**
   1. The Qualification Format and Rules Document will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Qualifications Board.
   2. In exceptional circumstances and at its sole discretion, the Board reserves the right to make amendments to the Qualification Format and Rules Document out of meeting. Where such changes are required, at least 75% of the membership of the Qualifications Board must confirm its agreement.
4. **Alteration of scheduled dates**
   1. The Chair of the Qualifications Board, in consultation with at least one other member of the Board, may amend scheduled dates for any part of the Qualification where the circumstances make such amendment sensible and appropriate, e.g. extending a submission date in the case of a UK Parliamentary General Election being called at short notice, etc.