

AQA evidence submission

The Current Affairs Education Commission

August 2026

Executive summary

AQA is an independent education charity, providing high quality assessments that are fair, reliable, and support students in their educational journey. Our qualification expertise dates back to 1903, when our predecessor boards were founded by five leading universities. Today, we're the largest provider of academic qualifications taught in schools and colleges. We set and mark the papers for over half of all GCSEs and A-levels taken every year. But exams are only part of the story – we also make sure the content of our qualifications support great teaching. Our qualifications are designed to suit a range of abilities and include GCSEs, AS and A-levels, the Extended Project Qualification and technical qualifications.

Our qualifications are internationally recognised and taught in more than 40 countries around the world and they're highly valued by employers and universities.

Young people lack key financial numeracy and digital literacy, limiting their ability to interpret real-world information and engage confidently with current affairs. Insights from our Student Advisory Group show students want practical skills such as understanding payslips, credit, debt, budgeting, interest and risk; essential for financial resilience and democratic participation.

Digital literacy is similarly uneven: only 48% leave education with the digital skills needed for work, and many struggle to identify misinformation or use digital tools safely. Teachers support stronger provision but need clearer national expectations and targeted CPD.

AQA recommends cross-curricular, practical solutions:

- Financial Futures, AQA's digital numeracy credential, to embed real-world numeracy
- A national digital literacy framework
- Cross-curricular climate change and sustainability education
- Curriculum and assessment structures that support breadth
- Student voice must be central.

Evidence

AQA's evidence draws on polling and focus group research from the last three years, alongside insights from our Student Advisory Group (SAG), which brings together around 20 students from different types of schools and colleges across England. Students meet with AQA to share views on assessment and help inform decisions about the future of exams.

There is a clear need to improve young people's financial numeracy and digital literacy

AQA's research shows that many young people still lack essential skills to interpret real-world information. Our focus groups and SAG insights found that students want stronger practical numeracy, including understanding payslips, credit, debt, interest, budgeting and risk. These skills underpin financial resilience, democratic participation and the ability to interpret data in public debate. (*Towards new assessments for literacy, numeracy and digital fluency*, 2023, <https://www.aqa.org.uk/files/2f07446c-4be1-4dd0-a7f3-7463d4285a6b/830b40903a7790e81a51e53818b7cc59035ab3e7.pdf>).

A recent study also found that only around 40% of UK adults scored highly for numerical competence, despite 60% rating their own ability as high ("Number Nation" Richmond Project, 2026). These skills underpin financial resilience, democratic participation and the ability to interpret data. Many students report limited teaching in these areas, despite high participation in GCSE Maths (*Re-imagining numeracy: Innovation through student insight*, 2025, <https://www.aqa.org.uk/about-us/our-research/research-library/reimagining-numeracy-innovation-through-student-insight>).

Our digital literacy research also shows a gap between young people's confidence online and their ability to use digital skills safely and effectively. While many are confident using social media, only 48% leave education with the digital skills needed for work. 87% want to learn more about spotting misinformation, yet 30% say they often share content without checking accuracy. Teachers also support stronger provision: 84% want new digital literacy content taught in schools, while 42% say they need more training to teach it confidently (AQA, *Digitally Native or Digitally Naïve?*, 2026, <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/p28bar15/green/17c41329134aa44640a481444680a1c0a58adf7e.pdf>).

Young people value citizenship and climate change education and want greater access to it

AQA's GCSE Citizenship qualification includes an Active Citizenship element, helping young people engage with current affairs, develop knowledge of social and political issues, and practise participation and influence. External research supports this. Nottingham Trent University research found that students who had taken GCSE Citizenship Studies were more interested in politics and news, and reported a higher understanding of political issues, than those who had not taken the qualification (Henn, Sloam & Nunes, 2025).

However, SAG members describe citizenship education more broadly as a "postcode lottery": some students receive rich political education, while others have little or no structured teaching. Students report that provision can focus heavily on "British values" rather than democratic institutions, media literacy or political participation, and they want more teaching on evaluating media, understanding manifestos and navigating political information online.

Young people also want climate change and sustainability embedded across subjects. AQA's polling in 2023 shows 70% of students want more teaching on climate change (AQA's Curriculum & Assessment

Review Response, 2024, <https://www.aqa.org.uk/files/5f88a2cf-13d4-4a75-8519-a865234ed0f0/b436361220f601e8b671f49636086a18e5b154d5.pdf>).

AQA looks forward to the inclusion of both climate change and financial education within a new Citizenship curriculum.

Practices in actions

AQA recommends that the Commission examine practical solutions that strengthen young people's ability to understand, evaluate and engage with current affairs.

- Embed numeracy provision using real world scenarios. AQA is building a universal, on-demand and when-ready digital numeracy assessment, Financial Futures. It has the potential to embed practical numeracy into curriculum design, lessons and assessment using authentic contexts such as payslips, credit cards, budgeting, interest, risk and business planning. This approach will help students leave school with the skills to interpret financial information and build confidence in everyday decision making. We launch our first module in financial literacy later this year and would be happy to arrange for the Commission to see it in action.
- A cross curricular digital literacy teaching framework is needed. Embedding digital literacy across subjects – rather than confining it to Computing – helps students develop critical evaluation skills, online safety awareness and confidence with workplace tools. Schools using cross-subject digital literacy frameworks (e.g., teaching misinformation in English, data literacy in geography, cyber security in PSHE) provide strong models for systemwide practice.
 - Our recent research report, *Digitally Native or Digitally Naïve? Rethinking Digital Literacy in Schools*, also argued for clear national expectations, high-quality resources and targeted CPD to support teachers to deliver digital literacy provision.
- Embedding climate change and sustainability across subjects strengthens young people's ability to understand environmental risk and the green economy. AQA's climate change teaching resources (<https://www.aqa.org.uk/climate-change>) show how sustainability can be integrated into citizenship, design technology, maths, psychology and religious studies. Schools using cross-curricular climate literacy models help students understand environmental policy, risk, and the green economy.
- Flexible curriculum and assessment models support breadth. Broader pathways – such as technical awards alongside GCSEs and rebalanced Progress 8 subject groupings can support wider engagement with current affairs. AQA supports retaining Progress 8, Attainment 8 and the English/maths grade 5 measure for stability, but the EBacc-driven structure has narrowed choice. AQA welcomes the recognition of Religious Studies and creative subjects in a reformed structure. However, modern foreign languages (MFL) risk further decline under a new model, weakening students' exposure to global affairs. AQA also does not support adding a fourth science breadth category in a new Progress 8 structure, which would further narrow options in languages, humanities and the arts; all key subject areas for current affairs education.
- Student voices should be heard when curating a curriculum that supports current affairs education. AQA's Student Advisory Group demonstrates the value of structured student voice in shaping policy and understanding young people's lived experience. The students meet with

other members and AQA to provide valuable insights and student views on key areas of assessment and help us make important decisions about the future of exams. We would be happy to facilitate a meeting between the Commission and members of our group if that would be helpful.