

myAQA

Issue: Summer 2026

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Festival of Education

Join us this July!

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A packed summer
programme of free CPD

AQA
Questions matter



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Stephanie Keenan, Head of Product, English.

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Welcome to our summer 2026 edition!

We hope you're feeling well-prepared for exam season and can still find time for some CPD – and maybe even the odd day out. Take a look at myNetwork and myTraining on pages 10 and 18 for inspiration.

We have loads of support available – including 'Zen in ten' on page 23.

And, if you've ever wondered how exam papers are created, our Chief Assessment Research Officer Alex Scharaschkin's article on assessment design will be of interest. Turn to page 6.

There's a science slant to this edition, with our Teacher feature from Scott Harding, 'A Day in the Life' of our science sector lead Emily McRae, and why A-level Environmental Science is our fastest growing qualification.

Finally, if you're planning to be at the Festival of Education this July, please do drop in at the AQA stands for talks, networking and ice cream. Turn to page 12 for our programme.

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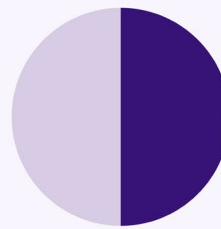
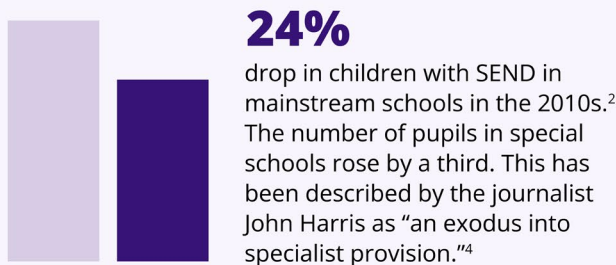
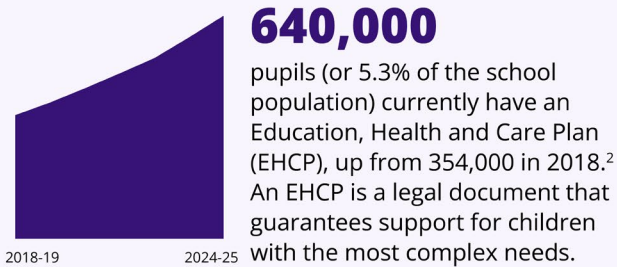


Picture courtesy of the Festival of Education

The Pulse

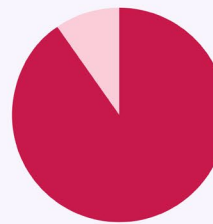
This term has a big focus on SEND, thanks to the publication of the Department for Education's white paper 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'.

The context



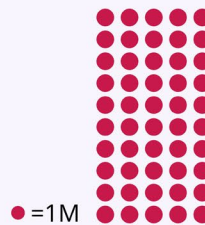
Half

of all new school spending in the last decade has been on SEND. Councils spent £13.1bn on SEND in 2025-6, up from £7.8bn in 2015-16.⁵ Last year, 95% of upper-tier councils ran SEND deficits, with most cutting other services.



90%

of council's SEND deficits have been written off (up to 2025-6) in an attempt to stave off bankruptcies. Central Government will take over the cost of SEND from 2028. The issue of council debts accrued between 2026-8 has not yet been addressed.

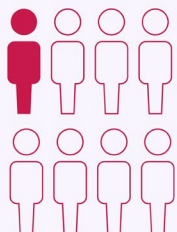


£50 million

in profit in the year to Sept 2023 made by one offshore private equity company (CareTech) by offering SEND schooling. Dozens of offshore companies have been accused of profiteering from the SEND system.⁶

The proposed changes

Education, Health and Care Plans



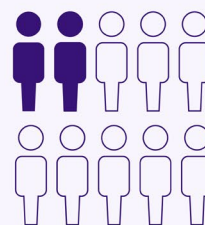
An estimated **1 in 8** pupils with EHCPs will be moved to ISPs (see right) by 2035. EHCPs will be reserved for pupils with the most complex needs only.⁷



Assessments

will take place when children with EHCPs move from primary to secondary school, to check whether or not they still qualify. This will start in Autumn 2029.

Individual Support Plans



15-20%

of students are expected to have Individual Support Plans (or ISPs) by 2035.⁷ ISPs will be for children with less complex needs and schools will be legally obliged to create them.



Reviews

of each child's ISP will happen at least once a year. If parents are not happy with their child's ISP, they will need to complain to the school first, rather than to the local authority.

Reaction to the proposed SEND changes



Positive

- > The Sutton Trust has called the changes “a significant step in the right direction” and welcomed the “multiple tiers of support, shifting away from today’s adversarial, all-or-nothing system.”⁸
- > Anna Bird of the charity Contact welcomed the “new legal right” to an ISP, adding: “If children are supported in school as soon as their additional needs become apparent, many families will not have to go through a traumatic legal process.”¹⁰

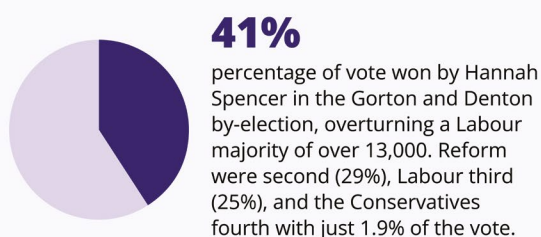


Critical

- > The NASUWT union condemned the reforms as underfunded. “£1.6bn over three years may sound like a lot of money, but it equates to just a few thousand pounds per setting.”¹¹
- > Jo Hutchinson, the director of SEND at the Education Policy Institute, has questioned whether there are enough trained staff to support the reforms: “There will not be enough educational psychologists to staff these services.”¹²

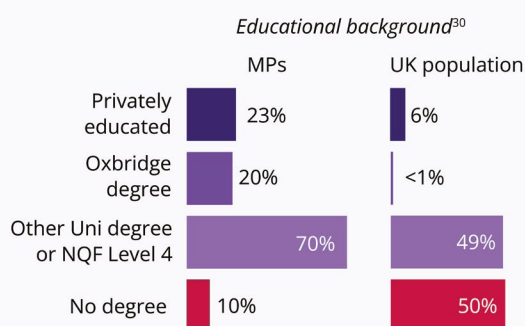
The educational make-up of Parliament

The victory of Green candidate “Hannah the plumber” in the Gorton and Denton by-election has sparked a conversation about the lack of “ordinary people” in Parliament and some of the political issues this causes.



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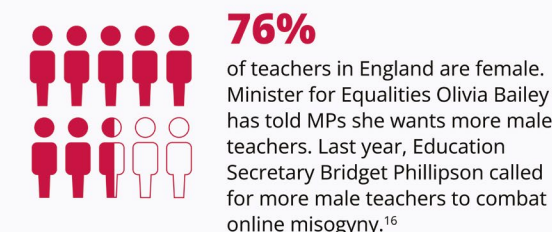
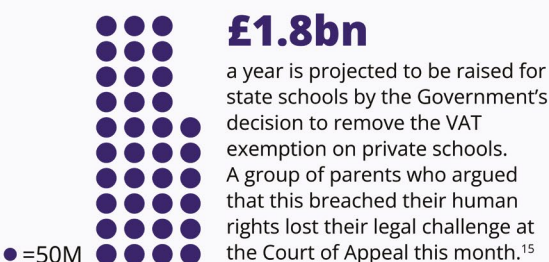
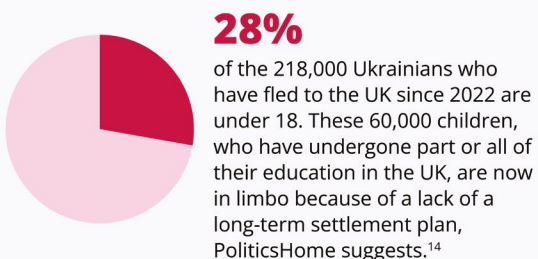
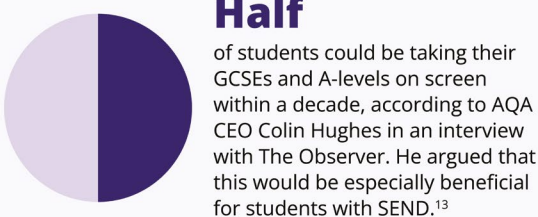
Age at which Spencer left school, becoming a plumber after completing an NVQ. Spencer said to Left Foot Forward: “We need more people who do jobs like mine and from backgrounds like mine [in Parliament].”²⁹



The Pulse team contacted The House of Commons Library to ask about the percentage of MPs completing vocational training but this data is not collected.

Of the 19 UK Prime Ministers since 1945, **14** attended Oxford University.

Schools and assessment round-up



2. <https://www.gov.uk> - SEN and EHCP data

3. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/children-with-special-needs-and-disabilities-pusher/>

4. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/feb/23/labours-send-revolution-reform-bridget-phillipson>

5. <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/hardest-questions-send-are-still-be-answered>

6. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/cap-private-companies-profits-from-send-education-special-schools/> <https://www.libdems.org.uk/press/release/lib-dems-demand-cap-on-send-providers-profits-as-top-firms-rake-in-pound100m>

7. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69987b40bfdab2546272c096/Background_on_projections.pdf

8. <https://www.suttontrust.com/news-opinion/all-news-opinion/sutton-trust-response-to-government-send-reforms/>

10. <https://contact.org.uk/help-for-families/information-advice-services/education-learning/the-schools-white-paper-education-reforms/>

11. <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/proposed-send-reforms-could-set-schools-up-to-fail.html>

12. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2026/feb/22/bridget-phillipson-overhaul-send-support-schools-england13>. <https://observer.co.uk/news/national/article/up-to-half-of-school-exams-will-be-on-screen-within-a-decade-says-board-chief>

14. <https://www.politicshome.com/news/article/ukrainian-children-uk-limbo>

15. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y4j1llvjo>

16. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/dfe-particularly-keen-recruit-male-teachers>

29. <https://leftfootforward.org/2026/02/hannah-spencer-we-need-more-people-who-do-jobs>

30. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/parliamentary-privilege-2024/>,

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/education-and-training-statistics-for-the-uk/2025>

Image credits: Hannah Spencer, NCarr Green Party via Creative Commons

Questions matter

Alex Scharaschkin, Chief Assessment Research Officer, gives us a glimpse at the complex world of assessment research at AQA

What would teaching and learning be without asking questions, appraising responses and making decisions based on them? As teachers, you're doing assessment all the time, even if you only think of a fraction of your practice (perhaps marking) *as* assessment.

As an independent education charity, AQA's purpose is to advance education for the benefit of the public. We invest heavily in assessment research.

Every product and service we offer (whether it's a qualification like a GCSE, a resource, guidance for teachers or an analytics tool like AQA Stride) needs to be based on up-to-date good practice and research evidence, so we can be fair, inclusive and effective.

My team looks at all aspects of what makes this possible, from assessment design that takes account of diverse accessibility needs, through to technical and statistical models we use to build in reliability and validity, to the application of digital technologies and AI.



Alex Scharaschkin,
Chief Assessment
Research Officer

For example, we study different ways of writing questions and mark schemes to make sure they work as intended, and to ensure that our examiner training is based on rigorous evidence. Methods such as eye-gaze technology help us appraise the best ways of laying out exam questions (on paper and on screen).

Answers	Extra information	Mark
any three from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> variation (between members of a species) better adapted survive (better adapted or survivors) reproduce pass on (favourable) allele(s) / gene(s) / mutation(s) 	allow in terms of an example ignore mutation allow survival of the fittest allow converse ignore passing on genetic material or chromosomes or characteristic	3

It should be noted that mutation is mentioned in the question stem and so cannot gain credit in mp1.

Bp2 is looking for the idea that the individuals better suited to the environment will survive, and students are expressing this in many ways such as 'those with the advantageous allele survive' or 'individuals without the mutation die out'. However, statements such as 'the strongest survive' or 'those with the better characteristics survive' are too vague.

Bp3 is for conveying that the survivors go on to breed. They may do this indirectly by referring to offspring later in the question, allowing us to infer that breeding has taken place. Consequently, 'the better adapted individuals survive and pass on the allele to their offspring' would gain bp2, 3 and 4.

Eye tracking fixation paths are part of the data gathered by AQA researchers.

We have done extensive studies of how teachers and learners experience and interact with digitally administered assessments. For example, we've worked in educational settings like hospitals and PRUs and got students interacting with prototypes. We've talked to them in focus groups and interviews to get their insights and have learned how past experiences shape present and future preferences.

Our work to support students' real-life numeracy and financial literacy skills has seen us build and pilot a prototype learning app. End-point assessments have been well-received by learners and teachers.

We also trialled AI-generated feedback on short English essays, working with students and teachers, and found that AI can deliver rapid, detailed and personalised feedback – with the proviso that AI use must be aligned with using appropriate question types. As teachers pointed out, this couldn't replace the benefits of a student-teacher relationship. But all these developments present exciting opportunities.

We're deeply committed to doing the best we can for every learner we engage with. That means constantly pushing the boundaries of assessment research to ensure we use best practice whenever it exists – and doing empirical research to find out the answers when it doesn't.



© 10'000 Hours/Getty Images

If you would like to find out more about assessment research at AQA, please go to:

[aqa.org.uk/about-us/our-research](https://www.aqa.org.uk/about-us/our-research)



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AQA
Questions matter

Lighting the spark: What it means to teach science today

Scott Harding has been teaching secondary science to 11–18-year-olds for the past eight years. Teaching brings wild challenge and fierce joy, so his background in zoology has prepared him well. Here, he tells us more about why exactly he thinks science is such an important part of the curriculum.

As a teacher of science, I firmly believe in the positive power of science to make changes in the world – no matter how big or small.

I can explore a wide range of topics through the AQA curriculum, with students from all walks of life. This brings huge opportunities, but also real challenges.

Teaching biology, chemistry and physics has allowed me to approach science in a flexible and engaging way, with the aim of inspiring learners to become the scientists of the future.

One of the most rewarding moments for me as a teacher is seeing that spark – when a student encounters something in a science lesson that ignites their imagination. That moment of curiosity, when they want to ask questions and investigate further, is what teaching's all about.

Our daily lives are changing in ways we may never have imagined a decade ago – driverless taxis, anyone?

In this fast-moving, technology-driven world, it's never been more important to adapt our teaching to nurture curiosity while meeting the demands of the curriculum.

As science continues to change the world around us, it's vital our young people are given the chance to thrive and evolve with it. Sharing knowledge is at the heart of the subject, and it's more important than ever to help young scientists develop the skills they need to tackle future challenges.

Science has the power to change lives, and we see that every day. Being able to share the awe and wonder of the world around us – from the vastness of space to the incredible species and ecosystems on our planet – is a true privilege. These moments are what (to me) make teaching such a rewarding profession.

Turn fascination into future pathways. Discover [science units](#) at UAS.



Scott, participating in his area of scientific expertise

Out and about: Meet us at events throughout the summer

Festival of Computing Bromsgrove School, 1 July

Organised by Craig 'n' Dave (creators of popular educational resources for Computer Science), The Festival of Computing is the UK's biggest networking and CPD event for secondary computing teachers.

As well as headline sponsoring the day, AQA is delivering the keynote speech, "Rethinking Assessment in Computer Science." We'll also deliver two CPD sessions and are sponsoring the Market Place where we have a stand. Come and say hi during a break, at lunch or at the fringe event afterwards, and meet Frances Sparrow, Subject Lead for Computer Science, and Steph Oldfield, Computer Science Product Manager, and play hook-a-duck to win AQA merchandise.



MEI Conference Keele University, 2 July

We'll be at MEI Conference, supporting a community committed to high-quality maths education. We look forward to joining teachers, leaders and innovators to discuss the future of maths learning and assessment.

The conference is an opportunity to collaborate and shape meaningful opportunities for students and educators, and we'll be sharing the smarter support we're developing for the maths community.



Robin Harris, Aysha Rahman, Colin Warden and Anna Berry from AQA's Team Maths.

Event title	Location	Date
Geographical Association Annual Conference and Exhibition	Sheffield City College	08 April 2026
AMiE	The Leonardo Royal Hotel, London Tower Bridge	11 April 2026
MathsConf40	City of Derby Academy	18 April 2026
ISRSA Annual Conference 2026	Eton College	23 April 2026
Schools and Academies Show 2026	Excel, London	07 May 2026
SEND Reform Conference	Cavendish Conference Centre, London	14 May 2026
The Historical Association Annual Conference 2026	Hilton Newcastle, Gateshead	15 May 2026
Training and Tech Summit 2026	County Hall, Westminster, London	20 May 2026
MathsConf41	TBC	06 June 2026
National Education Show Llandudno	Venue Cymru, Llandudno	12 June 2026
The English Association Conference 2026	Senate House, London	13 June 2026
Association for Language Learning (ALL)	The Grey Coat Hospital – St Andrew's site, London	13 June 2026
SFCA Summer Conference 2026	East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham	17 June 2026
CST Data and Digital Transformation Conference 2026	Birmingham Conference and Events Centre	18 June 2026
ME+ Conference 2026	Middlesbrough	19 June 2026
SW Geography Conference 2026	University of the West of England	22 June 2026
National Sixth Form Leadership Summer Conference	Convene Conference Venue, 200 Aldersgate St, London	26 June 2026
APT The Association of Philosophy Teachers Conference 2026	University College London	26 June 2026
Computer Science in Schools Conference 2026 (CSISC)	University of Staffordshire	26 June 2026
SE Geography Conference 2026	Royal Holloway, University of London	29 June 2026
Northern Geography Conference 2026	TBC	TBC Summer 2026
Festival of Computing 2026	Bromsgrove School, West Midlands	01 July 2026
Festival of Education 2026	Wellington College, Crowthorne, Berkshire	02 July 2026
MEI Conference	Keele University	02 July 2026
EPQ Conference	University of Leeds	03 July 2026
NASEN Live 2026	The Vox Conference Centre, Birmingham	03 July 2026
The NAEO 2026 Summer Conference	Kia Oval, London	06 July 2026
NATE 2026	University of Manchester	07 July 2026
ATP Intl Psychology Teachers Annual Conference 2026	University of Winchester	09 July 2026
The Big D&T Meet	De Montford University Leicester	10 July 2026
SHP (Schools History Project) 2026	Leeds Trinity University	10 July 2026
LitDrive National Conference 2026	Aston University	11 July 2026

16th Festival of Education (FoE) 2026

We're very happy to announce that we're back at Wellington College this summer for FoE – our fourth year as Headline Partner at this inspirational two-day gathering of educators from across the UK and beyond.

2 July 2026

Time and venue Session details

11:45 – 12:30

AQA Venue 1

Panel session: **The future of our maths curriculum**

Chair: Nicola Woodford-Smith, Subject Sector Lead Maths, AQA

Panellists: Bobby Seagull (maths teacher, broadcaster, author), Susan Okereke (maths teacher, communicator), Christian Friday (Maths Strategy Lead for TKAT)

Mandarin Centre

“Why are we reading this?” Finding relevance and meaning in unseen texts

Unseen texts pose different challenges to all students in **GCSE English Language**. In this session we will consider how to help students make connections between texts and their own contexts, to develop their inferential skills and to engage with big ideas.

Presenters: Lance Hanson, AQA English Language Subject Advocate (GCSE and A-level), and Jo Stanway, Subject Lead – English

12:45 – 13:30

Venue 8

From TikTok to tech skills: What students feel they really need from digital literacy

Chair: Clare Fraser, Interim Head of External Affairs

Panellists: Members of the AQA Student Advisory Group, tbc

Mandarin Centre

Supporting SEND learners in science

- Identify common barriers to learning particularly for SEND students in science
- Explain how to develop practical work and assessment of practical work to meet the needs for SEND learners
- Describe adaptations which can support all learners

Presenters: Dr Melanie Marshall, Subject Support Manager – Science, and Damian Gent, Subject Lead – Science, AQA

14:45 – 15:30

AQA Venue 1

From research into practice: Embedding accessibility at the heart of assessment design

We'll explore effective ways to build inclusive thinking into question writing and assessment planning from the start. Attendees will gain clear, actionable ideas for improving assessment quality and equity in their own contexts.

Presenters: Alex Scharaschkin, Chief Assessment Research Officer, AQA, Katy Finch, Head of Research & Evaluation, AQA, Louise Badham, Head of Assessment Development, AQA

Venue TBC

From I hate maths to I can do maths Presenter: Julia Smith, maths teacher, trainer and author.

Giving teachers practical ways to get their learners from a Grade 3 to a Grade 4.

3 July 2026

Time and venue Session details

09:30 – 10:15

AQA Venue 1

The Curriculum and Assessment Review: Successes and challenges nine months on

Chaired by Colin Hughes, CEO, AQA, this panel will explore CAR early wins, emerging challenges, and what schools need next to make meaningful progress.

10:30 – 11:15

Mandarin Centre

Creating a meaningful mock

Presenters: Anna Berry, Subject Lead – Maths, AQA, and Maths Subject Advocate Tom Bennison

12:45 – 13:30

Teepee

V-levels & Beyond: Getting ready for the next wave of vocational change

Chaired by Anna Trethewey, AQA's Chief Strategy and Vocational Officer, Natasha Armstrong, AQA's Head of Strategic Innovation and a College Leader, this interactive workshop will give an overview of upcoming vocational qualification reforms, including V-levels and the new Level 2 certificates, and their implications for curriculum, assessment and learner progression.

The session is intended for colleges, sixth forms and wider stakeholders preparing for vocational reform.

Mandarin Centre

GCSE English Literature: Making poetry accessible for learners with SEND

Using poems from the anthology clusters, we will look at scaffolding, multisensory techniques, and modelling to build confidence, comprehension and analytical skills.

Presenters: Lauren Palmer, AQA English Literature Subject Advocate (GCSE and A-level), and Wayne Power, Subject Support Manager – English AQA

14:45 – 15:30

Mandarin Centre

Assessment Reform: Shaping the future of science

In this session, we'll cover:

- Key updates from the Curriculum and Assessment Review for science
- How to start preparing your incoming Year 7 cohort
- How AQA will support and work with departments in preparing for upcoming change

Presenters: Emily McRae, Subject Sector Lead – Science AQA, and Elise Reece, Head of Product – Science, AQA

Get your
Festival of Education
tickets [here](#)



Picture courtesy of the Festival of Education

See you at FoE Wellington College, 2 – 3 July



The 16th annual
**FESTIVAL OF
EDUCATION**
at Wellington College | 2-3 July 2026

Natalie Perera, AQA's Chief External Affairs and Communications Officer, is just one of the faces you're likely to see at the Festival of Education.

"Before joining AQA in February 2026, I was Chief Executive of the Education Policy Institute, the research charity I co-founded in 2015 with former Schools Minister and now Chair of Trustees at AQA, David Laws.

For over a decade I was a civil servant in the Department for Education, leading work across early years, children's services, school funding and the Pupil Premium. I also worked in the Deputy Prime Minister's Office during the Coalition government, advising on education and

wider public policy including health and welfare reform.

I joined AQA because we'd collaborated on a number of events and policy papers over the years and, after working closely with the team during the Covid-19 pandemic, I became a huge admirer of AQA's commitment to improving education for young people from a wide range of backgrounds."



Natalie Perera, AQA's Chief External Affairs and Communications Officer

Considered becoming an examiner?

Strengthen your teaching. Support your students even more effectively.

When you become an AQA examiner, you gain valuable insight into how marks are awarded and what examiners look for. This knowledge is invaluable and it's something you can take straight back into your classroom.

Our recent research shows a correlation between schools with examiners and stronger student outcomes.

Compared with schools without AQA examiners, they typically see:

- **14% higher GCSE pass rates and a 5% increase in grades 7-9**
- **30% higher A-level pass rates and a 20% increase in grades B-A***

Examining is flexible, paid work that you can do from home alongside your teaching commitments, with full training provided.

We currently have vacancies across a number of subjects and welcome applications all year round.

Join our team, build your skills and CPD, and see why so many teachers return to examine with us every year.

*Please note that this data is drawn from conflict of interest information for 2025 examining. It is accurate at this time, but reflects the first teaching centre listed by each examiner. Now, examiners will confirm their current teaching centre, which will further improve accuracy.



Reprogramme what's possible with **Computer Science**

Our qualifications are designed by teachers, for teachers, giving you the **time, clarity** and **confidence** to deliver engaging lessons and strong outcomes.

Our Computer Science qualifications offer:

- **clear, easy-to-follow** specifications
- **straightforward assessment** methods
- **practical**, ready-to-use teaching resources
- **a simpler way** to plan, teach, and assess Computer Science.

From coding fundamentals to real-world applications, your students will turn curiosity into creativity and logic into lifelong skills – preparing them for some of the UK's most in-demand careers.

With dedicated subject support, free resources, and ongoing professional development, you'll have everything you need to teach with confidence.

Explore our **Computer Science qualifications** and discover how you can **shape the future of computing**:



A day in the life...

AQA Science Sector Lead, Emily McRae

Emily joined AQA last year and is passionate about helping to provide science qualifications that work for educators and learners, particularly those facing socioeconomic disadvantage, learners with SEND or those who haven't always felt science is 'for them'.

Emily, please introduce yourself

I work in the AQA Product team as the Science Sector Lead, which is a new role I began around six months ago. Before moving into qualification management two years ago, I spent six years teaching science and leading departments in comprehensive schools in Lincoln.

I've always loved science and education, so stepping into a role where I can help shape qualifications and support teachers felt like a natural next step.

How did you end up working in education?

My first experience of teaching was as a swimming instructor. I loved helping people learn something new and meaningful.

I also grew up with a strong educational role model. My mum has led and continues to transform SEND schools and alternative provisions, showing me how life-changing education can be – especially for the pupils who need the most support. Seeing her work gave me a deep sense of how important equity is and how powerful the right opportunities can be for young people from all backgrounds.

I've always loved learning and the idea that we never stop being curious, no matter our age or experiences. That's what drew me to science: it constantly offers new discoveries and new ways to understand the world. Teaching science felt like the perfect way to share that curiosity and lifelong love of learning with others.

Do you have any memorable stories from your teaching days?

I do actually! When I was teaching a Year 10 practical science lesson, I tried to loosen a tap on one of the sinks in the lab, and the top of the sink completely broke. A huge jet of water shot straight up to the ceiling and began flooding the classroom at impressive speed.

Within seconds, I had a line of very enthusiastic students form a sort of bucket-chain using plastic trays, collecting and throwing water out of the window to stop the room filling up.



It took one of my students 10 minutes to get someone to help us turn the water off. We had several soaked students and I looked like I'd returned to my days as a swimming teacher!

The class found it absolutely hilarious. It was definitely a memorable lesson... although I'm not convinced they remembered much of the science afterwards!

Tell us about your role at AQA

My role centres around staying connected to the science education community – educators, students, employers and specialists – to understand what we want science education in England to look like.

A typical day might involve running focus groups, attending conferences, analysing data or sharing updates to help teachers stay informed about the policy landscape and upcoming reforms. I also work closely with colleagues across AQA to make strategic decisions that shape our qualifications and the support materials that sit alongside them.

A key part of the job is considering the needs of all students and understanding the barriers they may face. I think carefully about equity and access – from students facing socioeconomic disadvantage to learners with SEND, or those who haven't always felt science is 'for them'. That includes encouraging more girls and young women to feel confident pursuing STEM pathways. Bringing these perspectives together helps ensure our decisions reflect the reality of classrooms across England.

What's your focus for the year ahead?

With Curriculum and Assessment Reform beginning earlier this year, my main focus is preparing for the changes ahead. Much of my time will be spent working with teachers and subject experts to understand what they need from future science qualifications and how we can

design specifications and resources that genuinely support high-quality teaching.

I'm also exploring how themes like climate change and sustainability can be embedded more meaningfully.

This involves working closely with specialists to understand which knowledge and skills our young people will need in future, and how we can build that into science in a way that feels purposeful and achievable for schools.

The year ahead is very much about planning and collaboration with the goal of giving students the strongest possible science education for their future.

Find out more about what Emily gets up to in her role on [LinkedIn](#) >>





Did you know that we offer a new free CPD programme every term?



This summer, AQA examiners lead live twilight sessions on understanding and using mark schemes. Plus, there's an ever-growing library of on-demand training courses to choose from.

Mark scheme guidance and application (live online)



© iStock.com/AJ_Watt

“Absolutely superb – covered everything comprehensively and I feel much more confident about applying the mark scheme.”

“Fast enough after a day at school but not too fast so that you missed any key points.”

There will be 98 live Mark scheme guidance and application training sessions this summer, covering a range of specifications. They will provide guidance on how to apply the mark scheme to key questions/question types from the 2025 series. You will have the opportunity to take part in marking activities and discussion led by an experienced AQA examiner.

Learning outcomes

- Develop a greater understanding of how to apply the mark scheme
- Apply accuracy when identifying a level/awarding a mark
- Identify typical features and characteristics of responses at different levels/marks
- Analyse and discuss the application of mark schemes with a senior examiner to strengthen your understanding

Book your
**Mark scheme
guidance
course**



Improving outcomes (on demand)



“Pace was perfect”

“Structure was clear”

“Timings were excellent”

Our spring courses – and the associated materials with marked examples and teaching tips – are now available on demand, so that you can train at a time that suits you.

- Raising potential (many subjects)
- Working towards outstanding grades (many subjects)
- NEA Marking (many subjects)
- GCSE Religious Studies: 12-mark response – Moving through the levels
- Stretching Grades 3 - 4 (GCSE Maths, English Language and Geography)

Explore
**on-demand
courses**



A-level Business – short-form videos (on demand)



Get up to speed on the streamlined new spec, for first teaching from September 2026.

- Understanding the 6-mark 'analyse' question
- Understanding the 9-mark 'assess' question
- Understanding the 15-mark 'evaluate' question
- Quantitative skills
- Using context from the case study: Farmore Cycles
- Using the context from a case study - Finlay's Farm Ltd
- Using the context from a case study in a response - P3 Q1.4
- Using the context from a case study response - Paper 2 Shein

EPQ and projects training



Our EPQ and Project qualifications let A-level students plan, research and study just about anything they want. It's a great way for them to dig deeper into something they were inspired by in class, or to investigate a personal interest that's completely unrelated to their studies.

Book now at aqa.org.uk/professional-development

If you have any questions, email: events@aca.org.uk



Live online

EPQ Coordinator training – 16 and 17 June 2026

EPQ Supervisor training – 23 and 24 June 2026

eLearning EPQ courses

- How to use the production log
- Safeguarding in project qualifications
- Understanding and applying the assessment objectives and criteria
- Understanding artefact projects
- What is required to deliver the Extended Project Qualification?
- What makes a good Supervisor?
- What's expected of a Centre Coordinator?

New eLearning modules coming soon

- What is required to deliver the Foundation Project Qualification?
- What is required to deliver the Higher Project Qualification?
- FPQ – Understanding and applying the assessment objectives and criteria
- HPQ – Understanding and applying the assessment objectives and criteria
- FPQ/HPQ – How to use the production log

eLearning - upskill yourself online, wherever, whenever



'Getting started' and 'Mark scheme guidance and application' are hugely popular courses to take at your own pace. They'll really help you get to grips with teaching and assessing your subject, whether you're new to the spec or need a refresher. Both are available for a wide range of subjects.

Book now at [aqa.org.uk/professional-development](https://www.aqa.org.uk/professional-development)

If you have any questions, email: events@aca.org.uk



Also available

- A-level Psychology: Getting familiar with the update to the gender topic
- A-level Biology, Chemistry and Physics: Practical endorsement
- A-level Biology: Essay writing skills
- GCSE Art and Design: Assessment objectives and guidance for applying the assessment criteria grid
- A-level Art and Design: Assessment objectives and mark grid guidance
- A-level Art and Design: Assessment objectives and mark grid guidance
- A-level Spanish: Speaking test engagement
- A-level French: Speaking test engagement
- A-level German: Speaking test engagement
- GCSE English Language: Changes overview
- Maths: Introduction to Exampro
- Maths x Exampro: Paper calculator tool – A resource designed to support maths teachers with their use of Exampro to build mock papers

STRIDE Maths

See every student clearly

Seven Stride eLearning modules are available now for GCSE Maths.



[Find out more](#)



In-school training – make it personal

We can come to you!

In-school sessions can be delivered in any educational setting, for up to 30 teachers. We have a team of experienced, inspiring trainers with teaching and AQA backgrounds.

We offer a range of courses/training to suit your needs:

- In-school versions of our courses
- Sessions tailored to meet your particular needs, utilising existing resources
- Introduction to the specification
- Discussion of your training needs if they are more complex

Book your in-school training at
inschoolcpd@aqa.org.uk

Want something else? Tell us what you'd like or need and we'll see what we can do.

We are recruiting!

Are you an associate?

Could you deliver training for us in schools?

We'd love to hear from you.

Contact us with your CV or just for more details.

E: inschoolcpd@aqa.org.uk



Zen in ten

Dip into a cool pool of ideas to bring some balance to the summer term.

1. The top 100 downloads from AQA are for specifications and exam papers. But we have so much more! Go to your subject page of our website and have a look. It's all free and you'll find lots to fill specific knowledge gaps or work on skills.
2. English teachers, find calm in the exam series – read and share a poem aloud (see Poetry by Heart website)!
3. Use the Examiner's reports – they are a golden resource.
4. Explore the training materials from our courses on Centre services – the Post-event booklets are full of marked student responses of all levels, or you can use the Pre-event booklets in class and get students to mark them and suggest improvements.
5. Use Exampro to create bespoke questions and mark schemes tailored to the areas your students find most challenging. Encourage students to use the mark scheme to self-assess their own work.
6. **"Folding frenzy"** – such a great activity that uses dual coding, forced recall and many other skills and means you can make one revision resource for a topic, then use it again and again! I had a lovely student do the whole of two history papers this way and they're now at Cambridge."
7. Last minute tip for students: Remind students of key exam techniques to decode questions. Encourage them to **BUG** the question.
 - **B**ox the command word
 - **U**nderline the key words
 - **G**lance back at the question

"Every year, you guide a new group of Year 11 or Year 13 students through their exams, and you'll do it again this year with the same skill, dedication and impact."

8. Summer term tips for **geography** teachers:
 - Target interventions using specific question types. For example, focus on 2-mark, AO4 skills-based questions such as describing graphs.
 - Revisit the meaning of different command words with students. [Find useful resources on command words on our geography webpages.](#)

9. Advice for procrastinating students: 'Eat the frog' – imagine nibbling it bit by slimy bit, compared to just going for it and getting it done. Apply the same logic to a task you've been dreading. Switch off all distractions and just gobble it up.

10. Vocalise/blurt – when you've revised a section, shut the book and say all the things you can remember about it.

Inspire us and be part of the community!

Have you got a brilliant resource, tip or technique that really helps? Please let us know and we'll share it in our autumn issue. myaqasummer@qa.org.uk



UAS mapped units: Bringing purpose to core GCSE subjects

Ruth Umerah, Head of RE and PSHE, Alleyne's Academy, talks to our UAS team about the difference mapped units are making there.

Schools across the country are looking for ways to make core subjects more engaging and meaningful for learners. One approach that's gaining momentum is the use of the AQA Unit Award Scheme (UAS) mapped units.

They provide structured recognition for learning and help learners see the value in subjects that might otherwise feel less significant.

At Alleyne's Academy, the introduction of UAS mapped units into the Year 10 core Religious Education curriculum has transformed attitudes and outcomes. Ruth Umerah, who leads the initiative, explains:

"We introduced the AQA Unit Award Scheme for our Year 10 core RE curriculum in September 2024. We have 250 students following the course, and over the year, they can complete up to 16 units, four of which also cover part of their PSHE curriculum."

The impact was immediate. Learners responded positively to the scheme, finding motivation in the opportunity to earn certificates for completed units.

Ruth recalls:

"It has proved to be very motivational. Some of our students who initially failed to appreciate the significance of core RE were disappointed when they didn't receive certificates because they had not completed the work, and were then keen to go back over work, even staying after school to complete it."

The scheme works for all abilities. Lessons are differentiated, with additional resources provided to stretch and challenge the most able, while ensuring accessibility for those who need more support. Ruth adds,

"Our students range in ability from those who are in top sets to those who are less academically able. We differentiate the lessons and add additional resources to stretch and challenge the most able."

For Ruth, the biggest success has been the credibility UAS brings to core RE.

"Students feel there is a purpose to the work they do."

For schools seeking to raise the profile of core subjects and inspire learners, UAS GCSE mapped units offer a practical, proven solution.



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Units included in the UAS mapped GCSE RE suite:

- [12823](#) Islam: The Five Pillars
- [12795](#) Christianity: Worship
- [12830](#) Judaism: Beliefs and Sources of Authority
- [12838](#) Buddhism: The Life of The Buddha
- [12846](#) Sikhism: Beliefs and Sources of Authority
- [12845](#) Hinduism: Pilgrimage and festivals



Engage every learner

40 years' experience.

Over 500 units mapped to GCSE subjects.

Countless inspired students.

Want to build your students' confidence and motivation on their journey to GCSEs? UAS has over 500 ways to help. **Celebrate every success.**

Find out more



AQA | Unit
Questions matter | Award
Scheme

Going for green:

Why A-level Environmental Science is our fastest growing qualification

In a world where climate change, biodiversity and sustainability are increasingly dominating global conversations, there's never been a more exciting time to offer your learners AQA's A-level Environmental Science.

This is a qualification that doesn't just inform students – it empowers them. It's modern, relevant and packed with opportunities to explore the issues shaping their future.



Will your students be interested?

Without a doubt. Environmental Science is AQA's fastest growing A-level, with entries rising by over 85% in just four years. Students are already immersed in environmental topics through social media, the news and subjects like geography and biology – this qualification gives them the scientific tools to dive deeper.

Students get to carry out fieldwork, build practical scientific skills and develop the critical thinking needed to tackle global challenges head on. It's perfect for curious, motivated learners who want their studies to feel meaningful.

Why should your centre offer Environmental Science?

Your curriculum reflects your values, and offering Environmental Science shows a genuine commitment to sustainability and future-ready learning. With the Department for Education placing increased emphasis on climate change and sustainable development, now is the ideal time to strengthen your centre's sustainability strategy with a subject that truly embodies it.

Whether you're a seasoned specialist or completely new to Environmental Science, AQA gives you everything you need to deliver the course with confidence from day one.

You'll benefit from support including:

- Comprehensive teaching guides and support
- A vast amount of assessment resources
- High-quality professional development
- Planning materials and classroom activities



Is it really a science?

Yes – and universities agree. A-level Environmental Science is a rigorous, evidence-based science qualification, designed to sit proudly alongside biology, chemistry and physics. While it naturally connects to the humanities, its core is scientific investigation, data interpretation and analytical thinking. The environmental context simply makes the science more relevant, more engaging and more impactful.



What can my students do with this qualification?

The opportunities are vast. As organisations worldwide commit to sustainability and climate action, the demand for skilled environmental scientists, analysts and consultants continues to grow. Furthermore, the transferable skills your students will learn will be an asset for any path they choose.

- Environmental science and ecology
- Management and conservation sectors
- Environmental law and policy
- Renewable energy and green technologies
- Sustainability and corporate responsibility
- Geography, earth sciences and more

Want to know more?

Contact our Environmental Science team.

Damian Gent leads our Environmental Science

E: alevelscience@aqa.org.uk
 Call: 01483 477756
 8am-5pm Monday to Friday



Met your regional account manager yet?

- Do you know about the huge range of support we offer?
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- Learn the opportunities for enrichment we provide.

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Find your account manager: [aqa.org.uk/contact-us/account-managers](https://www.aqa.org.uk/contact-us/account-managers)

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AQA Sales and Account Management Territories

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- Ben Galvin
- Alex Daluiso
- Greg Thomas
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- Rachel Fulcher
- Zoe Thomas
- Martin Hanney
- Helen Arman



Exams Officer tips

Preparing and sending student scripts

Our Exams Officer Engagement Team has put together a few tips to help you prepare and package scripts smoothly



Packing scripts

- Stack scripts by **component and tier**.
- Line up the **black spine tags** – this makes it easier to spot any misplaced scripts when bagging up.

Special consideration checks

- We often see students marked as disadvantaged but also listed as absent, or marked absent yet still submitting a script.
- Special consideration is only for students **disadvantaged at the time of the assessment**.
- It does not apply to long-term conditions unless there was a significant change during the exam that access arrangements could not cover.

Yellow labels

- You can print labels **up to seven days in advance**.
- Use **all labels for each component** and if you cannot use a label please notify us on Centre Services.
- Unused labels or labels on empty bags trigger searches for missing work.
- Extra labels can be used to split scripts across bags if space is tight.
- Use **one label per bag** and **please do not mix components** in the same bag.

Certificates and long names

- If you shortened a candidate's name (over 40 characters), their certificate can still show the full name by completing a name variation form (which can be found on our website).
- The form also covers names with **diacritic characters** (accents).
- Find the form by searching 'name variations' on the AQA website and email it to **NameVariations@aqa.org.uk**

Before sending the form, make sure:

- the candidate has been entered
- it's sent **at least one month before certificates are issued.**

Attendance registers

- If you amend a register manually, check the entry or withdrawal has been processed.
- You can view up-to-date entries on **Centre Services.**
- Adding a student to the register does **not** automatically enter them with us.

Contingency planning

- Plan for the period **after written exams**, including results and post-results services.
- JCQ regulations require a **second Centre Services Administrator.**
- Make sure IT systems are ready for results days, with no major works or roll-outs planned.

Results and post-results services

- The JCQ **Post-results services booklet** includes service guidance and key dates – keep it handy.
- For queries, contact AQA Customer Services on **0800 197 7162** or via **Live Chat.**
- Remind learners and budget holders about **fees and charging rules.**
- Linked components are charged as one award.
- Concurrent requests are judged together; sequential requests mean only the one that changes the grade becomes non-chargeable.

Exams Officer Podcast



Our Exams Officer Engagement Manager, Gemma Miller, brings you a brand-new Exams Officer podcast every half term. Each episode features an AQA expert focusing on a key topic relevant to that half term. So, grab a cuppa and absorb this valuable information at a time that suits you.

Tune in now >
Exams Officer
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STRIDE Maths

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