

Your chance to win in-school training worth £1000

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mytraining

A packed autumn programme of free training





Welcome to your autumn edition

This term, we're kicking off with the chance to win an expert-led training course of your choice worth up to £1,000 – perfect for your next INSET day. To enter the prize draw, scan the QR code on page 21.

We have a huge range of live online and on-demand training. Our autumn programme is informed by customer feedback and insights, helping us to provide timely support as you reflect on the summer exam series and prepare for the year ahead.

Also in this issue:

Discover 'Financial Futures', catch up with the latest on assessment reform, see how the brilliant headteacher Catherine Proud is helping special educational needs (SEN) learners and master your mock exams with top tips from our Exams Officer support team.

We're always proud to champion the Unit Award Scheme (UAS) too – has your school adopted it yet? Turn to page 26 to find out how Dagenham Park school is using it to motivate their Year 9 and 10 science students.



Image courtesy of Getty/
Caia Image.

Want to talk
to someone
at AQA?
[aqa.org.uk/
subjects/let-us-
know-if-youd-
like-to-hear-
from-us](https://aqa.org.uk/subjects/let-us-know-if-youd-like-to-hear-from-us)



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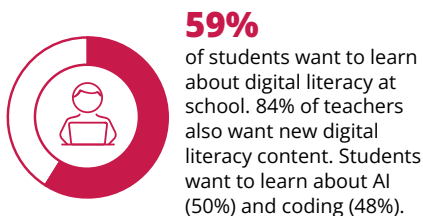
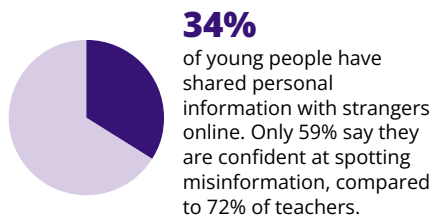
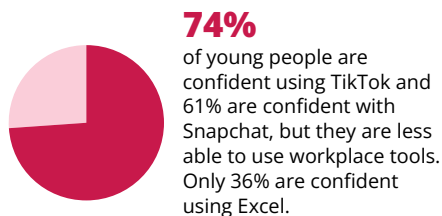
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The Pulse

This term, there was a big focus on digital as AQA released a digital literacy report and published a response to Ofqual's consultation about on-screen assessment.

AQA's digital literacy report

A new AQA report, "Digitally native or Digitally naïve?", warned that although young people are digitally active, they are not consistently safe or confident online.



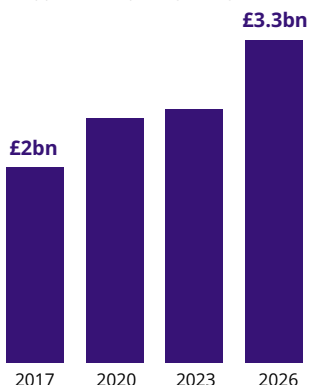
AQA

believes that digital literacy should be taught across the curriculum, not just in Computing. There should be a system-wide framework, with teachers trained in digital skills.

Spotlight on apprenticeships

As the apprenticeship budget increases, the Government is attempting to redirect funding towards younger learners as a way of making the most of limited resources.

Apprenticeship budget (England)¹



5.8%

increase in the apprenticeship budget this year (+65% since 2017).

40%

drop in apprenticeship starters aged under 25. More older learners are taking on apprenticeships. These are typically higher level apprenticeships, which cost more to deliver.²

16

higher-level apprenticeships including chartered manager and senior leader to be defunded in an attempt to divert training towards young people.³

AQA's response to digital exams

AQA has responded to Ofqual's consultation 'Regulating on-screen assessment' by advocating a more ambitious approach to the introduction of digital exams. Here are AQA's main arguments.

The context



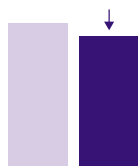
SEND pupils

have told us digital exams could benefit them, as it can be easier to use screen readers, use voice-to-text, increase text size and alter colour contrast.



Exams officers

have told us digital exams could help them streamline candidate management, reduce storage concerns and minimise the risk of lost scripts.



At least
9%
reduction in carbon emissions per digital exam. Carbon emissions are likely to decrease further over time.



82%
of jobs advertised in the UK require digital skills.⁴ Switching to digital exams could benefit both students and the wider economy.

AQA's position

Ofqual proposes

AQA believes

1 Each awarding organisation should be allowed to introduce digital exams in **no more than two subjects**.

We should introduce digital exams in **more than two subjects** so that we build a solid evidence base drawn from a range of different students and educational settings.

2 Digital exams should only be trialled in subjects with **fewer than 100,000 entrants**.

The threshold should be reduced to **50,000 entrants**. Trialling exams with a higher number of **small-cohort** subjects allows schools and students to become more familiar with digital exams.

3 Students should **not** be allowed to bring in their own laptops; these should be provided by schools.

This is a good way of maintaining the integrity of the exam system. However, this regulation should consider the investment required to ensure all schools have the devices they need.

Other news

£250,000

is the amount AQA is investing in the future of education with its Purpose-Driven Partnerships Fund. Any non-profit organisations that drive meaningful, lasting change for teachers and learners can apply. The funding is available from September 2026.

1 in 8

young people are NEET (not in employment, education or training) and this is set to rise to 1 in 6 by 2030, according to the first part of a new report by Alan Milburn. He proposes that the system should shift away from exams and towards preparing young people for work.⁵

Sources: 1. UK Parliament / Hansard; 2. FE Week, 'Apprenticeships purge', 19th March 2026; 3. FE Week, 'Apprenticeship budget to rise to £3.3bn', 15th March, 2026; 4. Prince's Trust, 'Decoding the Skills Gap'; 5. gov.uk, 'Young people and work: interim report'

Life outside the mainstream

Catherine Proud is an experienced mainstream headteacher and senior leader who was recently appointed headteacher at Great Howarth School, an independent Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision. We spoke to her about the daily challenges of helping learners with SEN to access learning and assessment.

How does your intake differ from that of a mainstream school?

Our cohort evidences the massive explosion in additional needs and the provision desperately needed for students that mainstream can't accommodate.

All our students come to us with an EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plan) so are referred from local authorities. We take children from 7 to 18, many with more than one additional need, which adds further complexity. Our students also come from all over – most have to travel a distance which is an extra stress. An hour and a half in a taxi is a long journey for anyone, so from the moment they arrive each morning we have to do things differently to mainstream schools. They might need movement, a quiet space – it's bespoke.

How diverse are the needs of your students?

The number of young people identified with SEND has rapidly grown and many assume provisions for children with Autistic Spectrum Condition or Social Emotional Mental Health needs are run like a youth club: not us! We personify diversity in a real school setting. There are young people with SEMH needs, autism, ADHD, Tourette's, adverse childhood experiences, plus many previously excluded students and some that have emotionally based school avoidance. Around a third are in, or have been in, care. With all of that, getting them to sit down and learn in lessons is a daily challenge.

How do you manage the relationships between staff and students?

A good relationship is crucial. When students first start their transition, it's all about finding out what they are like, reducing barriers, having fun to ease anxiety, giving them breaks. A lot of them love cooking so we do that regularly. One child likes vacuuming to regulate himself; another will do practical jobs to occupy himself and enable him to move, which helped him to interact with others and get to know the building rather than becoming heightened during induction.

And we don't apply 'velcro support' – we don't just stick one TA with one child; they have two or three TAs who are trusted adults. This benefits both the child and staff by enabling a change of face at times and reducing potential issues with attachment.



**Catherine Proud, Headteacher,
Great Howarth School**

The way we deal with behaviour incidents is based on PACE – playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. In mainstream schools, you are trained to enforce rules and issue a sanction; here we try to distract, make them laugh, change the subject and de-escalate to then refocus. It often works well. There are occasions where we have to restrain a child for their safety, but this is always a last resort and is done using specific techniques; they are always released at the first safe opportunity.

Whatever has happened, we have a restorative conversation and the next day is always a fresh start. We greet them with a “Good morning” and a welcome smile – no matter what’s happened. We are the adults and this is their safe and consistent space – we always remember that.

We have a staff briefing every morning, then a debrief at the end of the day where all staff can share success, offload any issues and then make any phone calls home to ensure we maintain open communication with parents/carers. Then colleagues can go home and leave the emotional weight of the job at work.

Do many of your learners progress to mainstream settings?

Transition into our provision aims to break the cycle of fear and build confidence up for students to attend. Once they’re in with us and we’ve extended their hours to full time, we review progress regularly. If deemed appropriate, returning to mainstream is discussed at their annual review meeting. Many parents don’t want them to though, as they’re flourishing in the smaller setting of our provision. It’s very child-centred and individual, which most mainstream schools can’t offer.

Our school also has therapists, who enable us to integrate the education offer with specific therapy – in mainstream, you’d have to wait a long time for this.

Most of the time, going back to mainstream isn’t the aim – it’s making progress in a range of ways, including getting qualifications if appropriate, helping to equip them for adult life after school.

Any thoughts about SEND and assessment?

In an ideal world, many young people with SEND would be assessed via a portfolio arrangement. We don’t just assess with tests – we do ongoing assessments, annotating work, taking pictures and pulling together evidence over time to show progress in a range of ways.

Ideally, we’d want an app that helps track this where we can upload evidence to get credits, because in less intense situations children with SEND can better flourish, and over time that becomes part of their routine and they can handle it better, allowing them to achieve their true potential.

For Catherine and her team, success isn’t defined by fitting learners into a system, but by helping every young person gain the confidence, skills and qualifications they need to thrive beyond school.

Is the AQA Unit Award Scheme for you?

We offer units mapped to our GCSEs. They’re bite-sized to make learning more accessible, and learners receive a certificate each time they complete a unit.

Here’s a taster:

Life skills – Using money
Unit code 117494

Life skills – Helping others
Unit code 126239

Life skills – Cooking
Unit code 118823

Find out more about the
AQA Unit Award Scheme >

**[aqa.org.uk/programmes/
unit-award-scheme/
about](https://aqa.org.uk/programmes/unit-award-scheme/about)**



Out and about

AQA's Subject Support teams attend events around the country, all year round. We'd love to meet you!

Join AQA at the Schools and Academies Show

Wednesday 18 – Thursday 19 November, NEC Birmingham



We're returning to the annual Schools and Academies Show this November. If you're heading to Birmingham, we'd love to have a chat.

Come and say hello

Our team will be on hand across both days, so whether you have a question, want to talk through your current challenges or fancy entering a competition to win a prize, come on down to the AQA stand.

- Find out more about our latest updates, qualifications and support
- Share what matters most in your school or trust
- Learn about our products and pick up ideas and practical support
- Chat to the people behind AQA

Stop by for our case study session

Please come and join members of AQA's Research and Innovation team who will be presenting a session around Inclusive Assessment. The session will take place in the SEND Theatre from 12:30 – 13:00 on Day 1 (18 November).



Event title	Location	Date
MathsConf41	Maghull High School, Liverpool	Sat 5 Sep 26
HMC Annual Conference Autumn 2026	Manchester Central	Mon 28 Sep 26
Cardiff NES	Utilita Arena, Cardiff	Fri 2 Oct 26
AoC Curriculum Conference 2026	Online	Tue 6 Oct 26
Diversifying English	Shakespeare's Globe, London	Tue 6 Oct 26
Tes SEND Show 2026	Business Design Centre, London	Fri 9 Oct 26
Rethinking Language	Aston University, Birmingham	Sat 10 Oct 26
IOE Annual Chinese Conference	UCL Institute of Education, London	Sat 10 Oct 26
Midlands History Forum Conference 2026	Black Country Living Museums, Dudley	Sat 10 Oct 26
CST Annual Conference 2026	ICC, Birmingham	Thu 15 Oct 26
Music Teacher Magazine Curriculum Conference 2026	America Square Conference Centre, London	Fri 16 Oct 26
BCME Autumn Conference 2026	East Midlands Conference Centre, Nottingham	Fri 23 Oct 26
BRILLIANT Festival	Exhibition Centre, Liverpool	Tue 10 Nov 26
AoC Annual Conference 2026	ICC, Birmingham	Tue 10 Nov 26
SFCA Curriculum Conference	Warwick University	Wed 11 Nov 26
MathsConf42	Trinity Academy, Barnsley	Sat 14 Nov 26
ASCL Autumn Leadership Essentials Series	Conference Aston, Birmingham	Tue 17 Nov 26
ASCL Autumn Leadership Essentials Series	Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Manchester	Wed 18 Nov 26
Schools and Academies Show Autumn 2026	NEC, Birmingham	Wed 18 Nov 26
ASCL Autumn Leadership Essentials Series	Marriott Hotel, Leeds	Tue 24 Nov 26
ASCL Autumn Leadership Essentials Series	Mary Ward House, London	Wed 25 Nov 26
AEA-Europe 2026	Rome	Wed 25 Nov 26
Alternative Provision Conference	Cavendish Conference Centre, London	Wed 25 Nov 26
AoC SEND Conference 2026	Leonardo Royal Hotel, London	Thu 10 Dec 26

Meet the students making their voices heard

You might think an exam board asking students what they think about assessment is a bit a risky, but that's exactly what we do – meet our Student Advisory Group (SAG).

This group represents the views and experiences of 20 young people, aged 16–19, who are completing or have recently completed an AQA qualification.

Asked what AQA can learn from the SAG group, A-level student Lily said: “Real life student experience. We're the ones living in the education system, we know it best”.

A particular highlight for some of the group included attending the Association of School and College Leaders Conference 2026. Four of them took part in a panel titled ‘Future Ready: Young Voice on Digital Literacy’.

They also met the then Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson MP, and His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Sir Martyn Oliver.

Another highlight was student co-chair Grace representing the SAG at the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Schools, Learning and Assessment.

Grace gave a speech and put questions to MPs on how Citizenship is taught in schools. She also shared her thoughts on the UK voting age being moved to 16.

The group regularly meets in the AQA offices. Most recently, they discussed the impact of technology on exams integrity, focusing on AI use in schools, especially regarding non-exam assessments. Will said: “Discussions on AI have changed drastically even in the year and a half I've been part of the group. There's always new developments and AQA are always very keen to be up-to-date.”



The group discussed the ways their peers are using AI, including using it to help structure an assignment or converting notes into audio as a study aid.

Increasing exam accessibility was a common goal among group members, and it was reflected in the afternoon workshop on the principles of design and language in exams.

"We have a lot to offer when given a voice"

Daniel said that through the SAG he "hopes to reduce the inequality with exams, for example for people with anxiety or different writing speeds". This view was shared by Evie who hoped the SAG could "contribute to the accessibility of assessment, making education and assessment more inclusive to neurodivergent pupils".

Maneet highlighted the importance of listening to the people actually sitting the exams: "As exams change, our experiences change and AQA instantly hears about that."

We hope to include features written by the brilliant SAG members in future issues of myAQA, so watch this space.



Would any of your students like to become a student advisor?

Scan the QR code to learn more about AQA's Student Advisory Group.



A day in the life...

Sandra Allan, AQA Creative Arts Subject Sector Lead

Sandra is passionate about making sure every learner has access to creative subjects, whatever their background. She believes strongly in the value of a broad and balanced curriculum and works to ensure the voices of both teachers and students are heard.

What inspired your passion for the arts?

I've always believed in the value of creative subjects in education. They help students develop skills that go far beyond the classroom.

What makes them so powerful is the variety of ways students can engage, communicate and succeed. For some young people, these are the subjects where they feel most confident, supported and inspired.

Tell us about your role at AQA

I work closely with educators, multi-academy trusts, subject associations, industry partners and policy makers, including the Department for Education and Ofqual.

Through these conversations, I build a picture of what's working well and where the challenges are. That insight shapes our qualifications, curriculum thinking and wider reform.

I also work with colleagues across AQA to turn this insight into practical outcomes. This includes supporting qualification design, strategising and making sure our specifications and resources meet the needs of teachers and learners. It's a varied role, which is why I really enjoy it.

Tell us about a typical day

My work is shaped by three main things:

- What's happening across the education landscape
- Current developments in curriculum and assessment
- The needs of teachers, learners and partners

I often bring groups together – teachers, subject experts and sector partners – to explore challenges and share ideas. These conversations give real insight into classroom experience and where support might be needed.



I also work with policy colleagues, advising on subject content across the creative arts, influencing and aligning qualification and curriculum developments to ensure they reflect what is happening in schools and inform upcoming reforms.

Alongside this, I contribute to resources that support high-quality teaching. This might involve reviewing feedback, spotting trends or working with internal teams to make sure what we produce is useful and relevant.

I particularly value visiting schools, attending conferences and meeting with education partners. Speaking directly with teachers means I know what matters to them (and what will help them).

It's a role that's always evolving, with a mix of big-picture thinking and hands-on work. While every day is different, the focus stays the same: supporting great creative arts education that's meaningful and inclusive for every learner.

What's your focus for the year ahead?

With curriculum and assessment changes ahead, my focus is on making sure creative subjects continue to offer exciting opportunities for all learners.

I'm particularly passionate about making sure the arts are recognised for the difference they make – supporting wellbeing, building confidence and helping students develop the skills they'll need for the future. They play a vital role in creating a real-world, broad and balanced curriculum.

Seen the AQA Unit Award Scheme units mapped to GCSE Music?

Here's a taster:

Introduction to musical instruments
Unit code 72547

Learning and performing a song
Unit code 75671

Basic DJing – unit code 86687

Music – an introduction to bands
Unit code 121747

**Follow Sandra Allan,
our Creative Arts Sector Lead,
on LinkedIn > [Sandra Allan](#) | [LinkedIn](#)**



New term, new training



© iStock.com/Tijana Simic

This autumn, discover our fresh programme of live online training – designed to support you with key exam questions and deepen your understanding of what examiners are looking for.

We also have new, expert-led NEA Marking sessions available. Plus, you can explore our ever-growing library of on-demand training courses.

A pathway for professional development

We offer training and support all year round and many of our events are designed to flow from one to the next.

Below is a suggested journey through the autumn term, featuring expert-led support sessions and live, interactive training courses.



Curriculum Connect: NEA Planning

Get advice from our subject experts on how to plan and deliver your subject's NEA component.

Sept

Oct



Curriculum Connect: Exploring summer 2026

Join subject experts and fellow teachers to explore the summer 2026 exams and discuss key insights from examiner reports. Available for many subjects.

Nov



NEA Marking

A live, expert-led twilight training session providing you with guidance on how to apply the assessment criteria to your subject's NEA component.

Dec



'Exploring...' training event

A live online training course exploring specific exam questions and areas students find challenging. Available for many subjects.

Find more
CPD courses



Curriculum Connect – join our teacher community

Our Curriculum Connect sessions give you the chance to connect with our community of teachers, meet our subject experts and share advice and ideas.

What's on this autumn?

Curriculum Connect: Exploring summer 2026 (available from September to October)

Start the academic year with our live 'Exploring summer 2026' Curriculum Connect sessions – available for a range of subjects. They'll provide an overview of the summer 2026 exams and look at key insights from the examiner reports.

You can then build on your learning by booking on to our corresponding 'Exploring...' courses later in the term – where you'll get the chance to dive deeper into summer 2026, exploring specific exam questions and student responses.



Book your
Curriculum Connect:
Exploring summer
2026 session



Curriculum Connect: NEA Planning (available from September to October)

Led by our Subject Support specialists, these live online sessions provide practical guidance on how to confidently plan and deliver your subject's NEA component.

Following 'NEA Planning', we recommend you book on to the 'NEA Marking' training course for your subject – these sessions are designed to complement each other.

Book your
Curriculum Connect:
NEA Planning
session



Stay up to date

Keep an eye on our 'Professional Development' pages for additional Curriculum Connect events that will be added throughout autumn.

See all Curriculum
Connect sessions



'Exploring...' courses (live online from October to December)

Our new 'Exploring...' courses are live, online training events led by AQA examiners. They'll be available for a wide range of specifications, focusing on specific exam questions and areas that students found challenging in the summer 2026 exams.

You'll work through real student responses and gain insight into what examiners are looking for, why certain areas are challenging for students and how student performance develops across the levels.

You'll also have the opportunity to ask questions, engage in peer discussion and discuss practical teaching approaches and classroom activity ideas.

These courses complement our Curriculum Connect: Exploring summer 2026 sessions, which will take place in September and October. For the best learning experience, attend a Curriculum Connect 'Exploring summer 2026' session first, then join our 'Exploring...' training events to deepen your knowledge and understanding.

Learning outcomes:

- Identify the key requirements and skills assessed in the selected question type or area
- Understand what examiners are looking for and why students may find this area challenging
- Analyse a range of student responses to recognise how performance develops through the levels
- Apply suggested teaching approaches to support students in developing the skills needed for success

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



Our new 'Exploring...' courses
are free twilight events.

NEA Marking (live online from October to November)

This live AQA training course provides guidance on how to apply the assessment criteria to your subject's NEA component. You'll have the opportunity to take part in marking activities and discussion led by the principal moderator.

Please note that the examples of work used in this course haven't been used in T-OLS and have been selected specifically for this training course.

Our NEA Marking courses are designed to complement our Curriculum Connect: NEA Planning events, which will be running in September and October.

Learning outcomes:

- Develop a greater understanding of how to apply the assessment criteria
- Apply accuracy when awarding a level/band and mark
- Identify typical features and characteristics of examples at different bands/marks
- Analyse and discuss the application of marks with an experienced moderator to strengthen your understanding

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



Our NEA Marking courses
are free twilight events.

Mark scheme guidance and application

(live online and on-demand)

These popular sessions will continue into the autumn, covering a range of specifications. They 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.

Missed the live event for your subject? Book on to the on-demand version and watch the recording at a time that suits you.

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

Improving outcomes

(now available on-demand)

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

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

Find all your courses on our 'Professional Development' pages

aqa.org.uk/professional-development



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Live or online 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.

Live online

- EPQ Coordinator training (Part 1):
5 Nov 2026
- EPQ Coordinator training (Part 2):
12 Nov 2026
- EPQ Supervisor training (Part 1):
19 Nov 2026
- EPQ Supervisor training (Part 2):
26 Nov 2026

Access anytime 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 e-Learning modules – Projects Level 1 and 2

- 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



e-Learning – boost your skills at a time that suits you

'Getting started' 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 fancy a refresher. 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@aqa.org.uk



Keep up to date

We'll be continually adding new training events to our programme throughout the term – so keep an eye on our 'Professional Development' pages to find the latest courses and book your place.

In-school training – tailored to your needs

Our in-school training sessions are run locally for schools/colleges, local authorities, clusters/consortia/MATs – we come to you.

You can arrange a session for a whole department, a group of teachers or managers – up to a maximum of 30 people.

Led by skilled trainers with teaching and AQA backgrounds, our in-school training sessions are flexible and can be tailored to meet your needs, using our vast back catalogue of training resources. Timings are also flexible and sessions can be arranged around your schedule.

We offer a range of courses/training, including:

- in-school versions of courses offered by AQA
- introductions to our specifications
- guidance and support with assessment, coursework or controlled assessment.

Want something else?

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

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

We are recruiting!

Are you an associate?

Could you deliver training for us in schools?

We'd love to hear from you.

Email us with your CV, or to ask for more details.

E: inschoolcpd@aqa.org.uk



A background photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, a man in a grey shirt is seen from the back, raising his right hand. In the middle ground, a woman with blonde hair and glasses is seated, looking towards the front. In the background, a man in a brown sweater is standing and holding a small object. A presentation screen is visible in the background.

Your chance to **win** free, expert-led training

Delivered in person at your school or college

One of our experts will come and deliver an AQA training session on a date that suits you. Just talk to our In-school team about what you'd like delivered.

Don't miss out on this chance to win first-class teacher training for your school – **worth up to £1,000.**



To enter, scan the QR code and complete the form.

Entries close at 12.00pm on Monday 19 October 2026.

The two winners will be notified by email within 14 days of the closing date of the competition. Our dedicated team will be in touch to arrange your session, and we will arrange photography and feedback from the day.

To learn more about in-school training and the different courses available, please visit aqa.org.uk/professional-development/in-school



WE ARE SCIENCE

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That's where confidence grows.

That's where curiosity builds.

This is where eureka happens.

Helping learners understand the world – and giving them the confidence to shape it.

Explore our webpage
to find out more about
our science specifications >



AQA
Questions matter

Getting real: How do we tackle the UK's financial literacy gap?

'Why didn't anyone teach me this before?'

It's a common enough complaint, and one that is often applied to money sense. **Natalie Wilson** and **David McEwan** talk to us about their solution: **Financial Futures**.

Defining the problem

Financial Futures is a complete learning package with assessment and certification for 14–19-year-olds. It began as part of a wider rethink about what's missing in GCSE Maths. For Natalie, the need was clear. "The focus shifted heavily into finance during our market research," says Natalie. "Existing education doesn't supply what young people want, like budgeting – they wanted to know what it was and how to do it. Young people need to practise making decisions and trying things out."

"What we kept coming back to," says David, "is where young people actually use numeracy in real life. You're going to use numbers, and 95% of the time that's going to be in financial contexts."

Rooted in feedback

In the focus groups, many felt they weren't developing essential financial skills. And statistics agree – 10 million adults in the UK are financially illiterate*.



"There are things young people feel they haven't been taught and that they want to understand before they become independent," says David. "When you show a young person a payslip, a lot of them don't know what it means."

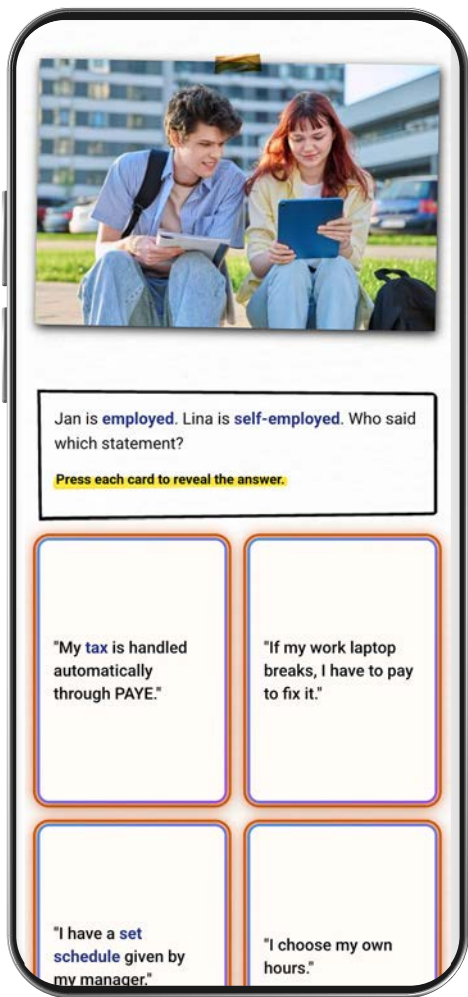
"You're going to use numbers, and 95% of the time that's going to be in financial contexts."



*Source: OECD

At the same time, ‘functional maths’ scenarios weren’t landing well. “They’re less interested in things like how much paint you need to paint a wall, because in reality, they’d just buy more paint if they ran out,” he says. “Finance feels more relevant.”

Early ideas were tested on paper, followed by multiple prototypes and tests. “We’ve iterated a lot,” says David. “Some early versions didn’t land as well as we hoped, but the next version landed much better – and that’s how we’ve got to where we are now.”



The modules are mobile friendly, if that's the students' preferred platform.

Natalie has been struck by students' reactions during testing. "Someone started out by questioning the relevance of learning about finances when he was still at school with no money. By the end, he was telling me he wanted to set up a business."

In another group, older students asked detailed questions about pensions, the stock market and long-term financial planning. "I came away buzzing," Natalie says. "There's so much enthusiasm there when you give learners the knowledge."

The citizenship angle

Learning on Financial Futures feels different to maths – and since the Curriculum and Assessment review, we know that financial education will be delivered in Citizenship. The recently published Enrichment benchmarks guidance also cites a need for skills including 'managing finances' and certification for enrichment activities.

The emphasis is on understanding, building confidence and decision-making – making real world numbers come to life.

One feature allows students to follow a character through real-life decisions depending on their appetite for risk, their personal goals and balancing income and spending.

"It's about realism," says David. "In theory, you could make extreme choices – but in real life, when people want things, they make trade-offs. That's what we're trying to reflect."

"I came away buzzing, there's so much enthusiasm there when you give learners the knowledge."

What happens next?

The programme will have a 'soft launch' in September 2026, then be ready for all to use from September 2027. "This is something we're developing responsively," David explains. "We rely on feedback to make sure it's the best it can be."

Want to join the 'Financial Futures' trial?

If your school or college would like to help shape the development of this exciting new course, register below.

Register your interest in Financial Futures



How Dagenham Park school has been using the UAS to empower every learner with a 'can do' approach to achievement

Dagenham Park is a mainstream school with a diverse student body. They've been using the AQA Unit Award Scheme (UAS) to motivate Year 9 and 10 science learners and it's been a great success.

UAS learning is aligned to GCSE content and split into bite-sized chunks. This means that learners receive Certificates of Achievement every time they learn a new unit which is a fantastic motivator.

As learners progress through the mapped units, they develop subject knowledge and build confidence through regular recognition, reinforcing a positive and forward-looking approach to their learning.

Find about more about the AQA Unit Award Scheme >> aqa.org.uk/programmes/unit-award-scheme/about



Amy Ige, SEN Coordinator in Science, explains:

Our learners take real ownership of their studies and the AQA UAS is an accessible way to show what they're capable of.

Learners get their Certificate of Achievement within two weeks of completing each unit, so they quickly build an impressive portfolio to prove what they 'can do'.

This is a sample of just some of the UAS certificates that 30 Dagenham Park school learners have achieved. The units are mapped to GCSE Science and Public Services:

115824 Energy transfers

75656 Investigating forces and friction

113601 Investigating speed

40434 Science: Energy resources and origins

114399 Introduction to cells, tissue and organs



Assessment Reform Week helps thousands of teachers prepare for change

Assessment Reform Week: The Essentials, held from 30 June to 3 July, brought together thousands of teachers and school leaders for a week of webinars, podcasts, discussions and practical support. Designed to help teachers like you feel prepared for the future of assessment, the event provided expert insight, guidance and opportunities to shape the conversation around assessment reform.

The week opened with a live webinar featuring Dale Bassett, our Chief Qualifications Officer, alongside Dr Katy Finch, Head of Research and Evaluation and Louise Badham, Head of Assessment Design and Principles. They explored our vision for assessment reform and the evidence shaping future changes. During the session, we also launched our new partnership with Teacher Tapp, creating more opportunities for teachers to share their views, contribute to important conversations and help inform the future of qualifications, assessment and education.

A new video podcast for MAT and school leaders also launched during the week. Hosted by Natalie Perera, our Chief External Affairs and Communications Officer, the episode featured MAT leaders Dr Rick Rhodes and Kay Tinsley, who shared their perspectives on what assessment reform could mean for schools and trusts.

More than 2,500 teachers signed up for our 14 subject-specific webinars. Through dedicated discussions and practical guidance from subject experts, attendees gained greater clarity on what assessment reform means for them, with 76% saying they felt confident afterwards.

Another key focus of the week was myAQA, showcasing the wide range of support, resources and guidance available to teachers and reinforcing our commitment to enhancing that support as we move through the assessment reform journey together.



The week concluded at the Festival of Education, where live teacher panels gave educators the opportunity to play an active role in shaping future developments. We also encouraged even more teachers to join our monthly teacher panels, helping to ensure classroom experience remains at the heart of future conversations around assessment reform.

Missed a session?

All content from Assessment Reform Week is now available on our Assessment Reform Hub at aqa.org.uk/assessment-reform-hub

Scan the QR code to access expert insights, practical guidance and resources designed to help you and your school navigate assessment reform with confidence.





GCSE English Language and Maths: Get resit ready

Our English and Maths Subject Support teams share their recommendations of our free resources, teacher guides and friendly support.

GCSE Maths

- Post-16 GCSE resit resources collection
- GCSE Maths Post-16: Preparing for 2026 on-demand training
- Fundamental knowledge questions
- One-year schemes of work/route maps
- Revision checklists
- Stride Maths adaptive assessment tool
- Worked papers



Customise or use our recommended one-year foundation tier resit [route map](#)

mynetwork

Curriculum Connect – join us live online or watch an on-demand session aimed at supporting Post-16 teachers.

AQA | Professional Development | Course Finder

Julia Smith's expert tips for the maths November resits.

mysupport

Free at 3? GCSE Maths support

Ask anything (maths related!) in a 20-minute 1:1 call with one of the Maths Subject Support team.

GCSE English Language

- GCSE English Language Exam Timing Ideas
- Reading support booklets and guides
- GCSE English Language Post-16: Preparing for 2026 (On-demand training)
- AQA GCSE English Language for post-16: Teacher Guide
- Scheme of work: Post-16 and one-year centres
- Collins Emerging Identities teaching guide
- Building Reader Confidence teaching guide developed with OUP



The GCSE Maths and English Language summer 2026 exam Snapshot reports are out now.

mysupport

Free at 4: GCSE English resit support

Book a free 20-minute 1:1 with our friendly English Subject Support team.

Available Tues – Thurs, 4–5pm

Find more resources
for GCSE English
Language and
Maths here

**Post-16 GCSE resit
resources collection**



Top tips for running successful mock exams

Our Exams Officer Engagement Team have revealed their trade secrets to ensure your mocks run as smoothly as possible.

Timetabling essentials:

- **Decide timetable ownership**
Who builds the schedule and signs it off?
- **Choose a seating strategy**
Whole-cohort blocks or subject-by-subject?
- **Clarify paper expectations**
Full papers, partial papers or a mix?
- **Balance the load**
Spread sciences and essay subjects to avoid writing-heavy days.
- **Avoid overload**
Three exams in one day makes extra time/rest-break management very difficult.
- **Use weekends strategically**
Build in downtime to protect student wellbeing.
- **Rotate annually**
Share early-exam advantages across departments.
- **Anchor the week**
Run whole-cohort exams on Day 1 and the final day to keep everyone aligned and motivated.
- **Late finishes**
Will some exams run over the end of the school day? Consider implications on students; travel arrangements home for example.

Mock exams are a valuable opportunity to test your processes, identify any gaps and help candidates experience formal exam conditions before the live series.

- They reduce risk in the live series by identifying issues early
- They prepare students for the emotional and procedural reality of formal exams
- They strengthen centre systems and reveal whether improvements are needed before the external exam series starts
- They build staff confidence in processes, timing and contingency planning

Your preparation can make all the difference. Good luck!

Preparation and logistics:

- **Engage stakeholders**

An assembly with students, update parents and highlight in staff briefings so that everyone is clear on their responsibilities.

- **Confirm paper production**

Who prints, copies, downloads media and quality-checks materials?

- **Deadlines**

Clear dates on when papers are needed for sorting/enabling access arrangements/ different rooms.

- **Plan student movement**

Entry, exit, late arrivals and supervision.

- **Define paper handling**

Before, during and after the exam.

- **Choose invigilators and produce a timetable for them**

Using external invigilators may free up staff for marking. It's also an invigilator training opportunity and the chance for students to become more familiar with them.

- **Rehearse JCQ rules**

Let students make mistakes now, not in the live series, but have internal sanctions in place so that they understand there are consequences.

- **Share key student information**

Access arrangements, special instructions and medical needs.

- **Prepare access arrangements**

Rooms, staffing, tech, readers, scribes, prompts, word processors and rest breaks.

- **Collect AA evidence**

Ensure use/need is documented for JCQ compliance.

- **Pastoral support**

Engage suitable staff to help support students who need extra support on exam day.

- **Have a catch-up plan for missed exams**

Who will be responsible for organising these?

- **Capture performance evidence**

Supports resilience requirements.

- **Try to test your contingency plans**

Mock exams can provide a useful training opportunity ahead of the external summer exams.

Contact the AQA
Exams Officer
Engagement Team >
Exams Officer
Engagement Team



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- We'll go through our curriculum offer.
- Learn the opportunities for enrichment we provide.

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Find your account manager: aqa.org.uk/contact-us/account-managers

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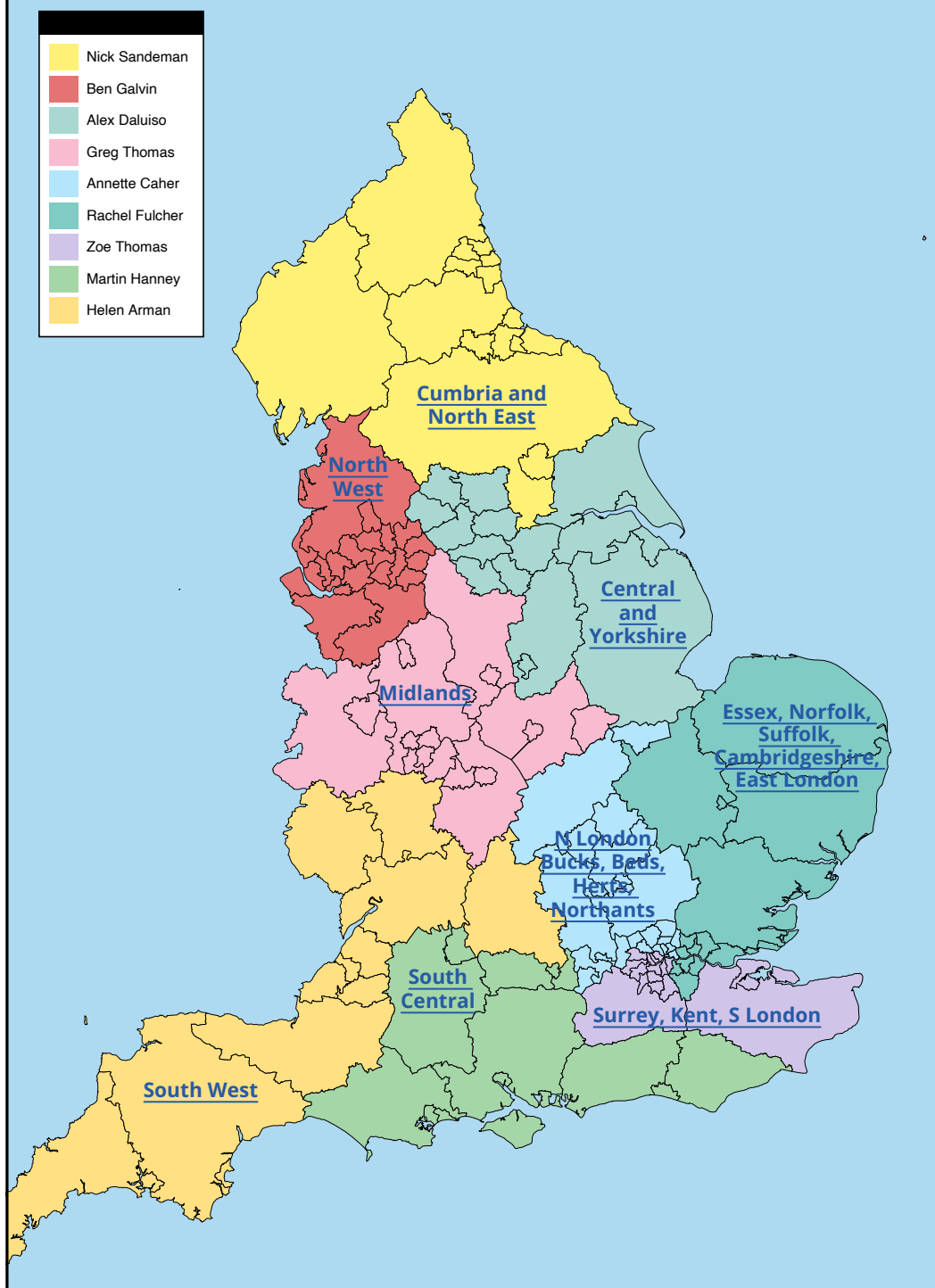
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- **Meet the trainers** who'll be leading AQA's free CPD for teachers
- Plus, **keep up to date** with the latest news, events and resources



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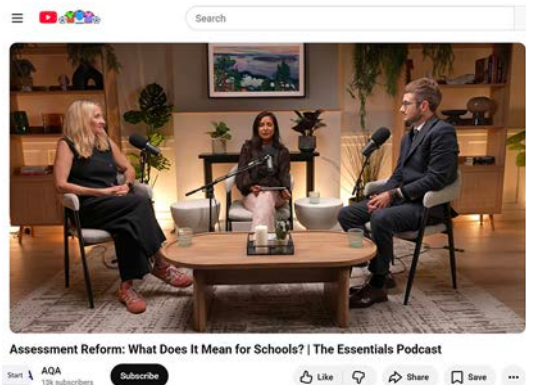
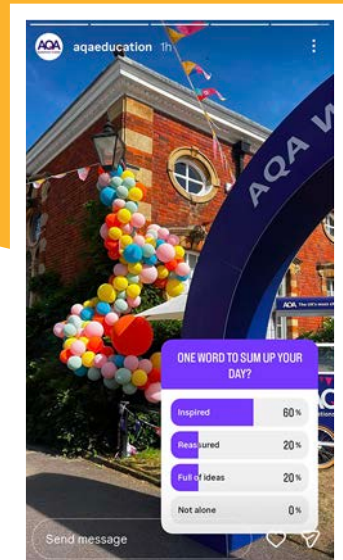
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Join us on Bluesky: **@aqaeducation.bsky.social**



Also, check out our YouTube channel **@AqaOrgUK** to hear from our team of experts, including discussion on assessment reform and what it might mean for your school.



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