

ANNUAL REVIEW 2008

'OUR SOLE PURPOSE IS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION BY PROVIDING QUALIFICATIONS OF THE VERY HIGHEST QUALITY'



Welcome to this review of our work in the past year. We are a self-governing educational charity with no shareholders or parent organisation requiring a financial return.

All our income is spent entirely on operating and developing our qualifications and services for the benefit of young people and other

learners. As a charity, our sole purpose is to improve education by providing qualifications of the very highest quality, based on specifications which are motivating and promote learning, and by providing services to teachers, schools and colleges which support their work.

Everyone involved in AQA is fully committed to this purpose. We stay in close touch with the current and future needs of learners and their teachers so that all our work is closely informed by their views.

We know that our work affects the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people

every year and we are very proud of the consistently high levels of service and accuracy which we provide.

As the largest A-level and GCSE awarding body, we also play a significant role in providing technical and educational advice to inform national policy.

Our research is known internationally for its quality and helps us achieve our aim of being a positive force in the educational world.

I hope you find this review interesting. It is only a snapshot of our work and you can find out much more by visiting www.aqa.org.uk

Sue Rogers is Chair of AQA

'GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE CHOICE OF WHAT AND HOW THEY STUDY IMPROVES THEIR MOTIVATION, EFFORT AND PERFORMANCE'



One of the things which marks out AQA is the breadth of our provision. We aim to provide as wide a choice as possible to young people and their teachers because we know that choice helps to promote effective learning.

For many years worldwide research has shown that giving young people choice of what and how they study improves their motivation, effort and

performance. GCSE and A-level exams allow schools and colleges to offer a wide choice of subjects to their students. Young people certainly make good use of that choice. It is, for example, unusual for a young person to take A-levels which all fall neatly into one of the traditional areas of academic coherence.

We also know that different young people learn in different ways. Offering Diplomas alongside GCSEs and A-levels provides a valuable alternative for students who are engaged by a more applied approach to learning.

But choice brings the need to ensure that standards are comparable – not least,

between different awarding bodies. We therefore welcome the establishment of the new independent regulator – Ofqual – with the power to ensure that awarding bodies' standards stay in line.

This is critical because teachers should be able to choose their specification solely on the basis of its educational quality, the support offered with it and the quality of assessment that it provides.

Offering that sort of choice is part of our contribution to helping teachers prepare their students for life in a challenging and ever-changing world.

Mike Cresswell is Director General



'WORKING WITH US GIVES YOU ACCESS TO CUSTOMER SERVICE FROM THE BEST IN THE INDUSTRY'



Students have just started on their new A-level courses – with AQA making the widest provision of any awarding body (52 specifications). This breadth is enhanced by two new qualifications:

1. Extended project: which allows a student to do an independent piece of work and present the outcome. This develops research and planning skills and provides an excellent preparation for further study.

2. AQA Bacc: This provides external credit for the full breadth of the sixth form curriculum. The student can combine any choice of A-levels with evidence of breadth (General Studies or Critical Thinking), depth (extended project) and wider social awareness through enrichment activity. This latter element is supported by an online diary tool to help students and their teachers

plan, track and record achievements.

We have received accreditation for 51 GCSE courses for first teaching in September 2009. Over 20 000 teachers have attended face-to-face presentations covering the new GCSEs and more events are planned for spring 2009.

For these new GCSEs, coursework has been changed to Controlled Assessment. The main features of this change are that students will produce their responses to the tasks set under direct supervision and within set time restrictions.

These changes have been introduced to address concerns over the inappropriate use of the internet, plagiarism and unacknowledged external support that have affected coursework. We will provide our normal high level of support in the introduction of Controlled Assessment, through teachers' standardising meetings and the provision of Controlled Assessment Advisors to each centre and subject. These Advisors will be able to give specific feedback about the new requirements, regulations and opportunities. Please let us know that you intend to

use our specifications, so that you are invited to attend the standardising meetings which, in many cases, will be held in the autumn term 2009. You can do this by submitting an estimate of entry (no charges apply) for your subject.

AQA is the lead contractor on the QCA sponsored Maths Pathway project and we are therefore actively involved in shaping the assessment structures to be used from 2010 onwards. Our development teams are also running the largest national pilots of the new Functional Skills qualifications in English, Maths and ICT, so we will be well prepared to support full scale operation.

Together with our partners City and Guilds, we will be offering all Diploma lines at all three levels. We currently have eight lines accredited, with more to follow shortly. Working with us gives you access to our unique visiting moderator service, staffed by experienced assessors as well as customer service from the best in the industry (Ofqual report, Autumn 2008).

Andrew Bird is Deputy Director General



'WE BELIEVE THAT OUR ROLE IS TO SUPPORT TEACHERS TO TEACH AT THEIR BEST'



Our broad range of high quality qualifications are designed to meet the needs and interests of all learners. We work in partnership with teachers to ensure understanding of the different requirements for each subject. We work hard to make sure our broad range of qualifications:

- enable learners to realise their full potential
- contain engaging content for learners
- are manageable for schools and colleges
- lead to accurate results, delivered on time and
- are relevant for employers and higher education and represent good value for money.

As the UK's leading educational qualifications awarding body, we believe that our role is to support teachers to teach at their best and, in so doing, achieve successful results. Going beyond this we aim to help prepare young people for the challenges and rewards of engaging with further and higher education and employment.

Over the year, we have hosted subject and qualification specific meetings across the country including the AQA Expo events – 7 events, 6 cities, 6 weeks in June and July. The events highlighted our new GCSEs that have been redesigned with teachers and students in mind to enable them to achieve more.

Over 3000 teaching professionals came to meet subject specialists and gain information about our new GCSEs and 14-19 curriculum changes. Teachers also got to meet the development teams for Diplomas, Projects, the new AQA Baccalaureate and new e-support tools such as our new Enhanced Results Analysis Service that offers



teachers an at-a-glance analysis of exam results.

Our Regional Officers have continued to support the exams officers who administer exams in schools and colleges and to support the teaching of our qualifications and to listen to the views of teachers.

We have held 2000 meetings across the country with 58 000 teachers. Whilst so many teachers have been able to come to special events, we know that not all can, so we are developing our online communications to offer information and advice when needed. Schools and colleges now have a far wider range of qualifications from which to choose and, to help them make the choices that best suit their needs, we are also introducing new curriculum advisers.

In September, we launched our new termly magazine *Award*, which is received by decision makers at all English secondary schools. *Award* aims to be a 'thought leader' on key 14-19 education issues and is aimed at all with an interest in qualifications and the role

they play in the wider education debate.

In autumn 08, we welcomed a report 'Making a Difference' published by our regulator Ofqual. The report examined the experiences of staff in centres during the summer of 2008 and found that when teachers needed to phone an awarding body, more teachers described their experience with us as positive than with any other awarding body. Our website was also deemed the most useful. We are keen to build on this success and make sure that we continue to deliver the very best for teachers and learners.

Our Annual GCSE and A-level Awards were held in London in October and November. These awards recognise outstanding performance in the GCSE and A-level exams. The winners are chosen from over three million AQA entries. The awards are made each year in several subject categories, each category consisting of a number of broadly related subjects. This year we were delighted to introduce a new award for the top performing student achieving an AQA Bacc (Grace Chesterton, pictured above). This new qualification is proving highly successful and is now offered by over 100 schools and colleges.

Geoff Hurst is Director of Market Strategy

'WE MUST NOT NEGLECT THOSE ASPECTS OF GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICE THAT WILL NOT CHANGE IN A MORE TECHNOLOGICAL FUTURE'



Over the year there has been an exciting and varied programme of research activity focused on exploiting new technology to improve assessment quality.

Our development of online examiner standardisation has been supported by the analysis of:

- live marking data
- qualitative work with examiners exploring their training needs and
- experimental work comparing conventional and online standardisation.

We have also been working with examiners to adapt existing electronic marking software for the marking of longer answers.

Looking forward to a time when tests of known difficulty will be presented on-screen and on-demand, work has been done to set out the broad principles which will regulate on-demand testing for general qualifications.

To enable us to explore these future scenarios in more depth, test construction software has been developed and evaluated by senior

examiners, and mechanisms for providing teachers and learners with useful feedback on performance evaluated.

We must not neglect, however, those aspects of good assessment practice that will not change in a more technological future.

To this end we have been working with examiners to

capture best practice in item writing, exploring new ways of supporting awarders in setting standards and investigating the impact of assessment schemes on learners' motivation.

John Milner is Principal Director, People, Environment and Research



EXAM FACTS AND FIGURES AND THE ROLE OF EXAMINERS



An amazing 99.4% of all entries for the June examination were made electronically. AQA has led in the support we provide to Exams Officers in our schools and colleges and in the introduction of

technology to all areas of our administration, reducing the administrative burden considerably and improving the reliability of our work/ Last summer under 0.01% of scripts were lost in transit.

As in the past few years, we met the performance indicators set by Ofqual 100%. All results were delivered on time and all access to scripts and results enquiries were dealt with on time.

Almost 25 000 examiners and moderators were

appointed and all examiners either marked scripts online or submitted their marks electronically.

Our examiners and moderators are our greatest asset. Their commitment to applying the correct standards in their marking and to meeting deadlines ensure that all of our candidates receive fair, accurate and timely results.

Carolyn Adams is Director of Examination Services