



## Unit Award Scheme

### ■ Using the AQA Unit Award Scheme within Offender Learning

Nearly 40 000 students, across over 1000 centres, are currently registered with the AQA Unit Award Scheme. Many of these centres are Prisons, Young Offender Institutions, Secure Training Centres or Juvenile Prisons. Other centres are involved with offenders in the community.

All of these centres have to make provision for the education of offenders. The aims of this include providing opportunities to develop and further general education, improving personal and social skills and increasing employability, thereby reducing the risk of re-offending. The Unit Award Scheme gives a means of providing external recognition of achievement in often difficult circumstances. It is used by students of all ages and abilities and sometimes provides the first external recognition which a learner receives of their achievement.

The Scheme is fully approved by QCA as a scheme for recording achievement in all non-qualification contexts and for providing interim accreditation of the achievement of students

following unit-based AQA Entry Level qualifications. The Scheme is listed in the National Youth Agency's 'National Framework of Awards in Non-Formal Educational Settings'.

As the Scheme can be tailored to make it more responsive to the diverse needs of the individual, it can make a significant contribution towards educational provision. Many of the units within the Scheme have been written specifically for offenders. Some are practical, whilst others relate specifically to gaining basic and life skills, or to obtaining employment or facilitating progression to further or higher education.

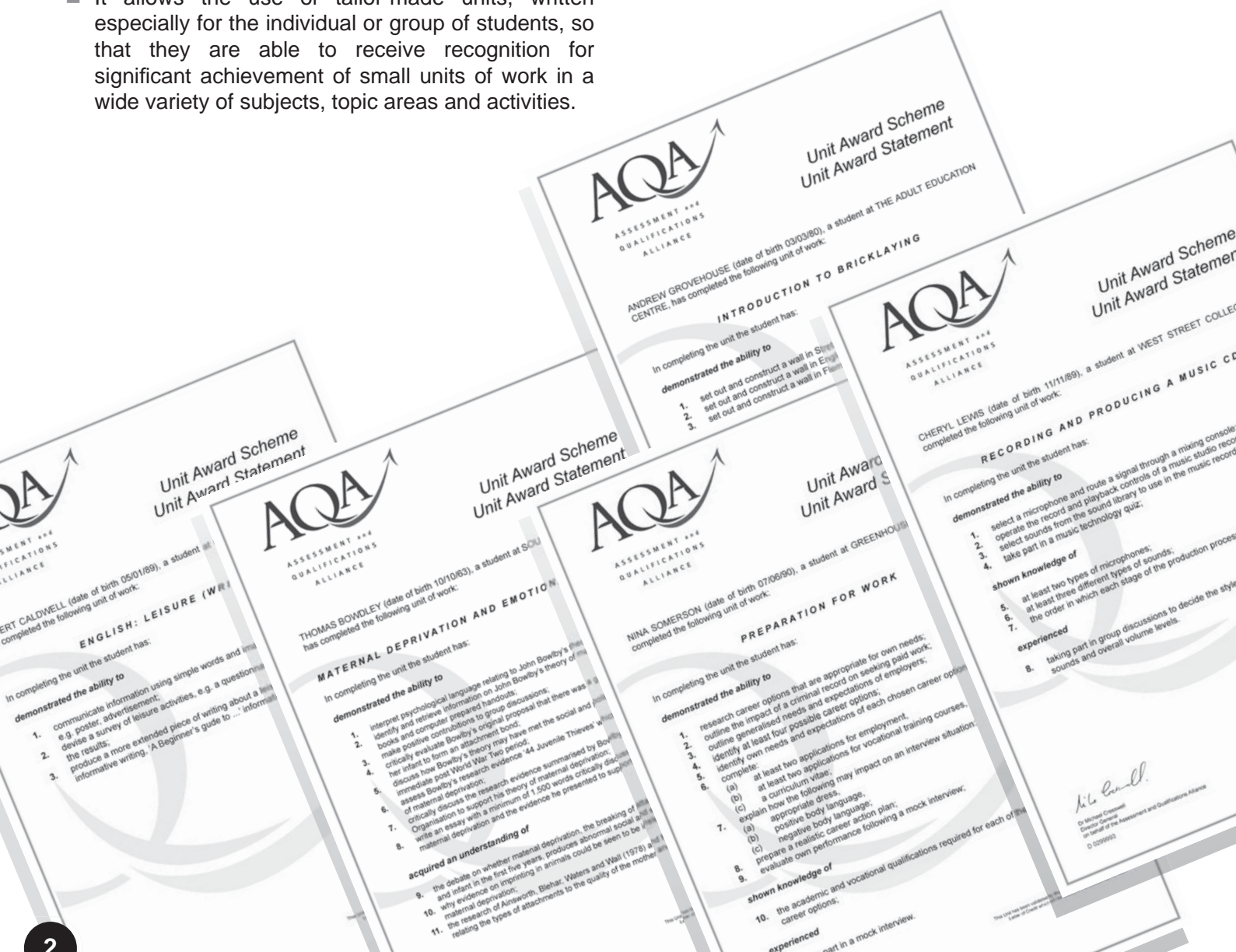
The Unit Award Scheme allows those providing offender education to write their own courses in unit form giving them the flexibility required in offender learning because of the largely transient and diverse nature of the student population. Offender learners often need to have short episodes of learning validated before moving on to other awards or qualifications in the future.



## Benefits of the Scheme for the offender and the centre

- The Scheme can be used to accredit achievement at all levels, from offenders who might have a range of learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties, to those studying at higher levels.
- When used alongside AQA's unit-based Entry Level qualifications, the student can receive recognition for the achievement of individual units within them. These qualifications are targeted at students who are working at a level below Grade G GCSE or Foundation Level GNVQ or NVQ Level 1 and may be particularly appropriate for juvenile offenders within a Young Offender Institution.
- It allows the use of tailor-made units, written especially for the individual or group of students, so that they are able to receive recognition for significant achievement of small units of work in a wide variety of subjects, topic areas and activities.

- For the offender, the Unit Award Scheme approach offers clear, short term, achievable targets and gives regular feedback on progress through the issue of a Unit Award Statement, enabling success to be recognised quickly.
- For those providing education, the Scheme provides an effective tool in planning course delivery. It offers a simple and effective means to structure programmes of work or activities by providing clear objectives and processes and is a means of showing progression.
- Annual training meetings, once the centre is registered, give the chance for those involved with the Scheme to 'network' with others and so share good practice.



# 'Giving everyone the credit they deserve'

## Comments from those involved in the Scheme

The following quotes are from people using the Unit Award Scheme in a variety of establishments.

*'The Scheme is easy to administer and keep records and is easy to modify and adapt. It is easy to design your own awards so that they are specific to the learners and their environment. There are very few limitations to the Scheme thrown up by a secure environment. It is relevant to the labour market, in terms of the skills and knowledge which can be demonstrated and certificated.'* (Life Skills Co-ordinator at a Young Offender Institution)

*'I have used the Scheme consistently over the last few years. The strength is, to me, the variety of subject areas covered, the progression available and above all the opportunity to create your own courses, tailor-made to meet the needs of the students in front of you. I have found working with the Unit Award team in Harrogate to be extremely straightforward.'* (Senior Lecturer in the Education Department at a Prison)

*'Development of resource material was easy to assemble and there is an excellent range of topics already available to choose from. It is easy to deliver and administer.'* (English Co-ordinator at a Young Offender Institution)

*'We mainly follow the KS3 and KS4 programme of study. As many of our young people have missed a great deal of their education it is important that we boost their self esteem and self confidence as quickly as possible. Using the AQA Unit Award Scheme allows our young people to quickly achieve success in each of the curriculum subjects they study, and gives them the confidence they need to build on their success. We, as teachers, find the Unit Award Scheme valuable as it caters for the wide spectrum of ability that our young people have, and means that none are excluded from celebrating their achievements with a nationally recognised award. Of particular use, too, is the fact that the Scheme is cumulative and can lead to the award of Entry Level qualifications, either at this centre or when a student has moved on to another education provider.'* (An Examinations Co-ordinator at a Secure Training Centre)

*'There is good, quick accreditation, and it is good for group work and paired teamwork, and work can be structured so it can be good for some trainees to follow.'* (Art/Art and Design Lecturer at a Young Offender Institution)

*'I have found the AQA Scheme has allowed the students to study at a level appropriate to them, up to and including Level 3. It has made education more readily deliverable and accessible to students. The Scheme has instilled in students a pride in their work and a desire to achieve. The vast range of units means there is something for everyone.'* (Psychology Lecturer at a Prison)

*'The Scheme encourages students to build a folder of work that can explore a given subject in some depth' and that 'gaining a certificate is valuable to students and demonstrates a wider remit of learning that can be presented to employers as a record of achievement.'* (English Lecturer at a Young Offender Institution)

As far as the students themselves are concerned, there have been some remarkable success stories in which the Scheme has played a significant part. One such situation involves students with no or limited formal qualifications using the Unit Award Scheme to facilitate entrance to university. One student was able to graduate with a first in BA (Hons) Media Studies and also won graduate of the year, another graduated with Sociology and Anthropology, another won NIACE's (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) National Learner of the Year Award, and yet another is on course to achieve a first in a Sociology degree.

## What students say about the Scheme

*'I think AQA units are good because in the future I can use them for references and show them to people who could give me a job interview.'*

*'AQA units are the first achievement that I have ever had recognised and they will help me get a job or a course at college.'*

*'AQA units are good because they help you learn more skills. When I receive a certificate I feel very proud of myself. I also feel like I have achieved something that I may not have been able to do before.'*

*'They say that it's very good to have AQA units. I think that they are right because I can show people what I've achieved from being at the centre. They show my mum and dad that I can do work. I have proved a lot of people wrong because when I first got here I wasn't really good at anything and now I am. Plus now when I turn up at an interview I can show them what I have achieved.'*

*'Gaining AQA units made me want to go to class and to take other exams.'*

*'I like collecting AQA certificates every month because you know you will get something for all the work you do without waiting for ages.'*

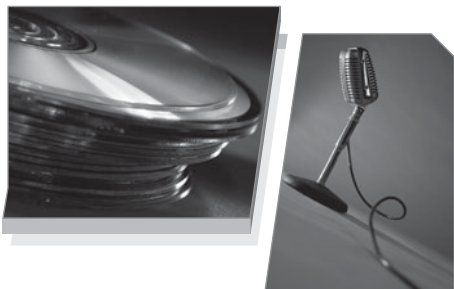
*'My mum is really proud of all my AQA certificates. They are the first good thing I have ever had from school.'*

## Using the Scheme

Once a centre is registered with the Scheme, following appropriate training, it will have access to a wide range of units, many of which have been specifically written by other centres involved in custodial care.

In addition to units available on our Website, on CD-ROM and units which form part of AQA's unit-based Entry Level qualifications, we offer a 'library service' to registered centres whereby AQA will search to see if a particular unit, suitable for an offender working at a particular level, or under specific circumstances or with special needs, has already been written. If this unit does not fully meet the centre's requirements, then the centre is able to amend the unit so that it does.

The flexible nature of the Unit Award Scheme and the ongoing facility to reward and celebrate success make it an ideal vehicle for empowering and raising the self-esteem of often marginalised individuals. It can help to engage offenders in the training and learning process, giving a positive outcome in an environment which is often negative. The Scheme is important in improving motivation, supporting lifelong learning and promoting inclusion, enabling personalised learning opportunities and experiences with nationally recognised accreditation.



## Contacting Us

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