

The Unit Award Scheme and Young People's Services/ Youth Provision

► What is the Unit Award Scheme?

The Unit Award Scheme (UAS) is a nationally-recognised scheme for recording and celebrating the achievements of students of all ages and abilities. It is offered by AQA, the largest unitary awarding body in England and Wales. The Scheme is based on a 'unit' approach whereby certificates are received for short units of work completed.

Units are available in almost any subject area or activity, eg traditional areas of study, PSHE/PSD,

work-related learning, wider key skills, life skills such as money management, peer mentoring, community activities and volunteering, residential experience, art and theatre studies, sport, music technology, travel, leisure and crafts.

Although the Scheme is not a qualification, the individual units are available at a range of levels from pre-entry to level 2 (GCSE grades A*-C) and beyond. Some units are suitable for use with young people with severe learning difficulties whilst others are intended for students of higher ability levels.

The main source of units is aqa.org.uk/uas, where over 18 000 units can be accessed. New units may also be written from scratch, or existing ones amended, so that each young person is able to receive full and specific recognition for what he or she has achieved.

► Benefits to young people and Young People's Services/Youth Provision

Many young people, who may not have achieved their full potential in school, find the experience of non-formal learning in settings such as youth clubs, very positive and engaging. Formal recognition of this learning, through the UAS, can make a real



difference to a young person's life chances in terms of:

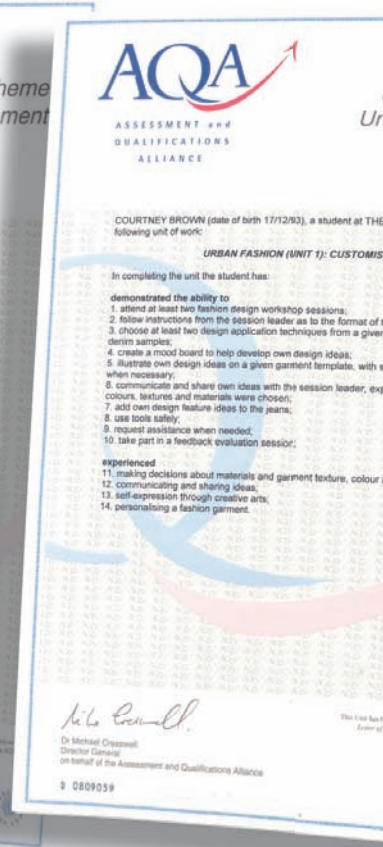
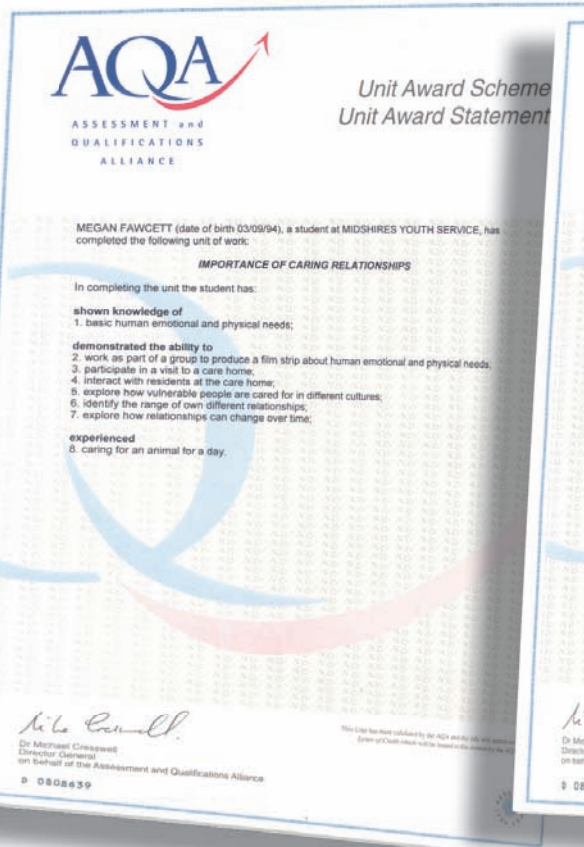
- preparation for work or further education
- preparation for independent living
- becoming an informed, participating and active citizen.

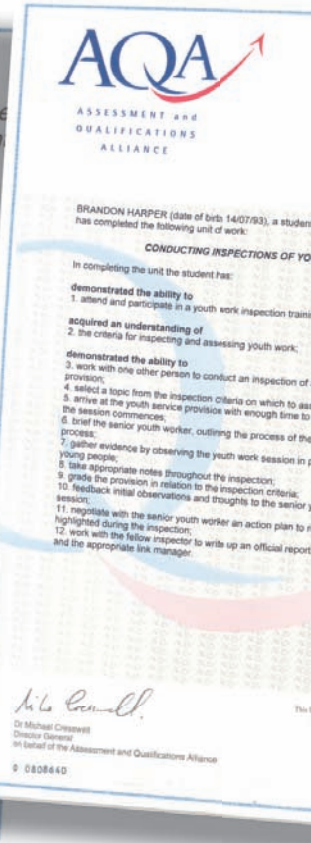
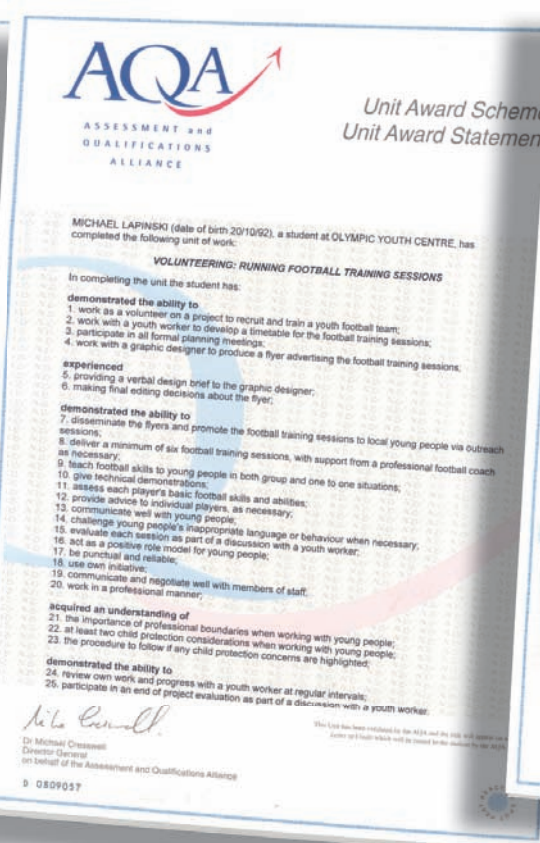
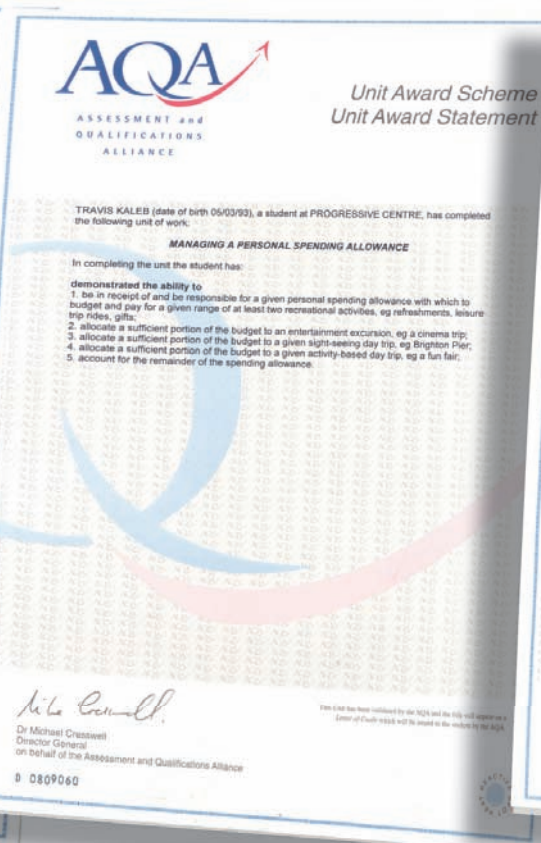
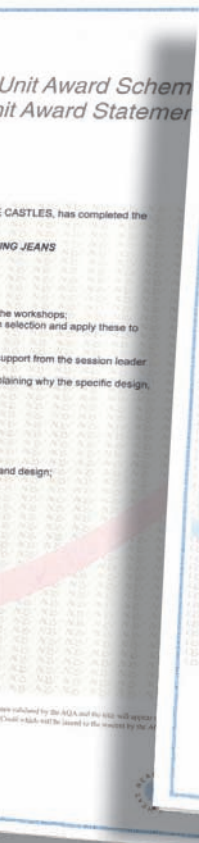
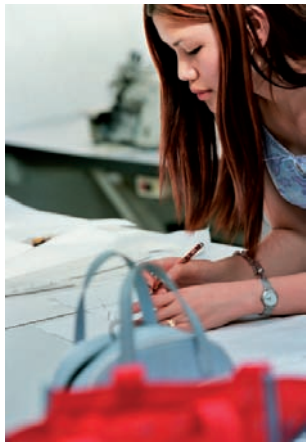
The Scheme provides external certification of a wide range of activities and work for which more traditional methods of certification are inappropriate or unavailable.

The flexible and motivating nature of the Scheme encourages and empowers young people by crediting them for their achievements. The young person is therefore more engaged and his or her self-esteem is boosted.

The Scheme promotes a 'can do' culture as it enables youth provision workers to choose units which are relevant to, accessible to and achievable by the young people they are working with and are pitched appropriately. Some units do not require a young person to provide any written evidence of achievement: sometimes assessment by one-to-one discussion or observation of the young person is sufficient to show that he or she has the required knowledge or skills.

The Scheme can also be used as a means of progression to other awards and qualifications, for example: Youth Achievement, The Duke of Edinburgh or Arts Awards.





► **What young people and others involved with the Scheme say**

From a Youth Service in London –

'In working with a school group that were neither well behaved nor performing well, their teacher commented that she was quite surprised, but delighted, that this group had been making such an effort outside of school. The young people in question had taken part in an important AQA supported project that culminated in their visiting Number 10 to meet with the Prime Minister and discuss substance misuse among young people.'

From Youth Provision Workers –

'Being able to offer AQA accreditation to young people in recognition of their measured achievements has enhanced our provision and also acts as another tool for an evidenced extension of the recorded learning outcomes we facilitate with young people. Receipt of an AQA Unit Award Statement tends to be of greatest significance to educational underachievers.'

From the young people –

'I like the paper (the certificate issued), because it's a sign that I did something good.'

'The certificate adds to my CV. I can add it to my other certificates. This is my first out-of-school certificate.'

'I have learnt a lot about cooking, music production, t-shirt making - and all these were AQA. I think it gives young people the opportunity to develop skills they may not have had previously, whilst having fun.'

'It was good doing the computer course – they taught me how to make my own website, create passwords and write a CV. At the end I'll get an AQA, which is good because I get excluded from school a lot.'

'As a young person with a learning disability I was not entered for GCSE exams as my teacher told me I wouldn't be able to do them. At the youth club I am told I can do things and my AQAs have filled up the holes in my achievement records.'

► **Quality assurance**

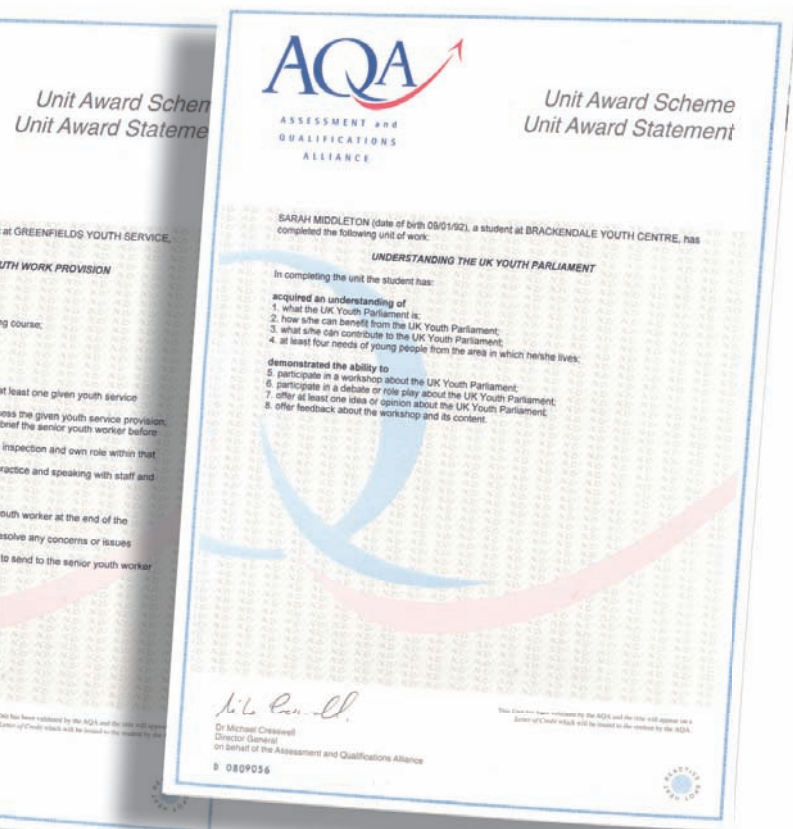
The Scheme is included on the *National Youth Agency's National Framework of Awards in Non-Formal Educational Settings*, published by the National Youth Agency on behalf of the Network for Accrediting Young People's Achievement. The members of the Network - which includes organisations such as ASDAN, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, The Prince's Trust, UK Youth and Sports Leaders UK – all adhere to a stringent set of criteria and meet regularly to discuss and inform national developments.

The Scheme is recognised by QCDA as a means of:

- recording achievement in all non-qualification contexts
- providing interim accreditation of the achievement of young people following unit-based AQA Entry level and Modern Foreign Language FCSE qualifications.

In addition, we ensure that:

- at least one person in every centre offering the UAS undergoes specific training
- every unit written undergoes a rigorous validation process
- every active centre is monitored by one of our Assessors, who checks that our assessment procedures are being followed.



► **Units**

Each unit clearly and concisely sets out:

- what the student is expected to achieve in terms of skills, abilities, knowledge, understanding and/or experiences
- how this achievement is to be evidenced and assessed.

Each unit is written as a ‘stand-alone’ unit, however they can be written together to form a series. Before submission, a unit must be checked by the centre and by us, to ensure that it is clear and meaningful. Every unit must represent an appropriate area of study and/or activity for the young person, at an appropriate level of demand. Units must also be challenging but achievable.

Units can be viewed at aqa.org.uk/uas_units

► **Certification**

Each time a young person completes a unit, he or she receives a certificate called a *Unit Award Statement*. This lists:

- everything the young person has achieved
- any experiences the student has had, eg attending a residential session or taking part in a visit.

The certificates are issued promptly, meaning that success can be shared and celebrated quickly with those involved.

When a young person leaves the Scheme, he or she can receive a *Letter of Credit* certificate listing the titles of all units that have been achieved whilst attending any particular centre.

The certificates are valued by employers and colleges as well as the young people themselves, especially when they provide evidence of essential qualities and skills perhaps not acknowledged on other certification, like being reliable, keeping to commitments and providing peer support.





► Training and fees

Training meetings for new centres are held in various locations around the country or on-site training can be arranged for up to 20 people. The training covers all the administrative and assessment arrangements and features a workshop on how to write a unit.

There is also a fee payable to cover a one-off visit to each new centre by an AQA Assessor, at the point when that centre's first young people have completed units. This is to check that assessment is being carried out properly by the centre and that administrative procedures are being followed.

Fees are then charged per student, per year (not per certificate issued) for those participating in the Scheme. This means that the Scheme can be used with the same students across a range of work areas and activities without excessive cost.

A centre may join the Scheme at any time of year.

Details of training and operational fees, including current charges, are available at aqa.org.uk/uas

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Further information can be found at aqa.org.uk/uas

