

# The Unit Award Scheme (UAS) in Special Education

## ► Unit Award Scheme

Nearly 55 000 students, across over 1200 centres, are registered with the AQA Unit Award Scheme. The Scheme is used with students of all ages and abilities, including those with special needs arising from communication and interaction, cognition and learning, sensory and/or physical and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The UAS provides an excellent means of recognising the achievements of these students.

The Scheme is fully approved by QCA for:

- recording achievement in all non-qualification contexts
- providing interim accreditation of the achievement of students following unit-based AQA Entry Level qualifications.

The UAS is also included on the National Youth Agency's 'National Framework of Awards in Non-Formal Educational Settings'.

National developments such as the 'Every Child Matters' agenda, the new secondary curriculum and 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' emphasise the importance of personalised learning, making education more responsive to the needs of the individual. The UAS provides an ideal means of recognising this kind of learning.



► **UAS benefits**

- The Scheme can be used to accredit achievement in terms of P levels, which are designed to measure attainment below level 1 of the National Curriculum. Many P level UAS units are available through EQUALS.
- When used alongside AQA's unit-based Entry Level qualifications, which are targeted at students who are working below Grade G GCSE or NVQ Level 1, the student can receive recognition for the achievement of individual units within them.
- It allows the use of tailor-made units, written especially for a group or even an individual student. The student is thus able to receive recognition for significant achievement of small steps in a wide variety of topic areas, activities and experiences.
- For the student, the UAS approach offers clear, short term, achievable targets. It gives regular feedback on progress through the issue of a *Unit Award Statement*, enabling success to be celebrated quickly, with staff, parents and carers, at any time of year. Examples of *Unit Award Statements* are shown on this page to give an indication of the range of achievement which can be recognised.
- For the centre in which the student is taught, be it a mainstream school, a special school, a college or training provider, or some other specialist organisation, the UAS helps the planning of course delivery. It offers a simple, effective means of structuring programmes of work/ activities by providing clear objectives and processes. It is also an excellent way of showing student progression.





► **Comments from those involved in the Scheme**

Roberta Fulford is Assistant Head and Scheme Co-ordinator at St Hugh’s Communication and Interaction Specialist College in North Lincolnshire. St Hugh’s is a special school for 11-19 year-olds with complex needs. Roberta says that:

*‘using the Scheme encourages inclusive practice, meeting the needs of all students working within the P levels up to NC level 4. Most importantly, all students will leave the school with a range of certificates to support their transition into Further Education and Adult Services that are valued and a true celebration of their achievements. The staff at St Hugh’s particularly like the way the certificates clearly outline what the student has achieved. This gives a clear message that is easily understood by parents and other professionals.’*

Linzi Holt is Co-ordinator of the Scheme at Liaise Loddon Ltd in Basingstoke. Liaise Loddon Ltd is a provider of residential care and education for people aged 18+ who have severe and complex learning and communication difficulties, and problems managing their behaviour. These serious disabilities are associated with autism. Linzi welcomes the fact that:

*‘the structure of the units allows descriptions of small learning steps with various levels of support from staff eg verbal, physical etc. Hence a young person may achieve a unit with gestural support one year and receive a certificate, but progress to achieve the unit with verbal support the next year, and gain a new certificate. The Scheme allows the celebration of these small but essential steps in learning. The fact that the certificates include reference to the level*

*of support required by the young person to achieve the unit makes them realistic.*

*The format for writing units has enabled the staff to take a role in developing each young person’s Person Centred Plan.’*

Roly Ward, Assistant Head and former Co-ordinator of the Scheme at Cambridge Park School in North East Lincolnshire, uses the Scheme with children who have a range of special needs including learning difficulties, behavioural problems and autism. The Scheme is used at Key Stages 3 and 4 and Roly says that:

*‘we write our own units to act as an assessment of children’s learning and have the ability to write units to cover all ability levels from the P levels up to GCSE. For many children, the length of Entry Level and other courses means that they cannot sustain their efforts without some tangible recognition of their achievements. We have found that by writing units which cover smaller sections of these courses we can retain children’s motivation.’*

► **What the students say**

Students at St Hugh’s Communication and Interaction Specialist College have said:

*‘The certificates are fantastic’*

Adam

*‘The certificates prove what I can do ready for going to college and getting a job’*

Anthony

*‘It makes me feel proud because it shows I’ve worked hard’*

Adam

*‘I feel proud and happy when I get my certificates’*

Jade Louise



► **Using the UAS**

Once a centre is trained and registered to use the UAS, it will have easy access to an extensive range of units specifically written for students with special needs.

The main source of units is [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk). On the UAS pages, you will find a large selection of free-standing units, including those suitable for use with students working at Entry and Pre-Entry level. If a unit does not fully meet the centre’s requirements, the centre is able to amend it - for example making it suitable for students working at a particular level, or for a student with specific needs. These free-standing units are in addition to those which form part of AQA’s unit-based Entry Level qualifications.

AQA has also worked with EQUALS to validate units at a range of P scale levels and National Curriculum Level 1. These units relate to EQUALS schemes of work for Key Stage 4 and post-16 [Moving On]. The units have been published on two CD-roms available exclusively from EQUALS. For further information contact EQUALS on 0191 272 8600 or e-mail: [admin@equals.co.uk](mailto:admin@equals.co.uk)

The UAS has been referred to positively in the QCA publication ‘Designing a personalised curriculum for alternative provision at Key Stage 4’ which outlines a number of case studies involving use of the Scheme in non-mainstream settings.

The flexible nature of the UAS and the ongoing facility to reward and celebrate success make it an ideal vehicle for raising self-esteem and ensuring that those with special educational needs feel valued. The Scheme helps to motivate students, supports lifelong learning and promotes inclusion, recognising personalised learning and experiences through nationally recognised accreditation.

► **Contact Us**

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