



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

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# **Centre survey 2004 – Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs)**

*Report on the findings*

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Qualifications and Skills Division, QVA

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## Introduction

In September 2004, QCA commissioned a paper-based survey of schools and colleges that enter students for Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs). The survey was designed to find out why schools and colleges were entering students for AEA tests, and their recruitment and support practices.

Three hundred and eighteen questionnaires were sent to schools and colleges in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales. All had entered students for AEAs at some point over the previous three years. The sample was selected to include different types of schools and colleges. Eighty-seven questionnaires were returned, representing a return rate of 27.4%.

Number of responses by school and college type:

Secondary comprehensive	30
Secondary selective	16
Sixth form college	9
Further education college	8
Independent	24

## Summary of findings

In general, the concept and content of AEAs were highly approved of by schools and colleges entering candidates. In particular, teachers applauded the fact that they moved both teaching and learning back to a broader, deeper, and more holistic approach to study of the subject. Many teachers considered that the approach of the AEA was an effective preparation for degree level study of the subject. They also welcomed it as an opportunity to exercise teaching and learning approaches that they felt the current A level courses no longer required, particularly in languages.

The majority of centres had heard about the AEA through publicity provided by their awarding bodies but a significant minority also reported that they had been recommended to enter candidates by Oxbridge admissions tutors, indicating that some university faculties appeared to be recognising the value of the award.

Centre policies on offering AEAs and selecting students varied. In most cases, offering the AEA was reliant on individual subject teachers' enthusiasm for offering extended study of the subject to their students. The provision of resources to support students was uneven, not only between centres but also within centres at subject department level. Schools and colleges with a history of entering students for S Level or preparing them for entry into the more selective universities had stronger support systems. Those providing little or no extra support were new to the concept of an extended examination. In some of these centres, for

some subjects, students' AEA results had been disappointing in relation to their A level grades.

The evidence therefore suggests that centres that have not traditionally entered candidates for S level and STEP papers need further guidance on how to select, encourage, support and prepare students so that they can fully demonstrate their abilities in the subject.

Many schools and colleges reported having very able students who had chosen not to take the AEA. They gave three main reasons for this: extra work; lack of credit from UCAS for the award; and the timetabling of the AEA tests in relation to A level examinations in the same subject.

Respondents commented on the difficulties that some students experienced in handling the more open-ended responses that the AEA test requires compared with GCE A level questions. However, this was not a criticism but very much a commendation that the questions were more challenging and required a different approach.

## Survey Results

### How centres were introduced to AEAs

Centres were most likely to have learnt about the AEA through their awarding body. A small number reported that they had been recommended to enter their students by Oxbridge admissions tutors, had noticed it referred to in the national press or that they had always done S level papers and had simply carried on.

Awarding body publicity (website or newsletters)	53%
Awarding body meetings for GCE	22%
QCA publicity	21%
Took part in AEA pilot	16%
DfES publicity (website, publication or conference)	6%
LEA advisor or seminar	3%
At education/careers fair	0%
OFSTED inspection	0%

### Centre policy on entering students for AEAs

Only half of respondents stated that their school or college had a formal policy on the use of AEAs. Of those centres that reported they had policy, 95% actively promoted the AEA to their students and 35% reported having selection criteria for entering students.

### Teachers' and students' views on the benefits gained from taking AEAs

	Teachers' views	Students' views
Test papers provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities more fully	84%	63%
Specifications encourage the development of higher level analytical skills	77%	43%
Test papers provide a more interesting challenge for students	74%	47%

AEAs can be used to support applications to higher education	67%	62%
Specifications encourage the development of higher level independent study skills	54%	30%
Specifications encourage students to take a more considered and comprehensive approach to the study of GCE A level subject content	48%	30%
There are no benefits	4%	5%

Teachers reported other benefits. Some felt that it gave students an advantage if they miss grades for university and an edge in UCAS applications for courses for which there is a high degree of competition. Others reported that it provided stimulation for students by providing interest and challenge in applying concepts in a different context and help to prepare students for degree level work.

### How students were selected to take the AEA

The advice and agreement of subject teachers was the main decisive factor in determining whether students were entered for the AEA, but student request was also important. Actual or predicted achievement was less of a factor. Students intending to read the particular subject at university were targeted in many centres, and for some Oxbridge courses, the AEA had been set as an entry requirement. Centres reported that one or more of the following criteria used when entering students for the AEA.

Advice/agreement of subject teachers	79%
The request of students	57%
The request of parents	4%

	A grade	A/B grade
Achievement at AS	32%	7%
Minimum predicted GCE A level grade	44%	9%

### Correlation between AEA entry and Awarding Body specification used for A level course.

For centres responding to this survey, the following table shows the relationship between the percentage of centres entering students in each subject and the specification studied at A level.

Subject	Managing Awarding Body for AEA test	% of centres making entries	Awarding body used for A level					
			AQA	CCEA	Edexcel	OCR	WJEC	Missing
Biology	AQA	42%	50%	0%	7%	14%	2%	27%
Chemistry	AQA	48%	44%	0%	29%	10%	2%	15%
Critical Thinking	OCR	16%	6%	0%	0%	61%	0%	33%
Economics	AQA	36%	53%	0%	25%	11%	8%	3%
English	OCR	59%	27%	0%	20%	34%	8%	11%
French	OCR	33%	15%	3%	33%	36%	11%	2%
Geography	WJEC	37%	8%	8%	13%	23%	29%	19%
German	CCEA	27%	15%	26%	18%	18%	0%	23%
History	Edexcel	37%	18%	0%	32%	18%	8%	24%
Irish	CCEA	20%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Latin	OCR	15%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
Mathematics	Edexcel	53%	2%	0%	50%	19%	9%	20%
Physics	CCEA	52%	18%	24%	14%	24%	2%	18%
Religious Studies	Edexcel	11%	9%	9%	33%	22%	0%	27%
Spanish	Edexcel	22%	9%	4%	49%	18%	17%	3%
Welsh and Welsh Second Language	WJEC		Nil return					

### Reasons why able students chose not to enter for the AEA

Eighty-five percent of schools and colleges reported that they had able students who had chosen not to take the AEA. Some had been deterred by the extra preparation, others by the fact that the AEA would not count in university offers and some by the timetabling of AEA level close to other subjects they were taking for A level.

### Participation in other educational activities for the most able

Almost 40% of the schools and colleges reported that they offered other educational activities.

### Support and guidance

The majority of centres (82%) reported providing some additional support to help students to prepare for AEA test papers. This took a variety of forms.

Guidance on the demands and approach of examination papers	70%
Teacher directed discussion on subject matter	58%
Tailored individual advice and guidance on request	57%
Teacher directed practice of examination technique	56%
Guidance on further/wider reading on GCE A level subject content	54%
Guidance on developing appropriate independent study skills	40%

The majority of schools and colleges (70%) provided additional support through extra classes, whilst 19% reported that they integrated additional support into the normal GCE programme of work for all students. However, there were few centres where this support was provided as a standard package for all subjects. The form and amount was variable and at the discretion of a particular head of department or subject teacher.

### The amount and timing of additional support

The amount of time teachers spent on providing additional support for AEA candidates was most commonly one hour per week. The table below contains information on when the majority of teachers started providing extra support.

Before the start of the second year of advanced study	5%
In the first term of the second year of advanced study	26%
In the second term of the second year of advanced study	35%
In the third term of the second year of advanced study	15%

### **The tests**

Whilst 71% of all respondents reported that full coverage of the GCE A level specification allowed their students access to a sufficient choice of questions on the AEA test papers, 33% of centres considered that candidates' AEA results had not been a fair reflection of their students' abilities. However, of the centres that felt their candidates' had not been able to demonstrate fully their ability and had given a reason, the majority felt that the greatest influence had been candidates' inexperience in responding to the more open-ended question style



## Appendix 1

## Other educational activities for the most able named by centres

Activities named by respondents	Further information
National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY)	Promotes an integrated approach to teaching gifted and talented students within the general education system. NAGTY offers a range of services and activities for members. It is also a useful gateway to other organisations that support learning in specific subject areas ( <a href="http://www.nagty.ac.uk">www.nagty.ac.uk</a> )
Citizenship course/award	This is organised by Glamorgan University who run a programme of 'taster' modules as an introduction to university life
Higher Education residential/summer schools for the gifted and talented	Many universities run suitable summer schools for gifted and talented students. Check your H.E. Institution or LEA for local details the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth
MOTIVATE (millennium maths project)	The Millennium Mathematics Project (MMP) is a long-term national maths education and outreach initiative, based in Cambridge, but active in programmes across the UK and internationally. <b>MOTIVATE</b> is a video conferencing programme that links mathematicians, physicists and engineers to primary and secondary schools across the UK ( <a href="http://www.motivate.maths.org">www.motivate.maths.org</a> )
UK Senior Mathematical Challenge	These are annual contests run by the UK Mathematics Trust ( <a href="http://www.ukmt.org.uk">www.ukmt.org.uk</a> )
Engineering Education Scheme	It is part of the Royal Academy of Engineering's <i>Best</i> programme ( <a href="http://www.engineering-education.org.uk">www.engineering-education.org.uk</a> )
Olympiad Chemistry and Mathematics tests	<p>The British Olympiads are competitions and related resources for post 16 Biology students studying 'advanced' or vocational awards in the sciences.</p> <p>The International Olympiads are competitions similar in design to the British Olympiads, but with teams from all over the world.</p> <p>See host web sites for more information on Olympiads and other support schemes (i.e. mentoring schemes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biology: Institute of Biology</li> <li>• Physics: Dept. of Physics and Astronomy, Leicester University</li> <li>• Mathematics: United Kingdom Mathematics Trust</li> <li>• Chemistry: Royal Society of Chemistry</li> <li>• Informatics: IT/Computer programming - various host web-sites</li> </ul> <p>Search British Informatics Olympiad</p>
Excellence in Cities/Aim Higher master classes	This is an initiative sponsored by the DfES that is often managed by LEAs. The initiative funds locally run programmes to link local schools and colleges with H.E., for example master classes. For further information, contact your LEA advisor for Gifted and Talented students or your local H.E. Institution
Sutton Trust summer schools	The main objective of the Sutton Trust is to support innovative projects that provide educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds. It supports various projects including university based summer schools ( <a href="http://www.suttontrust.com">www.suttontrust.com</a> )
University access schemes and summer schools	Many universities offer programmes of events for students including open days/conferences/summer schools/school visits/interview training (oxford). Check your H.E. Institution or LEA for local details or the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth

Target Two point Nought	The Bank of England/Times Interest Rate Challenge is national monetary policy competition for schools and colleges (Business Studies/Economics) ( <a href="http://www.bankofengland.co.uk">www.bankofengland.co.uk</a> )
Arkwright scholarships	For Design and Technology (engineering) ( <a href="http://www.arkwright.org.uk">www.arkwright.org.uk</a> )
Sixth Form Term Examination Paper	See awarding bodies web-sites for more information
Salters Summer competition	The Salters' Chemistry Club encourages schools to set up Chemistry Clubs and then to take part in Salters' Festivals of Chemistry ( <a href="http://www.salters.co.uk/institute">www.salters.co.uk/institute</a> )
Nuffield Post16 Analysis Competition Analytical (chemistry) Competition	The competition is run as a part of the government's VAM (Valid Analytical Measurement) programme. The VAM programme has identified certain principles of good analytical practice. ( <a href="http://www.Nuffieldcurriculumcentre.org.uk">www.Nuffieldcurriculumcentre.org.uk</a> )
Royal Institution of Great Britain	It runs an interactive Young Person's Programme and Schools' Programme (events, lectures, quizzes, discussion forum) ( <a href="http://www.rigb.org.uk">www.rigb.org.uk</a> )