

# Switching stories

## Teacher testimonials

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## Contents

Contents	Page
<a href="#">Lisa Ford</a>	<b>4</b>
<a href="#">Charlotte Parkinson</a>	<b>7</b>
<a href="#">Lisa Padmore</a>	<b>9</b>

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# Lisa Ford



## About Lisa

Lisa Ford is a teacher at Notley High School. Here are her thoughts on switching to AQA - her concerns and experience.

### **“We were able to avoid a time-consuming process”**

One of our initial concerns was the time it might take us as a department to get to grips with the demands of the new specification and the time it might take to prepare schemes of work and resources. To start off with, we used department meeting time to look over the specifications and sample papers, even having a go at writing some answers ourselves. This allowed us to discuss the courses and consider the benefits to our students. Having this time together as a department was really useful in making sure everyone felt comfortable and confident with the changes, and from this we divided the workload for the new schemes of work between us. Everyone had a different area to resource then share back with the department, and we used department time to help facilitate this.

When planning our schemes of work, we found the exceptional materials available on the AQA website and secure area hugely helpful, not only in providing us with materials, but also in further improving our confidence – we knew that our switch to AQA would be well supported and resourced, which was incredibly reassuring in what can be an uncertain time. The website and secure area are both really easy to navigate and you can readily find resources to use both in class and as a faculty – something that we had struggled with on our previous board's website. For our subject we also found a range of excellent Key Stage Three resources which have helped support our Key Stage Four curriculum.

Because of the clarity in expectations, we found that we were able to quickly resource the schemes of work and adapt previous materials with ease to be in line with AQA's assessment objectives and exam style questions. This meant that we were able to avoid what could have been an arduous and time-consuming process, and instead focus our efforts on our teaching and our students. Another practice that we found really helpful was to moderate students work across the department, using the example responses available in the secure area of the AQA website. This allowed us to readily

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adapt our teaching if needed to keep our students' responses in line with the assessment criteria. Having now had a cohort through the qualifications we are confident that we made the right decision."

### **"Budget is a huge concern for many"**

Understandably, budget is a huge concern for many – if not all – schools. However, due to the wealth of free resources and the detailed advice provided by AQA, we have been able to resource the English Language and English Literature specifications with very little expense. For example, we were able to resource the English Language GCSE ourselves at no cost, using both [materials from the AQA website](#) and materials of our own creation. Perhaps our biggest concern regarding the cost of switching was the prospect of having to buy several hundred copies of new texts for the Literature GCSE. However, the excellent range of set texts allowed us to make choices with our budget in mind. We chose a Shakespeare and a modern text that we already had copies of, meaning that we had a very minimal expenditure to buy our 19<sup>th</sup> Century text – which, in fact, we could access for free online through [Project Gutenberg](#).

Another concern was the potential cost of attending training for the new specifications. However, we found out about AQA's free local hub school network meetings through their website which have proven to be an invaluable source for resources and support. Run by a trained associate, the hub meetings are a chance to meet with other local teachers and discuss ideas and resources. The discussions at the meetings and the materials provided have been fantastic for department training, moderation, planning and have also provided engaging classroom resources. Most importantly, the meetings are free and are only half a day, local to your school.

### **"Changing can be a daunting prospect"**

We were both surprised and pleased with how easy it was to adapt to the AQA specification. As the assessment objectives and exam questions are clear, we found we were quickly able to work with confidence. The [Further insights](#) series has really supported our transition, not only in clarifying expectations and helping our teaching, but also to share with students too. In addition to this, the sample assessment materials (SAMs) provided have proven useful in shaping our understanding of the specification and how we can best help our students achieve. The *mark scheme engagement* materials and the *standardisation materials* on AQA's secure website have given us confidence in how to apply the mark schemes fairly with our students work, meaning that we feel secure in our knowledge of what our students will achieve.

Whilst changing can be at best a daunting prospect and at worst a stressful one, we felt assured in our delivery of the specification due to the excellent support afforded to us by the [subject experts](#) at AQA. They have been happy to discuss questions with us (at times, at length!), supporting and reassuring us wherever queries have arisen. One thing that we have found particularly helpful is that we have been able to contact the subject team not just by phone, but also by email and even on [Twitter](#) meaning that we can ask for support whenever needed and the team has been prompt in getting back to us.



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## Closing thoughts

By switching to AQA we feel we have become part of a wider network and community of English teachers and have a wealth of engaging and rigorous resources to use in order to help our students achieve. As a department, we feel confident and supported, and most importantly we have faith in AQA to work alongside us in order to deliver the best possible outcomes.”

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# Charlotte Parkinson



## About Charlotte

Charlotte is an English teacher at Rivington & Blackrod School and Sixth Form School. Here's her switching story.

### “Time constraints were a concern”

As a department, it initially seemed daunting to switch exam board with our Year 10 into Year 11 cohort during the end of the summer term – having dedicated a year of teaching and learning time to familiarising ourselves and our students with the specification of our previous exam board. One of our concerns was the time constraints which we believed were inevitable when switching halfway through the GCSE course.

However, as an English department, we found the changeover to be smooth and seamless, allowing us to get straight down to teaching the specification without the worry and burden of unnecessary admin or spending hours poring over the specifications. As a team, we attended the ‘[prepare to teach](#)’ sessions offered by AQA, as well as engaging with the clear and helpful resources. As a team, we were also able to create and adapt our resources in a timely fashion. The training sessions we had attended after switching provided us with practical classroom strategies as well as clear information regarding the expectations and requirements for each question on the respective Language papers.

The final result was that we moved forward with AQA feeling confident in our delivery of the specification, without feeling that our students were in any way disadvantaged as a result of the change. In fact, the wealth of support and ready to use resources offered by AQA meant that we were able to use our time more effectively, positively impacting our students.

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However, we use AQA both at GCSE and across three different A-levels and have found the free hub sessions extremely useful. It's helpful not to use our ever-depleting budget on various training sessions, and means a range of colleagues can attend different sessions throughout the year.

The teaching resources and guidance provided by AQA (such as the [Further Insight](#) series for GCSE Literature) have been useful to help us plan and organise our schemes. There is a large range of materials provided for use on the main AQA website as well as a further range of resources, training materials and past papers on the e-AQA site (the e-AQA materials are password protected so can be useful to save past papers that students won't have accessed).

### **“We spoke to other schools and decided it was right to try”**

At the time of switching we were reassured by the fact that lots of our local schools were already using AQA and spoke positively about their experience. We spoke to other schools that were part of our hub and decided it was the right thing to try. Everything is set up to support schools and provides the guidance and the resources needed to make the specification as straightforward as possible. We spent a bit of time researching the specification, looking at resources available and trialing past papers before contacting the [Support Team](#) to find out what support we could be offered and what would be involved in switching. There is regular communication, resources and support available, which is being updated and improved all the time. The guidance provided has always been straight forward, accessible and user friendly.

### **“The level of data in the post-results analysis has been a huge positive”**

The clarity of information provided about the specifications and the levels of support available helped us easily overcome any concerns we may have had. The transition was much easier and smoother than we could have anticipated, with staff and students adapting with ease. The level of data provided in [Enhanced Results Analysis](#) has been a huge positive for us.

**Tell us [you're interested](#). We'll tell you how to get in touch and where to find our services and support.**



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# Lisa Padmore



## About Lisa

Lisa Padmore is an English teacher at Benton Park School. She switched to AQA after being unhappy with her previous board. Here are her thoughts on the process of switching to AQA.

### **“Free teaching resources like sample A-level medium term plans have been a real time saver for me”**

I switched to AQA from another board several years ago. We were unhappy with the support and training materials provided by our previous board and felt AQA offered a wider variety of support such as face to face meetings and example scripts and answers.

The decision to switch started out as an idea put forward at the end of a long department meeting and evolved from there. Once we'd made the decision to switch it was very straightforward from an admin perspective but took a bit more thought in terms of long term planning. We had a year where we had one KS4 year group with AQA and one with our previous board; we made sure we'd given ourselves time to adapt our schemes of work and adjust our long-term plans to make this process as smooth as possible. Most of our schemes just took a little bit of tweaking and we divided this up among the department as part of our usual review processes. Inevitably there were a few schemes we had to start again with as we made the choice to switch to different texts.

I was pleased to find when moving to a new job that my new school also used AQA and as we moved to the new linear specification there was, once again, a range of [training sessions](#) both face to face and online to guide us in addition to the host of training materials available on the AQA website.

### **“Investing in new literature texts within our budget”**

An initial concern once we'd made the decision to switch were the costs that may be involved. We had to factor in issues such as investing in new literature texts and how we would cover that within our budget.

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## **“We were concerned that switching might be costly”**

We were concerned that switching might be costly, but one of the positive aspects of moving to AQA was the wealth of free resources and support available on the [subject pages](#) when we switched. As we moved forward with AQA, we found the free mark scheme support on the secure logged in area particularly beneficial in terms of further developing our understanding of the specification. As a school, we attended hands on training with the English team at AQA who provided us with a range of resources, example responses covering a range of grades, as well as practical advice regarding how to effectively deliver the specifications to our students.

In addition, all of these resources (plus many more) are available via e-AQA, an online platform packed full of free resources to effectively support teaching and learning. Helpfully, this platform is constantly being updated as new practice papers are released and new resources are available, so there is often something new to offer to students. Moving forward, we have made use of AQA's free hub school networks, during which teachers are given the opportunity to share ideas and resources from other teachers in their local area, supported again by accompanying free resources that translate into practical teaching strategies to take back to the classroom. Overall, the extensive range of free teacher support resources gave us the confidence and freedom to confidently deliver the specification to our students, within the classroom setting.

## **“Initial concerns about risks”**

Despite initial concerns about the potential risk to students' results, we now feel confident that AQA are invested in helping our students achieve the results they deserve. The specialist teams at AQA are easy to contact when needed, and advisors were always keen to find the answers we needed in order to support teaching. Furthermore, by creating resources and support materials were easily accessible, we were further reassured that we would be able to ensure the best possible results for our students.

All in all, the ongoing support, resources and communication from AQA has enabled us to feel confident in our delivery of the specifications, and secure that we have the support of our exam board as we strive to help our students attain the GCSE results they deserve.

## **“One potential barrier was concerns from students and parents”**

One potential barrier to switching that we faced as a school was the concerns from students and parents. We were able to reassure both parents and students by letting them know that this was a positive move we were making in the best interest of the students. It meant that our Language and Literature exams would be with the same exam board, and that having been partnered with AQA for our Literature specification we were confident in the support and resources we would have available to us with Language. It was beneficial that our teaching staff were able to quickly become familiar with the specification as it allowed us to instill confidence in our students and ultimately parents as well. We are now three years down the line with AQA and remain happy that we made the right choice for our students.

**Need help with pitching switching to colleagues and parents? Download our ‘The why and the how of switching’ presentation – which you can edit as you choose.**

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## Contact us

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