



A* A *grade awarded for exceptionally good performance in any subject at *General Certificate of Secondary Education. Previously, the highest grade awarded was an A grade. When the introduction of an A* grade also for *General Certificate of Education *Advanced Levels was proposed in 2002, it became part of the debate about *standards. Those who supported the introduction argued that the additional grade was necessary to reward and acknowledge the achievement of outstanding candidates, while opponents suggested that it represented an inflation of the grading system and was indicative of a general lowering of standards.

A Basis for Choice (ABC) *See* KEY SKILLS.

ability Used in education in the sense of 'potential for performance'. It is unclear, however, how ability might be accurately measured, if not in terms of performance. Nevertheless, it is synonymous neither with 'achievement' nor with 'attainment', and refers rather to what a student is capable of, than to what they have proved themselves able to do. This is best illustrated by the fact that a student may be described as having high ability but performing poorly; or as having low ability but performing well. The idea of ability as a potential is evident in such phrases as 'late developer', commonly used to describe someone whose innate ability does not become evident until late in their school career, or even after they have left formal education.

ability grouping Grouping pupils together in classes to be taught according to their *ability. In the United Kingdom this is not usually the case, as pupils are normally grouped according to age, and within a national framework of *key stages of development. However, *primary schools often use **target grouping** for *literacy and/or *numeracy, which is, in effect, grouping by ability for the purpose of teaching in these *curriculum areas. Similarly, in secondary schooling, pupils may be grouped according to ability within their age group cohort for specific subjects, so that there might be, for example, three Year 9 classes for English: one for high achievers, one for those pupils of average achievement, and one for those expected to do less well.
See also SETS.

Abitur The German *examination equivalent to the *General Certificate of Education *Advanced Level. It is often held up by educators in the United Kingdom as a model to be emulated as it offers the *academic rigour necessary for a *university entrance qualification as well as the breadth required to prepare school-leavers for employment. In this sense it can be cited as an example of how the academic-*vocational divide may be successfully bridged.
See also BACCALAURÉAT.

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academic 1. An adjective used to describe learning and related activities which are largely of a *cognitive nature and involve the acquisition, exploration, or application of knowledge, often of an abstract kind or for its own sake. It is often applied to point up the distinction between this type of activity and the more practical or instrumental types of learning which fall into the category of *vocational. In this context it can be used in a derogatory sense, as in the phrase, 'too academic', meaning that the learning in question is too far removed from the practicalities of life. This understanding of the term emerges also in the phrase 'That's academic', applied to a question raised about a merely hypothetical or fictional issue, about which further discussion would be fruitless.

2. A *teacher or researcher, usually in *higher education. This sector itself is sometimes referred to as Academe.

academic board A committee of staff and managers in a *university or *college which meets regularly for the purpose of regulating and monitoring the academic affairs of the institution. Staff members are usually nominated and elected by their peers, although such a board will normally include some co-opted members.

academic monitoring The process of observing students' academic progress in one or more subject over a period of time. It is used by teachers to compare the performance of a particular student to that of his/her classmates and to identify students who are struggling, excelling, or underachieving. Information for examining students' progress is usually collected in the form of *test marks and *teacher assessment levels or grades. These are often recorded on **tracking sheets**, or **progress reports**, which can then be issued to parents at intervals during the academic year. Usual practice is for these documents to be completed three times annually in order to illustrate a student's level of achievement at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The same documentation can also be used on a whole-school level by the *senior leadership team, in order to assess the success of intervention strategies, and also to monitor the effectiveness of teaching across all subjects. Academic monitoring is useful to pupils because it allows them to become aware of their *examination prospects and any disparity between their current and predicted performance.

I.F.W.

academy 1. A *specialist school or *college, usually providing training in the arts or in a specific profession; for example, a music academy or a military academy. It may also be applied to a secondary school, although usually a private one. The term was used in the naming of the *city academies, secondary schools set up as a trust with private sponsorship and government funding, as part of a 2002 government initiative aimed at improving the standards of performance in English inner-city schools in areas of social deprivation. The word 'academy' itself derives from the garden near Athens where Plato taught his students and from which his school of philosophy took its name. In this sense the term carries connotations of serious scholarship and learning suggestive of high status and academic respectability.

2. A generic term used to describe comprehensive schools in Scotland.

accelerated learning A range of techniques which are claimed to increase the learner's capacity to absorb and retain information by focusing on learning how to learn. Proponents suggest that we use only a small percentage of our potential mental capacity, and that we could increase this by, for example, identifying our preferred learning style and adopting strategies such as the use of memory maps. Training in accelerated learning often draws on the theory of *multiple intelligences.

 **SEE WEB LINKS**

- Summarizes the claims made for accelerated learning and how it can be applied in various sectors of education and training. I.F.W.

access arrangements Adjustments which are made which enable students with particular needs to access *tests and *exams. Such arrangements must not give students an unfair advantage. Students entitled to access arrangements are those who have a *statement of *special educational needs (SEN), who are at school action or school action plus of the SEN Code of Practice, and who receive special educational provision. Students whose access to the tests is significantly impaired by a *learning difficulty or a disability may also qualify. Students who have difficulty concentrating may also be entitled, as are those whose first language is not English or who lack fluency in English. Typical access arrangements include the use of readers, *amanuenses, scribes, and transcripts. Rest breaks can be given. Schools and colleges are required to give evidence of a history of special provision in support of a request for special access arrangements. Guidance for the correct use of access arrangements can be found in the *Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's guidance on access arrangements for pupils with particular needs.

Further Reading: Department for Education and Skills *Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (Revised)* DFES/581/2001 (DFES, 2001). T.B., L.E.

Access course Known in full as an 'Access to Higher Education course', this is a programme of study specifically designed for adults without formal entry qualifications such as *Advanced Levels (A levels) seeking to gain access to *higher education. Since their inception into education provision in the late 1970s, Access courses have been regarded as the 'third route' into higher education, differentiating them from A levels and diplomas. It is, though, worth noting the difference between 'access' and 'Access'. The former refers to any educational courses which provide entry into education, while the latter is specifically designed as a pathway for adults into higher education. Although the development of access courses can be seen to be part of a long history of *adult educational programmes in tertiary education, dating back as far as the original *mechanics institutes of the mid-19th century, more recently they have been shaped by specific governmental education policies which emphasize the role played by education and a highly trained workforce in creating economic health and stability. To this end, *widening participation in higher education has been the focus of policy reports and research, such as the *Dearing Report, the *Kennedy Report, and of the subsequent *Green Paper *The Learning Age* (DfEE, 1998). In this context, Access courses represent one major route towards widening participation in higher education. They are

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subject-based and are taught mainly in *colleges of further education, offering subjects such as sociology, psychology, English, and philosophy. They are internally assessed by *continuous assessment; and academic references from tutors play a key role in securing students' progression to undergraduate study. C.H.

Access Fund A source of financial support for students aged 16 or over in full-time education whose studies involve costs (for example, for specialist equipment) which they are not able to meet; or who face leaving their studies for reasons of financial hardship; or who have additional costs incurred by a disability or childcare responsibilities. The Access Fund is intended to facilitate wider access to further education and higher education. It is financed by central government and is administered through *local authorities for claimants in *schools, and through *universities and *colleges for disbursement to their own eligible students. The Access Fund cannot normally be used simply for the purpose of paying tuition fees.

accessibility plans Since 2003 it has been a requirement that all schools possess an accessibility plan. These must describe how the school intends to improve access for pupils with disabilities to the curriculum, environment, and information (which includes all written information including signage, handouts, and textbooks). Plans must be in writing and adequately resourced. They must be implemented, reviewed, and revised as necessary. Before drafting their plan, schools are required to consult widely. Plans are renewable every three years and must be published annually. T.B., L.E.

Access to Employment (A2e) A pathfinder project which aimed to enable adults, including people with disabilities or learning difficulties, to gain the skills needed to enter employment. The project concentrated on *literacy, language, and *numeracy, as well as the generic skills needed for employment. Managed by the *National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, in 2006 the project produced the *Skills for Working* document that was mainly based on the experiences of the learners involved at the various A2e pathfinder sites. *Skills for Working* is a set of guidelines which offers advice in meeting the needs of individuals in such matters as work experience, various courses and training opportunities, *mentoring, and travel. V.C., K.A.

accountability Educational institutions, in the persons of their managers and governing bodies, are required to account publicly and, in the case of schools, particularly to parents for their performance through such means as *performance indicators and *league tables. This is termed 'accountability'. It is an example of the trend for a vocabulary more usually associated with business and commerce being applied in the context of schools and other educational institutions following measures to create a *market in education since the 1980s.

accreditation 1. The awarding of credit to an individual student for achievement of, or towards, a qualification. *See also* ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR LEARNING.

2. A process by which an organization or institution, such as a college or university, wins approval for one or more of its awards, involving confirmation from a panel including representatives of peer institutions that the award or awards in question meet nationally accepted standards.

See also VALIDATION.

accreditation of prior learning The process or practice of awarding *credits which can be counted towards a qualification, based on the candidate's previous experience, learning, or achievements. This practice has become widely used in the *learning and skills sector since the introduction of *National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), as the nature of these qualifications allows a candidate to be assessed on their current *competence, rather than requiring attendance on a *course or the successful completion of *examinations. Candidates for *accreditation are usually required to present a portfolio of evidence which may include observer or assessor reports, witness statements, previously gained certification, evidence of competence in the workplace, photographs, or recordings. The process of compilation is usually supported by a qualified adviser and the portfolio is assessed by a qualified assessor, both of whom are required to hold the NVQ units appropriate to their role. The process of compiling a portfolio can be time-consuming and, in terms of support and assessment, can prove as costly as the enrolment fee for a course of study. Accreditation of prior learning is also used outside the system of NVQ qualifications; for example, for some candidates applying for a university course in teacher training for further education. In such a case, the assessment of portfolios does not require an NVQ-qualified assessor but is instead subject to the quality assurance system operating within that institution.

achievement The performance or *attainment of a *student or *pupil. It may be measured in a number of ways, such as the successful demonstration of a pre-specified *competence, the award of a pass mark, or the gaining of a satisfactory *grade for work accomplished. A learner's achievement is based on their performance, rather than on their potential or their *ability. A learner with high ability might, under some circumstances, perform less well than a learner with lower ability.

Action for Employment (A4e) Originally formed in 1986, A4e is now an international organization which helps people to return to work as well as providing a *training and recruitment support service for businesses. The organization works closely with other agencies such as **Jobcentre Plus** in supporting and preparing people who wish to re-enter work. Those whom A4e assists include black and non-white British groups, the disabled, and people from disadvantaged areas. The organization also operates *learndirect centres and delivers a variety of *basic skills and *vocational programmes.

 **SEE WEB LINKS**

- Provides the historical rationale for the foundation of the organization.
- Provides details and statistics of the groups and businesses supported, as well as links to specific aspects such as welfare to work, financial inclusion and education, and business support.

V.C., K.A.

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action research A *research methodology in which the researcher investigates practice through cycles of reflection, identification of issues, action, data collection, analysis, and more reflection in order to identify further areas for investigation. The emphasis is on improving practice. Researchers usually investigate their own practice, and may be working alone or collaboratively with one or more co-researchers. Most models of action research encourage collaboration as being optimal at every stage of the cycle. Action research may be narrowly instrumental: simply a method of problem-solving. However, most models emphasize reflection focused on the self of the researcher, the wider context of the research issue, the theoretical background, and the social and political assumptions governing the articulation of the research issue.

There are various kinds of research, all closely related to action research, which use cycles of action, collection of evidence, and reflection on the researcher's own practice. They include reflective practice, action inquiry, action learning, double loop learning, critical action research, and self-study. They differ in the emphasis placed on, for instance, collaboration, the focus on self, or social and political change. These differences in emphasis distinguish different models. All of them unite in having an *epistemological perspective which prioritizes improved practice. Evidence only has to be strong enough to warrant changes in practice in the specific context of the research. Research methods are likely to be qualitative, and are also often creative. 'Small-scale classroom research' and 'practitioner research' are allied to action research but they are not cyclical. Rather, they follow the pattern of identifying a research question, gathering evidence, and using the analysis of the data to formulate conclusions for dissemination.

Further Reading: B. Somekh and S. Noffke *Handbook of Educational Action Research* (Sage, 2008).



SEE WEB LINKS

- Details of the Collaborative Action Research Network.

M.G.

active learning Learning which encourages the pupil or student to engage actively with what is being learned through activities such as *group discussion, role play, or experimentation, rather than passively receiving and memorizing knowledge or instruction from the teacher in order to be able to repeat it accurately, as was the practice in many 19th- and early 20th-century schools. Active learning became the norm in most schools, as the value of being able to reproduce information uncritically and 'parrot fashion' came increasingly under question in the 20th century. However, the facilitation of active learning becomes more difficult the larger the *class size. The implementation of an active approach to learning, therefore, can depend as much on *pupil-teacher ratio as on beliefs about effective approaches to learning.

active vocabulary The range of words which an individual is able to use accurately in their speech (active spoken vocabulary), or their writing (active written vocabulary), or both of these. The active vocabulary does not include words which are only recognized and understood, either by reading or hearing, but not actually used. At most stages of learning of a language, the learner's active vocabulary will be more limited than their comprehension. In other

words, their understanding will outstrip their ability to express themselves. *See also* AGE, READING; PASSIVE VOCABULARY.

activity A task or exercise undertaken by the learner, and usually set by the teacher, which has an intended learning outcome. Such activities range from the fairly passive—for example, listening attentively to the teacher—to the dynamic and active—for example, carrying out an experiment, conducting a survey, or painting a picture. The types of activity the learner is required to undertake will be determined by a number of factors, which include the learner's age, the subject matter being learned, and the level of study. *See also* ACTIVE LEARNING; LESSON.

admissions The process of gaining a place at—being admitted to—a school, college, or university. Schools have been required since 2007 to ensure that their **admissions code** promotes social cohesion. This requirement was introduced as a result of evidence that pupils from less advantaged homes were more likely to fail to gain admission to the most popular schools, since these tend to be located in areas of social advantage. Some local authorities, in an effort to address this issue, have introduced the use of an admission **lottery**, where pupils are allocated places by chance rather than by parental *choice. In larger institutions, such as universities and colleges, it is often the title of the department or section which deals with the administration relating to applications, offers, and admissions. *See also* ADMISSIONS APPEAL; SOCIAL CLASS; UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES ADMISSIONS SERVICE.

admissions appeal If a child does not gain admission to their first *choice of school, their parents are entitled to lodge an appeal against this decision. Such appeals are heard by independent appeal panels whose membership must exclude all members of the *local authority and the *governing bodies of the schools in question. A decision made by the appeals panel is deemed to be final. The number of admissions appeals made in England annually continues to rise.

adult basic skills *See* BASIC SKILLS; BASIC SKILLS AGENCY; MOSER REPORT.

adult education Courses of study offered for learners over the age of compulsory schooling. Sometimes used synonymously with *evening classes, adult education encompasses a very wide range of provision, including prison education, education in the armed forces, *adult literacy classes, and church-based learning groups, as well as *local authority and *Workers' Educational Association provision. It has a long history closely associated with ideals of social reform, self-help, and self-improvement, particularly among *social classes who could not access adequate schooling or higher education. Direct forerunners of adult education were the 'adult and benevolent evening schools', the 'young men's reformation and mental improvement societies', and the *mechanics' institutes of the 19th century. By the 21st century, however, adult education has lost much of its earlier, radical image. Theory related to the education of adults constitutes in itself a field of academic study, sometimes referred to as **androgogy**, to distinguish it from *pedagogy, the theory related to the teaching of children. It is argued, for example, that some key characteristics

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can be associated with adult learners, which must be taken into account if they are to be helped to learn effectively. These include:

- their adult responsibilities and commitments, which will inevitably compete for time with their studies;
- their motivation, which has brought them back to education;
- their need to feel they are getting good value, in terms of learning, from the time and money they have invested;
- their level of anxiety at returning to education, which may be much higher than they are willing to disclose.

The education of adults can also necessitate a reconfiguration of the teacher–pupil paradigm into a more egalitarian, negotiated relationship in which it will usually not be appropriate for the teacher to use the same forms of encouragement and sanctions which they might employ with younger learners. *See also* NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION; RADICAL EDUCATORS.

Further Reading: Roger Fieldhouse and Associates *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (NIACE, 1996).

Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) A specialist inspectorate whose function was the inspection of *adult education provision and *work-based learning for 16–19-year-olds. Created in 2000 and operational from 2001, it had its own chief inspector. In *colleges of further education its specialist remit meant that it shared responsibility for inspections with *Ofsted (then the Office for Standards in Education). On 1 April 2007, following the reorganization of inspectorates embodied in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, ALI was incorporated into the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services, and Skills.

adult literacy It is estimated that 7 million adults in England possess *literacy skills which are below the level of that expected of 11-year-old pupils. The figures for the UK as a whole are unavailable, but are likely to reflect similar levels. To address this problem the *Skills for Life Strategy Unit was set up in 2000, operating at first within the *Department for Education and Skills and later, following departmental reorganization, within the *Department for Innovation, Universities, and Skills. Since the level of adult literacy is particularly low among the prison population, the Unit works closely with the Prison Service, as well as with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, to implement the Skills for Life strategy. This has involved the development of National Standards for Adult Literacy (NSAL), which are set at *entry level and levels 1 and 2 of the *National Qualifications Framework. These standards act as a benchmark against which an adult’s level of literacy skills can be assessed. They cover a range of literacy skills, encompassing not only *reading and writing, but also speaking and listening. In order to ascertain whether an adult is in need of literacy support, the individual is first screened, and may then go on to an initial assessment, which is designed to identify their level of *functional literacy as measured against the NSAL. This process is also used to ascertain the learning needs of adults for whom English is not their first language and who are seeking literacy support for their speaking, listening, reading, or writing skills. The assessment materials used also function to identify underlying problems such as *dyslexia.

Part of the strategy has included the development, begun in 2006, of a series of books, known as **Quick Reads**, designed to engage the interest of adult emergent readers and to encourage them in reading as an enjoyable leisure pursuit. Although simplified, edited versions of popular novels have been in existence for several decades, often aimed specifically at the prison population, the Quick Reads series takes a rather different approach, commissioning well-known celebrities to write original work which aims to build the confidence of adults who are in the process of developing their literacy skills. *See also* BASIC SKILLS; MOSER REPORT.

Advanced Extension Award (AEA) Aimed at the most able 10 per cent of *Advanced Level (A level) students, these awards are designed to encourage a critical and analytical approach to the study of a subject. They require the student to study in depth, and are available in a more restricted range of subjects than the standard A level. By making it possible to identify outstanding students, the AEA was intended to make it unnecessary for *universities to develop their own entrance examinations as a response to the increasing number of applicants with good A level results.



SEE WEB LINKS

- Lists the subjects available for the AEA.

Advanced Higher An advanced qualification made up of internally and externally assessed *units, which was introduced in Scotland in 2000/01 to replace the *Certificate of Sixth Year Studies. This is equivalent to level 7 of the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

S.M.

Advanced Level (A level) The generic term applied to the *General Certificate of Education advanced level *examinations taken by some students in Years 12 and 13 of their schooling, and by others, including adult learners, through other educational institutions, such as *colleges of further education. It is the most usual entrance requirement for *higher education, each A level *grade achieved carrying a number of 'points', which, added, must achieve the total specified for entry. Until 2000 the candidate would normally choose two or three subjects to study from a wide range of options. Following the reforms of *Curriculum 2000, the A level curriculum is now divided into two stages. During the first year, candidates are encouraged to choose four or five subjects to study at *Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS level), and to narrow their choice down to two or three in their second year, following the *assessment of their achievement at AS level. The final assessment is now known as **A2**, to distinguish it from the AS stage of the *curriculum. The intention of this structural reform was to broaden the post-16 curriculum. Both students and teachers have reported that the increased number of assessments and examinations, as well as the additional subjects for study, are proving onerous.

Schools and students receive the results of the A level examinations in August, an annual event widely covered by the national press. For 21 consecutive years the results have shown an improvement in performance overall, with more students achieving top grades each year. Perhaps inevitably, this has led to accusations by some of falling standards, and the suggestion that perhaps the

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A level examinations themselves are becoming easier, rather than students' performance improving year by year. Others argue, however, that such accusations at that juncture each year are ill-judged and do not give sufficient credit to successful students for their hard work and achievement. The debate over this issue of performance and standards remains unresolved. *See also* UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES ADMISSIONS SERVICE.



- Current information about A level choices.

advanced practitioner (AP) A title awarded to outstanding teachers in *colleges of further education in acknowledgement of their skills at teaching and supporting learning. APs are usually expected to take on the role of *mentor to newly appointed teachers or those with professional development needs, and to contribute generally to the professional development of colleagues within their institution. In this sense, the role may be seen as roughly equivalent to that of *excellent teacher in the schools sector. Unlike teachers with an *advanced skills teacher role in schools, the AP is not required to contribute to *local authority led professional development, since colleges of education fall outside local authority remit.

advanced skills teacher (AST) A teacher who has been recognized through external *assessment as having excellent classroom practice. The teacher must pass a national assessment and subsequently be appointed to an AST role. This scheme was introduced to reward the very best teachers who wish to remain in the classroom rather than being promoted up the management scale or taking on extra responsibilities for additional payment. ASTs should have 80 per cent of their timetable given over to supporting other teachers within their own or other schools; to helping colleagues to develop their skills; and to sharing excellent practice, approaches, and ideas.

They receive additional payment on a separate pay scale, and increased non-contact time in order to carry out their AST duties. These duties often involve supporting staff in other local schools, but can also include activities such as:

- producing high-quality teaching materials for use in their own and other schools;
- teaching 'model' lessons with staff observing;
- observing lessons and advising other teachers on good classroom practice and *lesson planning;
- supporting and *mentoring teachers who are experiencing difficulties;
- participating in the induction and mentoring of *newly qualified teachers;
- leading professional research groups or working parties;
- supporting professional development through performance management and quality assurance systems.

I.F.W.

Advanced Subsidiary Level The first stage of the *Advanced Level (A level) curriculum, introduced in 2000, following a recommendation in the *Dearing Review (1996) that the existing *Advanced Supplementary Level (AS level), which covered about half a full A level syllabus and was assessed against the same criteria, should be retitled Advanced Subsidiary Level, and should be assessed at a lower level which reflected the shorter length of study. Candidates