

Glenys Stacey
Chief Regulator



6 September 2013

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
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Dear

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glenys Stacey".

GCSE AND A LEVEL REFORM

I am writing to set out Ofqual's plans for the reform of GCSEs and A levels in England, in the light of the consultations over the summer on GCSEs and the work the exam boards have been doing over the last few months to review the curriculum content for A levels.

As set out in my letter to you of 21 March, earlier this year we asked the exam boards to review whether the current subject content of the most popular A levels supports progression to higher education, and they appointed Professor Mark E Smith as independent chair. We are today publishing Professor Smith's report.

The report concludes that the content is fit for purpose in two subjects, and can be made so in most others, but mathematics and further mathematics require more fundamental work. We therefore intend to set in hand a reform programme with the aim that new A levels in these subjects¹ are ready for first teaching from September 2015. These A levels will be linear, with more synoptic assessment, reflecting the agreed changes to the subject content and assessment objectives. Exam boards may also wish to develop new 'decoupled' AS qualifications alongside these A levels.

To enable this to happen, you have agreed to host a consultation this autumn on the proposed subject content changes, drawing on the advice from the exam boards. We will consult in parallel on the regulatory arrangements, in particular for non-exam assessment.

The Russell Group is now establishing the A Level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB) to consider subject content in the 'facilitating' subjects and to play a lead role in an annual post-A level review. ALCAB will advise over the next year on the subject content for new A level mathematics and languages, which we will aim to have in

¹ English Language and Literature, the sciences, history, geography, psychology, art and design, sociology, business studies, economics and computing.



place for first teaching in 2016. Officials will discuss the arrangements for developing subject content in other subjects.

The GCSE reform programme is more fundamental than that for A levels. The evidence is that there are problems with current GCSEs. We have made some short-term changes, but new GCSEs are necessary to address the concerns effectively. Your plans for changes to secondary accountability – which I understand you are planning to publish soon – will need to be taken into account in the design.

DfE and Ofqual launched parallel consultations in June on the content and regulatory requirements for the new GCSEs. Ofqual's consultation has just finished and we are considering the responses now. We will say more in the coming weeks about our decisions following the consultation.

Already, though, it is clear that the amount of work needed on GCSEs, including the development of strengthened regulatory arrangements, means we cannot be confident that new, high quality GCSEs in all subjects could be ready in good time for first teaching from 2015. We have therefore decided that we should focus the GCSE reform programme initially on English Language, English Literature and mathematics, which are the subjects where there are the biggest concerns. With the recent changes we have made to strengthen science, history and geography, reform in those subjects is less pressing.

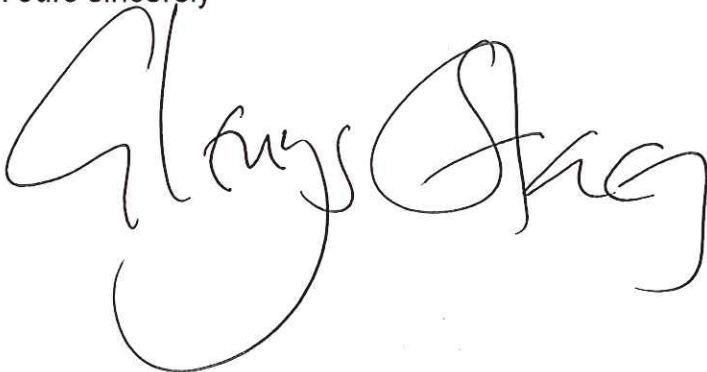
We therefore aim to have new English Language and Literature and mathematics GCSEs accredited and ready to go into schools and colleges during the autumn term of 2014 so that they will be ready for first teaching in September 2015. We will keep this timetable under review.

We will aim for GCSEs in the other subjects on which you have consulted, including languages, to be developed for first teaching in 2016. We are considering and will advise you on which other subjects should be available at GCSE in future, and the arrangements for developing the curriculum content in those subjects. Where possible, we will aim for these subjects also to be ready for first teaching in 2016.

This reform programme will be challenging for all those involved, but I am confident – as are the exam boards – that the end result will be good qualifications which will be more worthwhile, better assessed, and more resilient.

I am copying this letter to Graham Stuart MP, Ministers in Wales and Northern Ireland, the chief executives of the four exam boards offering A levels in England, and to Professor Mark Smith.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicky Morgan', written in a cursive style.