



**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
Secretary of State

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*514* September 2013

*Des Stacey,*

Thank you for your letter of 6th September concerning the reform of A Levels and GCSEs in England.

I am pleased to learn that you are publishing the excellent work carried out by Professor Mark Smith and the A level Awarding organisations over the summer. This gives us a firm foundation on which to build our A Level reforms and I welcome Ofqual's commitment to produce new A Levels in September 2015. I agree with delaying changes to mathematics and Further Mathematics given their fundamental importance and the need to learn from Professor Hyland's 16-18 project at Cambridge University.

On GCSEs, we both agree that existing GCSEs are inadequate and that reformed qualifications should be introduced at the earliest opportunity. We must replace the modular GCSE treadmill with exams that encourage the skills universities and employers want, such as essay writing and mathematical problem-solving. That is why I wanted new GCSEs in core academic subjects to be in place for teaching from 2015. However, I accept that much more rigorous regulatory demands should be put in place and that Ofqual needs more time to develop them.

You have provided expert advice on these requirements and we have agreed that the development of reformed GCSEs should be re-phased, with English and Mathematics GCSEs brought in for first teaching from 2015 and other subjects introduced in 2016. English and mathematics provide the foundation for students' progression to further study and employment and it is right to prioritise the availability of world class qualifications in those subjects. The re-phasing will allow schools to focus on preparing for teaching of new English and mathematics examinations and provide them with more preparation time for GCSEs in other subjects. As always, we will continue to keep schools' readiness to teach new qualifications under review.

Our programme of examination reform, alongside changes to the National Curriculum and accountability system, will ensure that all students are undertaking fulfilling and demanding courses of study. These are ambitious reforms and they place additional demands on your GCSE and A Level programmes. You have proposed and been granted increased resource to reflect that. I would be grateful if you could agree with my officials arrangements for reporting on progress with the reform programme so that I can have full confidence that development of reformed GCSEs and A Levels is on track, and be alerted early to any issues.

Ofqual's independent regulatory oversight plays a vital part in ensuring that students are provided with the high quality examinations they deserve. I am again grateful for your expert advice and your continuing role in safeguarding qualification standards.

I am copying this letter to Graham Stuart MP, as chair of the Education Select Committee and to Ministers in Wales and Northern Ireland.

V  
K.S.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a vertical line followed by a horizontal line that curves downwards to the right.

MICHAEL GOVE