

Glenys Stacey
Chief Regulator



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Dear Julia

Assessment of practical work in A level sciences

Thank you for your letter of 19 March which followed up our discussion at the meeting on 6 March.

As I emphasised when we met, we recognise the critical importance of practical skills in A level science qualifications. These skills need to be a central and integral requirement of science study. But, as teachers tell us, the current assessments do not work well – our concerns are about validity, not just malpractice and differentiation - and they lead to narrow teaching. Whatever assessment arrangements we end up with, we want them to support high quality, innovative teaching of practical skills and to be valid assessments in which people can have confidence.

In addition, and as we discussed at the meeting, we are clear that the examination papers must include the assessment of the theoretical and conceptual understanding of experimental methods, which could include the analysis of data.

I tabled copies of your letter at our Board meeting last week so that they were aware of and understood your concerns fully when they considered the issue. We will announce our final decision in the coming weeks and I will of course let you know once we are ready to do that.

I think that we agree that there are no easy ways of getting round the problems with the current system around validity, comparability and efficiency, but in considering how the new arrangements could be implemented we will reflect on the suggestions you make.

More generally, it is clearly the case that assessments alone, whatever the details of their design and how they are reported, cannot secure good teaching of practical skills. We would therefore welcome your input to the wider debate that we believe is needed about how the education system can make sure that the scientists of the future develop the skills that they will need.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Glenys Stacey", written over a horizontal line.

Glenys Stacey

