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15 January 2014

Dear Ms Mercer,

**A level science practicals trials: Feedback from participants' event: London, 16 December 2014**

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to give feedback following the event to discuss the progress of the trial of reforms to assessment in practical work in the sciences at A-level. The SCORE committee has made the following observations, and would be grateful if they could be discussed at the forthcoming Ofqual Board meeting:

1. There is a need to provide better advice on consistent record keeping so that teachers maintain the correct data. Some teachers involved in the trial were simply logging the practical experiment carried out and the names of students present. Others were making individual observations to assess mastery at the student level. These two approaches represent very different assessment systems. There needs to be clear guidance as to which system should be used. Also, there should be advice on how to deal with students who are absent due to illness or for some other reason.
2. SCORE is concerned by the apparent lack of a robust quality assurance framework to coincide with the introduction of these reforms. Without this, it will be impossible to establish trust that the new grade is being applied with rigour and consistency.
3. We do not think that the proposals for one monitoring visit every 3 years in the initial stages is sufficient, given the level of uncertainty displayed from the pilot schools, despite the extensive briefing they received. We have a significant concern that teachers might set up unsatisfactory procedures but will not discover the fact until it is too late. SCORE is also concerned that the standards of monitoring may be compromised if monitors are not subject specialists in the subject(s) they are responsible for monitoring.
4. From the evidence presented at the feedback sessions, teachers were interpreting the function of the student laboratory book in quite different ways. Given that the motivation for the lab records came from higher education institutions, there is a clear need for consistency here; the books should represent a contemporaneous record of the experiments undertaken. Examples of what is required would be helpful.
5. The Common Practical Assessment Criteria appear to be open to wide interpretation in practice, by both students and teachers, particularly Nos. 2 and 5. Teachers should receive the necessary professional development to be able to interpret the CPAC fully and properly.

6. It would be helpful if awarding bodies and Ofqual published information on the facilities, equipment and consumables that will be required to meet the demand for practical work. In some cases, such information will be essential to ensure adequate funding for these activities is allocated.
7. Teachers involved in the trial understood that the practical endorsement was important for admission to university courses, although the admissions officer present did not give the impression that would necessarily be the case. Ofqual should therefore:
  - a. Emphasize to universities that practical work is an essential part of the A-levels and that the A-levels are not complete without it
  - b. Publish the measures Ofqual and awarding bodies will take to prevent malpractice
  - c. Clarify certain technical issues such as whether a student re-sitting written examinations can carry forward their practical grade.

SCORE would like to offer any assistance it can give to ensure the new assessment system gives students a rich, varied and high quality experience of practical work in the sciences at A-level. We would be keen to meet representatives from Ofqual and the awarding bodies to discuss what form this assistance can take.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Julia Buckingham", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Professor Julia Buckingham  
SCORE Chair