

The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

10 December 2014

Dear Mrs Morgan

A-level reform

I write as Chair of SCORE, a partnership between the Association for Science Education, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Society, the Royal Society of Chemistry, and the Society of Biology, which aims to bring a common view and a strategic approach to strengthening education in the sciences of biology, chemistry and physics at 5-19.

Following the session of the House of Commons Education Select Committee on 3 December, at which you said that you had not been asked to delay A-levels in the sciences, I would like to clarify the SCORE position on the timing of the new A-levels. We feel strongly that their introduction should be delayed. We have expressed concern about the target dates for reform in the sciences in letters to your predecessor and Ofqual and also in consultation responses.

In September 2012, SCORE warned it was not possible to set up the structures for A-level design within the timescale favoured by the Department for Education, and that the reform itself should be delayed by at least a year, and ideally longer, to allow research and piloting of proposals. These concerns were repeated in October 2013 and in January 2014.

SCORE partners strongly recommend that the introduction of new science A-levels be postponed. This would allow:

- the appropriate development of reform to practical work in the curriculum, including its assessment and the reporting of attainment.
- improved coherence between AS and A-level courses in mathematics and those in the sciences.
- smoother transition and improved progression between the proposed GCSE courses in the sciences and AS/A-level courses. Basing A-levels on finalised GCSE criteria would ensure coherence. As it currently stands, in 2016-2017, students taking new A-levels will have taken old GCSEs.

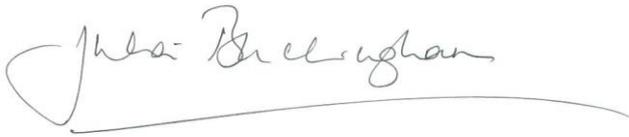
A postponement would allow further research into those aspects of the reform that continue to be of serious concern in order to provide robust, evidence-based advice. It would also give more time for the learned societies' subject committees to contribute to the reforms. Concerns about the process

of reform to A-levels in the sciences have led SCORE partners the Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry and Society of Biology to set up their own curriculum committees to advise on qualification content and assessment and it is very much hoped they will be able to play a part in future curriculum reform.

The learned societies, and SCORE as a whole, are ideally placed to offer the assistance needed to ensure that A-levels in the sciences are as good as they can be. However, our input will have considerably more impact if more time is allowed, as is now the case for mathematics.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julia Buckingham". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a long, thin horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.

Professor Julia Buckingham
SCORE Chair

cc Graham Stuart MP
Glenys Stacey