

Glenys Stacey
Chief Regulator



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Dear Julia

It was really good to meet you last month and share views on science practicals amongst other things. As you know, our second consultation on GCSE science practicals has now closed and I would like to take the opportunity to thank you and your colleagues for your continued engagement.

Let me say straightaway that I appreciate (from your letter) your concern about the length of the consultation period. I know it was a shorter period than you would have ideally liked, but to put it in context, we have been talking with teachers, subject associations and others about the issues for some time and, of course, this was not the first time we had consulted on them.

Overall, the responses that we received on our second consultation were very supportive of the approach we have proposed. Just under two thirds agreed or strongly agreed that the approach we have proposed would provide the best balance between our different aims. Equally importantly, just over two thirds did not believe there was a better option for achieving those aims than that which we proposed. We have considered carefully all of the responses that we received and reached a decision on the arrangements for GCSE science practicals.

We have decided to adopt the bulk of the proposals described in our consultation, although we will conduct further work on some issues. We will review the weightings for mathematical skills in each of the sciences, as respondents put a good case to us for the weightings to be different in each of the three sciences. The consultation responses strongly supported the provision of lists of apparatus and techniques, as they will provide important information about what must be taught. We will liaise with the DfE to agree amendments to the lists of apparatus and techniques, to best meet the curriculum intentions, and as you know I very much welcome your offer of SCORE's support. You are concerned that the requirements may result in schools needing to acquire additional resources, which would have associated costs, a concern expressed by others responding to our consultation. This is, of course, a matter for DfE but it does illustrate the point that some issues, such as schools funding and curriculum compliance, extend beyond the remit of Ofqual and require a systemic approach.

Your response also reflected a natural desire to understand, in more detail, how science practical activities and reporting would be monitored. Our consultation did acknowledge that there are implementation questions to consider subsequently with schools and exam boards. There are parallels here with our work to develop

A Level science practicals; following the conclusion of our consultation process, exam boards are now working very closely with you and teachers to develop the necessary processes and procedures. I am keen to see a similarly collaborative approach to the development of GCSE arrangements and would welcome SCORE's continued engagement. We had a constructive meeting with SCORE and exam boards just last week – thank you.

One area that attracted much comment in consultation responses was the requirement for students to keep a record of their practical work, to be made available to their exam board on request. Our consultation asked for suggestions as to what this record might look like. Lab books were most frequently suggested, but there was a wide range of other views as well, with the need for simplicity a key theme. The student record is to aid learning, and we share your view that schools and teachers should be able to determine what type of record suits their teaching style and students best. Any advice and existing materials and guidance that you have would be very useful to us here. That said, even if all records were in a similar format, we do not believe that they can usefully be marked, for summative assessment purposes. As we have discussed together, any attempt to do so would have adverse effects, incentivizing teachers and students to focus on record production at a cost to actual practical experience. And respondents to our consultation have confirmed that some practical skills, such as dissection, are impossible to record in a sufficiently assessable way.

We are also alive to the concerns of some, that our proposals would not ensure that practical science would be taught in all schools. Four out of five respondents agreed that students would be given appropriate opportunities to complete a range of practical work if exam questions reward those who can draw on their practical experiences, and we welcome that endorsement, but still think further checks and balances are necessary. At our Board meeting on Friday, we agreed that each school will be required to confirm that they have enabled their students to do the full range of practical work, and that each student will be required to keep a record of their work. This reflects the view of most respondents that such an approach would incentivize teachers and highlight to school leaders and senior management teams the importance of the practical requirements, ensuring the necessary budget and time.

In summary then, consultation responses show strong support for our approach, particularly from the classroom. Building on our work on A level science practicals, I hope that with exam boards we can again work collaboratively with you to develop GCSE arrangements. I look forward to meeting you again soon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Glenys Stacey', written in a cursive style.

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