

Ms Isabel Nisbet
Chief Executive, Ofqual
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

11 June 2010

Dear Isabel,

GCSE science specifications 2011

I am writing to you regarding the proposed GCSE science specifications for 2011. As you are aware, SCORE partners have in particular expressed concerns about the assessment materials used by the 2006 suite of examinations.

SCORE partners were approached and asked to play an active role in the development process of these new specifications, both during the drafting of the qualification criteria and the drafting of specifications. However, the GCSEs in science were the first major suite of GCSE qualifications to be developed with the support of the new regulator and curriculum agency. This has unfortunately meant that the development of these important qualifications has been hampered by a poor management process, with unclear responsibilities and timelines. Due to this, at times, the involvement of the professional bodies and subject associations has therefore been limited.

During May 2010, SCORE partners have been reviewing the draft specifications and sample assessment materials submitted to Ofqual. SCORE has three areas of concern regarding the proposed specifications for 2011 science GCSE examinations:

- The limitations of the accredited criteria
- The way the specifications and sample assessments interpret the accredited criteria
- The accuracy of the science in the specifications and sample assessment materials.

Each of these is dealt with in the attached briefing paper. Of particular concern to SCORE partners are:

- The way mathematical skills in science are dealt with in sample assessments
- The poor assessment of aspects of the criteria relating to How Science Works
- Inconsistencies across specifications in the language used to describe measurement.

In summary, SCORE is not convinced that the sample assessments in the proposed 2011 suites of GCSE science specifications demonstrate a significant improvement on the 2006 suite. This is primarily due to the way the criteria are being interpreted by the awarding organisations. We also note that the specifications do not appear to deliver the aims of the criteria.

SCORE proposes that the introduction of the new specifications be reviewed, with Ofqual ensuring that the assessments for students entering all GCSE science courses in 2011 are fair, robust and rigorous. SCORE would like to discuss with Ofqual whether the awarding organisations can produce suitable assessments under the existing criteria, or whether a further revision to the criteria is required. SCORE partners want to support the awarding organisations in the development of specifications, but this must be in an effective manner, and the current process does not facilitate this.

SCORE partners would be delighted to work with Ofqual to review the process for developing new GCSE criteria, to ensure that new criteria are fit for purpose and that the process facilitates the involvement of the full range of stakeholders.

In addition, SCORE partners are surprised that awarding organisations are permitted by the regulator to advertise specifications that have not yet been accredited, and that may yet not be accredited in their current form. We feel that this is inappropriate behaviour on the part of the awarding organisations.

SCORE has written to the Secretary of State to outline the partners' concerns.

We would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss and hopefully resolve these issues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Hutchings', written in a cursive style.

Professor Graham Hutchings FRS

Chair of SCORE