

Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Children
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

10 June 2010

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: GCSE science specifications

As you know, the GCSE science specifications are currently being redeveloped. We believe the process and outcomes are flawed and that there is a strong case to delay their introduction.

SCORE is a partnership between the ASE, Institute of Physics, Royal Society of Chemistry, Royal Society, Science Council and Society of Biology. The SCORE partners believe that the suite of GCSE science qualifications is an important suite of specifications which need to be rigorous, robust and have a positive impact on teaching and learning.

The partners in SCORE were approached and asked to play an active role in the specification development process, 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 both the new regulator and curriculum development 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 the regulator, Ofqual. In particular, we have considered how the awarding organisations have addressed concerns raised by SCORE about the 2008 assessments. Whilst there is evidence of some improvement in some specifications and assessments, SCORE partners do not believe that these specifications and assessments address previous issues and furthermore, that they do not meet the aims and content of the criteria. Of particular concern 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.

It has also surprised the SCORE partners that the regulatory arrangements allow awarding organisations to market and promote as yet unaccredited qualifications.

SCORE has written to Ofqual to describe the partners' concerns in detail.

We believe that you should actively encourage Ofqual to delay the introduction of the revised GCSEs in science in order to ensure young people have access to high quality GCSEs. The SCORE partners would like to engage with your officials and the regulator in order to address the issues surrounding the development process and to establish whether our concerns can be addressed without a further revision of the criteria.

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

Cc Isabel Nisbet (Ofqual)