

Consultation on GCSE Reform 14-19 Team
Ofqual, Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry, CV5 6UB

4 November 2011

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Re: Consultation on GCSE Reform 14-19

SCORE is a collaboration of five organisations¹ working together to influence science education policy at 5-19. We are writing to express our support for the removal of modular GCSE examinations and re-sits, and to highlight the issues that need to be considered in implementing these changes.

Linear examinations will have a number of positive effects on teaching and learning in schools. They will free up more of the school year for teaching and enrichment rather than compelling teachers to fill too much of it with exam preparation, they will reduce the pressure of assessment within schools, and they will reduce the disjointed nature of current curricula, in which topics are taught in isolation without scope to appreciate the interconnectedness of ideas within and between the sciences. Together, these effects will allow teachers to develop more coherent, structured and complete teaching schemes that help their students develop a fuller understanding of topics before they sit an examination.

There remains a question about the role and structure of the GCSE in Science for students who are going to go on to take Additional or Additional Applied Science. In a sense, Science is a large module that gets taught before the second certificate (often in one year). Therefore it will retain some of the drawbacks of modules – a forced lack of coherence and unhelpful sequencing. We suggest that, as part of the de-modularisation of GCSEs, the purposes and structures of the different certificates and combinations in the sciences are re-examined at the next review.

It is a minor point, but there is also a possibility that students who take Science in Year 10 will take a modular examination for Science and a linear exam for Additional or Additional Applied Science.

Finally, while we support a move to linear, the possibility of standards being affected must be considered. Once students are sitting examinations that contain questions covering a whole GCSE course that stretches back two years, they are likely to get fewer questions

¹ Association for Science Education, Institute of Physics, Royal Society, Royal Society of Chemistry and Society of Biology.

right than they would have done had they taken the same questions, in batches in modular examinations throughout the two years. Therefore, there is a choice between keeping the grade boundaries the same (in which case fewer students will get a given grade) or lowering the grade boundaries so that similar numbers pass each grade as at present. Ofqual will need to make clear whether it expects the grade boundaries or the number of students getting a grade to remain the same across the changeover.

Yours sincerely,

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

Professor Graham Hutchings FRS
SCORE Chair