



Qualification support material and services

A SCORE response to Ofqual Call for Evidence

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1. SCORE is a partnership of organisations, which aims to improve science education in UK schools and colleges by supporting the development and implementation of effective education policy. The partnership is currently chaired by Professor Graham Hutchings FRS and comprises the Association for Science Education, Institute of Physics, Royal Society, Royal Society of Chemistry and Society of Biology.
2. Please note that SCORE is unable to provide a detailed response in the time allocated. We welcome the move towards developing an overview of the quality of materials to support the teaching of mathematics. However, the timescale of a 2 week consultation prevents us from producing a fully-informed response which addresses the issues we wish to raise.
3. SCORE is very concerned about the management of conflicts of interest between awarding functions and any other activities Awarding Organisations (AO) and their related companies undertake. Good specifications should support effective teaching, learning and assessment, without being influenced or constrained by commercial interests and/or connected activities.
4. Specifically the relationship between AOs and publishers must be broken and specification/assessment development undertaken by AOs should not be explicitly linked to commercial publications. This relationship could mean that teachers feel obliged to use 'preferred' published resources even if they are unsuitable for developing a depth of understanding of a subject. There are also issues with Chief Examiners writing text books; as well as raising major concerns about there being a conflict of interest in terms of the Chief Examiners' role, it is also likely to provide a perception amongst teachers that these books may contain 'insider information'. This is potentially damaging to the teaching and learning of the sciences and indirectly encourages teaching to the test.
5. Furthermore this link between specification development and the production of textbooks can lead to unresponsiveness by AOs to adapt their proposed specifications. This was the case in developing the new 2011 GCSE science specifications where some AOs were reluctant to make changes to the specifications as the accompanying textbooks were already approved for print.
6. There are also financial implications to schools. AO endorsement of text books means that textbooks are very tightly matched to specific specifications and their associated examinations. Schools usually feel it is necessary to replace entire sets of text books if they changed specifications. This may lead to schools being reluctant to change specifications for financial reasons.
7. Ofqual should enact the following restrictions on AOs to break the link between publishers and Awarding Organisations. AOs must not:
  - talk in detail to publishers until after specifications have been accredited – the date for introduction/first teaching would need to be extended by 1 year; ideally there should be no direct contact between AOs and publishers
  - endorse particular text books;
  - be owned by publishers where there is clear evidence of this having too much influence on qualifications development and the outcome of examinations;

- allow its current examiners to contribute to textbooks that are explicitly linked to the specification they are involved with.
8. Please note that the restriction in paragraph 7 must not preclude the development of innovative 'B' specifications such as Salters Chemistry, Advancing Physics and Salters Nuffield Biology, where the curriculum content and approach is developed in collaboration with external organisations (for example the University of York and the Nuffield Foundation ). In these cases, the materials produced to accompany the specifications are developed by those external organisations, which have no involvement in the awarding of the qualifications themselves. Superficially, it may appear that the materials that support innovative specifications fall into the same category as branded A-specification text books. However, they do not. And it is important that any regulations do not prevent the essential and intrinsic links between innovative courses and the associated support materials.