



**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP**  
Secretary of State

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21 December 2011

Dear Glenys,

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2011 and the details of the progress of your inquiries into this summer's errors in exam papers and into the recent allegations of impropriety in the qualifications system in the *Daily Telegraph*.

I welcome your thorough report into this summer's exam errors, which follows up your interim regulatory action earlier in the year. While the effects upon exam candidates were minimised on this occasion, I am quite clear that the situation in the summer was an unacceptable one, and we cannot afford to be complacent. I am happy to support you in using your regulatory powers to secure the management improvements necessary to minimise the risk of errors in forthcoming exam sessions.

In respect of the *Daily Telegraph* allegations your priority has, rightly, been to focus on the initial evidence and the immediate impact of the activity highlighted by the newspaper. I am pleased to see that action is to be taken where there is a risk that the integrity of specific exams has been compromised. I recognise that there is more work to be done before you fully establish the full details of events, how widespread the issues are, and the implications of these for how you regulate. This will be vital if we are to repair the damage done to the reputation of our exams.

I am aware that, in some cases, it has been argued that actions were within the letter of the existing rules for exams. Nonetheless, I am clear, and the public reaction proves, that they have overstepped the mark on what is felt to be an acceptable level of advance information. This is not only an issue of whether the comparability of different awarding organisations' GCSEs and A levels is being maintained. Providing



teachers and students with too much certainty over which elements of the curriculum will be tested, or which questions will be asked, only serves to narrow the curriculum, lower standards and promote teaching to the test.

I was therefore pleased to see that you will be reviewing what role seminars should play in our qualification system in the future. In addition it will be important to look at the exam rules in the short term to ensure they are consistently applied and properly limit the information that can be given out. In the longer term, as we redevelop requirements for A levels and GCSEs, I shall seek to ensure that there is sufficient 'unpredictability' and rigour in those specifications to underpin public confidence that the exams are true tests of ability across a suitably broad and challenging syllabus.

However, while I have an open mind, I do not rule out that a larger scale reform might be necessary. I shall be seeking to understand whether there are fundamental issues with the market in GCSE and A levels which act against the effectiveness of rules and regulation and might therefore require a different approach. This is something I would like to consider carefully with you once you have completed your investigations.

It is important for candidates that we act as swiftly as possible, and this interim report is an important step. I look forward to receiving further information in the new year and working with you to ensure that we have the best possible policy and regulatory framework to secure exams which do real justice to the efforts of those taking them.

I am copying this reply to Leighton Andrews and John O'Dowd.

Y-s.



MICHAEL GOVE