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Ms Glenys Stacey
Chief Executive
Ofqual
Spring Place
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17 January 2014

Dear Ms Stacey

Ofqual consultation on practical experiments contributing to overall marks

We are writing in relation to the proposal set out in Ofqual's current consultation on New A Level Regulatory Requirements.

The Council for Science and Technology (CST) is the Prime Minister's strategic advisory body on science and technology issues that cut across the responsibilities of individual government departments.

Please regard this letter as CST's response to the proposition set out in Question 5 in the consultation, with which we strongly disagree: "To what extent do you agree that the results of practical skills assessments in biology, chemistry and physics should be reported separately on the certificate and not count towards the final grade?"

We attach our [letter to the Secretary of State for Education dated 31 July 2013](#), in which we focus on the importance of practical skills in science and the critical role that assessment plays in driving high quality practical work. We expressed our view there that A levels are not adequately preparing young people for the practical demands of undergraduate science courses at university or in scientific jobs.

We were very concerned to see that, under your proposal, practical skills will not contribute to a candidate's overall grade in A level physics, chemistry and biology.

We understand that this is to address the current malpractice whereby teachers tend to give their students over-inflated marks for the practical component of these A levels. We understand that the proposal is to show a separate, teacher-assessed grade for practical skills, alongside the 'main' grade. Universities handle a large number of applications, and will find the complexity of a two-grade system difficult.

To simplify matters they are likely to concentrate on the main grade and overlook the practical grade. In any case, this grade will be of little use unless teachers' malpractice is addressed by exam boards.

There is a risk that the proposed arrangements will lead to a further downgrading of practical skills, as schools and colleges conclude that theory is all that matters to get a good grade. We urge Ofqual to reconsider this proposal and to require exam boards to address the malpractice in teachers' practical assessments, so that they can be reliably included in a single overall grade.

We are copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Vince Cable, Michael Gove, David Willetts and Sir Jeremy Heywood.

Yours sincerely



Sir Mark Walport
Co-Chair



Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell
Co-Chair