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The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
London, SW1A 0AA

4 February 2014

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Reform of geography A level

Thank you for asking me to reconvene and oversee the independent awarding organisations' (AOs) A level review panels to consider the findings of the consultation on proposed A level subject criteria for first teaching in September 2015.

The review panels are meeting this week to discuss the consultation findings. I will present my final recommendations to you for your consideration at the end of March, following the conclusion of the panel meetings. My recommendations will set out the A level subjects that require no change or further change to content but can still be introduced for first teaching in September 2015, and the subjects that require further significant content change and cannot be reformed in time for first teaching in September 2015. I wanted to write to you at the earliest opportunity, however, to confirm my recommendation for geography A level.

The AOs and I have reviewed and discussed the consultation evidence as part of our preparation for the panel meetings. We agree that the consultation responses for geography, which included responses from the Royal Geographical Society and the Geographical Association, raised a number of fundamental issues about the proposed content that means further significant work is required before it can be considered fit for purpose. Stakeholders main concerns were that the revised content did not include enough physical geography; the content was outdated; and the level of challenge in the A level was not high enough, especially in the light of the proposed new GCSE content. The weight and quality of evidence meant I feel these issues are real.

Due to the fundamental nature of the further work required, and because AOs have already confirmed they will not be in a position to make the changes in time for first teaching in September 2015, I strongly recommend delaying the reform of geography A level until September 2016.

Best wishes,



Professor Mark E. Smith
Vice-Chancellor
Lancaster University