

6 February 2013

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
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Office of Qualifications  
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Dear Secretary of State

Thank you for your letter of today setting out your principles for reform of Key Stage 4 qualifications in England.

GCSEs are important and valued qualifications. We have been taking action to strengthen them and we are certain that they can be improved further. You have expressed confidence that we can regulate a market so that standards are secured and you have decided not to make changes to the market. We welcome that. It will allow us to focus on the key job of strengthening and reforming GCSEs and it is likely that we will achieve that more quickly and more safely with a stable market.

We welcome what you say about the primary purpose of GCSEs: that they should evidence pupils' achievement against demanding and fulfilling content. Ofqual's role is to make sure that standards are right. We have particular responsibility for assessment – for making sure that it is valid, reliable and manageable given the curriculum it is assessing. We will develop and consult on new requirements for GCSEs that reflect the purposes for the qualification you set out in your letter.

As we do this, we will take into account your views about the design and assessment of the qualification, alongside the outcome of our subject level review of controlled assessment and taking into account good assessment practice.

As you note, the regulatory requirements we put in place will need to reflect the accountability framework on which you are now consulting. Accountability measures have a profound impact on qualifications design and on how they play out in schools and the relationship between accountability and qualifications needs to be well balanced. We welcome your clear recognition of that and we welcome the general thrust of the accountability consultation you have launched today. We look forward to discussing the detail.

The timetable for qualifications development that you have set out is challenging. We know that you would not want us to compromise on the quality or standards of the qualifications. We will launch our consultation as soon as possible so that exam boards' development of the new qualifications can begin in the autumn. Subject to the curriculum content being ready as planned, this should allow GCSEs in the first group of subjects to be in schools in autumn 2014 and to be ready for

first teaching in 2015. We will need jointly to keep the timetable under review and if problems arise Ofqual would, if necessary, delay the reforms.

We will take account of your wish to see all subjects reformed as soon as possible and will advise on the extent to which GCSEs in other subjects can be ready to your proposed timetable and on the process for developing subject content.

I am copying this letter to recipients of yours.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G Stacey', written in a cursive style.

**Glenys Stacey**  
Chief Regulator

cc: Leighton Andrews AM  
John O'Dowd MLA  
Sir Michael Wilshaw, Ofsted  
Graham Stuart MP, Chair, Education Select Committee