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Acting Chief Executive



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Professor Dame Julia Higgins FRS FREng
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Dear Dame Julia,

GCSE Use of Mathematics

Thank you for your letter of 10 November 2009 regarding the development of the GCSE Use of Mathematics pilot qualification offered by AQA. I apologise for the long delay in sending a substantive response. There has been active consideration of this qualification proposal both within Ofqual and QCDA and I can now give a considered response to the issues you raise.

You identify two points of concern within your letter. The first is with the title of the new qualification, specifically with the use of the title GCSE, the second that a future version of this qualification cannot comprise solely of existing qualifications. I will deal with each separately.

It is true that Ofqual has advised AQA that they cannot use the GCSE brand for this qualification. As you will appreciate, whilst GCSE qualifications are not age limited they are designed with a focus on the knowledge, skills and abilities to be expected of learners aged 16 in mind. For these learners there is in place the statutory Programme of Study for mathematics at Key Stage 4 (KS4 PoS) and, therefore, the logical expectation that qualifications with GCSE and mathematics in the title will cover the Programme of Study. The Statutory Regulations for External Qualifications identify that, "the subject matter of GCSEs must compare in substance and range to the GCSE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for other subjects, for subjects where relevant subject criteria do not exist" (paragraph 82b) and "be consistent with the statutory programmes of study within the national curriculum where they exist" (paragraph 82c). Consequently, a GCSE in Use of Mathematics would be expected to comply with both these requirements with respect to Subject Criteria for Mathematics and the KS4 PoS.

As you acknowledge, the AQA specification is designed specifically with the needs of post-16 learners in mind. The specification cannot guarantee full coverage of the Programme of Study requirements. Therefore, there is a conflict between a specification with mathematics and GCSE in the title and both the statutory orders in place for the Key Stage 4 Programme of Study and aspects of the requirements of the relevant subject criteria.



We recognise the currency of the GCSE brand but we must apply the regulations in place consistently and robustly to protect the status and value of that brand. This has precluded the use of GCSE in the title of other qualifications in the past, for example, Cambridge Certificates which are not accredited under the title GCSE.

The issue surrounding concerns over the use of existing qualifications is primarily focussed on the challenges of successfully providing grading outcomes (A*-G) on a qualification where the focus of assessment is pass/fail that is, on the Functional Mathematics unit within the pilot qualification. This concern is shared by AQA and they have reviewed and revised the proposal in a manner that is acceptable to Ofqual.

As you will appreciate, the role of Ofqual is to ensure that accredited qualifications are of appropriately high quality. This we have done. Whilst we cannot endorse the use of the GCSE brand I am pleased to be able to confirm that AQA has now achieved accreditation of Certificates in Use of Mathematics specifications at each of Level 1 and Level 2 of the National Qualification Framework under the 'Other General' qualification heading. We understand that AQA will be seeking support from JACQA at the meeting on 17 March 2010 for the Secretary of State to fund the qualification for use in maintained schools and colleges. Decisions on whether the qualification meets a need which is not covered by the national suites and should therefore be funded for use in maintained schools and colleges are for the Secretary of State to make. You will appreciate that this is not a matter on which Ofqual is able to comment.

Yours sincerely

Isabel Nisbet

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