

Ms Isabel Nisbet
Chief Executive
Ofqual
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

14 April 2010

Dear Isabel,

Re: GCSE Use of Mathematics

Thank you for your letter dated 15 March on our concerns with the qualification previously entitled GCSE Use of Mathematics.

However, we are disappointed that your response fails to address some very important issues and also contains some worrying regulatory precedents which, if implemented fully, would have negative implications for any future qualifications landscape.

Firstly, the creation of a GCSE Use of Mathematics is a fundamental element of the 14-19 mathematical pathways as advocated by Professor Adrian Smith in his 2004 Report *Making Mathematics Count*. The concept of the pathways were accepted by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and we therefore believe that it is unacceptable that six years later the regulator should take decisions that essentially will lead to the stifling of a very important qualification, leaving a substantial hole in the pathways structure.

Secondly, your letter appears to suggest that one of the problems was the name of the qualification. We find it astonishing that what appears to be an issue of semantics could be allowed to obstruct the creation of a qualification with real learner benefits. If it is the case that having the word 'mathematics' in the name runs the risk of conflicting with the Key Stage 4 GCSE Mathematics, we believe that there should have been a discussion with the community about what would constitute an acceptable name.

Thirdly, the issue about age limitation is one that could also have been addressed if Ofqual had genuinely approached the issue from the needs of the learner. While we are skeptical of the need to guard against creating age-limited GCSEs, ACME believes that a compromise might have been to include the words 'post 16' in the title. Again, it is disappointing that the regulator appears to have not sought practical solutions to the problem.

There are dangerous precedents in your decision regarding GCSE Use of Mathematics. Some of the issues you have raised have potential implications for other qualifications for which the word 'mathematics' may be necessary if their titles are to describe them accurately. Ofqual runs the risk of acting against the national need for a variety of mathematics qualifications to support much wider uptake of some form of mathematics post-16. This would be very serious.

ACME agrees with the pathways policy advocated in the Smith report, which has already led to the pilot Use of Mathematics A-level. It is vital that this very positive approach to enabling continuing mathematical study of a fruitful nature by many more in the 16-19 age range includes a pathway for those for have not managed to achieve GCSE Mathematics by age 16.

It would appear that Ofqual have ignored the needs of the learner, and have simply approached the issue with a cold, clinical regulatory mindset. We believe this is a mistake and, as a result, I have also written to the Secretary of State on this matter, as there are clearly issues of policy which are being undermined by regulations, and it is not clear to us where the split in responsibility lies.

We would value a response on this pressing issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Julia', written in dark ink.

Professor Dame Julia Higgins FRS
Chair, Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education

cc Rt. Hon Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State for Children, School and Families