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**Nick Gibb MP**

Minister of State for Schools

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Professor Dame Julia Higgins  
Advisory Committee on Mathematics (ACME)  
Royal Society  
6 Carlton House Terrace  
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3 August 2010

*Dear Professor Higgins*

Thank you for your letters of 8 June and 15 July addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding mathematics education and the future of post-16 mathematics respectively. I am replying as the Minister responsible for mathematics education and I do apologise for the delay in replying to your initial letter.

You raised a number of issues to do with mathematics education. I fully agree that it is important that we give all children every opportunity to engage properly and excel in mathematics at all levels. Key to this will be giving schools far greater freedoms and flexibilities in how they educate their pupils. This includes curriculum development and review. It is our intention to restore the National Curriculum to its original purpose – a core national entitlement organised around subject disciplines. In doing so, we aim to slim the National Curriculum down to give schools greater freedom to build on the core statutory requirements to provide a rich learning experience for all their pupils, and to allow teachers to use their professional judgement to decide how to teach and to organise the curriculum. We plan to consult a wide range of academics, teachers and other interested parties to ensure that our core curriculum can compare with those of the highest performing countries in the world. More details about our plans to review the curriculum will be announced in due course.

On Key Stage 2 assessment and accountability we believe that rigorous external assessment provides the public and professionals with valuable objective data and plays a vital role in the accountability system. That said, I am very aware of the flaws in the current testing system. We are therefore committed to reviewing the way in which Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests operate as well as developing a new curriculum and we look forward to your support and expertise in developing science assessment.

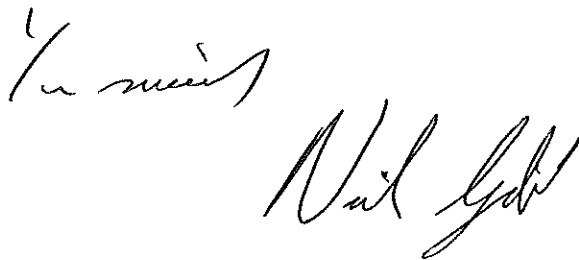
I have noted your concerns about the increasing trend towards early and multiple entry in GCSE mathematics and also the impact of the two-tier model. In considering reforms to GCSEs we shall look at their structure and content, as well their impact on what schools do in practice. Tiering arrangements do not necessarily make the difference on their own. As you suggest, we shall have to look at how meaningful curriculum requirements and accountability arrangements can link with qualifications in resolving any issues. In particular we aim to make sure there is proper recognition of the key subjects which everyone needs to learn throughout their time at school, including maths, and make sure there are no perverse incentives to teach in a way that limits engagement and attainment. Since the date of your letter you will now know that the Department is continuing to support the pilot of the linked pair of mathematics GCSEs. The evidence will be helpful in informing the detail of reforms in the longer term.

With regard to the future of post-16 mathematics, we need to get the right balance between encouraging students to continue to study key subjects and ensuring that A levels are a fully rigorous preparation for further study. The Department will involve subject bodies such as ACME, as well as universities and employers, in our review of the exam structure, which will examine the role A levels play within the wider range of qualifications available to students after the age of 16 in order to achieve this balance. We will set out detailed next steps later this year, but ACME's thoughts, as set out in your letter of the 15 July, are helpful.

The Government is committed to improving standards in mathematics and having the highest quality of teaching. Teacher training and continuing professional development are important in achieving these aims but I cannot give any commitments to the continuation of specific programmes such as some of those you have referred to as this will very much depend on the outcome of the current spending review.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet. It would be enormously helpful if you could please contact my Diary Manager, Hollie Gill, on 0207 925 6612. I intend to invite Celia Hoyles from NCETM to join the meeting, and Elizabeth Truss MP, who has recently written to me raising concerns about the new mathematics GCSE to be introduced from this September.

With best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Gibb', written in a cursive style.

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