

Christopher Trinick
Chairman



Qualifications
and Curriculum
Development
Agency

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Dear Sir Alan

GCSE science examinations – 2011 specification development

I have been sent a copy of your letter of 30 March to the Rt. Hon Ed Balls MP.

I am very concerned to learn of your views on the process for developing GCSE science specifications for 2011. This is of particular concern as my staff were not informed of this position until it emerged at a STEM meeting on 25 March, and QCDA was therefore not apprised of the range and strength of your views before the issue reached that point.

The science community has been closely engaged in the review of GCSE science criteria and revised specifications, which is a reflection of our close engagement with SCORE and the science subject associations in general. Indeed, we are currently working with SCORE, its member organisations and others from the science community to find external reviewers for the science submissions. However, I acknowledge that the reviewers will not yet have seen or commented on draft specifications.

The awarding bodies began working on specifications in the autumn when criteria were published by Ofqual. It is though for the awarding bodies to determine when and how to work with the subject community, and we advised that they should do so as early as possible. I appreciate that some awarding bodies have been more proactive than others.

With regard to respective roles and responsibilities being far from clear, I think this is fair comment. Defining the interface between Ofqual and QCDA continues apace, and QCDA's role in the work leading to the point of accrediting qualifications has only recently been clarified.

We note your points about SCORE partners being asked by awarding organisations to provide evidence of support, and that despite earlier discussions on this issue the SCORE partners have had no official notification from QCDA about the nature of this evidence. I will take this up with QCDA staff and provide you with clarification.

I fully understand your concerns regarding the commercial nature of awarding bodies, and this is a matter that will need to be addressed by Ofqual.

I want to stress the importance we attach to working with SCORE and other subject associations. QCDA will have a very clear role in consulting subject associations and adding value by bringing together diverse views and interests. QCDA is formally established today, 1 April, and we hope to continue and build on our strong working relations with SCORE in this context.

Following the meeting last week, QCDA undertook to address the concerns raised, which echo the points covered in your letter. We also agreed that over the next three months, we will investigate more thoroughly how we can work with SCORE and other key stakeholders in this area of work. I would therefore like to suggest that our respective senior staff should meet further to discuss the particular concerns of SCORE members more fully and to put in place arrangements to make sure our mutual interests are better served. If you are content with this proposal, I shall ask that our respective offices make the arrangements for a meeting in the very near future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "PP Roy Strawman". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Christopher Trinick
Chairman
QCDA