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Pocket Watch – New implementation plans for A level and GCSE

Introduction

So we are to have a phased rather than a big bang introduction for the new A levels and GCSEs. It means considerable breathing space for GCSEs where only English (Lang and Lit) and maths will now be prepared for first teaching from 2015 with other subjects following on from 2016. For A level, maths and Further Maths will be delayed for a year but most of the others, 13 in all, will come in for first teaching from Sept 2015. The changes were announced in an exchange of **letters** between the regulator and the Education Secretary last week following a summer of review and discussion about what was needed to be ready for 2015

Why the changes?

Given the need to balance political desire, regulatory requirements and practical realities, pace of change is always an issue in qualification reform, especially one as sweeping as the current one. But there are other issues this time. First, and talking of balancing acts, qualification reform doesn't happen in isolation, it needs to take into account other related developments notably in this case the forthcoming introduction of both a revised National Curriculum and a revised set of accountability arrangements. Second, groundwork over the summer has highlighted how much work is needed to bring about the current changes. The decision to hold back both maths qualifications for instance came out of Professor Smith's recent review with the exam boards of what needed to be done in shifting to a linear model with revised subject and assessment requirements. This resulted in both subjects being placed under Category 3: *'major structural change needed.'* As for GCSE, tiering, modularisation, assessment, grading, regulation, resources, vocational alternatives, let alone the summer issues of multiple and early entry, all pose a range of often complex questions that need tackling. Third, qualification development now takes place in a much more intense regulatory regime; valid assessment strategies, inter-board comparability, international benchmarking, monitoring of performance standards, all need to be taken into consideration. As the Education Secretary wrote, *"I accept that much more rigorous regulatory demands should be in place and that Ofqual needs more time to develop them."* Finally we should not discount the pressures that schools and colleges are already under, they are after all the ones that have to make it happen

What happens now?

Ofqual is currently establishing a set of working arrangements including a Management Board and various Working Groups to oversee ongoing development. For A level, the boards have been reviewing subject content working now with the Russell Group's A Level Content Advisory Board (ALCAB.) Consultation on both subject content and regulatory arrangements will follow in the autumn for introduction in 2015. The maths qualifications are intended to follow a year later although the Cambridge University 16-18 maths project which is informing developments has some way to go yet. For GCSE, the next step is the feedback from Ofqual's summer consultation on design principles for GCSE. This contained a lot of thorny issues particularly around assessment and grading but the aim is to have the English and maths specs at least in schools by autumn 2014 ready for first teaching from Sept 2015



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New exam reform timetable 2013