

ADDRESS REMOVED

9th March 2015

Nick Gibb MP
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
Westminster
SW1P 3BT

Dear Nick

I am writing to you as a concerned Maths teacher; Back in November you wrote to Ofqual for certain reassurances and I am asking you to confirm if the events that have subsequently unfolded with regards the Research Project have provided you with the reassurance you required and would ask that you seriously consider if ploughing on ahead is the right thing to do.

As a Maths teacher who happens to write a blog I have been following the GCSE shenanigans with interest. I add the following not as a boast but to provide you with some assurances that I'm not a "nutter": I have just changed jobs and have been at a (previously National Challenge) school that was announced as Most Improved School in England in Jan 2013 having been involved with Maths results going from mid 40% to mid 80% A* to C (a phenomenal improvement!) ... so feel I have some credibility in this area.

In your letter, you hit the "nail on the head" when you stressed how important it is that "schools receive clear and accurate picture of how the Maths GCSE is changing in time to allow them to adapt their teaching in advance of September 2015". Communication is an issue in that both the DFE and Ofqual have been selective about what and where they publish updates- the fact that I had to make an FOI to get a copy of your letter that was referred to in a published response is just nonsense. So much for a transparent system! The more forward thinking teachers are actively looking for updates but none of it is helped by them choosing to be selective about what is published and where it does get published means that many people aren't aware that there are changes afoot with the research project.

That aside – it really isn't as simple as needing this to plan for September, if you believe that, you have been misled – there is a third extra assessment time with extra content so some of "us" have been attempting to teach the content of the new programme of study since September. There is such a big change in the style of questioning that we needed to be adapting what we do with our **CURRENT** year 9s. I know that the content is the same regardless of which exam board you choose **BUT** there is a massive difference in the way each exam board is approaching "problem solving". This is fundamental to the way we approach the teaching of this course. This is not, and I repeat NOT a 2 year GCSE starting in September 2015 – you are delusional if you still think that can be done (Ok it'll get done but for some people it won't get done WELL!). "We" (the education establishment as a whole and not me personally as a teacher by the way!) will be doing the students an injustice.

Let me make it clear: I applaud and welcome the changes to the Maths curriculum. I am actually very positive about what can be done with my students ... ok .. not so much if it was with my current year 11s (but they'll do fab under the current system!) but give me 3 full years with a year group knowing what the end result is meant to be and I can get very very excited about the possibilities.

You state that schools are telling you that "sample assessment materials are critical to the picture" and you are so right ... I could go on about how problem solving requires a body of knowledge but also the ability to solve problems means being able to consider how your past knowledge of similar problems can be applied, but I have more important things to say.

There are some serious concerns about how robust the process has been from start to finish (oh yeah ... we haven't finished yet have we?!?)

- The accreditation process took months, especially to get to the point where they were all accredited – if one were cynical you *may* be of the mind that bouncing back one of the exam boards TWICE was sending them a message (especially as they have the biggest market share). The more cynical would suggest that this was providing ammunition to the "single exam board" fans.
- In some of the communications Ofqual refers to "initial" sample assessment materials (SAMs). These materials have supposedly gone through an accreditation process and now deciding to call them "**initial sample materials**" isn't going to fool anyone into thinking that it is ok that what was published as SAMs and something that we should be able to trust to be exemplars of what the new style of exam would look like, now isn't the case. Nope, sorry! ... just calling them something doesn't make it OK!
- **None of the boards were accredited first time** – they all went through what **should have** been a rigorous process before now. I'm not naïve – I know we can't go back in time ... we are where we are and we now need to make sure lessons are learned from the past.
- Accreditation should not be an "**important step** in assessing the quality of the new qualifications across boards" as Ofqual have said BUT I believe it should have been the **BIGGEST STEP**. Of course there should be ongoing moderation, but that is different to accreditation.
- Having to instigate the research project having tried to define the difference between difficulty and demand and now the latest admission that one of the strands isn't working is doing the opposite of what it was intended to do. At the very least it certainly isn't providing us with "further confidence".

On a serious note, we'll pick up the pieces and one way or the other we **WILL** come out the other side, but you can't keep relying on the professionalism and goodwill of teachers to have to deal with the aftermath of a poorly planned and poorly executed accreditation process. As Maths teachers we understand the pressure of accountability more than most other subjects – you only need to be in school on results day in August to get a feel for how much responsibility sits on the shoulders of Heads of Departments. This is one of the reasons that Maths teachers get fed up and are leaving the profession in droves – the constant poorly thought out changes we face. I am genuinely excited about the prospect of the depth of study we **SHOULD** be delivering from the new programme of study; we could be developing students that have a real love and passion for Maths.

The crux is that you made a request for assurances that the changes were reflected as soon as possible and here we are at the end of February and not expecting anything till at least the end of April, and **I am not convinced that adequate reassurances have been made.** I know, in government these things take time, but we don't have that time. We have a year 9 cohort (over 500,000 students) that may end up poorly prepared or the wrong decisions being made about choice of exam board ... that is not an insignificant number of students. What would you be thinking now if it was YOUR son or daughter facing these changes?

We do not operate in a vacuum and I have so much I wanted to relay to you, but it's difficult to formulate my thoughts. I am frustrated knowing that we approach a General Election and for most people now isn't the time to make any decisions, notwithstanding making the "right decision". In my opinion (and I know it'll never happen, but it's making me feel better writing this!) is that, the "right decision" would be to defer the first examination date to 2018 – it would bring Maths into line with other subjects (none of the confusion that will come from students leaving with grades and levels for a start!). This would mean putting the plans for A level back again, so what? Someone may have to make some apologies ... it's not the end of the world – a few bruised egos are better than the implications of not making the "right decision" for a whole cohort of students.

On that note I will end by quoting Theodore Roosevelt: "In any moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing".

Mel Muldowney

(A frustrated teacher)

PS: – Through all that twaddle and gumph what I'd really like you to do, is to confirm if the recent events following your letter, and in particular those surrounding the Research Project have provided you with enough assurances so that you are no longer concerned about the "implications for the success of the governments qualification reforms with regard to Maths"?

PPS: If you've got half an hour – the posts below detail the whole process as far as I have been able to ascertain

1 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/01/13/mmmmwwwahahahahahaha/>

2 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/01/18/now-means-now/>

3 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/01/22/ofqual-letter-speechless/>

4 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/01/22/gcse-maths-research-programme/>

5 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/02/02/accreditation-process-is-robust/>

6 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/02/05/saint-mel/>

7 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/02/16/make-up-your-mind/>

8 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/02/19/going-all-gangsta/>

9 <http://justmaths.co.uk/2015/02/25/its-finally-arrived/>