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19th May 2026

Helen Hayes MP, Chair
Education Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Sent via email to: helen.hayes.mp@parliament.uk and educom@parliament.uk

Dear Helen

Qualifications Withdrawals

Thank you for your letter about Cambridge OCR's withdrawal of selected general qualifications.

I appreciate the Committee's interest in our qualifications and share your commitment to ensuring students have access to a broad range of options for their studies.

Before setting out responses to your questions below, I would like to assure you that these changes will not result in the removal of any subjects from the curriculum.

Our decision to withdraw from these qualifications follows a detailed review of student and teacher preference. In most cases we are withdrawing from qualifications that have fewer than one hundred entries nationwide, with some at much lower levels than that, and on a downward trend across several years. This makes their ongoing provision unsustainable and makes setting standards technically challenging from an assessment perspective.

Most of our withdrawals are AS Levels, and you will be familiar with the long-term decline in the popularity of AS Levels following their de-coupling in the 2015 reforms, which has already led to the other major awarding organisations streamlining their provision of these qualifications. You will also be aware that this situation will not change following Becky Francis' review of curriculum and assessment.

I would also like to reassure you that we worked with our regulators, ensuring they were aware of our plans in advance.

Decision-making and evidence

It is a regulatory requirement that we keep our qualifications under regular review. As part of this latest review of our product portfolio following the publication of Government's response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, we analysed entry data and trends for all of our general qualifications going back to 2019. Our analysis also included the number of schools and colleges, age profiles of candidates, number of resit candidates and the number of A Level entries from schools and colleges that made entries for the AS Level, to see the potential impact of the AS Level withdrawal on the relevant A Levels.

Where we have withdrawn from an A Level or GCSE, we have ensured that the subject remains available from at least one alternative exam board.

At AS Level, almost all withdrawn qualifications are available from alternative awarding organisations, two exceptions being AS Level Latin and Classical Greek. These qualifications have very low entries, having seen a decline of over 90 percent since their peak in 2010-15, making it unsustainable for us to continue offering them in the longer term. In both cases we remain absolutely committed to the more popular GCSE and A Levels.

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As a not-for-profit organisation, we need to manage our commitments and focus on supporting teaching and learning in the areas that teachers and students are prioritising. We work to allocate our finite resources sustainably to deliver the best possible experience for learners.

Engagement with the sector

We took the difficult decision to withdraw these qualifications because the very low entries made them unsustainable, and the resource implications of continuing to offer them could have impacted on our ability to provide the highest quality qualifications in the areas being prioritised by students and teachers. However, once this decision was made we engaged with our regulators to assure them that current students would not be disadvantaged by our decision, and that our plans would not negatively impact the examination system.

Our engagement with impacted subject communities and relevant sector stakeholders has been constructive, and we are continuing to engage with and listen to these groups.

For AS Level Latin and AS Level Classical Greek, where we are sole provider for a very small number of students, we are mindful of wider concerns around access and support for these subjects. We have met with the Classical Association and Classics for All since our decision to withdraw and have agreed to work with them on raising the profile of Classics subjects to protect and grow their place in the curriculum. In addition, we are extending our provision of AS Latin and Classical Greek until June 2028 to ease the transition.

Impact on pupils and equality of access

We prioritise the experience of students and their fair access to qualifications, and our review included market analysis to ensure that this would not result in harm.

We are offering support and advice to schools and colleges to help with any transition to a new provider, in addition to our full, continuing day-to-day support for the qualifications until the final assessment opportunity. Students currently studying these qualifications should not be impacted by the withdrawals.

We are also mindful of the concerns of subject experts and societies. For example, we are very proud of our Geology qualification and did not take the decision to withdraw it lightly or without reassurance that students would still have access to the subject. We worked with regulators through this process and informed the alternative provider in advance of our announcement.

Impact on teachers and centres

While we appreciate changes will cause concern to some teachers and subject specialists, it is important to reiterate that these withdrawals do not reduce the number of subjects available at Key Stage 4 or Key Stage 5.

We are doing everything we can to support schools and teachers to make any transition as smooth as possible, and with well over a year to make the necessary plans should they wish or need to transition to an alternative qualification.

Transition arrangements and mitigation

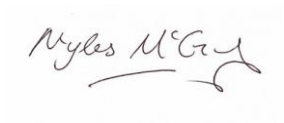
Schools and colleges will continue to have our full support with our withdrawn qualifications until the final assessment opportunity. For some of our withdrawals, such as our ‘B’ specifications for A Level Biology and Physics, centres will have the opportunity to switch to our much more popular ‘A’ specifications and will have our full support to do so.

Resit numbers are extremely low for our withdrawn subjects, and in most cases are zero. Students and teachers will have our full support until the final assessment opportunity, and we have offered bespoke advice through our subject advisors to any schools with concerns.

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I hope this provides you with the context for our decision and reassurance that we continue to support schools, colleges and students.

Yours sincerely



Myles McGinley
Managing Director, Cambridge OCR

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