

Glenys Stacey  
Chief Regulator



1 April 2014

Mr Keith Porteous Wood  
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Dear Mr Wood

### **Concerns over exam maladministration at faith schools**

Thank you for your letter of 11 March 2014 about the redaction of questions in OCR's GCSE Science paper at Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls School.

You will know that Lord Avebury asked a question in the House of Lords about whether Ofqual has any agreements with faith schools with regard to redactions of questions in science examinations because of religious sensitivity. I look forward to meeting you and Lord Avebury on 8 April to discuss this matter further. In advance of the meeting, I would like to set out the actions we have taken.

On 31 March 2014 we wrote to all exam boards to inform them that, although the practice of schools and colleges redacting exam questions is very rare, Ofqual believes this should not happen and we will expect exam boards to treat any instances of this taking place as malpractice. From a regulatory perspective, we do not think it is in students' best interests to have questions redacted from an exam paper. Such a practice denies students the opportunity to demonstrate their full potential across the curriculum they should have been taught and therefore disadvantages them. It also undermines the validity of the assessment.

Our regulations require each exam board to ensure that the content of its assessments is fit for purpose, appropriate for the method of assessment chosen and consistent with the specification for the qualification. We also require each exam board to ensure that its qualifications comply with particular requirements, for example criteria for a GCSE subject. Where a question is redacted the assessment would no longer be compliant.

Where any such malpractice is suspected or alleged, the exam board must investigate. If they find evidence that malpractice has indeed taken place, the exam board could impose sanctions on the school or college. The extent and nature of such sanctions would be a matter for the exam board itself. In line with our regulations, Ofqual would not prescribe what sanction the exam board needed to impose.



I appreciate that you are concerned that the practice of redacting exam questions for religious reasons could be more widespread. We asked exam boards to tell us about the extent of this practice. We were told about two centres where redactions have happened and about a very small number of requests that had been made by centres to redact questions, which were refused. The evidence would suggest that this practice is very rare. Nevertheless, we have decided that it is important to review our position on this matter and make clear our requirements of all exam boards. We have told exam boards that if they have any agreements with schools and colleges allowing redaction to take place, these agreements should be withdrawn before any further assessments are taken.

Clearly there are related questions as to whether any schools that redacts specific exam questions are teaching the appropriate curriculum. As curriculum matters are outside of our remit we have, therefore, been in touch with the relevant authorities, the Department for Education and Ofsted.

I hope you find this helpful and I look forward to meeting you and Lord Avebury next week.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Glenys Stacey', written in a cursive style.

**Glenys Stacey**  
Chief Regulator