

Glenys Stacey
Chief Regulator

1 April 2014

Mr Keith Porteous Wood
National Secular Society
25 Red Lion Square
London, WC1R 4RL

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Office of Qualifications
and Examinations Regulation
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344
Textphone 0300 303 3345
info@ofqual.gov.uk
www.ofqual.gov.uk

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.