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14<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Bob Stewart DSO MP  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Stewart

**Re: Commons Written Parliamentary Question PQ 190626**

The Department for Education has asked the Chief Regulator to respond to you directly on the question you asked about whether there are plans to stop faith schools redacting questions from national exam papers. The Chief Regulator is currently overseas on business, so I am writing on her behalf.

Ofqual's role is to regulate how the exam boards design and deliver exams and secure standards. We require exam boards to develop high quality exam papers, in the expectation that these will be made available in full to candidates taking the exams. 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 achievement across the full curriculum that they have been taught.

OCR alerted us last year to two schools opening GCSE exam papers early in order to redact them for religious reasons. This raised two issues for us. First whether there was a malpractice risk because of the early opening: this is something that OCR and the schools involved duly addressed. Second, whether it is appropriate for religious or other reasons for students to be denied an opportunity to take all the questions in a paper.

Clearly redaction is a very sensitive issue. In the light of the concerns, we have contacted the exam boards that offer GCSEs and A Levels to ask them for further information, including whether other schools have permission to open papers early and to redact in this way. Once we have a fuller understanding of the extent and nature of any current redaction we will discuss further with interested parties as to whether exam boards should allow such practice to continue and if so in what circumstances.

There are related questions as to whether any such schools are teaching the National Curriculum where this applies, and we have therefore been in touch with the relevant authorities, the Department for Education and Ofsted.

I am copying this letter to the Parliamentary Under Secretary for Education and Childcare and to Sir Michael Wilshaw.

Please do get in touch if you would like to discuss this issue further, or indeed any other aspect of our work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jeremy Benson'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

**Jeremy Benson**

**Director of Policy**

CC Elizabeth Truss MP