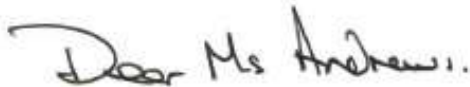


27 OCT 2016

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26 October 2016

Gill Andrews
President
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London W1J 0BE**AQA AS/A level Archaeology**

Thank you for your letter of 20 October, urging AQA to continue providing AS and A level qualifications – in particular those of Archaeology – beyond 2018.

AQA did not reach its decision on AS/A level Archaeology lightly. We recognise that for the centres and candidates who study it, this subject can provide a valuable education. We fully intended to continue offering the course under the current exam reforms and worked with a team of developers to produce a new qualification that we submitted to the regulator for accreditation. Ofqual's feedback on our initial submission provided an opportunity to reflect on our continued provision and to consider our experience of providing the current course this summer.

Archaeology as a general qualification has a very broad specification; its scope covers a great many time periods and geographical locations, themes and contexts. The qualification has a high level of optionality, allowing teachers and candidates to choose from an extensive range of topics and subjects. There can be difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified and experienced examiners. The number of candidates for the qualification is low (some 300 in 2015-16). All of this presents significant challenges to the marking and awarding process, which we experienced during this summer's exams. During the redevelopment process, the senior practitioners on our development panel (teachers and other subject experts) worked with our own staff to try to address these challenges in the new specification. However, we have reluctantly concluded that this has not been possible and that the requirements of the new specification will pose unacceptably high risks to the safe and secure delivery of students' results. It is for these reasons that we made the decision not to proceed with the redevelopment of a qualification we have willingly supported for many years.

I should also address two points that have been implied in some parts of the media, but which did not play any part in our decision-making.

AQA does not consider Archaeology to be a "soft" subject, taking "soft" to have the general meaning of "easier" in the context of an exam. Indeed, we do not consider any of the qualifications in our portfolio to be "soft"; all of them are subject to the same rigorous processes of accreditation by the independent regulator, Ofqual, before they may be taught in schools and colleges. All of our qualifications are subject to the same demanding processes of quality control in their life-cycle and all are subject to the same established and proven processes of awarding when we come to issuing students' results.

Equally, the financial aspect did not play a part in our decision-making. The low entries for this qualification mean that it was never able to be self-supporting, nor would it have become so. Indeed, the general move away from AS qualifications, which we are currently seeing in so many schools and colleges, means that entries would have declined further. This, though, was not the reason for our decision. We have supported this Archaeology qualification for many years and had originally intended to offer the new qualification, in the full knowledge that it would require ongoing financial support. Many of our qualifications are in a similar financial position.

We appreciate that the decision – even though based on the high risks to the safe and secure delivery of students' results – will be extremely disappointing to the teachers and others who are passionately committed to the subject, the schools and colleges that previously offered the course, and the learners who studied it. We are confident, though, that our decision will not preclude any learners from taking the subject at university. No university department requires the qualification as an entry prerequisite.

I am conscious that setting out the reasons for our decision not to proceed with the redevelopment of Archaeology will not lessen your concerns about the decision itself, but I hope it has, at least, made clear the rationale for our decision. Our website (aqa.org.uk/qualifications-update) includes further information about our reasons.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Hall
Chief Executive, AQA