

CaSE responds to reforms in science A-level practicals

9th April 2014

While the Chancellor has committed to making the UK the best place in the world to do science, changes to A-levels mean that young people will be able to leave school with the highest grades in science without being able to *do* science at all.

The decision announced by Ofqual today to remove the examination of practicals from A-level grades in science is a backwards step for science skills in the UK. Although competence in 12 practical activities will be a minimum requirement to gain a 'pass' for the practical element, there is no indication that a student will need to pass the practical element to be awarded their A-level.

Ofqual is taking these reforms forward despite the objections from across the science community, industry, universities and the Government's own Chief Scientific Advisor. And, contrary to the statement in Ofqual's response the reforms fail to tackle the problems they are intended to address.

CaSE is deeply concerned that uncoupling practicals from science A-level grades will lead to practicals being deprioritised, especially in schools where resource is tight. Practical activities will no longer be reflected in school A-level results tables running the serious risk that time and resources will be diverted away from science practicals, leading to worse outcomes for students. At a time when enormous efforts are being made to encourage a wider mix of students to take science subjects, not least to fill the UK's 40,000 a year STEM skills shortage, this is the last thing we need.

CaSE Director Sarah Main said:

"I am shocked and dismayed by the decision to remove practical assessment from A-level science grades, in the face of objections from across the science community. These reforms risk robbing students of the opportunity to find out if they enjoy doing science. And they could strike a serious blow to the Government's ambition to put science and engineering at the heart of the UK's future economy.

The changes will not help students who we know are inspired and motivated by doing science, not just learning about science. And they will not help universities, colleges and companies who already struggle to recruit people with the practical experience they need.

CaSE calls for practical experience to be at the heart of A-level science teaching and for its place to be assured by making it mandatory and rigorously assessed."

ENDS