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**Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP**  
**Minister of State for Schools and 14-19 Learners**

All Secondary Schools

27 January 2006

Dear colleague

I am writing to thank you for the tremendous contribution to the lives of young people that you and your staff have been putting in over recent months. I would also like to take this opportunity to alert you to important curriculum changes that you will already be thinking about for the coming academic year and the assistance available.

I know from my visits to schools and other conversations with school leaders that last term not only felt long but was also hugely challenging for headteachers, school staff and governors. I would like to offer my thanks to all concerned for the positive approach and professional manner in which the changes required have been introduced in schools. Taken together, the Teaching and Learning Reviews (TLRs), the increased importance of school self-evaluation procedures, including completion of the self-evaluation form (SEF) and the start of a new Ofsted inspection framework gave a short term challenge that I know led to a lot of work for school leaders in particular.

Together you have helped us put measures in place to support a workforce designed for the twenty first century and to develop our New Relationship with Schools; reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and providing more focused support and challenge. We believe these changes will enable you to raise standards in your schools even higher and for us to offer school leaders greater opportunity to fashion strategies that better meet the local priorities facing young people.

As we approach the time when Year 9 students will choose their subjects for Key Stage 4, I wish to draw to your attention the planned changes to KS4 science subjects and remind you of my statement last term regarding the entitlement for all students to study a modern foreign language. In both these curriculum areas the Government, public and business leaders need to be assured that all schools will enable sufficient numbers to access appropriate qualifications at 16 and beyond.

In science the Government expects nationally 80% of students to continue to take the equivalent of 2 science GCSEs, while in languages we expect nationally between 50% and 90% of students to continue with their studies until the end of Key Stage 4. We are not prescribing these figures in legislation but we want school leaders and governors to ensure that as many young people as possible study two sciences and at least one modern language in order to prepare themselves better for their future lives and job prospects.

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The rest of this letter describes in more detail the thinking behind this approach and the sources of help and support available to you. I hope you find this useful.

### **Key Stage 4 Science**

As you will be aware, the new programme of study was published in 2004 and will be introduced into schools for first teaching from September 2006. It is intended to maintain the breadth, depth and challenge of the current curriculum, while ensuring that science teaching is more effective, motivating and relevant. The range of new GCSEs provides students with greater flexibility to combine approaches to science to match their interests and capabilities and provide a sound basis for their future progression, whether in the sciences or elsewhere. The greater choice of individual science GCSEs on offer make it particularly important that schools give their students clear advice and guidance which enables them to choose combinations of GCSEs which provide this firm foundation. It is vital that students understand that only particular combinations of subjects will provide the basis for advanced level study in science.

Alongside these curriculum changes the Government is planning to introduce, from September 2008, a new statutory entitlement for all students to study science programmes leading to at least two GCSEs which will prepare them for advanced study in a wide range of fields including the individual sciences of physics, chemistry and biology.

These are important and significant changes and your science department will have already begun making preparations for them, considering the options available from the awarding bodies and selecting the specifications appropriate to their students. Over the coming months departments will be reviewing schemes of work and resources. Teachers will need to adopt different pedagogies to implement the new programme of study. This may have training implications for some staff. Your strong support for their work will be essential. To ensure effective implementation of the changes, science departments will need adequate time and resources to undertake the necessary planning, training and development. I would also encourage you to take the opportunity to discuss the changes with your governors and parents.

The enclosed sheet (Annex 1) sets out the sources of help and support which the Government and other partners have put in place. I hope that you will encourage and support your science department to take advantage of these opportunities this year and over the next few years.

### **Key Stage 4 Languages**

As I announced last month, the Government is committed to encouraging young people to study languages at Key Stage 4, whilst recognising that they should be offered flexibility in what they study. We feel it is important that every young person should be given the support to make an informed choice. That is why this Government took the decision to introduce changes to the Key Stage 4 curriculum from September 2004. Our intention in doing this was to provide greater opportunity for students to take advantage of a wider range of quality vocational courses. It was never our intention to deny significant numbers of students the opportunity to develop language skills, which we regard as critical to their personal future success as well as that of this country.

Together with the languages department in your school, I would like your support in articulating the arguments in favour of studying a language. You have the opportunity to influence students' options and provide timetabling to help students make a real choice.

After careful consideration and discussion with key partners, I have decided to introduce the following measures from September 2006 to ensure that all secondary schools consider the importance of languages in the Key Stage 4 curriculum:

- We expect all schools to set a benchmark for the number of students studying languages leading to a recognised qualification at Key Stage 4. It will be for schools to decide an appropriate target to set themselves between 50% and 90%, dependent on an individual school's circumstances. Where a school currently has less than 50% of its Key Stage 4 cohort studying a language leading to a recognised qualification, I would expect that school to set realistic milestones in an attempt to build those numbers up again and reach as a first step that 50% benchmark within a period they decide is realistic and achievable;
- We will make a change to the SEF, so that schools can indicate how they are delivering the statutory entitlement for languages. This will demonstrate to Ofsted how an individual school is meeting its statutory obligation. Further guidance will be offered in due course; and
- Encouraging schools to use their School Profile to demonstrate to parents how they are providing language programmes for their Key Stage 4 students.

In addition to the measures outlined above, I feel it is important for schools and LAs to be reminded about the definition of the statutory entitlement. Students should be given a real choice of options, so that a greater number will take the opportunity to continue studying languages leading to a recognised qualification beyond the age of 14.

I have asked Lid King, the National Director for Languages, to keep me notified about the status of languages at Key Stage 4, so that I can evaluate the effectiveness of these measures and decide whether anything further should be done. I would encourage you to work with us in our attempt to reverse the decline in take-up of languages at Key Stage 4. We will also be alerting LAs to these measures and enlisting their support in this matter at an area level.

You will find further details, including a definition of the statutory entitlement and the measures outlined above for languages as well as references to advice and support from the QCA in Annex 2 to this letter.

In conclusion, I hope I have explained why I attach such importance to both science and language teaching in Key Stage 4. Please pass on my thanks and appreciation to all your staff and governors for all their hard work. As Ofsted's evidence shows we have the highest standards ever in our schools across the country. Working together we can improve standards further still, enabling students to enjoy their best ever start to their future in your schools.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jacqui Smith", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Jacqui Smith MP**

## **Annex 1: Sources of advice - Science**

### QCA

QCA has issued copies of its guidance (Science changes to the curriculum from 2006 for key stage 4) free of charge to schools. Further copies can be downloaded free from QCA's website at [www.qca.org.uk/12265.html](http://www.qca.org.uk/12265.html) or copies are available at a cost of £5 from QCA Publications, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN tel 08700 606015, fax 08700 606017, [orderline@qca.org.uk](mailto:orderline@qca.org.uk), quoting reference QCA/05/1645).

Additional guidance can be found on the QCA's website. This includes the new key stage 4 programme of study and criteria, detailed summaries of each of the new GCSE specifications available from 2006 and electronic links to the awarding-body specifications and other useful guidance and resources.

### Science Learning Centres

Science Learning Centres are a national network for the professional development in science teaching, which have been established by the DfES and the Wellcome Trust. The Centres enable teachers and technicians to enhance their professional skills by learning more about contemporary scientific ideas and engaging and effective teaching approaches. Further information is available from <http://www.sciencelearningcentres.org.uk>

### Secondary National Strategy

The Secondary National Strategy is providing a range of support to schools and local authorities for the implementation of the new programme of study. Local authority strategy managers received a letter in July 2005 regarding the changes and have had another briefing in November 2005. Additional briefings will be given throughout 2006/07 as appropriate. Since summer 2005, science subject leaders have guidance materials on key stage 4 changes made available through their termly subject leaders development meetings which are held in local authorities. This will continue throughout 2006 /07 with additional online support. In October 2005, the Secondary National Strategy provided conferences jointly with QCA, Ofsted and National Advisers and Inspectors Group for Science from ASE, on the implications for teaching and learning. Three staff from each local authority, a head teacher or school senior manager and school science subject leader were invited to the conference so they could become champions within their local authority to support the introduction and implementation of the new programme of study and GCSEs. Members of the Secondary National Strategy have been working with the wider science learning community to ensure effective and coordinated support for schools and teachers. This will continue over the coming years.

Awarding bodies are providing programmes of training and support. Further details are available at [www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk), [www.edexcel.org.uk](http://www.edexcel.org.uk), [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk) and [www.wjec.co.uk](http://www.wjec.co.uk).

A range of programmes about science at Key Stage 4 are available on Teachers TV (Sky Guide 592, Telewest 240, ntl 803, KIT 70, HomeChoice 845, Freeview 88 (12-6am)) and at [www.teacherstv.co.uk](http://www.teacherstv.co.uk).

Further information about resources and forthcoming events can be found at the following websites:

Royal Society	<a href="http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk">www.royalsoc.ac.uk</a>
Institute of Physics	<a href="http://www.iop.org">www.iop.org</a>
Institute of Biology	<a href="http://www.iob.org">www.iob.org</a>
Royal Society of Chemistry	<a href="http://www.rsc.org">www.rsc.org</a>
Wellcome Trust	<a href="http://www.wellcome.ac.uk">www.wellcome.ac.uk</a>
Association for Science Education	<a href="http://www.ase.org.uk">www.ase.org.uk</a>

## **Annex 2: Sources of advice - Languages**

### **QCA**

The QCA document 'Modern Foreign Languages in the Key Stage 4 Curriculum', published in 2004, provides advice for Headteachers, curriculum managers and subject leaders for languages in schools with Key Stage 4 provision, Local Authority Language Advisers, language and careers teachers.

It sets out the statutory requirements and non-statutory guidelines for languages at Key Stage 4 and suggests different courses that schools might offer and includes information on qualifications. A copy of this document can be downloaded from: [www.qca.org.uk/ages14-19/](http://www.qca.org.uk/ages14-19/) or from QCA Publications, PO Box 99, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2SN, tel 01787 884444, fax 01787 312950, or e mail [orderline@qca.org.uk](mailto:orderline@qca.org.uk) quoting reference QCA/04/1300.

### **The National Languages Strategy**

As part of the National Languages Strategy, the Department is funding a number of Key Stage 4 projects and will be supporting enhanced CPD for secondary teachers. Further details will be sent to schools shortly. The text of the full strategy can be viewed on: [www.dfes.gov.uk/languagesstrategy](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languagesstrategy)

### **CILT, the National Centre for Languages and Comenius Centres**

CILT and its network of regional centres support language teaching nationally and regionally. During 2006-07 they will be developing support for new curriculum models in Key Stage 4. Visit: [www.cilt.org.uk](http://www.cilt.org.uk)

### **Definition of the statutory entitlement for languages**

From September 2004, languages became one of four statutory entitlement subjects. Schools must provide the opportunity for all students at Key Stage 4 to take a minimum of one course in a language that leads to a qualification approved under Section 96 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Schools must provide access to at least one such course in an official working language of the European Union (EU), but may in addition offer courses in any other language that leads to an approved qualification.

### **Alternative qualification routes**

New, alternative qualifications which have already been piloted include:

- Asset Languages, the Languages Ladder-related qualifications, which offers the option to take qualifications in the 4 individual skills at different levels (Breakthrough (equivalent to Entry), Preliminary (equivalent to Level 1), and Intermediate (equivalent to Level 2) with several testing opportunities in an academic year. The qualifications offer paper-based or computer-based tests and are already available in 8 languages (including heritage & oriental languages) with an additional 15 from autumn 2006. The qualifications are offered through OCR for Cambridge Assessment who have been contracted to develop the assessment models with the DfES. There is also a teacher-assessed model, which allows learners to build up at individual Languages Ladder grade levels before they take an end-of-stage external examination.
- Edexcel GCSE in Applied French, which combines French with Business, Leisure & Tourism or Media & Communications; and

Existing, alternative qualifications include:

- Certificate of Business Language Competence, usually used at Entry & Level 1, offered by OCR in 6 languages at Entry and 4 languages at Level 1; and
- NVQ language units which allow students to take units in the 4 individual skills. Usually used at Levels 1 and 2 and offered by a range of Awarding Bodies in a range of languages.

NB: There are other qualifications offered by awarding bodies including ABC's Certificate in Practical