

Glenys Stacey  
Chief Regulator



31 October 2014

Mr Nick Boles MP  
Minister of State for Skills and Equalities  
Department for Business Innovation & Skills  
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Dear Minister

### **Review of functional skills**

Thank you for your letter of 7 October and for our discussion last month. I welcome your clear statement about the importance you attach to functional skills qualifications.

As I explained when we spoke, in our review of these qualifications we are finding some of them wanting but capable of improvement and we intend to act to ensure they are improved. We will say more about our findings later in the year. As with GCSEs, the ownership of the curriculum and the purposes of these qualifications lies with policy Departments, so while we understand you are not seeking fundamental changes in these areas we welcome continuing engagement with you and your officials in this area.

You asked for advice on the branding of the qualifications. As you say, the brand of a qualification is important. It takes some years for qualification titles to become understood and trusted, particularly by employers and others who are not close to the education system. In general, our view is that we should keep the qualifications system as stable as possible, to allow qualifications time to prove themselves. We did a small survey of employers and others recently and found that employers in the survey had a broadly positive view of functional skills qualifications, as do colleges and other providers.

So our advice is that you consider carefully the benefits of change balanced against the benefits of stability. If you do wish to rebrand, then perhaps we could work with your officials to test out the views of employers (and others) more widely about the options? Assuming the changes are not major, qualification reforms can usually be introduced over a 2-3 year period allowing time for consultation, enactment and communication to education providers and students; so colleagues here will also discuss with your officials the options and timing for any reforms.

I hope we will have a further opportunity to discuss the work on functional skills before we publish our review.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "GStacey", written in a cursive style.

**Glenys Stacey**  
Chief Regulator