Dear Mr Halfon,

Following my letter of 19th March, I am writing to share the findings of the recent independent UK NARIC research in to the comparability of Pearson’s GCSE 9-1 and International GCSE qualifications.

UK NARIC (the National Recognition Information Centre) is the national agency, managed on behalf of the UK Government, for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications and skills. UK NARIC recently completed an audit and review of the comparability of Pearson Edexcel’s redeveloped International GCSEs to our redeveloped GCSE 9-1s. The research highlights that the introduction of the 9–1 grading system will allow for greater differentiation of performance in our International GCSEs. The research concludes that the “implementation and setting of grade boundaries follows the similar process to that established for the GCSE 9–1s, ensuring that grades 9–1 represent comparable standards of achievement across both qualifications.”

UK NARIC’s methodology is well-established and its analysis considers key qualification and assessment design principles in a subject-level comparative analysis of six International GCSEs (Business, Chemistry, Science (Double Award), English Language A, History, Mathematics A). The research draws a number of conclusions about the comparability between both sets of qualifications which I have summarised below:

**UK NARIC key findings:**

- Similarities are clearly observed between the GCSE 9-1 and International GCSE in relation to qualification size and duration, content, learning outcomes and assessment across all subjects. Whilst some aspects of the International GCSE have been adapted to suit an international audience, the depth and breadth of content covered in each subject reviewed are comparable.
- A linear scheme of assessment continues to be adopted with externally set written examinations used for all subjects, with an exception being the International GCSE English Language A which includes an optional coursework component. Assessment objectives reveal similarities in the scope and balance of assessed skills across the different subjects between the GCSE 9–1s and International GCSE. A review of sample assessment materials and mark schemes highlights similarities in the volume of assessment, question types, command words and cognitive skills assessed.
- The quality assurance processes underpinning the development, assessment, certification and delivery of the International GCSEs have been reviewed for the purposes of determining comparability. The International GCSEs have been developed in close parallel to the GCSE 9–1s,
with consideration also given to requirements of international stakeholders facilitating the qualification’s validity and relevance.

- Marking processes are in place to ensure consistency and fairness in the allocation of grades across the subjects. The introduction of the 9–1 grading system will enable greater differentiation for performance in the International GCSEs. Its implementation and setting of grade boundaries follows the similar process to that established for the GCSE 9–1s, ensuring that grades 9–1 represent comparable standards of achievement across both qualifications.

- The Pearson Edexcel International GCSEs have been designed according to Pearson’s World Class Qualifications Design Principles. Embedded within the International GCSE programmes are transferable skills, providing students with the opportunity to gain a wider set of competencies, including critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and innovation. Interpersonal skills are also developed. These include: communication, relationship building, collaboration skills, self-management, self-development, and flexibility. Transferable skills development facilitates progression onto Level 3 qualifications such as GCE A Levels, International A Levels, further education, and/or employment.

As I emphasised in my previous letter, we understand how important it is to have confidence in the quality and comparability of qualifications. All of our qualifications are designed and developed to be of the highest standards and we are pleased that both sets of qualifications have been independently confirmed to be comparable by UK NARIC.

If it would be helpful, I would be happy to meet with you to discuss the findings of the report or provide any further information on our GCSE 9–1 and International GCSE qualifications. We also continue to do further work in this important area and I will keep you updated on the outcome of this work.

I am copying this letter to DfE Ministers and officials and Ofqual, following the recent questions by your committee on this issue at the DfE and Ofqual accountability hearings.

Yours sincerely,

Derek Richardson
Vice President, Senior Responsible Officer

Cc: Nick Gibb MP, Chris Skidmore MP, Sally Collier and Roger Taylor, Michelle Dyson