

Mr Robin Walker
Minister for Schools
20 Great Smith St
Westminster
London SW1P 3BT

Cc: Mary Colwell, Caroline Lucas MP, Jill Duffy (Chief Executive OCR), Tim Oates (Head of Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment).
6th December 2021

Dear Mr Walker,

This letter argues that a relatively simple decision for education - the addition of a new qualification in Natural History - would make a huge and positive contribution to Government action on climate, biodiversity and environment; and would help us all.

As leaders teaching Life Sciences to undergraduates and graduates in British universities, we are deeply concerned that young people entering university to study the Earth, Environmental and Biological sciences are lacking basic knowledge of key terminology, fundamental concepts, species recognition and even a basic understanding of habitat/ecosystem interactions. Living as we do, in times of extreme depletion of the natural world, the skills needed to name, observe, record, interpret and understand data collected on wildlife in the UK has never been more important. These skills are sorely lacking, and have been for at least two generations. The loss of knowledge and skills over the past 50 years impacts both current and future student's career prospects, not only in academia but also when they enter jobs in the farming, environmental and wildlife sector.

The proposed GCSE in Natural History will make a welcome first step in producing future natural historians and allow us in the university sector to up-skill further those who choose Earth, Environmental and/or Biological sciences as their career path.

We need our future citizens to have these skills, as does the whole of society.

Given we have entered an age of climate and biodiversity crises, it is of the utmost importance that we produce future naturalists to monitor Earth and its environments in a broad range of jobs. There is great ambition now to begin an era of nature recovery both nationally and internationally, a recognition of the relationship between wellbeing and time in, and understating of, the natural world. This provides social opportunity and also a burgeoning demand for nature-literacy in both public and private sectors. This is not just a matter of losing the naturalist tradition for which Britain is world-renowned, it is vital for all our futures.

For ten years now a GCSE in Natural History has been promoted and developed and the specification and aims are now with the Department of Education. We wholly support the roll out of this qualification. The skills gained through studying the natural world encompass mathematics/statistics, biology, geography, geology, chemistry, physics, climatology and environmental science (to name but a few), but it will also help students gain practical outdoor skills and stimulate the critical connection between nature, culture and the future prosperity of this planet.

For those many students who live in urban settings, taking a GCSE in Natural History will provide an access point to nature that is currently absent in other parts of education. In such an educational system, more students will develop in the tradition of world-class naturalists like Gilbert White and Charles Darwin.

We urge the Department of Education to give its full support to the establishment of a GCSE in Natural History.

Yours sincerely,

1. Prof Yadvinder Malhi CBE FRS, University of Oxford
2. Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, FBA FRS. Faculty of Economics, University of Cambridge
3. Prof Phil Manning, University of Manchester
4. Prof Simon L. Lewis, Department of Geography, University College London
5. Professor Jos Barlow, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University
6. Prof Zoe Davies, Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of Kent
7. Dr Tommaso Jucker, Lecturer, University of Bristol
8. Professor Richard Betts MBE, University of Exeter
9. Professor Vincent Gauci, University of Birmingham
10. Tim Baker, Professor, School of Geography, University of Leeds
11. Prof Peter Cox, University of Exeter
12. Prof. Mark Maslin, Department of Geography, University College London
13. Prof Peter JS Jones, Department of Geography, University College London
14. Prof Jan Axmacher, Department of Geography, University College London
15. Prof Julia PG Jones, School of Natural Sciences, Bangor University.
16. Prof Nathalie Seddon, University of Oxford.
17. Prof. Andrew Hector, University of Oxford.
18. Prof. Robert Ewers, Imperial College London
19. Prof. Tim Guilford, Professor of Animal Behaviour, University of Oxford
20. Prof Catherine (Kate) Parr, School of Environmental Sciences, University of Liverpool
21. Prof. Mathias Disney, Department of Geography, University College London
22. Prof. Oliver Phillips FRS, School of Geography, University of Leeds
23. Prof Russell Wynn, Wild New Forest and University of Southampton
24. Prof. Vivienne Jones, Department of Geography, University College London
25. Prof Anson Mackay, Department of Geography, University College London
26. Prof. Theresa Burt de Perera, Professor of Animal Behaviour, University of Oxford
27. Prof. Geraldine A. Wright, University of Oxford
28. Prof Tim Birkhead FRS, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield
29. Dr Huw Lewis-Jones, Marine and Natural History Photography, Falmouth University
30. Dr Adriane Esquivel Muelbert, Lecturer, University of Birmingham
31. Dr Laura Graham, Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham
32. Dr Tom Matthews, Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham
33. Dr Thomas Pugh, Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham
34. Iain Stewart, Prof of Geoscience Communication, University of Plymouth
35. Prof. Tim Coulson, Professor of Zoology, University of Oxford
36. Prof. Mark Mulligan, Department of Geography, King's College London
37. Prof. Sir Charles Godfray FRS, Oxford Martin School, University of Oxford
38. Prof William Sutherland, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge
39. Dr Francis Brearley, Department of Natural Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University
40. Prof Colin Osborne, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield
41. Dr Alexander Lees, Department of Natural Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University
42. Professor Nick Graham, Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University
43. Prof. Jonathan Leake, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield
44. Dr Martin Jones Department of Natural Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University
45. Dr. Sarah Griffiths, Department of Natural Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University
46. Prof. David Edwards, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield
47. Dr Jennifer Rowntree, School of Biological and Marine Sciences, University of Plymouth
48. Prof. Mark Briffa, School of Biological and Marine Sciences, University of Plymouth
49. Professor David Raffaelli, Environment and Geography, University of York
50. Dr Sarah West, Director Stockholm Environment Institute York, University of York
51. Prof Rosie Hails, Director of Nature & Science, The National Trust & University of Exeter
52. Professor Rob Jackson, School of Biosciences, University of Birmingham
53. Prof. Gareth Phoenix, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield
54. Prof. Philip Warren, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield
55. Dr Karl Evans, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield

56. Dr Tom Webb, School of Biosciences, University of Sheffield
57. Professor Andrew Balmford FRS, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge
58. Prof. David Coomes, Dept Plant Sciences, University of Cambridge
59. Prof. Dave Goulson, University of Sussex
60. Prof. Christine Nicol, Royal Veterinary College
61. Dr Chris Sandbrook, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge