March 1, 2015

Mr Andrew Hall, Chief Executive Officer
AQA
Stag Hill House
Guildford
Surrey GU2 7XJ
UNITED KINGDOM

SUBJECT: Prospective termination of the A-level qualification in Anthropology

Dear Mr Hall,

On behalf of the American Anthropological Association and its Executive Board, I am writing to express our concern over the AQA Examination Board’s announced plans to terminate the recently established A-level qualification in Anthropology. AAA has more than 10,000 members, including 182 from the UK, and more than 900 from throughout the British Commonwealth countries. The qualification has been seen by our Association as a promising prototype for introducing secondary students to core concepts that will better prepare them for college, career, and active participation in civic life. In addition, we believe the A-Level prepares students to study anthropology at the university level, and we note a growing interest on the part of both public and private sector employers in employing graduates with anthropology training for our methods of inquiry as much as our substantive knowledge.

We are concerned that the four-year trial period that the Anthropology A-level qualification was initially granted is simply too short to evaluate either implementation processes or educational outcomes, and we urge you and your colleagues to reconsider your decision to terminate the qualification when this current cohort completes its course.

Our Association recently commissioned a Task Force on Anthropology and Education, which observed that anthropology has much to offer in exposing students to distinct modes of inquiry, values, and “habits of mind” in a diverse and increasingly unequal world. Our Task Force also observed that when students are engaged in learning about anthropology, they increase their awareness of cross-cultural understandings and their implications for justice and global sustainability, they are encouraged to foster systems thinking, and they improve mathematics, writing, technology, and presentation skills.

The AAA Task Force formulated these observations, which you can read in full here (http://www.aaanet.org/cmtes/commissions/Anthropology-in-Education-Task-Force.cfm), based in part on visits with the group that developed the A-level standards, and on observations of anthropology classes in several London schools. Terminating the Anthropology A-level in the UK is, in our judgment, premature. The qualification has only been offered since 2010 and, like any new A-level subject, needs time to grow and become more familiar to students, their parents, and guidance counselors. We sincerely hope the AQA will give it a proper chance to grow. Furthermore, if terminated at this juncture, we will lose a pioneering model that can be
followed in the US and elsewhere. We respectfully urge the AQA to reconsider its decision to eliminate the program. We suggest that AQA look at the success and growth that the anthropology subject of the International Baccalaureate has enjoyed for decades in schools around the world as a clear indication of the appeal of the subject to secondary students.

The petition that has been generated and signed by teachers of anthropology and their students is testament to the enthusiasm of those with direct experience of the A-level. Our Association is committed to further stoking this enthusiasm. The American Anthropological Association is reaching out to the Royal Anthropological Association, the European Association for Social Anthropology, and the other national groups that comprise the World Council of Anthropological Associations and the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences to call public attention to the many important contributions that anthropology makes to significant, if sometimes difficult, public conversations. We sincerely hope that the AQA can continue to be instrumental in leading the way to Anthropology flourish not only in the UK, but around the world, at a time when it is greatly needed.

Sincerely,
AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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