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EDUCATION

Plans to end science practicals 'a huge risk'

By Sarah Cassidy

EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

A-level reforms which will mean practical science tests no longer contribute to students' grades pose an "enormous risk" to the future of experiments in schools, a specialist in practical science has warned.

Steve Jones, director of the Consortium of Local Education Authorities for the Provision of Science Services, told a conference of science teachers in London organised by OCR, the Oxford and Cambridge exam board, that he was concerned the shake-up could lead to schools committing less time and fewer resources to experiments.

The plans by Ofqual, the exams regulator, to exclude practical science work from GCSE and A-level grades have been fiercely opposed by the scientific community and the Department for Education.

The Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan (*pictured*), warned last week that the proposals were "in danger of holding back the next generation of scientists". But exam boards and science teachers backed the move, saying the system of "controlled assessment" of practical science encouraged superficial learning, with children simply following procedures rather than understanding what they were doing.

Mr Jones told the conference: "It is an opportunity that comes with enormous risk. I absolutely hope it goes in the right direction. But I

have that little voice at the back of my head saying the risk is actually quite large. It is about resource decisions which need to be made on the right basis."

Tim Oates, of OCR, defended the reforms. "It is widely recognised that the current system of coursework assessment does not work," he said.

