



Ms Glenys Stacey
Chief Regulator
Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
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17 December 2013

Dear Ms Stacey,

Re: Consultation on New A Level Regulatory Requirements

The Mathematical Association welcomes your desire to improve A levels and the opportunity afforded by the current consultation to respond to the proposals you have put forward, in particular regarding the general regulatory requirements. We are making this response jointly with the Association of Teachers of Mathematics and The Institute of Mathematics and its Applications.

We are concerned that precedents will be established in making decisions about subjects in the first round which could have unfortunate consequences for those that follow; your several provisions within the proposed regulatory requirements for exceptions for particular subjects show that you are aware of the need to preserve the integrity of individual subjects and meet their special needs, and we take comfort from that. We hope that you would make clear that decisions being made in regard of subjects being reformed in 2015 will not create precedents which will bind subsequent decisions about Mathematics and Further Mathematics.

Along with the overwhelming majority of the mathematics community, we welcome the decision to delay changes to mathematics until 2016. Nevertheless, given the scale of the changes needed, the timescale remains challenging if all is to be in place in time for providers to be ready for a September 2016 start. Although you will receive advice from ALCAB, it is important that there is broad engagement with all stakeholders, and that sufficient time is provided for that, especially whilst proposals are still being shaped.

Numbers taking AS and A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics have shown rapid and sustained growth in recent years; it is vital to the futures of our young people, and the country as a whole, that these gains are not put at risk. To that end, it is critical that the qualifications are attractive to potential students with a wide range of progression goals. Many consider that flexibility in the choice of units and being able to use these in either Mathematics or Further Mathematics qualifications have been important features in achieving the increasing popularity and they need to be retained, especially for students taking Further Mathematics.

Mathematics is perceived by many as a valuable but difficult subject and it is key that students have open to them the alternative goal of an AS level as well as that of an A level. To that end, we strongly believe that co-teachability of AS and A level, with the AS level content forming a subset of the A level content, is vital. Not only is co-teachability essential to ensuring the practicality of widespread provision of AS level mathematics, it also allows learners to modify their qualification goals in the light of experience. With this in mind, your decision to maintain the present standard of AS level examinations is welcome.

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It is vital to the success of the reforms that they combine realism with ambition and, in particular, they have a prudent recognition of the mathematical competence and sophistication of students at the beginning of their courses and of what can be safely achieved in one round of reform, especially when any changes to the assessment objectives and structure of the qualifications will be taking place alongside changes to their content. We support your proposed requirement that examinations should include questions that integrate and apply knowledge, understanding and skills across different aspects of the subject and which require the development of sustained lines of reasoning, but this will need to be done cautiously, especially at AS level and in the first few years of the new qualifications, if we are to avoid undesirable consequences.

The re-development of AS and A level Further Mathematics will be particularly challenging and may need innovative solutions that will require the new regulatory requirements to be applied sensitively and flexibly.

We would be happy to discuss these matters further with you or your officials.

Yours sincerely,

Adam C. McBride

Professor Adam McBride
Chair of Council