The Mathematical Association
Supporting Mathematics in Education

*On the subject of **Measuring Performance** we say that there should be a change of emphasis ...*

> **The Mathematical Association believes that there should be a focus on reducing opportunities for the 'gaming' which so readily distorts students' experience of learning mathematics, on alleviating stress in students and teachers alike, on improving performance within schools rather than making comparisons between them, and on taking better account of social factors and prior learning.**

The emphasis on tests and examinations, arising from an accountability agenda, has the serious effect of distorting mathematical activity in the classroom towards the short term goal of maximising results. In an almost inevitable attempt to 'game' the performance tables regimen, teachers often feel driven to focus on those aspects of mathematical learning that are measured whilst those that are unlikely to be assessed immediately, but on which students' subsequent progress depends, are neglected. Some of the worst excesses have been realised through now discredited policies to accelerate students towards early presentation for GCSE Mathematics. With students being entered according to a variety of strategies, the result has been a repeated cycle of failure and superficial coaching for some students, and success and neglect for others. Similar patterns have been seen elsewhere, notably towards the end of the primary years, with the breadth and balance of the curriculum severely skewed, particularly in Year 6 according to Ofsted. So, whilst recognising that society does have to measure the performance of the education system and provide certification to indicate the attainment of individual students, we believe that this should be done in ways which ensure that the long term goals of education are not compromised.

We recommend that there should now be a change of emphasis.

1. Performance measurement should be used to support:
   - students to understand the quality of the breadth of their mathematical skills and, with the support of their teachers, identify what areas should be developed next,
   - schools to celebrate success and to identify and take measures to counter underachievement.
2. Performance tables should be based upon a rich mix of metrics that between them cover, as fully as is possible, what we mean by a good (mathematical) education. This would ensure that the tables could not be gamed; the only way to move up the tables would be to improve the education provided.
3. Consideration should be given to withholding performance tables from the public, or else limiting their extent and educating the public and the media as to how to guard against their misuse and misunderstanding.
4. National performance should be monitored by an independent body using sampling techniques, backed by evidence gathered from the classroom by Ofsted.

A more detailed statement is provided in The Mathematical Association's 'Detailed Position Paper on Measuring Performance'.