



Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP  
 Secretary of State for Education  
 House of Commons  
 London  
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October 2013

Dear Mr Gove

### Converging Views on the Issue of Early and Repeated Entry for GCSE Mathematics

The Mathematical Association warmly welcomes the Government's decision to significantly reduce the incentive for schools to enter candidates for GCSE Mathematics early, repeatedly and *en masse*. We recognise that changing the rules midcourse is undesirable since candidates will have to be withdrawn from examinations for which they have been studying. However, the negative short-term effects of disruption and concern will be more than compensated for by the reduction in opportunities to 'game the system'. Teachers will again be able to ensure that mathematical concepts are understood by individual learners in a time appropriate to them, allowing glimmerings of comprehension to mature into fluency of thought and technique. And schools will find that they spend less time on the systems of planning and administration that have negatively influenced their decision making, beckoning a refocussing on pedagogical issues.

From the outset, The Mathematical Association's grounds for concern about early and repeated entry were pedagogical. More widespread concern emerged with the publication of statistics that demonstrated that candidates who tackled their mathematics examinations early went on to underperform on more advanced courses or else withdrew from them. Whilst, in itself, this proved insufficient to reverse the trend, changes became inevitable with Ofsted's recent announcement that it was prepared to hold senior managers to account if the practice was seen to be detrimental in a particular institution. We are sure that there will still be some schools that explore and exploit any remaining avenues to manipulate performance tables, but trust that the announcement that only a candidate's first attempt at an examination will count towards a school's statistics will prove very persuasive.

As you will be aware, The Mathematical Association has played a leading role in arguing for these changes, publishing position papers on early and repeated entry and making representations to your officials both in writing and face-to-face.<sup>1</sup> We believe that the convergence in the positions of the Department for Education and The Mathematical Association on this subject will lead to an improvement in mathematical education in England. We look forward to continuing the positive dialogue with the Department's officials, whether on this issue or on other matters of joint interest and concern.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Ransom, President

Professor Adam McBride, Chair of Council

cc Elizabeth Truss MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Childcare  
 Dr Tristram Hunt MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education  
 Stephen Rogers, Department for Education

<sup>1</sup> The MA's 'Policy on early and repeated presentation' and 'Detailed position paper on measuring performance' can be found in the *We Say* section at the Association's website: [www.m-a.org.uk](http://www.m-a.org.uk).