

Mathematical Sciences

4. To quote from a recent White Paper on Higher Education²: “This is truly an era of lifelong learning. Today’s generation of students will need to return to learning – full-time or part-time – on more than one occasion across their lifetime in order to refresh their knowledge, upgrade their skills and sustain their employability.” A review of the funding of part-time education was promised during the implementation of this Paper; we would urge that any implementation of such a policy should be done only alongside such a review.

The timing of the decision and of the implementation of the change

5. The implementation of the policy relies on the ability to determine which qualifications are at an equivalent ‘level’. It is not clear from the Government’s proposal or HEFCE’s consultation paper that a student with an integrated master’s qualification (referred to as MMath below, but including MPhys, MSci etc) could still receive HEFCE funding for an MSc course, given that both qualifications would be at the ‘second cycle’ level in terms of the Bologna Process. It is important to realise the different purposes that MMath and MSc courses can serve. Many mathematical MScs act as a ‘conversion’ for specialism in an area useful for employment – such specialism would not normally be available on an MMath course. The suggestion that completing an MMath course would disqualify a student from funding for a more specialist MSc course would be very unfortunate and damaging. MSc courses can also serve as training for those who are returning to the discipline after a period in employment and who would be using the course as a route to a PhD or another career.

The exemptions from the withdrawal of funding proposed by HEFCE

6. HEFCE’s proposals include some welcome protection for the funding of current levels of students classified as studying a Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subject (SIVS), but the methods for the ‘targeted allocation’ proposed are not dynamic and would prevent the UK from responding to changes in national needs. HEFCE states that the proposals have not been developed in order to incentivise growth, but it is precisely the strategically important and vulnerable subjects that need to be grown beyond current levels – this has been acknowledged by the Government and HEFCE.
7. The mathematical sciences community is grateful for HEFCE’s support for projects such as *more maths grads*³, and for the government’s recognition of the shortage of suitably qualified specialist mathematics teachers. It is hard to see any coherence in policy in trying to encourage more graduates and promote growth in this strategically important area while simultaneously removing the funding that would allow more people to improve their skills or change their career paths appropriately.
8. If the policy is to be implemented, we would strongly recommend that support for mathematical sciences is in the form of a complete exemption from the ELQ policy, rather than via the targeted allocation that HEFCE proposes.
9. We also have serious reservations over the criterion suggested by HEFCE for deciding which students would be classified as studying a SIVS, as we believe that the ability to acquire even relatively small amounts of mathematical sciences training is of disproportionate benefit and must not be hindered.
10. ELQ students contemplating a career change into school mathematics teaching or those already teaching and wishing to enhance their teaching of mathematics will often derive the relevant knowledge and skills from just a few mathematical sciences modules, and this needs to be recognised by the policy. Likewise, many other graduates in

² *The Future of Higher Education* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003)

³ See www.hefce.ac.uk/aboutus/sis/stemprojs/moremath.htm and www.moremathsgrads.org.uk for further information

employment become better equipped to contribute effectively within their jobs through study of a relatively small amount of mathematics, compensating for the shortcomings of school mathematical education over so many years. The need to be enrolled on a full degree programme with more than 50% based in a strategically important subject in order to qualify for the proposed support indicates that HEFCE has not recognised this.

11. National needs would be best met by regarding a much greater number of part-time mathematics ELQ students as exempt (or at least eligible for some degree of support) than just those studying for a full degree programme with 'substantial' mathematic g^f