

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 We recognise that changing the rules midcourse is undesirable since candidates will have to be withdrawn from examinations for which they have been studying.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.

A full recognition of the damage being done by early and repeated entry came last year 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. In itself, this evidence proved insufficient to reverse the trend, but 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. The death knell came with the announcement that only a candidate's first attempt at an examination will count towards performance tables.

The Mathematical Association has played a leading role in persuading the Department for Education that change was necessary, publishing policy on the issue of early and repeated entry and making representations to decision makers both in writing and face-to-face. In addition to the changes already announced, we would wish to see the adoption of the average point score as the headline accountability measure. That said, 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.

Relevant Mathematical Association position papers:

- [Policy on early and repeated presentation 2010](#) June 2010
- [Detailed Position Paper on Measuring Performance](#) December 2012