



The Right Honourable Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards
Sanctuary Buildings
20, Great Smith Street
Westminster
London
SW1P 3BT

25th July 2017

Dear Minister,

Response of The Mathematical Association to the “Report of Professor Adrian Smith’s review of post-16 mathematics”, July 2017, and the letter from the Right Honourable, Nick Gibb, MP, Minister of State for School Standards responding to the report

The Mathematical Association wholeheartedly welcomes Professor Smith’s review of post-16 mathematics and the recommendations therein.

With respect to implementation of the report’s recommendations we note your letter as Minister of State for School Standards, responding to Professor Smith’s report. We very much welcome the investment in post-16 support and hope that this targeted funding will have a similar degree of impact to the highly successful CMSP and FMSP projects.

We note the concerns expressed by Professor Smith about the current government policy that all students progressing into education post 16 must work towards GCSE Mathematics if they have obtained grade 2 or lower and must re-sit if they have obtained grade 3. We welcome your commitment to active monitoring of the impact of government policy in this area and look forward to appropriate and timely action as needs emerge.

We are pleased to see that the Royal Society Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education is to be directly involved in the reform of technical qualifications at level 3, to ensure that appropriate expert advice is given to employer groups developing the qualifications and look forward to further details.

The encouragement to universities and employers to signal the value of mathematics education to 16-18 year-olds is to be particularly welcomed. We, as a professional association committed to the enhancement and improvement of mathematics education, will continue to encourage and support students and teachers, and society more broadly, to maintain a breadth of progression pathways through continued engagement with mathematics.

The MA’s 60-second survey on entry for A-level Mathematics and Further Mathematics, published in the TES of 14th July 2017, suggests there will be a serious decline in numbers starting Further Mathematics in September 2017, which the profession attributes in part to the new funding model for A-levels. Against this background, it is with disappointment that we note you have chosen not to implement immediately Recommendation 6 of the Smith Report concerning the removal of disincentives from the funding model for mathematics provision, notably Further Mathematics and Core Mathematics.

It is clear from your letter that government policy as set out in the Green Paper 'Building our Industrial Strategy' is still current. The Green Paper has a strong focus upon mathematics and improving participation in mathematics post-16 as a means of supporting that industrial strategy, quoting widely from the Smith report. However, unless there is a much stronger concentration upon the recruitment and retention of well qualified mathematics teachers the fulfilment of the government's strategy is in doubt: the report itself points to the significant issue of teaching capacity even post-16. It is therefore with grave disappointment that we note that your letter states only that in the area of recruitment of teachers of mathematics current policy will be pursued. Whilst, according to the letter, there was last year an improvement in recruitment, this improvement is insufficient to meet current and future needs and to cover the increasing shortage caused by well qualified teachers of mathematics leaving the profession to take up what they see as better remunerated and/or more satisfying employment elsewhere. We would have welcomed a much more positive statement about recruitment and retention of teachers of mathematics, and would be happy to work with you and your department to broker ways forward.

Finally, we welcome the commitment to ensure that all young people and adults have access to basic mathematics skills where they do not already possess these but again would caution that without sufficient well qualified teachers of mathematics such access will not materialise.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Roper', written in a cursive style.

Tom Roper

President of The Mathematical Association 2017-18