

Report on the meeting between The Mathematical Association (MA) and the Department for Education (DfE) on 23rd October 2019

Present: Peter Ransom (Chair of Council, MA), David Miles (Treasurer, MA), Alex Smith (DfE)

The meeting began with a discussion about the issues surrounding A level Mathematics. The reduction in entries for A level Mathematics (5.8%), A level Further Mathematics (10.1%) and applications for undergraduate courses in Mathematical Sciences (9.9%) were highlighted. Regret was expressed about the relatively low-grade boundaries in the summer 2019 A level exams. We commended the DfE for introducing the Advanced Maths Premium but suggested the special large programme uplift arrangement for Further Mathematics is insufficient to make a difference.

The next item was the Year 4 Multiplication Tables Check (MTC) and we mentioned the NAHT report about the challenges faced in the pilot by pupils and schools. We share the NAHT's concern that the MTC may test computer/tablet proficiency as much as multiplication tables knowledge and we pointed out that 94% of teachers surveyed had said the MTC did not tell them anything useful and 85% reported it had increased their workload.

The recruitment and retention of mathematics teachers was discussed. We reaffirmed our support for the Future Teacher Scholars and Mathematics Teacher Training Scholarships programmes and welcomed the expansion of Alumni events designed to improve retention through professional development, collaboration and networking. The peculiar situation where Departmental mentors often take home less money than the trainee teachers they are mentoring, was emphasised. We recognised the move towards Early Career Payments alongside bursaries and scholarships to improve retention but pointed out that this sometimes made experienced colleagues feel overlooked and unrewarded.

The issue of retention is strongly associated with workload and wellbeing. The additional pressure on mathematics (and English) teachers created by school performance measures and inspection is a concern. The MA's Teaching Committee is looking at what we can do as an Association to help to alleviate workload and improve wellbeing.

We mentioned the unnecessary duplication of work resulting from having no national Schemes of Work and asked about the "structured curriculum resources to reduce teacher workload" that have been promised by the DfE. We learnt these resources will be available for primary and offered our assistance in their development and/or quality assurance. We are hopeful such resources may ease workload for all but especially primary colleagues who feel the curriculum is overloaded. Guidance on the time to be spent on each topic would be much appreciated.

The DfE is setting up a Post-16 Mathematics Teacher Focus Group and we mentioned that the Post-16 subcommittee of Teaching Committee might be able to make a valuable contribution to the work of this Group.

In July 2020, the 14th International Congress on Mathematical Education takes place in Shanghai and the UK has been successful in having an application to make a National Presentation accepted. We brought this to the attention of the DfE as it is important for us to promote our mathematical education on the international stage, encouraging investment in this country. The plans of the Working Party will be sent to the DfE.

To finish the meeting, we asked the DfE to be proactive in disseminating information about Maths Week England.

We appreciate all the comments received on Twitter and the fact the DfE found time to meet with us to discuss these matters. We look forward to further positive discussions in the future.
