

LONDON MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

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Dear Mr Wade

Universities UK/SCOP/HEFCE/Higher Education Academy Consultation “Towards a Framework of Professional Teaching Standards”

I am pleased to respond on behalf of the London Mathematical Society to your consultation on professional teaching standards. You sought answers to five questions; the responses below reflect the outcome of a consultation by the Society’s Education Committee.

A: Are the principles set out in paragraph 11 appropriate and sufficient to enable the development of an effective professional standards framework?

The Society believes that high standards of teaching should be achieved first and foremost through subject-specific practice, as much in academic as in professional and vocational subjects. Principle (a) should therefore refer to ‘... professional and learned societies’. Whilst liaison across all sectors is necessary, too much reliance should not be placed on generic educational development, which at its worst is ‘a research area that has become fragmented, isolated and ineffective’ (Coffield et al., *LSDA report*, 2004). We applaud the desire (e) to minimize the burden, but believe that this could easily be vitiated by (f).

B: We recommend that the Higher Education Academy be invited to undertake the development work on a professional standards framework. How might the Higher Education Academy best work with institutions and other stakeholders in order to develop standards that would be of most benefit to the sector?

The HEA, by bringing together the body which accredits institutional courses (the ILTHE) with the LTSN subject centres, provides a new opportunity for integration of the subject disciplines into professional development frameworks. (The introduction of the LTSN national induction day for maths lecturers, for instance, is a very positive development.) Whilst the divisions of responsibility are reasonably clear in the professional and vocational subjects, in which there are professional bodies which accredit practice and thereby induction into practice, in the more academic subjects the question is how best the HEA should work via the subject centres with the learned societies.

We believe that the subject centres should create, in association with the learned societies and endorsed or accredited by them, discipline-specific modules for initial professional development

(IPD), which should replace all or part of the generic institutional courses. Further, we see little need for generic educational developers to accredit discipline-based IPD. No-one should be accrediting induction into the teaching of material which they would not themselves be capable of studying.

C: The model of a possible standards framework, set out in paragraphs 16-21, covers inclusion of threshold standards with links to expectations of continuing professional development (CPD), including specialist areas, and support for recognition and reward of successful teaching. We welcome comment on the range of staff and levels of activity proposed in the framework.

In our response to B and D we have addressed specifically the means by which IPD might be facilitated and accredited within subject disciplines. For continuing professional development (CPD), we first note that for most practitioners in HE, research (and, more generally, scholarship) form at least as large a part of their jobs as teaching, and that these are highly integrated within the subject disciplines. Research teaching management, and research-led teaching, are essential aspects. Again, therefore, we consider a generic, pan-discipline approach to be inappropriate. The main means of CPD should be through the professional and learned societies. We note the increasing trend for the latter to introduce the pathways of the former, with 'associate' and 'chartered' status.

D: We outline an approach to accreditation of institutional courses based on a framework of professional standards, with links to associated professional qualifications, which is developed from the accreditation arrangements of the ILTHE. We welcome comments on this approach.

See reply to B above

E: How might a framework of standards and expectations for continuing professional development be used to support and promote teaching quality whilst minimising burden on individuals and institutions? How could the benefits best be demonstrated to prospective students and other stakeholders?

Rewards for teaching quality must be available for excellence in classroom teaching and treatment of material. We believe that the emphasis on 'generic' educational skills and on conformity with institutional goals tends to downplay the achievements of those who succeed in presenting difficult material to ill-prepared students. Thus CPD in teaching needs to be subject based, and validated by peers – see the last sentence in the response to B and D above.

We believe that students vary in how they judge courses, but that, in general, the quality of the course, the experience of students and the success of graduates dominate their judgements.

I hope these replies will be helpful to your review.

Yours sincerely

Peter Cooper
Executive Secretary