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Early entry to GCSE mathematics – not always the right path

The Institute of Mathematics and its Applications (IMA) and the London Mathematical Society (LMS) welcome the publication of the Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME) position paper on early and multiple entries to GCSE mathematics. The Societies agree with ACME that, except for the most outstanding students, the practice of early entry can not only have a damaging effect on a student's mathematical education, but can also limit progression to a range of subjects post-16 and hence close off many potential career paths.

Professor Chris Budd of the LMS explained: 'It appears that the practice of early entry and entry to the examinations of multiple examination boards is sometimes designed to enable students to get a grade C in mathematics as quickly as possible to get mathematics out of the way. This is a flawed strategy and is to be deplored. Even for the most able students, early entry should only be considered if there is stimulating mathematical support for them in subsequent years'.

The ACME paper draws attention to the fact that there could be a temptation to omit key areas of study and concentrate on the minimum necessary to obtain a grade C. The Societies agree that this would deny students their right to the full diet of mathematics at Key Stage 4, mathematics that is vital for progression to many areas of study. Early entry may sometimes be justified for the most able students, but this should be very much the exception.

Professor Nigel Steele of the IMA said, 'There seem to be a number of perverse drivers at work here, and these must be resisted. Students, and those who guide them, may well not understand the key role that mathematics plays in many careers and thus not appreciate the damage caused by not allowing achievement of full potential in mathematics'.

Notes for Editors

1. The **Institute of Mathematics and its Applications (IMA)** is the UK's learned and professional society for mathematics and its applications. It promotes mathematics research, education and careers, and the use of mathematics in business, industry and commerce. Amongst its activities the IMA produces academic journals, organises conferences and engages with government. www.ima.org.uk

2. The **London Mathematical Society (LMS)** is the UK's learned society for mathematics. Founded in 1865 for the promotion and extension of mathematical knowledge, the Society is concerned with all branches of mathematics and its applications. It is an independent and self-financing charity, with a membership of over 2600 drawn from all parts of the UK and overseas. Its principal activities are the organisation of meetings and conferences, the publication of periodicals and books, the provision of financial support for mathematical activities, and the contribution to public debates on issues related to mathematics research and education. It works collaboratively with other mathematical bodies worldwide. It is the UK adhering body to the International Mathematical Union. www.lms.ac.uk

3. The **Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME)** is an independent committee based at the Royal Society, and operating under its auspices, that aims to influence government strategy and policies with a view to improving the outcomes of mathematics teaching and learning in England and so secure a mathematically enabled population. www.acme-uk.org

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