

Submission to the Public Bill Committee on the Higher Education and Research Bill by the London Mathematical Society

0 The London Mathematical Society (LMS), founded in 1865, is the UK's learned society for mathematics. The Society's main activities include publishing journals and books, providing grants to support mathematics and organising scientific meetings and lectures. The Society is also involved in policy and strategic work to support mathematics and the mathematics research community. This work includes engaging with government and policymakers on mathematics education and research, participating in international mathematical initiatives and promoting the discipline.

1 The London Mathematical Society expressed strong concerns in its response to the consultation on the Green Paper in November 2015. We do not believe that these concerns are addressed in the Bill that has now been published.

2 The London Mathematical Society, as a leading UK learned society, welcomes the intention to support teaching in Higher Education, but regrets that, without a significant change of direction the effects of the Bill will be damaging rather than improving.

3 Many of the London Mathematical Society's members are engaged in teaching Mathematics in universities, and the Society aims to support good Mathematics teaching, and those who deliver it, in universities as well as more widely. The provisions of the Bill will not be helpful for reasons we have set out in our submission to the Green paper and to the technical consultation on the TEF.

4 At a time when Universities are facing the considerable difficulties that even a soft Brexit will bring, this badly thought out Bill is particularly unwelcome.

5 We do not believe that the Bill reflects a broad vision of Universities as institutions that train professionals, preserve and develop scholarship, question philosophical and political assumptions and inspire and conduct research.

6 It is not clear that the OFS will be able to perform its regulatory function in a way that supports the intertwined nature of university teaching and research activity. Much of the proposed role for the OFS involves an increased commodification of Higher Education that seems to overlook the fact that the benefit of a university education does not simply accrue to the person who receives it; there are also wider, collective benefits to society and the economy. It also overlooks the fact that a student's engagement with Higher Education involves much more than simply paying for a service to be 'provided'. A student of Mathematics has to work to understand the material presented and solve problems, and must be able to interact with lecturers and tutors who are engaged in scholarship and research to enable them to develop a good understanding of the ideas encountered.

7 The Bill mentions an intention to encourage competition between English higher education providers in connection with the provision of higher education where that competition is in the interests of students and employers. There is no balancing statement about the encouragement of cooperation.

8 It is not clear that the OFS will be able to address the considerable concerns that we and many others have expressed about the methodology of the TEF, concerns which are exacerbated by the extremely short timescale for its introduction. We are particularly concerned that the TEF will fail to judge quality of the educational experience for Mathematics students, and its value to the wider community; this depends on actively encouraging institutions to "add value" in ways that the student does not yet understand, and that cannot be captured by short term numerical indicators of satisfaction or learning outcomes.

9 The proposed use of fees to drive improvements in teaching has many flaws, not least in its conflict with widening participation aims and its lack of a direct mechanism for recognising and rewarding good teaching of Mathematics.

10 In short, the proposals for the OFS make it unlikely that this will be a body which can strengthen universities in the UK, on the contrary the proposals pose threats to the current high standing of UK universities in the world as well as to the contribution they make to UK society and its economy.

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