



ACME response to the UCAS proposal to introduce a new UCAS Tariff May 2014

1. ACME

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 mathematics education strategy and policies with a view to improving the outcomes of mathematics teaching and learning in England and so secure a mathematically enabled population.

2. Mathematics and UCAS Tariff points

The Government has acknowledged the importance of mathematics and has committed to developing policies to ensure that more students do more mathematics post-16. Mathematics in the post-16 education landscape differs significantly from all other subjects, in that students have a greater choice of courses available, with the option to take AS/A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics, and from 2014, 'Core Maths' qualifications.

2.1 AS Further Mathematics

AS Further Mathematics is a crucially important qualification, which enables students to take on more mathematics in a gradual way and offers students a mathematics education of internationally-excellent breadth and depth. It also is essential for maintaining and increasing over time the supply of mathematically literate undergraduates and young workers. The cohort taking A level Mathematics in combination with AS Further Mathematics is much larger than that taking A level Further Mathematics.

In the UCAS proposal Ofqual's belief that an AS is not equal in demand to an A level is stated. UCAS thus proposes to reposition the AS level at 40% of an A level rather than 50%. AS Further Mathematics is a unique qualification, in that it involves taking at least one and a half A level's worth of mathematics and is as demanding as an A level in mathematics. It requires a significant commitment of students and needs to be treated differently to other AS qualifications. It should be recognised as 50% of an A level in Tariff points.

To do otherwise may have a detrimental effect on AS Further Mathematics uptake. The numbers taking AS/A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics have significantly grown in recent years.¹ Throughout the reform process for AS/ A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics, ACME has highlighted the need for a considered reform process to ensure that participation levels of those taking mathematics qualifications at AS/ A level are not detrimentally affected.² UCAS should consider whether awarding AS Further Mathematics Tariff points equivalent to 40% of an A level might have unintended consequences for Further Mathematics. There is a high risk of adversely impacting the policy goal of increasing post-16 participation in mathematics and maintaining and further increasing Further Mathematics participation.

2.2 'Core Maths' qualifications

In September 2015, new Core Maths qualifications will be introduced for general teaching. Early teaching trials of newly accredited qualifications will start in autumn 2014.³ The goal in developing new post-16 qualifications is to

¹ <http://www.jcq.org.uk/media-centre/news-releases/entry-trends-2012-a-as-aea-tables>.

² <http://www.acme-uk.org/policy-advice/current-areas-of-focus-for-acme/a-level>.

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/303050/Core_maths_technical_guidance_-_Consultation_Document.pdf .



provide recognised and valued Level 3 qualifications for students. They should give students the opportunity to develop and use mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding to engage critically with mathematics and develop problem solving skills in realistic contexts.

Ofqual has indicated that core mathematics qualifications do not meet the requirements for AS qualifications and need to go through the Tariff process in September 2014. This means that awarding organisations will have to submit the qualifications to the Tariff Advisory Group and undertake the benchmarking process to decide upon the Tariff points, by comparing a current qualification with their new submission. In the Department for Education's Technical Guidance for 'Core Maths' 16-19 qualifications, it is stated that 'in order to count in the 2017 performance tables as Core Maths, it must be at least 180 Guided Learning Hours (GLH)' to allow students time to develop mathematical skills to a higher level and to gain currency from higher education. If the new 'Core Maths' qualifications that are submitted to the Tariff Advisory Group are of similar size to AS qualifications, It is essential that Core Maths qualifications carry equivalent UCAS Tariff points to an AS.

3.3 Other mathematics qualifications

Not all qualifications attract UCAS Tariff points for various reasons. However, higher education institutions should recognise and value a wide range of mathematics qualifications at Levels 1 and 2 and providers should make their acceptance of these qualifications explicit in their entry requirements.