

Elizabeth Truss MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Childcare
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
6 June 2014

Dear Minister,

ACME strongly supports the Government's aim to increase the numbers of students studying mathematics post-16. We therefore welcome the commitment that this Government has shown to the development of Core Maths qualifications and the investment in the Core Maths Support Programme (CMSP) and the early adopters' scheme for schools and colleges. ACME welcomes the intention that the CMSP will work alongside the emerging Maths Hubs.

ACME very much wants Core Maths qualifications to succeed. For this to happen, we suggest that more work is needed to ensure the successful implementation of these qualifications in the years ahead. A clear communication strategy from the Government is needed to inform students and their parents, schools and colleges, higher education institutions (HEIs) and employers about the purpose and value of Core Maths qualifications.

Introducing a new qualification type is a long-term process. Moving so quickly from design to trialling to the more widespread introduction of qualifications in 2015 presents risks to the success of Core Maths. The new qualifications should be refined in their early years of development, using the experience of early adopter schools and colleges as part of this development process. Arrangements should be set out in advance to ensure that all Core Maths qualifications may be adapted as lessons are learned during the first few years.

In order to ensure success and longevity of these new qualifications, the Department for Education should ensure that Ofqual produces written regulations for Core Maths. This will promote comparability across qualifications and a common understanding of the purposes, aims and objectives of Core Maths.

A year ago ACME suggested that the Department for Education should create a 10-year roadmap outlining how to achieve the desired objective of increasing post-16 participation through offering a new kind of mathematics qualification. Such a roadmap could help address concerns about the speed of reform by demonstrating that current plans are part of a long-term strategy. Knowing the final destination should help identify intermediate steps and link together different actions that need close co-ordination.

ACME proposed qualifications that were significantly smaller than half an A level, which would facilitate as many students as possible taking the qualification alongside an A level or vocational programme. The situation as it now stands is that awarding organisations need to submit qualifications, which are at least the size of an AS level (180 guided learning hours) for accreditation this summer, but they will not be accredited as AS qualifications. We can see why some might believe that an AS-size qualification will have more currency with HEIs. However, requiring qualifications to be of AS size, but without AS accreditation, is potentially very damaging and could lead to confusion for students about which qualification to take. Core Maths and AS Mathematics have fundamentally different purposes, a distinction which could now be less clear.

A smaller qualification would have emphasised the differences between AS Mathematics and Core Maths. In addition, AS Mathematics participation could potentially be reduced.

Schools, colleges and students need to understand the suite of qualifications available to them and what qualifications are appropriate for students with different needs and aspirations. As it now stands, there remains much more to be done to ensure that all stakeholders understand the purpose and value of Core Maths. It will require a concerted effort to ensure that this relatively large qualification will be valued by students, teachers, HEIs and employers. Work also needs to be done to promote these qualifications to other subject communities, such as geography and the sciences, as their involvement in delivery is likely to be crucial to the success of the programme.

ACME would welcome an opportunity to discuss some of these issues with you or with your officials in more depth. We remain committed to the goal of increasing post-16 participation in mathematics.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Andy Noyes, Deputy Chair, Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education