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29 April 2010

Dear Mr Baker,

**Re: Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL)**

Thank you for your letter of 9 March, responding to our letter regarding the development of the Masters in Teaching and Learning.

We would be keen to take up your offer to meet to discuss matters further, and I will ask the ACME Secretariat to contact you to arrange a mutually convenient date. In the meantime I would like to respond to some of the points raised in your letter and clarify ACME's concerns further.

**Further study at masters-level**

The issue as described in our original letter was not whether MTL participants themselves will feel that further study is unnecessary; the more pressing issue is that the Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQ) policy will prevent those that *have* been inspired to continue their lifelong learning in this way from securing funding at masters-level. Given that there is every chance that a teacher studying for the MTL will have included very little subject-specific material this is a serious concern – the MTL presents the option of improving subject knowledge but imposes a barrier to doing so at a later date whether or not this is pursued as part of the MTL.

The concerns set out in our letter have recently been sharpened further by the announcement that TDA funding for postgraduate professional development courses will cease from July 2012 for general and subject-based courses in favour of the MTL. Teachers wishing to study subject-based Masters will from then on have to pay full fees. This decision runs contrary to the DCSF/BIS Science and Learning Expert Group's findings and all reason about improving mathematics teaching over the lifetime of teachers. We believe that funding should remain for at the very least STEM subject Masters courses.

In addition, it appears now that the MTL is likely to lead to the demise of mathematics education masters-level courses across the country. This threatens the next generation of

mathematics education researchers – there will be no supply of experienced teachers with masters qualifications in mathematics education to educate future teachers and conduct the education research needed to inform future policy and practice. We believe this is also a worrying development.

### **Improving subject knowledge**

The point ACME is making is here is that there is a *lack of emphasis* on improving subject knowledge – not that it is impossible within the MTL. We maintain that the MTL will lead to masters-level teachers whose own subject-specific knowledge and practice has not been developed, given that these elements are optional in the MTL and portrayed as a minor part.

The personalised nature and range of options guarantees that the amount of subject specialist content in an MTL programme will vary from individual to individual. The MTL may well support the development of subject knowledge, but it certainly does not lead on it. Teacher development requires more than an ‘opportunity’ to make the right choice – the TDA should lead the way here. There can be little doubt that improving subject knowledge is an appropriate way to develop mathematics and science teacher effectiveness – this is well-supported by research. A focus on subject knowledge cannot be left solely to teachers’ choice, or to institutional priorities.

I note that since our initial correspondence the DCSF/BIS Science and Learning Expert Group led by Sir Mark Walport has added its own emphasis to the importance of subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy.

### **Early-career focus**

We would be interested to receive further details of the research basis for the early-career focus that you refer to in your letter – the interest shown by early-career teachers is not evidence in itself that this focus is in the national interest.

### **Coaching in the MTL**

Participants cannot be ‘coached’ to teach mathematics better, in subject specific ways, by mentors whose own practice is not informed by subject specific research about appropriate pedagogy.

The coaching element of the MTL course will not be able to incorporate a focus on mathematics pedagogy or evidence-informed practice. Without this focus we do not believe that teaching and learning of mathematics can be improved.

### **Evaluation of the MTL**

We are concerned that the evaluation process that you refer to will be based only on how the courses interpret and enact the (rather general) objective for the MTL – if the MTL does not set out to improve teachers’ subject-specific pedagogy then it seems unlikely this will be assessed in the evaluation; research findings on teacher development should inform the assessment of the MTL.

ACME considers that the development of the MTL is great importance, and is now also in correspondence with the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dame Julia Higgins FRS  
**Chair, ACME**