

2014/40

6 July 2014

## Pocket Watch – Keeping up with the maths

### Introduction

Last week was very much maths week. The Chancellor may have wisely declined to answer a maths teaser thrown at him on national television by a 7 year old but elsewhere the Government was busy announcing a series of measures designed to beef up maths standards, particularly for young people at the crucial transition stage of 16-19. Driven by concerns about our poor international standing in maths league tables, our failure to encourage more young people to continue with maths beyond the age of 16 and a continuing clamour about maths levels from employers, the Government has made the pursuit of maths a mission. It's already lined up seven measures, from banning calculators for KS2 tests to strengthening GCSE requirements and last week, it added a further seven more.

### The seven latest announcements

1. *GCSE and Functional Skills*. The new GCSEs are to become the national standard qualifications for full-time 16-19 year olds yet to achieve a L2 from August 2017 and potentially for Apprenticeship and Traineeship programmes from 2020. Functional Skills which have been the subject of a recent Ofqual survey will remain as stepping stone qualifications and for Apprenticeship programmes and will be funded. The Government will seek ideas about how to ensure the GCSEs match the needs of different programmes, an obvious issue being for example the application of functionality, in an evidence call shortly
2. *Funding*. The Government has already announced that funding for 16-19 Study Programmes from this September will be contingent on the provision of English and maths for those that need it and will make provision of the GCSEs for full-time 16-19 year olds with a grade D, a condition of funding from 2015. It also intends to review 16-19 funding conditionality generally for 2017
3. *Accountability*. New 16-19 accountability measures which include an emphasis on maths have already been announced and are due to come in from 2016. The Government has also said it wants to highlight the numbers taking A level maths and Physics in separate listings and later this month, will launch further consultation on revised success measures for English and maths in Apprenticeship and adult provision
4. *Assessment*. While GCSEs will remain linear, the Government has asked Ofqual as part of this maths drive to consider potentially increasing the number of assessment opportunities and to look at the case for further online assessment
5. *Teacher support*. Much of this new pressure on raising maths levels will fall on FE where many of the 40% of young people yet to achieve L2 tend to study. To support this new drive, the Government has confirmed a series of bursaries, incentives and support programmes within a new FE Workforce Strategy to support English/maths teachers
6. *Maths Hubs*. These are being set up to try and replicate the 'Asian mastery' methods that have pushed countries like Singapore and Shanghai China to the top of global rankings and which the Education Minister observed first hand recently. The Government has now announced the first 32 such Hubs to be set up in this country bringing schools, colleges and universities together working with leading Shanghai 'experts' to develop and share best practice. The scheme will be funded by the DfE, managed by the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Maths and in time extend to many more schools
7. *Your Life*. This was a campaign launched a few weeks ago by Ministers backed by business and intended to increase the number of students taking A level maths and Physics by 50% over the next three years

**Steve Besley**

Head of Policy (UK and International)



Pocket Watches are intended to provide quick, informal updates on national developments. Information is correct at the time of writing and is offered in good faith. No liability is accepted for decisions made on the basis of information given.

**Keeping up with the maths July 2014**