

2013/8

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## Pocket Watch – Keeping up the maths

### Introduction

Just three weeks into a new year and already it's clear that maths and in particular how best to raise standards, what to learn from other countries and how to build excellence, remains a hot topic. The last week has seen developments in each of these areas with another keynote speech by the Education Secretary on the first, a further empirical report on the second and a couple of new announcements on the third. Summary details below

### Raising maths standards in schools. Education Minister's speech

This is familiar terrain for the Education Minister who returned to it in her [speech](#) last week to the North of England Conference. Her last speech on the topic in December followed the release of the latest SATs and TIMMS tests; this time she used the centenary anniversary of the birth of Alan Turing to highlight the pervasive importance of maths and what the Government was doing to raise standards. There was just one new announcement, that of funding Imperial College to develop and pilot a one year course for A level maths teachers but the romp through other current activity including notably the strengthening of core arithmetic for the new primary curriculum and work going on around post-16 maths offered a useful reminder of this busy area

### What to learn from other countries?

With both Parties now committed to increasing participation in maths beyond the age of 16, the race is on to develop appropriate forms of provision for different levels of need and ability. Given the low participation base in post-16 maths in this country, there's been much interest in how other countries have managed to overcome the problem. Last week's Report from the Nuffield Foundation looked at countries such as Hong Kong and New Zealand as well as states in the US and Germany to see what lessons could be learned. Appropriate courses, clear pathways, high-level teaching all count but interestingly *"a key message is that high levels of participation are not simply driven by compulsion."* A link to the Report can be found [here](#)

### Building excellence

A couple of developments to note here. First, we're beginning to see the emergence of plans first announced in the Autumn Statement of 2011 for specialist maths Free Schools for 16-19 yr olds mirroring the model first opened in Moscow some 50 years ago. Last month, plans by Kings College got the green light and this week plans for a similar venture were announced by the College and University in Exeter. Both are due to open in 2014 and students will typically focus on advanced maths including the STEP exams used by some universities. Second, and in a similar vein, Experian and pfeg (Personal Finance Education Group) are working together to develop further Centres of Excellence offering financial literacy for young people. These come as a Private Members Bill on incorporating financial literacy into schools curricula is introduced

### And finally for the moment

It's worth noting this year also sees the launch of a wider numeracy and maths 4us campaigns with various tools and materials developed by the National Numeracy Challenge and NIACE



**Steve Besley**

Head of Policy (UK and International)

Pearson Think Tank

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