

A level students flock to 'most demanding' qualification

Last week's Ofqual report, comparing the standard of international qualifications, states that '*A level Further Mathematics was the broadest and the deepest qualification reviewed.*'

The report, 'International Comparisons in Senior Secondary Assessment', looks at international qualifications which are comparable to A levels from a wide range of countries including: Hong Kong, China, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Ireland, the USA, Canada and the UK.

It states that some of the mathematics included in A level Mathematics and Further Mathematics was amongst the '*most demanding*' considered in the study.

Given this, it is particularly remarkable that, thanks largely to the efforts of Mathematics in Education and Industry (MEI), an independent educational charity, A level Further Mathematics has been the fastest growing mainstream A level subject in the UK over the past 5 years. In 2011, the number of students in England sitting A level Further Mathematics reached an all-time high of 11 805.

Less than a decade ago A level Further Mathematics was generally only available to students educated in the independent sector, or in the best performing state schools and colleges. This meant that many students educated in the state sector were seriously disadvantaged when applying for prestigious degree courses at leading universities.

The work of MEI's government-funded Further Mathematics Support Programme (FMSP) has revolutionised access to Further Mathematics, enabling all students to have access to tuition.

The figures speak for themselves. Since 2005, when the FMSP started, the number of students in England taking A level Further Mathematics has more than doubled, from 5627 to 11805, and the proportion of state-funded schools and colleges with students taking A level Further Mathematics has increased from less than 40% to well over 60%.

The Ofqual report recognises both the breadth and the depth of study offered by A level Further Mathematics:

'...the in-depth knowledge required by A level Further Mathematics and the IB Diploma significantly raises the demand of those specifications'

'[A level Further Mathematics] is unusual in that the study of three application disciplines, statistics, decision mathematics and mechanics, is offered.'

Universities recognise the importance of mathematics to many of their courses, including those in science, technology, engineering and finance. Many universities require or encourage students to take Further Mathematics for entry to some of their courses.

People well-qualified in Mathematics are highly regarded in the work place and are likely to earn higher salaries. At a time when our economy needs more well-qualified young people to pursue careers that require high levels of mathematics, it is good to know the country's young people are taking advantage of the increased opportunities to study A level Further Mathematics.

Charlie Stripp, MEI's Chief Executive, said:

“The FMSP has been able to boost participation in AS/A-Level Mathematics and Further Mathematics both by working closely with schools and colleges, helping them to give their students access to Further Mathematics tuition, and by liaising with universities and employers to promote the value and importance of mathematics in higher education and careers. The doubling of the entry in in A level Further Mathematics since 2005 shows how effective this has been.”

Notes for Editors

1. The Ofqual summary report ‘International Comparisons in Senior Secondary Assessment’ can be downloaded from <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/news-and-announcements/83-news-and-announcements-news/899-comparison-of-international-qualifications>
2. Mathematics in Education and Industry (MEI), is an independent charity that supports mathematics education (www.mei.org.uk)
3. The Further Mathematics Support Programme (www.furthermaths.org.uk) is a government-funded initiative, supported by the Department for Education and is managed by MEI. It follows on from the ‘Further Mathematics Network’ initiative, which was set up following a successful 5 year pilot project that was developed by MEI and funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.
4. The Further Mathematics Support Programme involves schools, colleges and universities working together collaboratively to widen opportunities for students. It uses a blended learning strategy that employs intensive tutorial input alongside independent study, supported by extensive, purpose-written, online resources.
5. Further Mathematics reinforces the content of the standard AS/A level Mathematics and introduces students to important topics such as complex numbers and matrices, which are vital for many mathematics-related degrees.
6. For more information, please contact Janice Richards on 01225 774777 or by email at: janice.richards@mei.org.uk

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