

THE COUNCIL FOR THE MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES

Response to Measuring and Recording Student Achievement Steering Group Consultation

The Council for the Mathematical Sciences (CMS) has established a working group to look into the implications of the Bologna Process, use of credit, and similar matters. The working group welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals for National Credit Arrangements for the use of academic credit in Higher Education in England.

Recommendation 8 raises concerns in the mathematics community.

A substantial worry is that Table 1 (which contains the substance of the recommendation) will be read as support for the proposition that it is somehow normally possible for a student to progress from A-level to PhD in mathematics in seven years. The need for a longer period was recognised by the International Review of Mathematics. The Research Councils, following recommendations by Gareth Roberts, now provide funding based on three-and-a-half years. Pragmatically, although many university regulations are still phrased in terms of a three-year period of doctoral study, it is usual for a student starting a doctorate with an MMath to complete in four years: very few complete in three, and a significant number take longer than four. We suggest that the table should recognise this change in the pattern of PhD studies by replacing '3 years' by '3 to 4 years'. Additionally, this brings the period into line with that agreed at Bergen for the 3rd cycle of the Bologna process.

We have a concern, too, about the way Table 1 is presented. Although in the main report the table is subject to various footnoted caveats, in the consultation itself these have vanished. There is clearly a danger that this will happen in future unless the footnotes are incorporated into the table itself. Although formally the recommendation does not touch on the column "FTE period of study (normal)" it is likely that its inclusion will give these periods some legitimacy. That being so it is surely important that the column is labelled in a transparent way, by replacing '(normal)' by '(minimum)', as explained in the footnote.

To avoid doubt, even if the column is clearly understood as 'minimum', the PhD entry should be '3 to 4 years'.

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Chair of CMS working group

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