The Rt Hon David Cameron MP Prime Minister 10 Downing Street London SW1A 2AA c/o David Holmes Mathematics Institute, University of Warwick Coventry CV4 7AL

On behalf of the UK young researcher community in mathematics: EPSRC funding decisions.

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the UK young researcher community in mathematics, we are writing to express our concern about the recent funding decisions taken by EPSRC regarding the funding of postdoctoral fellowships in mathematics. Consistent with the recommendations of the International Review of Mathematics[1] organised by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), we presume that the aim of EPSRC funding is to maintain diversity within mathematics and to encourage the best researchers in all areas of mathematics to work in the UK.

No doubt you are aware how mathematics of all kinds underpins all of modern technology from medical imaging to internet transactions; as a recent example, algebraic topology is now being applied to analysing complex data[2]. We as a group are embarking on careers which we hope will continue the strong UK tradition of excellence across all fields of mathematics.

We observe that in contrast to this, the EPSRC has resolved that their 'fellowships will no longer be universally available in all areas ... but rather that priorities will be identified'[3]. In particular, the current round of fellowships will only be available to researchers in the area of statistics and applied probability. This seems incompatible with the intention to attract the best researchers in all fields. It is not plausible that this will encourage the best young researchers to move into the EPSRC's preferred area; specialisation begins around the second year of an undergraduate degree, so that by the completion of a PhD a young researcher has had around 6-7 years of intensive specialised training in their chosen discipline, and cannot rapidly switch fields to accommodate the desires of the EPSRC. It is furthermore neither desirable nor realistic to expect second year undergraduates to pick their specialities according to the availability of funding (which might change in the course of the next 6 or 7 years anyway). Instead of winning the most promising people for the areas EPSRC wants to support, this policy will drive many of them abroad.

The timing of the fellowships offered by the EPSRC is also not well suited to the aim of attracting outstanding young researchers; decisions are made after those for US fellowships, so that the best candidates are routinely forced to withdraw from the EPSRC competition to accept offers from the US.

Overall, we find the actions of the EPSRC incompatible with its aims; it seems to have little regard for obtaining the best value for (public) money, or for developing mathematics capability in the UK to the greatest benefit of its citizens, as detailed in the EPSRC-organised International Review of Mathematical Sciences.

We see this as a consequence of a failure of the EPSRC to either communicate with mathematicians, or to listen to the recommendations of their own International Review. Further evidence of this is provided by the recent letter from the Review panel to the EPSRC stating that 'the limitation imposed on fellowship sub-areas is inconsistent with both the emphatic 'unity' viewpoint in our report, and with our expressed concerns about weaknesses in the UK mathematical sciences career pipeline.'[4]

We therefore request that you strongly encourage the EPSRC both to consult more actively, and to act in line with the results of these consultations.

[1] http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/newsevents/pubs/corporate/intrevs/2010maths/Pages/default.aspx

[2]http://comptop.stanford.edu/

[3] Letter from Philippa Hemmings of EPSRC to the heads of UK mathematics departments, explaining EPSRC's policy of Shaping Capability.

[4]Letter from Margaret Wright of the International Review panel to David Delpy, Chief Executive of EPSRC, protesting against EPSRC's July 2011 policy on fellowships.

The following 383 cosignatories represent a wide range of research fields including Algebra, Algebraic Geometry, Analysis and PDEs, Category Theory, Combinatorics, Complexity, Differential Geometry, Dynamical Systems, Financial Maths, Fluid Dynamics, Fluid Dynamics, Geometric Analysis, Integrable Systems, Mathematical Biology, Mathematical Logic, Mathematical Physics, Number theory, Numerical Analysis, Probability, Quantum Information & Foundations, Representation Theory, Statistics, Theoretical Physics, Topology.

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Sabri Al-Safi	Quantum Information & Foundations	University of Cambridge
Rafael Alcaraz	Dynamical Systems	University of Manchester
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	Mathematical Biology	University of Oxford
Don Praveen Amarasinghe	Analysis and PDEs	University of Warwick
Hafiz Junaid Anjum	Fluid Dynamics	University of Cambridge
Raphael Assier	Mathematical Physics	University of Cambridge
Sarah Astill	Algebra	University of Bristol
Aistis Atminas	Combinatorics	University of Warwick
Andrew Bailey	Analysis and PDEs	University of Birmingham
Simon Baker	Dynamical Systems	University of Manchester
Leonardo Baldassini	Information Theory	University of Bristol
Jessica Banks	Topology	University of Oxford
Robert Barham	Mathematical Logic	University of Leeds
Nathan Barker	Algebra	University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Andrew Barwell	Dynamical Systems	University of Bristol
David Bate	Analysis and PDEs	University of Warwick
Mariano Beguerisse	Mathematical Biology	Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine
Mark Bell	Topology	University of Warwick
Gwyn Bellamy	Algebra	University of Manchester
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Florian Block	Combinatorics	University of Warwick
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Adam Bohn	Combinatorics	Queen Mary, University of London (University of London)
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This letter had been copied to:

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The Hon. Gavin Barwell MP, Science and Technology Committee

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The Hon. David Morris MP, Science and Technology Committee

The Hon. Stephen Mosley MP, Science and Technology Committee

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The Hon. Jonathan Reynolds MP, Science and Technology Committee
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