

Three Million Pounds to Increase Student Numbers in Maths

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The University of Birmingham will manage a new £3 million project to increase the number of mathematical sciences graduates in England over the next three years.

The scheme will run in three pilot areas, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, and London. Each region will organise a series of initiatives designed to increase the overall numbers studying mathematics and to widen participation amongst groups, who are currently underrepresented on mathematical sciences courses at University.

The project, which is funded by HEFCE, has been developed by a consortium of partners including the Royal Statistical Society, the London Mathematical Society, the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications, and the Heads of Departments of Mathematical Sciences, and the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research.

Funding will be focused on three main areas: developing careers information and education, encouraging school and college students to maintain an interest in mathematics after GCSE, and developing the undergraduate mathematics curriculum to ensure it supports a wide-range of students, and hence helps increase student retention.

Michael Grove from the School of Mathematics at the University of Birmingham said: "There has been a 9% drop in the number of students choosing to take undergraduate courses in the mathematical sciences over the last four years. We are delighted to be a part of a mathematical community that has come together to try and reverse this trend.

"The pilot project will help school and college students understand the purpose of studying mathematics, enjoy mathematics, be confident about meeting challenges in the subject, raise aspirations, and encourage them to realise their potential. It will also demonstrate the wide range of careers open to graduates from the mathematical sciences."

The measures in each region will be centred upon a University (Coventry University, University of Leeds, and Queen Mary, University of London), who will work directly with local schools, colleges and employers. A number of appointments will be made within each region to coordinate and organise activities and develop resources.

The work in higher education will focus on developing the undergraduate mathematics curriculum to give students greater flexibility and choice about how they learn. This will include reviewing current teaching, learning and assessment methods to see how students can best be supported with their studies at university. The project will also look at how new technologies can be best used to assist teaching.

There will be considerable engagement with school and college students through enrichment and enhancement activities, careers fairs, university visits, and by using undergraduate ambassadors to work directly with students within the local schools. The project will also strengthen, and further develop, links between schools, universities and employers.

Michael Grove continues: "The project will find effective ways of enthusing students about mathematics. The aim is not only to increase the number of students entering the mathematical sciences, but also to find the best ways of supporting their studies at University. Although the project is initially being run in three areas of the country, it will generate resources and ideas that can be employed nationally. There will be an ongoing process of monitoring and evaluation so that we can understand the range of activities and resources what will enthuse students about the possibilities offered by studying the mathematical sciences."

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