



Media Release

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Universities need to be clear about maths skills required for degrees

Students often misunderstand or ignore the entry requirements for mathematics at many of Australia's universities, and as a consequence, begin their university careers underprepared for their chosen study. Current practice for a significant number of universities is to state mathematical requirements for entry to degree programs including science and engineering, as 'assumed knowledge' and do not stop students enrolling without it.

Academics from science are calling on the Minister for Education and Universities Australia to review the information provided to students about the mathematics background required to study a wide range of degree programs. Over 140 academics and education specialists met in Sydney earlier this year at a National Forum to discuss how 'assumed knowledge' entry standards are impacting on students studying degree programs including science, engineering, mathematics and technology.

'Students make strategic choices in year 12 to maximise their ATAR. This means that they commonly choose either no maths subjects, or lower level maths subjects than they should when the 'assumed knowledge' information is not clearly stated' said forum organiser, Dr Deborah King. 'Students need to be made aware of the consequences that these choices may have on their future study.'

A communique from the forum participants asks the Minister to investigate the current information provided by universities to prospective students, with a view to making the expected mathematical knowledge statements clear enough for students to be able to decide if they meet the expectations and what the consequences will be if they do not.

'The use of the term 'assumed knowledge' is ambiguous and students do not understand what it means. It is our responsibility to ensure that the messages and information we give prospective students about the background knowledge required for their degree programs is clear and accurate,' said Dr King.

The national forum was organised as part of a project investigating first year mathematics courses in Australian universities. The First Year in Maths (FYiMaths) project team has interviewed mathematicians from over 25 institutions and found that universities expend significant resources teaching secondary school level mathematics to their underprepared students. Project findings show that we need to send a clearer message to students about the importance of their final years at school in preparing them for university study.

Media contact: Dr Deborah King, University of Melbourne, ph: 03-8344 8052 or 0401832578 dmking@unimelb.edu.au

Deb King is the project leader for a government funded project investigating first year mathematics programs in Australian universities ([FYiMaths](#)). This project is funded by the Australian Government, Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, Office for Learning and Teaching.



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