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Bigger numbers in maths but don't count on physics graduates

The Campaign for Science & Engineering (CaSE) today welcomed the big rise in the number of students taking mathematics A-levels but warned that the continuing decline in physics students threatens the nation's economy.

"It is genuinely good to see that efforts to encourage youngsters into doing maths are working, with a rise of almost 6% taking Maths A-level and a whopping 22% increase in Further Maths" said Dr Peter Cotgreave, Director of CaSE.

"However, we are still seeing big drops in the numbers studying physics; we're losing physics students at the rate of around 1,000 every year, and if this trend is not urgently reversed, the UK has no chance of competing in the global economy. You can't run a 21st century economy in a developed nation without scientists to discover new knowledge and engineers to use that knowledge to create new practical applications - products and services that people are prepared to pay for.

"We in the scientific community need to redouble our efforts to get more young people interested in the sciences, but it's essential the Government sends strong signals if it wants to fulfil its ambition to make the UK 'the best place in the world for science'.

"They should start be reversing the crazy decision to reduce the ratio of funding available in universities for sciences. *Then physics departments can concentrate on producing physics graduates instead of worrying about avoiding going broke.* A quarter of secondary schools in England and Wales have no physics teacher, and any measure that would do anything to remedy that would be worthwhile.

"The authorities could also signal the importance of sciences by scoring them more highly in the points system that is used for getting into university. Then students would have a real incentive to consider studying physics."

ENDS

For more information, contact Peter Cotgreave on 020 7679 4995 or 07958 570591