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Transcript of interview with Dr Hilary Leever, CaSE's Assistant Director, on A level results

Interviewer (I): Let's get more on the rise in science and maths A level results now. I'm joined in the studio by Dr Hilary Leever, from CaSE, the Campaign for Science and Engineering in the UK. Good afternoon to you. There have been small increases, 3.5%, 2.7%, but is that a real increase proportionally in people doing these subjects?

Hilary Leever (HL): Well, we're really pleased to see that the number of entries into maths and science have risen. It looks like a genuine increase, as it were, in mathematics. But in the sciences they haven't actually increased their market share, so the increases are just in-line with the increase overall. And what we really want to see is a much larger and more significant increase in student preference for the sciences.

I: And how do you think the best way is to go about doing that?

HL: Well, the government and the science and engineering community have many many initiatives to excite students about science at the moment. But they're clearly not having the impact necessary. One thing we're suggesting is to actually give more UCAS points for science and mathematics. The justification for this is that they're incredibly strategically important for the country. There is a shortage of skills in this area and there's certainly a shortage of teachers so we need to produce more graduates.

I: Is that a little bit like bribery, if you do this, we'll give you this and you'll get into a better university.

HL: Oh, it's not necessarily about getting into universities, it's about increasing the uptake.

I: Yeah but in giving them higher points for UCAS entry - you're saying that they get more points for taking maths or science than they would for doing english or history?

HL: Yes, so what we think is that you might get students who are wavering between arts and sciences or taking for example history and English and are choosing between biology and another subject and might think - well actually biology will boost me that bit. And who knows? They may end up developing a passion for biology and going on to study it.

I: And what do this year's results say about the different results across the country. Have you got more people taking up science and maths in different parts of the country?

HL: They've been unable to analyse that as yet. But they have - as I think you know - there's a lot of regional variation in performance and there's also a lot of variation across different types of schools and the big increases this year were actually in the independent sector and the selective schools.

I: Ok, we've got to leave it there.