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CaSE congratulates GCSE students but regrets that so few have the opportunity to study separate sciences taught by specialist teachers

CaSE was delighted at the good news in mathematics: additional mathematics entries have increased a whopping 198% to almost 10 000, statistics entries have increased 21% to almost 83 000, and students achieving A-C grades at GCSE have increased .9% to 55.2%. CaSE was also cautiously optimistic at the 2-3000 increase in entries into separate science GCSEs, now taken by approximately 10% of science students.

CaSE believes that every student has the right to be taught separate science GCSEs by specialist teachers and that if this happened, the skills shortage in STEM subjects would be abated.

CaSE's Acting Director, Dr Hilary Leever, commented:

"The tide may have turned for mathematics and the sciences, but do not forget that it was out a long way – there is no room for complacency.

"It is a scandal that most students do not have the opportunity to take separate physics, chemistry, and biology GCSEs. It is unsurprising that just 10% of students take separate sciences given that just 26% of mainstream schools offer them (compared with 58% of science specialist schools, 66% of grammar schools and 72% of independent schools).

"Most children in state education do not have the chance to study separate science GCSEs, whereas children in private education do. Studying separate rather than combined sciences means that you are more likely to take science A levels, do well, and go onto study science at university. Of the many pleasures derived from studying the sciences, one is about £80 000 more lifetime salary than the average graduate. You can see how a private education literally pays off for those whose parents can afford it.

"Performance in separate science GCSEs is incredibly good, with 45-47% of all students getting As or A*s, suggesting that many more students could get reasonable grades in these subjects."

On the teaching situation, Dr Leever added:

"We are constantly complaining about the shortage of specialist teachers: a quarter of schools have no physics specialist teacher and a sixth have no chemistry specialist. Astonishingly, a third of GCSE physics teachers do not even have a physics A level. We call upon the Government to set targets for recruits into teacher training in these subjects and to take radical steps to make sure that they are filled."

This year the first 57 000 students took the new Science GCSE. Dr Leever said:

"The new course was designed to run over two years alongside other new science GCSEs with more practical and theoretical content. We are concerned that students focusing on just this course in its first year will not have had a broad science experience."

ENDS

Notes for Editors

1. For more information contact Dr Hilary Leever on 07905 304 702

2. CaSE is a pressure group that works to improve the scientific health of the UK. CaSE was founded in 1986 (then known as Save British Science), and is accepted as an organisation that speaks for a wide section of the science and engineering community in a constructive but also critical and forceful manner. We speak directly to ministers and civil servants, interact with the press and backbench politicians, organise symposia to discuss current developments in policy, and publish documents. Our work is supported by 1,500 individual scientists and engineers and by a wide range of industrial companies, universities, city financiers, learned societies, publishers and others. Full details of CaSE's work can be found at www.sciencecampaign.org.uk.