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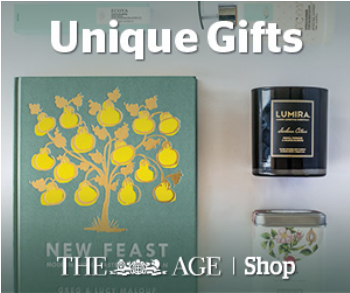
Apr 14 2016 at 5:49 PM | Updated Apr 14 2016 at 5:49 PM

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Simon Birmingham urges universities to make maths mandatory for more degrees



Federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham wants other universities to follow the University of Sydney's move to reintroduce maths prerequisites. Louise Kennerley



by Tim Dodd

The University of Sydney's bold move to require its science, commerce, engineering and information technology students to have passed year 12 maths has earned the praise of federal Education Minister Simon Birmingham, who urges other universities to follow suit.

Senator Birmingham said on Thursday he welcomed the university's decision to require that new students in these degrees have passed year 12 maths at the intermediate level, which includes calculus.

"That makes the University of Sydney the first university in NSW with the requirement. It's a concept that I would encourage other institutions to consider," he said.

The university [announced in February](#) that it would reverse the trend established over the past two decades to drop maths prerequisites for bachelor degrees and reintroduce them for 62 degrees in science, commerce, engineering and information technology. Students [will be required](#) to get at least a level 4 pass in the NSW year 12 mathematics subject or equivalent. The measure will be introduced for students starting in 2019, to give those at school now time to adjust.

Senator Birmingham said he was concerned that there had been a 20 per cent drop in numbers of students studying higher-level maths in year 12 from 2000 to 2013.

The Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute said only 13 per cent of Australian commerce degrees, 14 per cent of science degrees and 59 per cent of engineering degrees require maths as a prerequisite.

Senator Birmingham said making maths a stronger requirement in year 12 study would have a benefit at all levels of schooling. As a result "much more mathematical or scientific accomplishment would be expected through the early years of education", he said.

Chief scientist Alan Finkel endorsed the minister's praise for the University of Sydney's move.

"You can't do engineering without a strong grasp of mathematics – algebra, calculus and matrix manipulation. I'd be delighted if other universities would consider the same kind of approach. It's impressive," he said.

On Thursday Senator Birmingham also said the government would provide a language learning app to 300 pre-schools across the country, which would help young children learn Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, French and Arabic.

In an expanded trial, the Polyglot app will be available to about 10,000 pre-schoolers and Senator Birmingham said he expected it would help turn the tide on the decline of language study in schools.

He also said the government would put \$6 million into developing a similar app to inspire students about science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects.


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