

ZMATH 2014d.00450

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University students' perspectives on diagnostic testing in mathematics.

Int. J. Math. Educ. Sci. Technol. 45, No. 1, 58-74 (2014).

Summary: Many universities issue mathematical diagnostic tests to incoming first-year students, covering a range of the basic concepts with which they should be comfortable from secondary school. As far as many lecturers are concerned, the purpose of this test is to determine the students' mathematical knowledge on entry. It should also provide an early indication of which students are likely to need additional help, and hopefully encourage such students to avail of extra support mechanisms at an early stage. However, it is not clear that students recognize these intentions and there is a fear that students who score poorly in the test will have their confidence further damaged in relation to mathematics and will be reluctant to seek help. To this end, a questionnaire was developed to explore students' perspectives on diagnostic testing. Analysis of responses received to the questionnaire provided an interesting insight into students' perspectives including the optimum time to conduct such a test, their views on the aims of diagnostic testing, whether they feel that testing is a good idea, and their attitudes to the support systems put in place to help those who scored poorly in the test.

Classification: D65 C35

Keywords: diagnostic testing; perspectives; opinions; feedback

doi:10.1080/0020739X.2013.790508