

Bonus points for maths

Tue, Oct 12, 2010

Madam, – The current debate about bonus points for mathematics has been framed in very limited terms, in particular the contribution from Orla McCormack (Opinion, September 29th) was disappointing. An understanding of mathematics is not simply a foundation for science and enterprise, but also underlies the beauty of art and the natural world. An Irish child who fails to appreciate the legacy of William Hamilton is as impoverished as the child who fails to appreciate Yeats.

The writer claims that bonus points are unfair to students whose interests lie in areas such as literature. However, even if a 50 per cent bonus was awarded for higher level mathematics, this would still only yield a maximum allocation of 150 points for the subject to the student. This is notably less than the 300 or more points available to most students for languages. Additionally, the disproportionate effort required for higher level mathematics deserves to be fully recognised.

The introduction of bonus points is not a solution in itself. It must be one part of a larger strategy to address the low uptake of higher level Leaving Certificate mathematics. Other components are the Project Maths initiative and increased support for professional development courses for mathematics teachers, such as those offered by NUI Maynooth in collaboration with the University of Cambridge, or indeed by other institutions. – Yours, etc,

Prof STEPHEN BUCKLEY,

Head,

Department of Mathematics,

Dr BERNARD MAHON

Dean of Science Engineering,

NUI Maynooth,

Co Kildare.