

IRISH MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

President's Report 2006

Mathematical life has been busy in Ireland since the AGM in DCU last year. The traditional activities of the Society have continued as usual: the Bulletin, meetings here in Tralee and at DIAS in December, conference support, our web site and the IMO (both Irish and International). Three important developments during the year were: the presentation of the Fergus Gaines Cup (FGC), progress in the development of our relationship with the Société Mathématique de France (SMF) and efforts towards greater involvement of the Institutes of Technology as part of the mathematical community served by the Society.

In February at a joint event organised by the IMTA, the IMA and ourselves, in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Mrs Marie Gaines, widow of the late Dr Fergus Gaines presented the FGC (for the first time with that designation) to Fiachra Knox winner of the Irish Mathematical Olympiad in 2005, and subsequently silver medal winner at the International Mathematical Olympiad in Mérida, Mexico. The joint event was a celebration of excellence in extra-curricular mathematics at post-primary level in schools, combining the IMO with mathematical achievement at the Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition. It is a collaboration which we hope to repeat in November this year. I strongly encourage members to attend. I would like to congratulate the young Irish team who participated this summer at the 47th IMO in Slovenia and who distinguished themselves with four honourable mentions. Of course, their achievement would have been impossible without the dedication of olympiad trainers throughout the country.

The Bulletin which you receive today (no. 57) contains an article by Marie-Françoise Roy, President of the SMF outlining the activities of that society. I have written a corresponding article about the IMS which will be published shortly in the Gazette des Mathématiciens. These reciprocating articles are the first steps in what I hope will be an appropriate and, of course, fruitful collaboration between our two societies. I urge members interested in participating in any way to read the Bulletin and to contact me directly. The SMF President was invited to join us at our meeting here in Tralee. However owing to another long-standing commitment she has not been able to attend, and sends her apologies.

Mathematicians in the Institutes of Technology have met both here in Tralee (in 2005) and in Tallaght last May to address issues of common concern such as innovative teaching technologies, provision of support for post-primary maths teachers, policy development and liaising with organisations outside the sector. Three members of the IMS Executive attended the Tallaght meeting with a view to promoting a framework within the Society to support colleagues in the sector. I hope that we will develop many initiatives which these colleagues will find of interest, and that membership in the sector (now at only 10% of total membership) will increase significantly.

Outside the Society there have been several developments of importance to our community, some of which we discussed in the forum yesterday. SFI's Mathematics Initiative has progressed as far as awarding two groups with funding: the Claude Shannon Institute for Discrete Mathematics, Coding and Cryptography and the Mathematics Applications Consortium for Science and Industry (MACSI). I congratulate these groups on their success. We have also heard about the Strategic Innovation Fund recently announced by the HEA which appears to offer significant opportunities for supporting mathematics teaching.

The NCCA has published two important reports in relation to mathematics within the past year: the discussion paper *Review of Mathematics in Post-Primary Education* (October 2005) and the resulting *Report on the Consultation* (April 2006). The Secretary has prepared a brief document on these reports, and, indeed, was involved in the preparation of a detailed response to the former in her capacity as secretary of the RIA Committee for the Mathematical Sciences. This response has been published in our Bulletin no. 57. It is regrettable that there was no IMS response to the NCCA Review. I take responsibility for this and apologise that the pressure of other work prevented me from coordinating a response. However, had there been one, it would, I am sure have duplicated to a large extent the excellent response from the RIA prepared by many of our members and, in particular, by our Secretary. I welcome these reports and look forward to the implementation of their recommendations.

Other developments in mathematics education include Team Maths organised by the IMTA on a national level for the past two years in collaboration with the Hamilton Mathematics Institute, in TCD and which I chaired. Team Maths is essentially a mathematical table quiz for students in the Senior Cycle involving questions compatible with the curriculum. It is likely that a contest involving olympiad-style questions will take place for the first time next month, organised by members involved with the IMO. It is noteworthy the increasing attention the Society is paying to mathematics education; indeed 30% of talks here in Tralee are in this area.

As seems to be the tradition, the publication of the Leaving Certificate results draws attention to 'worrying trends' in mathematics. Following discussion about this matter at last year's AGM, I contributed to the debate both on RTÉ radio and in the letters' page of the Irish Times in an effort to put some of the public concerns in context. The Irish Times published no fewer than ten letters on the issue (including another by an IMS Committee Member) as well as an editorial and an opinion piece by the Labour Party's spokeswoman on education. Other newspapers and broadcasting stations also covered the issue extensively.

In an effort to increase and improve public awareness of mathematics, Waterford IT (under the auspices of CALMAST) is coordinating the first ever Maths Week Ireland beginning 16th October 2006, coinciding with the traditional celebration of the discovery of quaternions. Events will take place in at least eleven centres.

With the increasing diversity of mathematical activities throughout the country there are corresponding demands on the Society. In this exciting environment, active and coordinated participation is vitally important. It means that individual mathematicians are challenged to think in new ways about their discipline and its place in Irish society. To find out how best the IMS might engage more fully in this endeavour, I intend to initiate a survey of members to ascertain their views and how best to avail of the untapped potential of the Society to have a greater impact. I hope that you will be imaginative with your ideas and generous in your commitment.

As I prepare to leave office as President, I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the Committee Members for their support, and, in particular, to the Executive Members for their good counsel and hard work.

Maurice O'Reilly
IT Tralee, 5 September 2006