

# IRISH MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

## President's Report

**Introduction:** This year, my last as President of the IMS, has seen further deterioration of the research infrastructure, and much heated discussion about Project Maths, the new syllabus for mathematics education at second level in the Republic of Ireland. More details on both are given below.

The life of the committee has been relatively stable, welcoming two new members onto the committee of the beginning of this year: Bernd Kreussler and James Gleeson. Next year will see many more changes as several committee members will come to the end of six years' of service, and we will need volunteers to replace them.

In November the European Mathematical Society published a Code of Practice for mathematics, available here:

<http://www.euro-math-soc.eu/system/files/COP-approved.pdf>

The Code emphasises ethical aspects of publication, dissemination, and assessment of mathematics. It is a well thought out document, and I would like to see it adopted by the IMS at our next AGM.

**Meetings:** The Annual Meeting of the Presidents of the National Member Societies of the European Mathematical Society took place in Prague, March 31–April 1. The meeting was organised by the Czech Mathematical Society, in celebration of the 150th anniversary founding of the Union of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists. The IMS was represented by our Vice President, Martin Mathieu, who found the meeting informative and useful.

**Funding:** As many of you will know, SFI restructured two of their grant schemes last year, amalgamating the Research Frontiers Programme and the Principal Investigators Scheme into a single entity, the Investigators Programme. Many grants had been awarded to projects in mathematics that funded PhD studentships through RFP over the last few years, but the initial signs were that the criteria for awarding money under the Investigators Programme would be disadvantageous for mathematics.

As it turned out, my fears were more than realised, with essentially all applications from mathematicians being withdrawn administratively, having been judged not to fulfil the eligibility requirements regarding their 'impact', measured by SFI on economic and societal grounds, rather than for any scientific reasons.

An initiative started by Gary Maguire resulted in a meeting between the head of SFI, Mark Ferguson, and myself, Stephen Gardiner and Eugene O’Riordan, where we were given an opportunity to present the case for mathematics. This came in the middle of SFI’s consultation period for their Agenda 2020 initiative, which has now been published in final form, and still strongly emphasises economic impact as the main criterion by which to judge applications. The next round of the Investigators’ Programme has yet to be launched, at the time of writing, so I do not know yet whether our lobbying will bear any fruit. I am not confident of any significant change; the news on the European front for funding is similarly bleak.

In better news, James Gleeson has recently been appointed to the Council of the Irish Research Council. Hopefully having an IMS committee member in such a position will provide us with some leverage to further our case at the highest levels.

**Fergus Gaines’ Cup:** This award, for the best performance in the selection test for the Irish team for the International Mathematical Olympiad, was presented to Adam Keilthy on 27 August at the IMS meeting in IT Tallaght.

**Conference Support:** The Society supported the following conferences in 2012:

- Algebraic Geometric Conference, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 3–4 Feb
- Groups in Galway, NUI Galway, 11–12 May
- 7th Annual Conference in Mathematics and Statistics Service Teaching, NUI Maynooth, 28–29 May
- Irish Geometry Conference, UCC, 15–16 June
- Mini-symposium in memory of Prof. Frank Hodnett, UL, 8 June
- 7th Annual Workshop on Irish Mathematics Learning and Support Centres, QUB, 7 December

Conference support continues to be one of our main roles; details for applications are circulated on mathdep on a regular basis by Sinéad Breen, Treasurer of the IMS.

**Mathematical Education Matters:** As mentioned above, Project Maths remains a hot topic of debate amongst teachers at second level, members of the Society, the media, and beyond. This initiative, which has now almost completely replaced the previous Leaving

Certificate in mathematics course, is ambitious and has admirable goals, and will be very welcome *if* it succeeds in helping our second level students move beyond rote learning of algorithmic solutions to standard problems.

There are some obvious concerns, chief of which, in my opinion, would be ensuring that sufficient training is provided to teachers to ensure that they are able to teach this new course. There is also much debate about which topics should be covered.

Since the debate even within the Society has been heated at times, it has not been possible for the IMS to take a unified position. One solution would be to set-up a Mathematics Education Committee to formulate such positions on behalf of the Society, and I have recently set-up a survey of IMS members to find out if this is an initiative that you would like to see the developed. Whether or not this committee is set-up, I would urge all members to continue to monitor the progress of Project Maths, and to make suitable submissions to the NCCA commenting on course content and structure.

**Future Meetings:** Next year's 'September' meeting will take place in NUI Maynooth (26 & 27 August), in 2014 we will meet in QUB Maynooth, and in 2015 we will meet in UCC.