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Staff room

Introducing the MMP

by Robert Hunt



Mathematics is vital for any modern technological nation. Economic success depends on technology, which depends upon engineering, which depends upon science, which ultimately depends upon mathematics. But because mathematics lies at the far end of this chain, its importance is not always appreciated: and many people think that mathematics is what they were taught at school and have no idea of its true depth. Some people are even proud of being bad at it! The importance of computers, biotechnology, telecommunications, aero-engineering or medicine is much more obvious to them. But without mathematics, none of these areas would exist. Even their washing machine would be stuck in the '50s.

Lack of basic numeracy amongst a significant minority of school-leavers, on the other hand, is a problem which is widely appreciated. But improving numeracy is not just a matter of better teaching at school. What is required is an improved appreciation of mathematics throughout society; only this will create the positive environment in which numeracy can flourish.

The Millennium Mathematics Project is a new national initiative which aims to make people of all ages and interests more aware of the importance and excitement of mathematics – and its many applications – to their everyday lives. The Project will build on the existing successes of both PASS Maths and its sister online publication, NRICH, in reaching schoolchildren and teachers with interesting articles and puzzles about mathematics, and we are proud to be associated with it! The Millennium Mathematics Project will be launched formally later this year; a wide range of *new* activities are planned, from travelling roadshows, exhibitions and televised lectures to debates and seminars aimed at non-specialists, all intended to enhance public understanding of state-of-the-art research. The Project will also provide a national resource centre of written and electronic material for mathematics enrichment, for teachers, schoolchildren and adults. Not least, it will assist professional organizations and the media – newspapers, radio and TV – in understanding mathematical concepts and how to explain them to others. The presentation of mathematics to the public, through all kinds of media, has an immense impact on public perception of the subject!

Above all, the Project will be flexible and responsive, developing alongside the new mathematics of the new millennium, reflecting its growth and changing concerns, interpreting its central issues to the public, and exploiting new media to communicate the excitement and importance of mathematics in the broadest sense.

Introducing the MMP



Prof. John Barrow, future MMP Director

Prof. John D. Barrow, currently Professor of Astronomy and Director of the Astronomy Centre at the University of Sussex, will be the first Director of the Millennium Mathematics Project. Previously he held positions at the University of Oxford and at the University of California at Berkeley. Professor Barrow is well known as an author and lecturer committed to the public understanding of science, and has written ten books about a wide spectrum of subjects that connect science and mathematics with other human interests in the arts, history and philosophy. He will launch the Project in July of this year and simultaneously take up the post of Professor of Mathematical Sciences at the University of Cambridge.



Plus is part of the family of activities in the Millennium Mathematics Project, which also includes the NRICH and MOTIVATE sites.