

IRISH MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

President's Report

Since our last AGM less than nine months ago, the Irish mathematical landscape has changed in significant ways. Issues of policy and strategic planning have been much more evident than is usually the case. This is happening in the context of the Hamilton Year 2005: Celebrating Irish Science, as designated by the Government. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment launched, only three weeks ago, the Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Mathematics Initiative. In February, the Royal Irish Academy (RIA) replaced its committees dealing with mathematics by a new one called the Academy Committee for Mathematical Sciences. Each of these developments was preceded by consultation with the Irish mathematical community, a community with diverse and, at times, strong points of view. Within the past few weeks, the national media have engaged in their annual discussion of the Leaving Certificate results with particular attention on the 'high' failure rate in mathematics.

The continuum of issues in this landscape from education to research, on the one hand, and across the various levels of education as well as the spectrum of research from 'pure' to 'applied', on the other, is complex. The links between mathematics and society are increasingly emphasised, in particular through the teaching profession and in industrial and commercial applications of mathematics. Some have expressed legitimate concerns in regard to support for research and, especially, for 'pure' research in this context. Yet, it seems to me, that the challenge facing mathematics in Ireland is to make new connections within and across these varied areas of concern, without diluting the quality of the endeavour. This challenge reflects international trends towards interdisciplinary activity, as well as the optimism associated with prosperity in Irish society.

We should expect, as the SFI Vision Statement states, that 'the effects of a significant investment will readily be felt throughout the mathematics community'. The new RIA committee has a remit to promote the development of all the mathematical sciences, and, in particular, to lead, inform and guide mathematics policy, not only for the Academy, but also for Government. Initially this committee is emphasising publicising mathematics, mathematics education, funding mathematics and links with other interested bodies.

Much in the agendas of both SFI and RIA resonate with the activities and concerns of the Society. Our regular activities include the Bulletin, our September and December meetings, support for conferences (already four this year) and for the IMO, and our web site. Making links with other relevant bodies both at home and abroad is becoming increasingly important. A review of our membership is overdue. We expect to address this shortly. In the medium term, I hope that the Society will play a stronger roll in promoting the public image of mathematics in Ireland. In summary, the situation for mathematics in Ireland is exciting and challenging at present. I am confident that the IMS through our 328 members will contribute significantly to the work ahead. I am grateful for the support of members in debating, formulating and carrying out the remit of the Society as laid down in our Constitution. I would like to express my sincere thanks, in particular, to all the Committee Members on whose help especially I rely.

Maurice O'Reilly
DCU, 2 September 2005

PS Two important matters were decided at the Committee Meeting of 14 December 2005 which I would like to communicate to members as early as possible. First, since the Society meets only once a year (at the AGM, normally in September), the Committee considers it important to publish the minutes of the AGM while their content is still relevant. Thus draft minutes will be published in the first Bulletin following the AGM (typically the Winter Bulletin). These minutes will, of course, be subject to approval at the AGM in the following year. Secondly, because of the variability in the number of conferences supported by the Society each year, those seeking such support are urged to do so six months in advance of the date of the their conference. Although applicants who apply late for funding will not necessarily be turned down, there is the danger of their being disappointed if funds allocated for the purpose have already been depleted.

Maurice O'Reilly
18 December 2005