

Letters to the Editor

CAOGA BLIAIN AG FÁS: CUMANN MATAMAITICE NA hÉIREANN
From Rachel Quinlan

Dear Editor,

The 50th anniversary in 2026 of the foundation of the Irish Mathematical Society provides excellent grounds for celebration. The history of the IMS reflects a period of rapid expansion in mathematical research and education on the island of Ireland. Looking back at records of the earliest meetings, archived at irishmathsoc.org, we see that the vision and purpose of the founding members remains entirely current and as relevant as ever. The constitution asserts that “the Society is incorporated for the purpose of promoting and extending the knowledge of mathematics and its applications”. The 1978 newsletter reports progress towards this goal, which included the first conference of the IMS in May 1978, visits by distinguished international speakers and initial steps towards the establishment of the Irish Mathematical Olympiad. The same report highlights another issue that has not changed since 1976, that the IMS depends on membership fees and voluntary involvement to carry out its activities. The annual fee has admittedly changed from the original £2 for regular members and 50p for students, but the generosity, commitment and engagement of members continues to sustain the IMS.

The evolution of the Society since those early days can be seen as a resounding validation of the insights and aspirations that guided its first steps. The series of early meetings became the annual meeting, running in its current format since 1988, and hosted so far by sixteen different institutions. The Irish Mathematical Olympiad was inaugurated in 1988 and has taken place every year since, with 14,000 students taking part in the first round in 2025. Since 2005, the IMS has awarded the Fergus Gaines Cup to the most successful participant in this contest. The newsletter evolved into the Bulletin of the IMS, which was established in 1986 and will publish Issue 100 in 2027 (another numerical milestone).

The mathematical landscape in Ireland has of course changed dramatically since 1976. PhD education in mathematics in Ireland was a rarity until at least the 1990s; now our country is an attractive destination for aspiring research mathematicians from all over the world. The growth of our community has been accompanied by a diversification of activity and of people, which is reflected in the programmes of the annual conferences. The commitment of our community to sound practice in education, and the emergence of mathematics education (especially at university level) as a research area within the mathematical sciences, has led to many informative and valuable talks and discussions at IMS conferences. The establishment of ICEDIM (the Irish Committee for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Mathematics) aims to ensure that all voices are heard in our organisation, and to counter the negative effects of patterns of exclusion and underrepresentation that persist in higher education and in mathematics. Since 2024, ICEDIM has overseen the organisation of the annual Women in Mathematics Day Ireland Conference, which typically takes place on or near May 12 as part of the global celebration of International Women in Mathematics Day.

The Irish Committee for Mathematics Education was established in 2021, to advise the IMS Committee on matters concerning mathematics education. Amongst the initiatives of this committee are a series of online seminars on research developments of practical relevance, and a review of the quality of mathematics textbooks in use in post-primary schools.

As we look back at the last 50 years and ahead to the next 50, it is appropriate to recognize all the people whose efforts have brought our Society to this moment. They include the founding officers Finbarr Holland (President), Michael Hayes (Vice-President), Ted Hurley (Secretary) and Trevor West (Treasurer) and all the founding members. They established the newsletter, bulletin and conference series and generated the momentum that ensured the persistence and robustness of the IMS. We thank all the colleagues who organised all the annual meetings over the years, and all the speakers, poster presenters and audience participants. We thank all contributors to the Bulletin, including the editors and editorial board members, and all authors and referees, as well as colleagues who arranged printing and distribution on paper and online. Thanks to everyone who maintained the IMS online resources and communications and everyone who served on the committee and subcommittees and as local representatives. Every member who has participated in the activities of the IMS in any way has made a valuable contribution to the collective achievement that we celebrate this year.

Central to the goal of “promoting and extending the knowledge of mathematics and its applications” is the need for community. Mathematical knowledge cannot be promoted or extended in a vacuum, and the drive to share, exchange and co-create knowledge is a human one. Although conferences and collaborations surely enhance our productivity and efficiency, they are motivated more by the human experience of doing mathematics, of searching for insights, of fitting together the parts of our understanding and sharing the pleasure of progress. Whatever the challenges of the decades ahead, that human experience will not go out of fashion and the IMS will continue to flourish.

We hope to see you in Trinity College Dublin for the 50th birthday celebration, and we thank our colleagues there for their outstanding organisational efforts. The last word goes to the 1978 report on the achievements of the first year, a call to action that is as pressing now as then.

The aims of the Society are to promote the teaching and research of
Mathematics, particularly in Ireland. Being a relatively small Society we
need the active support of a good percentage of our members, especially in
the initial formative stage. So let us hear from you!

Yours sincerely



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