

Being a Professional Mathematician

The importance of professional bodies – worksheet

Mathematical professional bodies, learned societies and other organisations relevant to the UK include:

- IMA (Institute of Mathematics and its Applications)
- RSS (Royal Statistical Society)
- OR Society
- LMS (London Mathematical Society)
- EMA (European Mathematical Society)
- EMA (Edinburgh Mathematical Society)
- MA (Mathematical Association)
- ATM (Association of Teachers of Mathematics)
- NANAMIC (National Association for Numeracy and Mathematics In Colleges)
- MEI (Mathematics in Education and Industry) (an independent curriculum development body)
- FMSP (Further Mathematics Support Programme)

By contrast, there is one main professional body for physics: the Institute of Physics (IOP), which has 40,000 members.

www.BeingAMathematician.org has interviews with representatives of the IMA, LMS, OR Society and RSS, who talk about the benefits the societies offer to their members. Find these under the **Resources** link.

There are also interviews with professional mathematicians who talk about how they see professional bodies and learned societies. The relevant sections begin at the times indicated.

- Danny Brown (from 1:32)
- Nira Chamberlain (from 2:22)
- Peter Furness (from 6:26)
- Jay Jobanputra (from 5:06)
- Sue Merchant (from 4:36)
- Mason Porter (from 4:24)
- Gwyneth Stallard (from 16:54)

Exercise

Comments for tutors

- 1) How do the mathematical learned societies and professional bodies differ from one another in the way the services they offer to their members? Do these differences result from different needs of different kinds of professional mathematician, or from some other cause?

- What do their websites say about the societies (explicitly and implicitly)?
- How open are the societies to potential members?
- Do the societies have different categories of membership?
- Do the societies offer professional accreditation?
- What other benefits do the societies offer their members?

- 2) One benefit offered by some professional societies is **credentials**. If you are a senior member of some professional bodies you may be a “Fellow” and may be entitled to put initials after your name.

There is also “Chartered Mathematician” status.

Are these credentials important for professional mathematicians in the fields in which you might make your career?

The value of accreditation is discussed by mathematicians in the case study interviews at www.BeingAMathematician.org, at the following points:

- Nira Chamberlain (from 2:22)
- Peter Furness (from 9:29)
- Jay Jobanputra (from 1:34)
- Sue Merchant (from 3:35)
- Mason Porter (from 5:32)
- Gwyneth Stallard (from 16:54)

This worksheet looks in more detail at questions also raised on the worksheet “What makes a professional mathematician”.

Note that the professional mathematicians in the www.BeingAMathematician.org case studies offer differing views on this. It depends, for example, on the kind of mathematics you do, and where you do it. Industry often values professional body credentials and academia sometimes doesn't.

3) Why are there so many professional bodies and learned societies? What does the proliferation do for mathematics?

- How do mathematicians decide which societies to join?
- How big are the societies?
- Who do politicians go to for advice on policy?
- Do these societies "speak for mathematics"? Do they have influence?
- What are the relationships between the societies - co-operative or competitive?

Students might find on the web various discussion about the proposed merger between the LMS and the IMA,, which the LMS members voted against in 2009.

A joke from the Institute of Physics (quoted in *Mathematics Today*, April 2012: "What is a mathematician's favourite operator? Division!")

Is this fair? Is it funny?

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