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# Recent activities and plans for the near future

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As mentioned in our previous newsletter, we now have a range of publications as below. Samples have been sent to departmental contacts, and further copies can be ordered at any time. There is no charge for the leaflets or for individual copies of the others.

**Facts and Formulae leaflet:** Bulk copies available free of charge for distribution to students

**Algebra Refresher:** Bulk copies can be purchased for distribution to students. The current cost is £125 for 100 copies, payable in advance. A Calculus Refresher has also been commissioned

**Learning and Teaching in Mathematics, Statistics and Operational Research**

Occasional series ISSN 1476-1378. Individual copies available free of charge:

1/01 Post-sixteen mathematics within Curriculum 2000

2/01 Guidelines for Introducing Groupwork in Undergraduate Mathematics

3/01 Good Practice in the Provision of Mathematics Support Centres

**Visitors:** Associate Professor Helen MacGillivray, of Queensland University of Technology, visited the RSS Centre under Network funding for four months up to the end of March. She brought an extraordinary amount of learning material and expertise with her and carried out tasks with gusto and enthusiasm, even *surpassing* what those of us who know her have come to expect! She was involved in all aspects of our activities. She made university mathematics departmental visits across the UK, contributed her invaluable experience to our staff development project in statistics and OR, helped with a major reorganisation of the statistics and OR web pages and made available on our site over 50 student projects, with data, for use by UK higher education teachers of statistics. While here she made several seminar presentations on aspect of statistical education. She has been retained as an official consultant while back in Australia and plans to return in January 2003.

Dr Beth Chance, of California Polytechnic State University visited us during April and worked on aspects of her research into using simulation to teach and learn statistics at university level. She presented talks at the Welsh Universities' annual statistics colloquium at Gregynog, to the University of Glasgow and at an afternoon meeting called *Recent Developments in Statistical Education*, which was jointly organised by the RSS and our Network in London. We have plans to run her simulation software directly off our web site for the benefit of HE teachers in the UK.

**Staff development events** were held for statisticians in Newcastle and Strathclyde Universities, and a Maths Support workshop at Imperial College in London. The Newcastle event was similar to that reported on p7 of last November's newsletter; the Strathclyde and London events are described later in this issue. Neville Davies also addressed the conference of Professors of Statistics.

The maths conference season takes place at Easter, and we were invited by the **Heads of Departments of Mathematical Sciences** to address their annual event, along with the Education Minister Stephen Timms. The

following week we presented a minisymposium on current developments in learning and teaching in mathematics within the **British (Applied) Mathematics Colloquium** at the University of Warwick. Speakers included Chris Budd, Stephen Hibberd, Chris Sangwin and Mike Savage. Our web pages contain abstracts and links to some of the presentations.

**Learning and Teaching Projects** - updates from the MathsTEAM and Staff Development projects follow this summary. These were funded under Tranche 1 of the LTSN development programme, and currently we have four bids outstanding under Tranche 2: pump-priming for a UK Mathematics Learning Support Centre; research into the learning of mathematical skills; the embedding of computer-based mathematics assessment into a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE); and the extension of the SearchLT database of engineering learning resources to cover Mathematics and Computing. The full bids can be viewed on our website, and by the time you read this we should know which have been successful.

**FDTL Phase 4:** seven projects relating to our disciplines have got through to stage 2 of the bidding process, and need to submit more detailed plans by 17 May. The most focussed from our point of view will be:

- mainstream funding for a UK Mathematics Learning Support Centre (Leeds)
- Open Learning Support for the Mathematical Education of non-specialists (Loughborough)
- Web Resources for Staff and Students (Coventry)
- Creating of Statistical Resources from Real Datasets (De Montfort)

Final decisions will be made by HEFCE in July and projects will start from October.

Three expressions of interest have also been submitted to the ESRC-funded Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLRP) phase III. A very strong one on the statistics side is entitled *Improving the Learning and Teaching of Statistical Numeracy and Thinking in some non-Specialist courses by increasing real world relevance*. If successful we will be working closely

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with LTSN Engineering and Business, Management and Accountancy. The other two are looking at what computer-aided assessment offers to future generations of students, and the transition from mathematics learning to scientific-technical practice in work/HE.

**Improving provision for disabled students:** HEFCE published a Call for Proposals on 12 April. There are two strands, the first for small and/or specialist institutions, the second to develop and disseminate resources relating to the learning and teaching of disabled students. Funding for individual projects under strand two is expected to range from £10,000 up to a maximum of £150,000 over the three years, with an average of £75,000. HEFCE will, exceptionally, fund larger consortium projects up to a maximum of £250,000. Projects will be required to work with a new national co-ordination team and (as appropriate) the LTSN in the transfer and promotion of resources. At stage one, institutions are invited to submit brief expressions of interest. At stage two, selected institutions will be asked to produce detailed bids, taking into account feedback on their expressions of interest. HEFCE expects to take the majority of bids for stage one through to stage two.

Bids for less than £50,000 do not need to submit an expression of interest at stage one and are invited to proceed directly to stage two, with a deadline of 30 August. Further details at [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2002/02\\_21.htm](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2002/02_21.htm)

**e-Tutor of the Year Competition:** if you are teaching using a virtual learning environment have a look at <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/etutor> - the closing date is 31 July.

#### **Forthcoming activities (see diary on back page)**

Events planned for May include a one-day short course on **Teaching Statistics in Finance** at Nottingham Trent University, and a workshop on **Assessment for a Purpose** at Sheffield Hallam University, where you can bring your own assessment tasks for development.

On Tuesday 18 June a **Maths Support** workshop at Bell College, Hamilton (near Glasgow) is aimed at those teaching mathematics to students in science and engineering departments. We are looking for a venue convenient for our Welsh colleagues so we can run one later in the year. Please contact us if there is any chance of hosting it in your department.

**Induction Course for new lecturers, 5-6 September:** Last year we ran a successful induction day but found it was too short to allow delegates to form an ongoing and mutually supportive group. This year the event will run over 24 hours, and is aimed at people who have started teaching mathematics in UK higher education institutions

within the last three years, whether they are new graduates or coming from industry or from outside the UK. In the past, attendance has been recognised as contributing towards introductory institutional programme in learning and teaching for new staff (certificated or otherwise). The course will take place immediately after the **Undergraduate Mathematics Teaching Conference** which runs from 2-5 September at the University of Birmingham. It will start with an afternoon session on 5 September and finish at lunchtime on 6 September. Topics will include

- Teaching and supporting learning-
- Design and planning of learning activities
- Assessment and feedback
- Systems to support learning
- The computer environment
- Sharing experience

The cost will be kept as low as possible with a subsidy from the LTSN Maths, Stats & OR Network.

Further details of all these events have been posted in the web diary and circulated to departmental contacts. See [http://mathstore.gla.ac.uk/events\\_diary/index.asp](http://mathstore.gla.ac.uk/events_diary/index.asp)



#### **LTSN MathsTEAM Project - Update**

The LTSN MathsTEAM project has just completed an in-depth survey of student support practices throughout the UK. The results have illustrated a growing need and an increasing diversity of support-based initiatives. The MathsTEAM has had an excellent response to the first information pack by academics. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who replied and contributed to the final case studies and interviews.

The MathsTEAM has started calling for brief descriptions based on the next information pack. If you are teaching maths to your students within an engineering or scientific context then go to <http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk/mathsteam/form2.htm>. By filling in the form you will be providing the MathsTEAM with a brief description of the resources and teaching methods being used. If you are interested in developing the description into a case study please indicate on the form. The LTSN MathsTEAM will provide guidelines and we would expect payment to be in the range of £150 - £250 to thank you for your contribution.

The MathsTEAM would also like to hear from those who are interested in the concept of the project and would like to be kept informed of the project's development. For information about the LTSN MathsTEAM project please go to <http://ltsn.mathstore.ac.uk/mathsteam>. For further details please contact Christine Hirst, MathsTEAM Co-ordinator, LTSN Maths, Stats & OR Network, The University of Birmingham. phone 0121 414 3945, email [c.hirst@bham.ac.uk](mailto:c.hirst@bham.ac.uk)