
UMTC 2000: One Lecturer's experience

Dr Dirk Hermans, The University of Birmingham

d.f.m.hermans@bham.ac.uk

This year UMTC (University Mathematics Teaching Conference) was held at Sheffield Hallam University from September 4th till September 7th. It was my first experience of the UMTC and I was fairly unprepared, not having read David Emery's article in a previous issue of MSOR [1] (do I dare to admit this?).

This year's conference featured two very good plenary speakers. First, Dr Simon Singh gave us a unique insight in the making of the Horizon programme, "Fermat's last Theorem" [2]. His personal experiences serve as a nice example of how the "dry" history of a bit of mathematics did become a great story full of passion, commitment and twists. The second plenary speaker, Prof R. Burn, took us through his own personal development which led to his series of successful books [3]-[5].

Some of the other attendants gave a small presentation in two parallel sessions, but (as I should have known, sic) most of the time was spent in working groups. The working briefs selected for this conference were:

- What use might mathematics education research be to university mathematics teachers?
- Attracting students to mathematics
- Use of the Internet in teaching mathematics (2 groups)
- Supporting the professional development of mathematics lecturers

Each group worked for over 10 hours to produce a draft report which was then presented to the other participants and reviewed by other groups. The resulting reports will in due course be published in the conference proceedings.

I found this to be one of the most useful conferences I ever attended. The shared experiences bubbling up in the discussions, the various pointers to bits of information never heard of or only vaguely known. The informal discussions of your colleagues initiatives all filled that box labelled "Good to know" which is never far from my desk. And it did not stop on September 7th. We're still working on polishing the reports. I guess I'm hooked already.

Next year, UMTC 2001 will be hosted by the University of Birmingham (oops, where's that pecuniary interest form?) from September 3rd till September 6th. I can only recommend you tick these dates in your diary. Further information to follow. Ideas for themes for discussion groups can always be submitted to Dr. Patricia Egerton (p.a.egerton@tees.ac.uk), the chairperson of UMTC 2001.

References

- [1] D Emery, *UMTC: One Lecturer's Experience*, MSOR Newsletter, May 2000.
[2] see also transcript at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/horizon/fermat.shtml>
[3] R P Burn, *A pathway to number theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1982 and 1996
[4] R P Burn, *Groups, a path to Geometry*, Cambridge University Press, 1985
[5] R P Burn, *Numbers and Functions, steps into analysis*, Cambridge University Press, 1992 and 2000