
UMTC2002: An invitation to contribute

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This year, the 27th annual UMTC (Undergraduate Mathematics Teaching Conference) was held at The University of Birmingham from 3–6 September 2001, with 46 delegates taking part. The Organising Committee is already planning for UMTC2002, which will be held again in Birmingham from 2–5 September 2002, and invites ideas for themes for discussion and action that are considered important by mathematics lecturers in executing their professional teaching duties.

A summary of the 2001 Conference can be found on the UMTC website at <http://www.umtc.ac.uk>. The plenary speakers were Professor Alison Wolf (Institute of Education, University of London) who spoke about “*Why do non-mathematicians need more maths?*”, and Professor Neville Davies (Nottingham Trent University) who spoke about “*Mathematics, Statistics and OR: Subject Provision Reviews, Benchmarking and Learning & Teaching*”.

However, the main focus of the Conference is the time spent working in small groups to produce a report on a brief or topic relating to undergraduate mathematics. The briefs for 2001 were:

- Preparing a Portfolio – supporting professionalism in mathematics teaching in HE
- Engineering Mathematics should be taught by Engineering lecturers
- Innovations in Teaching Discrete Mathematics.
- Action Research on Diagnostic Testing
- Study Skills for Mathematics
- Issues of Web-delivered Assessment

Each group worked for over 10 hours to produce a draft report on their brief which after a process of review and ‘polishing’ will be published in the Conference proceedings, as will a detailed review of the talks of plenary speakers. Again, readers new to this conference format should look at the UMTC web-site or read reference [1].

So what was new in 2001 (besides the location)? The LTSN Maths, Stats & OR Network ran a one-day induction course on 3 September for 30 mathematics lecturers new to teaching in UK departments. This induction course was free for those who participated in the UMTC Conference. A number chose to do so and followed the brief on Preparing a Portfolio, led by Peter Kahn (University of Manchester). Another innovation was that of the Action Research on Diagnostic Testing, where the group has set up an action plan to evaluate the effectiveness of diagnostic testing at three University centres and to report back to UMTC in 2002. This ‘action research’ approach was suggested by the Heads of Mathematics Group (HoDoMS) and is an example of the response we are seeking when planning for UMTC2002. Also, UMTC and the Mathwise User Group coordinated their efforts to produce working briefs that would be potentially attractive to both parties, and the Mathwise User Group AGM was held in

Birmingham immediately following UMTC.

So what of UMTC2002? A preliminary meeting of the Organising Committee has put forward the following suggestions:

Possible plenary speaker topics:

- The impact of AS levels on admissions to undergraduate mathematics courses.
- Continual professional development for lecturers.
- Benchmarking issues and its impact on course design.
- Mathematics knowledge and skills and the needs of Industry.

Possible Working Group briefs:

- Mathematics for intending mathematics teachers.
- What is ‘good practice’ in teaching, learning and assessment?
- Liaison with schools and colleges – how?
- Deep versus surface learning (led by an advisor).
- Teaching financial mathematics – sharing ideas.
- The impact of hand-held technology (likely to be an action research topic).
- Student group work and projects in honours degrees.
- Providing Foundation level mathematics support in a University environment.

The above suggestions aim to allow delegates to choose an area of interest that will improve their performance as lecturers in a learning and teaching role or enhance their subject-specific knowledge and ideas.

However, these ideas are neither fixed nor exhaustive. Nor will they be fixed until after the Organising Committee meeting in January 2002. Hence this invitation for any individual or mathematics body to contribute ideas that you feel are important and should rightfully be considered for inclusion at UMTC2002. As chairperson for UMTC 2002, I would be happy to receive any such contributions by e-mail, preferably before Christmas 2001. Given that time is precious to every mathematics lecturer, the ultimate aim of the Organising Committee is to make UMTC2002 as rewarding an experience as possible for its participants.

References

- [1] D Hermans, UMTC2000: One Lecturer’s experience. LTSN Maths, Stats & OR Newsletter, Nov 2000.