



The Association of Teachers of Mathematics
for mathematics educators
primary, secondary and higher



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Meeting of the General Council Saturday January 18th 2014 Room C17 Institute of Education, University of Durham

Present:

GC members	10
Durham branch members	8
Representatives from other branches	5
Representatives from working groups	5
HQ staff	3

Chair's Valedictory

Being the last GC before the AGM at conference, all attendees were invited to an evening meal after which the outgoing Chair of the General Council reflected on her period of office. As this describes a significant phase in the history of ATM, the notes of her observations are set out below:

Whilst we should make decisions today that help us sculpt and reach a better future we should be mindful of where we come from and what we stand for. I am sharing these observations with you this evening so that those of you here who are about to come onto GC, or to take up new office on GC might take the association forwards on the next phase of its journey.

Back in 2010, teachers of mathematics had argued that if a government body, such as NCETM, was actively promoting the joining of a professional mathematics subject association, then teachers' salaries should be increased with an earmarked amount in a similar fashion to the GTC subscription. NCETM took this compelling argument to the government who, in response, phased out their grant to NCETM and paid it directly into a "teacher subject association subscription fund" (TSASF).

Negotiations through JMC meant that £120 per annum was set aside for each teacher for subject association subscription costs. In return each mathematics subject association agreed to cap their individual membership subscriptions at £60 per annum. An agreement to cap at 50% of the allocation was struck.

The TSASF was disbursed and made available to each teacher as a grant – the TSASG, which could be used for no other purpose than paying subscription fees to subject associations. Each year, each teacher filled in an on-line form nominating the subject associations(s) they wished to join. No nomination meant no disbursed grant. Unlike GTC membership there was no further government subsidy to subject associations.

Though these new arrangements started in the mathematics community, they quickly applied across all the different subject interest groups. In this way teachers could join two different subject associations, either within or across disciplines.

Interestingly, the subject associations' response to these new funding arrangements was to reduce their membership fees. Whilst HQ central costs always have to be met from total subscription receipts, increased membership numbers meant these fixed central costs could be met from a lower subscription rate.

It is unknown which minister or senior civil servant authorised the switch of funding to the TSASF, but its effects have been significant. Released from their pre-occupation of making ends meet, subject associations have switched their attention to curriculum and pedagogical innovation. Though subject associations were still competing for members (which ensured value for money), new collaborations emerged which began to transform practice in the classroom. The Science-Mathematics-Technology (son of STEM) collaborative was invited by government to lead on the reform of assessment in secondary schools.

JMC had co-ordinated the first subject collaborative across all the mathematics subject associations and, as you know, it is now leading mathematics curriculum and assessment development across the UK.

Through 2011 the shift of power was moving away from the QUANGOs and into the heart of the profession. Government appeared to be delighted with this new arrangement because they were spending less money, whilst at the same time:

- *Gaining from a more professionalised workforce;*
- *Seeing curriculum development that was establishing itself as world leading;*
- *Seeing higher take-up and regeneration within the STEM subject family.*

2012 saw many of the QUANGOs phasing out and a government confident in being able to listen and talk to a teaching profession through its thriving subject associations. With its newly rediscovered confidence, the teaching profession initiated and sustained, through its subject associations, research and development. It was towards the end of 2012 that all 38 professional subject associations formed a co-operative that, although known as the General Teaching Council, completely replaced the former GTC. The journey of workforce professionalization had reached a significant milestone. From this point, the identity and independence of ATM was secure. Though the membership numbers were not in the 'top five', ATM was able to work in ways true to its aims and principles. In practical terms the ATM branches and working groups were made up from members of ATM and MA as well as members from other subject associations. The IT working group turned out to have the most hybrid membership.

2013 brought a new coherence to the educational landscape. There was ATM. ATM sat with other mathematics subject associations in the JMC. ATM sat with all other subject associations in the GTC. And that is it. National policy continues to emerge through debate between government and GTC and practices are researched, developed, evaluated and improved through constituent subject association members. A wider remit for GTC, agreed last September, to include all educational professionals has proved popular with initial teacher trainers, researchers and consultants.

But, let me take you back to the dark days of 2009. Well-meaning but misguided intentions of NCETM, along with misguided interpretations of those intentions, were suggesting closer

relationships between the different mathematics subject associations. Notions of “speaking with one voice is more authoritative than speaking with many”, and “choice of mathematics subject association is confusing for teachers”, were not challenged but created frenzy around exploring patterns of merger or federation. Preoccupation with the present occluded visions of a possibly more promising future. Obvious solutions for today’s circumstances did not look so rosy when seen in the possible contexts of the medium and longer run.

It was pretty clear that the increasing number of QUANGOs and other organisations between teacher and learner would soon break under its own weight. Think about it: QCA, NAA, OFSTED, OFQUAL and NCETM were funded by government. OCR (albeit a Charity), AQA, EdExcel were funded from budgets devolved to schools. CfSA was an umbrella organisation for all subject associations, JMC was an umbrella organisation for all mathematics subject associations, while MMSA, formerly AMSA, was an umbrella organisation for some mathematics subject associations. All umbrellas were paid for from the funds of the constituent subject associations. With all these umbrellas, no wonder there was a drought at ground level. At the next level ‘down’, in the mathematics education community we had the different mathematics subject associations: ATM and MA as the universal ‘learner-facing’ association; NANAMIC, AMET, HoDoMS and NAMA as the specific ‘learner-facing’ associations; BSRLM for researchers; BSHM, MEI, GAMA and RSS as specific interest groups; IMA as an applied mathematics society, and LMS with EMS as national capital-based learned societies.

ACME did not fit easily into any of these groups. With independent grant funding it was conceived by some of the members of the constituent societies of JMC, blessed by government and delivered by RS. However, it was not a representative body, it was not an umbrella organisation and its relationship with NCETM (though itself conceived by ACME) and subject associations was unclear.

All this last group of subject associations existed because mathematics educationalists wanted them to. They paid for them through subscription. JMC existed because the constituent mathematics subject associations wanted it to. Beyond that the territory was different. Either directly or indirectly they were all funded by all of us as tax payers – no choice. Perversely most of these ‘up line’ organisations purported to be promoting the best interests of learners. Arguably, few added to the professionalism of teachers – they simply created bureaucratic barriers between teachers and learners.

Discussion in 2009 about federations was put on hold by the argument that a federation across one or more mathematics subject organisations would create yet another umbrella layer distancing further teacher from learner. GC concluded that if the organisational overgrowth were to be pruned then the LAST place to start should be those vulnerable parts that teachers themselves had constructed. Better to hack back those parts which had rich arteries of funding and divert those resources into the parts constructed by teachers. Doing the opposite would render void the government rhetoric of professionalising the educational workforce. It was at the January 2010 GC that the resolution to lobby government to fund teachers’ membership of subject associations was passed. This cause was taken up by all mathematics subject associations and JMC proved themselves as effective government lobbyists.

Early in 2009 we were unaware of what the future held – though we did try to form a view on what we wished it to look like. To deal with the immediate issues we resolved to hunker

down, deal with today and work tirelessly to make the tomorrow we wanted to happen, happen.

Hunkering down, stripping back to the essence of what we, ATM were and are about, was not, in itself, a bad thing. It is said that fasting is good for the soul as well as the body. It pushed us to reminding ourselves what our essence was, and is; and, in doing so describing our unique identity and purpose.

So what were the invariants in this transformation of stripping back? Our beliefs, values and principles. What were the variants? Everything else. Just as a reminder, those beliefs and principles, articulated by the founder-members of ATM are declared on our website and in the front cover of every journal.

In practical terms, what emerged as the most important characteristic of ATM was the provision of opportunities for groups of teachers to come together:

- i. to share, discuss and evaluate practice;*
- ii. to propose changes to practice that may have beneficial effects on learner attitudes to and confidence in mathematics;*
- iii. to encourage each other to trial such changes in their classrooms*
- iv. back to (i)*

We agreed that this could and should happen through branches, and working groups that may be focused on specific learning stages or on particular areas of mathematics or on the development and use of particular resources – or on any combination of these.

From this focus on the essence of ATM's work we proposed three core functions for each part of our organisation.

For GC this meant:

- i. Enabling the pattern of activity described above;*
- ii. Establishing the future and steering the association towards it;*
- iii. Ensuring HQ is fit for the purpose of supporting the association's journey from its present position towards its declared future.*

For HQ this meant:

- i. Facilitating internal communications across branches, working groups and GC;*
- ii. Supporting GC in navigating the association's journey from the present to its declared future;*
- iii. Facilitating external communications between ATM and the wider educational community.*

For branches this meant:

- i. Making ATM's existence known by being invitational and inclusive and collaborating with MA and other mathematics subject associations wherever this brings direct benefits to teachers.*
- ii. Encouraging the sharing of current practices and the research and development of new ones;*
- iii. Sharing what is happening in their branch with other branches and working groups, including the provision of CPD and the production of publications and materials.*

It was agreed that branches may be joint with MA. Because the vast majority of teachers were not members of any mathematics subject association any notions of 'territory' would

be misplaced. We now know that there is more than enough space for two universal mathematics subject associations.

Working groups worked to a brief similar to that for branches.

This shift of emphasis remains to this day – where, as you will be aware, we are all meeting together with the Durham branch. How did we arrive at where we are now? Well, we described where we are now, back in 2009. It was the first exercise of GC after the 2009 conference – and then we did everything in our power to bring that description into reality. Every decision we made as GC, we checked to make sure it was moving us towards that articulated vision of the association's future.

It's now your job to refresh that vision and move the association along the next leg of its journey. Thank you Durham for being our hosts today – and thank you GC for your hard work.

Time to replenish our drinks at the bar!