From ATM’s Professional Officer

June and July were hectic but very satisfying months for me as Professional Officer. I was kindly invited by Angela Gould, of King’s College London to take part in a series of sessions around the country designed to support mathematics teachers in the most practical of ways, with ideas that could be directly transferred into the classroom. I focused my input on the value and management of group work. I used material from a variety of our publications as well as examples from ATM software to demonstrate to around 1000 teachers the value of group work in helping young people to understand mathematics. Details of our publications and software can be found at www.atm.org.uk. The challenges I set exemplified subordinating teaching to learning in true Gattegno tradition and it was good to work with such enthusiastic audiences in a variety of venues across the country from Cardiff to Durham.

July 1st was a particularly memorable day when I ran an ATM bookstall at the North East Maths Fair organised by members of our Durham branch. It was heartening to see the range of activities on offer, including bell ringing, the Crystal Maze and model making of all types. It was even more encouraging to see the obvious enthusiasm of children of all ages as they met the challenges set. Even England’s exit from the football World Cup later in the day could not completely dampen my spirits, which had been so lifted by the positive reaction of students to the efforts of a dedicated group of Durham teachers. If other branches or groups of teachers would like to arrange a maths fair, please contact the ATM CPD team at CPD@atm.org.uk.

Reading back copies of MT really does help give a better understanding of the history and development of the ATM. Linda Haggarty’s letter in MT134 (1991) was part of the debate about whether or not to merge with the Mathematical Association. She supported the push to merge, giving as her major justification that a merger may encourage those not members of any association to join. It is not my intention to join this debate at this stage, but it was her follow-up that really took my attention. She carried out some small-scale research, which was reported in the MA’s journal in early 1992. She sent out 60 questionnaires to 10 schools in southeast England and received 51 responses. She expressed surprise to learn how many mathematics teachers were not members of subject associations. She concludes:

“It seems to me that if these results are anything to go by there are a significant number of mathematics teachers who are not members of the associations. This is a potentially serious issue, which needs to be explored further and addressed by those who are already members. After all, as well as developing our own thinking through membership of the associations, should we not also take a professional and shared responsibility for reaching out and representing what might be a substantial majority of mathematics teachers.” (Haggarty, 1992)

I believe that this statement is as valid today as it was 14 years ago. The introduction of a new ATM membership category, e-membership, which will be cheaper than the current personal membership and will bring all correspondence, including the journal, in e-format, will, I am sure, be attractive to many. This may be of particular value to those teaching overseas, enabling them to keep in touch very easily with the latest from ATM. The snowball of increased membership has started gathering pace; let’s all give it a little push until it becomes an avalanche by making colleagues aware of the work of our Association.

If you haven’t already booked your place for our 2007 conference in Loughborough, I encourage you to do so. I have seen the provisional list of workshop providers and it promises to be another inspiring event. The people who attend conference regularly find it one of the most exciting parts of their ATM membership yet the majority of members have never attended. Why not give it a try? www.atm.org.uk/conferences/conference2007

Finally, the DfES, through BECTA, have agreed to provide further funding to continue our joint project with the MA, of embedding ICT into mathematics teaching. There will be three strands to the next stage of this initiative, which will take into account the infrastructure and expertise in each of the nine regions. A joint ATM/MA steering group will organise further one-day conferences and will look to appoint experts to provide support and focus for regional developments. In addition, two regions, yet to be decided, will act as pilots in having dedicated, supported sub-groups looking at embedding ICT into schools. The steering group will have organisational, monitoring and evaluative roles.

Further details can be found on www.atm.org.uk as well as the BECTA and MA web sites.

David Cowley
ATM Professional Officer

References