Discussion paper: the future of the MMSA organisations, perhaps as a single amalgamated Professional Association

Audience: The MMSA organisations, namely The Association of Mathematics Education Teachers (AMET), The Association of Teachers of Mathematics (ATM), The Mathematical Association (MA), National Association of Mathematics Advisers (NAMA), and National Association for Numeracy and Mathematics in Colleges (NANAMIC).

This paper arises from reflection on the duty of trustees of a charitable organisation (such as the MA) to periodically consider whether the charitable aims of the body would be better served by amalgamation with others. It should be read in conjunction with Sue Pope's excellent article on the subject, published in Mathematics Teaching (the journal of ATM) and elsewhere.

At present, there are five 'classroom-facing' professional associations (PAs) in UK mathematics education, with overlapping membership: AMET, ATM, MA, NAMA and NANAMIC. However, roles are changing, so a classroom teacher might also be teaching on a SCITT (so want AMET) or supporting other teachers' development via a Teaching School or a Multi-Academy Trust (so want NAMA). Such changes are now taking place across the UK.

In parallel, participation practices and opportunities are changing: there are online and other communities (e.g. NCETM), offering opportunities and support that overlap with that of the PAs. Consequently, participating numbers in all five are dropping. Openings to earn money via running professional development courses or publishing are limited by freely available (though in general less quality-assured) online resources, and centrally funded courses run by the Further Mathematics Support Programme, Maths Hubs etc. Such funding won't last forever, but meanwhile it undercuts what PAs can offer, even if they do so with volunteer presenters and at cost.

This situation leads to confusion among potential participants, and particularly beginner teachers – for example, why should they join the MA rather than ATM? Or for those working in FE teacher education, why AMET as well as NANAMIC? A frequent response is not to join any, yet the PAs have specific evidence of the substantial benefits PA activity can provide[1].

Together, the PAs could benefit from economies of scale and pooling of expertise, viewpoints, resources and administration. This is clearly seen for example in the work of the joint ATM/MA Primary committee. There are greater opportunities together than as the sum of five parts: for example, as a teacher's interests and/or professional role develop, there would be scope to move gradually into or across sub-communities with slightly different foci. We would also have a more powerful contribution to policy: although the PAs currently endeavour to speak together, it is not unknown for central authorities to listen to just one, or to 'divide and rule'. Together the PAs would have both a stronger voice and a stronger appeal. A combined PA would be a single point of reference not only for those in education policy, but for our peers nationally and internationally.

[1] E.g. Golding, J. (2016) *Professional association activity: what contribution can it make to teachers' professional development and their students' learning? Final report* MMSA available at http://www.m-a.org.uk/resources/PA%20activity%20impact%20report%20final%20JG%202016.pdf

Finally, there is a strong perception that the community want a single PA: the current situation is widely perceived as unhelpful to teachers, to the health of mathematics education in this country, to influence on policy….

Proposal: That the five MMSA PAs work towards amalgamating into a single PA for UK mathematics education, with a variety of Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

In this proposal, it might be that one SIG might be for those with an interest in initial teacher education, one re continuing professional development, or resource development, or Primary mathematics, or mature (post-16) basic mathematics, or….

Such a move could not, and should not, be achieved quickly, but with due regard to mutual adjustments and consideration of current employees, outlier members such as practising mathematicians who wish to support mathematics education, opportunities for representation, etc. It need not be entirely synchronised, but it would be good to first achieve a commitment across all five organisations to a shared end goal of a single mathematics education PA.

Mathematics education in the UK needs a strong, single professional knowledgeable, expert voice if the PAs are to effectively tackle the challenges of the years ahead, including the crisis in teacher supply and retention. This solution would put the PAs in a far stronger position to function internationally, and to encourage PA participation across the UK.

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