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September 1997

Regulars

## Editorial



PASS Maths stands for "Public Awareness and Schools Support for MATHEmaticS" so at first glance the Dearing report <sup>[1]</sup> on the future of Higher Education in the UK might seem out of bounds for a PASS Maths editorial. We think otherwise.

Firstly, Dearing sees a central role for "Communication and Information Technologies" (C&IT). We like this extension from plain IT because the addition of communication technologies emphasises that whilst computers and software with learning packages are one thing, the Internet and the World Wide Web add a new dimension. We of course completely agree with Dearing on this; after all, the conviction that communication technologies will be of supreme importance to learning in the future was the motivation behind PASS Maths in the first place. We think that Dearing gives a ringing endorsement of the principles behind PASS Maths, and that is worth mentioning in an editorial.

The second reason why Dearing is significant for the PASS Maths project is that the report emphasises the continuity between all stages of education. A-Level syllabuses provide a mutual point of reference between secondary and higher education, but in the past the two systems have operated quite independently with regard to teaching style. In the case of some syllabus areas, it is increasingly hard to say to which side of the secondary/higher divide they belong.

This "level-blurring" is particularly true of mathematics. Some pre A-Level students study topics from Further Mathematics syllabuses which other students encounter in the first or even second years of their degree courses, and similarly with other subjects. There has therefore got to be scope for sharing resources for teaching and learning between secondary and higher education, and Dearing adds that this process must be extended to lifelong learning. Communication and Information Technologies are particularly suitable as a medium for this purpose.

A good example of the potential of this is the investment by HEFCE (Higher Education Funding Council for England) in computer based courseware for a very wide range of subjects through the TLTP (Technology in Learning and Teaching Programme). Many TLTP materials are available over the Internet, and some are used by schools. At present, schools' access is limited because there is no network infrastructure for schools corresponding to the academic network enjoyed by universities. The publication of the Dearing report, with its vision of continuous lifelong learning at all levels, reinforces the need to connect schools properly. There was a pre-election commitment to this by all political parties, and we look forward to speedy implementation of this promise.

## Network capacity problem

This is a good moment to draw attention to a network capacity problem which has come to light in PASS Maths trials with our partner schools. Those schools who have internet access, usually through service providers, generally report adequate speeds of connection (within the limits of their connection technologies) when connected to the service provider's site or those of other schools. But they often report slow connections with university sites. Likewise, universities generally report excellent inter-connectivity with each other, but often encounter delays with external access. PASS Maths would like to hear from anyone with experience of this problem, with a view to making representations in the appropriate quarters and getting something done about it.

## References

[1] For the benefit of non-UK readers, and for those who missed the press coverage, the previous UK government commissioned Sir Ron Dearing to report on the future of Higher Education in the UK. The report was published in July 1997, and is the most wide-ranging review of Higher Education in the UK for over 20 years. The Dearing report is therefore a significant pointer to the future of education in the UK, and it will have consequences at all levels.

The Dearing report is available at "[The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education](#)".

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