

# LONDON MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

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From the Executive Secretary:  
Peter Cooper

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Dr Gwyneth Stallard

Megg Munn, M.P.  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London, SW1E 5DU

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Dear Mrs Munn

## **Women and Work Commission recommendation on professional bodies**

Thank you for your letter of 28 November 2006 and the Executive Summary of the report *Shaping a Fairer Future*. This reply has been drawn up by the Chair of the Society's Women in Mathematics Committee and myself.

The London Mathematical Society is the UK's learned society for mathematics. It is an independent and self-financing charity for the promotion and extension of mathematical knowledge, covering all branches of mathematics and its applications. Its principal activities are the organisation of meetings and conferences, the publication of periodicals and books, the provision of financial support for mathematical activities, and contributing to public debates on issues related to mathematics research and education. It works collaboratively with other mathematical bodies worldwide and is a member of the UK Council for the Mathematical Sciences, which comprises the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications, the Royal Statistical Society together with the London Mathematical Society.

The Society has a membership of over 2600 drawn from all parts of the UK and overseas, predominantly from universities and research institutes. Of these some 10% are women. The Society has had a long-standing concern for women in mathematics, from numbers of young women studying mathematics post-16 through to the drop-off in women in higher posts in universities. It has various activities aimed at addressing these issues – these are described in greater detail below.

In answer to your specific questions, there is currently no reduction in membership fees for part-time workers or those on a career break. However, the Society's Council is considering the latter at present. The Society's membership fees are comparatively low at £40 per year (2007 rate). There is a lower rate for members near the beginning of their careers but otherwise all members are on a single grade and pay the same fee regardless of salary so that a reduction for part-time workers may not be appropriate.

The Society does not organise specific training events although attendance at Society meetings would be one way in which mathematicians would keep up to date with current mathematical research. All events organised by the Society are, in any case, free of charge and open to non-members.

The Society is very aware of the low numbers of women mathematicians and actively seeks to address the many issues involved in a number of ways. For example, the Society recently changed its rules concerning Prizes so that these are now defined in terms of years of relevant experience (allowing for career breaks and part-time working) rather than restricted by age.

In 1999 the Society set up a Women in Mathematics Committee and this has a number of roles. The Committee keeps under review issues relating to women mathematicians and, where appropriate, proposes and carries out actions aimed at ensuring equality of opportunity and treatment. It liaises with other bodies working in the area of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) in the UK, at a European level and elsewhere. Recently the committee persuaded the EPSRC (the main funder of mathematics research in the UK) to change its rules on part-time working for its Advanced Research Fellowships and also made representations to the Higher Education Funding Councils for more specific wording to be put into the Research Assessment Exercise guidelines on part-time working.

The Committee also organises two events each year. The first of these – the Mary Cartwright Lecture, named after a very eminent mathematician of the 20th century – aims to increase the awareness of women in mathematics by ensuring that at least one important Society lecture each year is given by an outstanding women mathematician. The second event brings women mathematicians from across the country together for one day to share their mathematical research and experiences. This is attended by many postgraduates and we hope it encourages them to continue in their mathematical careers.

Finally, the Committee runs two grant schemes. The Grace Chisholm Young Fellowship provides some support when a mathematical career has been interrupted by family responsibilities, relocation of a partner or other similar circumstances. The financial support provided is small but it provides the holder with a position in an academic institution and thus access to resources and other mathematicians – prerequisites to remaining current in the subject. The Society also offers childcare grants which can be claimed to help offset the additional childcare costs incurred when attending a conference. Both schemes are open to all UK-based mathematicians, not just to members of the Society. We would be happy to provide details of these schemes if it would be helpful.

The Committee is very aware that the number of women mathematicians in academia drops at higher levels. In particular, there is a dramatic drop in the numbers of women between the ages of 30 and 40. We have been very disappointed by the fact that most universities and funding councils will not allow expenses such as extra childcare costs to be included when claiming funding for conference trips (or other similar activities). Also, many grants and fellowships are for a fixed time period and can not be extended *pro rata* when the holder seeks to work part-time. Any pressure that you could exert to change this situation would be much appreciated.

I hope this response is helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

Peter Cooper  
**Executive Secretary**