

Changes in curriculum and assessment for school mathematics: Ireland in international context

Students who came through the Irish education system recently have experienced “Project Maths,” the major curriculum initiative for second-level mathematics that was introduced gradually over a period of several years, started in 2008. Except for the small number of students who attended the so-called Phase 1 schools, the first full cycle of implementation – a complete Junior Certificate followed by the revised Leaving Certificate – was completed only in 2018 for those who did not do Transition Year and 2019 for those who did. Evaluation of the initiative is therefore problematic, and is exacerbated by the fact that a further development is already taking place in the Junior Cycle. The extended period of change has made it difficult for third-level lecturers to adjust their expectations about incoming students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions towards mathematics.

This talk does not attempt to provide an evaluation. Rather, it seeks to explain the rationale for key developments, framing them by taking a historical perspective and examining the changing context for mathematics education internationally as well as nationally. It focuses on significant changes in content and assessment since the foundation of the state and in particular over the last sixty years. The main emphasis will be on the Higher Leaving Certificate; with regard to assessment, the talk draws on the invaluable archive of state examination papers compiled by David Malone and Hazel Murray. Lively discussion will be welcomed!