Employability of Mathematicians: IMA Employers’ Forums

As both a learned and professional society, the IMA takes a great interest in the role of mathematics and mathematicians in the commercial and industrial spheres. The IMA achieves this via its Professional Affairs Committee, its support for both Graduate Training Schemes and Initial Professional Development and its awarding of the Chartered Mathematician and Chartered Scientist designations. There is also the developing group of Corporate Affiliates and the Friends of Mathematics. However, a recent survey of the Corporate Affiliates revealed a desire among our industrial partners for a forum at which organisations could meet and share best practice in many areas related to mathematics but notably the recruiting, training, development and retention of mathematicians. In order to address this need, the Professional Affairs Committee have developed an Employers’ Forum which is intended to provide such an opportunity to commercial and industrial organisations. Principally through the work of David Ogle CMath FIMA, CSci of EDF Energy and Heather Tewkesbury CMath FIMA of the Industrial Maths Knowledge Transfer Network, the first IMA Employers’ Forum will be held in September. The subject of the first forum will be Employability of Mathematics Graduates.

Mathematicians are possibly unique in the commercial world in that, very soon after entering employment, their application of mathematics to their profession takes them into areas that may no longer be recognisable as solely mathematical and they may soon come to regard themselves as financiers, engineers or physicists. This aspect of their careers may present a potential difficulty in terms of their career development and retention. Responsible employers will wish to offer a rewarding career path to these highly able people; to mutual benefit, such a career path may involve a Graduate Training Scheme and the development of a framework to ensure relevant Continual Professional Development. The employers will also have views on the educational profile which new graduates will need to succeed within their organisation.

Universities are becoming increasingly aware that maximising their prospects of good employment following graduation is a major consideration for potential undergraduates trying to decide in which establishment to invest their student loan. The universities may wish to tailor their courses accordingly, and would value the views of potential employers as to how this can be best achieved. Within this adaptation lies a decision on how education and training complement each other.

The aim of the first Employers’ Forum is to bring together the stakeholders in this process so that views can be exchanged and best practice shared. Delegates will include representatives from academia, industry and commerce, specialists in employability skills, students and recent graduates. Speakers from industry will describe their experience of the progress of mathematicians through their organisations and begin to discuss the knowledge and skills profile of the mathematicians whom they would wish to recruit. A breakout session will permit recently employed graduates to express their views and there will be an opportunity for general debate during a panel session.

It is intended that this will be the first of a series of Employers’ Forums which will be held twice a year. The agenda for future meetings will be determined by the needs of the employers and sharing best practice in mathematically related aspects of their businesses is likely to feature prominently.

The skills of mathematicians are vital to the health of a modern technological society. It is essential that their transition from education to employment is smooth and their subsequent careers rewarding. By bringing together the stakeholders in this process at the IMA Employers’ Forum, a sharing of views will help to achieve this aim.

The first Employers’ Forum will be held in September and will be hosted by EDF Energy for which I would like to express my thanks. If you are interested in attending or would like to contribute to future events, please contact me by email at john.meeson@ima.org.uk.

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