

# HELP WANTED!

## The journal's Question and Answer column

*Please send your questions to the Editors, who will then respond to them or will try to find a person well placed to answer them*

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*On this occasion Mellony Graven approached Dr Stephen Sproule at St. Johns College, who has been the main instigator of a useful e-mail group*

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**Mellony:** The FET Mathematics online e-mail group seems to be hugely active with interesting comments, questions and teaching ideas coming in from teachers across the country. Can you tell our readers more about the aim of the online community and how they can join should they wish to?

**Stephen:** The online email group was set up as a forum for mathematics teachers to discuss the changes in the FET mathematics and mathematics literacy curricula and to share advice and support on a more ongoing basis. This way we can keep in touch outside of the conferences.

So far people have asked many curricula questions, talked about the correctness of certain mathematics we use in statistics, advertised jobs openings, put out information about conferences, shared materials and tests for the new curriculum, and asked for help.

We see about 30-50 e-mails every month, not too many to be cumbersome but enough for a lively discussion.

One of the difficulties of having the group situated at *yahogroups* is that some servers block the email thinking it is spam or junk mail. If you join be sure to get your server people to unblock *yahogroups*.

Anyone still interested in joining the group is most welcome. Send an email to [math\\_fet-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:math_fet-subscribe@yahogroups.com), with a short message about who you are and what school or university you belong to.

**Mellony:** One of the key topics under discussion in the FET at the moment is the place of AP Maths (Add Maths) as a learning area in the new curriculum. Can you clarify for our readers the status of AP Maths at present?

**Stephen:** Mellony, I'm glad to see you using the new name. The name of Additional Mathematics has been changed to Advanced Programme Mathematics or simply AP Maths. With the change in curricula at the FET level and the government no longer offering Add maths a few enthusiastic teachers asked the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) to facilitate a curriculum-writing venture and act as the examination authority. Unfortunately the Department of National Education has declined to put AP Maths on the official list of eighth subjects. This reduces the social and economic value of the subject but certainly not the mathematical value.

**Mellony:** What suggestions do you have for schools at present in relation to the status of AP Maths in the curriculum?

**Stephen:** Add Maths was always about giving enthusiastic learners an outlet to explore more advanced mathematics and the top learners a leg up for studying mathematical fields at university. AP Maths will fulfil that same role and I would encourage teachers and schools to keep teaching the subject. By the way, anyone can do AP Maths, whether at a government or private school. The IEB will examine the subject and send out a separate certificate so everyone still has access to the subject. Although the Department of Education is not officially recognising the subject at this time they are supportive of schools offering the subject extramurally.

**Mellony:** What does the AP Maths curriculum look like?

**Stephen:** The curriculum has been changed and updated. The course has been made a little easier to encourage more learners to get involved in mathematics. The outcomes have been designed to include some mathematical topics that fit well with the twenty-first century and advances in calculator technology. Besides the traditional Calculus topics there is also some of the algebra that has been excluded from the FET mathematics curriculum. The optional topics include recursive modelling and financial mathematics, matrices and graph theory, and statistics. Lots of fun stuff to get your teeth into!

Try to join the *maths\_fet* group but if this isn't possible please feel free to e-mail me at [sproule@stjohns.wits.ac.za](mailto:sproule@stjohns.wits.ac.za)