

# The IMA's 60th Anniversary Celebration of Maths

**M**athematicians from across the country and across the generations gathered to celebrate three huge milestones for the IMA, the 60th anniversary of the Institute, the 20th anniversary of the Early Career Mathematicians (ECM) and the 100th year of the birth of the Institute's first president Professor Sir James Lighthill FRS.

After an hour of old friends being reacquainted and new ones being made over tea and coffee in the beautiful IET building in London, the morning started with a welcome from our current President, Hannah Fry HonFREng FIMA.

The vibrant and enthusiastic welcome set the tone for a focussed but truly collaborative day where the future of the IMA was discussed with hope and positivity. Despite an uncertain environment, the mathematics community is dedicated and focussed on ensuring the huge benefit that mathematics brings to society is maximised and understood. Who better then to set the tone of the day, than one of the best mathematics communicators of our generation?

The second session was a presentation by the wonderful Joanna Jordan FIMA, who turned a talk into a celebration of the impact that knowledge exchange has had on society as well as a celebration of the people who have dedicated so much time and energy to making Knowledge Exchange happen.<sup>1</sup> In a theme that ran through both keynote speeches, her first slides talked about celebrating the impact that mathematics has had on our world and emphasising the ubiquity of mathematics in our everyday lives.

However, the thing that I really took away from her talk, was the huge number of mathematicians that give their time and energy so willingly. I do not have the word count to name them all but Rebecca Hoyle FIMA, Alan Champneys CMath FIMA, Matt Butchers, Chris Budd OBE CMath FIMA, Martine Barons CMath FIMA and I. David Abrahams CMath FIMA all appeared on many of the slides and were just some of the people Joanna (herself an incredible advocate) deservedly noted.



Credit: astarstudios.tv



Panel discussions – from EDI to maths anxiety

As echoed throughout the day though, there was a serious message in the slides too. Mathematics has a long way to go, the community is not as well represented or as representative as it might be and mathematicians are still not taking (and do not know about) the many opportunities there are to promote knowledge exchange and advise at senior levels. As discussed later in the day, we also need to think more creatively about how we can be a truly inclusive community for everyone.

My talk was the second keynote, which covered the impact that mathematics has had on our country. It led to some thought-provoking discussion about what mathematics brings as both a language and a description of our world. It then went on to ask questions about whether, as mathematicians, we should be thinking more carefully about how we translate, communicate and assure the outcomes, safety and ethics of our models and advice.

The talks were followed by a challenging panel discussion that covered a wide range of issues from how we improve mathematics for the UK as a whole to how we should engage at the highest levels of government.

Last but not least before lunch, past president David Abrahams presented a look back on the history of the IMA across the years and then led a presentation of a memento (a glass Klein bottle) to Professor Sir Bryan Thwaites Hon FIMA who at 100 gave his perspective on the IMA.

The afternoon was a change in focus from a celebration of what had gone before to a look at how we might improve, with sessions on Equality (or Equity) Diversity and Inclusion, the social challenges in mathematics and then an incredibly insightful and thought-provoking session on maths anxiety.<sup>2</sup> I think the key messages from the afternoon have to be that we all need to listen more and try to be more inclusive and accepting. That at the heart of any progress we must make is a

Credit: astarstudios.tv



The morning session – Veronica, Joanna, Hannah and Sir Bryan

need to address early years teaching in mathematics and a need to bring some of the joy in mathematics back to the curriculum. If up to one in three people suffer mathematics anxiety, in a world so fundamentally reliant on mathematics, as an Institute we can make a huge difference just by helping to share our love of the subject.

As Nira Chamberlain OBE CMath CSci FIMA so energetically stated:

Mathematics is indisputably the greatest subject in the world and we should never apologise for being a mathematician.

And as Hannah Fry eloquently summed up in the fireside chat:

Mathematics is the portal for the playground of the soul.

To my mind, as the caretakers of the language and the applications of mathematics, we are the lucky ones. This was a feeling that I think pervaded the meeting and helped to focus the discussion on how we ensure everyone has access to and

an understanding of the joy and benefits that mathematics can bring in the future.

You can also view the IMA's 60th Anniversary Celebration Event playlist on the IMAmaths YouTube channel.

**Veronica Bowman OBE CMath FIMA**  
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## Notes

- 1 For an introduction to KE, see V-KEMS ([www.vkemsuk.org](http://www.vkemsuk.org)) and the KE Hub ([www.kehbmaths.co.uk/about-us-2/affiliates](http://www.kehbmaths.co.uk/about-us-2/affiliates)).
- 2 For maths anxiety links, see [tinyurl.com/MathsAnxietyIntro](http://tinyurl.com/MathsAnxietyIntro).

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