

Maths in a Box Prize

What would you do with a £1,000 prize? It's not something that many people have to consider, but one lucky teacher from the North East was faced with exactly this question last year!

Mike Forrest, Head of Maths at George Stephenson High School, won the prize after entering a prize draw on mathscareers.org.uk that required teachers to provide an evaluation of 'Maths in a Box'. The prize was equally funded by the IMA (via an Education Grant), the London Mathematics Society and the Royal Statistics Society. 'Maths in a Box' was developed as part of the *More Maths Grads* project and is an extensive range of resources which help students see the importance and applications of maths.

Mike Forrest has certainly put the £1,000 prize to good use for the George Stephenson High School pupils. He started off by taking a day out of school to visit the National Science Learning Centre (NSLC) in York. The NSLC houses the UK's largest collection of learning and teaching resources for science, engineering, technology and maths. There is also an extensive eLibrary which includes some classic maths teaching resources which have gone out of print (www.nationalstemcentre.org.uk/elibrary). Whilst the physical centre has more science than maths resources, Mike Forrest still found the experience worthwhile:

'Having a day in a quiet environment, reflecting on my teaching and the department was great and is not something which happens very often.'

Mike found that the NSLC housed a wide variety of maths games and this was the main thing he took from the day. He decided to purchase a number of games with the prize money which could be incorporated into his normal schemes of work.

One of these games was called Fractics – a card game where players compete to make fractions out of flash cards. Mike found the game had a very positive influence on his pupils' attitudes:

'The great thing is that it can be incorporated into the curriculum and the students get really enthusiastic and competitive about it. It is particularly popular with the boys who love the competition and forget that

they are doing work. It is too early to say if the games have influenced attainment, but they have definitely influenced attitude and that is surely going to have positive effects.'

Mike Forrest subsequently took the games to a Heads of Maths meeting where he showed them to other teachers. The teachers were even more competitive than the students and many of them were interested in purchasing class sets of the games.

With the rest of the prize money Mike Forrest purchased new resources for the school's LAMP club (LAMP standing for Logic and Maths Puzzles), which runs once a week and has become very popular with the school students. Mike left us with this interesting comment:

'As a head of maths I need to spend my budget on all the essentials such as photocopying, new textbooks and stationery and very rarely do I have any money left to be innovative with. The prize from the IMA gave me a sum of money with which I could take risks, using my professional judgement to try something new for our students. The relatively small amount of money has gone such a long way and made a big impact in our school and other schools in the area. I think that every school would benefit if their subject leaders were given a small fund such as this to be innovative with. Thanks ever so much for giving it to our school!'

Below is a list of the games that Mike Forrest bought:

- Fractics - a card game where players compete to make fractions out of flash cards.
- Equate - similar to scrabble, but using letters and mathematical operators.
- Smath – similar to Equate, but good for lower abilities.
- Function Well – bingo style game where pupils have to calculate quickly in their heads.
- Trilemma – like connect 4 but testing times tables and other mathematical functions. Good for lower abilities.
- What's the Point - a game for testing knowledge of fractions, decimals and percentages.
- Maths Brainbox - a game covering basic maths topics and testing visual memory.

HAZEL LEWIS (née Kendrick)
HE STEM PROJECT OFFICER

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