



Coláiste Mhuire gan Smál, Luimneach
~ Ollscoil Luimnigh ~

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick
~ University of Limerick ~

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Top Teenage Brains in Training at MIC for Mathematical Olympiad

A group of secondary school students, all highly talented in mathematics, attended a training camp at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick this week. Seven students from Dublin, Cork, Wexford and Kildare attended the two-day camp, with four sessions each day provided by Dr Mark Burke (UL), Dr Bernd Kreussler (MIC), Prof. Tom Laffey (UCD), Gordon Lessells (UL) and Dr Anca Mustata (UCC). Two of the students are on this year's Irish team for the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO). The other attendees scored well at the Irish Mathematical Olympiad, which was held on the 7 May 2011 and some of them will very likely qualify for next year's IMO team.

The International Mathematical Olympiad is the most prestigious mathematical contest for second level students in the world. The first IMO was held in 1959 in Romania with just seven countries participating. Since then, IMO has grown considerably with about 100 countries participating in recent years.

Every year, the best students in the Irish Mathematical Olympiad qualify for the International Mathematical Olympiad. Ireland has sent a team to the IMO every year since 1988, with most successful Irish participant being Fiachra Knox from Co. Meath, who received a silver medal in 2005 and is currently a Ph.D. student in mathematics at Birmingham University. This year's IMO will take place in Amsterdam, 16-24 July.

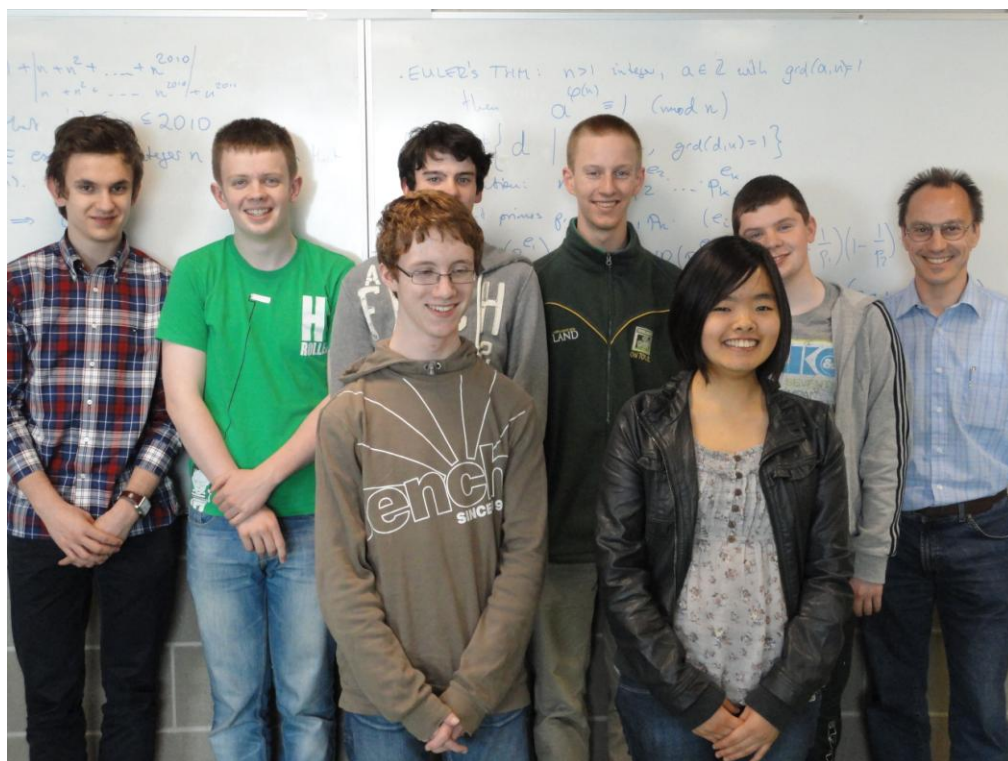
In order to have any chance of scoring even a few marks at the two four-and-a-half-hour exams at the IMO, students have to undertake an intense training course which focuses on problem solving. Four members of this year's Irish team are currently sitting the Leaving Cert exams but will have the chance to attend another training camp at the beginning of July. One of the two members of the team who attended the recent two-day training camp at Mary Immaculate College, Adam Keilthy from Dublin, was the top scorer at the Irish Mathematical Olympiad this year. Describing his experience of the training at MIC, Adam said, ***"It was great! Much more informative than the sessions in our local centres before the Olympiad because it was much more focussed on problem solving as opposed to theory only. We really learned how to apply the theory. All the trainers are great and were happy to stop and explain even the most basic things."***

Dr Bernd Kreussler, one of the organisers of the camp at MIC, said, ***"I think that both, students and trainers, enjoyed these two days very much. The basis for the success of this training camp was the enthusiasm of the students for mathematical problem solving. Compared with many other countries who participate in the IMO, Irish students start too late to get involved in such activities. We could have a broader basis for Irish success at the IMO if more students gained experience in creative mathematical problem solving towards the end of their Primary School age. We would be happy to support teachers with our experience who are interested in running weekly maths clubs in their schools for the best students in their locality."***

Among the other trainees at the camp were potential candidates for the Irish team for IMO 2012, which will take place in Argentina. However, according to Dr Kreussler, ***“To enable us to send a full team of six students requires extra funding, because of the higher costs for the flights. All trainers, who voluntarily devote a lot of their spare time to the training of the most talented students, would welcome sponsors willing to support the 2012 Irish IMO team.”***

In addition to the intensive training these talented and highly-motivated students received through the two-day summer camp, they also had access to term-time training sessions at one of the five training centres at UL, NUI Galway, UCC, NUI Maynooth and UCD. At the Limerick centre there are four mathematicians from UL and one from Mary Immaculate College involved in the training. The trainers at these centres are volunteers who carry out this work for free in their spare time. These training sessions take place at UL every Thursday between 7 pm and 10 pm during the months of January until April.

These courses deal with the four classical subjects traditionally covered in mathematical Olympiads: algebra, combinatorics, geometry and number theory. The material covered is not directly related to the second level curriculum, but the training provides an opportunity for interested students to think about challenging problems in a friendly and stress-free environment. Talented and interested secondary school students of any age are always very welcome. Teachers, parents or relatives who are aware of a student with exceptional talent in mathematics should contact one of the training centres mentioned above. Detailed information can be found at www.irmo.ie, which is the website of the Irish Mathematical Olympiad.



Mathematically talented attendees of the first IMO Training Camp at MIC with Dr Bernd Kreussler

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