

#mathscpdchat 2 March 2021

Maths department meetings: what are they for? What do you do in yours?

Hosted by [David Helsby](#)

*This is a brief summary of the discussion – to see all the tweets, follow the hashtag **#mathscpdchat** in Twitter*



The graphic features a large teal hashtag symbol on the left. The text '#mathscpdchat' is written in white on a teal background. To the right, 'Today' is in a yellow box, followed by 'Tuesday, 2 March, 7-8pm'. A central photo shows three people in a meeting. Below the photo, the text reads: 'Maths department meetings: what are they for? What do you do in yours?'. At the bottom, it says 'Hosted by David Helsby @MrHelsbyMaths' and 'ncetm.org.uk/mathscpdchat'. A small version of the NCETM logo is in the bottom right corner.

Among the links shared during the discussion were:

[Is this the best we can do? Part 7: the spacing effect](#) which is a Michaela Staff Blog by Hin Tai in which the author examines one strategy for trying to improve 'maths memory'. It was the focus for discussion during a maths department meeting lead by [Sharon Malley](#) who shared the link.

[Book Club Study Guide](#) which is a blog by Director of Maths ([Gemma Scott](#)) who has been running her maths faculty meetings as a maths-education book club. It was shared by [Gemma Scott](#)

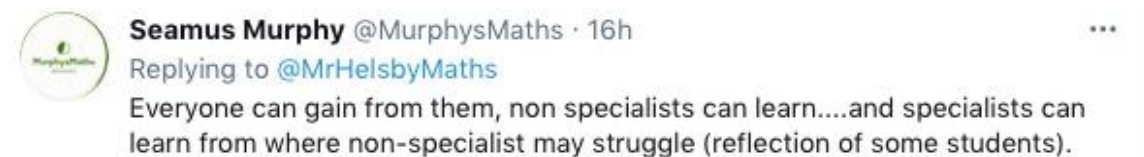
[Developing Products in Half the Time: New Rules, New Tools](#) which is a book, by Preston G Smith, about effective leadership in 'highly competitive fast moving business'. It was shared by [Lee Overy](#)

The screenshots below, of chains of tweets posted during the chat, show parts of several conversations about teachers' (very positive) experiences in maths department meetings. **Click on any of these screenshots of a tweet to go to that actual tweet on Twitter.**

The conversation was generated by this tweet from [David Helsby](#):




and included these from [Rachael Taylor](#), [Gemma Scott](#), [Laura Gilbert](#) and [Seamus Murphy](#)




these from [Mr P](#), [Mrs Currie](#) and [David Helsby](#):




 **Mrs Currie** 🇪🇺 🇮🇪 @mrscurriemaths · 16h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
As someone who is also relatively new to maths (but not to teaching) regular departmental meetings are great to know that it's not just me /not just my class #mathscpdchat


 **Mrs Currie** 🇪🇺 🇮🇪 @mrscurriemaths · 16h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
Also just so good to feel part of a team and share practice #mathscpdchat

 **Mrs Currie** 🇪🇺 🇮🇪 @mrscurriemaths · 16h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
I only recently moved to schools from FE so regular departmental meetings were a bit of a novelty (in college was part of bigger faculty and they were administrative/one or two per year) #mathscpdchat

 **Mr Helsby** @MrHelsbyMaths · 16h ...
A really interesting perspective to have- what have you found to be the most useful? #mathscpdchat


 **Mrs Currie** 🇪🇺 🇮🇪 @mrscurriemaths · 16h ...
Shared planning - especially informal feedback on why a colleague teaches one topic before another, misconceptions to watch out for etc

these from these from [David Helsby](#), [Miss Ward-Gow](#), [Laura Kavalier](#), [Priya Parmar](#) and [Rachael Taylor](#):

 **Mr Helsby** @MrHelsbyMaths · 18h ...
#mathscpdchat YOU are allocated 15 minutes at the next departmental meeting with no specific topic, what do you choose to do? #mathscpdchat

 **Miss Ward-Gow** @mcwardgow · 17h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
Choose an interesting problem solving question to do and then compare notes 🙌 #mathscpdchat


 **Laura** @mathsteacher09 · 17h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
A colleague recently asked me about how I would reach a specific ratio q . I'd send the question round to staff beforehand and get everyone to demo how they'd explain it.

 **Priya Parmar** @priya_p81 · 16h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
Changing the subject has come up in our top 10 worst answered at GCSE a few times so I once got sugar paper and pens out, chose a Q and got everyone in the dept to show how they would model it to students. Lots of great practice shared and great discussions! #mathscpdchat

 **Rachael Taylor** @rachaelhandley2 · 18h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
We had this last week, we had a whole hour though. We looked at exam marking and moderation as we felt it best to check accuracy with this year in mind. In the past we've looked at sharing best practice and give dept members a chance to showcase what they've done

these from these from [Peter Mattock](#), [Laura Gilbert](#) and [David Helsby](#):

 **Mr Mattock FCCT NPQSL** @MrMattock · 17h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
Depends on what the depart needs #mathscpdchat.

 **Laura** @mathsteachlaura · 17h ...
I was just thinking about how much the stability of a department will impact this. Lots of staffing changes will make the aspirational ideas we have heard here difficult to implement. #mathscpdchat

 **Mr Helsby** @MrHelsbyMaths · 17h ...
Absolutely but departmental meetings can also provide opportunity (time, space, support) to develop all members of staff whether they are new or established, experienced or non-specialist, bringing everyone together #mathscpdchat

 **Mr Helsby** @MrHelsbyMaths · 17h ...
Replying to @MrMattock
What about your current department- what are you currently working on? #mathscpdchat

 **Mr Mattock FCCT NPQSL** @MrMattock · 17h ...
Most recently we did a good bit of work on designing good multiple choice questions to aid AfL during online learning (we spotted some less than ideal practice in materials that had been designed for use in school). #mathscpdchat. I always like to look at Structure as well.

and these from [David Helsby](#) and [Laura Gilbert](#):

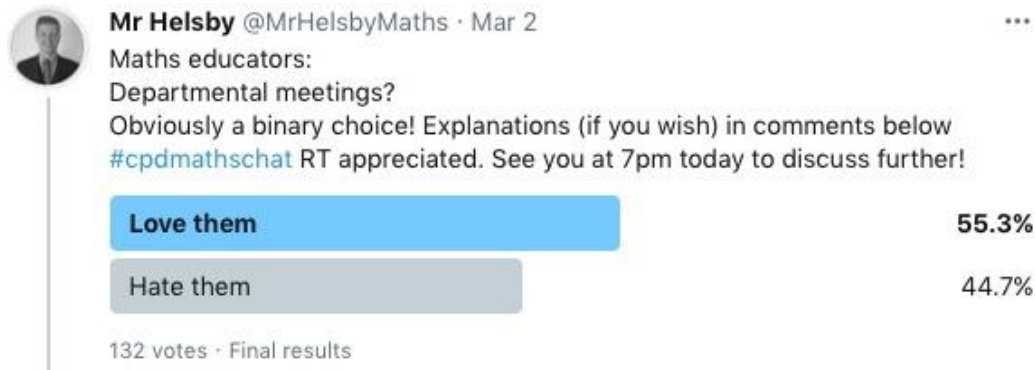
 **Mr Helsby** @MrHelsbyMaths · 17h ...
Final one to end #cpdmathschat tonight- what is your most memorable mathematics departmental meeting?

 **Laura** @mathsteachlaura · 17h ...
Replying to @MrHelsbyMaths
The first meeting with a new HOD. We started by working through some maths problems together and then he asked us to bring something that we had used in lesson to share in the next meeting. So refreshing! #mathscpdchat

(to read the discussion sequence generated by any tweet look at the 'replies' to that tweet)

Some of the areas where discussion focused were:

the host tweeted a poll:



responses to this tweeted poll included:

- that teachers **prefer to talk about pedagogy rather than data** ... that if pedagogy is never the focus, the data is unlikely to change;
- that the greatest impact on teaching and learning made by department meetings results from **what happens 'in between colleagues'** during them;
- **'we go into great detail on how we will model the maths** to the point that we decide on the exact language and examples we will use' ... examples were given;
- some departments have a **maths-teachers' Teams chat** that they use for 'quick questions and sharing' in between department meetings;
- some teachers **use blogs and articles 'as a jumping off point for discussion'** in department meetings;
- some teachers reported that there is **'very little difference' between their department meetings and 'Inset time'**;
- teachers reported that in their department meetings they **discuss what they are about to teach** ... the learning that it builds on, and to what learning it leads ... some also 'take an exam question and reflect on KS3 skills ...';
- some department leaders **look critically at their draft proposed agenda** before the meeting, considering what is in each item for everybody ... 'I hate being in meetings that are a 1-1 conversation';

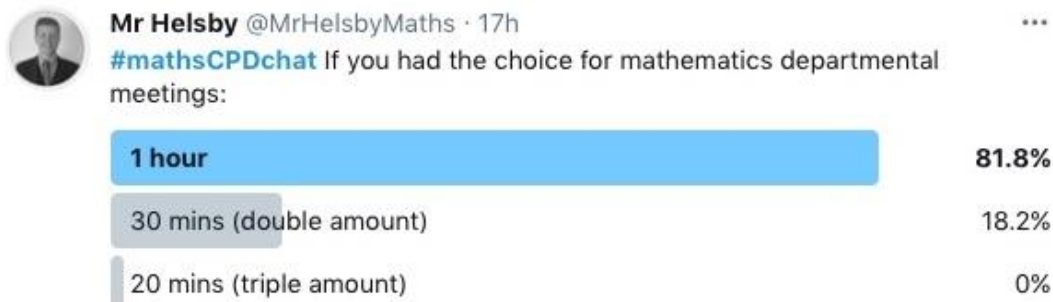
what teachers love about departmental meetings:

- talking about 'problematic' teaching experiences that are shared by many ... **together finding solutions** to such 'problems' ... sharing CPD resources;
- **together 'developing ourselves and our practice'** ... sharing planning, for example 'why a colleague teaches one topic before another', and 'misconceptions to watch out for' ...

hearing another colleague's approach 'can help you view a topic with fresh eyes and enthusiasm';

- **seeing 'the team grow and develop into a unit'** ... also seeing individual teachers 'grow' ... coming up with new ideas and initiatives collaboratively;
- that it is 'just so good to feel part of a team and share practice';

the host tweeted a poll about preferred time-lengths for departmental meetings:



responses to the following statement ... 'if it can be written in an email, it has no place at a departmental meeting' included:

- some people agreed that administrative issues should be dealt with via emails, but **issues relating to pedagogy, teaching and learning, need to be discussed in meetings** ... 'I'm the leader and I send emails, but it doesn't always mean I have the best ideas' ... someone else could 'spark something creative';
- some teachers drew attention to teachers' well-being/workload, commenting that **'if it can be said in a conversation then I don't send it in an email'** ... 'there are enough emails every day, don't need extra ones where possible';
- others believe that **administrative information should be communicated first via email**, 'then questions about it can be asked in a meeting if needed';
- some people commented that they prefer to impart some information about which there can be no uncertainty **'in person so that I have control over how the message is received'** ... 'a whole layer of good leadership can easily be lost by hiding behind a 'send' button' ... that it is best to consider/discuss everyone's real opinions in order to develop a shared 'vision';

the host invited teachers to say 'what they would change' in department meetings:

- **'get rid of all the admin, which can be done by email'** ... that it's not necessary to read emails 'when you know someone will tell you the crucial bits in the meetings';
- that looking for evidence of progress made by pupils by scrutinising their books is not a good use of department-meeting time ... that **time would be better spent discussing ways in which teaching can generate progress;**

the structure/format of department meetings:

- at least one department leader devotes a large part of every department meeting to the **discussion of people’s ideas prompted by reading a particular book or article (a book-club discussion)** ... the leader sets the agenda which includes an ‘AOB’ slot ‘for anyone who wants to raise anything else’;
- in some schools the **headteacher specifies a ‘whole-school agenda’ for department meetings, to which the department leader adds a ‘department-specific agenda’** for which all members of the department can suggest items;

in order to obtain a rough idea of teachers’ preferences, the host tweeted a poll about the ‘online’ or ‘face-to-face’ nature of future departmental meetings:



what teachers would choose to do if they were given 15 minutes of a department meeting to use in any way:

- some would **choose an interesting mathematical problem for everyone to solve** ... then during the meeting they would together **compare and discuss methods, strategies, and reasoning** evident in their various solutions;
- a discussion developed about ways in which **departmental meetings can contribute to the professional development of participants**;
- a teacher reported that the whole of a recent department meeting was devoted to **collaboratively designing multiple-choice questions** that would be likely to facilitate assessment for learning;
- one teacher would **send a mathematical question round to staff beforehand** and invite them to demonstrate in the meeting **how they would use it in a lesson**;
- some teachers would use the time to **focus discussion on particular pupils** ... perhaps write ‘well done’ postcards to send home to some pupils;
- a teacher suggested choosing **a real GCSE question that had been poorly answered by students**, giving out sugar paper and pens, and challenging everyone to show (by writing/drawing on sugar paper) **‘how they would model it to students’** ... that actually doing this in a department meeting had resulted in ‘lots of great practice shared and great discussions’;

- that all activity in a department meeting ought to be **‘focused, purposeful and developmental’**;

at the end of the discussion the host invited teachers to describe their ‘most memorable mathematics departmental meeting’:

- one response ... during a refreshingly memorable department meeting teachers **worked through some maths problems together**, then they were each asked to bring to the next meeting something (prompted by what they had just been doing?) that they had ‘used’ in a lesson.