

The NCETM Maths Podcast Episode 87

Teacher Professionalism: a conversation with Professor Dame Alison Peacock

Julia Thomson: Hello, and welcome to the NCETM Maths Podcast. I'm Julia Thomson, Senior Communications and Marketing Manager for the NCETM, and I'm delighted to share this new conversation exploring teacher professionalism and collaborative professional development with you. I know when I was in the classroom, my professional life was very much plan, teach, assess, rinse, and repeat.

I didn't experience the kind of collaboration or opportunity to develop professionally that is explored in this episode, and I think that's the situation many teachers find themselves in. I found this conversation really fascinating and inspiring, and I think it's an important conversation for us to be having.

I'm going to hand you over now to my colleague here at the NCETM, Gaynor Bahan, and our special guest Professor Dame Alison Peacock of the Chartered College of Teaching. Enjoy the conversation.

Gaynor Bahan: Hello and welcome to the NCETM podcast. I'm Gayner Bahan, Assistant Director for System Leadership at the NCETM and, in this episode, we're exploring the idea of teacher professionalism, what it means today, why it matters, and how it can be nurtured across schools and trusts. At the NCETM, we believe that professionalism thrives in environments where teachers collaborate, share expertise and grow together.

So that belief underpins the work of the Maths Hubs Programme, which now supports thousands of teachers and leaders across England in ongoing research informed professional and school development. And today I am delighted to be joined by Professor Dame Alison Peacock, Chief Executive of the Chartered College of Teaching, who's a passionate advocate for teacher voice, autonomy and trust in the profession. Alison brings a wealth of experience, not only as a leader in education, policy and research, but also as a former head teacher and teacher herself. So together we'll be discussing what teacher professionalism looks like in practice, how collaborative programmes like Math Hubs support its development, and why this matters more than ever for the future of our profession.

Professor Dame Alison, welcome and thank you for joining us.

Alison Peacock: Thank you very much. It's a real pleasure to be here.

Gaynor Bahan: I think we'll probably start by just asking you to explain what the Chartered College of Teaching is and why it exists, please, Alison.

Alison Peacock: Right. So the Chartered College of Teaching is a charitable professional body.

We are apolitical. We are completely independent of government and we have members from the state sector, the independent sector, primarily in England, but also across the four nations and internationally. We started seven years ago, my goodness, that's whizzed by. But we were building on an existing college of teachers, which was established in 1849.

So depending on who I'm talking to and whether it's convenient or not, I either talk about we're new and we are niche, and it's seven years. Or I look back to 1849 and say, look, we are a fixture that has been around for a long time. And essentially, as professional body, we seek to empower a

knowledgeable and respected teaching profession through membership accreditation. That's our mission. And it's a very exciting one, and I'm delighted to be able to talk to you about what we're doing today, Gaynor, so thank you.

Gaynor Bahan: Thank you/ I think one of the things that we wanted to explore is the Chartered College's recent report, 'Revisiting the notion of teacher professionalism', which I know when I read that, it challenged me to think a bit differently about what it means to be a professional in today's schools.

So I wondered if you can explain what do we mean when we talk about teacher professionalism, and why is this conversation that we're having particularly timely?

Alison Peacock: Yes, thank you. We have a research team that's based at the college now, and one of the things they've done recently is to look into this notion of professionalism.

Where does it come from? Is it something that is confined to teaching, or is there a notion of professionalism that has much broader borders? The reality is that there are very many organisations that set themselves up and describe themselves as professional bodies. We had a presentation yesterday as a team from Jonathan Brecken who's writing his PhD about professionalism, and he has looked into it and said that there are 3,000 registered professional bodies. 3,000!

Gaynor Bahan: Wow.

Alison Peacock: Many of which though he did say had got that status as part of what they needed for fundraising or whatever it might be. But there is this sense that whether you are working as a lawyer, whether you are related to the medical profession, whether you are related actually from the origins of professionalism, which comes from the church, that there's a sense of kudos that comes from being able to establish yourself as a long-serving contributor to the history and development of the area in which you're working. So in a way, that's why I also introduced the College of Teaching back to 1849 because I think it's really important that we understand that to be a teacher is so much more than just to exist within your classroom or within your school, or group of schools.

It's about joining a professional endeavour: essentially you are contributing as an individual teacher to the overall sense of what it means to be a teacher. Your identity is wrapped up in other teachers. Teachers have taught you, teachers decades ago, teachers of the future. So you are part of something as a teacher that is much bigger than your own individual contribution, which is why, looking at the nature of professionalism as it particularly relates to teaching, we believe has been really fruitful. So we, I'm saying we in the management sense, because it wasn't me at all, it was Dr Lisa Maria Muller and Dr Vic Cook, who pulled together a literature review of professionalism and then looked to see how it relates directly to teaching. And they've come up with a series of definitions, if you like, that we most recognisably pull into a Venn diagram.

We've looked at all of the evidence, and we believe that there are three key domains that make up the nature of what it means to be a professional in today's education system. Now, the first of these domains is the cognitive domain. So it is really important, we believe, to be a true professional that colleagues engage with the corpus of knowledge about teaching.

So that's about building your understanding, your recognition, applying different theories. Really having an awareness of where has teaching got to right now. Why do we do the things that we do? What's the history of what we do? What's emerging and is really interesting and important. So keeping an eye on all of that, but also having a kind of backward glance to say, well, where has all this come from and why do we think it matters?

It's really important, also, we believe that we have a corpus of knowledge that is built through practice-informed theory, which is why we published the journal that we publish, the *Impact* journal. We are

really keen to hear from teachers about practice in their classrooms, informed by theory that is making a difference to children.

And this is fundamental because this is about - right at the cutting edge - what is making the most impact in my room might not be the same in your classroom, might not be the same in your subject. So in this instance, for you, it's about mathematics and that's why the work of the NCETM is so aligned with the work of the Chartered College because you are very keen to collaborate, to pull together knowledge, to understand theoretically what works, but also then practically in groups of colleagues to actually work this out and observe each other's practice and problematise a lot of what's being seen.

Gaynor Bahan: Absolutely, yes.

Alison Peacock: I've been really impressed with what I've seen from the NCETM. I think there's a huge alignment with what we're talking about here in terms of knowledge. So that's the first domain, the cognitive domain, and of course that overlaps with professional learning because you can't do all of this on your own.

It's that teaching is necessarily a collaborative endeavour. Then the second domain is the ethical domain - the idea that you can be on your own in the classroom and teach any way that you like and have no regard to anybody else in your school or any other anybody else's theory. There may well have been a time when that was prevalent, but it's certainly not the case now, and it's really important, we believe, that there is an ethical dimension to understanding the impact of your actions, but also that collective, what makes a difference across the whole school to the community that you are serving as a teacher, making sure that there's a real sense of, what are the values that you commit to as a teacher?

And you might not be articulating these on a regular basis, but they feel intrinsic to who you are as a teacher. And I guess the biggest thing I would say is that when someone is contravening your values, you know when someone is suggesting something that would make you kind of think, 'Oh, I'm not sure that's what I want to be doing'.

So at the Chartered College we're working together in an ethical leadership alliance, and I'll talk more about that in a moment, which is really about trying to bring all of this to the surface and articulate clearly what we think it means to be an ethical teacher. And then the third domain is the sort of regulatory domain, the legal and social domain that says, if you're going to be a teacher, you need to be qualified, you need to be registered, you need to have safeguarding concerns, all of that needs to be covered in order that you can do everything else.

It's necessarily important. And, within that comes the sense of accountability, that as a professional we should be accountable for our actions, and we should be accountable for the results that our children achieve and so on. We bring all of that together and the intersection is around professional learning, ethics, building trust, all of these really important values that maybe aren't seen.

But as I say, they have certainly noticed when they're not there.

Gaynor Bahan: Absolutely. And I think I was reflecting as you were talking then, Alison, on what we're sort of trying to do in a Maths Hubs context. Thinking about professionalism - and I was thinking ethical - we're holding a shared responsibility across England for equitable outcomes in maths.

It's not just about what is happening in our own classroom, it's beyond that. It's about what is happening in our school and also what's happening in the school down the road. And with the cognitive - we are trying to deepen subject knowledge collaboratively. You've talked about teaching being a collaborative practice: it's absolutely what we're encouraging in the Maths Hubs Programme.

Also, working within frameworks, but shaping practice together, looking at what works for our children in our context. I think there was something from the report which talked about summarising what you've just said there: professionalism includes moral purpose. We believe that education is a vehicle for social justice, and we want all children to enjoy maths and achieve in maths as well.

Alison Peacock: I just think it's so important that we recognise that when teachers love the job that they do and they're driven by a kind of sense of, I've tried this and now I want to try that, and what can I learn from it? Can I read about this, and can I come and see your classroom? You know, when they've got that curiosity that is born out of wanting to be the best teacher they can be because they want their children to really thrive, then the job feels irresistible. And I think what I saw when I came and presented to your, your Maths Hub Leads, I saw a room full of colleagues who were fired up by the notion of, how can I support other people's learning.

It's not about me. It's about what I can do that can build the learning across my team or across a group of schools, that means that teachers, when they're on their own in the classroom, are far more confident and have the capacity to take children on a journey, which they otherwise might not have to do.

Gaynor Bahan: Absolutely. We want teachers to be trusted to make complex decisions with all of the kind of collaborative practice that sits behind that. I wonder if you could just touch on - perhaps why this conversation is particularly timely - we know there's current pressures in schools at the moment: accountability, recruitment, retention - all of those challenges.

Why is it feeling timely right now, Alison?

Alison Peacock: Well, if I could be a bit controversial, I think that, in some cases, teacher agency, autonomy, has been eroded in favour of compliance, in favour of a kind of one-size-fits-all better than multiple sizes. So in some cases I think there's almost been a kind of an assumption that if we've got a great scheme of work, that's all we need because we've got a great scheme of work and we just need people to come in and deliver it.

Now, for me, that is the kind of base minimum of where we need to be, because what great teachers do, and I'm not suggesting everybody needs to write their own scheme of work, by the way. No, I'm not at all. What great teachers do is they take the resources and the materials and the lesson ideas, and they just tailor them in a way that brings the whole thing to life for their students. They know their students best. They understand the context in which they're working. As long as they have this sort of notion of high ambition, high aspiration for all students, then if they've got great materials to work with, so much the better.

But diminishing teachers' capacity to be able to tailor what they're teaching, I think means that we lower the quality of what's available. Now, having said that, and again, this is very interesting talking to your Maths Hub Leads, there's a world of difference between having that sort of sense of agency, collective purpose, I'm using these resources, I want to do the best I can, and a kind of belligerence that says, well, I'm going to put all that to one side because I know best. And if I can give you a kind of doom-laden scenario that occurred, I went to a conference before the pandemic. This is how I judge everything: pre- and post-pandemic, that's how I can remember things in my life. Anyway, pre the pandemic I went to a conference. I wasn't speaking at the conference. Don't even remember what it was. Anyway. I was sitting having a cup of tea, and two teachers came and sat down at the table where I was and they were having a conversation, nothing to do with me, but I was just sitting there and they were talking about a maths scheme that had been implemented in their school.

They were saying, well, they say we have to do this. So now I say to the children: 'Hmm, it says here, now I've got to ask you la-de-da', whatever it may be. And they were saying: 'Oh, of course it doesn't work'. And I was thinking, 'Well, of course it doesn't work!' I mean, whatever it was that you were going to be setting out to do, as soon as you are kind of breaking down that third wall and saying to

the children, well, it says, I've got to say this now. Disaster. Complete lack of buy-in from those teachers, obviously feeling that they have been told this is what you've got to do, without the really rich professional learning that needs to take place. Which is where I think what you're doing with Maths Hubs is so important: that means that people understand why. They're understanding: what is it that's being presented to me? How can this be helpful? How does this supplement what I already know about teaching mathematics? How does this make it even better? How can I take these resources and really fly with them? It's not helpful for anybody to have a resistance.

Gaynor Bahan: Yes.

Alison Peacock: And professional learning at scale is really hard work. because it feels like it should be easy. It feels like - this is why we need a chartered college, quite frankly, because it feels like it should be really easy to just say to people, this works well, why don't you try it?

The reality is that people are very driven by habits in the classroom: they're very driven by, this has worked for me for ten years, why would I want to shift it? And not only that, I haven't necessarily got the band-width to adjust what I'm doing alongside all the other pressures I have while I'm teaching.

Because it's...

Gaynor Bahan: Absolutely, yeah.

Alison Peacock: ...A really challenging job!

So the notion that is being embraced by NCETM, of collaboration, working in partnership, trying things out, evaluating them in a trusting way, in a way that means that people feel validated in their practice, but also that they are able to take a few risks, and not worry that the world is going to collapse.

That is an approach to professional learning that is designed to build professionalism, as opposed to one that is designed to negate individual approaches to teaching and say, you just need to do this.

Gaynor Bahan: I think it absolutely resonates with what we're seeing in the Maths Hubs Programme, where we have teachers and leaders working together to lead and shape professional practice. It's empowering teachers to, to shape and lead their own learning, and I think I'm probably quoting from the report again, where I'm saying where teachers are trusted and respected, that professionalism thrives and we see it where the teachers are co-constructors of the CPD, not passive recipients.

And the autonomy comes through, it's balanced through structure, through shared principles like teaching for mastery, because we know evidence-informed practice is central to both the Chartered College of Teaching and, as you said, the NCETM, and there absolutely is a danger in treating it as prescriptive. But when we think about teaching for mastery, we think about something that's grounded in evidence, but it's shaped locally, so our role really is helping teachers to navigate that tension between guidance and autonomy. Because I think you said really that autonomy isn't just about doing whatever you like. It needs to be informed.

Alison Peacock: Yeah.

Gaynor Bahan: And it needs to be a purposeful choice, being able to apply knowledge in context. I think I'm quoting you from your speech at ResearchEd in September 2022, when you said that evidence should inspire and not prescribe.

Alison Peacock: I think all of these factors are crucial when we are thinking about the profession at large, when we are thinking about retention of teachers, when we are thinking about the prestige of teachers. So we've looked at all of these factors that we believe make up this sort of professional discourse, this notion of professionalism.

And we believe this is the way that we raise the status of the profession, that we raise the self-esteem of teachers, it's really, really important. Ultimately this builds prestige because we are not demanding authority: we're enabling authority, because through our practice, we are able to explain our ideas.

I think for example, pretty much every parent has been to school, and pretty much every parent has a view of school, depending on their own educational experience.

And we all encounter so many teachers as we are growing up, and there will be some teachers that stick in our mind because they're brilliant.

There will also be some teachers that stick in our mind because they weren't, and I think the relationship between schools and parents is becoming increasingly fragile. Now, the more that we've got a questioning on the part of parents about the authority of teachers, the intellectual authority of teachers, the authority of teachers to actually prescribe for their students in the way that they think is best.

If you've got parents who are questioning that, it really potentially undermines the whole thing, because this is about society and the teaching profession. So the notion of professionalism is really, really important in how we build those respectful relationships.

Now you can't demand this: this is something that has to be built. I feel one of the really key things here is for teachers to be able to confidently explain their practice. If you think about a typical parents' evening, you've probably got a few minutes to talk to hundreds of parents. If a parent comes to you and says, why are you doing this with my child in the classroom? Or, Why aren't you supporting them in this particular area? If you are a confident professional, and you are constantly interrogating ideas around your subject, the chances are that you can very convincingly, because you believe it, talk about: this is why I'm doing this because I think this will help this, this is the reason I'm working in this way. I think that Jamie will flourish because we are doing this now.

Now, if you haven't got that sense of understanding about what you're doing, if you're following someone else's rules, if you are doing what you need to do, because this is what the school policy says, but you don't really buy into it or you don't really understand it, you are not going to be convincing with those parents.

So that relationship fractures further. And this is why, at the Chartered College, we are very keen to encourage colleagues to study to become chartered teachers because it's a way of building on your subject knowledge and then using that opportunity in a formal, accredited way to interrogate some of your practice, read around your subject, really think about, and refine your ideas about what you're doing, and try something out and then record what goes on as a result of that, and then write it up.

That's one of the modules for being a chartered teacher. Recently at the Teaching Commission, we took evidence from several chartered teachers and, honestly, if I wanted to get a boost before I went on my holiday, this was, was totally wonderful.

Gaynor Bahan: Was it? Yeah.

Alison Peacock: They were just saying, well, it's transformed the way that I think, it's given me an opportunity to lead others now in their teaching because I feel much more confident as a mentor, because I know what I'm doing and I'm questioning what I'm doing, but I'm also writing now.

All three of them have been promoted. So the work that you are doing and the work that we are doing is about building colleagues up throughout their professional career. It's not enough to say, well, I'm a qualified teacher and you are only a taxi driver, so I'll tell you, this is what we're going to do. Shut up.

You have to be able to really be clear about the actions you're taking in your classroom that are going to make a difference for your children.

Gaynor Bahan: And I think one of the key features of what we try and do through Maths Hubs is that emphasis on teachers learning from each other as well in those collaborative groups.

So really respecting each other, building that relational trust and mutual respect, that kind of peer-led professional learning which we see, is so powerful for developing that teacher professionalism. I think we see that teachers learn best from those who understand the context as well.

It's encouraging agency and that sort of reflective inquiry, but we do have many participants in Maths Hubs, especially those that take on the role of what we call a local leader of maths education, those maths system leaders that begin to work beyond their own classroom and work, and to lead other groups of teachers in these sort of collaborative groups.

They begin to see themselves not just as excellent practitioners, but as system leaders and influencers. So, I think, how important is it for a healthy profession that teachers can be given the opportunity to take on these kinds of leadership roles without necessarily leaving the classroom and following the standard route through what we might have expected a teacher to have in their career?

Alison Peacock: Yeah, I think it's vitally important. And interestingly, I was speaking to one of the newly appointed RISE advisors in London and I was saying that, wouldn't it be great if we could work together?

We've got lots of fellows now from the Chartered College who are incredibly experienced. Would that be helpful if we were to convene a meeting and just sort of see whether regionally there are particular things that we can all do through working in collaboration?

There have been formal routes of doing this kind of thing through things like the teaching schools. I mean, when I was a headteacher, I led one of the first teaching schools. In fact, I was on the first teaching school council, and that notion of system leadership, of colleagues supporting one another is incredibly powerful.

I really believe in that, and I think it's so important, but equally it needs to be resourced.

What we've seen over the last number of years is that what started off as a really powerful policy around building teaching school communities, building teaching school alliances, has morphed over time, and some of that has been dialled down a bit, but then the collaboration that comes through the hubs that are being established, the same premise is right at the heart of the NCETM, it strikes me, as was at the heart of starting teaching schools, so there's a balance to be had, isn't there? You want people to work together, but we also need to enable that to happen. If you're going to take people out of school and they're working with other colleagues elsewhere, the school needs to have some sort of remuneration because the teacher's no longer there because they're working elsewhere, and all those kind of factors do need a bit of resource.

Gaynor Bahan: We've got to make it work, absolutely. We've got to have the systems behind it.

Alison Peacock: Exactly. So when resources get stretched, there's almost a sense of, well, do we need that anymore? You know, do we need those teaching school alliances? But actually that vision, right back in the day, certainly when I as a stropky headteacher became a teaching school head in that first cohort of teaching schools, I thought I was just being given the keys to the kingdom. I mean, they were basically saying, we trust you as school leaders, we want you to work with other colleagues and show us how we improve the system. Now, I could completely, a hundred percent buy into that. There were, however, to be frank with you and be honest about this, back in the day when all the, those first 98 teaching schools were established, there were some headteachers of teaching schools

who said, 'Oh, well, how do we do this? Who do we ask? Where are the rules?' Whereas me, well, we don't need any rules. We've been given the kind of principles, let's get on with it and let's find a way through. So we are so used to, as a profession, being told what to do, and we're so worried about doing anything that we shouldn't do in case we get our schools into trouble, we get ourselves into trouble, and so on.

So again, it's that agency: if you're going to be a system leader, you need to feel that you have some room to make a difference, don't you?

Gaynor Bahan: Absolutely, and believe in your own professionalism and take those risks and know that we are the best people to be making these decisions, because we are in classrooms and living and breathing the reality of what's happening.

And we know that there are programmes like Maths Hubs, like teaching schools, teaching school hubs now, that are for schools and school leaders and trust leaders to be able to kind of make the most of. So how would you suggest that school and trust leaders make the most of these programmes and bodies like the NCETM to build that culture of professionalism, not just in maths, but across subjects and phases?

What advice would you give to school and trust leaders?

Alison Peacock: I think there's so much that's on offer if you look at what's available nationally. For school leaders it's about making sure that that they are prioritising looking beyond their school and beyond their MAT. It's interesting: it feels like we've had MATs for ages, but we haven't at all: I mean less than 15 years really, that we've had multi-academy trusts at scale.

Initially when you work with a group of other schools there is a lot of finding out to do. There's a lot of sharing of ideas, there's lots of discovering ways of working, building collaboration, I think, if that doesn't include looking beyond your multi-academy trust, if that doesn't include looking out and saying what else is there?

Then the ideas that are initially hugely exciting because it's the first time everybody's come together. 'We can't even find a venue that's big enough to get us all in the same room!' All that kind of thing. If we are not careful, we run out of steam, so we do need to be looking beyond our MAT, beyond our group of schools, beyond our local area.

National organisations like the NCETM have got their eye on what's working at scale and what might we learn from. So those system leaders that can embrace that notion I think really help their home schools to nurture their home schools, to kind of feed them, if you like, with the ideas. So it's not only what can you do, looking out, that supports others, but it's also how does that come back to your own school and your own group of schools and make them stronger? It's a mutually beneficial relationship. That is really helpful, I think.

Gaynor Bahan: I think as you say we're so lucky in the NCETM and the Maths Hubs Programme, that each Maths Hub is a partnership of schools and trusts that are providing those local leaders of maths education to make the whole thing work.

I know that you say yourself - I'm going back to another interview that you did back in 2023 - where you, I think I'm quoting you directly here, Alison, when you said, 'Engagement in meaningful professional learning can reignite passion and purpose'. You touched on that earlier, and we know that schools and trusts are encouraged to prioritise time and space for meaningful CPD and many, many recognise and reward professional engagement, and they can see that kind of professional dialogue across teams and the importance that brings. We are sometimes hearing, though, from leaders that there are just too many barriers to releasing teachers to engage in this type of collaborative professional development.

So I suppose at a time when leaders and teachers are under pressure, and, as we know, recruitment is an ongoing challenge, how can involvement in something like a Maths Hub help to renew a teacher's sense of purpose, identity and professional worth? I think possibly, when you were back in school, Alison, maybe your school was engaged in Maths Hubs as well, maybe you can reflect on what you saw from your own school in that.

Alison Peacock: Well, I can. What I saw in my own school was a real excitement about maths mastery in particular and about sharing, learning. And you know, we had lessons in the hall so that lots of teachers could come and see, and it was very exciting.

I think money is always a problem, but on the other hand, I was in Northern Ireland recently. I was in Belfast and I met with some teachers, in fact, we met with the education minister. And they were talking about the fact that their engagement with professional learning had kept them in the profession, had stopped them walking away, had reignited the passion exactly as you say.

And these were schools that really didn't have the opportunity to release their teachers. They didn't actually pay for them to study to become just teachers: they pay for themselves. But the sense of discovery, of inquiry of reading, these are not things that you need to do. It's helpful if you've got time in the school day, but you don't have to have time in the school day. You know teachers are, I guess many, many teachers are, intrinsically driven by wanting to make things better in their classrooms. And so they do lots of work out of school, sometimes because they have to, lots of times because they have to. But also there are times when they don't have to do things, and they still want to do it.

They still want to read, they still want to find out, they still want to go to ResearchEd conferences on Saturdays. They still want to tune into the podcasts while they're in the gym or whatever it may be. You know, there are ways of embracing professional learning that doesn't have to be sitting with a cold cup of tea and a limp biscuit at the end of a long day. There are other ways of doing it aren't there? I think that that sense of drive, that excitement, that interest also links to recognition because people do like, and need to be recognised for, the work they're doing. And this is again, one of the things that we're really pleased to work with you, about enabling people to be nominated as fellows at the Chartered College.

That is something that is very prestigious. People feel very thrilled to become fellow at the Chartered College. People like to be noticed. So writing for the *Impact* journal, again, that's something that gives people a great sort of thrill to find that their work has been published.

It's not that we haven't got enough people wanting to write for us - we get inundated with people wanting to write for us. So to be published in our journal is a very prestigious part of being a teacher. I would've loved that when I was teaching, and in the classroom, I would've loved to have thought that I was going to be published and be noticed.

So that sense of recognition is another driver. It's not all about time. Time is one of these things, isn't it? We will always blame the lack of time and lack of money. But actually when we want to do something, we'll find time.

Gaynor Bahan: Absolutely. And I have had the privilege of experiencing both of those things that you've mentioned.

Alison, a few years ago, myself and Chris Dale had an article published in *Impact* and still get quite excited when it lands on my doormat. It's one of the best things that I read because, as you say, it's written by practitioners for practitioners. And yes, we do, we hear that. We often hear from Maths Hub participants that they feel part of something bigger. And that sense of belonging to a kind of wider professional community and continuing to develop themselves as professionals and, as you say, receiving that validation and a sense of growth that comes with professional learning. So I think again, you know, taken directly from the report revisiting the notion of deep professionalism.

I think there's something in there that talks about the importance of belonging to a professional community. It fosters that identity and that resilience and pride in the profession. Because I still say when people ask me what my job is, I still say I'm a teacher, because that's what I believe I am to my core.

I still see myself as a teacher, even though I'm six years, almost seven years, out of the classroom now. I tell people it's the best, best job in the world. Yes, I'm very proud of having been a teacher.

Alison Peacock: Well, even when I got my damehood and I met the Queen, I said, I'm a teacher. No, it's just it's something to be really proud of, but that sense of belonging and have communities within the overall profession of teaching.

So the NCETM is exactly one of those communities that speaks to these values that we've been talking about that enables and supports high-quality teaching, but also within a bigger community of what it means to be part of education. I think also celebrating teachers for remaining in the classroom is something that is really important because – it does at the moment - if our pay scales reflect that the more that you accelerate up the pay scale, the further away you get from the classroom, that's removal of the AST grade back in 2013.

I don't understand why that decision was taken, to be honest, because I think everywhere we know that when you've got great teachers and they teach children and actually spend their days in classrooms, they are most likely to make a massive difference, aren't they?

Gaynor Bahan: Yes.

Alison Peacock: So we do need to celebrate teachers for remaining teachers.

It's much harder, I think, in many ways.

Gaynor Bahan: Yes. So looking ahead now, our vision and future direction using the Chartered College's working definition of professionalism, if we want to build this teaching profession that has the type of authority, status, prestige and esteem that we've been talking about...

What role do you think that programmes like MATLAB bodies, like the NCETM should play, not just in CPD, but in shaping the culture and values of the system?

Alison Peacock: I think that the future has to be one of giving due regard to professionalism, giving due regard to the importance of individuals feeling celebrated, recognised and being given the opportunity to grow intellectually, essentially teaching.

We should be celebrating as an intellectual endeavour. I don't think we talk about these things very much. You know, in staffrooms, you probably wouldn't be very popular if you came in to grab a cup of coffee, if there's even a staffroom in your school anymore, and then wax lyrical about the lesson that you've just had that was amazing. And people are going to turn away pretty rapidly, go and do something else.

But actually, we talk about the membership of the Chartered College, the kinds of people that join the Chartered College are excited by the idea of being a teacher and are committed. So the more that we can work with organisations like yours, and we do, we have partnerships with many organisations that have that similar sort of sense of a real DNA, which is about making things better, taking people with us, giving teachers agency and purpose, all of these things are really important. And we're on the path, at the moment, and let's see how this goes, of seeking to become a Royal College.

We would love to be the Royal College of Teaching. We think that's overdue, and it would be something that would really build the prestige of teachers. So one of the things that's happened this

year for the first time is that Buckingham Palace have taken the decision to hold a Royal Garden Party for education and skills, which is taking place in May.

And this is I hope, the first step of many towards really building this national pride in our teaching profession, and that's for all of us. It doesn't matter where we are in the system. Doesn't matter whether you are a teaching assistant just working a couple of hours a week, or whether you are working as a governor, or whether you are full-time in the classroom, or a school leader, wherever it might be, anybody associated with helping our children to learn and to thrive should be recognised.

Gaynor Bahan: And that recognition is important. I know of two people who have had that letter land on their doorstep inviting them in May, and it means a lot. It's important to people and it is important that they hear that recognition from all across the country.

Alison Peacock: I mean, it's important. I wrote to the King to say, thanks very much.

Gaynor Bahan: Good.

Alison Peacock: I doubt he's read my letter. But I wrote to him just to say, thank you. Because it's so important, isn't it? When we had the Duke of Edinburgh as our patron, when I first started the Chartered College, one particular Christmas I contacted him and I said, the profession would love it if you would just send a message wishing everybody a restful Christmas break, because it's been a really tough year. I mean, every year feels like it's a tough year, but I can't remember what happened in this particular instance. But anyway, he did, and I sent that out, and it just, it just kind of lifts people to feel that they've been noticed and the job they're doing really matters to society in the way that it really matters if you are a doctor or a nurse - it's important to all of us.

Gaynor Bahan: I know the Chartered College has been such an important voice for teachers in that and acting as enablers of collaborative professionalism, being an advocate for teacher voice in system reform, and really supporting equity, ambition and professional respect. We want to recognise teachers as professionals, not just technicians and raise the status of the wonderful profession that is teaching.

So I think we could possibly move to a final reflection here from you, Alison. I suppose we know people who listen to our podcast are sometimes people who are already engaged within the Maths Hubs Programme.

But if you're speaking directly to teachers and leaders who are listening, they may be involved, they may be interested in leading change in their schools. What message would you most want to leave them with about what it means to be a teacher today?

Alison Peacock: Oh, goodness me. Well, firstly, I'd want to say our children need you.

There is no doubt about it. You've only got to think about those images of youngsters returning to school post-pandemic. Those youngsters who weren't able to be in school, and some of them were virtually cartwheeling as they went down the street to come back to school. It's not just that they miss their friends.

I mean, schools are very social environments. They also really appreciate their teachers, and teachers provide a unique role in children's lives growing up. And for some of our children, teachers are the people that give them the greatest sense of hope. They may not have that at home. They may have that at home, but then the teacher also provides another way of looking at what their future might hold.

I really believe that teachers make so much difference to communities. I think there are things that sometimes get in the way and of that relationship and the whole issue around attendance right now

and schools finding parents and so on, puts up barriers. So if there's a way that we can move beyond that, I think that's one thing that would make a massive difference to teaching and parent relationships.

I think also the issue of special educational needs and the sense that we need to, everybody's striving for labels, everybody's striving to say what's wrong so that we can get money to put it right, as opposed to valuing children for who they are and providing the best resources that we can.

I think the priorities get in the way and are in the wrong place. I know that government is certainly looking to do something about that and the commission, I'm sure, will come up with some very sensible suggestions in that space. But all of these things impact on all of us within schools and colleges.

So the more that those national conversations go on and hopefully move things forward, I think organisations like yours are really, really valuable. Organisations like ours, of course, are equally valuable. And together, I think, we can do the best we can to take teachers with us because it is the most brilliant job, even though it's frustrating, and you know, every day that something brilliant happens, something else happens that makes you think, oh gosh, I really believe that teachers transform lives.

Gaynor Bahan: Absolutely, Alison. Thank you so much. So we're hearing teachers, you are shaping lives and the future of the profession. And we know that teaching is an intellectual, it's an ethical, it's a deeply human act.

So we should never underestimate the power of teachers in the profession. It's been wonderful to hear your reflections about teacher professionalism and consider together the role of the Chartered College, the role of the NCETM and the Maths Hubs, and hopefully see some of the kind of vision that we've talked about today, start to embed as we move forward over the next few months and years.

Thank you so much.

Alison Peacock: Well, thank you. It's been lovely.

Julia Thomson: Thank you for listening to this episode of the NCETM Maths Podcast. I hope you found the conversation as thought provoking and inspiring as I did. Whether you are already engaged in CPD, or just beginning to think about how teacher professionalism plays out in your setting, we hope it's given you ideas to reflect on and take back to your own school or trust.

If you'd like to find out more about the Chartered College of Teaching or about the Maths Hubs Programme, we've included links in the show notes along with the transcript of this episode.

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