**Exploring the extent of maths anxiety amongst students within the STEM faculty at the Open University**

**Sue:** Sally and I are exploring the extent of maths anxiety within the STEM Faculty. Using a questionnaire devised by Betz, with some additional questions to establish the effects of distance learning. The questionnaire has been piloted on TM111 and TM192 students. See if you can guess what percentage of respondees displayed physical anxiety about mathematics.

**Carol:** Maths anxiety is described by Spicer as an emotion that blocks a person’s reasoning ability when confronted with a mathematical situation. In an extreme form, Krantz suggests when confronted with a maths problem, the sufferer has sweaty palms, is nauseous, has heart palpations, and experiences paralysis of thought.

**Sue:** Maths anxiety is a very personal issue, often triggered by experiences from the past.

**Carol:** A student on T192 told his tutor "some of these maths questions just make me turn the laptop off and not even think about the course for a few days. They make me feel as if I'm not good enough or smart enough." With support from a tutor who understood maths anxiety, he passed with distinction and said "I may not be that great at maths, but you helped me overcome my anxiety towards the subject. This has contributed towards a much more positive outlook on life and helped me with my anxieties outside of education.”

**Sue:** A senior colleague in STEM told us how a humiliating childhood experience led to a lifelong anxiety about maths. Despite a very successful career, she said "I still feel a residue of fear when

asked to arithmetic off the cuff."

**Carol:** In 21J, we will extend our survey to cover students from other introductory level 1 STEM modules and carry out in depth interviews to gain a picture of the level of maths anxiety across the faculty.

**Sue:** So, how close was your guess? Are you surprised that students with visible anxiety's as high as 38%?

**Carol:** Future projects will look at establishing support mechanisms to help students with maths anxiety. Many thanks for listening.