



## President's column by Tony Guttman

This issue of the Gazette is the first to be compiled by the editorial team of Jan de Gier and Ole Warnaar, with TeXnical assistance from Maaiké Wienk. On behalf of the Society I would like to thank Jan, Ole and Maaiké for assuming this responsibility.

A number of significant events have recently occurred. As many of you will be aware, AMSI has been awarded funding to establish an International Centre of Excellence for Education in Mathematics (ICE-EM). The Federal Minister for Education Brendan Nelson made the official announcement at the University of New South Wales on 27 January while visiting AMSI's second annual Summer School, which attracted over 150 participants. The Minister spoke enthusiastically of the importance of mathematics, saying it is "the foundation science for almost everything that happens in our society."

The International Centre of Excellence for Education in Mathematics will be managed from AMSI's offices in Melbourne but activities will be devolved nationally. It has funding of \$7.8 million over four years. ICE-EM will strengthen Australia's capability in education in mathematics at all levels, from pre-school to postgraduate studies. AMSI is currently negotiating finer operational details with the Department of Education, Science and Training, and hopes to have a contract signed within a few weeks.

As I noted in my column in the previous issue, the *Review of Teaching and Teacher Education* has been released. This six-volume report can be succinctly

described as disappointing. While long on rhetoric, and containing some good recommendations, it is short of meaningful actions. In particular it steers around any unequivocal statement that there is a substantial shortage of mathematics teachers in schools, in all States.

As also previously noted, as a result of the Federal Government's Higher Education Legislation, a revised Relative Funding Model (RFM) has been implemented. This new RFM is just as dismissive of mathematics as its predecessor, with Government contributions to mathematics courses being lower than those for comparable science and IT disciplines. This probably represents the greatest threat to our long-term viability as an academic discipline, so we will be lobbying hard to bring about changes. It was a major topic of discussion at the recent Heads of Departments meeting at UNSW on February 13th.

Professor Ian Petersen's appointment as the ARC's Executive Director for Mathematics, Information and Communications Sciences will end at the end of February, and he will be succeeded by Professor Ah Chung Tsoi of Wollongong University. Prof. Tsoi has a background in complex systems, in particular the applications of neural networks. Professor Michael Cowling of the University of New South Wales invited him to attend the Heads of Department meeting, but he was unable to attend, and also expressed his reluctance to attend such events prior to officially assuming his new role. I also wrote to Professor Tsoi in my capacity as President, expressing my concerns about

the poor representation of mathematical scientists on the panel, and about the quality of the advice received. We will be discussing these matters with him after he assumes office.

On a more positive note, in the past six months AMSI and the ARC Centre of Excellence for Mathematics and Statistics of Complex Systems (MASCOS) have worked well together and separately to sponsor a wide range of conferences, which I believe have raised our international profile. The premises of MASCOS at 139 Barry St, Carlton are now complete, and a number of post-doctoral positions have been offered. The next task is to secure premises for ICE-EM.

The AMSI and Heads of Departments meetings on February 12th and 13th reflected the collaborative spirit currently operating in addressing the issues raised above.

With the start of the academic year upon us, I hope you can fire up the incoming generation of undergraduates and graduate students with enthusiasm and passion for our discipline—and do remember to sign up incoming honours and graduate students to a year's free membership of the Society.