



President's column

Michael Cowling

A number of members of the mathematical sciences research community in Australia have, at various stages, opined that the community should ask the ARC to provide smaller grants, but more of them. Generally speaking, those who have thought about writing a submission to the ARC to formulate this request have held back, because they fear that the outcome would be a decrease in grant size without a commensurate increase in number. But there is another strategy, as a look at the latest message sheet (June 2006) from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) in England shows. There, the mathematical sciences (defined to be mathematics, statistics and the theoretical end of operations research) are mentioned in a remarkable number of articles, each of which is talking about some kind of financial support for the discipline.

The ways in which the EPSRC support the mathematical sciences are many. They offer regular research grants like ARC Discovery Projects. They also fund mathematical scientists to build industrial links (like Australia's Linkage grants). But the additional kinds of support are interesting. A few months ago, the EPSRC was involved in hosting a meeting of representatives of (most) European nations to discuss ways in which international (which in Europe usually means inter-European) collaboration could be boosted. The EPSRC is calling for applications for funding for centres (plural) to run advanced mathematical sciences coursework, pitched at least in part at PhD students, with the aim of broadening their high level knowledge (this is something that AMSI/ICE-EM do here, but they do not get ARC support). And they

are calling for funding for projects where a mathematical scientist gets involved at the interface with another discipline, or for support for pilot projects, in the expectation that this will lead to future applications for further funding from more standard sources.

The point of this list is that someone, somewhere, inside the EPSRC has decided to diversify funding for mathematical sciences research. Perhaps this has been achieved without cutting other programs (though I doubt it), but perhaps it has been achieved by reducing the average size of grants given out through their regular funding program. I wonder whether the mathematical sciences community in Australia should not be lobbying the ARC for two things: first, to accept the general principle that different disciplines need different funding models, and that the various panels (such as the mathematics and computer sciences panel to which we belong) should be allowed, or even encouraged, to develop their own programs, and second, to support some particular projects that we might like to suggest. I am visiting Europe in June and again in August this year, and I will be meeting representatives of the British mathematical sciences community several times over the next few months, and I aim (amongst other things) to find out what arguments were advanced, and by whom, to bring about these new programs in England. But I would be interested to hear from Australian colleagues their opinions about these suggestions.

I also aim to talk to European colleagues about journal publishing. Earlier this year, I suggested that the Society might explore the possibility of associating with a commercial publisher, such as Oxford or Cam-

bridge University Press. I remind you that the main advantage of this kind of arrangement would be that our journals would be “bundled”, that is, sold to libraries as part of a package, and that we would get better exposure that way, with a consequent improvement in our income, our impact factors and in the quality of articles submitted. I am surprised that I have received only two negative comments: I was reminded that we did try associating with another large math-

ematical society in the past, and that we were unhappy about a number of issues, and I was admonished never to think about associating with a large commercial publisher, but to look at the successful model of the journal *Geometry and Topology*, and to contrast that with the flagging fortunes of another leading journal in the field. I intend to further explore the possibilities unless I am deluged with contrary advice in the next week or two.

Vacancy: Editor(s) for the Gazette

The present Editors of the *Gazette*, Drs Jan de Gier and S. Ole Warnaar, are sadly stepping down from their position on 31 December 2006. So the hunt is on for a replacement Editor or Editors, to carry the *Gazette* forward from 2007 on. An overlap in the position of a few months, from about October 2006, is envisaged, to enable a smooth transition.

Anyone interested in the position of Editor is invited to send (via e-mail) a brief resumé and covering letter to both the President and the Secretary, at President@austms.org.au and Secretary@austms.org.au.

There is financial assistance available for part-time secretarial help. Knowledge of L^AT_EX is essential. For further information about what the position entails, please contact the present Editors at gazette@ms.unimelb.edu.au.

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