



# President's column

**Nalini Joshi\***

I have just come back from an exhilarating annual meeting of the Australian Mathematical Society held at the University of South Australia's City West campus in Adelaide. This meeting broke the AustMS record for attendance at a regular annual meeting.

Over 70 of the 397 registered attendants also attended the very first AustMS Early Career Researchers Workshop, held at Mount Lofty on the Sunday preceding the conference.

There were many highlights throughout the week. The conference featured 12 plenary speakers, possibly a record in itself. One of these was Terry Tao, our Mahler lecturer. It was particularly appropriate to have Terry there, since Adelaide is his home town. I saw his family members at two of the lectures he presented during the week. The participation of Terry and two other plenary speakers, Mohammed Abouzaid and Danny Calegari, was funded by the Clay Mathematics Institute<sup>1</sup> and so Terry was designated the Clay-Mahler speaker and Mohammed and Danny were called Clay Lecturers. These three speakers toured Australia on the Clay-Mahler Lecture tour held between July and October, during which Terry presented 19 talks in five weeks.

At the annual conference, we also had an Early Career Plenary speaker for the first time, Akshay Venkatesh, who also spoke at the ECR workshop at Mt Lofty. Most of the ECR participants I met told me how much they enjoyed the opportunity to meet and talk to each other and to hear not only about mathematics but also about the process of learning to write mathematically and planning for careers. They would like to hear more about the ups and downs of doing research and also would like more of an opportunity to mingle. We will be continuing this workshop as a regular event at annual meetings. Next year, we plan to hold the workshop from mid-Saturday to mid-Sunday preceding the annual meeting; Saturday evening will offer the desired longer window for conversations.

Another highlight was a lunch for women mathematicians. At this lunch, short talks were presented on 'the art of saying no' and the 'impostor syndrome' by Elizabeth Billington, myself, and Jacqui Ramagge. The women participants also appreciated this opportunity to focus on issues of interest to them. They would also like to have a longer opportunity for discussion and to hear more about mentoring. At next year's meeting, we will hold an evening session, perhaps with a convivial meal, to allow this opportunity for longer discussions.

Yet another highlight was the mathematics education afternoon, which had three great speakers: Jonathan Borwein, Mike Eastwood and Kerry Landman. The

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.claymath.org/>

discussion that followed these marvellous presentations reached highs and lows, touching on issues such as whether technology was a boon or a disaster for developing mathematical thinking. Perhaps not as widely advertised during the conference was an auxiliary presentation by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on the latest thinking about the National Curriculum. There are issues around this topic that the AustMS will need to be agile in responding to.

During my report to the annual general meeting of the AustMS that week, I highlighted the need to think about strategic expenditure. Under a careful and conservative stewardship of our funds, we have built a very healthy reserve. I believe that it is time to think about spending a modest amount of our reserves (say 5% per annum) to help our profession in Australia. I had a conversation with David Ellwood, the Research Director of the Clay Mathematics Institute (CMI) about this matter. He pointed out some of the innovative steps that had been taken by the CMI, which we may be able to adapt to AustMS. One of the CMI schemes I particularly liked was the one called *Liftoff*, which supports recent PhD students for one month in the summer following their degree plus some funds for travel to research conferences or to work with collaborators. I would love to hear from you about any other ideas that you may have on how AustMS should be supporting mathematics and mathematicians in Australia.

I thought it was wonderful to hear that the week was capped off with the wedding of the main organiser of AustMS 2009, Vladimir Ejov, and I would like to wish him well and thank him and his wonderful team at UniSA for a great conference.



Nalini Joshi has held the Chair of Applied Mathematics at the University of Sydney since 2002. In 2008, she was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science. She is currently Head of the School of Mathematics and Statistics.