



President's Column

Peter Forrester*

It's a great honour to represent the Australian Mathematical Society as President for the next two years. As such, I take over from Outgoing President Peter Taylor.

One of Peter's many passions for the benefit of the mathematical sciences is that of communication, whether it be at a conference, within Council, or in proper representation to governing bodies. For related commentaries on this point, particularly in the context of a career as a research scientist, I recommend reading the essay by the late Richard Hamming entitled 'You and your research'. Clearly the role of communication will be important in the upcoming 'Mathematics of Planet Earth' year. The public lecture of the recent AustMS Annual Meeting at the University of Ballarat by Professor Manfred Lenzen of the University of Sydney, was on the general theme of the mathematics of planet Earth, and indeed the interaction by the speaker with the audience (in particular a number of school students who were present) helped the success of the evening.

My taking over the role of President also happens to coincide with the sad occasion of the passing of one of our former Presidents, Emeritus Professor Garth Gaudry. Many of Garth's significant contributions to the mathematical sciences in Australia are recorded in Jan Thomas' dignified obituary notice which appeared in *The Age*. It is planned that Jan will also contribute an obituary for the Gazette next year.

The main theme of my first President's Column is the opportunities and challenges that exist for us in the global world of mathematical research and education. This issue gained prominence in AustMS circles during our preliminary investigations into hosting a future International Congress of Mathematicians. The most recent ICM was held in India, and the 2014 ICM is to be held in Korea. The significance of these two particular countries is immediate within the context of the recently released White Paper 'Australia in the Asian Century'. For a long time now Australian universities have been reliant on full fee-paying undergraduate students, most of whom come from Asia, for their financial viability, and such reliance is correspondingly a fact of life in departments representing mathematics. The White Paper moves more into the territory of research, making explicit for example the obvious truth that international scientific collaboration and communities are crucial to Australia's relevance internationally.

One important initiative that could reasonably follow from the 'Australia in the Asian Century' White Paper would be new programs to sponsor talented Asian students for PhD studies in Australia, and to similarly target Asian postdoctoral researchers. Increasing the ranks of our postgraduate and earlier career researchers in this way would certainly be a welcome boost to our general research efforts, and would provide natural networks with Asian mathematics communities.

*E-mail: President@austms.org.au

The AustMS has reciprocity agreements with a number of mathematics societies in Asia, but in practice this does not translate into very much: presently there are just 40 reciprocal AustMS members globally. Nonetheless, many of our members have important and long-standing collaborative research links in the Asia region. Speaking personally, I've had research ties with Japanese mathematicians for over 20 years now. This came about due to an invitation in 1991 to attend the program on 'Infinite Analysis' at RIMS, Kyoto University, which in turn led to correspondence and soon after that, collaborations, with mathematicians and mathematical physicists at other universities in Japan. I returned to Japan a number of times in the 1990s, and hosted a number of visits by my Japanese collaborators to Australia. Presently, a former student of one of my collaborators from that era is spending his sabbatical visiting me here in Melbourne (by the way, he was most impressed with the collegial atmosphere of our Annual Meeting).

One of my visits was funded by a scholarship from the Australian Academy of Science as part of its exchange program with the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. The AustMS does not have programs of its own for such exchanges. Of course, AustMS members should be encouraged to make use of exchange programs offered through the Academy.

More common for societies are joint meetings. The AustMS has regular joint annual meetings with our New Zealand counterparts, the next one being scheduled for Melbourne in 2014. Back in 1999 our annual meeting was jointly run with the American Mathematical Society. But noticeably no joint meeting has been hosted with the mathematical societies of our Asian neighbours. It's undoubtably timely for us to work towards changing this situation, and generally as a Society to help facilitate international research networks.



Peter Forrester received his Doctorate from the Australian National University in 1985, and held a postdoctoral position at Stony Brook before joining La Trobe University as a lecturer in 1987. In 1994 he was awarded a senior research fellowship by the ARC, which he took up at The University of Melbourne. Peter's research interests are broadly in the area of mathematical physics, and more particularly in random matrix theory and related topics in statistical mechanics. This research and its applications motivated the writing of a large monograph *Log-gases and Random Matrices* (PUP, Princeton) which took place over a fifteen-year period. His research has been recognised by the award of the Medal of the Australian Mathematical Society in 1993, and election to the Australian Academy of Science in 2004, in addition to several ARC personal fellowships.