NCMS News

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Hands up if you know what the National Committee for Mathematical Sciences does! I am writing this column to let you know more about the National Committee for the Mathematical Sciences (NCMS) and specific recommendations that will influence its future.

In mid-2012, the Australian Academy of Science established a Committee to review all the National Committees of the Academy. Professor Bruce McKellar chaired the committee and amongst its members was Professor Peter Hall, whom many of you know as a past President of the Australian Mathematical Society. The report of this committee was accepted by the Council of the Academy earlier this year.

The report recommended that the Academy establish or continue with 22 National Committees[1]. It is recommended that the NCMS continue under the same name. Other National Committees whose terms of reference overlap with the mathematical sciences are set to change. The National Committee for Mechanical Sciences (whose acronym confusingly used to be the same as NCMS) is to change to the *National Committee for Mechanical and Engineering Sciences*. A new committee that may be of interest to the mathematical sciences is the *National Committee on Information and Communication Sciences*. Aside from the dry question of who is called exactly what, there are some very insightful observations made in the report about discipline representation and belonging.

You, dear reader, are probably quite knowledgeable about professional societies of which you may be a member, such as the Australian Mathematical Society, the Statistical Society of Australia, Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia, and Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers. You are probably also aware of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI) due to their generous activities including summer schools, workshops and sponsorship of Mathematics of Planet Earth.

But there is a whole range of additional bodies that have been established to represent different slices of the Australian mathematical sciences, of which you may not be aware. For example, heads of departments and heads of societies or other professional bodies including government instrumentalities form a collective called the Australian Council of Heads of Mathematical Science (ACHMS). Other representative groups and societies to which mathematical scientists belong include

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[1]This is the same number as it had prior to the review. Some of these are mergers of existing committees. Three National Committees are to be disbanded, whilst five are new.

STA (Science and Technology Australia, previously known as FASTS), and Heads of departments of Go8 Universities.

What about the NCMS? At its most basic level, NCMS operates as the interface between Australian mathematical sciences and international mathematical sciences, through the Academy's membership of the International Mathematical Union and the International Commission on Mathematical Instruction. At a more subtle and strategic level, the NCMS provides an interface for the mathematical sciences with the whole of the other sciences in Australia. The explicit aims of the NCMS[2] are to

- shape future directions in the mathematical sciences in Australia by facilitating and encouraging community-wide strategic planning initiatives
- promote the national value and benefits of the mathematical sciences
- manage relations between Australian mathematicians and the International Mathematical Union (IMU) and the International Commission for Mathematics Instruction (ICMI).

The structure of National Committees in the Academy is an extraordinarily valuable framework for the mathematical sciences. It provides us a platform to communicate with other sciences. It gives us a seat at the table when the Academy provides strategic policy advice, seen as based on all of the sciences and free of conflicts-of-interest, to the Australian Government. And, it facilitates a dialogue in which all the different, overlapping sections of mathematical sciences in Australia participate.

The review recommends that the current restriction on number of members of National Committees be relinquished in order to bring about the widest possible representation by professional societies in the corresponding discipline area in Australia. I look forward to a more widely representative National Committee for the Mathematical Sciences.

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[2]From work plans available at http://science.org.au/natcoms/nc-maths.html.