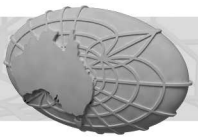

President's Column

Tim Marchant*

Mathematics has featured heavily in the mainstream media lately, on the issue of the low numbers of female mathematicians employed in Australian universities. Some recent headlines include 'Sydney's female maths professors welcomed but inequality remains', *The Australian*, 24/2 and 'Top Sydney University mathematician Nalini Joshi laments gender discrimination' *SMH*, 30/3. Melbourne University has recently advertised for three female only positions in their School of Mathematics and Statistics. This initiative has been widely reported in the media, 'Melbourne University advertises female-only jobs in bid to remedy gender imbalance in maths', ABC 19/5. The AMSI 2015 Discipline Report states that females hold 28% of all academic positions in mathematics but the rate is much lower at senior levels, with only 9% female professors. Comparative figures overseas show the UK has 21% female maths faculty, with 9% female professors, while the USA has 21% females in tenure track roles.

Within Europe there are significant regional differences, with countries in Southern Europe having much higher rates of female faculty than in northern Europe. Given the interchange and migration of researchers, to and from Australia, it is not surprising that our current female participation rates are similar to those in other countries.

Many initiatives are now in place to help support the career aspirations of female mathematicians. The Society offers the Cheryl E. Praeger Travel Awards (for females only) and the Anne Penfold Street Awards (open to both genders to support the cost of members' family responsibilities whilst they are on research related travel). The Women in Mathematics Special Interest Group is also very active is supporting the interests of our female members. Special mention needs to be made of the outstanding leadership provided by Professor Nalini Joshi, a past AustMS President, in establishing the Science in Australia Gender Equity Program (SAGE). Thirty-two Australian universities and research institutions have signed up to this pilot scheme, which is based on the Athena SWAN Charter, a well-known UK program addressing gender equity issues in STEM disciplines. Another UK program is the London Mathematical Society's Good Practice Scheme for universities, to help advance women's careers in the mathematical sciences. The BHP Billiton sponsored AMSI Choose Maths initiative is also a great initiative, as its works with young girls and women to improve mathematics and statistics as a career choice.

Increasing the female participation rate among Australia's mathematical science academic and research workforce to equality will clearly be a long, complex and

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multifaceted task. As a society we need to encourage more young women to study maths at the undergraduate and postgraduate level as this will increase the number of female ECRs. It has been estimated that about 40% of the factors inhibiting women's careers are institutional in nature, so there is much we can all do to improve our workplaces. Also, as mathematical research and education is a truly international activity we cannot achieve these goals in isolation, but need to work in partnership with overseas institutions and societies on global solutions.

I would like to congratulate our two Society members who recently were made Fellows of the Australian Academy of Science. They are Professor Susan Scott and Professor Fedor Sukochev.

Tim Marchant received his Doctorate from Adelaide University in 1989. After graduation he joined Wollongong University where he is currently Dean of Research and Professor of Applied Mathematics. His research areas include nonlinear optics, nonlinear waves and combustion theory. Tim is a Fellow of the Australian Mathematical Society, a Member of the Endeavour Awards selection panel and on the editorial board of *Applied Mathematical Modelling*. His other interests include playing bridge and learning Mandarin.