President's Column

Peter Forrester*

With the annual conference this year not being until December, due to it being joint with the New Zealand Mathematical Society, my term as President extends a couple of months beyond the nominal two years. Still, the incoming President, Tim Marchant, will get to serve a full two-year term, as after the 2015 annual conference, which is to be held starting late September at Flinders University, the 2016 annual conference is scheduled to be held in early December. This new date was approved by Council at the annual general meeting this time last year in a bid to open up participation to members who have teaching commitments during the so-called common break week in 2nd semester. The location of the 2016 meeting is, at the time of writing, being negotiated between AustMS Vice President (Annual Conferences) Ole Warnaar and a University that indeed does not observe the common break week. Having more universities eligible to hold the annual meeting is also another important consideration in the change of date.

Remembering back to my first President's Column, I had occasion to make mention of the perennial issue of the importance of our communication skills, both with respect to the external representation of our discipline, and for the interests of our own research. Lately, the issue of communication for the purposes of representation of our discipline has again become prominent, with both some good and bad news. The good news is that AustMS member Terry Speed — the 2013 recipient of the prestigious Prime Minister's Prize for Science — has since August been lecturing around the country as the AMSI–SSAI lecture on topics relating to bioinformatics. This field is a prime example of modern inter-disciplinary research which is motivating new researchers — here geneticists and biologists — to take up studies in mathematics and statistics. The bad news is that in broader science forums — an example being the recent (15 September) Q&A on the ABC — mathematics and statistics is all too often mentioned only in passing. In particular the societal benefit of activities undertaken by applied mathematicians in the fields of mathematical modelling, optimisation and computer algorithms to name a few, or the underpinnings of developments in applied mathematics due to basic research in pure mathematics, aren't being given their due press. Geoff Prince at AMSI is very aware of this issue, and is making efforts wherever possible to coordinate the profiling of our discipline in the mass media.

There are happenings taking place in mathematics and statistics departments around the country at present which are unprecedented for the generational change they will set in place. Here I'm referring in particular to the 15 positions advertised all in one hit at Monash, and of the (staggered) recruitment of around 10 new staff members here at Melbourne. While indeed one hopes that new directions

*Email: President@austms.org.au

and future leaders will emerge out of this expansion phase, to sustain such growth even in the short term, new sources of funding, the retention or growth of service teaching, an increase in the quality and quantity of mathematics and statistics majors, and a larger intake of higher degree students from overseas will all be necessary. Certainly the passing of the budget proposal to increase the CPS funding for mathematics would get things off to a good start.

I have two concluding points to wrap up my series of President's Columns. The first is to echo the words of Thierry Coulhon, Director of the Mathematical Institute at the ANU, who, at a meeting relating to the formation of a national research centre, offered the opinion that an overarching goal should be to increase the visibility of the footprint left by Australian mathematics in the world arena. As a suggestion, one way AustMS could contribute to this goal is to commission some targeted research articles, reviews or even monographs for our publishing titles. Another idea is to consider sponsoring web-based lectures for a world-wide audience as pioneered so successfully by Chris Tisdell from UNSW. My second and final point is to pay tribute to the two pillars of AustMS's very existence, our honorary treasurer, Algy Howe, with over 20 years in the role, and our honorary secretary, Peter Stacey, who puts in a remarkable amount of work in both quantity and quality. That both Algy and Peter are continuing in their respective roles is certainly good news for Tim Marchant as he takes over as President this December.

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.