



# President's Column

**Peter Forrester\***

With ERA 2015 on the horizon, AustMS has been asked by the ARC to provide feedback on the assignment of journals to FoR codes. This task was carried out by Andrew Francis (Pure), Larry Forbes (Applied) and Jan de Gier (Mathematical Physics). Jan had assistance from Peter Bouwknecht. Jerome Droniou has been working with our webmaster Ross Moore on the construction of electronic application forms, amongst other high-level technical tasks. Such voluntary professional services are essential to the running of AustMS, and are examples of the many activities undertaken by members for the benefit of the profession.

It still being the summer break in the northern hemisphere, this is the time of year when our departments see a number of former students back in town to visit family and friends, and to share with us some of their recent work. I personally hosted the visit of one such former student, James Saunderson. James first came to my attention when I was vacation scholar coordinator, and he partnered up with Nick Sheridan (now a postdoc at the IAS, Princeton) and Maurice Chiodo (now a postdoc in Germany) to work on a problem in knot theory under the supervision of Craig Hodgson. James is in the final year of his PhD studies at MIT on the topic of convex optimisation in engineering problems. Coincidentally, I noticed Maurice in the department just last week. As I mentioned in a recent President's column, AustMS is generally keen to enhance community among expat Australian mathematicians. I said we can make use of their successes to provide inspiration for our student and ECR members. It is also in our interest to actively encourage Australian mathematicians abroad to contribute quality articles to our journals and/or to our Lecture Series. As highlighted by the Editor-in-Chief of the latter, Cheryl Praeger, only five Lecture Series titles have appeared in the past 10 years. To have a contribution or two from an expat would help rejuvenate this publication and may well encourage others in the local community to do similarly.

ARC matters, ERA included, are always of much interest to the AustMS membership. Recently Council member Scott Morrison drew attention to the issue of visitors and travel funds within DP grants. One concrete change in the DP14 round was that there is a \$50 000 limit on travel over the life of the project (subsection 5.2.1j of the funding rules). In the DP15 rules, it is now explicitly stated (A5.2.1.m) that workshop and conference costs that are necessary for the conduct of the proposed research may be supported. Julie Clutterbuck brought to my attention the fact that in the recent Future Fellowships round, none were awarded in 0101 (Pure). It was subsequently pointed out that the five Future Fellowships awarded in the mathematical sciences out of the 150 in total is not too

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different in percentage terms to the 47 out of nearly 1000 in previous five rounds. Nonetheless, it remains disappointing to those mathematicians who missed out.

In June I was happy to be able to present the opening address at the First Year in Maths Project (FYiMaths) workshop organised by Deb King and Joann Cattlin. The attendance at the workshop was excellent, with speakers and participants from all over the country, and New Zealand. Topics explored included flipped classroom teaching, video tutorial instruction, online maths courses and student support for first-year students. There are some innovative and progressive measures already in use. On the other hand, their implementation is uneven, begin driven mostly by individuals and not so much a collective movement within departments or the universities themselves. It seems to me that the lack of engagement in higher level courses that I have been reporting is a collective responsibility and will have to be addressed as such.

Of late I've become more involved in the issue of the serious under-representation of women in teaching/research positions in my own Department, and together with some colleagues have put a proposal to our Head for action on the problem. My colleague Kerry Landman has often remarked that the lack of female lecturers is noticed by the students, and this may well be harming our retention of female students. There's no doubt that the problem is extreme. Last Friday I gave a talk at our undergraduate maths society seminar series: out of the 31 in attendance, none were female. Right now, I'm just back from the department colloquium, coincidentally given by AustMS Vice President (Annual Conferences) Ole Warnaar, and out of the healthy sized audience, only one was female.



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.