



NCMS News

Peter Forrester*

On Friday 3 June, the National Committee for Mathematical Sciences held its first meeting since I took over as Chair, and most importantly, its first meeting since the launch of the decadal plan. Coincidentally, on this same date Louise Ryan at UTS was holding the event STEMS: putting statistics into STEM in the Age of Data. This also feeds into the decadal plan, in the sense that the meeting was to focus on the advancement of statistics education in Australia at all levels, and how this ties in with the needs of a securing Australia's future.

The decadal plan nominates the NCMS as the body to formally monitor its progress. At the 3 June meeting, attention was focussed on the decadal plan's three key priorities: (1) to provide professional development for existing out-of-field teachers of mathematics, and to enhance the recruitment and retention of properly qualified staff; (2) to plan for a staged reintroduction of at least Year 12 intermediate mathematics subjects as prerequisites for all bachelors programs in science, engineering and commerce; (3) to source seed funding for a new national research centre in the mathematical sciences.

Bronwyn Welch on behalf of AAMT submitted a document 'AAMT response to the decadal plan' which explicitly addressed many of the 12 recommendations, including the first two of the priorities. On these, it is commented that in point (1) the use of the term 'out-of-field' seems to indicate that the problem is restricted to high school level. It was argued that the need for professional learning in mathematics is just as urgent at all earlier stages of schooling. In relation to (2) the document argues for the same prerequisite to be put in place for bachelor of education courses, and also expresses concern about the time scale of this reform if left entirely up to the universities.

The meeting benefitted from the counsel of Chris Hatherly, Director Science Policy and Projects, who took us through seven key points for advocacy. It was clear that these points, the first two of which read 'clear message and concept of what you're asking for and who you're asking to do it' and 'clear idea of why something needs to happen and what the benefits will be' are all important come priority (3). Chris kindly volunteered to participate in a meeting with a delegation from the Mathematical Sciences community to formulate an action plan on priority (3) that is mindful of the seven points. At present this meeting is being planned for the university teaching break in late September.

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Another aspect of the NCMS meeting was an address by Bruce Ferrington, one of reSolve: Mathematics by Inquiry writing team. The is a very ambitious program managed by the Australian Academy of Science and AAMT, to produce resource material for the learning of mathematics via an enquiry approach at all levels of schooling up to Year 10.



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. He was AustMS President from 2012 to 2014.