



NCMS News

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Next month will see the release of the federal budget. Three years ago, with no fanfare nor anticipation, the budget papers proposed to revise upwards the place of mathematics and statistics in the funding tiers for Commonwealth supported places (CSP), to be equally funded with science and engineering. It would have meant that universities would receive over 20% more for each CSP mathematics and statistics student. It's now 10 years since the 2007 budget delivered a similar CSP percentage increase, then with much anticipation as it was a primary recommendation of the National Strategic Review of Mathematical Sciences Research in Australia released in late 2006. The 2014 budget proposal did not make its way to legislation, but this passed as quietly as its announcement, and in the meantime universities on the whole have enjoyed increased revenues for the teaching of mathematics and statistics due to an increase in student numbers.

It may be that not funding mathematics and statistics at the same level as science and engineering sends the wrong message to universities as to how to resource its teaching. In the 2013 report 'Science, technology, engineering and mathematics in the national interest: a strategic approach' from the Office of the Chief Scientist, the sector is urged to adopt inquiry based teaching and learning. At the school level, this has been embraced by funding of the reSolve: Mathematics by Inquiry program, providing resource material from Foundation to Year 10 for teachers to use. The reSolve program is jointly managed by the Australian Academy of Science, and the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers. The NCMS has received several briefings from the director of the program Steve Thornton, and team members, and are happy to hear that the feedback from the pilot schools has been very positive. Meanwhile, my observations are that universities on the whole are doing very little to change in response to calls for more emphasis on enquiry in the undergraduate mathematics curriculum at least. Not that it is an easy ask, with the reality of fairly rigid requirements from service disciplines, and a seemingly overfull curriculum to be delivered in a short period of time. Still,

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with increased resourcing, and advances in technology, it is far from impossible, and would seem to be a necessary response on the part of us in the university sector to best serve our students for their futures.



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.