

WIMSIG – Two Years On

Asha Rao, Founding Chair, 2013 – 2015

The Women in Mathematics Special Interest Group (WIMSIG) of the Australian Mathematical Society was officially founded in December 2012, and the Executive Committee met for the first time in February 2013. Now, two years on, the group has become well established on the mathematics scene in Australia, and with a new Executive Committee taking office in February 2015, it is time to take stock. This report outlines the many achievements of the group in the short period of its existence so far.

The Volunteers

The Executive Committee has been fundamental in pushing many of WIMSIG's activities towards their conclusion. There have also been many, many volunteers who have been the force behind converting these activities into achievements. So, firstly, here is a list of people who have been instrumental in making WIMSIG a success (with apologies for any omissions).

The first mention needs to go to the many people who advocated for the start of this organisation, and a bit of history seems relevant at this point. While WIMSIG was formed by a motion at the 2011 AustMS AGM in Wollongong, moved by Julie Clutterbuck and Anne Thomas, there were many actions which preceded this formation. An important precursor was the creation of the AustMS Hanna Neumann Lectureship (led by Nalini Joshi, Cheryl Praeger and others) which was, itself, a response to there being no female plenary speakers at the 2007 AustMS Annual Meeting.

The impetus for the group seems to have been initiated by a meeting of 10 female participants at the 2006 AustMS Annual Meeting at Macquarie (following a suggestion by the then AustMS President Michael Cowling), and continuing with a catered lunch and discussion with 35 women participants at the 2007 AustMS Annual Meeting at La Trobe, both organised by Lesley Ward and Cheryl Praeger. The trend of lunch meetings with panel discussions continued over the next few years, leading finally to the suggestion of the formation of a special interest group at the 2011 Annual Meeting, a move warmly welcomed by the then President of the AustMS, Peter Taylor. Thus the gestation period of many years finally resulted in the drafting of the WIMSIG Rules of Procedure by Barbara Maenhaut, Anne Thomas, Lesley Ward and Julie Clutterbuck, and the election of the first Executive Committee of WIMSIG in late 2012. The Returning Officers to date have been Julie Clutterbuck (2012) and Birgit Loch (2014).

The first Executive Committee (Feb 2013—Jan 2015) was composed of Asha Rao (RMIT) as Chair, Giang Nguyen (Adelaide) as Treasurer, Joanne Hall (QUT) as Secretary, and Amy Glen (Murdoch) and Lesley Ward (UniSA) as Ordinary Members. As can be seen from the affiliations, the executive members were from far and wide and the monthly meetings via Skype were full of agenda items and enthusiasm. The current Executive of WIMSIG (Feb 2015—Jan 2017) is composed of Lesley Ward (UniSA) as Chair, Asha Rao (RMIT) as immediate past Chair, Giang Nguyen (Adelaide) as Treasurer, Joanne Hall (QUT) as Secretary, and , Deborah Cromer (UNSW) and Lynn Batten (Deakin) as ordinary members.

In addition to the Executive Committee members, a large number of other members have volunteered their time to contribute in many ways, such as serving on the WIMSIG Travel Awards Selection Committee. Thanks are especially due to Cheryl Praeger, Julie Clutterbuck and Amie Albrecht, the Selection Committee for

Round 1 of the Travel Awards, for their patience and help in ironing out all the many snags that became obvious once the process got underway. Other members helped by contributing to WIMSIG's 2013 submission to the Decadal Plan for the Mathematical Sciences; hosting coffee gatherings and lunch meetings at AMSI's Summer and Winter Schools as well as at various national events including the Mathematics in Industry Study Group (MISG), the Australian Mathematical Sciences Student Conference and AustMS and ANZIAM annual meetings; and hosting a total of 16 women-in-mathematics get-togethers in June and November in cities around the country. It should be noted that all of the events mentioned here are open to all genders, as WIMSIG recognises that successfully addressing gender equity as an issue requires the involvement of all in finding solutions. And then there is the constant assistance WIMSIG has received from AustMS Secretary Peter Stacey – the many requests and questions have been answered patiently and clearly.

Special mention must be made of AustMS past-President Nalini Joshi, who has been using part of her ARC Georgina Sweet Australian Laureate Fellowship to fund the Women in Mathematics dinners at the AustMS Annual Meetings and lunches at ANZIAM Annual Meetings. Nalini Joshi hosted the first of these dinners, at her home campus of the University of Sydney in 2013. The second one was hosted by the then Chair of WIMSIG, Asha Rao, at the ANZMC8 meeting, incorporating the AustMS Annual Meeting, at the University of Melbourne in 2014; it attracted over 100 registrations and gave WIMSIG an opportunity to highlight some of the issues it believes to be important with regards to gender equity. While Nalini Joshi's Laureate Fellowship will cover funding of these events until 2017, WIMSIG hopes to continue this new tradition beyond that date with funding from the AustMS or elsewhere.

Mention also needs to be made of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute (AMSI) which has enthusiastically welcomed and encouraged WIMSIG participation. The AMSI Summer and Winter Schools now have special events to encourage networking among female mathematicians. AMSI hosts the annual meeting of the Australian Council of Heads of Mathematical Sciences (ACHMS), and WIMSIG has been invited in 2014 and 2015 to address this gathering. Since 2014, AMSI funding of workshops and conferences has required organisers to put measures in place to increase female participation; WIMSIG has developed an advice sheet to help organisers to develop such measures. In return for increased exposure, WIMSIG promotes AMSI events to its members via its newsletter, as well as mentioning these events on the WIMSIG website. A Memorandum of Understanding between WIMSIG and AMSI is in progress.

The Website

The establishment of the WIMSIG website <http://www.austms.org.au/Women+in+Mathematics+group> was one of the first successful endeavours taken on by the Executive Committee. Amy Glen took up the challenge of being the webmaster and continues in that role. All events that support and showcase female participants are advertised, and the website contains an advice sheet for event organisers. The WIMSIG website is also used to collect and disseminate information, scholarly works and other resources about gender equity in the sciences in general, and mathematics in particular, in areas including employment, recruitment, student evaluations, refereeing of articles, conference participation, and country comparisons. It showcases examples of best practice on gender equity, such as the UK's Athena SWAN Charter¹, the Banff International

¹ <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/>

Research Station for Mathematical Innovation and Discovery (BIRS) report on “Women Mathematicians in the Academic Ranks: A Call to Action”², and the London Mathematical Society’s “Good Practice Scheme”³.

Advocacy

WIMSIG has been actively raising the issue of gender equity in many ways, including addressing the annual meetings of the Heads of Mathematical Sciences. The Executive Committee with input from many WIMSIG members prepared an eight page written submission to the Decadal Plan for the Mathematical Sciences, about the need for gender equity within mathematical research environments, putting into context published research on this topic. The report included possible actions that could be taken to address the eight issues raised in the WIMSIG submission as well as the possible negative consequences that could eventuate from taking these proposed actions. The then Chair, Asha Rao, as well as WIMSIG member Maria Athanassenas, participated in the Decadal Plan Workshop in December 2013.

In late 2014, the Science Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) Forum was set up under the auspices of the Australian Academy of Science. The SAGE Forum is currently convened by Nalini Joshi and Brian Schmidt. Then WIMSIG Chair, Asha Rao, attended the first SAGE Forum workshop, held in November 2014, where ideas such as the set-up of an equivalent program to the UK’s Athena SWAN program were discussed. WIMSIG plans to be involved in future developments of the SAGE Forum.

WIMSIG Travel Awards Scheme Launched

An achievement of the WIMSIG Executive Committee was securing funding from the AustMS, mainly for the establishment of two travel awards. The AustMS WIMSIG Cheryl E. Praeger Awards are designed to support the research careers of female mathematicians by providing travel funding for conferences or research visits. Valued at up to \$2000 for an international trip and up to \$600 for a domestic trip, the Praeger awards are funded for \$6400 in each financial year with funding approved by AustMS Council in September 2013; there is the possibility of increased funding in future years based on demand. The AustMS WIMSIG Anne Penfold Street Awards recognise the fact that mathematicians sometimes need financial support to meet caring needs when travelling. Open to AustMS members of all genders, the Street Awards gained funding of \$1600 per financial year. Each Street award is valued at up to \$400, with the possibility of increased funding in future years based on the increases in the costs of caring.

The efforts of Giang Nguyen and Lesley Ward need to be acknowledged, as they led the development of these Awards by drafting the award documentation, including: the selection criteria and scoring schemes, processes and timelines to be followed by the Selection Committee, the application forms and conflict of interest policy, advice for applicants, and biographies of the Award patrons. The Awards were publicly announced on 1st September 2014, and the first awards were made in late 2014. Details of the awards are available on the WIMSIG website. The application deadlines are 1 April and 1 October each year, and people are encouraged to apply.

Membership

² www.birs.ca/workshops//2006/06w5504/report06w5504.pdf

³ <http://www.lms.ac.uk/women/good-practice-scheme>

WIMSIG membership is open to all members of the AustMS. In addition, WIMSIG has a number of 'friends' – those who wish to be part of WIMSIG, but are not members of the AustMS. Currently there are over 300 members and friends, including 200 AustMS members, on the mailing list. The membership is kept informed of events and opportunities via a monthly newsletter, which is archived on the WIMSIG website. The friends of WIMSIG include visiting foreign mathematicians, staff of AMSI and others.

Conclusion

WIMSIG has had a very successful start and we confidently expect that it will continue to grow from strength to strength. The new Executive Committee took the reins in February 2015, exactly two years after the first meeting of the inaugural Executive Committee. As the Founding Chair, I feel privileged to have been instrumental in giving the conversation on gender equity in mathematics a new footing.

With the new executive and the many volunteers, as well as the continued support of all members of the mathematics community, I am certain that WIMSIG will continue to grow and influence policy, engendering equity in the mathematical sciences at all levels and making mathematics a desired profession for all genders, both in industry as well as academia.