



President's column

Michael Cowling

Join Mathematics and see the world! This was something that someone told me in the 1970s, and it is much truer now than then. We have a generation of young people who aspire to travel, and mathematicians travel often. For instance, in the last few months, I have been at mathematical meetings in Australia, Canada, China, Singapore, the UK, and the USA, and visited several other countries to give talks or to take holidays. And yet we never advertise travel as a side benefit of being a mathematical scientist; sometimes we are our own worst enemies.

While in the UK, I talked with people involved in the production of a number of journals, to ascertain their views about the future of scholarly publishing. There is a clear tendency for learned societies in the UK to publish their journals through publishing houses such as Oxford and Cambridge University Presses; the main advantages of doing this are that larger publishers market their journals more effectively, and sell journals to university libraries in bundles which increase circulation (and hence increase first citations, then impact factors, and finally further increase circulation figures), and that economies of scale can be achieved. The AustMS Steering Committee recently met in Mansfield, Victoria, and decided that it would be worth our while to look more closely at the possibility of dealing with such a publisher. I hope that we can get some information to Council about this over the next few months.

We are living in difficult times, and mathematics departments in various universities are under threat. However, I am pleased to be able to report that some of

the threatened bodies are no longer in immediate danger. In particular, the University of Canberra has decided not to disperse its mathematical scientists, but to maintain the department. I gather that the letters that the University received from many bodies (including the AustMS) influenced this decision. Better job security is one of the real benefits that a strong professional organisation can help provide, and this is one good reason why mathematicians in universities in this country should all join the AustMS.

In Mansfield, Steering Committee also considered ways in which the Society might cater better to the needs of mathematical scientists, in universities and outside them. The possibility of instituting state (and even regional) branches was discussed. ANZIAM has branches, some of which are very lively, as does the Statistical Society of Australia Inc. Branches might improve communication and networking opportunities for those who participate in their activity, and help make the AustMS more responsive to its membership. Again, this will need to be discussed in Council, and if we decide to proceed in this direction, it may even involve changes to the Constitution of the Society.

As I write this report, the review team, who will travel around the country in the next two weeks and interview members of universities as well as representatives of business, industry and government, are gathering in Sydney. The Strategic Review presents an opportunity for us to paint a picture of the excellence which is present in the mathematical sciences in Australia and of opportunities for the future, and to put our case for help to attract more students

into mathematics courses and hence into careers as mathematical scientists in business, industry and government, as well as in universities, which will add value to the nation. It is important that the review team has as complete and documented a picture of the

state of mathematics in this country as possible, so could those of you who have been considering making a submission or providing information please do so as soon as possible. The report is due in May, and information received before then can easily be incorporated.