



President's Column

Kate Smith-Miles*

Half way through my term as President already, and I am reminded of the Immediate Past President Tim Marchant's advice to me a year ago: the two-year term will fly by, and you should focus on only a few things you wish to achieve before handing over to the next President. Well, there is a long list of things to achieve, and I wonder if the next President should have a longer term, perhaps three years, to achieve them. I will be discussing this issue with Council.

At the start of my term, I identified some issues that formed an initial set of priorities:

- provide a forum for mathematicians to debate fundamental questions about our discipline
- expand reciprocal agreements between AustMS and like-minded overseas societies, and reciprocal agreements with other Australian societies in '01' fields
- review and adapt the London Mathematical Society's 'Good Practice Scheme' for gender equity, ensuring that all society processes conform to best practice.

This list quickly grew following a consultation period with members. In particular, a meeting in February with the members of the Australian Council of Heads of Mathematical Sciences identified a number of issues where they hoped to see AustMS playing a leadership role:

- helping to implement the decadal plan
- improving visibility of MISG and other opportunities to engage with industry
- investigating the perceived inequities in the ARC grant system that may be disadvantaging some groups within the mathematical sciences
- ensuring sufficient numbers of mathematicians are nominated for ARC College of Experts roles
- revisiting the course accreditation role of AustMS

I am grateful to these colleagues for their feedback and look forward to advancing these issues. A summary of progress to date is provided below.

The Inaugural Debate

Thanks to the six debaters and Adam Spencer for the time and commitment to make our inaugural debate at this year's annual meeting as entertaining and informative as possible. Thanks also to the colleagues I consulted on a range of possible topics before deciding on 'The traditional mathematics blackboard lecture is dead!' There are plenty of other topics that we can choose in future years,

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and I hope this will serve as just one of several mechanisms we can develop to provide opportunities for mathematicians to discuss fundamental questions about our discipline.

Reciprocal agreements

This year we have signed reciprocal agreements with the Japanese Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (JSIAM) and renewed a cooperation agreement with the European Mathematical Society. Discussions are underway with the Australian Society for Operations Research (ASOR) about reciprocal membership. Please contact me if there are other societies with which you would like AustMS to explore reciprocal arrangements.

Gender Equity

1. Thanks to Aidan Sims (Wollongong) who has chaired a working party this year charged with reviewing the London Mathematical Society's Good Practice Scheme for Gender Equity. The working party included Ben Burton (UQ), Bronwyn Hajek (UniSA), Vivien Kirk (Auckland), Susan Scott (ANU), Aidan Sims (Wollongong), and Yvonne Stokes (Adelaide). They have done an excellent job in providing a comprehensive set of recommendations that Council has been asked to endorse.
 - Changes we can make to policy now within the AustMS to improve AustMS practice.
 - Initiatives we could develop to support its members at their home institutions.
 - Initiatives we could develop to encourage good practice in mathematics departments.

There is also a recommendation to establish an Equity Committee to oversee the implementation of these recommendations, and I'd be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to join this committee.

2. WIMSIG conference: Congratulations to Lesley Ward and her team for organizing such a successful inaugural Women in Mathematics conference, held in Adelaide in September this year. It was a truly wonderful few days spent supporting each other, mentoring, and learning from some outstanding plenary speakers and a line up of excellent research talks across many parallel sessions. I hope that this event will become a regular part of the AustMS conference schedule, and that even more people (of all genders) can benefit from attending next time.
3. I am pleased to offer continued support of the Women in Maths Special Interest Group (WIMSIG) networking events, via my ARC Laureate Georgina Sweet funding, continuing the tradition established by Nalini Joshi with her generosity. Funding will be used to continue the WIMSIG lunches and dinners at AustMS and ANZIAM conferences for the next few years, and to provide additional Anne Penfold Street awards. I urge all female members

of the society to get involved in these activities and to benefit from the networking and support that WIMSIG is providing so well.

ARC issues

Concerns have been raised by some members about the methodology used by the ARC for the ERA benchmarking exercise, in particular pointing out the volatility of the relative citation indices of world benchmarks and the very blunt tool this creates for assessing university performance in 4-digit FoR codes. I have a draft letter to the ARC, currently refining to seek input from others about other concerns with the process, and have suggested that there are many members of the society who would be happy to be on a working party to ensure the methodology and use of these benchmark numbers is meaningful. If anyone has any other concerns they would like expressed, please let me know.

My time spent this year on the ARC College of Experts has been very interesting and useful, giving me a very good picture of the mathematical research work going on across the country. I also believe that the process of awarding grants is very fair and transparent, but the outcomes for our discipline depend greatly on the quality, background and skills of the mathematicians on the panel. It is particularly important to have enough mathematicians nominated, and we must identify outstanding candidates and encourage them to nominate as a service to our discipline. I mentioned this in one of my President columns, and mention it again now. I would be happy to discuss with anyone who is potentially interested. I also have a 1-hour seminar I have been giving, based on my experiences this year on the ARC College of Experts, about the process and tips I can share, and would be happy to give this seminar at your university if you contact me.

Course accreditation

Following the discontinuation of the AustMS Course Accreditation process in 2012, and at the request of several groups, I have agreed to chair a working party of AustMS to look into the feasibility of re-establishing the Course Accreditation process. This will be in partnership with AMSI who will coordinate the various mathematical sciences societies, such as AustMS, the Statistical Society of Australia, Australian Institute of Physics, etc. Please contact me if you have any interest in contributing to this working party or any subsequent accreditation panel, or if you believe your department would be interested in having any courses accredited.

New VP (T&L)

I am delighted that Council has been asked to endorse a proposal to establish a new Vice President (Teaching & Learning) role. This recognizes the fact that teaching mathematics is an important part of the lives of many of our members, and is an area where the society can better support members. The appointment of the new VP(T&L) will be an open process for nominations to be considered.

Engagement with Industry

Recently I attended the Science Meets Business event in Sydney, organized by Science and Technology Australia. It was an interesting day, and I encourage members to attend such events (also Science Meets Parliament) when you receive emails calling for expressions of interest. Highlights of the day for me included an excellent opening address from UTS Chancellor Catherine Livingston which contrasted Australia to Israel, arguing that our negative attitudes create a self-reinforcing mantra about us not doing university-industry collaboration well. She argued that we need to rethink university education, its role and our products; better integration between university of VET sectors, mid-career training, etc. A lot of the discussion was on job creation, and the role of universities in job creation, so that the government has sufficient wealth to afford to support research and innovation. The political messaging continued with speeches from both government and opposition (Craig Laundy and Kim Carr). One opportunity for AustMS members that I learned about that day is Data61's Expert Connect <https://expertconnect.data61.csiro.au/> — an online database currently listing 45000 experts available to support business with research challenges. Many of you are already automatically listed there, but won't be happy with the information they have mined. I will be speaking with Data61 about what we can do to improve this.

Election

I am delighted that we are having an election for the President-Elect role with two very excellent candidates in Jacqui Rammage and Geoff Prince. It is a very positive sign that leadership of the Society is seen as a desirable role, attracting high quality nominations, and suggests that the future of the Society is in good hands.

But there is still one year left in my term, and much to be done. I'd like to thank members of Council, Steering Committee and the office holders, particularly Peter Stacey and Algy Howe, as well as May Truong, for their tremendous assistance this year.



Kate Smith-Miles is a Georgina Sweet Australian Laureate Fellow, and recently commenced as a Professor of Applied Mathematics at The University of Melbourne. She was previously Head of the School of Mathematical Sciences at Monash from 2009–2014, followed by several years as inaugural Director of its interdisciplinary applied mathematics institute (MAXIMA). She is a member of the ARC College of Experts, Chair of the Advisory Board for the AMSI CHOOSEMATHS program, serves on the MATRIX Advisory Board, and is a member of the Federal Government's Knowledge Nation 100 group. Kate is a Fellow of the Australian Mathematical Society, and Fellow of Engineers Australia. She was awarded the Australian Mathematical Society Medal in 2010 and the EO Tuck Medal from ANZIAM in 2017.