

President's Newsletter: October 2014

Uppermost in many of our minds over the last few weeks has been the referendum on independence for Scotland which has seen well-argued and passionate debate and expressions of deeply held views on both sides from within the Scottish mathematical community. Whatever our individual views may have been, the broad direction of the near future seems now to have been mapped out, and it is important for us all to work together to ensure maximum benefit to the mathematical sciences in Scotland. Independence would have brought an urgent set of questions for the Society to address in terms of its future role and *modus operandi*, but, notwithstanding, the Society must remain alert to opportunities and vigilant to possible threats in whatever political landscape ultimately emerges.

Most of us have spent the year in an atmosphere of relative calm after the REF submissions a year ago, but we are now beginning to bite our nails in anticipation of the results due to be announced shortly before Christmas. A worrying development is that mathematical sciences FTE submissions to REF from Scotland are about 6% down in comparison to those to RAE 2008, while the figures from the UK overall are steady. The ensuing distribution of research funds to universities and departments is of course a matter of great concern to us all, and the fine detail depends in no small measure on the multipliers that the Scottish Funding Council chooses to apply in its funding formulas. Mathematics has suffered from a particularly unfavourable REG coefficient for some time and with this in mind a group of us met in March with Stuart Fancey, Assistant Director for Research Policy at SFC to press the case for a better deal for mathematics in this particular respect. SFC has been possibly distracted until recently by the prospect of independence, and we are awaiting further news from them. We also stressed the importance of maintaining broad doctoral training in the mathematical sciences at an internationally competitive level in Scotland. The current UK Mathematical Sciences CDT landscape sees Scotland disappointingly under-represented.

The Deloitte report "Measuring the economic benefits of Mathematical Science Research in the UK" has been mentioned in the two most recent Presidents' Newsletters, and has proved very helpful in making the case for mathematics at a high level. It contains the by now much-wheeled-out statement that "... 16% of Gross Value Added to the UK economy stems from mathematical sciences research." I can't resist adding my own footnote to this. I was at a large gathering in July at which a senior EPSRC official gave a session on Effective Advocacy (aka pragmatic lobbying) which included special reference to mathematics. He stated that the original figures Deloitte produced contained estimates of twice this order of magnitude, but were massaged down in order to be more in line with what ministers might recognise as being reasonable. So much for rigorous methodology!

The Society's day-to-day life has of course continued against this backdrop, and our core ventures of talks, publishing the Proceedings of the EMS, making grants supporting both

educational and research activities, as well as the Burn conference for postgraduate students have once again all flourished. The Society now also offers support to undergraduate Mathematics societies in Scotland, with little take-up so far. Full details of all of these and the application procedure for our grant schemes are available on the relevant sections of the Society's web pages www.ems.ac.uk and the Annual Report. A small cloud on the horizon is the recent news that Swets and Zeitlinger Group B.V. which, on behalf of CUP, handles PEMS subscriptions for many libraries, has been placed in administration by a court in the Netherlands.

The Society's 2013-14 lecture programme once again featured a wide variety of excellent, enjoyable and stimulating talks by eminent speakers. John Barrow delivered the Society's 5th "Popular Lecture" on Mathematics and Sport which left your President determined to try to improve his swimming technique in the light of tips from Usain Bolt. Next year's Popular Lecture will be given by Tadashi Tokieda, with his enviable collection of toys, on Friday 20th February 2015 - please be sure to make a date in your diaries! Before that we have a lecture by Fields Medallist Martin Hairer at Heriot-Watt on 12th December which promises to be another "do not miss" event.

A new date for the 2015 calendar is the Society's upcoming joint meeting with the Catalan Mathematical Society to be held from 28th-30th May 2015 in Barcelona. The Society's General Secretary Jozsef Farkas has been the driving force in setting this up. The Scientific Committee consists of Angel Calsina and Marta Sanz Sole (Catalonia) and Jose Figueroa O'Farrill and Jim Howie (Scotland). Roberto Emparan, Istvan Gyongy, Carles Simo and Jim Wright have agreed to give plenary lectures, and a number of special sessions are to be organised. It is hoped that some limited financial support will be available for travel expenses. There will soon be a dedicated website, linked to our own, where you can find out all the details.

The EMS Policy Advisory Group (PAG) convened early in 2014, and in addition to making recommendations for the next Vice-President and President-elect, considered the future of the Whittaker Prize. It recommended that the next prize be bestowed in 2016 and that the Prize Committee should at that stage be asked to consider the balance between ensuring continuing high-quality awards and offering broad encouragement to young mathematicians based in Scotland, and then make a recommendation as to the future frequency of the prize.

The Council for the Mathematical Sciences (CMS) continues to be led by Adrian Smith and operates on UK policy issues at a high level with contacts in RCUK, BIS and HEFCE. The issues that Scotland faces seem a little remote to it despite our financial support and presence on its committee.

On the international front, I was unable to attend a meeting of the Presidents of National Mathematical Societies of the European Mathematical Society in Istanbul in April, but made it to the Council in Donostia in June. (I recommend the restaurant Eme Be Garrote to anyone who finds themselves unexpectedly in the San Sebastian/Donostia area). Concern was raised that Mathematics appeared to be weak in obtaining EU funding through Framework Programmes as distinct from the European Research Council. Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, formerly Director of IHES, is the incoming President of the ERC and he gave a highly informative presentation on its workings; he is also to deliver the Royal Society of Edinburgh's MacCormick European Lecture in Edinburgh on Monday 24th November at 6.p.m. (This event is open to all but registration via the RSE's website www.royalsoced.org.uk is required.) Closer to home, it was noted that the European Mathematical Society's excellent new website has been developed by Robert Carr of Perth. The Society was represented on the LMS stand

at ICM-2014 in Seoul, South Korea in the form of a newly-designed poster organised and designed by Jozsef Farkas. Please display this poster (available on the front page of the EMS website) prominently in your departments.

ICMS has let us know that the EMS funding for its Research in Groups (RiG) programme has been somewhat underused; if you are based in Scotland and wish to invite one, two or three visitors to work together with you under this programme please see the ICMS website www.icms.org.uk/proposals/rigs. The next deadline is 30th December.

It is with sadness that we note the passing of three distinguished figures of Scottish mathematics over the last year, Douglas Jones, Murray MacBeath - both of whom held Chairs at the University of Dundee - and Bryce McLeod, who although he lived mostly in England and the USA, never ceased to be a proud Scot. On a more cheerful note, it is a pleasure to congratulate my predecessor-but-one as President, Penny Davies on her well-deserved OBE.

As the AGM approaches, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the very many people who have given generously of their time to the Society, on its committees, on the PEMS Board, and as EMS representatives to outside bodies. Thanks in particular are due to the Society's continuing officers, Jozsef Farkas, Richard Steiner and Tibor Antal as well as to the continuing Convenors of Committees and Boards, Michael Grinfeld, David Pontin and David Pritchard. Raluca Eftimie has very capably taken on the role of organising the Burn meeting. I would also like to thank the annual report coordinators Richard Steiner and Mark Chaplain, and, last but not least, Frances Reid for her sterling work in the Society Office.

Stepping down after the AGM are our webmaster Lyonell Boulton, Rob Archbold from PAG, Jim Wright from the Research Support Fund Committee, Tom Leinster as a BMC representative and Colin Campbell - after many years of loyal service to the EMS including as President from 2005-2007 - as our JMC representative. Heartfelt thanks go to all for everything you have done to support the Society over the years. A very special vote of thanks goes to Tom Lenagan who steps down after 11 years service as Meetings Secretary and who, above all, has been responsible for maintaining the incredibly high quality of our programme of talks over all these years, and will certainly be a hard act to follow. Finally, Mark Chaplain stands down from his role as Vice-President having previously been President for two years. Mark has served the Society with distinction and has also been very helpful in supporting me in my presidency, not least in deputising for me at a number of meetings which I was unable to attend. Mark is soon moving on to pastures new at St Andrews where he is to take up the James Gregory Chair of Applied Mathematics. I wish him every success in this role and hope that he, like the rest of you, will enjoy the forthcoming year's programme of events.

Tony Carbery.