Purposeful research

I TOTALLY agree with Coalition spokesman for science Andrew Robb that research should result in innovation (“Link grants to innovation: Libs” 8/11). It’s why scientists do research — we want to ensure that our research is applied to improve society in as many ways as possible. However, perhaps the best research is not that which produces products for sale but makes discoveries to prevent problems. The type of research Robb is reported as not wanting to fund was key to Australia’s success with the HIV-AIDS epidemic from the 1980s. We were more effective than any other nation in containing this devastating disease. The research at the Centre for the History of Emotions, singled out by Robb to be cut, aims to look at how populations manage disruptions in the past. It is likely to help us manage these as we will know how humans behave.

The former Liberal government funded such research and increased research funding. I recall these decisions as I sat on John Howard’s science and innovation council. Innovation Minister Chris Evans is right to challenge Robb’s thinking, but the Coalition has funded research and for good reason. Scientists should be the ones to prove to all politicians that research is a good investment.

Fiona J. Stanley, Faculty of Medicine, University of Western Australia
The sum of a career devoted to mathematics

GARTH IAN GAU DRY

Born May 16, 1941; died October 18, 2012

By JAN THOMAS

Eminent Professor Garth Gaudry, a champion for the mathematical sciences, has died in Sydney after a long illness.

The son of a Queensland primary school teacher, he completed his secondary education at Mackay High School, then obtained a degree in mathematics at the University of Queensland, followed by a PhD at the Australian National University.

His PhD supervisor was Robert Edwards and they later wrote an influential book on harmonic analysis together. The PhD was followed by post-doctoral studies in Paris and England and time at Yale University as a Gibbs instructor, a prestigious appointment for young academics.

In 1971 Gaudry returned to the ANU and the following year was appointed professor of mathematics at the newly established Flinders University. He led the Flinders mathematics department until 1992.

Fluent in French and Italian, he and his collaborator, Alessandro Figa Talamanca, established many years of work between the mathematicians of Australian and Italy.

One of the highlights of his time at Flinders was an outstanding student named Terry Tao.

Tao came to him at the age of 12 and, with Gaudry’s guidance, entered Princeton University at the age of 17. In 2006 Tao was awarded the Fields Medal, considered the Nobel Prize in mathematics. Being present when Tao was presented with the medal at an international mathematics congress in Madrid was a highlight of Gaudry’s life.

In 1983 Gaudry moved to the University of NSW where he became head of school. His research interests at this time were aligned with Swedish mathematicians, and the University of Gothenburg in Sweden awarded him an honorary doctorate in 1984.

Gaudry had appreciated his excellent teachers in rural Queensland. They enabled him to gain a scholarship to the University of Queensland and to undertake further study within Australia. He became a leader among a group of Australian mathematicians who view with dismay the lack of similar opportunity for an excellent mathematics education, especially in rural and regional schools, for young people today. They have become active in promoting quality mathematics education across Australia.

Gaudry’s involvement in raising the public profile of mathematics and mathematics education began while he was at Flinders. From 1986 to 1990 he was the vice-president and then president of the Australian Mathematical Society. He took a leading role in the creation of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Council, an umbrella group for the mathematical sciences on the board of the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies. He was the council’s first president and, in collaboration with the federation’s then executive director, the late David Widdup, achieved considerable prominence for mathematical sciences in the media and political circles.

This commitment to the broader mathematical community continued when he moved to the UNSW, especially in regard to school education. In 1995 he particularly enjoyed meetings with mathematics teachers across NSW as a member of a panel asked to review the implementation of national statements and profiles in the state.

Then, in 2002, a message went to all heads of mathematics and statistics departments in the universities that there was an opportunity to obtain funding through a Victorian government initiative to establish a mathematical sciences institute at the University of Melbourne. Gaudry immediately saw the benefit to the broader mathematical community and committed the UNSW to full membership.

Others followed, the funding proposal was successful, and the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute came into being. Gaudry moved to Melbourne in 2003 when he became the institute’s inaugural director, a role in which he was instrumental in solidifying what has become a major asset to the mathematical community.

Dr Brendan Nelson, minister for education and science at the time, took a keen interest in the institute. He found funding within his department’s budget for the first summer school, and honours students from around the country were able to attend four weeks of stimulating courses and peer interaction at Melbourne University. The Institute will hold its 11th summer school in January. In 2003 it was was awarded a major grant to establish an International Centre of Excellence for Education in Mathematics. Gaudry chose to relinquish the position with the institute to become the director of the new centre, which funded many higher-education activities, including the establishment of a network of access grid rooms. These enable someone in Townsville to participate in a lecture given in Perth.

The grant also led to major initiatives in school education. Gaudry arranged several meetings with mathematics teachers and asked them what would assist them most. It was a seminal moment when one of them said: “The textbooks we use are awful.” And so the centre’s schools mathematics materials, comprising books and support materials, came into being. He worked tirelessly to see this project come to fruition until ill health forced his retirement in 2008. After he left Melbourne, Gaudry was made an honorary life member of the Australian Mathematical Society, and in June he was presented with an Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute medal for distinguished service.

Gaudry pursued many interests other than mathematics. These included music, the theatre, wine and windsurfing. In later years he became involved in outback travel, bird study and photography, and took a keen interest in the work of Australian Wildlife Conservancy.

Garth Gaudry is survived by his wife, Patricia, and children Kerry, Rebecca and Peter.

Jan Thomas was a friend and colleague and is a senior fellow at the University of Melbourne.
GROUNDBREAKER: Garth Gaudry was to the fore in mathematics
FED:Aust, Malaysia unis to strengthen ties

CANBERRA, Nov 14 AAP - Australian and Malaysian universities are expected to forge closer links through a new memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed on Wednesday.

Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans said the MoU reflected a joint commitment to increasing collaboration and policy dialogue on higher education issues.

The two countries have a strong history of co-operation on education issues and there is a high number of Malaysian students attending Australian universities.

Senator Evans said the agreement would support the federal government's efforts ensure more young Australians were well placed to take advantage of deepening engagement with Asia.

This includes encouraging more Australian students to take up educational opportunities at Asian universities.

Senator Evans signed the MoU with his Malaysian counterpart Mohamed Khaled Bin Nordin at Curtin University in Perth.

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