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*News & Views item - April 2008*

 **Field's Medallist Calls on Colleagues to Petition Against Staff Reductions in Maths/Stats and Computer Science at USQ.** (April 7, 2008)



[Click Image for short video](#)

Terence Tao is the only Australian born [Fields Medalist](#). Professor Tao received his undergraduate training at Flinders University, went on for his graduate training in United States and currently holds a [chair in mathematics at UCLA](#).

In introducing a plea to his colleagues around the world Terry Tao writes:

*On March 17, the [University of Southern Queensland \(USQ\)](#) at Toowoomba announced [proposals](#) to cut staff at the [Department of Mathematics and Computing](#) (which consists of the disciplines of mathematics, statistics, and computing) by more than 50% as part of a rationalisation program, eliminate all non-service teaching classes from the mathematics curriculum, and also eliminate the mathematics, statistics, physics, and chemistry majors at USQ. This is in direct opposition to the [federal government's explicit support](#) for the importance of such enabling sciences, and is in direct opposition to the [significant increase in funding for mathematics and statistics approved last year](#) and flowing into USQ this year. (In fact, it appears that this funding has been [diverted for other purposes](#) by the university administration.)*

*The official USQ proposals can be [found here](#), together with a [supplementary rationale](#) for these proposals. Key points include:*

- *Eliminating 12 positions in Mathematics and Computing, from a current faculty of 27 (see page 6 of [the proposal](#)). The bulk of these cuts fall on the disciplines of mathematics and statistics, where the faculty is being cut from 14 to 6; three more staff are being cut in physics and chemistry. In contrast, other divisions of USQ are experiencing significantly less severe cuts (and, in some cases, staff increases).*

- *Phasing out “low enrolment program streams” (i.e. non-service teaching).*
- *Discontinuing the undergraduate major program in maths, chemistry, physics, and statistics (see page 13 of the [rationale](#)). This is despite enrollments in mathematics and statistics holding steady at USQ (computer science enrollments have declined, though).*

*These cuts not only affect undergraduate education at USQ in the maths and sciences, but also have impacted other maths-related programs, including a program to educate high school maths teachers at USQ.*

On April 5 Professor Tao published a petition on the Web to reverse the University of Southern Queensland's decision:

**I believe that the proposed severe cuts to mathematics, statistics, and computing at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) will do severe and permanent damage to the quality of education in maths and the sciences for USQ students, at a time when the need to support such education is both urgent and widely accepted in Australia at all levels. Service teaching alone, especially at reduced staff levels, cannot deliver the level of mathematics education that the students of USQ deserve. I urge the university administration to negotiate with the Department of Mathematics and Computing to find a compromise solution that will preserve the proven capability of this department to train students and teachers in the maths and sciences at the highest levels of quality.**

It is a testament to Professor Tao's influence with his colleagues and the importance they place regarding the matter, that in the space of 24 hours there have been just over 200 declarations of support.

To learn more and to, should you choose, add your name to the petition [click here](#).

*A few of those outside Australia in support of the petition:*

Robert Harper, Professor  
Computer Science Department  
Carnegie Mellon University

Marco Isopi, Professor  
Mathematics  
University of Rome “la Sapienza” (Italy)

Danny Calegari  
Richard Merkin Distinguished Professor of Mathematics  
California Institute of Technology

Walter Neumann  
Professor of Mathematics  
Barnard College - Columbia University  
New York

Ernesto F. Galvão  
Professor, Institute of Physics, Universidade Federal Fluminense  
(UFF, Niterói, Brazil).

François Loeser  
Professor  
Department of Mathematics  
Ecole Normale Supérieure  
Paris, France

Michael Cowling  
Mason Professor of Pure Mathematics  
University of Birmingham

Mike Titterton  
Professor of Statistics  
University of Glasgow  
Scotland

