

Maths success is a matter of choice

TIM DODD
HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR

Maths campaigners are stepping up their efforts to persuade more girls to choose maths in school to help them break into male-dominated jobs in science, technology and engineering.

Astronomer and media personality Alan Duffy is one of the latest to join the push, becoming a Choose Maths Careers Ambassador for the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute.

"I want to see girls engaged in subjects such as mathematics, because I know how smart they are and how much the world needs

'Girls shouldn't let anything stop them studying mathematics'

ALAN DUFFY
SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY

their brilliance as part of the scientific workforce," says Professor Duffy, from Swinburne University.

"Girls shouldn't let anything or anyone stop them studying mathematics. There is a universe to explain, diseases to cure and world-changing technologies to invent. They need to know they are smart enough, skilled enough, good enough to do this and more."

Professor Duffy and other Choose Maths ambassadors are aiming to convince girls that there are no barriers to them being successful in maths-based careers.

Surveys have shown that just

over half of women and girls doubt their ability in maths, with one in five seeing maths and other science, engineering and technology disciplines as a "boys club".

Today, on International Women's Day, the Choose Maths campaign will hold a careers event for 400 Victorian high school girls from years 9 to 12 to show them the opportunities which follow from studying maths.

AMSI is launching a series of Choose Maths videos for high-school students which show them, particularly girls, the power of maths in solving the world's problems. The videos are available at choosemaths.org.

Choose Maths project director Janine McIntosh says maths is an "enabler" which opens up career opportunities in nearly every job sector, and that girls and their teachers and parents should see them as real and valuable options.

But she says that girls are still under-represented in the senior high-school maths courses which lead to further study in university maths-based courses.

"We've still got girls underperforming in calculus-based maths across the country. That's the maths you need for a science course or engineering course," she says.

Nationwide only 6 per cent of year 12 girls choose a more advanced maths subject which included calculus while among boys the figure is 12 per cent.

Women and girls are still a minority in many STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) professions.

For example the latest figures from Engineers Australia show that only 12.4 per cent of engineers are women.