

Committee of Professors of Statistics, UK and Ireland

Annual meeting, 1.30pm, 9 May 2005

MINUTES

Present: Peter Diggle (Lancaster, Chair), Julian Stander (Plymouth), Denis Mollison (Heriot-Watt), Tony O'Hagan (Sheffield), Ed Godolphin (Royal Holloway), Raj Bhansali (Liverpool), Eric Renshaw (Strathclyde), Richard Weber (Cambridge), Trevor Sweeting (UCL), Charles Goldie (Sussex), Suzanne Evans (Birkbeck), David Balding (Imperial), Marian Scott (Glasgow), Valerie Isham (UCL), Phil Brown (Kent), Sylvia Richardson (Imperial), Henry Wynn (LSE), Anatoly Zhigljavsky (Cardiff), Chris Jones (Open), David Hand (Imperial), Peter Green (Bristol), Guy Nason (Bristol), Stephen Buckland (St Andrews), Adrian Bowman (Glasgow), Steven Gilmour (Queen Mary), Peter Smith (Sunderland), Charles Taylor (Leeds), Ian Dryden (Nottingham), Tony Lawrance (Warwick), Subba Rao (Manchester), Chris Skinner (Southampton), Simon Thompson (MRC Cambridge), John Matthews (Newcastle upon Tyne), Michael Goldstein (Durham), Bob Gilchrist (London Met), Neville Davies (Nottingham Trent).

Apologies: Gavin Gibson (Heriot-Watt), Vic Barnett (Nottingham Trent).

1. Welcome and apologies

PJD welcomed members to the meeting

2. Appointment of minute secretary

Julian Stander agreed to take notes during the meeting

3. Minutes of 2004 meeting

The minutes of the 2004 meeting were agreed.

4. Matters arising

None

5. Publications

(a) Postgraduate publicity

The copstat web-site offers links to individual web-sites. *Members were requested to review their current entries, update as appropriate and email any required changes to PJD.*

No suggestions were made regarding any additional national publicity.

(b) Academic Directory

The meeting thanked Alan Mayer for his willingness to continue to produce the Directory. Alan will prompt members to update their departmental entries.

There was brief discussion of whether a printed version of the directory should still be produced and a copy distributed, one per member. On a show of hands, there was a clear majority in favour of continuing with the printed version (but see also Minute 6(b))

List of Statistics Departments

Denis Mollison maintains a list of Statistics Departments. Members continue to find this useful, and the meeting thanked Denis for his willingness to continue with this task. Some

entries in this list are clearly out-of-date. *Members were asked to review and update as appropriate. A single entry per University is preferred, but is not obligatory.*

- (c) Copstat website <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/files/COPSTAT/>

Suggestions for additional material that might usefully be placed on the web-site were invited.

6. Domestic matters

(a) Membership list

Peter Green asked whether the COPSTAT list could/should be widened to reach all academic statisticians. The meeting agreed that it should not be so widened, but that *members should use their discretion in circulating within their departments messages to the list* which appear to be of relevance/interest to the wider academic community.

The meeting also agreed that one role of members was to represent the views of colleagues. *Departments with more than one member should discuss locally how best they can discharge this responsibility*, for example by nominating one of their number to circulate within their department any relevant information.

Charles Goldie suggested that COPS buy, for £5, the web-site address www.copstat.org, for possible future use. *PJD will look into this.*

(b) Financial report

Julian Stander presented the annual report. On the basis that 2004/05 expenditure exceeded income by approximately £500, Julian proposed an increase in annual subscriptions, from £20 plus £5 per additional member to £25 plus £10 per additional member. David Balding noted that the current balance was approximately £700 greater than annual expenditure, and that the need for a reserve of this size was unclear. Several members noted that the major item of expenditure was the production and distribution of the Academic Directory, and asked what proportion of this was attributable to the production and distribution of the printed version.

On a show of hands, a clear majority of the meeting voted NOT to increase the annual subscription for 2005/06.

PJD agreed to obtain a breakdown of the costs involved in the production of the Academic Directory.

The meeting thanked Julian for his work as Treasurer, and for his willingness to continue in this role.

7. Data-collection

Steve Buckland drew particular attention in his report to the evidence from successive RAE returns for an apparent decline in the volume of statistical research activity in UK universities.

The meeting agreed that this was an issue of the greatest importance, and that COPS should support efforts to address it (see also Minute 10(a)).

Steve also noted that the usefulness of the data collected by COPS was currently limited by:

- (a) its non-availability in electronic format
- (b) the high rate of non-compliance by member institutions.

After discussion, it was agreed that efforts should be made to sustain an annual time-series of dis-aggregated data, stored electronically and aiming for better compliance but covering a more limited range of topics and avoiding unnecessary duplication of existing data-sources.

PJD agreed to discuss this with Steve Buckland and Neville Davies, and to circulate by email to the membership list a specific proposal.

PJD also agreed to attempt to reconstruct a historical time-series, in the first instance using information passed on to him by Adrian Bowman.

8. Research Councils

Slides from individual presenters under this item are attached, where these are available.

(a) EPSRC

Peter Green reported on relevant recent developments within EPSRC, including: developments following the International Review of Mathematics; science and innovation awards; implications of full economic costing of research; data on success rates for grant applications; prospects for cross-council collaboration with respect to support for statistics.

PJD agreed to write to EPSRC to indicate that COPS members had found the descriptive analysis of success rates very interesting, and would wish this analysis to be updated annually if possible.

(b) ESRC

Chris Skinner reported that ESRC research support mechanisms include: research grants; research and capacity building grants; programme centres and networks; 1+3 studentships for MSc+PhD training.

Chris noted that statistics proposals were welcomed, and that the responsive mode research grant scheme in particular represented a potential source of funding for research in statistical methodology provided its relevance to social science was clear.

Chris also noted that the National Centre for Research Methods, which he directs, would be making another call for proposals in two or three years time, and that three of the six currently funded proposals were strongly statistical in character.

(c) MRC

Simon Thompson reported on research support mechanisms within MRC. These include funding of research units (including the Biostatistics Unit in Cambridge which Simon leads), and research grants to universities, for which anyone can apply.

Statistics falls within the MRC remit in the form of either methodological research of generic relevance to medical applications, or statistical input to specific medical applications.

(d) BBSRC

David Balding reported on relevant developments within BBSRC.

BBSRC is favourably disposed to statistical research, provided its relevance to biology is clear. BBSRC publicity makes little or no reference to statistics as a discipline. Bioinformatics is an area with huge potential for innovative statistical input, but there is a danger that bioinformatics is seen by BBSRC (and other organisations?) as a branch of computer science.

9. RAE 2008

Bernard Silverman presented a frank, detailed but off-the-record update of planning for RAE2008.

Points of particular relevance to the meeting included:

- (a) all information will be posted on the RAE web-site in due course, and members may wish to keep a close watch on this web-site;

- (b) Statistics will be assessed by Sub-panel 22 (Probability, Statistics and Operational Research) of Panel F (Mathematics and Computer Science) – Bernard chairs F22
- (c) results are formally approved by panels, based on recommendations by sub-panels, and will be published as quality profiles at the sub-panel level;
- (d) each staff member will be invited to submit up to four pieces of work to be evaluated, with four as the normal expectation for a full-time member of staff in post throughout the review period (2001-2007);
- (e) special consideration will be given to early-career, part-time or career-break staff who have fewer than four pieces of work to submit;
- (f) deadlines: 31 October 2007, staff in-post; 30 November 2007, receipt of submissions; 31 December 2007, publication of submitted pieces of work (authenticated work in press in final form OK);
- (g) quality profiles will be derived from assessment of individual pieces of work, not individual members of staff;
- (h) overall quality profile will be a weighted average of profiles of pieces of work, research environment and indicators of esteem, with weights provisionally set at 70, 20 and 10, respectively.

10. Teaching/training

(a) **Issues and developments in teaching and learning statistics**

Neville Davies summarised the various teaching issues raised in his agenda paper. Subsequent discussion focused on two of these (numbering as in Neville's paper).

2(v) RSS Certificate: Teaching Statistics in Higher Education

Members warmly welcomed this development, and felt that it would make a more useful contribution to early-career training than much of what is currently provided by generic in-house staff-development programmes. Noted that the Certificate might also be embedded within an MSc programme.

Members are invited to discuss within their respective universities whether the RSS Certificate might replace some or all of their existing generic provision, whilst still meeting national QAA requirements.

4. The State of Teaching Statistics in the UK (see also tabled paper from Vic Barnett).

The meeting was strongly supportive of the proposal to undertake a project in this area and welcomed the news that the request for funding support from the Teaching Statistics Trust had been successful.

Discussion centred on whether COPS support should/could be in kind and/or in cash. Possibilities include:

- (a) a direct cash contribution from COPS
- (b) an approach by COPS members to their respective Departments to request a cash contribution
- (c) offers by COPS members to make a time-commitment to contribute to the project.

Pending further discussion of subscription rates and/or continued printing of the Academic Directory, COPS is not able to make a direct contribution. Some members also expressed concern that on principle COPS should not make funding contributions of this kind without some form of internal peer review mechanism, whilst others felt that the importance of the topic merited special treatment.

No agreement was reached for immediate action under possibility (a).

Members are encouraged to follow-up possibilities (b) and (c) and to contact Neville Davies accordingly.

(b) **MSc courses**

i. **Consequences of EPSRC switch from MTP to CTA**

The overall picture remains unclear, but there is some indication that the switch from MTP has resulted in an overall drop in EPSRC funding for statistics MSc courses.

ii. **Proposal to establish list of potential members of external steering committees for statistics MSc courses**

The meeting was not minded to take any specific action on this proposal.

(c) **QAA soundings**

We are invited by Brian Stewart (LMS) to nominate a member of a working group to prepare for the forthcoming QAA review of Maths, Statistics and Operational Research.

The meeting agreed that COPS should nominate a member to join the working group being established by Brian Stewart (representing LMS), but no volunteer was forthcoming.

PJD will endeavour to identify a COPS nominee.

(d) **RSS Report on statistical education in the 14 to 19 age-group**

This report (44 pages including appendices) is available from the web at:

<http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2046>

(e) **Proposed review of statistics teaching in higher education**

See minute 10(a) above.

11. **AOB**

Peter Green expressed concern that COPS might be seen to be “passing the buck” inappropriately to RSS in areas specifically relevant to the university sector, but acknowledged that the current structure of COPS made it difficult for COPS to do otherwise unless members were willing to volunteer to take on specific tasks. He suggested that formation of a COPS Executive might be helpful.

PJD agreed to consider this, and to circulate a proposal to the membership in due course.

Peter J Diggle, May 18, 2005