## Committee of Professors of Statistics, UK and Ireland

Annual meeting, 22 May 2006.

1. Present: Trevor Bailey, PJ Diggle, J Forster, E Godolphin, B Gilchrist, D Hand, JL Hutton, C Jones, J Kent, J Stander, S Lewis, S Lauritzen, J Marriott, K McConway, L Pettit S Senn, B Silverman, A Skrondal, TMF Smith, T Subba Rao, A Wood.

Apologies not formally recorded.
2. Minute secretary: Jane Hutton
3. Minutes of 2005 meeting were accepted as a correct record.
4. Matters arising

Charles Taylor had agreed to represent COPS on a working group being esablished by Brian Stewart (LMS) to prepare for the forthcoming QAA review of Maths, Statistics and Operational Research. PJD informed Brian Stewart, but Charles reports that he has not since been contacted.
5. a) Postgraduate publicity

Everyone is reminded to update their own pages. If links are not correct, please email Peter Diggle, p.diggle@lancaster.ac.uk.
b) Academic Directory

The electronic version of the directory is not suitable for printing. The meeting agreed to an intermediate option: the directory will be provided in a pdf version suitable for printing. The pdf file will be secure, perhaps by being password protected, so that email addresses cannot be easily harvested for spam.
Action: PJD to contact Alan Mayer.
6. a). Membership list

Anyone can be added, without scrutiny.
b). Financial report

As the cost of the venue will be zero this year, and the costs of the directory may be well below $£ 1700$, it was decided that Departmental Membership should be increased from $£ 20$ to $£ 25$, but the cost for each additional member will remain at $£ 5$.
Note added after the meeting: Julian Stander is willing to continue as Treasurer, and PJD has thanked him on behalf of the membership.

## 7. Data-collection

Data from previous years, on paper, are not easily accessible. Because groups are selfdefined, the 38 responses received cannot be expressed as a percentage. The meeting agreed that the summary was very useful, and thanked Peter Diggle and Barry Rowlingson for their work. Ways of achieving a higher compliance rate were discussed. Colleagues should contribute to refining the 'other' categories, for example, for sources of PhD funding.
Alternative data sources, such as RAE and HESA might be useful for comparisons, but cannot replace these data. The RAE is a self-selected subset. More useful data might be available in future from HESA, but previously the definitions of statistics students and staff were very different from those used by COPS.

The ratio of PhD registrations to competitions is high, and should be monitored. The relatively limited support through EPSRC DTA grants was noted, and the need to lobby for a better system for allocating DTA funds at a national level.
Maintaining data on numbers of staff in five-year bands could be very useful, for example in constructing projections.

An FAQ section would be helpful to clarify possible ambiguities, eg how to return PG students with two qualt sources of funding?

Some errors noted by Stephen Senn have been corrected in the attached version.
Peter Diggle would be grateful for further comments.

## 8. RAE 2008

Bernard Silverman stressed that colleagues should read the official RAE document. The three important sets of comments and criteria are:
i) The generic statement;
ii) Panel F document;
iii) Subpanel 22.

Bernard re-assured members that the highest ratings were intended to be attainable. He reminded them that $70 \%$ of the assessment is on publications. Multi-author publications will count as full weight. Papers will be judged without reference to which name they are listed under, so if two authors are in the same UoA, their paper can be submitted under either name, but should not be submitted twice. Bernard re-emphasised the statement in the guidelines the panel will assess the full range from theoretical to applied statistics.
The Esteem component counts for $10 \%$. For young researchers, judgment of esteem items will take into account their youth. Departments are able to state when they believe a person's independent research career began. There is nothing in the guidelines to prohibit brief explanations of the nature of esteem items.
9. Teaching review

Fred Smith began by stating that the USA and Australia are also concerned about a possible decline in statistics. He recently received a report from Australia on statistics and mathematics. The COPS data were used, as HESA does not discriminate sufficiently, or consistently; for example, actuarial students are sometimes returned as statistics graduates, sometimes not. Recent changes within HESA may mean that statistics will be more clearly identifiable in future.
Fred's report suggested a decline in statistics within maths and/or statistics departments, whlst other statistics groups remained at about the same strength. However, this is against a background of increasing numbers of university staff and students overall.

The age profile shows few people under 30 years in established posts, and the number of UK PhD's is not sufficient to stop a decline in the number of established statistics academics over the next ten years. This is partly a tribute to the employability of statisticians, but suggests we need to lobby relevant national government agencies. The decline may be being exacerbated by changes in Research Councils' policies for PG funding, for example the paucity of EPSRC funding for MSc studentships, and the style of the four-year ESRC PhD studentships.

The use of increased stipends for PhD students, and golden hellos were mentioned as possible solutions, but funding for MSc places was seen as critical.

The meeting recognised that statistical methods are used in many other areas, some of which spawn separate sub-disciplines (eg Econometrics) whilst others maintain close relationships with the wider statistics discipline (eg Medical Statistics). Computer science and bio-informatics are some of the many newer areas of application, and there is an implicit threat to the statistics discipline if subject-matter scientists do not recognise the value of maintaining and developing links with statistics.

10 MMath, MSc, Bologna
A statement by the working group of the Council for Mathematical Sciences (CMS), and some data on the number of students graduating with BSc or M mathematics degrees, were circulated.

The University of Warwick has decided as an interim position to allow Integrated Masters eg MPhys degrees which meet specific criteria, including sufficient CATS at level 4, to be given a dual designation eg BSc.MPhys. It is not known which Warwick departments will make use of this permissive ruling.
This dual designation, with a single class for both BSc and M components, allows students to show explicitly that BSc level material has been covered, while preserving the undergraduate status which protects DFES funding.
Points raised in discussion included:
(a) The CMS working group addresses not only the Europe Unit's briefing note on compliance with the Bologna Declaration, but also the health of mathematical sciences in general. Funding, especially of MSc, is a particular concern.
(b) For statistics, MSc courses are often the entry point to the profession, and overemphasis on MMath degrees could be detrimental to recruitment into Statistics.
(c) The CMS working group hopes in the longer term to win secure funding for Cycle 2 (M level) courses in the UK. There are concerns that government policy might focus on harmony with Europe as an end in itself, whereas academic interests might be better served by other models, eg the USA approach to Masters degrees.
(d) The Statistics community might decide that rather than promoting MMath degrees, they should lobby government, as a major employer of statisticians, to support more MSc places.
11. Relations with RSS

Tim Holt, RSS president, had asked whether the RSS is doing enough for the academic membership. The majority view was that the academic, intellectual aspects were well served, but the policy side was not. It was suggested that a member of RSS Council could be nominated as a formal link person on COPS, and that policy matters, such as funding for MSc courses, could be fed back to the RSS this way.
Action: PJD to write to Tim Holt accordingly.

