

Committee of Professors of Statistics, UK and Ireland
Annual Meeting, 2.00pm, 1 June 2009
Royal Statistical Society, London

Present: J Forster (in the chair), J Norris, D Hand, N Davies, M Gilthorpe, S Bird, B Francis, P O'Neill, K Abrams, P Green, T Bailey, D Applebaum, H Tong, W Kendall, D Firth, C Goldie, M Broom, A Chen, B Gilchrist, J Hutton, P Brown, M Goldstein, P Garthwaite, R Bailey, S Todd.

Apologies: A Bowman, J Stander, D Jones, B Silverman, G Dunn, R Henderson, R Bhansali, G Nason, P Diggle, K Glazebrook, D Spiegelhalter, S Lauritzen, K Darby-Dowman.

1. Jon Forster (JJF) presented a list of apologies.
2. Philip O'Neill was appointed minute secretary.
3. **The Future Research Environment and Key Challenges** (presentation by Adrian Smith, Director General, Science and Research, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills).

Adrian gave his views on the current UK research environment: The UK is in a strong position globally, and the excellence of the research base is a key national asset. There is strong support for research at ministerial level, with the result that the research budget was not cut in the recent budget. However the current economic climate reinforces the need to keep demonstrating the impact of research. Challenges include: how should the research base respond to the downturn; how can reputation be maintained; how to ensure research delivers benefits to UK; and how to increase dialogue between universities and government. Adrian discussed the forthcoming REF, which is likely to reward not only academic excellence, but excellence with impact. Adrian pointed out that DIUS houses both forms of research support (QR and research councils) and highlighted three key elements of DIUS's role: influencing academics, other departments, Treasury; developing methods for assessing economic impact of research; and building stronger capability for producing impact. Finally, he discussed postgraduate provision. DIUS intends to develop of a national strategy on this, and there will be a consultation launched within the next few months.

A wide-ranging discussion ensued, with Adrian addressing questions on the interpretation of impact, Masters course provision, movement of personnel between universities, business and government, and how interdisciplinary research is assessed.

4. **Minutes of 2008 Meeting.** These were accepted.
5. **Matters arising.** JJF had assisted EPSRC with an investigation of the poor success rates for first grant applications in Statistics. The main issue was that referees were generally more negative than referees in other areas.

6. Publications

- (a) **Postgraduate publicity.** The annual request for updates had been made in January, and any changes notified had been effected. COPS members were invited to check the web site links to postgraduate opportunities at their universities, and inform JJF of any further amendments required.
- (b) **Directory of Academic Statisticians.** Alan Mayer is still progressing a fully electronic version of the DAS.

7. Domestic matters

- (a) **Membership** is stable. [Please inform JJF and Julian Stander of new members].
- (b) **Financial report.** Presented by JJF in the absence of the COPS treasurer, Julian Stander. The treasurer proposed that, as we have a healthy balance, and no major items of expenditure are anticipated, no membership fee should be charged in 2010. This was accepted by the meeting. The meeting thanked JS for his ongoing efforts as COPS treasurer.
- (c) **Data collection.** JJF presented the data for 2008-9, which was the second year of operation of the reduced questionnaire. Again, the response rate had been good. (See attached paper).
- (d) **COPS Executive** subcommittee. JJF reported that Bob Gilchrist's term of office on the subcommittee had ended at the end of 2008, and that he had been replaced by Wilfred Kendall. Bob was thanked for all his efforts on behalf of COPS. JJF informed the meeting that, at the end of 2009, he would have served as COPS chair for three years, and that he intended to stand down at that time. He proposed that the other members of the COPS executive be charged with the task of identifying a new Chair. This was agreed by those present.

8. Research Excellence Framework (REF)

David Firth gave an overview of the current thinking on the format of the forthcoming REF. There was likely to be three elements, Outputs, Environment and Impact (with weightings 60%, 20% and 20% respectively). Esteem, which had formed a separate element in RAE2008 would be assessed under environment in the REF. The methodology for assessing impact was still to be developed but the definition of impact was not intended to include academic impact. Other aspects of the RAE would be retained (subject panels, a small number of outputs, results returned as profiles). The result of the pilot exercise on bibliometric assessment had been that citation data was not suitable for measuring quality. The proposal is that citation data would "inform" peer review of outputs. There will be a consultation in Autumn 2009, on full proposals for the REF.

A discussion on the REF ensued. JJF proposed that a COPS response to the consultation, when it was issued, would be drawn up by the COPS Executive, and this proposal was approved by the meeting.

JJF noted that this was the first COPS meeting since the RAE2008 process had been completed. He proposed a vote of thanks from COPS to Bernard Silverman as UoA22 chair, and all other Statisticians who had served the community so well on RAE panels. This was approved unanimously. JJF would write to Bernard, thanking him, and asking him to convey COPS appreciation to other members of the UoA22 panel.

9. **Other research and postgraduate matters**

Wilfred Kendall gave a brief update on APTS and reminded COPS members of the Advisory Committee meeting on September 17. JJF passed on a reminder from Alastair Young that the LTCC ran intensive courses in London to which any COPS department was welcome to send their students.

10. **Masters in statistics**

The context of this discussion was that Research Council funding (particularly from EPSRC) for Masters training in Statistics had been substantially reduced recently. Ways forward were discussed. It was felt that COPS should continue to lobby EPSRC, but other avenues were needed. The forthcoming national review of Postgraduate provision would be a chance to raise the issue of where responsibility for Masters funding should lie. It was agreed that COPS should respond to that consultation.

11. **Other teaching matters**

The RSS Centre for Statistical Education is shortly to move to Plymouth. There was a brief discussion of the Bologna process; further information would be placed on the COPS website.

12. **Any other business**

None