

# Minutes of APTS Advisory Committee meeting (AC14) on 10th September, 2020

**Present:** Kaustubh Adhikari (Open University), Sergio Bacallado (Cambridge), Mark Brewer (BIOSS), Carlos Rodriguez Calderon (Lancaster, Student representative), Hongsheng Dai (Essex), Isabella Deutsch (Edinburgh, Student Representative), Jochen Einbeck (Durham), Colin Gillespie (Newcastle), Paul Jenkins (APTS co-director), Adam Johansen (APTS co-director), Dmitry Korshunov (Lancaster), Finn Lindgren (Edinburgh), Brendan Murphy (University College Dublin), Philip O'Neill (Nottingham), Antony Overstall (Southampton), Jan Palczewski (Leeds), Andrew Parnell (Maynooth University), Simon Shaw (Bath), Mark Steel (Warwick), Jian Zhang (Kent)

**Apologies:** Biman Chakraborty (Birmingham), Nema Dean (Glasgow), Chris Ferro (Exeter), Paul Garthwaite (Open University), Mathieu Gerber (Bristol), Janet Godolphin (Surrey), Laura McDonnell (EPSRC), Garrett Morris (Oxford), Pete Philipson (Northumbria), Jonty Rougier (External Adviser), Julian Stander (Plymouth), Len Thomas (St Andrews), Benjamin Taylor (Lancaster), Kostas Triantafyllopoulos (Sheffield)

**In Attendance:** Shahin Tavakoli (APTS Programme Manager)

**Meeting held at:** online meeting via Microsoft Teams

**Meeting Began:** 14:00

**Meeting Ended:** 15:00

## 1 Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting on 12th September 2019

The previously circulated minutes were accepted as a true record.

## 2 Matters arising

### 2.1 From Advisory Committee Meeting AC13

**AC13-2: Paper feedback.** The paper version of feedback collection was only implemented for week 1 of APTS 2019–2020 (since the other weeks were cancelled) and an email was sent to participants following the week to collect feedback electronically. 50 out of 141 participants responded to the feedback (including 8 responses via the online feedback form). In the past response rates for paper feedback were higher, perhaps due to the presence of an APTS representative who would encourage feedback to be completed. APTS management will continue to ask module leaders to encourage participants to provide feedback.

**AC13-3: Changes to R resources and module descriptions.** It was suggested in AC13 to ensure that (1) the module descriptions are sufficiently detailed that students can make an informed choice as to whether participation would be beneficial to them, and (2) to make sure the R resources are appropriate and up to date. APTS contacted all module leaders. Based on their responses, module descriptions are now slightly more detailed for the purpose mentioned above. All were happy with the current R resources, though two noted that the resources are perhaps a bit dated.

**Action:** Continue to review the R resources APTS is providing (APTS Management).

**AC13-3: improving alumni feedback rates.** It was decided to look into ways of improving the alumni feedback rate. ADAM JOHANSEN looked at using LinkedIn group for collecting feedback, but targeting a particular cohort did not seem feasible for technical reasons. The APTS management team will continue to investigate routes to improve feedback response rates.

**AC13-8: Amount of printed materials for APTS weeks.** Starting with the Cambridge Dec. 2019 APTS week, APTS now asks participants if they wish to receive printed versions of the lecture materials, and only those wishing so will receive printed materials. The module leaders were also asked explicitly to consider the amount they were asking to be printed. About 70% of students wanted printed material for the week hosted by Cambridge in December 2019.

## 2.2 From Executive Committee Meeting EC14

**EC14-10: APTS Collaboration Agreement.** The collaboration agreement is in the process of being renewed for the new five-year period of APTS management commencing from 2021. No substantial changes to the current agreement seem necessary. The APTS Management team has circulated a working draft to the APTS Underwriting Institutions and has received some comments. A number of points of detail were raised, but none of them are substantial and currently APTS co-directors do not foresee any difficulties in getting the agreement in place on the right timescale.

## 2.3 From Executive Committee via email

**Statistical Machine Learning Module.** Following up from EC14, a new module on “Statistical Machine Learning” will be delivered starting this year (2020–21), replacing the module on “Flexible Regression”, and Louis Aslett has kindly agreed to deliver it.

## 3 Covid-19 Response

PAUL JENKINS: The lockdown started mid-March. Weeks 2–4 of 2019–2020 had not been held by that point, and had to be cancelled due to the outbreak. Week 2, scheduled for 30 March 2020, was cancelled immediately while weeks 3 and 4 were cancelled closer to their scheduled dates due to the uncertainty associated to potential easing of the lockdown. No cancellation costs were incurred.

Since local organization of APTS weeks as well as module leaders had already put in a non-negligible effort in preparing for the APTS weeks, APTS honoured its commitment to make payments to their institutions in compensation for that work. No registration fees were collected, and APTS provided the supporting materials for the cancelled modules on its website. Overall, APTS was able to absorb the financial consequences.

Given that no warning of cancellation was given to module leaders sufficiently ahead of the APTS week, it was decided that it would be unfair to ask module leaders to move to an online delivery for the cancelled APTS week. There was nevertheless interest for online module delivery from participants. APTS will implement online delivery provisions for 2020–2021 in case face-to-face delivery is not feasible. Cambridge has already confirmed that it will not be able to host week 1, and the week will be therefore delivered online. The two module leaders concerned have been notified and have started preparing for online delivery. The following note has been added to the student registration page to communicate this:

### **\*\* Contingency planning for 2020/21 \*\***

The coronavirus pandemic means that the future is a little less predictable than has generally been the case in recent times. There is a possibility that one or more of the APTS weeks planned for 2020/21 may not be able to go ahead as a face-to-face event. If we are unable to have sufficient confidence that an APTS week can proceed safely then an online alternative will run in its place. This is expected to take the form of recorded video lectures covering equivalent content, as well as the accompanying written materials (preliminary reading, lecture notes, and assessments). There will also be opportunities for live online interaction with the module leader and other participants, the exact nature of which will vary depending on what is most appropriate for the content of the module, but may take the form of problem classes or guided computer practicals over video conferencing software. Should an APTS week be replaced by a “virtual” alternative then no accommodation/meal costs will be charged to a student’s sending institution. The original registration fee for the APTS week, which covers administrative and delivery costs that will not be lessened by such a cancellation, will still be levied and will be subject to the usual Billing and Cancellation policy.

A discussion followed about the operational aspects of a virtual APTS week.

PAUL JENKINS: there is some freedom regarding, for example, the technology used for online delivery, the balance of asynchronous versus synchronous teaching, and the length of teaching sessions. SIMON SHAW: Darren and himself were considering recorded lectures of 1h–1h30 split into shorter chunks, with some form of live interaction with students, through problem classes or question & answer sessions. He highlighted that one of the advantages of APTS was that it allowed students to meet each other (and meet the module leaders) which helped creating a community of PhD students, and that emulating this virtually would probably be the most challenging aspect of moving to online delivery. MARK STEEL: incoming PhD students at Warwick were encouraged to set up a form of

social media interaction between them to create a cohort feeling. This could be easy to do with APTS participants. GDPR-related regulations needed to be respected while implementing this (e.g. having participants share their email addresses themselves instead of APTS sharing these on their behalf), and that the multi-institutional aspect of APTS might create technological difficulties due to the varying type of online meeting software used. COLIN GILLESPIE mentioned the “hopin” platform (<https://hopin.to>) which randomly pairs participants so that they can interact with people they don't yet know. ADAM JOHANSEN proposed to ask the participants themselves for idea of platform to use. BRENDAN MURPHY: UCD PhD students have set up their own virtual interaction platform in the form of a reading group. SERGIO BACALLADO suggested to estimate the number of universities represented in the meeting that use Microsoft Teams; a large majority, though not all, of respondents present indicated that this technology was used by their institution. SERGIO BACALLADO noted his knowledge of an online module that uses discussion points (scheduled every week) as a means (not initiated by students) of engaging students. For an APTS week this could happen a couple of times during the week. Other suggestions included use of a scheduled reading group in advance of the APTS week. ANTONY OVERSTALL: it could be possible that an APTS week takes place face-to-face, but that some universities would not allow their students to attend physically. What of APTS' cancellation and billing policy—in particular refunds of registration costs—in such cases? FINN LINDGREN: similar scenarios could happen due to distinct attendance restrictions imposed by different governments of the sending institutions. JOCHEN EINBECK What are APTS' expectation concerning the module delivery in such cases, where some students would wish to attend the week virtually? ADAM JOHANSEN It is difficult to predict at this stage what APTS will be able to do in terms of changing the cancellation policy, and that it has not made any explicit plans to amend the billing & cancellation policy in the coming year. Situations such as the ones mentioned will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure all sending institutions are treated fairly and equally. In terms of delivery, though it is likely that not all registered participants will be able to participate physically and that some online surrogate to the face-to-face lectures might be desirable, APTS is not necessarily expecting host organizations to do large amounts of work toward this goal, but will nevertheless be very grateful for any kind of support they would be willing to provide in that matter, particularly in recording lectures, in order to avoid having to ask module leaders to prepare both video lectures in addition to face-to-face lectures.

## 4 Report of APTS 2019–2020

SHAHIN TAVAKOLI gave a brief overview of the report. The initial registration numbers were in line with previous years. Week 1 (Cambridge) was a record (or close to one) in terms of attendance. He pointed out that all the summary statistics on the report referred to week 1 of 2019–2020, since all other weeks were cancelled. The response rate to the alumni questionnaire (2016–2017 cohort) was in line with what is usually expected (37 responses this year, compared to 44 last year). Participants were generally happy with the training provided by APTS, with 92% of the respondents recommending it to new PhD students.

## 5 Programme for APTS 2020–2021

The following programme was reported.

1. [online] 14–18 December, 2020  
     Statistical Inference. (Simon Shaw)  
     Statistical Computing. (Darren Wilkinson)
2. Durham 19–23 April, 2021  
     Applied Stochastic Processes. (Nicholas Georgiou and Matthew Roberts)  
     Statistical Modelling. (Helen Ogden)
3. Lancaster 12–16 July, 2021  
     High-dimensional Statistics. (Yi Yu)  
     Computer Intensive Statistics. (Paul Jenkins)
4. Oxford 13–17 September, 2021  
     Design of Studies and Experiments. (Dave Woods)  
     Statistical Machine Learning. (Louis Aslett)

PAUL JENKINS noted that a new module on Statistical Machine Learning will be delivered in the coming academic year. APTS is very grateful to Louis Aslett to have agreed to deliver this module. A sketch outline of the module, prepared by the module leader was presented by PAUL JENKINS. The outline will be shared with the advisory committee via email alongside these minutes to collect comments. SHAHIN TAVAKOLI commented that the kernel trick was briefly covered in High-dimensional statistics.

**Action:** Ensure that Louis Aslett is aware of the material delivered in other modules as to minimize overlapping material (APTS Management).

## 6 Dates and Locations for APTS 2021–2022

The following dates and locations were reported for advanced planning purposes:

1. Warwick 13–17 December, 2021
2. Nottingham 25–29 April, 2022
3. Durham 11–15 July, 2022
4. Glasgow 16–20 August, 2022

PAUL JENKINS noted that Cambridge is taking a break from hosting APTS weeks after hosting the first week of the year nine consecutive times, and that APTS warmly thanked Cambridge for its continuous contribution in supporting APTS and the community for all these years. He invited and kindly encouraged Institutions to place bids to host future APTS weeks, therefore further supporting the community and training of the future generation of statisticians. ADAM JOHANSEN reminded the committee that host Departments are paid £1K for organizing a week.

## 7 Elections

### 7.1 Advisory Committee representative to the Executive Committee

Brendan Murphy's turn is at an end. Brendan Murphy was the only nomination received and he was elected *nem. con.*

**Agreed:** Brendan Murphy is elected as AC representative to the EC for a further two years.

## 8 Any other business and general feedback

### 8.1 APTS Blog

ADAM JOHANSEN: contributions in the form of writing a blog post from any member of the AC is warmly welcomed. Stefan Stein will continue to be the student maintainer of the blog for the next Academic year, but since he is reaching the end of his PhD, it will be necessary to find someone to take over his role.

**Action:** Contact the 2019/20 participants to ask whether anyone is interested to take on the role of APTS blog maintainer in conjunction with Stefan Stein with a view to this becoming part of the annual renewal process. (APTS management)

### 8.2 Registration of students previously registered for cancelled APTS weeks

BRENDAN MURPHY enquired about allocation priority for students who are registering again for APTS weeks for which they were registered in 2019–2020, but which were cancelled.

ADAM JOHANSEN: the registration form will have a box asking whether they were registered for a cancelled week. In discussion with the Executive Committee it was decided that their allocation priority would be immediately after 1st year students in statistics and probability and this will be communicated to sending institutions when registration opens.

### 8.3 Fees for online week

JOCHEN EINBECK queried about the fees for weeks delivered online. ADAM JOHANSEN clarified that only the registration fees of £160 would be charged in such cases, and pointed out that the costs covered by the registration fees are largely unaffected by the cancellation of the local arrangements.

### 8.4 Comments from Student Representatives

ISABELLA DEUTSCH highlighted that an important benefit gained from attending the first APTS week 2019–2020 was community building, and that it would be desirable to be able to maintain this added value of the APTS weeks in spite of possible online delivery, though the operational specifics required to meet such goal were far from obvious. She also mentioned that it would be desirable to strive for better gender representation at the AC. ADAM JOHANSEN agreed that better gender representation at the AC would be desirable. He highlighted the practical difficulties in ensuring this for this committee in particular, given that the choice of representatives sent to the AC was ultimately the prerogative of each institution, but that APTS will explore further ways of increasing gender representation in the AC.

**Action:** Explore ways to encourage diverse representation on committees and throughout our business. (APTS Management).

CARLOS RODRIGUEZ CALDERON shared his experience in attending the APTS week, mentioning that given the rather practice-oriented direction of his PhD made it a bit difficult for him to fully benefit from the Statistical Inference module, but that he connected more with the Statistical Computing module.

ADAM JOHANSEN thanked both student representatives for their helpful comments, and thanked all attendees for their participation.

## **8.5 Date of Next Meeting**

Planned date 16th September 2021, 14:00–16:00.