Minutes for APTS Advisory Committee meeting
(AC15) on 16th September 2021

online via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Adam Johansen (APTS co-director), Amanda Dougill (note-taker), Anthony Nixon (Lancaster), Antony Overstall (Southampton), Andrew Parnell (Maynooth), Aria Ahari (Student Representative), Brendan Murphy (University College Dublin), Finn Lindgren (Edinburgh), Iulia Promskaia (Student Representative), Jan Palczewski (Leeds), Jian Zhang (Kent), Jonty Rougier (External Representative), Kaustubh Adhikari (Open University), Mark Steel (Warwick), Mark Brewer (Expternal Representative; BIOSS), Mathieu Gerber (Bristol), Nema Dean (Glasgow), Paul Chleboun (APTS Programme Manager), Philip O'Neill (Nottingham), Sergio Bacallado (Cambridge), Tahani Coolen-Maturi (Durham).

Apologies:
Paul Jenkins (APTS co-director)
Simon Shaw (Bath)

Meeting Started: 14:00
Meeting Ended: 15:00

Adam Johansen opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. He reported that Paul Chleboun has replaced Shahin Tavakoli, as APTS Programme Manager.

1 Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting on 10th September 2020

After a small correction to the dates in Section 6 identified by Tahani Coolen-Maturi, the previously circulated minutes were accepted as a true record.

2 Matters arising

2.1 From Advisory Committee Meeting AC14

AC14-1: Statistical Machine Learning. To ensure that the overlap with other modules was minimized, Louis Aslett was made aware of the material delivered in other modules.

AC14-2: APTS Blog. We are still in search of someone to take up the APTS blog. Another email will go out to the current cohort after the end of Week 4.

AC14-3: Collaboration Agreement. This comes into effect on 25th September, we are just waiting for a signature form Trinity and Bristol. Adam Johansen reported that we are now close to the end of signing and that things are in good shape.

2.2 From Executive Committee Meeting EC15

EC15-1: Warwick IT Services Support. The online weeks during 2020-21 were supported by Warwick IT Services without any charge.

EC15-2: Kaggle Challenge in SML. Louis Aslett may encourage students to use Kaggle challenges to provide real data for a report as part of Statistical Machine Learning (on-going this week). Post-meeting note: some use of Kaggle is made in the assessment material.

EC15-3: Design of Experiments. We are still looking for another module leader to co-teach DeE (currently Dave Woods).

EC15-4: Simon Shaw and Darren Wilkinson confirmed they were happy to continue with their modules. Dave Woods kindly agreed to teach Design of Experiments without a co-lecturer in the coming year.

3 Report of APTS 2020–2021

Paul Chleboun gave a brief overview of the report. Initial registrations were up on line with previous years, due to cancellations last year. Online attendance was very high, it is likely to go the other way in the coming year due to social-distance restriction at host institutions. Two modules in particular were judged by students to be particularly difficult this year, Applied Stochastic Processes and High-dimensional Statistics. The response rate to the alumni questionnaire (2017–2018 cohort) was in line with what is usually expected (32 responses this year, compared to 37 last year). Participants were generally happy with the training provided by APTS, with 91% of the respondents recommending it to new PhD students.

Adam Johansen asked the group if they had any comments or concerns they wished to bring forward.

Mark Steel suggested that all module leaders should be made aware of the feedback, particularly the relative difficult of different modules. Adam Johansen advised that this has been communicated to them. Mark Steel added that it would be good to mention the need for greater accessibility. Adam Johansen agreed and said that this can be done.

Kaustubh Adhikari expressed a general feeling that students are quite happy with the format and that they have enjoyed their experiences. He suggested that recent modules have appeared shorter and that longer sessions would be appreciated.

Adam Johansen said that one aspect of difficulty is the form of the assessment, which is open-ended in some cases. We tend to assume that our module leaders know their module best. Informal feedback prior to this meeting had suggested that the assessment material for High-dimensional Statistics, for example, was both challenging for the students and difficult for academics working in other areas to assess fairly. Adam Johansen asked the group if this was reflected across other institutions.

Aria Ahari expressed a feeling that there is not always enough time, and that it can sometimes be difficult to grasp what is going on particularly with the High-dimensional Statistics assessment which resembled a mini-project.
Action: Adam Johansen to feed this back to module leaders.

Adam Johansen asked the group if solutions to assessment material is being used. It was agreed that they are, and have been provided for a number of years. Finn Lindgren expressed that although they haven't had their own students yet, others have been making use of material and there has been no particular feedback, good or bad.

Paul Chleboun continued to highlight the details from the report, noting that last years income is from registration fees only, with no food or accommodation revenue. He stated that administrative fees had been honoured for those universities that had already started planning modules, when circumstances changed and moved online. Adam Johansen stated that APTS own costs had been much the same, with no significant financial concerns.

Paul Chleboun advised that an email will be sent out with information regarding registration opening on 24th September 2021. He asked the group to please check the webpages for consistency and to let him know of anything that requires amendment, particularly in regard to contacts.

4 Programme for APTS 2021–2022

The following programme was reported.

1. **Warwick** 13-17 December, 2021
   Statistical Inference. (Simon Shaw)
   Statistical Computing. (Darren Wilkinson)

2. **Durham** 4 - 8 April, 2022
   Applied Stochastic Processes. (Nicholas Georgiou and Matthew Roberts)
   Statistical Modelling. (Helen Ogden)

3. **Nottingham** 4-8 July, 2022
   High-dimensional Statistics. (Yi Yu)
   Computer Intensive Statistics. (Paul Jenkins and Richard Everitt)

4. **Glasgow** 15-19 August, 2022
   Design of Studies and Experiments. (Dave Woods)
   Statistical Machine Learning. (Louis Aslett)

Registration Fees: £170 for each week, with a 20% reduction for students attending all 4 weeks. Accommodation and food / food only costs for each of the weeks will be:

	Accommodation and Food	**Food Only**
Warwick	£440	£160
Durham	£300	£120
Nottingham	£430	£160
Glasgow	£330	£160

5 Dates and Locations for APTS 2022–2023

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

1. Warwick 12-16 December, 2022

2. Oxford 20-24 March, 2023

3. Durham 10-14 July, 2023

4. Glasgow 14-18 August, 2023

6 Elections

6.1 Advisory Committee representative to the Executive Committee

Adam Johansen reported that Jochen Einbeck's turn is at an end, after many years of service. Therefore we are looking for a replacement representative. As no nominations had been put forward, Adam Johansen asked the group if anyone wished to volunteer. No nominations were forthcoming.
Action: APTS Management Team to send out another email asking for people to put themselves forward.

7 Covid-19 Response

Adam Johansen reported that weeks 1 and 2 were moved online in advance and that lecture material was pre-recorded. Week 3 had to be moved to online delivery fairly last minute and was delivered synchronously. Week 4 returned to the previous online model. Students were allocated, or set up their own, reading groups prior to each week, following the same model as set up after the suggestions of the previous AC.

By registering a student, institutions will be committing to send the student for face-to-face delivery in the event that the week goes ahead in person (i.e. registration fees will still be subject to the usual cancellation policy). Would people be in favour of hybrid events in the case of severely limited attendance due to restrictions? We will ask for preference on the registration form for participation in the event of further restrictions, e.g. hybrid delivery. There seems to be a preference in student feedback for live lectures if things do take place online - and we would hope that any hybrid events can be attended synchronously online. The following note has been added to the student registration page:

> **** Alternative delivery ****
> There is a possibility that one or more of the APTS weeks planned for 2021/22 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 (APTS reserves the right to make this assessment at its sole discretion) then all reasonable attempts will be made to ensure that 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 move to an online event, will still be levied and will be subject to the usual Billing and Cancellation policy.

Adam Johansen asked the group for any comments about what happened last year and what we should do this year. Jonty Rougier requested clarification for this year's modules and particularly whether they would be the same modules as in the previous academic year. Adam Johansen confirmed that they were. Jonty Rougier continued, saying that contingency planning was required, particularly in respect of the possibility of losing a module leader, rather than just a venue not being available. Adam Johansen agreed and stated that recorded material could be used if a lecturer could not deliver, but that this would only be done with explicit permission from the relevant module leader / content creator. Jonty Rougier asked if it would be helpful to have a designated reserve lecturer for each module. Adam Johansen agreed that it probably would and said

that this would be explored. Tahani Coolen-Maturi said that she felt last years online module delivery had worked well for people that were finding travelling a challenge or who had childcare issues.
Action: APTS Management Team to consult module leaders over possible "reserve" module leaders who could support delivery in the event of a module leader becoming unavailable (possibly making use of existing recorded resources).

Adam Johansen explained that as things continue to unfold this year, there might be need for changes. If we need to deliver entirely online, then we could utilise live lectures rather than recorded ones. The expectation at the current time, though perhaps optimistic, is that all the weeks will go ahead as face-to-face events. He said that suggestions about what could be done better were very welcome, should we have to move online again. He continued to explain that there are a number of complications due to limited choices, long-term agreements for accommodation etc. and that face-to-face interactions are seen as beneficial so as not to lose the social side. He highlighted that various universities have capacity restrictions in place; for example only 50 people are allowed in the large lecture theatres at Warwick, meaning that video links become essential, though not ideal. However, if we are in a position where videos are being taken, then it is possible that we have a hybrid delivery model. Whilst optimising face-to-face, video could give an option to those that prefer this method or have issues attending in person. When registration is complete, we may be able to offer places that have accommodation for this.

Tahani Coolen-Maturi expressed a wish for Durham to have a contingency for hybrid modules, and said that using the technology we have, this could be a possibility. Adam Johansen said that, in the event that we can't do face-to-face, a hybrid route would be preferable and would be explored with host institutions.

Jonty Rougier asked if APTS has a contingency plan for any student that displays as positive for Covid-19. Adam Johansen answered saying that each institution already has a robust policy in place. Jonty Rougier noted that the difficulties faced by APTS students away from home required to isolate would be more substantial than those faced by students at their own institution.
Action: APTS Management Team to consider mitigation strategies for this issue and to liaise with host institutions over their implementation.

Jonty Rougier then asked if there were any cost implications to all the changes and things that need to be put in place. Adam Johansen stated that this will be considered before each week takes place. Rapid changes mean it is necessary to make firm plans much nearer to the date of each event.

Paul Chleboun clarified that, when registration opens on 24th September, students will be registered for face-to-face learning, with no guarantee of hybrid modules being possible. Adam Johansen continued saying that there is no requirement for a student to commit until we are able to lay out what we will be able to deliver. Tightening up of all the contingencies is still ongoing.

Tahani Coolen-Maturi asked if there is a possibility for second year students to be treated as if this were their first year, as events were out of their control last year. Adam Johansen said that we are exploring prioritisation rules and that this is being considered. As the number of students requiring assistance are likely to be smaller than last year, this should be manageable. Adam Johansen asked the group for their thoughts. There were no further comments.
Action: Adam Johansen to consult the executive committee.

8 Any other business and general feedback

8.1 Comments from Student Representatives

Adam Johansen welcomed student comments about any aspects of APTS

Aria Ahari advised that a couple of students had suggested it would be nice if we had pre-recorded video and materials supporting the use of the R language. He also stated that the live lectures with schedules were enjoyable, having an easier style and being similar to attending a lecture. Adam Johansen said that he had heard broadly similar feedback. He also stated that some material is rather dated and not suiting student needs. He repeated the call for good resources to be signposted to him, saying that he would welcome all ideas. However, there is of course an ongoing cost to keep things up to date.

Iulia Promskaia agreed with Aria Ahari saying that live deliveries are much easier to schedule, whereas pre-recorded are more challenging to timetable. With the amount of uncertainty, there may be an issue for international students hoping to attend a particular week, applying for visas etc. For them an online alternative would be very useful. Adam Johansen said that the management team was aware of this and was exploring options, but that resourcing might constrain what is possible.

Jonty Rougier said that the quality of sessions at the RSS conference in Manchester were very high and most enjoyable. He asked if it would be worth showcasing their lecturers doing their real research. It would be very gripping to hear about what they are working on and see them in action. The event is in Aberdeen next year. Adam Johansen agreed that this is worth exploring.

Mark Brewer stated that he is the Chair of RSS for 2022. He said that he thought it would be a really nice idea to have sessions for the lecturers and would make enquiries. Adam Johansen thanked him and asked him to take it forward if possible.
Action: Mark Brewer to explore the possibility of the Young Statisticians Section hosting a session based on the research of APTS lecturers at the next RSS Conference in Aberdeen.

Adam Johansen thanked the student representatives for their helpful comments, and thanked all attendees for their participation.

8.2 Date of Next Meeting

Planned date 15th September 2022, 14:00–16:00.

Adam Johansen stated that although this should be a face-to-face meeting, virtual attendance would be supported for participants who did not wish to travel to Warwick.