



## **Minutes for APTS Advisory Committee meeting (AC16) on 15th September 2022**

online via Microsoft Teams and MB2.24, Mathematical Sciences Building, University of Warwick

### **Present:**

Adam Johansen (APTS co-director), Paul Jenkins (APTS co-director), Amanda Dougill (note-taker), Paul Chleboun (APTS Programme Manager), Jian Zhang, Jonty Rougier, Brendan Murphy, Adhikari Kaustubh, Chris Ferro, Andrew Parnell, Len Thomas, Anastasia Papavasileiou, Tahani Coolen-Maturi, Corradin Riccardo, Finn Lindgren, Simon Shaw, Sergio Bacallado de Lara, David Leslie, Nicola Branchini.

**Apologies:** Mark Brewer.

**Meeting Started:** 14:00

**Meeting Ended:** 15:50

Paul Jenkins opened the meeting by welcoming everyone.

## **1 Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting AC15 on 16th September 2021**

As there were no comments, the previously circulated minutes were accepted as a true record.

## **2 Matters arising**

### **2.1 From Advisory Committee Meeting AC15**

**AC15-3:** It was noted that the assessments for some modules, particularly high-dimensional statistics, had been set as being rather too open-ended. It was agreed that this feedback would be fed back to module leaders. Paul Jenkins advised that this has been done, adding that hopefully things have improved for this year.

**AC15-7:** In a discussion on contingency planning for Covid-19, it was agreed that APTS would consult module leaders over nominating possible 'reserve' module leaders who could support delivery in the event of a module leader becoming unavailable (possibly making use of existing recorded resources). Paul Jenkins advised that this has been done. For modules delivered by a pair this has been rather straightforward. This year we did have one close shave, with one module leader testing positive in the week prior to their APTS week, but in the end no changes were needed.

**AC15-7:** It was also noted that APTS students required to isolate away from home would face more difficulties than usual and that the APTS Management Team should liaise with host institutions over their implementation. Paul Jenkins advised that we have done this and asked each local organiser to confirm that their institution has some mitigation strategies in place. It seems these days most institutions have gained some experience in these kinds of issues.

**AC15-7:** Given the difficulties students have had in attending APTS over the last two years, the AC requested that we consult the Executive Committee to consider continuing our policy that second-year students be treated as if this were their first year for the purposes of administering the prioritisation process during registration. Paul Jenkins advised that this has been done; the EC agreed to maintain this policy for an additional year. In the event, all students requesting a place could be accommodated anyway.

**AC15-8:** Mark Brewer (BioSS) agreed to explore the possibility of the Young Statisticians Section of the RSS hosting a session based on the research of APTS lecturers at the next RSS Conference in Aberdeen. Paul Jenkins advised that this has been done. A session comprising four current and former APTS lecturers, including a talk by co-founder Prof David Firth on the history of APTS, was proposed by the APTS management team and has been accepted. It was noted that it was taking place concurrently with this meeting. Discussion followed regarding the regularity and role of continuing in future years.

**ACTION:** to investigate the possibility of future, but not necessarily annual sessions at RSS, seek feedback from this year's speakers and to consider what formats might be most appropriate, with speakers potentially including students and alumni.

## **2.2 From Executive Committee Meeting EC16**

**EC16-8:** There was a discussion of the particular difficulties that arose during APTS week 1 of 21-22 held in Warwick in December 2021. This took place at a time of rapidly rising Covid cases and shifting government guidance. As a result, there were a large number of cancellations given at short notice as well as students who had to drop out during the week. A small number reported that they had tested positive for Covid. The EC agreed to deviate from its usual cancellation policy and not charge those that cancelled or changed their attendance, "as a one-off gesture of goodwill, without establishing a precedent". Specifically, it agreed not to pass on any accommodation or food costs to those who cancelled or moved to online attendance at any point between the registration period and the end of APTS week 1. Paul Jenkins reported that invoices for this APTS week were issued on this basis.

**EC16-9:** An update on the APTS Collaboration Agreement for the five-year period 2021–2026, which has been signed by all underwriting institutions and is now in effect. At the time of the last EC there were ongoing negotiations between the legal teams of Warwick and Durham – the latter is not a UI but had been asked to sign a 'host institution agreement' for the APTS weeks it was scheduled to host in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Paul Jenkins was pleased to report that Durham has now signed these host agreements.

**EC16-11:** With Dave Woods stepping down as module leader for Design of Experiments, the EC agreed to replace this module, in its spirit of ongoing rotation of topics, with a new module on Causal Inference. Paul Jenkins was pleased to report that, following that meeting, we have now had agreement from Vanessa Didelez of Bremen and Robin Evans of Oxford to co-lead a module on this topic from 22-23. Adam Johansen took this opportunity to express his thanks and those of APTS to Dave Woods for his considerable service to the academy both in leading this module and more broadly.

## **3 Report of APTS 2021–2022**

Paul Chleboun ran through the report, shared on screen and circulated previously, giving a summary. He highlighted that 2020-21 had inflated attendance numbers, as sessions were cancelled in 2019-20, and have remained significantly higher than pre-pandemic. Students are still attending in later years and registration numbers are increasing, although this may change when we are back to exclusively in-person delivery. There was one new module leader this year: Richard Everitt. There is a good geographic spread of students attending. Student feedback: preliminary material usage as expected, most say it is helpful, difficulty level rated Applied Stochastic Processes now in-line, and High-dimensional Statistics still rated as too difficult by

quite a large proportion of respondents. It was noted that feedback response rates are good in the first week but drop in the second week. Classes are considered overall to be very helpful. The number of students completing the assessment is broadly in-line. Alumni Feedback: APTS is recommended by 96% of students, which is very positive. Discussion followed regarding the timing of gathering feedback, however it was agreed that although there might be benefits in gathering feedback a year later it would be difficult to do so logistically as contact details for PhD students tend to lapse shortly after the current point of collection. Nothing was noted as being concerning in the data.

## 4 Programme for APTS 2022–2023

The following programme was reported.

1. **Warwick** 13-16 December, 2022 – Note the non-standard Tuesday start.  
Statistical Inference. (Simon Shaw)  
Statistical Computing. (Darren Wilkinson)
2. **Oxford** 20-24 March, 2023  
Applied Stochastic Processes. (Nicholas Georgiou and Matthew Roberts)  
Statistical Modelling. (Helen Ogden)
3. **Durham** 10-14 July, 2023  
High-dimensional Statistics. (Yi Yu)  
Computer Intensive Statistics. (Richard Everitt)
4. **Glasgow** 14-18 August, 2023  
Causal Inference. (Vanessa Didelez and Robin Evans)  
Statistical Machine Learning. (Louis Aslett)

[Costs were reported after the meeting:]

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	£400	£160
Oxford	£460	£160
Durham	£310	£120
Glasgow	£380	£160

## 5 Dates and Locations for APTS 2023–2024

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

1. Warwick 11-15 December, 2023
2. Nottingham 8-12 April, 2024
3. Durham 8-12 July, 2024
4. Oxford 9-13 September, 2024

We note that this programme was put together after APTS was obliged to accept one unusually expensive bid from Warwick due to the absence of alternative bids. Very few institutions are prepared or able to bid to host an APTS week in December – the only other host of APTS week 1 ever has been Cambridge, who has indicated that it wishes to step back from hosting APTS weeks for the foreseeable future. The APTS Management Team tried to seek alternative bids, unsuccessfully, and to reduce the cost of the Warwick bid, with limited success. We therefore have a long-term problem with the APTS Calendar which was flagged here as it fed into discussion of one of the upcoming items on the structure of the APTS timetable. As short-term mitigation we are happy to announce that, as a gesture of goodwill, the Dept of Statistics at Warwick has kindly offered to subsidise the costs of this APTS week by £100 per head. We are grateful to the Dept for this support.

Discussion followed regarding week 1 being quite an expensive bid week and ways to seek alternatives. The Department of Statistics at Warwick is subsidising this year by £100 per head, thanks to the Head of Department, Jon Forster. Adam Johansen advised that capacity is also becoming an issue and will be discussed further in item 7 of this meeting.

## **6 Elections**

The term of the Advisory Committee representative to the APTS Executive Committee has come to an end. The Committee thanks Brendan Murphy (Dublin) for his service. Additionally, we have a vacancy for a second representative post. Members of the committee were invited to nominate themselves for these positions.

Jonty Rougier and Brendan Murphy were nominated, and elected nem. con.

## **7 APTS Delivery Model**

Adam Johansen gave an overview and reasons for this discussion. Fifteen years into APTS's operation, a great deal has changed and now is a good time to take stock, consider what we do and whether there might be scope for improve. The EC will be discussing this in January and we would like to feed the thoughts of this committee into those discussions: particularly if there are changes that would be problematic for some MIs.

### **7.1 Timing and Schedule**

It's very hard to secure reasonable accommodation for the first APTS week; it will be very expensive next year. Warwick and Cambridge are the only institutions which have ever hosted this week; Cambridge have indicated they are unlikely to do so again, and Warwick often has been prohibitively expensive, and limited accommodation available. Absent a realistic expectation of receiving bids from other institutions, we need to explore alternative possibilities.

Adam Johansen outlined some possibilities and welcomed thoughts on (a) how well these options might work for your institutions (and more broadly) and (b) are there other possibilities we should explore?

#### **Possibilities:**

- \* Identify 5 or more slots through the year with a view of populating four of them depending on host availability: perhaps 1 over Christmas, 2 over easter and 2-3 over summer.
- \* Have two two-week sessions each hosting 4 modules. More work for fewer hosts each year. Lumpier aggregation reduces flexibility. Attending only one week could be made an option.
- \* Have one two-week session; and two one-week blocks.

- \* Reduce the number of weeks to 3, and the number of modules to 6.
- \* Reduce the number of weeks to 3, run each week over a full seven days and increase the number of modules to 9.
- \* Variations on these themes.

Discussion followed regarding: holding a session in early January; making the first session on-line; regional hubs for the first week; the current set-up and pace working well; whether there is room to increase intensity; starting the yearly cycle in January; assessment timings; utilising facilities outside of the University establishments; administrative burdens; advantages/disadvantages for students; visa issues.

The view of the committee was that avoiding changes to the format of individual weeks would be highly desirable and that should change be necessary the first of the options proposed was the most desirable. Starting later in the academic year would be less problematic to the institutions of those represented on this committee than the alternative options.

**ACTION:** to take these views and interesting ideas forward to Executive Committee and to include encouragement to consider non-standard venues in future calls for bids.

## 7.2 Curriculum

Adam Johansen posed the question: Are we happy with the current curriculum? Are there large changes we would like to make? For example, Jonty Rougier has made a suggestion involving replacing ASP with an “Approximation” module.

The HDS module will need renewal soon: are there others who could lead the module who might appeal to a broader group of students; or is there a different module that could profitably replace HDS? How about “Approximation”?

Are there any suggestions for module leaders to succeed any of the current lecturers, particularly:

- \* Darren Wilkinson
- \* Simon Shaw
- \* Helen Ogden
- \* Matt Roberts & Nicholas Georgiou [how might the ASP module in particular evolve?]
- \* Yi Yu

Discussion followed regarding: replacing module leaders more regularly; the value of adding Approximation; delivering modules; using a wider pool of people to deliver sessions; being mindful that these are 1<sup>st</sup> year PhD modules; giving an introduction to a broad base; remaining relevant and on-topic. Several members of the committee expressed support for moving ASP to week 3 where it would be paired with CIS, leaving HDS or its successor paired with Statistical Modelling in Week 2. Adam Johansen asked everyone to consider this further and get in touch via email if they had any more ideas, suggestions or comments.

**Action:** to feed these suggestions and ideas into the next EC discussion.

## 8 Student representative feedback

Adam Johansen invited Nicola Branchini to make comments. Though he admitted that her thoughts might be slightly Edinburgh biased, he felt that most people seem to be happy with the content and organisation. Having to use the train for long distances can make starting early morning difficult. July and August weeks are currently quite close, in comparison to the others. The last week being mid-August is holiday season for some and can be inconvenient. Practicals are quite long and there is not much time to complete them. Some have voiced complaints about the food options for vegetarian and vegans. Preliminary material can be overwhelming for some. Linking active research to topics would be a useful addition.

Adam Johansen responded to some of these points noting that not everything was entirely within the control of APTS or even local organizers particularly with catering considerations, and noted that there was some helpful feedback here which APTS would aim to act upon.

**Action:** review timetable with a particular emphasis on start and end times

**Action:** encourage module leaders to spend some time making connections with current research topics

**Action:** discuss practicals, their role and guidance upon them and related issues with module leaders

**Action:** review guidance on preliminary material to module leaders: it should be short and focussed so as not to be intimidating and, most importantly it should be fun and engaging.

## **9 Any other business and general feedback**

### **9.1 Printed Materials**

Tahani Coolen-Maturi raised a question about using digital material rather than printed where possible and wondered what student thoughts might be. Discussion followed about practicalities; however, it was generally agreed to be a more environmentally sound approach.

**ACTION:** to adopt a policy of not normally providing printed lecture materials, articulating this policy to all stakeholders well in advance and aspiring to make electronic versions of materials available in advance of the week.

### **9.2 Date of Next Meeting**

Planned date 14th September 2023, 14:00–16:00.