

## **Minutes of the APTS Advisory Committee meeting 11<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

Meeting held at University of Warwick.

Present: Wilfrid Kendall (chair: APTS co-Director), Kanchan Mukherjee (Lancaster), John Aston (Warwick), Cathal Walsh (Dublin, Galway), Richard Samworth (Cambridge), Sean Collins [EJC] (Bristol), Jennifer Rogers (Student Representative), Helen Thornewell (Student Representative), Phil O'Neill (Nottingham), Lothar Breuer (Kent), William Deans (co-opted external adviser: GCHQ), Prakash Patil (Birmingham), Leonid Bogachev (Leeds), Neil Laws (Oxford), Jon Forster (Southampton), Nick Fieller (Sheffield), David Elston (co-opted external adviser: BioSS), Robin Henderson (Newcastle).

In attendance: David Firth (APTS co-Director), Ioannis Kosmidis (APTS Programme Manager).

Meeting commenced at 14.00

Apologies for absence: Adrian Bowman (Glasgow), Brendan Murphy (Dublin), Julian Stander (Plymouth), Peter Diggle (Lancaster), Trevor Bailey (Exeter), Carl Donovan (St Andrews), Paul Garthwaite (Open), Janet Godolphin (Surrey), Eos Kyprianou (Manchester), John Newell (Galway), Simon Wood (Bath).

All members of the Advisory Committee (AC) were formally welcomed by Wilfrid Kendall.

### **1. Discussion on the minutes of the Advisory Committee meeting on 13 September 2007.**

No comments.

### **2. Matters arising.**

No matters arising.

### **3. Report on APTS 2007-2008.**

- *Member Institutions, overview of the APTS 2007-2008 programme and registrations.*

David Firth presented a summary report for the first year of APTS (2007–2008). The current situation for the subscriptions of Member Institutions and a short overview of the four APTS weeks in 2007-2008 were given. Statistics on the number of registrations were presented. There was some discussion on the current system of the prioritization of the annual APTS admissions. It was agreed to recommend continuation of the current system which is described in detail in the [APTS constitution](#), subject to minor suggestions for clarification of the policy.

- *Student feedback.*

The presentation continued with the feedback obtained from the students during the first three APTS weeks (Warwick, Oxford, Bristol).

It was agreed that student feedback on the modules was generally very satisfactory.

Comments were made on the question “How long did you spend on the preliminary material?”. It was agreed that the question might be rephrased to “Roughly, how many days did you spend on the preliminary material?” in order to get a more precise picture.

In the feedback on the level of the module lectures, *Statistical Asymptotics* differed from the rest of the modules; a significant minority of students rated that module as too hard. These figures were discussed especially by the Student Representatives (Jennifer Rogers, Helen Thornewell), who suggested the module might benefit from more examples.

The feedback on evening sessions raised several comments on whether the evening sessions should remain unaltered for the second year of APTS. Success of the evening session “How not to give a presentation” was recognised, and several similar ideas for evening sessions were proposed.

- *Student costs.*

A summary of student costs for the first APTS year was presented.

- *Registration, billing and cancellation policies.*

David Firth presented the current APTS registration, billing and cancellation policies. After discussion, the AC recommended that the policies should remain unaltered for the 2008-2009 APTS year.

- *Assessment tasks.*

Students' perception of the module assessment tasks was raised. The AC recognized the fact that the collection of student feedback on the matter is difficult. The subsequent discussion was based on the opinion of the student representatives and on the verbal feedback they heard from participants in the four APTS weeks.

The student representatives commented on the amount of time required for the completion of the assessment. The AC noted that the time frame cannot be centrally controlled.

The student representatives commended the assessment model followed in the Spatial and Longitudinal Data Analysis module: the availability of several exercises both theoretical and applied in the assessment so that the choice can be made by the student depending on her/his own interests.

- *Questions.*

It was asked what is the motivation of the students of attending the APTS weeks. David Firth replied that no hard information is collected from the students on that, but that he thought, from talking to students, that there was a mixture of motivations ranging from strong interest to strong compulsion.

***Actions:***

1. Adjust the student feedback questionnaire (**IK/DF**) and clarify aspects of the registration procedure on the website (**DF**).
2. Suggest revision of the *Statistical Asymptotics* module in light of the feedback received and taking into account the comment that more examples might be beneficial (**DF/WSK**).

#### 4. Programme for APTS 2008-2009.

- *APTS module weeks 2008-2009, key dates and registration fee levels.*

Wilfrid Kendall presented the programme and the key dates for the 2008-2009 APTS year, and a preview of the 2009-2010 APTS dates. The presentation continued with the registration fee levels for 2008-2009. There was no discussion.

- *A preview of 2009-2010 dates.*

Wilfrid Kendall presented a preview of the 2009-2010 APTS dates. The student representatives raised the matter of potential clashes with the RSC and the RSS annual meeting. Wilfrid Kendall replied that a considerable effort was taken to try to avoid clashing with the RSC and the RSS annual meetings. However, success is not always possible because of the long term planning APTS has to do in order to deal with accommodation bookings etc.

- *Oxford's proposal for APTS web-lectures on R programming.*

Wilfrid Kendall announced the proposal of Oxford to make available their course on R programming in web-lecture form to the APTS students. The course is aimed to complement the computational parts of the APTS modules. The proposal was very much welcomed by the AC.

- *Questions.*

David Elston suggested that inclusion of an overview of the discipline might help students grasp the diversity of statistics, allowing them to see how the different elements relate to one another. A thorough discussion followed. Many AC members noted that the subjects covered during the APTS weeks could be complemented by the Graduate Training Program (GTP) and/or more specialized RSS courses. A specific suggestion was the possibility of introducing an evening session which attempts to map out all of Statistics, indicating the place of specific APTS modules as well as important areas not covered in APTS.

Sean Collins and Wilfrid Kendall noted the possibilities for enriching the cross-referencing between the APTS modules, a matter that should be discussed with the Module Leaders.

**Action:** Encourage module leaders towards greater cross-referencing between APTS modules (**DF/WSK**).

#### 5. Long-term future of APTS.

Wilfrid Kendall presented some remarks on the long-term future of APTS, after the end of the current EPSRC grant in 2011. The possibility of APTS moving to web-delivered lectures was discussed, but there was overwhelming AC support for the current residential model which brings the important benefit of forming a national community of young researchers in statistics.

It was suggested that further EPSRC funding should be sought in parallel with seeking new ways of funding, for example, from industry. It was felt that formation of a national community of researchers, and the promotion of career-long peer-support networks, were important long-term objectives in which EPSRC might wish to have a major stake.

Sean Collins suggested that the number of students admitted to APTS might be enhanced by both maintaining the residential model of APTS and providing web-delivered lectures in parallel. The suggestion was welcomed by the AC but the matter remained unresolved. Members were invited to submit further proposals for future discussion.

**Action:** Submit further suggestions for ways to continue the current, successful format of APTS beyond 2011 (**all**)

## 6. Election of AC representative to Executive Committee.

Brendan Murphy was elected to serve as AC representative to the Executive Committee for the next two years, 2008-10, along with Robin Henderson who continues until 2009. Prakash Patil retires from EC but remains on AC as the academic contact for Birmingham.

**Action:** Write to thank PP and to notify BM of election **(DF)**

## 7. Any other business.

- The matter of APTS coordination with the RSS Graduate Training Programme (GTP) was raised by Robin Henderson, in view of the relaunch of GTP. It was recommended that a representative of APTS be sought from the EC to join the RSS group currently discussing the future of the GTP.

**Action:** Seek APTS representative on the RSS GTP continuation committee **(DF/WSK)**

- The AC expressed its appreciation to Stephen Connor (APTS Programme Manager, 2007-2008) for his excellent work in setting up and implementing the APTS programme in its first year. The incoming APTS Programme Manager for 2008-2009, Ioannis Kosmidis, was introduced and welcomed.

*Meeting ended at 16.30.*