

# Minutes of APTS Advisory Committee meeting (AC6) on 13th September, 2012

**Present:** Chris Brignell (Nottingham), Caitlin Buck (Sheffield), Biman Chakraborty (Birmingham), Jochen Einbeck (Durham), Carl Donovan (St. Andrews), David Firth (APTS), Wilfrid Kendall (APTS; Chair), Kevin McConway (Open), Robin Mitra (Southampton), Kanchan Mukherjee (Lancaster), Brendan Murphy (UC Dublin; teleconferencing) Geoff Nicholls (Oxford), Nathaniel Shiers (Student Representative), Simon Wood (Bath), Shuaiwei Zhou (Student Representative; teleconferencing)

**Apologies:** Vivienne Blackstone (EPSRC), Leonid Bogachev (Leeds), Adrian Bowman (Glasgow), Jeremy Bradley (GCHQ), Lothar Breur (Kent), David Elston (BioSS; written contribution supplied), Chris Ferro (Exeter), Colin Gillespie (Newcastle), Susan Pitts (Cambridge), Jonathan Rougier (Bristol; written contribution supplied), James Smith (Warwick), Julian Stander (Plymouth)

**In Attendance:** Benjamin Graham (APTS Programme Manager, 2012/13), Adam Johansen (APTS Programme Manager, 2011/12)

**Meeting held at:** A1.01, Zeeman Building, University of Warwick

**Meeting Began:** 14:00

**Meeting Ended:** 15:40

## Overview of topics

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WILFRID KENDALL introduced BENJAMIN GRAHAM as the new programme manager for the coming academic year.

## 1 Minutes of Advisory Committee meeting on 15th September 2011

The previously circulated minutes were agreed.

## 2 Matters arising

### 2.1 From Advisory Committee Meeting AC5

None not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

### 2.2 From Executive Committee Meeting EC6

#### 2.2.1 EC6:5: Module leaders to be encouraged to provide skeleton solutions to assessment material

WILFRID KENDALL indicated that he will be writing to module leaders encouraging them to provide skeleton solutions to their assessment material (where it is appropriate) and also detailing other matters following this meeting.

#### 2.2.2 EC6:6: JMP Sponsorship of 2012/13 Cambridge APTS Week

WILFRID KENDALL reported that JMP are sponsoring the Cambridge Week academy dinner and that he has had several very positive meetings with Ian Cox of JMP.

#### 2.2.3 EC6:7: APTS Alumni Questionnaire

ADAM JOHANSEN delivered the attached report.

CARL DONOVAN suggested that a LinkedIn group might be a useful way to connect with APTS alumni.

#### 2.2.4 EC6:8.2: Registration fee for 2012-2013

Registration fee: £125 per week, with 20% rebate for students participating in all four weeks.

Accommodation and food:

	Accommodation & Food	Food Only
Cambridge	£255	£100
Nottingham	£265	£100
Warwick	£285	£125
Glasgow	£280	£100

WILFRID KENDALL noted that one reason for heterogeneity in pricing is that it is much easier to find cheap accommodation at certain times of year.

#### 2.2.5 EC6:4.1: Discussion of fractional FTEs and MI qualification

WILFRID KENDALL reported that such a discussion had taken place. Each year, on registration, we do have to check whether institutions have registered a fraction of their funded PhD students to qualify as Member Institutions and very occasionally a discussion between the Executive Committee institutions which appear not to have done so take place. This year no action was taken.

WILFRID KENDALL Noted that it would be helpful if any unusual circumstances which affected this were reported to us in advance.

The number of weeks for which an institution with  $n$  students who could reasonably benefit from APTS tuition must send to qualify for member institution status remains unchanged, at  $\min(8, 2n)$ , following discussion at the Executive Committee meeting.

## 2.3 From Executive Committee Meeting EC6-1

### 2.3.1 EC6-1: 3.1–3.2: Discussion of renewal of modules

Covered in detail under item 4.

WILFRID KENDALL noted that the changes which will be made as module leaders are succeeded. DAVID ELSTON'S written contribution was mentioned at this point, as was that of DAVE WOODS.

WILFRID KENDALL also noted that high dimensional inference, currently very topical, is a module which there have been growing calls for and that there may be the opportunity to introduce such a thing next year. DAVID FIRTH noted that there was the question of what such a module would replace.

BIMAN CHAKRABORTY arrived.

## 3 Report of APTS 2011–2012

DAVID FIRTH presented the previously-circulated report.

The level of demand in the current year led to APTS admitting a much larger number of students than in previous years.

WILFRID KENDALL raised DAVID ELSTON'S point about attendance numbers. It was noted that the figures referred to those returning a questionnaire rather than attending. DAVID FIRTH noted that the drop-off in attendance rates fall through the year due to the remoteness of registration.

CAITLIN BUCK suggested that some institutions would find it helpful if APTS could bill at the beginning of the year. BIMAN CHAKRABORTY noted that Birmingham would also find this helpful. DAVID FIRTH identified this as something which should be considered. WILFRID KENDALL noted that this could in principle be dealt with on a case-by-case basis in the case of *anticipated* difficulties.

**Action:** Write to DAVID ELSTON (WILFRID KENDALL)

DAVID FIRTH noted that students are not spending adequate time on preliminary material and that this is a real concern. CAITLIN BUCK suggested that we communicate with student's supervisors as well as the students themselves and the institutional academic contacts. DAVID FIRTH stated that we had relied on local contacts to disseminate information locally.

**Action:** To ensure that communications which it is appropriate to disseminate to students supervisors be sent to academic contacts in such a form and clearly marked. (Programme Manager)

CAITLIN BUCK felt that communications from within APTS would carry more weight. WILFRID KENDALL suggested that APTS could send information to be forwarded to students' supervisors to academic contacts at institutions. NATHANIEL SHIERS noted that student priorities change throughout the year and it may become more difficult to find time to dedicate to preliminary material later in the year; he also noted that those students who did prepare adequately and then found that module leaders were forced to cover that material anyway because other students had not done so may be demotivated. WILFRID KENDALL suggested holding this over to item 4.1.

DAVID FIRTH noted the difficulty of the asymptotics module. It was observed that this wasn't qualitatively different to previous years. WILFRID KENDALL noted that in one respect this module is clearly the most difficult and also that it is an area in which British statisticians are notoriously weak. He also noted that it was an area of concern to British statistics that British statisticians were 'hobbling themselves' by considering this to be 'too difficult'.

There was discussion of the view that more examples would be helpful in the Statistical Asymptotics module. DAVID FIRTH suggested that we should take this on board. KEVIN MCCONWAY asked: do we ever ask the students how *relevant* they found material — there may be a relationship between this and perceived difficulty?

DAVID FIRTH suggested that any policy decision on Statistical Asymptotics would need to be made by the Executive Committee; noting that the view taken until now has been aligned with that expressed above by WILFRID KENDALL.

DAVID FIRTH expressed disappointment with the uptake of the Oxford R modules. NATHANIEL SHIERS suggested that it may have a lower priority even than the preliminary material, and that many students are already adequately familiar with R. SIMON WOOD suggested that he felt that students were adequately prepared and that there wasn't a problem.

NATHANIEL SHIERS asked how information was fed back to module leaders and hosting institutions. He noted difficulties with accommodation in Glasgow and also that coloured notes would be very helpful for

spatial and longitudinal statistics. Would it be possible to have notes supplied in advance for Nonparametric Statistics? There was also a question as to how appropriate it was to cover long proofs in the nonparametric statistics module. Would it be possible for lectures to be video recorded? WILFRID KENDALL noted that this was a resourcing question: would it be better to provide videos or printed notes?

## 4 Programme for APTS 2012–2013

### 4.1 “Core Module” Exercises

The point was made, strongly, by one member of the Executive Committee that for some students the first half of Statistical Asymptotics was very slow and that they consequently didn't come away with a deep understanding or the more complex topics. WILFRID KENDALL interpreted this as evidence that the cohort is diverse.

It was suggested that we identify core modules and ask those module leaders to provide a number of core questions which require substantial attention which set out that which would otherwise have covered in the first part of the course allowing the lecturers to move a little less slowly at the beginning and to include more challenging material towards the end of the modules. Several members of the AC noted that they had not heard anything of the sort from their students; SIMON WOOD noted that it didn't sit comfortably with the student feedback.

**Action:** To write to the module leaders encouraging them to include one or two questions labelled as core material in the preliminary material which is sent out and to see how this works. (WILFRID KENDALL)

CAITLIN BUCK felt that it would be appropriate to make explicitly clear to students that much of this material *will* be difficult and *is expected to be*. WILFRID KENDALL noted that this needed to be done sensitively. DAVID FIRTH suggested that this is not in fact a big change and for the Statistical Inference module would be a very slight change. KEVIN MCCONWAY is there a risk that this will stop students answering the other questions, some students may struggle with this material: students should be encouraged to ask their supervisors *and* there may be an interaction with taught-course centres.

WILFRID KENDALL noted that at the present time second-year students in taught course centres are currently treated as first year students for prioritisation purposes.

### 4.2 The Scientific Method, Data Collection and Quality Control

WILFRID KENDALL presented the paper from TIM DAVIS, explaining that TD was concerned that sufficient time was not being spent on fundamental issues relating to data quality and that the attached paper was a written comment he had supplied. This summarises something that he felt should be given more attention in APTS.

WILFRID KENDALL invited comments. CAITLIN BUCK felt that some of Sheffield's students would really benefit from this, but it wasn't clear where it would fit. SIMON WOOD suggested that it would be a natural fit for a design module. WILFRID KENDALL noted that this could be passed on to DAVE WOODS in case he found it stimulating. DAVID FIRTH noted that he does a lot of this himself and that it would be difficult to teach, although the recommended chapter from Cox and Donnelly (2011) might be a useful resource.

**Action:** Convey the spirit of this discussion to DAVE WOODS (ROBIN MITRA)

### 4.3 Statistical Inference: Proposed Syllabus Revision

WILFRID KENDALL put the circulated paper into context and invited remarks.

CHRIS BRIGNELL have some things moved from the course into prerequisite material, such as Neyman-Pearson. DAVID FIRTH noted that he had hardly touched on this, and was a little surprised by the size of the pre-requisite list. DF remarked that he felt the proposal was excellent in all other respects. BIMAN CHAKRABORTY felt that all of their students would have this pre-requisite knowledge. WILFRID KENDALL noted that APTS should not be duplicating courses which would more naturally be taken to “catch up”. JOCHEN EINBECK also felt that the pre-requisites were fine, but that writing them all down perhaps makes the list appear intimidating. DAVID FIRTH noted that the module has to reflect the heterogeneity of the cohort and that this influenced both the content and the style of the module. KEVIN MCCONWAY suggested that it would depend upon how deep an understanding of these prerequisites would be assumed.

SIMON WOOD questioned the focus on hypothesis testing. DAVID FIRTH suggested that this was not important provided that the module leader has a coherent vision for the week.

WILFRID KENDALL noted that we have to place a great deal of trust in the chosen module leaders and that what really matters is what happens in practice.

**Action:** Write to JONATHAN ROUGIER to summarize the discussion. (WILFRID KENDALL)

## 5 Dates and Locations for APTS 2013–2014

Dates for the year *after* next:

16–20 Dec 2013 Cambridge

7–11 April 2014 Warwick

26 July – 1 August 2014 Leeds

1 – 5 September 2014 Oxford

## 6 Sponsorship

WILFRID KENDALL noted that we have JMP sponsorship for the academy dinner in Cambridge; and that he will be present for the presentation they will make there. Suggestions on other possible sponsorship would be welcomed. The process of preparing APTS for the end of the current tranche of EPSRC funding, taking place over the next four years, and it is desirable to make APTS as robust as is possible.

KANCHAN MUKHERJEE asked what magnitude of sponsorship was being sought. WILFRID KENDALL suggested that sponsorship reducing (e.g.) registration fees would be the ideal form. There are three other academy dinners pre-year which are unsponsored in the coming year.

## 7 Elections

### 7.1 Advisory Committee Representative to the EC 2012–2014

BRENDAN MURPHY expressed willingness to stand for another term.

WILFRID KENDALL gave a short description of what was involved and invited members of the AC to self-nominate by email to WILFRID KENDALL by Monday lunchtime (i.e. noon on 17th September, 2012).

## 8 Any other business and general feedback

### 8.1 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 12th September, 2013.

### 8.2 Additional Participant Feedback

NATHANIEL SHIERS asked what the feedback about the alternative timetable for the Glasgow week was — ADAM JOHANSEN reported that the feedback forms for this week were still being processed. NS noted that he hadn't found the different timetable made a substantial difference. SHUAIWEI ZHOU also felt that it wasn't a significant factor.

SHUAIWEI ZHOU asked whether it would be possible to extend the modules. WILFRID KENDALL suggested that this was probably financially precluded. DAVID FIRTH was pleased to hear that the students would like this. WILFRID KENDALL mentioned the availability of the Graduate Training Programme for students beyond their first year.

### **8.3 Dividing Attendance Between Two Years**

CAITLIN BUCK Caitlin Buck expressed a concern that for some overseas students it would be preferable for them to take some of their APTS modules in the second year (principally because of language difficulties) - however were Sheffield to act on this, it would risk violating the terms of being an APTS Member Institution. After some discussion THE DIRECTORS felt that this could be usefully taken to the next meeting of the Executive Committee and invited CAITLIN BUCK to provide a written comment for their attention.