

Minutes of the APTS Advisory Committee meeting 16th September 2010

Meeting held at University of Warwick.

Present: Wilfrid Kendall (chair: APTS co-Director; WSK), David Firth (APTS co-Director; DF), Lothar Breuer (Kent), Chris Ferro (Exeter), Jochen Einbeck (Durham), Paul Fearnhead (for Kanchan Mukherjee; Lancaster), Jon Forster (Southampton), Jane Hutton (for Mark Steel; Warwick), Neil Laws (Oxford), Brendan Murphy (UC Dublin), Jeremy Oakley (for Caitlin Buck; Sheffield), Prakash Patil (Birmingham), Susan Pitts (for Richard Samworth; Cambridge), Murray Pollock (Student Representative; MP), Howard Thom (Student Representative; HT), Cathal Walsh (for Simon Wilson; TC Dublin).

In attendance: Adam Johansen (APTS Programme Manager).

Apologies for absence: Leonid Bogachev (Leeds), Adrian Bowman (Glasgow), Caitlin Buck (Sheffield), William Deans (co-opted external adviser: GCHQ), Vanessa Didelez (Bristol), David Elston (co-opted external adviser: BioSS), Paul Garthwaite (Open), Kanchan Mukherjee (Lancaster), John Newell (NUI Galway), Philip O'Neill (Nottingham), David Saad (Aston), Richard Samworth (Cambridge), Jian Qing Shi (Newcastle), Julian Stander (Plymouth), Mark Steel (Warwick), Simon Wilson (TC Dublin), Simon Wood (Bath).

Meeting opened at 14:00

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

1. Minutes of the Advisory Committee meeting on 10 September 2009.

No comments.

2. Matters arising.

None not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

3. Report on APTS 2009-2010.

DF presented report attached to agendum 3.

● *Member Institutions, overview of the APTS 2009-2010 programme and registrations.*

Currently 26 registered member institutes. No changes to programme.

Agreed: to propose to the executive committee (EC) that the preference ordering (at that level in the allocation algorithm which currently prefers those students registered for all four weeks over those who aren't) be based upon the actual number of weeks for which they register with those registering for larger numbers receiving preference. Random selection to be used for tie-breaking as a last resort.

● *Student feedback.*

DF drew attention to time spent on preliminary material.

Recommended: Academic contacts to receive information about availability of preliminary material at the same time as students. An APTS academic contacts electronic mailing list will be established and copies of *relevant* student emails sent to that list.

Recommended: That module leaders review assessment material and present hints at the end of the final lecture and make this known to students in advance (to encourage attendance at the final session of an APTS week).

Alternative mechanisms for the return of feedback were discussed.

The following points were raised in general discussion:

Statistical Asymptotics: HT&MP suggested exercise sessions were helpful and greater emphasis on this style rather than formal lectures might be helpful. More examples and less abstraction? Preliminary material perhaps classed as “not useful” because it was repeated in the first lecture?

Stochastic Processes: MP suggested that one problem was a gap between background knowledge and the starting point of the course. HT suggested it was still very difficult for someone with an appropriate background. WSK noted this (as module leader).

Statistical Computing: assessment exercises were perhaps rather too hard. Perhaps some hints would help.

Oxford R lectures: Might individual departments provide support for the R lectures or otherwise help their own students prepare?

Laboratory Sessions: Might providing laboratory exercises in advance and encouraging students to bring their own laptops with appropriate software increase engagement with laboratory sessions?

4. Programme for APTS 2010-2011.

WSK presented the paper attached to agendum 4.

- *APTS module weeks 2010-2011, key dates and registration fee levels.*

Note S B Connor is returning to Applied Stochastic Processes next year.

WSK Emphasized key dates and registration procedure. Details to be circulated by email in the course of the usual registration procedure.

The Programme Manager will enquire whether Cambridge might be able to provide accommodation on the Monday night to assist those having to travel from Scotland in particular to arrive on a bank holiday?

- *Registration, billing and cancellation policies.*

Fee levels increase to £120 as decided by EC. Standard rebate for 4 weeks. Fees increasing in a phased way to provide smooth transition to likely higher cost after EPSRC funding.

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

WSK thanked the University of Oxford for continuing to host their Web lectures on R.

- *Programme for 2011-12*

Preview of dates for 2011-12 year presented.

- *General discussion:*

Agreed: preliminary material to be made available 5 (rather than 4) weeks prior to module commencement. This has been trialled during the past 3 APTS weeks.

Agreed: 90 minute lectures are long. Some students find this too long to concentrate. It is noted that some lectures introduce breaks in the middle: local organisers and module leaders should be encouraged to consider this when specifying their timetables.

It was suggested that 45 minutes coffee breaks might be counterproductive.

Noted: a new timetable will be tried in 2010-11.

5. Arrangements for APTS in years 2011-2012 and following

WSK explained context and presented papers attached to agendum 5.

Underwriting institutions receive preference and representation at EC level. Intention is risk-sharing and delocalisation of APTS ownership.

Simon Wood (Bath; via email): Some underwriting institutions may be small and fail to accrue costs up to their subscription. Suggests change such that a rebate should be made at the level of the full subscription rather than incurred costs in this instance. Alternatively: allow subscriptions to be held over to the next year. **This will be raised with EC.**

Legal formalities: it's hoped that an acceptable document will be ready for presentation to the next EC meeting in January, 2011.

William Deans (GCHQ; via email): business plans presented are two extremes (essentially best/worst case analysis). Possibility of protected places for higher-fee industrial places. [Deferred until we have knowledge of EPSRC position].

Lothar Breuer: might any future EPSRC funding continue to provide subsidised travel/subsistence for EPSRC students? WSK/DF suggested that it was unlikely that this would be the case.

WSK Presented 3 possibilities that have been discussed in meetings of the directors of taught course centres over the last year. Members of the AC were invited to comment on the following possible developments:

- To require mandatory uptake of (possibly a fraction of) modules from taught course centres for year one PhDs.
- To require mandatory (perhaps light touch) assessment based on taught-course-centre material for progression.
- Taught course centres to insert generic maths-specific skills training in programme.

Discussion:

Mandatory Uptake

- This would seem to be an RCUK decision which APTS cannot easily influence.
- Might this be preferable to an exclusive focus of funding on DTCs?
- If this increases uptake further we have two problems: capacity and the undesirable monopoly role.

Mandatory Assessment

- HT: This might actually be a positive from the student perspective.
- It's unlikely that individual organisations would be prepared to devolve control of internal progression procedures to any external agency.
- MP: How would this deal with the broad spectrum of academic backgrounds amongst participants?
- MP: Would assessment have implications for module structure and content? At present they are very open-ended, which seems desirable. WSK: We certainly don't want assessment driving the course.

- In PhD training, independence is a very highly valued output. It would not be desirable, therefore, to regulate things to the extent that the objective of APTS modules appeared to be satisfactory completion of an assessment exercise.
- Procedural difficulties: internal degree regulations. Appeals procedures.

Generic Skills Training:

- There is existing provision of generic skills within home institutions. Is this not a rather expensive way of providing the same? Might it not also *increase* funding requirements?
- Might the provision of one or two residential weekends providing sensible generic skills training be worthwhile? WSK would be happy to see this done in association with APTS but resources are not available for APTS to provide these. DF mentioned that much of the APTS administrative machinery (registrations etc.) could perhaps be used by any such effort.
- Could something be done in conjunction with the Young Statisticians Section of the RSS? Perhaps a day attached to the Research Students Conference?

WSK offered thanks for constructive suggestions.

6. Election of AC representative to Executive Committee.

Brendan Murphy (UCD) is prepared to stand again.

Murray Pollock (Student Representative) also expressed an intention to stand.

To be circulated via email.

7. Any other business.

None.

Meeting ended at 15:56.