

# **Conference feedback – Fourth Subjective Bayesian Meeting**

## **Reflective report by Sophia Wright, PhD student in Department of Statistics, September 2016**

### **How did you feel it went?**

Overall, I was very happy with the success of the day and was gratified to receive feedback that attendants had also enjoyed their time. I had arranged a diverse series of talks aimed at exploring the length and breadth of subjective Bayesian statistics and each presentation stimulated lively discussions, which lasted through to the coffee breaks. The catering was brilliant at both coffee breaks and the main lunch; however, one piece of feedback was that there needed to be more cake or biscuits during coffee breaks to keep the participants energetic. I was hoping for an attendance of around 50 people, however 39 people signed up which was on a par with the meeting held last year. I thought that this attendance was a reasonable number given that I later found out there was another workshop to be held in Warwick statistics department on the same day, as well as the Royal Statistical Society's annual workshop elsewhere.

### **How many students were involved in the organisational process?**

I was the only student engaged in the organisational process; I contacted the speakers myself, organised catering with the help of the statistics department Research Administrator and found several sources of funding to ensure the event could be held. Throughout the process I had occasional tips from a postdoc who had held a similar style event last year. This enabled me to question her about aspects I was less sure of and she also suggested alternate sources of funding when we heard that our department was unable to fund the event. I also recruited the assistance of another statistics PhD student on the day of the event who set up posters, a welcoming desk and signed in attendees when they arrived.

### **How many students were involved in presenting at the conference itself?**

I invited six speakers to present at the workshop – five early career statisticians and a keynote speaker. Unfortunately, one of the early career speakers pulled out the week before the event due to unforeseen circumstances. Remembering earlier correspondence from last year's hosts, I recalled they had specifically mentioned they would be very interested to hear about the current research being undertaken by Prof. Jim Smith (who also happens to be my PhD supervisor). I approached him to fill the slot and was very gratified to hear that he would be willing to step in at such short notice. I chaired one of the three sessions of the day, and the other two were chaired by experienced Warwick statisticians who volunteered their assistance. During the lunch break I also arranged a poster session and four early career statisticians brought along posters of their recent research which encouraged numerous discussions.

### **How many students attended the conference?**

I had 39 people sign up for the conference and as with any event there were a couple who did not show up on the day. The majority of these participants were early career researchers who work in the field of subjective Bayesian statistics across the UK.

### **What did you learn during the organisational process, and what challenges did you encounter?**

My first major hurdle was securing funding for the event to go ahead. Last year, when Newcastle University hosted, they mentioned that the Statistics Department funded the entire event, and the local RSS co-hosted the keynote speaker. Unfortunately, the Warwick statistics department could not fund this year's event, so I had to search for alternative sources of funding which is a time-consuming process as there are so many different forms and applications to write.

### **How has it contributed to your research and helped you develop?**

I found it great to meet and exchange ideas with academics in my immediate field of research. Hearing their talks and discussing their research enabled me to find new avenues of research I could explore. I also garnered many useful literature recommendations which I am keen to follow up on.

The keynote speaker works in a very similar field to me and has indicated that he would like to help me run an expert elicitation workshop which would be focussed directly on my PhD research. He has kindly given me some advice on expert elicitation and has

shared some expertise which he has collected from his many years in the field. We have corresponded since the event and are keen to stay in contact.

## **What would you do differently next time?**

If I were to hold a similar workshop again, I would try and allow myself as much time as possible. By the time I had sourced funding, I had only given myself about three months to find speakers, catering and set up all the minor details of the day. If possible, I think it much more professional to give speakers at least 6 months warning for a workshop and attendees need as much notice as possible to make travel arrangements. With hindsight I would probably change the date of my event to the end of December term as I believe that many potential attendees were away on holiday at the beginning of September.

## **Some top tips**

1. Find your funding as soon as possible so that you know what level of catering you can book and whether you can afford to reimburse speakers for travel expenses.
2. Funding does not have to be particularly large, sometimes it is inevitable that you will have to source funds from multiple little pots – try your department, any internal Warwick pots (such as PG Hub or RSSP student-led conferences), subject organisations (such as Royal Statistical Society etc.) and finally, it may be possible to find a corporate sponsor (such as a book publishing company).
3. Book the venue as soon as possible to ensure that you get the rooms you require.
4. If you find hurdles appearing, find a postdoc or other student who has held a similar event and ask them to answer a few questions over a cup of coffee – most people are willing to help and share their experiences.
5. Try to give the speakers as much notice as possible – many have their own teaching responsibilities so need ample time to arrange cover and transport.
6. Advertisement is a huge part of holding a conference – never be afraid to send round mass emails to your department or through related local organisations. Allow people to forward your advertisements to colleagues so that it reaches as wide an audience as possible.
7. Set up a website as early as possible and keep it updated at all times. Include thanks to funders, the names and abstracts of any speakers, a timetable for the day, directions to the venue, registration forms, dietary requirement forms and your contact details in case anyone has any questions.

## **If possible, what tangible results came of organising the event (e.g. publications and opportunities)?**

I am currently trying to find a host for next year's event as many attendees have indicated that they would love the meetings to continue. I have also been contacted by an Adjunct Associate Professor from Australia who wanted to attend the conference, but sadly could not make it. (Her PhD student did manage to attend and bought a poster along for the lunch-time session.) She has requested that I and a few others in the Warwick Statistics Department hold an on-line presentation day with some of her colleagues to discuss research ideas and overlapping fields of research in the near future.