

International Statistical Education Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

ICOTS II has come and gone - see below for a rather brief account of it - and there is no doubt that the great majority of participants, and probably all, enjoyed it: and so ICOTS III is already at the planning stage. But two questions remain: firstly, do these meetings do anything to improve the teaching of statistics; and secondly, whether or not the historical answer to the previous question is positive, what would those interested like to see in the programme? Anyone who has views on either point is welcome to send them to the Chairman of the ISI Statistical Education Committee, at the ISI Permanent Office.

Editorship of ISEN

The present Editor intends to relinquish the position in the near future. Discussions have taken place with a number of potential successors, but if anyone has any suggestions they wish to put forward, they should feel free to do so, either to the present Editor, or to the Chairman of the ISI Education Committee.

REPORTS FROM ROUND THE WORLD

ICOTS II

The Second International Conference on the Teaching of Statistics was held on the campus of the University of Victoria, Vancouver Island, Canada, from August 11 to 15 1986. About 400 full and 80 associate participants enjoyed a well-organised conference, in splendid weather, in a beautiful part of the world. Among the various social events organised was a logging show on the Tuesday evening, and a range of alternatives on the Wednesday afternoon including a visit to the Butchart Gardens, and salmon-fishing - though rumour has it that one of the participants from Japan turned it into a gull-fishing expedition.

The programme was very full, with plenary sessions devoted to talks by J. N. Adichie (Statistical Education in Developing Countries of Africa: The Nigerian Experience), W.H. Kruskal (Is Anyone Listening Out There? Statistics & the Public), T.P. Speed (Questions, Answers & Statistics) and J. V. Zidek (Statistics and the Quest for a Curriculum). Eleven sessions of invited papers dealt with Teaching Statistics (6-11), Teaching Statistics (12-18), Initial & In Service Training of Teachers of Statistics, Use of Computers in Teaching Statistics, Teaching Statistics

in Developing Countries, Principles of Learning Probability and Statistics, Education of Statisticians, Statisticians in Government and Implications for Teaching, Statistics in Industry and Implications for Teaching, Statistics in Business and Implications for Teaching, and a few other topics grouped into a Miscellaneous Section; tutorials and workshops dealt with Computer Packages, Computer Graphics, Statistics by Simulation, Survey Sampling, Statistical Consulting, and the Teaching of Statistical Practice; and in addition there were contributed papers and poster sessions. Clearly the programme was very diverse, but if one were trying to find a single theme, underlying much of the conference, it would be a search for the real character of statistics as it is practised and for ways of ensuring that teaching comes to terms with this character. The proceedings will be published later. A systematic enquiry into participants' views on the success of the conference is being carried out, but informal reactions suggest that most people enjoyed it.

ICOTS III, the third in the sequence, is scheduled for 1990 and according to present plans will take place in Dunedin, New Zealand, in August.

Many readers will know of the Institute of Statisticians (IOS), but for those who do not, it is a British-based, though international in outlook, society which has for many years, in addition to engaging in the usual society activities, set examinations for entry to the various grades of its membership.

The IOS now reports that it has recently agreed a contract with the European Economic Community (EEC) to act as agent and distributor of certain funds, aimed at supporting various statistical training projects in Africa. This signing followed various lengthy discussions with the Statistical Office of the European Communities (SOEC).

The overall programme covered by the contract is concerned with improving teaching, training, and applied research, as well as related activities, of parts of the African statistical training system. The programme was originally to have been managed by SOEC, but as the initial feasibility studies progressed, SOEC decided to seek the involvement of an outside organisation capable of collaborating with it in the project. A number of possibilities were explored and after careful consideration, SOEC made the decision to award the contract to the IOS.

SOEC recommended the IOS for the following reasons:

- (a) the IOS examination system and qualifications are widely recognised and accepted in many English-speaking countries throughout the world. In particular, the concept of an internationally-recognised standard of statistical qualifications, and the IOS's efforts to achieve this, is of great interest to SOEC, since it tends to facilitate easy movement of labour between different nations on the basis of a commonly recognised professional level of qualification
- (b) the IOS has extensive experience in setting and holding examinations in all parts of the world
- (c) the IOS's long involvement in validation and moderation in developing countries
- (d) the relationship that the IOS enjoys with developing countries, particularly in Africa
- (e) the declared aim of the IOS to provide assistance, on request, to any country that wishes to develop its statistical qualifications up to and including graduate level
- (f) the ability and determination of the IOS to take a wide and objective view of the resources available.

SOEC is particularly concerned to secure objective and professional management of the funds allocated to the projects. It was clear that the Institute's long history of active involvement and practical achievement overseas was of importance to SOEC; the Institute has had its own entirely self-financed overseas operations for more than thirty years.

The funds will be provided for the IOS by the EEC, and the IOS will sub-contract the necessary specific tasks to selected organisations and individuals. The primary roles of the IOS are to recommend recipients of these funds, to distribute the funds, and to report to SOEC on the use of the funds.

The objective of the projects which are covered by the contract are:

- (a) standardisation of levels and content of statistical qualifications awarded by certain African statistical training centres, by making

reference to the internationally-recognised IOS syllabuses and qualifications. The task of the IOS will be to select and send representatives to the centres concerned for the purpose of making recommendations on the action which will be taken to standardise the qualifications. Following the production of these evaluation reports, the IOS will supervise the implementation of the necessary modifications.

- (b) the organisation of teaching missions to certain African statistical training centres. Here, the job of the IOS will be to select appropriate specialists who are able to make short teaching visits to African centres in order to deliver specific specialised courses of lectures.
- (c) the organisation of 'twinning' between certain African centres and selected European institutions. The purpose of these twinings is to help to develop the teaching (and possibly research) capabilities of the African centres by establishing prolonged contact with European centres of excellence. The IOS will, in conjunction with SOEC, select the European institutions, evaluate proposed twinning programmes, and monitor and report upon their success, as well as distributing funds to support specific activities undertaken as part of the twinning.

During the discussions with the SOEC, it was made clear that an important factor in the negotiations was the mechanism of management of the contract. In particular, SOEC was impressed by certain features of the IOS.

- (a) the extensive involvement in Institute affairs of both academics and non-academics. SOEC takes the view that good professional training requires the participation of working statisticians, and is keen to avoid a situation in which the projects are managed mainly or exclusively by academic statisticians.
- (b) The connection of the IOS with individuals and organisations from a wide range of backgrounds.
- (c) the concept of 'professional membership'. The academic qualifications and experience of Members and Fellows are carefully assessed on entry to the Institute, and a certain minimum level is therefore guaranteed in IOS Fellows and Members.
- (d) the great experience of the IOS Secretariat, particularly in administering overseas examinations and a large overseas membership, and their extensive knowledge of overseas statistical affairs.

The contract will operate as follows:

- (a) the contract and associated activities will be supervised by a Project Management team (PMT), consisting of Fellows/Members of the Institute. Members of the PMT, and any organisation connected with these individuals, will be disqualified from receiving any funds arising from the contract. The PMT will take all final decisions on the recommendations to be made on project selection, selection of individuals and organisations to receive funds, and on the distribution of funds.
- (b) the PMT will be advised by a Validation Panel. Members of this panel must be Fellows/Members of the Institute and will be drawn from both academic and non-academic backgrounds. The role of the panel will be to give technical advice to the PMT.

[Adapted, with permission, from an article in The Professional Statistician, May 1986].