

Review of the 2007 Radical Statistics Conference

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RadStats members are a diverse lot, and speakers at the February 2007 conference have responded in very different ways to the theme 'Who's in Charge of Public Statistics?'

Ray Thomas broadens the current debate about governance of statistics and public trust in its products: statistics is too important to be left to the government of the day, and Ray suggests that a public corporation could ensure that the public interest in statistical information is represented. Alison MacFarlane describes several serious current threats to such information, from loss of staff and experience within ONS to the cost of public access. Daniel Smith gives a vivid example of failure by regulatory bodies to share data. And official bodies can be slow to realise new needs for data, as in the example of migrant workers set out by Gill Green.

Roy Carr-Hill returns to the theme of involving the public: bodies involved in international development could simplify their information requirements by attending to the views of local people who depend on the services.

The public interest is not confined to governmental statistics. From his academic involvement with the pharmaceutical industry, Aubrey Blumsohn describes his fight for access to data and for integrity in reporting drug trials.

Two papers on surveys conclude the proceedings. Petra Boynton describes how easily survey 'findings' can be generated as a form of Public Relations, and asks what statisticians should be doing about this. And Diana Kornbrot shows how lazy approaches to data manipulation can make published results almost useless.

As organizer of this conference, I have two comments. Firstly we were disappointed at the low attendance. The responsibility for this was largely mine; planning the conference requires timely publicity which I found hard to organize, but the choice of date causing a

clash with a major anti-war demonstration could not have been anticipated. And secondly, I found huge pleasure in the quality of presentations, in particular by newcomers to RadStats. Our conference continues to fill an important role. I'd like to thank everyone who contributed.

The annual conference is also a social event. Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, proved to be a convenient and comfortable venue, in which we could have several breaks for informal discussion. Many of us communicate throughout the year by email and post but welcome the chance to meet up in person, to chat and exchange news and ideas. A stalwart few managed to meet up on Friday night and a larger group enjoyed an Italian meal in Bloomsbury after the AGM. The two who visited the Florence Nightingale Museum on Sunday at St Thomas's Hospital can recommend others to visit. Ms Nightingale had initiated the use of Statistics to influence social policy.

Next year we look forward to the conference being hosted in Edinburgh, Scotland.



Troika members: Shailen Nandy, Geoffrey Rendle and Janet Shapiro
Sorry! No picture of Lee Williamson.