

COMMISSION ON FUTURE OF RADSTATS

BACKGROUND

Minutes of 23rd Feb AGM from Alistair Cairns (Administrator)

Given the lack of participation on the Troika (currently one member), the need to review impact, stability and entire method of producing the journal, and need for financial review it is agreed to create a temporary working committee. This group will discuss and propose ideas, circulate as appropriate and come up with recommendations well before the next AGM so that an appropriate amount of time can be given for discussion and decisions.

Motion approved: that we establish a commission to examine all aspects of RS's organisation (including aims and finance, the journal and all volunteer roles) and suggest what changes are necessary to ensure that RS is fit for purpose for the next two decades.

ISSUES

Aims:

- Problem: What are our Aims now? To what extent do they attract deter new recruits?
- Possible Solution?????

Annual Sub

- Problems: Finance
- Possible solutions?: Donations if not as per NGOs on tele! At least some marketing; Supplement for those who want printed copy

Finance:

- Problem: at current levels of expenditure (vs income), we shall be out of business in 2-3 years; online provides free access to Journal
- Possible solutions: donations/ endowments, badges and marketing, more recruits, raise sub; reduce printing costs; cap on annual conference expenses; fee for Joining Pack for those accessing online only

Journal

- Problem: Financing printed colour
- Issues: Printed or not?; Colour or not?
- Possible Solution? Perhaps B&W printed, colour online

Recruitment

- Problems: stable numbers but growing older and possibly whiter;
- Possible Solutions: Active Marketing at Conferences; 6th Form Colleges, University presence; international marketing?

Troika:

- Problems: What is Management Role – is it clearly defined; current Personnel mostly absent
- Possible Solutions: Clear statement of tasks for Troika members; criteria for membership of Troika (a bit unrealistic?)

Volunteer Roles:

- Problem: many have been ‘in office’ or several years
- Proposed Solutions:
 1. Editor: recruit a stable team?
 2. Conference Organiser (rotates annually:)Encourage more local participation – how?
 3. Copy Editor: others to provide almost immediate feedback on submissions.
 4. List Manager: another recruit to help Alison

Website manager: another recruit to help Robin.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contribution from Sean Demack

OK, I remember that there was general agreement for the journal to remain in printed form at the moment but the commission would look at how to balance the books – one thing I thought of was to go back to Black & White printing for the paper copy but provide colour online.

Sub rates and expanding membership seem important – there was also mention (David Byrne I think) of seeking funds from members (e.g. via endowments) and to look at RadStats promotional materials (badges were also mentioned ... T-shirts / fridge magnets might also follow up). If we do consider changing the subscriptions Alastair noted some logistic headaches around getting members to alter standing orders – and we will need to think how to entice the online-only people to join given that the journal is (appropriately) open access online (e.g. a joining ‘pack’).

Yes to the need for new younger members – but also to try to increase diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity. I am unsure about the international reach of RadStats (there were a fair few nationalities at the weekend).

I am also pondering about younger people –at A level or even pre-16 – e.g. could have an edition focusing on youth issues and target colleges / 6th forms for membership (sociologists, social scientists, maths and politics types).

Contribution from Alison about Time required for Considering Commission’s Report

That’s the sort of length of time I think is needed. This year, we were trying to squeeze fire fighting some urgent issues and also having the AGM in the amount of time which was appropriate for a routine AGM. We also need to present the future discussion in such a way as will attract some newcomers. Otherwise, they will think it’s just a boring business meeting and stay away. So if we have the conference on the Friday and the ‘future meeting’ on the Saturday morning. Given the poor attendance on walks in London after recent conferences, we could perhaps leave that out.

The Friday could then have the day’s programme followed by drinks for everyone and a meal for those staying over. These would allow time for discussion and perhaps persuading more new people to come back on the Saturday.

**Contribution From David Lamb (Treasurer)
Some suggestions to improve the financial position**

Events

A few years ago RadStats held a series of annual conferences with relatively large attendances, in excess of 100 people. These events generated a substantial surplus. These conferences were untypical of earlier RadStats conferences, which usually had between 25 and 50 attenders. The three most recent conferences held in Liverpool, London and Edinburgh had an attendance more typical of conferences held in the 1990s and early 2000s. These conferences did not generate the substantial surplus arising from a few conferences held in London and York.

We could organise regional conferences and charge for attendance. I don't expect these, after paying for room hire and catering, would raise sufficient funds to make a difference to the overall financial position. However we should explore the value of holding regional meetings.

A more lucrative source of income could be to offer training in applied statistics and programming. Although we've never profiled the membership of RadStats I have the impression that the employment membership use data in a variety of ways. These people can be grouped loosely in a spectrum in terms of their use of data. At one end are confident users, able to read the technical language of quantitative journals. At the other end of the spectrum are occasional users of data, eg practice managers monitoring primary care activity or administrators monitoring performance in small voluntary organisations. They have probably had some training in statistics, but lack the knowledge to make an efficient use of data. From experience I have seen eg activity monitoring reports where the writer has not tested for regression to the mean. RadStats members who use data but who haven't had as much training as they would like could benefit from input by more statistically experienced RadStats members.

I believe RadStats could offer support, both in the journal and by offering training, to these individuals so they can make a more efficient use of the data they are required to report. The groups I'm thinking of are research staff in local authorities, researchers in small voluntary groups and activists in community groups. There are likely to be many others who would welcome low cost training.

Would any members of RadStats be willing to offer short courses in data analysis and in the use of Excel and R?

RadStats Journal

When the RSS issued News and Notes, there was a Forsooth column of statistical howlers. The RadStats journal could include a similar page of dubious statements culled from the media. There are plenty every week in newspapers, TV and radio so we wouldn't be short. We could also include some comments on each item to stimulate some debate. I'm thinking of topics like regression to the mean, the ecological and individualistic fallacies, confusing correlation and causation, and Simpson's paradox. Those of us who've worked with data most of our lives are familiar with many of these, but early career RadStats members with a brief training in data analysis may not be so aware of these phenomena.

The journal could include a problems and solutions page, where a data analyst discusses eg a dataset they've had trouble analysing or the experience of being a lone statistician explaining results to non-technical colleagues.

Membership

Ideally we should be more vigorous in promoting RadStats among students of applied statistics and quantitative social science degrees. Is it feasible to write to course leaders in colleges and universities to ask them to distribute marketing material from RadStats?

Name

There's been a suggestion that we should consider another name for the group. We could change to calling ourselves Critical Statistics.

DL, April 2019