



Foreword from the President



As I complete my term as President of the Royal Statistical Society, it's a good time to reflect on the last year. A huge amount has been achieved in relation to influencing public debate, championing statistics education and supporting the profession.

My particular enthusiasm is for public engagement – I feel that statisticians, with their characteristics of balance and integrity, deserve a far stronger voice in modern debates. So it's heartening to see the amount of positive coverage the Society is receiving in the media.

The Society's voice is also being increasingly heard within the research community. In the UK, this is now organised under the cross-disciplinary UK Research and Innovation. As our subject cuts across all the research councils, this should act in our favour and we have been actively promoting statistics to this new body.

In September, I was delighted to welcome delegates from 43 different countries to our International RSS Conference in Cardiff. It was wonderful to witness the likes of Sir David Cox, Hannah Fry and Sir John Curtice on top form. However, it was the numerous smaller sessions that provided the opportunities for deeper discussion of vital issues ranging from the production of migration statistics to inferring causality.

The range of achievements outlined in this review would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of our fellows, and the many organisations with which we work in partnership. This year, I was pleased to see the huge variety of events we ran with partners, which were available for members to attend for free. For me, a highlight was the Beveridge Lecture, which this year was given by Will Moy from Full Fact – the lecture is available to view online.

I feel the statistics community is very fortunate to have such a strong 'ecology' of like-minded organisations whose only agenda is that the public and policy-makers should have access to balanced and accurate evidence. Constant work is needed to support 'factfulness', in Hans Rosling's phrase, in the face of misinformation. In particular, we must remain ever-vigilant in the face of emerging threats to statistical independence worldwide.

Now it's time for me to pass the Presidency over to Deborah Ashby, and I wish her luck in the interesting times to come, both for the world and the Society.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'David Spiegelhalter'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Sir David Spiegelhalter

Goal 1

For statistics to be used effectively in the public interest, so that policy formulation and decision-making are informed by evidence for the good of society.

Independent statistics

We spoke out to counter threats to the independence and integrity of the statistical office in Puerto Rico; highlighted some disturbing developments in Tanzania; and supported the Greek statistician Andreas Georgiou in his continued defence of the independence of official statistics.

Media

We have enjoyed regular coverage in the press, radio and television, which has continued to raise the Society's profile. Our President, Executive Director and Statistical Ambassadors have made numerous television and radio appearances including on the BBC's *Today* programme and *News at 10*, as well as in the UK and international editions of the *Financial Times*.

Data Ethics

We helped to set up the Ada Lovelace Institute at the Nuffield Foundation. This new body will work to ensure that data and artificial intelligence are used in ways that promote the public interest.

Research Councils

Our voice is increasingly being heard within the UK Research Council community, which is now organised under UK Research and Innovation. The Society is in discussion with this new body about how statistics can be strengthened across the research landscape.

UK Parliament

We have responded to inquiries and met with Parliamentarians on issues including inflation measures, algorithms in decision-making and artificial intelligence. The President, Executive Director and other Society representatives all appeared before Select Committees to give evidence. Our submissions were quoted at length in publications including the Science and Technology Committee's report on *Algorithms in Decision-Making*, and a report by the Scottish Parliament's Economy, Energy & Fair Work Committee on *How to Make Data Count*.

Policy

Our work to influence public policy has led to a number of important changes. Our 2017 Presidential Address was quoted in the new Code of Practice for Statistics issued by the UK Statistics Authority. Following dialogue with us, the Greater London Authority agreed to adopt this Code of Practice in its own work. In addition, following our campaign, the UK Government's pre-election guidance has been changed to make it clear that it does not apply to independent academics.



Goal 2

For society to be more statistically literate, so that people's understanding of data, risk and probability can inform their daily decision-making, leading to better outcomes.

Education

We demonstrated our commitment to improving statistical education by successfully arguing for statistics courses to be covered by a new government financial premium for post-16 maths courses in England.

We launched a new partnership project to review the maths education system in conjunction with the Royal Society, the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications and the London Mathematical Society.

Statistical Ambassadors

We have continued with our aim of improving the coverage of statistics in the media, recruiting a third cohort of ten Statistical Ambassadors, from the UK and Ireland, and providing them with training and support to speak in public and to the media about statistics. Our Ambassadors spoke to the media many times throughout the year.

Significance

Significance magazine continues to grow in popularity, and at the time of writing our articles on the Wiley Online Library have been downloaded more than 172,000 times this year.

Resources

Building on our existing resources to enable members to deliver activities to young people, a new set of 'Hands on Statistics' resources are now available on our website. These are intended for use at science fairs and departmental open days, to help attendees learn about statistics in an accessible and engaging way.

Events

We organised a number of well-attended public events including: a compelling Beveridge Lecture from Will Moy of Full Fact, entitled 'Other truths are available'; a public event in Manchester on 'What's wrong with GDP and how do we fix it?'; and a number of free-to-attend seminars with partners including the Office for National Statistics and the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence.



Goal 3

For a strong body of professional statisticians to maintain and develop the skills they need so that they can critically apply methodology, interpret results and communicate findings.

Training

The range and popularity of our training courses continues to go from strength to strength. We expect to run 33 public training courses by the end of 2018, and have exceeded our target for commissioned courses. We provided bespoke courses for clients including NHS England, the Banking Standards Board and the Financial Conduct Authority.

Accreditation

We are developing a new junior level of recognition in our accreditation routes for statistics courses/modules, entitled 'The RSS Data Skills Quality Mark'. This will be launched next year.

Awards

The Significance early career writing competition – part of our drive to recognise statistical excellence - had entries from 16 countries, and was won by the USA's Letisha Smith.

Honours

Each year we award medals and prizes to people who have made outstanding contributions to the development of statistics. The 2018 awards ceremony was held at our international conference in Cardiff.

2018 honours and awards recipients

Guy Medal in Silver	Peter Bühlmann
Guy Medal in Bronze	Peng Ding
Bradford Hill Medal	Nicky Best
Greenfield Industrial Medal	Idris Eckley
West Medal	Jill Leyland
Barnett Award	Peter Diggle
Research Prize	Emanuele Giorgi
Howard Medal	Colin Aitken



Goal 4

For statistics as a discipline to thrive, so that methodology is advanced, applied and made accessible, leading to greater understanding of an increasingly complex world.

Journals

Our journals continue to thrive, and, by the end of 2018, six discussion meetings will have been held. In particular, a packed lecture hall at the Society's international conference participated in the three-paper presentation on 'Data visualization'. In total, the three-series published nearly 4000 pages, and, by the end of the year, the number of new submissions looks to be heading for a new record high.

Local groups

Our sections and local groups continue to be very active, holding 78 events and meetings. A Nigeria Local Group was formed in 2018, and the Manchester Group has been relaunched.

Data Ethics

Our new Special Interest Group on data ethics was formed this year, to address emerging topics in the burgeoning data ethics landscape, and to champion best practice in this area.

International Conference

In September, we ran our biggest and most successful annual conference to date in Cardiff, with 688 registrations. The packed programme included 55 invited sessions, 133 contributed talks, 37 rapid-fire talks and over 80 poster presentations. We have also announced that 2019's conference will be staged in Belfast and the following year's event in Bournemouth.



Goal 5

For an engaged and energised membership and staff to work collaboratively with partner organisations and other stakeholders in meeting these goals, so that the Society can maximise its impact.

Statisticians for Society

We launched a programme to enable our members to provide pro bono statistics expertise to small UK charities. So far, we have recruited more than 290 fellows as volunteers, and matched 24 organisations with volunteer statisticians.

International Development

We have signed a new agreement with Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) to enable RSS fellows to volunteer to help low-income countries develop their statistical systems. In addition, the Society continues to send a series of lecturers to the different branches of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS).

Group Membership Schemes

We have continued to expand our partnerships by developing corporate membership schemes with seven new organisations, including the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Department for Transport.

Member Update

In response to the results of our last members' survey, we have launched a new printed Member Update to keep fellows informed about our work and how they can get involved.

Partnerships

The Society has continued to work with a wide range of partners throughout the year including government statistical bodies (e.g. the UK Statistics Authority, the Office for National Statistics); research councils (e.g. UK Research and Innovation); civil society bodies (e.g. Sense About Science, Full Fact); statistical societies (e.g. the American Statistical Association, the International Statistical Institute); mathematical bodies (e.g. through the Council for the Mathematical Sciences); and scientific bodies (e.g. the Royal Society, the British Academy).



Goal 6

For the RSS to be a financially stable and well-run organisation with effective governance and use of technology, so that it will grow in relevance, exert influence and have wider impact.

Awards

In May, we won several 2018 MemCom awards including 'Professional Association of the Year'. We were awarded 'Best Campaign on a Shoestring', for our successful work on the abolishment of pre-release access to statistics. For this category, the judges noted that our 'outstanding entry was head and shoulders above the rest.'

Database

We are using technology to improve the member experience, by working with an external provider to develop a customer relationship management system. This will replace our existing member database, integrate with our new website and improve personalised content for members.



From past to present...

The image of the sheaf of wheat first appeared in our original seal. Being the end product of the harvesting and bundling of wheat, it was a pictorial way of expressing the gathering and analysis of data: the foundations of statistical work.

It also implied that statistical practice comprises more than the collection of data, but also its active interpretation and application as well (threshed for others, if the rural analogy is sustained). Rigorous data gathering is still at the heart of modern statistics, but as statisticians we also interpret, theorise and present the data we collect.



Royal Statistical Society

12 Errol Street, London EC1Y 8LX

T 020 7614 3910

E rss@rss.org.uk

🐦 @RoyalStatiSoc

www.rss.org.uk

www.statslife.org.uk