Report of the Kershaw Working Party on Royal Statistical Society outreach and services

May 2007

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Executive Summary

This working party was established to consider the needs of statistical analysts and users of statistics, how the Society engages with these analysts and users (many of whom will not be RSS members) and what action can be taken to strengthen this engagement through stronger and more co-ordinated outreach.

The members of the working party were recruited with a view to bringing together experience that would enable us to gauge these needs. Within the working party we also had members with a wide knowledge of RSS activities and recruitment initiatives.

The working party considered options on how best to assess the needs of analysts and users not currently well engaged with the Society. We carefully considered our methodology. Direct questioning of the disparate individual analysts would be problematic as it would certainly be resource intensive, but we also felt that such questioning would tend to generate predictable "top of the head" responses (e.g. on better meetings and training) given the limited knowledge respondents would necessarily have of the RSS. We decided that it would be most productive to adopt a methodology of questioning those most involved in the Society in working with users and organising RSS public events.

This report sets out a summary of results from surveys of RSS sections and local groups (as well as views received from members of the Statistics User Forum), details on RSS membership provided by the RSS's Director of Membership Services, and a presentation made to us by the Director of the newly-established RSS Professional Development Centre. This information, together with our own experience and additional comments received following circulation of a draft report to RSS Theme Directors and Managers, constitutes the evidence base for this report.

Recommendations are listed at relevant points in the text with our key recommendations given at the end of this Executive Summary. Section 7 also contains a full list of our recommendations, grouped into recommendations around understanding and expanding current membership of the Society, improved mechanisms for arriving at and communicating Society policy, better

ways of working for RSS sections and local groups, statistical training and marketing.

On the issue of membership, we felt that more could be done to capture information on current members and that work needs to be done to unlock the potential of the Linked Associate membership, requiring close liaison with other professional bodies. The steps being taken to develop corporate membership within Government Departments are commendable although we have some concerns that not enough is being done to attract private sector analysts into the activities and membership of the Society.

Communication is fundamental in outreach, not only in presenting a public face to the wider world but also in making the RSS themes and the activity of sections and local groups cohere better together. Although the RSS has a number of 'lines' which give the Society's considered views on selected important issues (see Annex D), our questioning of sections and local groups indicated little knowledge of this initiative alongside limited channels for communication of Society priorities. We recommend that the RSS should establish a body, under RSS auspices, to formulate policy positions on statistical issues of public concern.

The forthcoming demise of the Statistics Commission makes it more important for the RSS to promote research, and to develop policy positions, either directly or in some way at arm's length (the publication in March of report *Use Made of Official Statistics* being just one obvious illustration of the Statistics Commission's value). Establishing a body to consider these issues is not meant to detract from the work of the Council and Executive Committee but is, instead, designed to bring together proposals that can be debated and considered for adoption. It would directly serve the Society's aim to promote public understanding of statistics and be one means in which it could support for users of statistics and statisticians. It would also be an important mechanism for determining priority areas for activity by the other parts of the Society.

There are dangers that the RSS might find itself arriving at a policy position on a topic prematurely and the range of work undertaken in this area could only reflect resources that could be identified for such work. Determining how this idea might be carried forward needs careful consideration, but the view of the

working party is that this should be a priority for the Society in a period where the Statistics Commission (which fielded many media requests) will soon be disbanded.

On publications there remains concern that Series A, 'Statistics in Society', could be better used to underpin the work of the RSS without compromising its integrity. We felt the magazine 'Significance' was well produced, but that the articles it carries are typically not seen beyond the Society's membership. Much more should and could be done by the RSS centrally to promote and monitor the reporting of statistical issues in the media.

We recognise that some good work is currently being done with the media, in particular the new prize for journalists, but that more could be done in the area of journalist training and organising newsworthy events. The RSS centre, RSS sections and the Statistics User Forum have a role in developing public-facing RSS events that could engage the media more effectively.

The discussions with sections and local groups pointed to some specific steps to promote better communication with the RSS centre (e.g. newsletters and more a more pro-active role for Council representatives on committees).

Our report contains a large number of recommendations on strengthening the roles of RSS sections and local groups. This reflected the importance we accord to them as the public face of the RSS for many of the analysts we want to reach out to. Many of the recommendations relate to good practice, such as maintaining lists of attendees and making RSS publicity available at meetings, but there are also a number of issues of central support (e.g. redevelopment of the RSS website so that it contains toolkits of information to assist sections and local groups in promoting meetings). We also feel that the time has come to review how sections relate to one another and coordinate their work. Our view is that joint meetings with other bodies are very much to be encouraged, but we also recognise the value in joint meetings between sections and repeat presentations either at local groups or at section meetings.

We believe that the work of the Professional Development Centre (PDC) has got off to a good start and we are particularly impressed by the consultative way in which the PDC is marketing and developing its services. The way this has been approached is a good model for other significant RSS initiatives.

In conclusion, the main thrust of our recommendations centres around better internal and external communication which, in turn, requires a clearer formulation of the messages that need to be communicated to those both within and beyond the Society. Section 7 contains our full list of recommendations. We would particularly highlight seven key recommendations that are as follows:

Further work needs to be undertaken with other learned societies and professional bodies to make the Linked Associate membership scheme attractive to analysts from other disciplines *(Recommendation 2);*

The RSS should actively seek to establish a body, under RSS auspices, to formulate policy positions on statistical issues of public concern. This should also include development of a communications strategy so that these positions can be well articulated by RSS representatives to a wider public *(Recommendation 4);*

To better engage the media the following steps should be taken:

- **The recently instituted RSS prize for examples of good journalism in the reporting of statistics should be built upon and cover all forms of media;**
- **In developing policy lines the Society should be pro-active in organising newsworthy events and responding to public consultation in a way that is likely to engage the media;**
- **The Statistics User Forum and RSS Sections should build links with relevant journalists, for example by developing topic-specific briefing material and by inviting the media to appropriate events** *(Recommendation 8);*

The strategy for internal communication within the RSS needs to be reviewed, with a particular aim of ensuring greater coherence between the parts of the RSS that are outward facing *(Recommendation 9);*

That the following steps be taken to better publicise RSS events:

- **A central toolkit be created, giving advice on setting on distributing publicity and listing national contact and distribution lists, should be developed by the RSS centre and placed on the RSS website;**
- **A record of attendees at RSS events should be maintained, specifically including email details, as a means of encouraging future attendance through invitations to join email distribution lists;**
- **Sections and local groups should consider whether establishment of a JISCMAIL distribution list would assist in administering their email distribution lists (see www.jiscmail.ac.uk);**
- **Consideration should be given to centralising lists more effectively, and encouraging the sharing of information between RSS sections and groups;**
- **More should be done to communicate good practice in planning and publicising events. This is an area where the RSS centre has some role, but sections and local groups can also learn from one another;**
- **The redevelopment of the RSS website should have as a priority the setting up of an area on the site to provide guidance on publicising meetings, allow entry of new meeting details directly, enable sections and groups to be aware of meetings planned by others and enable better branding of RSS events *(Recommendation 10);***

The way in which sections relate to one another and their range of responsibilities should be reviewed to determine whether important aspects of statistics are adequately covered and whether better mechanisms can be set up to coordinate meetings and run joint meetings *(Recommendation 16);*

In developing new RSS initiatives it is imperative that a consultative approach to potential customers is followed, with consideration of commissioning of market research for the more significant initiatives *(Recommendation 19).*

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The impetus for establishing the working party came from the report-back from one of a number of breakout sessions at the RSS Council meeting held in June 2006. The breakout group considered the issue of "Engaging the wider constituency of analysts and users of statistics" (Annex A contains a record of this breakout group discussion). There was a wide ranging discussion that considered a number of relevant RSS initiatives, such as:

- Linked Associate membership
- Statistics User Forum
- Young Statisticians
- Course development, including presentation and use of statistics
- GradStat and CStat qualifications

The discussion focused on the following questions:

- Who are the groups of users/analysts?
- What do they want?
- What can the RSS do to help them?

It was agreed that the RSS exists because of the value placed on statistics, rather than on statisticians. Many statistics are not produced by statisticians, but by other analysts. Looking at this from the general user/analyst perspective, the group asked what might be the answer to "Why should I join or even have any interest in the RSS?"

The discussion went on to consider what these clusters of analysts need and how these needs can be satisfied. It was felt that RSS Sections and local groups could be of great assistance *if* they are outward looking. The internet and email distribution lists can also put people in contact with each other.

Other issues were also discussed, including the public profile of the RSS, the Society's links with other societies and the role that education and training events can play in working with analysts in other fields.

Council members agreed that further work should be undertaken to consider these issues in detail. In the autumn of 2006 the President of the Royal

Statistical Society, Tim Holt, asked Chris Kershaw, who had reported back on the breakout group discussion, to chair a working party to take this thinking forward and to come up with specific recommendations on improving RSS outreach and services.

In drafting terms of reference for the working party, it was agreed that the RSS, as the learned and professional society for statistics, would wish to represent and encourage all those involved with statistics either in the collection, production, analysis, academic research or application. There are a growing number of people whose work involves significant analysis and use of statistics but whose job title is not that of 'statistician'. These people may not immediately feel associated with the Society or the work that it does. The working party has been established to investigate what the Society can do to support and actively draw-in this group.

The discussion at the RSS Council in June 2006 considered whether the RSS Theme structure is correct. From our discussions sections, local groups and others it became clear that internal communications within the RSS need to be improved. Such communication should becoming more systematic so as to better link the RSS Themes (the Themes structure is set out in Annex B) and harness the great deal of work being done in different parts of the Society and make it available to the wider analytic audience.

1.2 Terms of reference

The terms of reference were agreed by the RSS Executive Committee as follows:

- To investigate the needs of statistical analysts and others who work with or use statistics;

- To review the ways in which the Society currently engages with statistical users and analysts and to consider how these might need to change in order to foster stronger links and to encourage membership in some form;

- To consider ways in which parts of the Society (sections, local groups, conferences, meetings and staff services) can contribute to a stronger and more co-ordinated outreach.

1.3 Membership of the working party

To address the terms of reference we recruited a wide range of members to the working party who, through their experience, would be in a position to gauge the needs of the range of analysts and understand what might be successful in attracting a wider public to RSS events. We also considered it to be important that we had members of the working party with wider knowledge of RSS activities and experience of recruiting analysts to the RSS.

Membership of the working party:

Chris Kershaw – Chair
Ross Young – Secretary
Paul Allin
Peter Challenor
Janet Dougharty
Nicola Emmerson
Gordon Farquharson
Alan Kimber
Paul Gentry
Martin Orton
Francesco Vivarelli

Chris Kershaw, Ross Young, Peter Challenor and Alan Kimber are members of the section committees for Social Statistics, Official Statistics, Environmental Statistics and General Applications Sections respectively.

Chris Kershaw is also a member of the RSS Council. Nicola Emmerson is RSS Theme Director for Membership Services and Paul Gentry is RSS Theme Manager for Sections, Local Groups and Study Groups.

Francesco Vivarelli and Gordon Farquharson were both nominated via links to the Market Research Society and the Statistics User Forum.

Paul Allin was nominated by the committee of the South Wales local group, bringing a local group perspective. Paul works at the Office for National Statistics at its Newport site, and is also involved with developing the Professional Skills for Government's theme of 'analysis and use of evidence'.

Martin Orton is a manager of analytic services based at the NHS Information Centre, bringing insights from that group of analysts now at "arms length" from government. Janet Dougharty is Chair of the Professional Affairs Committee.

Nicola Bright, Director of the new RSS Professional Development Centre, attended the February meeting of the working party to give a presentation of the Centre's plans for developing RSS-sponsored training to the wider analytic community.

2 Summary of questionnaire responses from sections and local groups

Much of the public face of the RSS for many in our target groups will come via meetings held under the auspices of the RSS. It was agreed at the first meeting of the working party that a questionnaire should be devised to gather information from sections and local groups on their current activities and how they viewed the activity of the RSS at the centre.

Our view was that such a survey would be the most feasible way of gaining a better understanding of the issues faced in organising public facing events and good organisational practice. As well as aiming to identify good practice, a further key aim was to gain a clearer understanding of the barriers in extending outreach to the wider group of analysts. The questions on general RSS activity were designed to provide a good indication of the steps that could be taken at the centrally to engage with a wider audience.

As a group of volunteers, the working party is content that it has undertaken sufficient evidence-gathering of those who are aware of the challenges in undertaking outreach to produce a set of practical recommendations in line with our terms of reference. The working party did not consider that it had sufficient resources, both financially and in terms of volunteer time, to scope, commission, and analyse a wider survey of analysts who are not well-engaged with the society, and we also felt that this would have been a problematic exercise as such questioning would tend to generate predictable "top of the head" responses (e.g. on better meetings and training) given the limited knowledge respondents would necessarily have of the RSS. It could well be appropriate, where *specific initiatives* in response to our recommendations are being piloted, for some further work to directly ascertain views of the target audiences to be undertaken. To do this the necessary central resources would, however, need to be dedicated for such work.

This section of the report summarises responses from the questionnaires sent to RSS sections and local groups. It is also drawn upon later in this report as providing evidence for the working party's recommendations. The questions were structured to into two parts, the first on meetings organisation, and the second on RSS activity more generally. There were also responses via a questionnaire to members of the Statistics User Forum.

2.1 Meetings Organisation

How many meetings on average would your group aim to organise during a year?

The number of meetings, of course, depends on a range of factors that include the willingness of committee members to organise meetings, availability of speakers and local demand. However, both sections and local groups do indicate, e.g. via the RSS website, that their main activity is the organisation of meetings.

The number of meetings each section or local group held during a typical year varies considerably. A number of sections and local groups organised between 6 or 7 meetings a year, although two local groups and one section only organised 3 or 4 meetings, while the Social Statistics Section organised up to 10 meetings.

How far in advance do you generally plan your programme?

The extent of advance planning varies. Most sections and groups planned for the session/year ahead, with planning meetings taking place during the summer. Several local groups only planned a few months ahead; one section planned just 3 months ahead. Most sections and local groups agree an initial series of meetings and leave the detailed organisation until 6 to 8 weeks in advance. The meetings programme of the Northern Ireland local group "evolves over time". The Social Statistics Section reported that planning meetings well in advance was very important in persuading speakers to present and to ensure the reliable booking of rooms.

How do you arrive at topics and titles for meetings?

Most sections and local groups determine the topics and titles for meetings using the suggestions put forward by their committee, and by using networks or links with other individuals and organisations. The Manchester local group tries to "theme" each meeting, for example the October meeting is held jointly with the Manchester Biostatistics group, December has an industrial topic, March covers a theme within National Science Week, and April/May discusses sports or other topics of interest to younger people. The South West local

group uses RSS News to stimulate ideas for interesting talks and speakers that have been given elsewhere (this was an idea that has come up in other discussions, with encouragement for speakers at section meetings to also speak locally and *vice versa*). The Highland local group plans its meetings bearing in mind the interests of statisticians working in north-east Scotland, and generally 2-3 meetings on medical statistics, 1-2 meetings on environment statistics, one on bioinformatics, and one on fishery statistics. The Environmental Statistics Section structures a subset of their meetings around certain themes which last 2-3 years which are "sufficiently broad to provide an interesting focus…to build awareness of the Section's activities in applications communities". Local groups particularly stressed that topics covered reflected local expertise and contacts.

Many responses also stressed the importance of meetings for more general audiences being applied in nature and that topics covered could encourage those with a topic interest in addition to those with a more statistical interest.

There was little response to the specific issue of how titles are determined, but the Social Statistics Section mentioned the need to choose a "suitable title" to attract a wider audience. However, later questioning on steps taken to improve outreach indicated that some groups had considered appropriate titles in making events more attractive to a wider audience.

What would the typical level of attendance be and who come to meetings?

The number and type of people attending meetings varies depending on the topic of the meeting and the number of statisticians able to attend. Among the local groups, the number attending meetings ranged from 5-10 to 50+, although attendance at many local groups tended to be between 20 and 30. The proportion of attendees who are RSS members also varies, but most local groups reported that RSS members usually comprised more than one-half of those attending. A large proportion of those attending meetings of local groups are drawn from the academic sector, but other analysts (e.g. pharmaceutical industry, research/government) also attend.

The Social Statistics Section reported attendance of 150 at the Cathie Marsh Memorial Lecture while the General Applications Section reported median attendance of 30 with numbers ranging from 10 to 130. The Official Statistics

Section reported that they did not achieve such high levels of attendance (typically attendance was in the range of 20 to 30) even though there was some overlap with Social Statistics in the section's areas of interest, suggesting that attendance could have been higher for some events.

What would you say are your target audiences for meetings?

Most local groups target their meetings to statisticians, academics, and those with an interest in statistics living in the local area, avoiding the topics of meetings being too technical so as to attract as wide an audience as possible. The target audience for RSS Sections tends to vary with the topic being discussed, although most sections recognised the existence of general target audiences, for example the Social Statistics Section targeted social researchers, the Official Statistics Section targeted government and other public sector statisticians, and the Environmental Statistics Section targeted the environmental science user community.

What steps do you take to publicise meetings?

Almost all sections and local groups publicise their meetings using one or more of ALLSTAT, email groups and distribution lists (including some postal lists) gathered from the names of past attendees at meetings, and RSS News. Some local groups ensure that posters are displayed at local universities. Some sections also maintain a JISCMAIL list, with the Social Statistics Section having built up a comparatively very large list of over 500 (this being largely driven by collection of attendee details at all section meetings). The Official Statistics Section also set up a JISCMAIL list in April and this attracted over 100 subscribers in less than two weeks. The Social Statistics Section has a targeted approach to publicising, for example local government meetings are advertised among members of LARIA and BURISA.

It is difficult to precisely judge from responses, but it would appear, as one would expect, that the sections and local groups drawing-in the largest audiences are the ones that indicate the greatest activity in promoting meetings beyond the usual RSS channels.

Some sections expressed concern at the difficulty in ensuring that meetings are advertised on the RSS website, which was seen as one way of achieving wider publicity. The Official Statistics Section observed that they wished that

the RSS would centrally administer email distribution or attendance lists since publicising meetings required considerable volunteer time, and "shortcuts" such as these would be of considerable assistance (though subsequently they have established their own JISCMAIL list with some success). One local group remarked that the facilities to edit material on the RSS website were "unmanageable" and that their "patience was exhausted" in trying to use the facility. Another respondent mentioned that edit facilities on the website can be frustrating as one can easily be locked-out if one fails to log–off correctly. The website facilities also do not work with the latest release of Microsoft Internet Explorer.

Do you have much attendance at your meetings from non-RSS members?

This question was asked only to RSS Sections. Some sections expressed concern that statistics are not routinely collected on levels of non-RSS member attendance which made this question difficult to answer accurately. Some Section meetings were well attended by non-RSS members, for example the Social Statistics Section have an annual well attended joint meeting with the Social Research Association (the "Cathie Marsh Memorial Lecture") or where the topic of the meeting straddled several academic and/or user communities. The General Applications Section estimated that about 40% of those attending its meetings were non-RSS members. The Social Statistics Section has found that around one-third of the members of its JISCMAIL list are not RSS members and this is probably reflected in attendance at its meetings.

Local groups indicated mixed levels of attendance of non-RSS members. One group reported that around 25% of attendees are RSS members, but another group indicated that virtually all its attendees were RSS members. Typically respondents suggested that around 50% of attendees at meetings are RSS members, although the Highland local group made the cogent point that the proportion of non-RSS members at the larger and more popular of its meetings tended to be higher.

Do you have publicity at your meetings regarding RSS membership? Do you sell or distribute RSS publications and advertise other activities?

This question was asked only to RSS local groups. A number of local groups

did not routinely have RSS publicity material available at their meetings. The most common reason reported for this was that the RSS did not, as a matter of course, send this material to local groups, requiring local groups to remember to ask. A number of local groups also simply answered "no" to this question without offering reasons. Some local groups ensured that copies of the RSS magazine *Significance* and RSS membership leaflets were available at some meetings, although these quickly become out of date. One group suggested that committee secretaries should receive extra copies of *Significance* for publicity purposes. It should, however, be noted that RSS HQ distribute a pack of Society materials to groups once a year and will provide publicity material on request. We also understand discussions are taking place to attempt to have wider distribution of the *Significance* to schools.

The South West local group reported that they displayed publicity at some of their more general meetings, although they found that "at most meetings such materials would be fairly pointless". The West Midlands local group reported that, once a year, it advertised student membership and occasionally had publicity material available at other meetings. The Highland group publicised RSS membership at its larger meetings, where it was thought to be most worthwhile.

A similar question was also asked to the Sections. The response was mixed. Some sections routinely ensure that RSS publicity and publications are available at meetings, while others did not (one section distributed its own flyer routinely, but not other RSS information). The Environmental Statistics Section observed that they did not routinely make publicity available because RSS membership was not necessarily relevant to the non-statisticians in the audience. The Research Section did not publicise RSS membership at meetings, but acknowledged that non-members did also attend meetings straddling academic disciplines. The Quality Improvement Section reported that they distribute the RSS welcome leaflet at each meeting and that a "focus on outreach is part of our strategy", with discussion taking place on promoting Quality Improvement Section and the RSS generally, also citing contacts they have made with the Chartered Quality Institute. It should also be noted, however, that the Society's staff do try to ensure that membership leaflets and other relevant promotional material is made available at every section and study group meeting that takes place at Errol Street.

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Would you have any advice for other groups as to what works well in achieving good attendance?

There was no single suggestion that all sections and local groups put forward. Some local groups stressed the importance of advertising; others recommended joint meetings as being generally the most popular. The response of the Highland local group summarised their advice well, "be flexible with respect to venues, times, topics" and tailor meetings to those "who apply statistics".

The Social Statistics Section recommended early publicity and "precise, clear, well-designed flyers", with wide electronic distribution of information. The Official Statistics Section reiterated the importance of a RSS central co-ordination role in publicity to ensure good attendance. The Research Section recommended that meetings coincide with other RSS events. The Environmental Statistics Section suggested that sections and local groups "think about the target audience when deciding on the meeting topic, have the programme organised well in advance, and send out targeted publicity material to other organisations in plenty of time".

The Social Statistics Section reports good attendance at sponsored meetings that are followed by receptions for attendees, suggesting that opportunities for networking may strongly encourage levels of attendance. The Manchester group stressed the importance of having a good annual structure for planning. Finally, a well-known and engaging speaker was also cited, at a time of day and location convenient to the target audience.

2.2 RSS activity

What steps do you think the RSS should take to improve outreach to the wider analytic and user community?

Responses from sections and local groups focused on better publicity. Suggestions included local marketing of local group meetings through newspapers and local bodies, stressing that meetings are open to non-members; better links with other organisations to break down the 'exclusive' nature of the Society, with Linked Associate membership being seen as potentially a very good initiative. Inviting users of statistics to speak at RSS-organised and joint events was also suggested. A point was made that the RSS should market itself as a body of statistical experts, not just 'statisticians'.

One remark from a member of the Statistics Users' Forum was that a lot more could be achieved with respect to outreach among the private sector, with the RSS seeming to be dominated by academic and public sectors. Links with the Market Research Society could assist in making contacts, and thereby strengthening the Society overall. There was an apparent plea to improve communications within the RSS. When new groups are set up it is essential that regular communications are made among interested and target audiences.

Respondents appeared to feel that a better profile in the media alongside the preparation of articles for professional organisations in target areas would be helpful. It was also felt that attendance at RSS meetings should, in some way, earn Continuous Professional Development points (attendance can, of course, be noted by attendees working for the Government Statistics Service on the new mandatory logbook of Continual Professional Development). RSS meetings need to be relevant and inviting, where appropriate, to a more general audience and this needs to be spelt out more clearly in RSS publicity.

It was suggested that the RSS could run short courses for data analysts, bringing in non-members and advertised widely. The success of half-day events indicated the existence of a wider market. It was also felt, especially by local groups, that schools and further education colleges could be targeted more effectively.

Furthermore, it was suggested that RSS honours and awards should be open

to those in other disciplines and advertised widely. The new award for journalism has been ground-breaking in this area.

Evening meetings at RSS HQ should continue to be free and other meetings must be good value. More talks should also be presented regionally. The impact of the ONS re-location on the programme and location of events needs to be more thoroughly considered by the RSS centrally.

It was felt that reports of section and local group meetings should be put on the RSS website more systematically. Consideration should also be given to web-casts and teleconferences (particularly bearing in mind the move of many ONS staff from London to South Wales). The RSS website was seen as too "static" and "boring". It was felt that the site needs to be more up-to-date and easier to navigate. New publicity material should be better integrated with RSS News and flyers for events could be used more widely. One suggestion was that central contact lists for publicity would be extremely useful in organising section and local group publicity.

One response from a member of the Statistics Users' Forum was that publicity should be directed to relevant contacts in other societies for inclusion in newsletters etc.

What steps has your local group/section taken to improve outreach?

Many respondent reported that meetings should have an applied focus and be widely advertised (not just among academic statisticians) with local groups observing that posters can be mailed-out to local academic departments. Titles should be accessible so as not put people off.

It was felt that, although joint meetings can often work well, they sometimes fall "flat". Meetings can also be organised in research groups of private companies. It was mentioned that venues and times should be tailored to target audiences more systematically.

One local group organised a careers session although attendance was poor. Schools meetings are seen to work well, but the timing of these events need to be when school students can attend. Efforts to reach school teachers often only had a short-term impact.

A number of local groups have contacted their local press and other local bodies in order to gain publicity. Mailing lists were seen as important in inviting non-members. It does not necessarily follow that sections and local groups should be discouraged if individuals attend meetings but do not subsequently join the Society.

Is there anything you plan or hope to do in this area in the coming year?

There were a range of proposals:

- Plan to host a debate on "what it means to be a statistician";

- RSS Manchester Student Prize award;

- Many respondents mentioned the worth of holding joint meetings with other groups, and a desire to improve publicity further;

- The Official Statistics Section observed the importance of a new committee structure to address wider policy issues as well as ideas for short income-earning courses for the RSS;

- Some local groups explicitly mentioned activity in connection with Science Week, although this may require more active support from the RSS centrally in order to ensure that such activity is supported well in time to publicise and generate interest effectively;

- Members of the Quality Improvement Section Committee in many cases undertake work which has very positive impact and brings value to other organisations, such as industry and local and central government (closer links with EMBIS and setting up a Study Group are under discussion);

- One local group observed that budget restrictions were a problem for them, although this was not a widely expressed view among other sections and local groups.

Does your group consider RSS Themes and Lines in planning the programme of events and, if so, how?

Responses to this question were generally negative, with little knowledge of "RSS lines" among respondents (information on RSS lines, as set out on the RSS website, is given in Annex D). Among those more positive responses cited Science Week as the one national initiative influencing their programme, although this does not explicitly relate to a "RSS line". Discussion with one of the RSS Series A Editors also indicated lack of knowledge about "RSS lines", which could be important where journal papers are being prepared or commissioned relating to "RSS lines".

How effective do you think the magazine *Significance* is in providing statistical material to readers who are not RSS members?

Respondents generally liked *Significance*, but cited difficulties in getting the publication seen by non members. There were a lot of concerns expressed about its distribution and whether the publication "gets through" to schools and colleges. It was felt that *Significance* needs to be marketed better, is too costly for non-RSS members and extra copies should be made available to sections and local groups for marketing purposes.

Is there anything you would like to say regarding the way in which RSS Journals are put together?

There was not much comment to this question. Journals are typically seen as irrelevant for outreach purposes. There were suggestions for more themed RSS journal issues with guest editors. Special issues might receive more publicity outside of the RSS and more could be done to attract reviewers from other disciplines. One respondent commented that RSS Journal Series A has become an outlet for modellers, not covering 'statistics in society' as its by-line suggests. Another suggestion was for electronic-only publication. It was suggested on-line access would be valuable and could assist in encouraging membership and act as an income stream for the RSS. Some suggested the need for a business and industrial statistics journal in collaboration with 'another body'. Finally, wider issues emerging from other discussions included the currently limited extent to which meetings organised by sections and local groups led to journal articles, and whether work in providing forums for debate would best be underpinned by a strategy to encourage the submission of journal articles by presenters at sections and local group meetings.

Are there groups of analysts you would like to cite that are not adequately drawn into RSS activity?

The list mentioned consisted of:

- All quantitative disciplines and users of statistical methods;
- Policymakers;
- 6-sigma analysts
- Analysts in the health sector, especially NHS analysts;
- Financial analysts (e.g. actuaries, investment analysts),
- Medical;
- Local authority and police analysts;
- Scientists in bioinformatics;
- Social researchers;
- Operational researchers;
- More "real users" including the media;
- All users of official statistics.

How useful do you find the annual meeting for committee chairs and secretaries held at the RSS?

The annual meeting was considered useful in making contacts with other groups and to hear about RSS themes and initiatives. One group mentioned that they would like the RSS to co-ordinate speakers who are willing to travel to local groups. Another group felt that this meeting was broadly useful but has been downgraded of late. Some mentioned that it was hard to attend in London and some respondents reported that they have never attended (interestingly there was one suggestion that RSS should pay costs directly, although the RSS will pay expenses for those attending). Some mentioned that this meeting tends to focus on issues that people don't like rather than the strategic issues, also that RSS Council representatives on section committees should do more to communicate with their committees. It was felt that this meeting was only an annual communication and that prompter appearance of minutes would be appreciated as this would aid local group and section discussions.

3 Current RSS membership

This section gives an overview of the current membership, where members come from, and the benefits offered by RSS membership. Firstly, to gauge the proportion of the current membership who see themselves principally as users and analysts of statistics, and secondly to consider the people within the RSS who might be well placed to assist in engaging with others.

At the time of writing, RSS membership is at it highest level for 10 years. After several years of fairly static membership, an increase can now be seen in a number of categories, particularly where specific recruitment initiatives have been implemented:

3.1 RSS membership

	Nov-04	Nov-05	Nov-06
CStats	1,410	1,403	1,412
GradStats	308	318	367
Standard fellows (all other categories)	4,554	4,576	4,603
Total number of fellows	**6,272**	**6,297**	**6,382**
Other members			
Linked Associate members	-	2	4
Section and local group members	137	118	102
Student members	316	236	331
Total other members	**453**	**356**	**437**

Significant resources have been allocated to the recruitment of both student and younger members through the 'Recruitment in universities pilot project' and into the development of services for career young statisticians, 'The Young Statisticians Forum'.

Effort is also being made into developing corporate membership schemes, one example being the Home Office model which yielded 56 new members in a single month (figures not included in the table above). Further schemes are being considered, particularly with other Government Departments.

The area with the most potential for increasing membership is that of the

Statistics User Groups, particularly those affiliated to the Statistics User Forum. Many members of user groups would have not previously considered RSS membership to be appropriate in meeting their own individual needs. However, with the development of the Statistics Users Forum, the Society now offers a platform to bring users together so that they can share experiences, get their views across, and give them an influence in ensuring their needs are taken into account. Annex C sets out the membership of the Statistics User Forum; many of these users will not also be members of the RSS.

The 'Linked Associate' category of membership was developed with these potential members in mind. Of particular concern is that, as yet, take-up of this category of membership has been limited and this is an area that needs further work. There are plans to publicise this category of membership via the Statistics Users Forum.

3.2 Where do members come from

The Society does not automatically record the 'work' related details of members. New applicants are invited to provide contact details – some use work details, others use home details, so it has always been difficult to ascertain the sectors in which are RSS members are employed. During the summer of 2004, the Society carried out a data capture exercise asking members to respond to a variety of questions in order to help the Society improve service delivery. The data capture form is now automatically sent out to new members who are invited to respond – under the *Data Protection Act 1998*, it is not compulsory to do so.

Members were invited to respond to the following questions:

- Please indicate your main relationship with statistics – multiple answers welcome
- Please indicate your principal current employment status (one answer only)
- Please indicate your primary area of employment (one answer only)

The data collected in response to these questions is given in the table below:

Data relating to questions on the RSS data capture form.

Total respondents; n=3,300 (letters A, F and G relate to placement of questions in the data capture form)

A – Main relationship with statistics	Number	% of respondents
A1 general interest	1,018	31
A2 researcher in statistical methods/theory	942	29
A3 student (undergraduate)	52	2
A4 student (postgraduate)	191	6
A5 teacher of statistics	960	29
A6 provider of statistical information	729	22
A7 user of statistical information	951	29
A8 user of statistical methods	1,454	44
A9 consultant to others in design or analysis	1,243	38
A10 research in discipline related to statistics	664	20
A11 collection of data (survey statistician)	414	13
A12 applied statistician	1,399	42

F – principal current employment status		
F1 employed - full-time	2,019	61
F2 employed - part-time	195	6
F3 self-employed	229	7
F4 student, full-time	99	3
F5 student, part-time	4	0
F6 part-time employed, part-time student	18	1
F7 retired	439	13
F8 unemployed	16	0
F9 career break	28	1

G – Primary area of employment if answered F1,2,3 or 6	Number	% of respondents
G1 business/industry/commerce	335	10
G2 central/local government	335	10
G3 health service/NHS	131	4
G4 higher education/academic	886	27
G5 private consultancy	160	5
G6 school/college of further education	93	3
G7 research institute	155	5
G8 media	6	0
G9 voluntary sector	12	0
G10 pharmaceutical industry	270	8
G11 other	74	2

One reading of the responses on "main relationship with statistics" might suggest that at least 40% of current RSS membership view themselves principally as applied analysts and users of statistics (as evidenced by numbers for the categories under A7, A8 and A12). This information is useful, particularly in identifying where sectors are not well represented in the membership. We believe there would be benefits to the Society of obtaining more information about the professional lives of members and we would therefore recommend that:

1. ***From 2008 all new and renewing RSS members should be asked to fill out their job title and employer so that relevant data can be captured.***

To limit the administration involved with this task we would see automatic capture of such information as a priority in redeveloping the RSS website. Having such facilities in place would also deliver other benefits in reducing administrative burdens, improving services to members, and collecting other information on membership of interest (e.g. to monitor diversity issues).

There is also considerable value in including a question on whether respondents would be happy to have further contact for research to improve membership services (e.g. it could be interesting to collate views of members whose primary employment is in the media). To follow the example of the British Society of Criminology, respondents could also be asked whether they would be willing to be contacted as expert sources for specific topic areas.

3.3 Benefits of RSS membership

The current benefits and services to members according to membership category are given in Annex E, which lists the tangible benefits.

There are other important (but less tangible) reasons why members join the Royal Statistical Society. These include supporting, protecting and promoting the discipline, networking opportunities, and the 'feel good' factor of belonging to and feeling part of a supportive, professional society. It is arguable that these less tangible services have not been well-promoted, although recent experience with the Young Statisticians Forum has demonstrated that networking opportunities rate very highly as a reason for joining the Society.

The questionnaire results from local groups and sections generated a list of potential audiences that largely matched our own assessments. These include: analysts in the health, financial and local authority sectors, and public bodies (e.g. police and central government). Social researchers are a key group in government, as are economists and operational researchers. There are also academics working in other disciplines who need, in the course of their work, to apply statistical methods or collaborate with statisticians. The Society has a specific policy to recruit "young statisticians" which we see as very valuable, this also being a natural part of the strategy to increase RSS membership. We would, however, recommend:

2. ***Further work needs to be undertaken with other learned societies and professional bodies to make the Linked Associate membership scheme attractive to analysts from other disciplines.***

In connection with the above recommendation, it is encouraging that further work on the Linked Associate membership scheme is part of the forthcoming Statistics User Forum business plan.

In making this recommendation we accept that there are real difficulties in demonstrating the value of RSS membership, of any kind, to those not directly employed as statisticians. The Statistics User Forum, given its wide membership, is pivotal in considering these issues. Links between sections and

local groups (including joint meetings and the kind of discussions that the Quality Improvement Section refer to having with the Chartered Quality Institute) are important in establishing the relevance of the RSS more widely, whether these result in extension of Society membership or not.

In considering development of the Linked Associate membership scheme the RSS needs to keep in mind the benefits of a wider RSS membership and audience in supporting the Society's wider aim of improving public understanding of statistics. Better links with a wider community will also assist in determining whether the RSS is devoting its limited resources (including both volunteer and RSS staff time) in the most effective way, thereby helping in setting overall RSS priorities. This would also assist in raising the profile of the RSS and provide further income generation opportunities. For the Linked Associate membership to confer real benefits it must be linked to opportunities for involvement via attendance at RSS events, training or pro-active work within the Society, or in collaboration with other bodies.

The Society's recent activities in promoting corporate membership are to be applauded. However, both within the working party and in feedback from members of the Statistics User Forum, concern was expressed that not enough is being achieved to attract membership from among the private sector. We recognise the particular challenges in identifying analysts and users of statistics who may be "well-hidden specialists" within particular industries, although within the market research and the pharmaceutical sectors it ought to be easier to work through existing professional groups and networks.

The activities of the Professional Development Centre ought to be expected to stimulate a demand at the corporate level (discussed later in this report) for RSS membership. The work of local groups and sections should also have a similar effect if focused on specific organisations or sectors. For example, the remit of the Social Statistics Section, covering survey methodology, could be developed further to make the Society more relevant to a wider audience of market researchers, hence links to the Market Research Society should be usefully fostered. Therefore, the working party recommends that:

3. *The Society should actively engage with private-sector and public sector analysts, such as those working in market research or the pharmaceutical industry and continue marketing of the corporate membership scheme to Government Departments.*

4 Characteristics of a wider audience base

The questionnaire to RSS sections and local groups identified a wide range of people who were judged not to be adequately involved in RSS activity, this being similar to the initial impressions of the working party. The questionnaire responses identified:

- All quantitative disciplines and users of statistical methods;
- Policymakers;
- 6-sigma analysts
- Analysts in the health sector, especially NHS analysts;
- Financial analysts (e.g. actuaries, investment analysts),
- Medical;
- Local authority and police analysts;
- Scientists in bioinformatics;
- Social researchers;
- Operational researchers;
- More "real users" including the media;
- All users of official statistics.

To a large degree, these can be split into two groups The first of these groups includes individuals such as policymakers, general users of official statistics, the media and the public at large, who might be termed the 'wider audience'. This broad group will be influenced by the RSS according to the Society's effectiveness in raising its public profile and its ability to become a trusted source for the media with respect to discussions on statistical matters. A second group consists of individuals who are likely to come into direct contact with the RSS, either through attending meetings or via training and other services that the Society offers – these we might term 'practitioners'.

The working party considered the issues around the needs of the 'wider audience'. This was, to some extent, prompted by discussion of a draft Official Statistics Section paper entitled *RSS Engagement with Official Statistics* with the final version considered by RSS Council in April 2007. The paper considered options for the RSS in improving its engagement with official statistics, particularly enhancing its ability to take a stance on matters of public

debate around official statistics. The central theme of the paper sought to create a RSS "body" to consider policy positions on issues of public concern, although the working party felt that this ought to go beyond issues that simply related to official statistics.

Respondents to the questionnaire to sections and local groups already indicated difficulties in engaging even those who were well acquainted with the RSS in terms of communicating "RSS lines" (see Annex D for more information on "RSS lines"). RSS lines are designed to promote the Society's considered viewpoint on particular issues. This is not a satisfactory position. If the Society's viewpoint on key issues is not well known to those active in the Society it is unlikely to have much impact externally.

The working party agreed that the RSS should to play a more dynamic role, irrespective of the outcome of the current parliamentary consideration of the *Statistics and Registration Service Bill*, and the implementation of the Government's proposals for an independent Statistics Board at "arms-length" from Government.

At the April 2007 RSS Council there was broad acceptance of main points of the paper, but it was felt that the issues needed to be further considered by the RSS Executive Committee and by the next Council meeting in July. There was a concern that the RSS might find itself arriving at a policy position on a topic prematurely and that resources would need to be identified to undertake such work successfully.

Determining how this idea might be carried forward needs careful consideration, but the view of the working party is that this should be a priority for the Society in a period where the Statistics Commission (which fielded many media requests) will soon be disbanded. One possibility exists that funds for the better operation of the Statistics User Forum might be obtained from the new Statistics Board. Were this to happen, these funds could assist in underpinning a new research and user-coordination function, under RSS auspices, that would most certainly extend beyond what would, at present, be achievable.

We therefore recommend:

4. *The RSS should actively seek to establish a body, under RSS auspices, to formulate policy positions on statistical issues of public concern. This should also include development of a communications strategy so that these positions can be well articulated by RSS representatives to a wider public.*

Our working party was largely established as a result of a breakout session at the June 2006 RSS Council. We also envisage that the Council and other RSS committees should take a greater role in future in considering new policy developments in collaboration with this new standing committee.

A greater emphasis on policy would also assist the Council and those working on developing RSS Themes to consider business planning in a more strategic way. This would aid the Council and Executive Committee in prioritising proposed and current activities. Not only would this allow identification of priority areas for new work, but would also indicate proposed or existing work that could be deleted from the business plan put to Council.

The working party has not had the resources to survey a wider public base to directly consider their needs and we would, in any case, not expect that members of the public would, as things stand, have either much knowledge or a well considered view about the Society. We expect that knowledge about the Society and its policies would tend to derive from media reports, therefore we would further recommend:

5. *The Society should engage a media monitoring service to assist the management of the Society's External Relation Theme and so that the RSS Council can receive fuller reports on outward-facing initiatives that include an analysis of the media coverage obtained.*

The working party recognised that the Society's journals did not have a large role in improving outreach. There were, however, some concerns that RSS Journal series did not link well enough to initiatives such as "RSS lines". While

it is recognised that the Society's journals need to maintain the highest standards, it was felt that the Society's objectives would be better served by the commissioning peer reviewed journal articles to underpin the public pronouncements of the Society. More consideration should also be given to promoting events via RSS Sections that would have the potential to lead to production of refereed journal articles. We would recommend:

6. *The Society should be more pro-active in commissioning articles intended for publication, especially in Series A, 'Statistics in Society', to support other work of the RSS.*

Our questionnaire feedback on the magazine *Significance* was generally positive with respect to its content, but there was scepticism as to the extent to which it is seen outside of the RSS. We would recommend:

7. *Articles of similar nature to those that appear in 'Significance' should be promoted for use in more general publications, especially where the topic area covered would be attractive to other more widely distributed publications.*

In discussion with the Theme Manager for External Relations the notion of developing a list of publications that might commission articles (either from new or re-writes of those in Significance) was considered worth exploring. If so, groundwork for this could be done in the communications to be sent out to promote the awards for statistical excellence in journalism.

We recognise that the public at large receive much of their information about statistics via the media. The ways in which the RSS engages with journalists are, therefore, very important. We have not made a specific recommendation on rolling out of training sessions for journalists as we understand that this has been identified as a priority under the RSS business plan.

There are a number of other ways of engaging with the media that we could we would recommend the following:

8. To better engage the media the following steps should be taken:

- *The recently instituted RSS prize for examples of good journalism in the reporting of statistics should be built upon and cover all forms of media;*
- *In developing policy lines the Society should be pro-active in organising newsworthy events and responding to public consultation in a way that is likely to engage the media;*
- *The Statistics User Forum and RSS Sections should build links with relevant journalists, for example by developing topic-specific briefing material and by inviting the media to appropriate events.*

In making these recommendations, we would say that the old-fashioned press conference should be avoided except in exceptional circumstances. Dissemination of news releases, targeted appropriately, is more effective. This is particularly the case where relationships have been developed with particular journalists (either directly built up by the Society or using the contacts known to individual fellows). The opportunities arising from public consultations are also important as they can be high profile, but also allow adequate time for thorough preparation of considered lines to take.

More work could be done on promoting events of the Society to the media. Given that there are over one hundred events a year this would need to be carefully considered. Certain events will be amenable to news releases and direct contact with journalists. Some work was done in this direction for the RSS 2006 Conference, both in contacting 'good prospects' among speakers and in targeting releases to journalists in appropriate news sectors. The communications on the journalism award have been identified as another means of promoting events to journalists.

The working party also felt that greater coherence on policy and enhanced public profile for the RSS could assist with communications to the groups we were aiming to engage. It would provide a spur for better internal RSS communication of Society objectives, particularly with respect the sections and

local groups that promote the work the Society with the more restricted groups of analysts likely to attend RSS organised events.

It was felt that this enhanced coherence would also tend to bring together the work under the various themes (see Annex B for details of themes). Our findings indicated connections between themes that were not as strong as they ought to be. For example, RSS sections had little knowledge of what was being done with respect to external relations, despite the sections been responsible for many RSS events. We are not now making specific recommendation on changes to theme structure, but we do feel there is a need for enhanced internal communication to hold the themes adequately together.

9. The strategy for internal communication within the RSS needs to be reviewed, with a particular aim of ensuring greater coherence between the parts of the RSS that are outward facing.

We understand that there are future plans to send sections copies of news releases as they happen, which is certainly to be welcomed. The RSS e-news bulletin was produced for some time but is now dormant and we understand was a significant task to compile on a weekly basis. In taking forward a strategy for internal communication consultation with the target audience would be important. Much information is communicated via *RSS News,* but we would envisage more specific material, that could influence planning by those active within the Society in organising external events would be of use, say on a quarterly basis.

5 Role of RSS Sections and Local Groups

Sections and local group committees are in the front line of interacting (or not) with analysts and users of statistics (including media). We might see them as ambassadors for the RSS, although perhaps few of them would claim to be that at present. They should have an awareness of their current audience and should be well placed to identify potential audience and reach out. We view sections and local groups as being key players in bringing people from a wider analytic community (the group termed 'practitioners' in the section 4) into contact with the RSS.

In making our recommendations, the working party has borne in mind that the work of local groups and sections is entirely voluntary and we should not make recommendations that place too heavy a burden on them. We also feel that, although it is correct that these groups have a high degree of autonomy, these groups would welcome more in the way of toolkits to support their work and a better understanding of activity at the RSS centre. This was reflected in much of the feedback from the questionnaires to sections and local groups.

There was significant criticism from RSS sections of the way the RSS website operates and is updated and calls for more central guidance and support in publicising meetings. There have been some encouraging recent developments, with central guidance being circulated to sections on the mechanics of setting up JISCMAIL list, and a nod in the right direction in setting up a "section planning" page in the members' area of the RSS website. There have also been recent moves to ensure the meetings calendar on the website up-to-date. However, more needs to be done to provide support for the work of sections and local groups, which should be provided by permanent guidance and other website facilities (e.g. simple systems for updating web pages and meetings information). Redevelopment of the website could also provide a means of better branding of RSS events (e.g. by providing a standard template for web-based meeting flyers rather than the existing very disparate formats that are now used)

Bearing the above in mind we would recommend:

10. That the following steps be taken to better publicise RSS events:

- *A central toolkit be created, giving advice on setting on distributing publicity and listing national contact and distribution lists, should be developed by the RSS centre and placed on the RSS website;*
- *A record of attendees at RSS events should be maintained, specifically including email details, as a means of encouraging future attendance through invitations to join email distribution lists;*
- *Sections and local groups should consider whether establishment of a JISCMAIL distribution list would assist in administering their email distribution lists (see www.jiscmail.ac.uk);*
- *Consideration should be given to centralising lists more effectively, and encouraging the sharing of information between RSS sections and groups;*
- *More should be done to communicate good practice in planning and publicising events. This is an area where the RSS centre has some role, but sections and local groups can also learn from one another;*
- *The redevelopment of the RSS website should have as a priority the setting up of an area on the site to provide guidance on publicising meetings, allow entry of new meeting details directly, enable sections and groups to be aware of meetings planned by others and enable better branding of RSS events.*

It should be recognised that in considering the above, the limited time volunteers and RSS staff centrally are able to give means that any initiatives need to be consistent with available resources and carefully targeted. However, provision of more tools to do the work and better communication should be of great assistance to volunteers and ultimately reduce pressures on RSS staff. We understand that there is a Statistics User Forum business plan line relating to creation of a marketing toolkit, which we could see usefully rolled out to sections and local groups.

We would also recommend:

11. ***Consideration should also be given to setting up facilities for web-casting RSS events, particularly in light of the increasingly wide geographic distribution of statisticians.***

The need for large numbers of statisticians, analysts and users to remain engaged with RSS activity is well illustrated by the current relocation of a large number of ONS posts from London to South Wales, the latest in a series of relocations of government and NHS statistical and analytical work out of London. Electronic channels such as web-casting offer new ways for this engagement although there are technical and accessibility issues to resolve. The ESRC and the new Statistics Board may be possible sources of funding for piloting and developing these channels.

Although groups can provide some support in the setting of central RSS policy, their core role is to promote fora for the debate of statistical issues, be it within the subject-related framework of sections or on the broader canvas of local groups. We do not see much evidence (despite the presence of members of RSS Council on section committees) that centrally-determined objectives are influencing the planning of programmes by sections or local groups. There is little or no knowledge of RSS "lines" and only once-yearly central engagement with groups via annual officers' meetings. We would recommend:

12. ***The following steps should be taken to improve communications:***

- ***Currently, section and local group meetings tend not to take sufficiently into account the Society's objectives with respect to agreed themes. There needs to be a more effective strategy for internal communication within the RSS that pro-actively directs messages to sections and local groups;***
- ***Where the RSS Council or Executive commissions particular work or research to be undertaken on their behalf, the relevant reports should be communicated to as wide an audience as possible, both within and beyond the Society, and relevant meetings should be organised and advertised, making use of the current structures for organising section and local meetings.***

An example where an initiative could have been better followed through in section and local group activity is the recent work on performance measurement and indicators. The above recommendations relate to having a better developed system for communication between the RSS centre and activities taking place on the ground, and also for better formulation of RSS objectives. One step in the right direction was more rapid circulation of action points from the section officers' meeting in January 2007. Simple innovations, such as quarterly newsletters, containing material from the RSS headquarters and from sections and local groups would be a significant step forward in the area of communications.

The RSS headquarters should ensure that adequate consideration is given to how the work of groups can be best harnessed to achieve the aims of the Society. This is subject to the proviso, noted above, that groups work on a voluntary basis and their autonomy and limited resources need to be fully appreciated.

The questionnaire responses that we had from sections and local groups point to a range of good practice that should be considered in planning their meetings. We recommend:

13. The following steps should be taken in organising meetings:

- *Where significant numbers of non-RSS members are expected to attend a meeting, it should be a routine practice that RSS membership information and other publicity are made available. The RSS, should, centrally, also ensure that adequate information and materials (including additional copies of Significance) are made available for promotional purposes;*
- *Where possible, RSS meetings and events should be advertised with non-statisticians in mind and promoted as widely. Publicity material, including titles for events, should be made as appealing as possible;*
- *Venues and times for events should be chosen with the needs of the potential audience in mind;*
- *Joint meetings with other learned and professional societies should be encouraged.*

The first of these points particularly important and should give rise to some consideration of the effectiveness of the membership publicity that is currently available. The point about promoting widely includes going beyond current email list to promotion via other bodies (such as BURISA and local businesses). There may, for example, be innovative ways of presenting publicity information on RSS membership, for example a small number of PowerPoint slides could be developed that could be played prior to meetings to promote the RSS.

The working party are pleased to note that it is now possible to register for some RSS events via the website. If this is more widely used it could be an improvement on the established method of sending an email to meetings@rss.org,uk. We would wish to see the new website development provide online registration routinely (with a memorable registration website address) for all RSS events alongside more information on joining the Society and section/local group distribution lists displayed in suitably prominent positions.

We would also further recommend:

14. *The process of planning meetings programmes should be more structured and streamlined, and reflect the priorities of the Society;*

15. *Groups should do more to coordinate their activities and steps should be taken to encourage better sharing of speakers between local groups and sections.*

The above recommendations relate to communications between the sections and local groups and with the RSS centrally. We would ask that the Theme Director for sections and local groups discuss a way forward on these issues with section and local group representatives as none of these can be delivery by the RSS centre or by sections and local groups in isolation.

For example, the working party felt that discussion of issues around NHS performance management fell between sections given their current range of responsibilities. The paper that the group considered *RSS Engagement with Official Statistics* pointed to some overlaps in responsibility between their section and the Social Statistics Section. The Social Statistics Section includes a strand on educational issues, but this is not a main priority for the Section. At the section officers' meeting in January 2007 the RSS President-elect also mentioned the

need to review section responsibilities and we would recommend:

16. *The way in which sections relate to one another and their range of responsibilities should be reviewed to determine whether important aspects of statistics are adequately covered and whether better mechanisms set up to coordinate meetings and run joint meetings.*

Local groups undertake activities with schools, but can report difficulties in take-up (e.g. attendance at career events). We recognise the importance of outreach to school pupils but we have concerns about the degree to which activity at a local level can influence general perception of school pupils and we recommend:

17. *The strategy for promoting statistics within schools should be reviewed, to consider the most effective means of influencing perceptions and skills, bearing in mind the balance to be struck between national initiatives and activity by local groups.*

6 Making contact with new audience through training activity and marketing

The previous chapter considered ways in which the publicity and planning for events could be improved and better coordinated within the Society. An important additional means of engaging new audiences is via training events. These events are particularly relevant given the added emphasis now being placed on employers of Continual Professional Development. With this in mind we invited Nicola Bright, the director of the new RSS Professional Development Centre (PDC), to our second meeting of the working party.

Nicola Bright reported to us that the PDC committee is currently identifying statisticians and non-statisticians who may be able to deliver training. Presenters and courses will be subject to peer review through an approvals process overseen by the PDC committee. Well-established courses delivered by presenters known to the RSS will undergo a 'light-touch' process. Approved trainers will deliver courses that have been designed by the PDC or, if they are part of an established unit, then they may also design their own course syllabus. Courses will be open to participants from the UK and abroad, or may be delivered in the workplace for a particular employer. The PDC is seeking to actively engage with RSS Sections and local groups, as well as the Statistics User Forum.

The initial focus of the PDC's work will be members of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and public sector organisations employing significant numbers of analysts and users of statistics. The PDC will approach *Statisticians in the Pharmaceutical Industry* (PSI) since it also runs similar courses for pharmaceutical analysts in the private sector. The working party also discussed the importance of the PDC building links with groups such as the Market Research Society and designing a publicity leaflet aimed specifically at non-statisticians. The PDC will also seek to engage younger statisticians at the RSS's Young Statisticians event later this year. The RSS's Director of Membership Services, Nicola Emmerson, advised the working party that the RSS has been successful in recruiting younger new members at universities, particularly Bristol where the number of RSS members had increased from 8 to 55 in one term.

PDC course fees will be set at commercial rates with significant reductions for RSS members and students. The course programme will be balanced between applied and theoretical statistics, and include scope for more general courses

such as consultancy skills and the presentation of data.

The PDC is hoping to run 25 courses during 2007, rising to 50 per year from 2008. The courses programme will include both "open" and "closed" courses – open courses advertised widely, and closed courses run on demand for particular organisations and companies.

The working party discussed the need for sections and local groups to run at least one income-generating event each year, many of which could be characterised as short courses. Nicola Bright advised that the PDC would be very happy to work with sections and local groups to help them in planning and running income-generating courses.

Finally, Nicola reported that the PDC's course programme will strike a balance between popular, frequent revenue raising courses and one-off "loss-leading" courses aimed at a particular niche market or certain statistical user community.

The working party were impressed by Nicola's presentation and particularly welcomed the consultative way in which the PDC is establishing its remit. We also felt that the approach of inviting expressions of interest from other providers who would provide training under an RSS banner and subject to RSS peer review as the most feasible way of building up a wider range of training activity. Our recommendations in this area are that:

18. The PDC should:

- *Continue to approach its task in a flexible way, involving external providers, liaising closely with potential customers;*
- *Should work closely with sections and local groups, particularly with respect to developing income-raising one off events into more routine training activity.*

The working party were impressed by the consultative approach of the PDC to developing its services. Extrapolating from this we would recommend that:

19. *In developing new RSS initiatives it is imperative that a consultative approach to potential customers is followed, with consideration of commissioning of market research for the more significant initiatives.*

One approach that would be worth considering is bringing together focus groups, potentially using the enhanced membership information that we call for, to discuss specific proposed initiatives with groups of analysts for which they would be likely to be relevant.