

Report on the 2008 meeting of Newton Institute Correspondents

This year's meeting of Correspondents was held on Monday 2nd June 2008 at the Institute. It was attended by 37 Correspondents or their substitutes (29 from Universities plus 8 from other organisations), out of a possible 84 (63 plus 21 respectively): a list is attached. The agenda was as follows:

- 12.30 Lunch
- 13.30 Mike Titterton (current organiser): *Some issues with high dimensions in statistics*
- 14.30 Sir David Wallace: presentation on future programmes at the Institute and current issues
- 15.15 Peter Clarkson (Kent): experience as programme and workshop organiser
- 15.30 Tea
- 16.00 Open Discussion
- 17.00 Carsten Thomassen, Rothschild Visiting Professor Lecture: *Maps and graphs on surfaces*
- 18.00 Wine Reception

The presentation by the Director covered: science at the Institute; serving the UK community; financial and operational issues; the appointment of a new Deputy Director; and possible issues for discussion. The presentation may be found at <http://www.newton.ac.uk/ucbulletins/corpresent2008.pdf>. Much of the content is on-line, including the web seminars; their quality is impressive and the AVA technician Steve Greenham was warmly thanked by all for his commitment. The first three items reflected the structure in which the *Annual Report* was now being prepared. The Director noted that Robert Hunt would be resigning as of August to take up a full time position as Senior Tutor at Christ's College. The Director would greatly miss the huge support which Dr Hunt had given to the Institute and he thanked him sincerely, congratulated him on his new appointment, and wished him all success. The Institute is advertising for a replacement, with a deadline for applications of 20 June.

A key issue for discussion would be how best to strengthen the role and engagement of Correspondents given that the consultation on the role of the National Advisory Board (NAB) suggested that it should be disbanded, and that this was imminent. Correspondents' information packs included the Draft Action Plan which had been discussed at the NAB, summarising ways in which the Institute intended to ensure that it continued to serve the interests of the national community. The packs also included a breakdown of participation and Junior Membership by institution, as well as the advertisement for the Deputy Director post, which Correspondents were asked to display.

In his talk, Peter Clarkson underlined that, although considerable commitment was required to undertake the organisation of a programme or workshop, in his experience the support from Institute staff made this much easier than for other conferences or workshops in which he had been involved. In particular, a key role of the organisers was to approach suitable numbers of key people asking about interest in participation; the formal invitation and all administration would then be done by the Institute.

The Open Discussion included the following issues:

- *Outcome of consultation.* The Director clarified that all responses to the consultation had been supportive of the idea that the NAB should be disbanded and the role of Correspondents strengthened, provided that appropriate safeguards were put in place to ensure that the UK community's interests continued to be met; the Action Plan in the packs was a draft of how the Institute proposed to achieve that.
- *Chair of Correspondents.* A clear consensus emerged that it would be better if this person was an independent champion, and not one of the Correspondents. There was broad support for an arrangement in which all Correspondents could suggest names, which would be put to the five learned societies of the Council for the Mathematical Sciences (the LMS, IMA, RSS, ORS and EMS) who would make a recommendation to the Management Committee for endorsement. As well as membership of the Management Committee, the Chair of Correspondents could fulfil a useful role as an approachable 'ombudsman' if a Correspondent had particular concerns.

- *Wider involvement of Correspondents in governance.* It was suggested that two or three of the Correspondents might be identified with specific roles who could also sit on the Management Committee. There was widespread support for the suggestion that two Correspondents might be invited to each meeting of the Scientific Steering Committee as observers, because this would give them first hand understanding of how the selection process worked, and enable them to give better encouragement and advice to potential proposers in their institution.
- *Improving the gender balance of participants.* There was a wide-ranging discussion. It was recognised that this was a generic issue, but the Institute felt that it should be taking active steps to help in whatever way it could. Actual numbers depended critically on the nature of the programme; data could be transformed by a strong biosciences programme, so naïve benchmarks were not appropriate. A good dialogue was developing with the Women in Mathematics Committee of the LMS, and the Director hoped that this would identify practical steps the Institute could take. One step already in hand was to ensure that programme organisers were aware of the gender balance issue when drawing up lists of invitees.
- *Correspondents' Annual Meeting.* In response to a suggestion that this might be rebranded as the National Consultative Committee, there was a strong view that the informality of the Annual Meeting was valuable.
- *Forum software.* It was suggested that the Institute should consider implementing a discussion forum for Correspondents, which would enable them to form collective views in an on-going way outside of the Annual Meeting.
- *Increasing engagement with industry.* This is a requirement of the Institute's EPSRC grant, and the Director summarised ways in which the Institute is going about this task. Recently this has included a *Finance Day*, and an *Open for Business* meeting in collaboration with the Knowledge Transfer Network for Industrial Mathematics. The latter in particular had been welcomed and could be a useful general format. The Director and Deputy Director had also visited companies to discuss their needs and interests, and there was an interesting growing network in financial services. The Director stressed his personal view that, while the Institute should do all it can to encourage participation by people from business and industry, this should not be to the detriment of the successful ethos of the Institute in supporting long-term programmes, complementary to the ICMS workshops in Edinburgh.
- *People or topics.* It was suggested that an alternative approach to stimulating proposals in particular topics was to approach strong individuals suggested by Correspondents, to encourage them to develop proposals in areas of future interest to them.
- *Barriers to participation.* It was noted by a Correspondent that the format of short visits of up to two days without invitation would enable irregular participation by UK scientists, at times that suited them; the Director agreed that the new arrangements permitted this, and were part of the Institute feeling more open to the Community. The Institute could not commit to providing accommodation or an office for such visits. The Director requested only that anyone intending to participate in this way should keep the Institute informed in advance.
- *Pressure on Organisers.* It was also suggested that the Institute should look at the wording of the requirements for participation by programme organisers, to ensure that it was not more demanding than was needed in reality.

The Director thanked all Correspondents warmly for their contribution to the work of the Institute, and for the excellent discussion and input during the meeting, which would be taken forward to the Management Committee. He would welcome the opportunity to speak informally to any Correspondent, in person, by telephone (01223 335980) or by email (david.wallace@newton.ac.uk).

David Wallace and Robert Hunt, June 2008

Attendees

University Correspondents

Gernot Akemann*	Brunel
Chris Athorne	Glasgow
Andrew Burbanks	Portsmouth
Colin Christopher	Plymouth
Peter Clarkson	Kent
Piotr Crusciel	Oxford
Stephen Donkin*	York
Robert Douglas	Aberystwyth
David Dritschel	St Andrews
Steve Ellacott	Brighton
Michael Hintermueller	Sussex
Liu Kai*	Liverpool
Igor Lerner	Birmingham
Mark McCartney	Ulster
Alan McKane	Manchester (Physics)
Yong Mao	Nottingham
Ben Mestel	Open
David Penman	Essex
Anand Pillay	Leeds
Teimuraz Pirashvili*	Leicester
Mike Prest	Manchester (Mathematics)
Rui Reis*	Aberdeen
Terry Rudolph*	Imperial
Colin Sparrow*	Warwick
Jordon Stoyanov	Newcastle
Alexander Veselov	Loughborough
Christopher Voll*	Southampton
Anke Wiese*	Heriot-Watt
Wojtek Zakrzewski	Durham

Correspondents from other Institutions

Tristram Amour*	Smith Institute
Nikitas Gidopoulos*	Rutherford Appleton Laboratory
Wendy Hawes*	Institute of Actuaries
Richard Hibbs	OR Society
John Huthnance	Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory
Nick Manton	LMS
Mikhail Semenov	Rothamsted Research
John Sherwood	Schlumberger

* Substitute for official Correspondent